

Communities@Work

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What is a Community?



- Couple of geeks meeting virtually* to talk about a specific topic or product



- >200 people social substructures start to build
- From there communities behave strangely and controversial to traditional marketing experience

Community Attributes



- Anonymous
- Invisible unless they participate
- Members fluctuate a lot



- Grown Communities live for a very long time
 - Our Panzer Elite Community lived for 8 years
 - And would have longer if not killed by publisher
 - The Soldner Community lives since 2001
 - Community even controls webspace and product!

Of what use is this then?

How do you talk to invisible
anonymous people?

What you need

- A Portal (Webspace)
- A Good News plan
- A Forum
- Hard skin: Marketing will interfere
- Community Manager(s)
- Forum Moderator(s)
- Hard Skin 2: Communities are ruthless

The Portal

Traditional Marketing is enemy to
your Community

Portal: Your Webpace

- Easy Url
 - (Mischief-in-Heaven-The-Game.com is NOT easy!)
- FAST Load Speed
 - Internet is global
 - Modems are still out there!
- There IS a standard Community layout!
 - Don't go too far from there
- Categorize, 3 Click Rule
- Lets look at some examples

Good Community Sites

- <http://www.wow-europe.com>
- <http://soldner.jowood.com>
- <http://www.worldofgothic.de>
- Categories:
 - Product Information (Features, Media, Links)
 - Community (Forum, Chat, Fansite Links)
 - News (from you and other sites)

Product Information

- Categorize here, subdivide
- Easy Layout (did I mention fast load speed?)
- List unpublished info as “?”
 - Otherwise it looks too small at start
- Don't advertise. This is marketing, but marketing talk will shy away visitors!
 - Hint: Community is NOT stupid
- Do not say it all at start. Otherwise you have nothing to post at launch
- Release bit by bit, post as news
- Lets see how ...

The News

No News is even worse than Bad
News

News Postings

- News Posts is your tool to draw visitors to your site
- News need to spread: mail them to the world
 - Collect sites of interest to your product
 - Establish personal contact whenever possible
 - They are your community too!
- When you post and email, why don't they post it?
 - Because news is old, you posted them already!
- This means:
 - Let them post FIRST, give them lead time

News - How to

- #1: Prepare news - the email
 - Write a time and date WHEN you will post the news on your site
 - Do NOT post early! Otherwise it is old news and they won't post it on their site!
 - Make sure media links point to your site, don't send media with it
- #2: Email news to all sites you find
- #3: Release News exactly at the time you mentioned
 - Hint: Time is global, mention what time you mean :)
- Evaluate:
 - check all sites who post. When, how, and if
 - Make statistics how effective the site is. If it is an important site contact them and ASK
 - Establish personal relationship to important sites

News - On your site

- When you post on your site sign the news
 - People need someone to bash on!
 - If possible leave link to comment (link to forum or comment system)
- If you post media include a reduced sample. Pics are worth a million words
- News mailed on fridays have less coverage!
- News mailed on tuesdays are best
 - (as mondays are too crowded)
- And yes, people read the net during business hours!
- If you post twice a week pick Tuesdays and Thursdays
- Exclusives are good on weekends though!
- Tricky: Worldwide news and release TIME

News - What you get

- Other sites post your news:
- You get first time visitors to your site through those links
- <5% of their visitors click your news
- <5% of those visitors stick and return ONCE
- They return within 5-7 days of your posting
- If your site doesn't offer something new by that time they will never come back!
- This means:
 - update often (bi-weekly best)
 - Alternate news type (game info, links, media etc)
 - News which aren't mailed count as well
- ASK yourself: if you gain 0.x% for big news, how long does it take to build up your community?

News - Types

- Game Information
 - Features
 - Game Features in detail
 - Unit/Weapon/etc lists posted or expanded
 - Remember? Don't post all at once, even in sub categories
 - Scenarios, Maps, Settings
 - Community tools like editors, mods, script languages etc.
 - Media
 - Screens, Music, Ingame Videos, Trailers, Wallpapers, Fan Site Packages, Background stories, Artworks, the possibilities are endless
 - Remember: someone needs to create all these!
 - Links: previews, reviews, Q&A's, links to exclusives for other sites, links to new fansites
 - Activities: Dev Chat, Competitions, Exclusives for forum users (see below)
 - Many more, check good community sites what they do!

News - What it means for you

- You need to create a shit load of assets
- You need to plan ahead
- You need to subdivide your product into categories you can “news” about
- Categorize:
 - Prime News (Game Features announced)
 - Content News (Weapons, Vehicles, Classes etc.)
 - Categorize! Ie. Pistols, Sniper Rifles, MG, Grenades, etc.
 - Media News (Screens, Videos, Music)
 - Even categorize Screens! (by setting, game mode, class, etc.)
- Categorization multiplies your ability to post news and draw visitors!

News - Category Timing

- Daily: Minor news (ie. links to other sites)
- Weekly: Media (ie. Screens)
- Monthly: Major Game Features, Trailer, first timers
 - First Timers: whenever you do something first
 - First Ingame video
 - First Screens of a setting never seen before
 - First Trailer
 - First Music etc etc.
- Update old monthlies in weekly news
 - Ie. “New Sniper Rifles announced”

Sample Categorization

- For Söldner we even categorized Screens
 - Summer, Winter, Autumn, Underwater
 - Soldiers (classes), Vehicles (types, ie. Helicopters, jets, tanks, transports)
 - Game Features
 - Exclusive Packs for important gaming sites
 - Exclusive Packs for Magazines (we can post them too after the magazines release)
 - Game Features (Gestures, Advanced Destruction System etc.)
- All in all we had over 20 categories which allowed us to post News with “new” media assets over 20 weeks time
- Add other media type categories and we were able to post something “new” for 2.5 years time!

News and Project timing

- News change by Project state:
 - Pre Release
 - create news hype as mentioned
 - Release
 - previews, reviews
 - release timing (when, where)
 - Demos (single Player, Multiplayer, Languages)
 - At this point you loose control of your news plan!
 - Post Release
 - Reviews
 - Patches
 - New Media
 - Problems (yes, even post about those!)
 - News means total but controlled transparency to your project

News Honor

- Be recent and on time
 - 4 hour news are OLD news
 - Bad News MUST be posted asap, even if it means 3am at night!
 - Did I mention time zones?
- It is your community, don't let others steal it
 - Link to other sites news but make sure the other sites used YOUR links
- Be Honest, even if news are bad
 - Broken Patch? Tell them NOW and tell them what you do about it
 - Too many bugs? Tell them! (remember what Gothic3 did?)
 - Can't provide an answer? Tell them!

News Honor

- Remember: Communities are worldwide
 - Post in different languages simultaneously!
- Multi Languages - How?
 - Use a news system
 - You can place news in your language and timestamp them when they will be released
 - Meanwhile a translation service can translate on time
 - Timestamp means you can post even at 3 am (see what I mean?)
- With Söldner we posted news in English, German, French and Japanese worldwide at the same time! (well almost...)

The Forum

The Key is invisible Management

Forum - some Facts

- Inside the Forum your best asset is very close
 - Ie. YOUR Community Members
 - They are there because they like your product
 - They post because they care
 - They are human beings
 - And yes, some of them know their stuff better than YOU!
- Use easy to use Software and Standards
 - Don't develop your own unless you have to (MMO's)
- All can read, but let them register to post
- Give them space: let them talk about other stuff too
 - They are a social structure after all
 - Did I tell you that they are human beings?

Forum - some Facts

- Less than 5% of your visitors will ever post
- 20x more will only read (ROM's, Read Only members)
- This means your Forum becomes an uncontrollable voice to your community!
- It is important to control the Forum. But:
 - Moderate, don't censor!
 - Competing Products are ok, remember users don't want to be censored
 - "You fucking idiots!" is ok as well if they mean YOU and not other members!
 - Guide the community, don't over control

Your enemies at the gates

- Make your enemy your best friend: Contact them!
 - Address them personally (forum email is best)
 - LISTEN. There is a reason they freak out
 - React, give him feedback personally
 - They will become your most valuable asset
 - They even will do the work for you afterwards!
- Some of the biggest fans of my games have been the biggest critics of those projects!

Forum - a virtual Game

- Let members personalize their entries (signature, pictures)
- Additional goodies like chat, ranks and minigames are ok if they are in relation with your product
- Be honest. Never lie. Even if the truth is hard for you
- Give them exclusives, they are after all your most important visitor!
 - Competitions inside forum only
 - Some assets ONLY for forum users
 - and link to them via the news page, dont email them
 - Listen. Give feedback. Integrate them into your project!
- Some of the most important features of my games were integrated due to forum feedback and analysis!

Forum - a virtual Game

- Most important: give them a HERO within your company.
 - Their contact to the “enemy”
 - He full fills promises (and do so, otherwise you loose members!)
- Let News posters answer questions about his news (remember I told you to personalize news?)
- At Best is the hero posts news too!
- This person is called Community Manager (or CM)
 - Note: Moderators are placed beneath
 - The CM must know it all but need to know what he can say
 - The CM must be the one who knows when and which info is being released
 - So he doesn't destroy your News plans!
 - In other words: The CM is key and knnows it all
- A good community manager is worth millions in advertising money!
- Those guys are hard to find, mine was stolen by Blizzard

Special Case: MMO's

Massive Multiplayer Online
Games need rigorous control

MMO Communities

- MMO communities are the most challenging task to control
- Everyone in the company needs utmost control over what they can say
- Best is that no one says anything but the dedicated people
- Community Managers talk to all openly
- Customer Management talks to ONE privately
- GameMaster talks privately to ONE in game
- Rule Bible: what everyone can say and what not
 - All questions and answers are listed here
 - Reason: identical questions MUST have identical answers!
- Now try to fit forum Moderators, PR and Marketing in here and a War inside your company will start
- This is too complex for here. I will talk about this another time

CM is Marketing?

Community Management is
Marketing

But traditional Marketing doesn't
get it

Marketing belongs to ...

- Divide territories: traditional print marketing vs. Online
- They can work together
 - But you need lots of communication
 - And a good plan everyone sticks to
 - Control marketing by providing assets on time, not sooner :)
- Online Marketing/Community Management must be in house
 - It doesn't work otherwise
 - Reaction time is too slow
 - They have other stuff to do which might interfere
 - I.e. You need dedicated online marketing people per product
- Leave Marketing exclusives for print
 - But reuse after release of magazine
- Leave last minute exclusive feature for reviews!
 - It will gain you 3-5% at least!
 - Reviewers know your product ... Give them something new to talk about

Famous last words

Community Management is more
than Marketing

It is a SERVICE to your customer!

Questions & Answers

Lets play Community
Management in here