TOOL | 10 GUIDELINES FOR INCREASING ONLINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engaging people online involves more than understanding how technology works or how to post on social media. These guidelines are meant to help you think about the best ways to involve others in your work.

❶ Keep things simple
Make it easy for people to engage with you. Trust that participants for the most part will be civilized in their exchanges with you. If you moderate Facebook postings, for example, people will feel like you are deciding if their comments are worth your time. Sure, someone might criticize your efforts or your organization, but as a general rule it is better to let them surface and then engage your critics in a dialogue.

❷ Do more than tell and sell
Social media is a good way to share information and to present your cause, but people like to participate, so ask them questions. Ask them what they think about an idea and ask them for theirs. Offer helpful comments on their sites and social media streams.

❸ Be a leader that takes the high road
Sometimes you need to have a thick skin and persist through negative postings or comments while leading the way to constructive dialogue. Whomever is leading your online social media activities must have razor sharp interpersonal skills and walk the fine line between being true to your cause and getting sucked into an argument. When criticized, consider ways that you can involve others in the conversation. Often other participants will actually raise their voices and address unruly or unreasonable participants.

❹ Manage with kindness
There can be occasions when someone's remarks cannot be tolerated. Racist comments, personal attacks, profanity, and other incivilities should be managed. But do more than delete a posting or ban someone from your social media stream. Contact that person and explain why you have removed their posting or them from the engagement. They might not like it, but it's better than saying nothing. And it is the right thing to do – always with kindness.

⑤ **Be inviting**
Continually seek out and acknowledge newbies into your online community. Go to other sites and social media streams and participate there and also invite others to join you. Welcome people who are new to your online community and encourage them to participate.

⑥ **Identify and engage power users**
These are people who are active online blogging and often with many followers on their Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram streams. Invite them over to your stream and ask them if they might promote your cause to their followers, perhaps write a blog posting or otherwise leverage their presence on social media to lend a hand. And be prepared to offer the same to them. Social media is about networking; don't be afraid to seek the help of influencers.

⑦ **Engage visually**
Go beyond text as your medium. Include photographs, graphics, and short videos when you are posting to your blog or website or on social media. This is especially true when trying to reach out to younger people. Anyone can shoot a video these days on a smart phone.

⑧ **Link face to face engagement with your online presence**
When in a face to face gathering, make it easy for people to join your online community. Share what is going on in your meeting using hash tags and quick postings to Facebook during the event, with photos or a video clip. Pass out sign up sheets with an explanation as to why participating may benefit them. Also let your online community know how those local to you can participate in a face to face gathering.

⑨ **Communicate clearly and to the point**
Avoid jargon and acronyms or technical language. Using your professional lingo can be a turn off to others and implies that outsiders are not welcome. Craft your messages, whether text based or in other media in a manner that is concise while including sufficient content to solicit a response.

⑩ **Know what is working**
If a blog posting, web page or social media posting receives a lot of comment, shares, or retweets, try to learn from that experience. Try to discern what it was about what you did that resonated with so many. Conversely, pay attention to those instances where postings failed to elicit any engagement at all. Being successful online involves continually learning and adapting your activities.

Keep in mind that people want to engage with others but they want to trust you and want to feel like they matter. Your credibility is not just connected to your cause but to how you interact with others online. If you are seeking support from your online community, ask for it, but avoid always wanting others to meet your needs. Social media in particular is about relationships. Form them and nurture them. People tend to support causes and organizations they are engaged with. They are more likely to give of their time and money once they feel connected to your cause or community.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- **11 Unusual Social Media Tips to Drive Branding, Clicks and Conversions**
  https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/235596

- **Social Media: What it is and why it is important for any organization**
  http://www.masternewmedia.org/social-media-what-is-it-and-why-its-so-important-for-any-organization/

- **5 Movements Where Social Media was a BIG Catalyst for Social Change**
  http://socialmedia4nonprofits.org/blog/5-movements-where-social-media-was-a-big-catalyst-for-social-change/

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