

Online Community Metrics

Best Practices Survey / March 2007

Survey Coordination:



San Francisco / Washington, DC

Online Community Research Network Sponsors



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Online Community Research Network

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A research-based network of online community professionals working to understand key community building issues and best practices.

Executive Summary

The Online Community Metrics survey was initiated in February of 2007. Bill Johnston (Forum One Communications) sent approximately 150 survey invitations to online community professionals in our network of executives and practitioners. We received 50 completed surveys. Participating organizations ranged from small to very large, with approximately 75% representing commercial groups, the balance representing non-profits. Commercial participants included large software companies, large community destination sites, niche community sites, platform providers and interactive marketing firms. The respondents, most of whom we know professionally, represent a very senior and experienced group.

The survey results provide a great deal of qualitative information and require some diligence to comb through. Section summaries have been provided for the majority of questions. With that said, to our eye the most valuable information in the survey results include:

- **Metrics Options** (page 9): a comprehensive list of unique metrics that respondents value;
- **Management Tactics** (page 11): strategies for improving community metrics;
- **Desired Metrics** (page 14): a long metrics wish list
- **Demonstrating ROI** (page 16): quantifying the value of community for management and stakeholders
- **Tools for Collecting Metrics** (page 19): Services, tools and techniques for collecting and analyzing community data
- **Advice** (page 20): best tips for community managers concerning metrics.

Other data we found that were noteworthy: The percentage of communities that have paying members improved from 16% in 2006 to 30% for this survey (page 7), and that good sources of information on community metrics are scant (page 22). The best source of information continues to be other online community professionals.

Survey Results

Questions 1-3:

Name, Organization, E-mail Address

[responses suppressed]

Question 4:

Approximate number of online communities in organization?

1	28%
2-10	33%
11-100	21%
> 100	18%

Question 5:

Approximate total page views per month?

< 100,000	23%
100k - 1m	26%
1m - 10m	32%
> 10 million	19%

Question 6:

Approximate total monthly unique users?

< 10,000	29%
10k - 100k	26%
100k - 1m	21%
> 1 million	24%

Question 7:

Approximate total number of registered users?

< 1000	10%
1k – 10k	23%
10k – 100k	19%
> 100k	45%

Question 8:

Approximate percentage of monthly unique users that are registered?

0%	0%
1% - 10%	19%
11% – 50%	35%
51% - 99%	23%
100%	23%

Question 9:

What registration information do you require?

Summary:

- E-mail:** 87%
- Name:** 74% of all respondents
- Age:** 31%
- Location:** 25%
- Industry:** 21%
- Company:** 18%
- Gender:** 15%
- Phone:** 13%
- Interests:** 3%

Questions 10:

What are registered users allowed to do that non-registered users are not?

Summary:

In general, most survey participants noted that unregistered users can view some content, but cannot participate in the community by contributing or interacting with members or content. Sensitive content, such as member profiles are typically restricted to viewing by members only.

Detailed Responses:

Access to members only content such as webcasts. Contribute content as well as personalize the content we send to them.

Access to private forums, content, tools, etc.

All must be registered

Create content, rate content, access some content not available to non-registered users

Create personal pages, post images, vote for one another, collect points

Create profile, post content (messages/comments/videos/photos/guides/create blogs/create wiki entries/create guides), see information about other member's, receive newsletters

Depends on the community - in most cases for the communities I build- registration is required for access (b2b communities) but in other cases, unregistered members are allowed to access some content and view the discussions but not post.

Depends on the community - unregistered users may not be able to read and/or post

Edit content, view content 'internal' to group (through sub-communities labeled 'projects' in the COTS product we use)

Few content and participate in discussion boards

I operate a blog and a wiki. Wiki access requires invitation. Blog is opening including comments.

It varies by community. The general convention so far is members can post, non members can't. In some communities, must be member to even enter. In others, totally open. The general open option is fading due to spam issues.

Keep preferences, create relationships, post content, send/receive mail, instant messages, etc.

Most of our sites only allow non-registered users to view a small amount of public content. To participate and to read premium content, users must be registered.

Post to the community, rate & comment, use of health tools

Post, have email, have access to most of site (mostly members-only content), make own web page.

Post, subscribe via email, view private forums, create profile.

Re: site content, registered users have access to premium content that's behind subscription wall but doesn't require paying subscription. Re: community features, non-registered users can do everything registered users can... e.g., read, post comments.

Receive content via email and personalize the site.

Registered users become members and can access all the different types of user-generated content/collaborative environments run by the BBC. If you are not registered, you may not be able to post, but you will be able to access all content.

Registered users can post comments (on blogs, forums, news stories & columns) as well as product reviews.

See certain articles/content, post, get their own statistics, achieve ranking, rate messages, polls

Sign up for newsletters, customize RSS, get topic updates

they can post messages, start a blog and participate in online chats

Unregistered visitors can read free/open forums. Registered visitors can also post messages in free/open forums. Only paid subscribers can read or post in designated for-pay forums.

Use community products and services.

Question 11:
Approximate percentage of registered users that are paying users?

0%	70%
1% - 10%	14%
11% – 50%	7%
> 51%	9%

Note: It should be noted that the percentage of total paying members, 30%, improved from 16% in the 2006 survey. This is merely highlighted and not reported, as the survey participant base isn't 100% consistent between the 2 surveys (~75%).

Question 12:

Which community metrics do you track?

	Very Important	Moderately Important	Not Important	Not Collected
Unique Visitors	62%	26%	12%	10%
New Member Registrations	62%	21%	17%	12%
Page Views	57%	26%	17%	12%
Retention / Attrition	50%	22%	5%	22%
Member Loyalty	46%	12%	0%	41%
Member Satisfaction	44%	12%	2%	41%
Most Active Members	43%	40%	5%	14%
Top Searches	40%	30%	2%	30%
Message Posts	38%	48%	14%	12%
Conversion	38%	18%	5%	40%
Advertising Performance	32%	20%	0%	49%
Influencer / Evangelist Identification	32%	29%	2%	37%
Member Lifecycle	28%	22%	2%	50%
First Time Contributors	24%	27%	10%	39%
Content Rating	22%	22%	2%	52%
Ratio: Unregistered to Registered Visitors	17%	34%	12%	37%
Ratio: Page Views Per Post	15%	39%	12%	34%
Reputation Changes	13%	28%	5%	54%
Ratio: Posts Per Thread	12%	28%	22%	38%
Content Tagging	12%	24%	2%	62%
Comments per Blog Post	11%	26%	13%	50%
Ratio: Searches Per Post	10%	12%	20%	58%
Podcasts & Video (linked to / Uploaded)	8%	33%	0%	59%
Member Blog Posts	5%	31%	8%	56%
Size of Networks / Buddy lists	2%	22%	5%	70%

Question 13:

Which other key metrics do you track?

Summary:

A highlight of other important metrics categories collected were:

Quality of content and exchange: For instance, resolution time, days thread was active, ratio of validated responses. Support communities are leading the way on best practices and reporting.

Tracking the brand through the “Community ecosystem”: Tracking brands and community members as they travel through the larger community ecosystem that spans sites, technologies and devices.

Impact of the community on revenue: Particular attention is being paid to the value of members, both to the host communities’ revenue, and the organization’s sales or fundraising.

Mobile interactions with the community: including views and posts from mobiles.

RSS subscriptions: RSS had surprisingly few mentions, which could speak to the relative difficulty in tracking RSS metrics, or the relative value of RSS metrics to community hosts.

Detailed Responses:

of downloads of content, RSS feed subscriptions

Annual reader surveys track satisfaction and impact (what did you DO after having used ...?) - 75% report having taken an action as a result. Other metrics include # and satisfaction of partner orgs, job postings, etc.

Answer rates in forums for our support communities. The % of questions that receive a validated answer. We also track unreplied message % over time to see how long it takes askers to get a first reply.

Days active , Threads/poster, Initial posts/poster, Replies/poster's posts

Depending on size of community, evaluate with a number of qualitative indicators, we sometimes call 'community indicators' or 'barometer.' These can be surveys, after action reviews, phone calls, or whatever. Take the pulse.

I focus on interactivity ratio - what percentage of members are interactive - visible in some way - taking polls, completing surveys, posting messages, uploading content, volunteering to moderate or welcome members.

Ideas, general mood, arguments, behaviours, competition entries, TV and Radio habits in connection with the communities around the TV and Radio brands. It's going to be increasingly important to track flows generated by brands across all media, and on other host services, ... such as Second Life.

Images uploaded, votes cast
Impact of community on revenue generated by these users and new sign ups.
Location
Message views Home page views Mobile page views IMs sent IMs opened File attachments (number, size, etc.) Searches w/o results Sessions Logins Unanswered threads Moderator posts to user posts Company posts to user posts Time to response Deleted posts/threads Activity by role Activity by rank Activity by module (boards, blogs, chats, IM)
Net promoter, Avg time to reply to 1st post, # users who initiate a personal email exchange, ratio of visits to community from total site, # new topics, repeat posters,
Only pageviews for now
Opens and clicks in e-newsletters. Average time spent on site, and average pages viewed. Visits per unique visitor.
Passive tagging based on lurking behavior (associating attributes that are not disclosed but inferred)
Referral sources
Repeat visitors and visits. Purchases made by registered members versus non-registered site visitors, loyalty offer redemption by members, viral marketing referrals, Search Engine keyword mix and referrals.
Retention of membership is #1. Number of paid members.
Robot activity, logins, active (posting) users, watches, active threads, top forums and categories, churn.
RSS, clickthrus in general, newsletter subscriptions, downloads, email opt-in, offline events, license requests
Size of individual member networks as percentage circles of influence
Software downloads. Specific site activity by user
Solved questions and time to resolve.
Specific pages for our sponsors
Subscription rev
Time spent in each community tools. Number of community tools and services used per month
Total blog comments per month, total user product reviews per month, user review pageviews per month.
Unique visitors per topic

Question 14:

For metrics you identify as “very important”, what tactics are most effective to improve those metrics?

Summary:

Key tactics for improving metrics categorized as “very important” were:

Engagement by Hosts: Being an active participant in your own community. Contribute to conversations, praise exceptional users and content. Be “present” in the community.

Marketing Externally: Reach out to blogs in your space, make sure your site is optimized for search, mention your community via your other marketing channels.

Marketing Internally: Educate new users on community feature set. Place prominent calls to action to participate. Create email vehicles to send “best of the best” content and encourage members to visit the community. Make it easy for members to refer other members.

Leaders: Find and/or cultivate community members that can act as your evangelists, community greeters, and second-tier moderators.

Site Experience: Ensure that the site experience is a quality one. Conduct ongoing satisfaction surveys and usability test. Ensure site performance is optimal.

Detailed Responses:

Acquisition and retention of visitors.

Answer every post personally--try to build loyalty

Ask for money. Nothing makes people more demanding than when they pay for a service. They don't pay full cost but payment is important. If they won't kick in anything than value is suspect.

Basic traffic improvement strategies: SEO, multiple mentions in other areas, promo of most interesting/controversial content, contests

Communications to get people to do something

Educating members on the usefulness of participating in the rating system, providing lists to show impact of participation

Email updates of new content on site; individual emails to members to encourage participation on a specific topic in their interest area.

For member loyalty and satisfaction and message posts and blog responses, we have created a team of volunteers called the 'welcoming committee' to ensure that all posts and blogs have at least three responses (if not more)

Great communication with the development group Great understanding of tracking tools like Omniture

Having online community services, off-line event participation, contests

Identifying community leaders and sharing information and goals.

increased marketing, finding ways to get people to register, communicating with enthusiasts to get them to come back. some level of communication with active users.

It really varies by the intent of the community. If it is a community where new folks are

constantly coming in, welcoming activities, buddies and newbie areas can be useful. If it is about building practices to share knowledge, having a core team that role models and facilitates is critical. Mostly it is a range of facilitation strategies coupled with positioning of communications to focus attention on the desired outcome.

Links to message boards in email newsletters to registered users.

Outreach and relationship building.

Outreach is critical for moving people through the membership lifecycle- behind the scenes personalized or semi personalized outreach to members via email that are strategically aligned to lifecycle milestones. (e.g. first log in, first post, etc.) working with companies we distill the business objectives for the companies building the communities and then assign interventions to shepherd people through the different lifecycles. we focus on percentage of movement.

Page Views -- promoting community content on homepage, syndicating content around the site, selecting interesting and/or controversial topics to write about, promoting community positively in editorial (community newsletter, articles about community reaction to a topic, etc).

Message Posts -- active moderation and hosting to keep the conversation flowing

PV/Post -- drawing in new participants with interesting and timely discussions

Post/Thread -- keeping conversation flowing, encouraging interesting or 'hot' topics

Comments/Blog post -- volume and interesting/hot topics

Most active members -- individual recognition, rewards, and encouragement

Paying attention to the community and rewarding active members with recognition and sometime cash.

Promotion outside the community; search engine optimization.

Reaction time of new posts to a new topic

Reflect metrics back into user's interface

Site design and rewards/encouragement for behaviors that contribute to those metrics.

Tagged links, Email surveys

This is a very new application. Blog mentions are the best way for us to reach new users, We see the application being mentioned in many verticals and niches that we could not reach effectively through advertising.

Tight integration between community platform stats tool, site stats platform and membership/registration system

To have at least two people who facilitate the interactions around a brand, i.e. real people who engage with what used to be known as 'the audience'. Producers need to be aware of what their audience is thinking, and shared space environments are good for that. Some producers are beginning to invite co-production as well as real time comment from 'the community'. Engaging with and interacting back as the most effective metrics still, in my opinion.

Unique Visitors = marketing (traditional and Word of Mouth). Posts per thread = Promote search of threads and make it hard to see new thread button; highlight

threads that the user replied to (so they can track existing threads); email notifications for specific threads; don't archive threads for 3-6 months. Most Active Members = We don't promote this; Activity does not translate to quality. Member Satisfaction = set and maintain expectations; listen to new ideas; police community based on shared values; respond quickly to emergencies even if you don't immediately *do something*.

Varied. User Experience Research is probably the one unifying tactic.

Viral marketing - word of mouth

We often conduct focus groups to refine our site & activities. Also surveys, phone interviews to continuously improve.

Website performance

Question 15:

If you were to add and track new metrics, which business problems would you like to better understand?

Summary:

Survey participants identified several major business problems that they would like to gain insight in to:

Member Lifecycle: Understanding stages of a member lifecycle, and how to effect desired behavior, like contribution and member retention.

Engagement: How do you quantify and foster member's engagement (emotional investment) in a community?

ROI: What is the return on investment an organization gets from hosting a community? Dimensions could be a number of things, such as revenue, donations, product awareness, product trials, cost reduction and co-development.

Aligning Goals: Specifically, tactics for aligning the host organizations goals with the community's goals.

Detailed Responses:

As we build our community/tools, more of the participation/rating ones.

Behavior of power users is a key one... folks who visit frequently

Call deflection

Content Contributor Lifecycle

Conversion from non-reg to registered ad performance

Expanding networks to wider circles

How people find/don't find the areas and moments of engagement in their community. This ranges from simple things like 'knowing what is new or important,' searching and finding skills, both through tech and process means, social network analysis in business or learning communities.

How the company plans to integrate community in the overall business plan--not currently done.

How to drive up the contribution of the 'middle-tail' folks.

How to get businesses to understand that we are moving from a Fordist production model to a dynamic, two-way, flow of market exchanges. This may at times be products in exchange for money, but it could also be ideas and recommendations. The new model disrupts the seller/buyer and producer/consumer model, so there has to be more consultation between both parties.

I would like to understand better how to connect other activities (consumption of content outside of community areas) with the community behavior. Interested in iterative disclosure with payoffs.

I'd like to get more granular and integrated on conversion at all levels (from visitor to regular visitor, from regular visitor to registered member, from regular member to return visitor, from return visitor to poster at the community level, and then relating to conversion on the business side (from visitor to customer, from customer to repeat customer, from repeat customer to advocate/enthusiast), etc.

Identify emerging topics and attitudes toward them, to keep the community focused on what matters to its members.

Impact on customer service; direct impact on profit

Lifecycle of a user - how over time we can transition lurkers into active members & supporters (OneWorlders). We need to beef up our tech capabilities to match users with existing, trusted communities at OneWorld or elsewhere.

Luck to post ratio.

Member behavior across entire site and not just on community pages

Member behaviour

Member lifecycle

Member lifecycle, what motivates people to publish their content (share it) versus keeping it private.

Product awareness / Product adoption

Ratio of views per post

Retention of top contributors

The business goals for the company and the social goals from the community.

The lifecycle of a member and how it relates to whether or not they've posted or participated in a meaningful way. Are there certain events that lead to spikes in registration of members who stay active longer? what are those motivators?

User behavior metrics around new, reg vs. non-reg, return visits, 'quality of visitor', tie-back to user demographics for ad sales

We're just beginning to treat online communities as having significant business value, and will be establishing metrics tracking soon.

We're moving from a small set of low-traffic, high engagement forums towards an emphasis on high traffic, low engagement with CR. Would hope to track changes in satisfaction, impact.

What topics are our customers specifically interested in (e.g. what technologies and services), How do our users especially like to get access to our site and read our content (e.g. download and read online, via blackberry, online, etc.)

Where in the lifecycle of a user they decide to participate in a community How to fine the opinion makers and influencers in a community

Would like to know more about lurkers. Why they don't register. Where they are from.

Question 16:

What metrics do you use to demonstrate the value (ROI) of the community back to your management?

Summary:

Survey respondents share a number of metrics to communicate ROI back to their management and stakeholders.

Page Views: This is not an insightful metrics for most communities, but it is essential to understand page views for ad-driven communities in order to establish CPM rates.

Registrations: Membership of a community, which some tie to "awareness".

Satisfaction: Satisfaction with the community as well as with the host organization.

Downloads / Trials / Lead Generation: Software companies and communities with a premium (paid) layer can compare this metric with other marketing activities and channels.

Cost Savings: Cost displacement or reduction as a by-product of community activity. This could be call deflection for support communities, or R&D benefits for product

teams.

Content that ties back to “Mission”: This is particularly relevant for non-profits, who generally have a very clearly defined mission. Showing examples of content and activity that support an organization’s mission help justify the return on the community investment by demonstrating effect.

Direct Revenue: Perhaps the ultimate metric? Showing direct revenue from a community, and comparing revenue (and donations) from members and non-members is becoming possible because of better metrics packages and more careful instrumentation of community sites.

Detailed Responses:

registrations = awareness # product downloads = penetration

Again, it varies. In some communities is number of people, volume of participation. How does that impact the community and organizational goals? In others, it is about fulfilling specific actions or tasks - learning, knowledge sharing, etc. (I'm not working in product communities or general social spaces)

ARPU: average revenue per user

Because we are a non-profit, we use anecdotal quotes, stories and short case studies to understand where we are having an impact. We have developed keywords that show or occur near phrases that indicate the kind of impact we are working for. For example, 'this board' is an excellent way to find kudos, criticism and your users personal view of your community especially when users are speaking to other users. Another example is that we seek to reduce isolation of our clients. Therefore, '(I am|I'm not alone)' highlights expressions that people are not feeling alone (but it filters out phrases such as 'you are not alone' which are not as valuable.

Benchmarks above. Are developing reach metrics as well, correlated to activity and support.

Change in revenue from those who participate in community

Community ROI is developed for each client individually. There is no one size fits all approach.

Cost avoidance of technical support

Cost savings Sales Retention Referral Customer sat

Customer satisfaction with our products as moved by thier feeling of being 'supported' through our reach 'community' channels.

Depends on the community - for communities that are seeking to increase loyalty or reduce human efforts on customer care then the metrics are very different than those communities that are created to generate revenue.

Growth in activity (posting and reading)

I don't but would like to know what to use we really only use number of members

Lead generation - leads to actual purchases, registrations

Membership and service fees.

New member acquisition, # of downloads (pointing to value of content, and future pay service opportunity)

No metrics but anecdotal notes.

Not enough as some of these metrics still need to be gathered manually i.e. by human observation and reporting. There needs to be more inward reporting of behaviours, ideas, thoughts and so on, but that takes time and the more traffic you have, the less time you might have to 'engage with' and report back. Traffic flow is not necessarily a good metric to use, quality is more important. A good signal to noise ratio is a good thing to report back to management. Whether the solicit for content has resulted in good contributions which answer the 'call' is also important. Companies who run online communities are not like the rest of the - more freeform - Internet, they should not be afraid to do more facilitation and set the topic e.g. through challenges, events and so on....GUIDED by both the community and also the strategic direction of the brand. It's not the same kind of shared space as, say 'My Space'. There should be a common goal and common interests between the community and those who facilitate the hosted space, if they don't match up, something's gone wrong?

Ones listed above are key... still trying to figure out other ones of relevance

Page requests, new member registrations

Page views and ad impressions; some non-quantative value for share of visit

Page views, unique visitors

Page views, visitors, Page views/posts, loyalty

Pageviews, because the site success is demonstrated in pageviews and ad impressions delivered. There is also anecdotal value in helping us beta test, giving us material to include in our stories, and helping us position our brand and site as the go-to place when you need help.

Participation in the community, mentions of the community on other sites, positive impacts that are trace-able to participation in the community.

Revenue/UU and Number of properties used/UU



Subscription fees / participation bookings revenue / participation sales / participation

Time spent in community activities, product, and services Number of community products and tools used per month Number of social networking transaction
Amount of community contributed content

Traffic + conversion rates.

Unique visitors and subjective content analysis

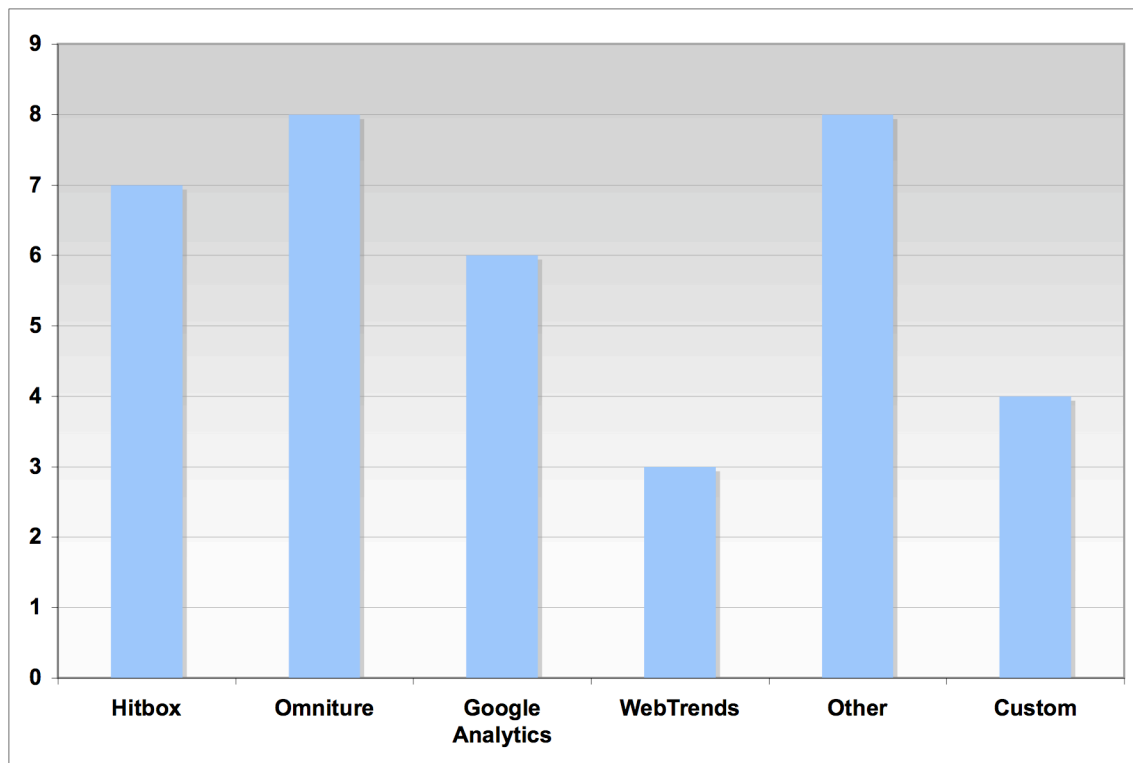
Uniques and page views to advertising dollars.

We are a non-profit. I can compare and contrast registered community members to participants of our fundraising events and how much they raise

Question 17:

What tools, technologies, and services do you use to capture, produce, and view your metrics?

Note: There was enough data to graph the “major” metrics tools respondents used. Outlier data and interesting write-ins follow the graph below.



Detailed Responses:

An awfully large data warehouse... some of our clients use Omniture and share their analysis.

Analog log analysis home-grown activity tracking visual sciences

Hitbox and Yesmail (for e-newsletters)

hitbox, customized query/report tools, excel (ugh!)

Hitbox, WebTrends, Urchin

Netscan.Research.Microsoft.Com

Omniture, Hitwise and Comscore/NNR ahve been some important tools.

Prospero Technologies back-end.

SAS (We used to use Crystal reports and were planning to convert our reporting to Cognos, but are planning to discontinue our service this Spring, so we won't be proceeding with that plan.)

Surfaid, Brio

We use Hitbox to track on both the ... sites. However, Hitbox is limited in terms of community metrics, because it cannot tell us the number of new posts. Currently, ... is using phpBB, which we have installed a statistics mod for that gives me some data. ... is using UBB Threads, which has extremely limited data. This year, we are moving to Jive, which has a more robust reporting feature we expect to take full advantage of. We were using webtrends, but just switched to hitbox. We also use in-house data gathering tools that query the community data.

Wide range depending on tools customers use for their web site.

Will be using a COTS add-on that analyzes portal and collaboration transactions.

Question 18:

Your colleague is establishing a new online community. What advice would you have concerning community metrics?

Summary:

The survey respondents offered a variety of great advice for establishing online community metrics.

Detailed Responses:

1. Know your goals and translate them into concrete terms.
2. Relate stats where you can rather than rely only on absolute numbers.
3. Page views are fast becoming useless, especially with AJAX apps on the rise.
4. Never throw away your data -- you may need to rerun it in that shiny new metrics package you bought so you can accurately compare previous data with new data.
5. Mix quantitative with qualitative -- your community is made up of people with real stories to tell. They are as important to your future success as how many conversions to sales were made.
6. Consider measuring things that are not on your site: technorati/digg/delicious links.

Be careful what you measure, have clear goals

Be realistic. For (site name deleted), quality is more important than quantity.

Build a powerful & flexible 'metrics engine' or 'data store' up front. You won't know what metrics you'll need up front, but if you are successful, you will need easy access to query & present the data in order to gain support to move forward :)

Capture everything!

Capturing and surfacing metrics (e.g. ratings) on the site indirectly provides value to the users. They understand which pieces of content people found most valuable. It also encourages authors to deploy good stuff because there is pressure to do well because

the content will be rated.

Define some, collect them, report them

Determine your goals for the site (including fiscal) then decide what to look at so you're not 'Lost in Hitbox' or the like in a fairyland of gorgeous and non-actionable numbers.

Discover an existing community, don't create one top down. Establish purpose and align with business strategy (or modify business strategy to reflect value of the community). Establish ties to business results (increased productivity, client contacts, etc.) - track business metrics as paramount. This involves engaging data and metrics that likely lie outside the online community software. Show this linkage, de-emphasize metrics that simply show 'people are sharing.' We are not yet evolved to where a 'dial-tone' of community tools is deemed necessary for business - unfortunately we are still asked for the 'ROI' for online communities.

Do it faithfully, from the beginning.

Don't get hung up on measurements and don't measure everything

Don't ignore them. Even if you don't have all the metrics you want when you start - get the community going anyway.

Figure them out up front. Sometimes hard to measure

Find your best evangelists and develop them. Our top 20 community volunteers make up one third of all posts...but also do a great job of spreading the word and other volunteer recruitment.

Focus on the critical few. Can't track everything

Follow your metrics closely, but make sure you understand who your community is in order to interpret them correctly. You need to know if dips in page views/unique visitors are seasonal or if they're due to some other factor - these require different strategies.

For a business community, look at three levels:

- * Community metrics
- * Web metrics
- * Business metrics

Measurement programs need to account for all three.

Identify your business objectives first, then use metrics to measure the impact of the community on meeting those objectives.

It's important to track, especially at the start, to make certain new members are getting in and finding a place to talk

Know the question you want to ask. There are more stats than you know what to do with.

My favorite quote from last year's survey, on my wall: 'Don't rely on metrics to claim your community is successful. Use metrics to understand your community better.' - Online Community Metrics, Best Practices Survey, March 2006 AND when deciding what to measure, ask myself 'what action will I take based on this?' and write it out so I only measure things I can use.

Network with others at annual online community Summits

Numbers tell a story, but numbers only tell part of the story. Metrics are important -- pageviews, new threads & posts, etc all tell you hard growth facts. But part of community is organic -- how the culture is developing, how many people are forming deeper relationships with each other -- these are important things for community growth that can't be measured.

Open access is helpful

Set up goals that are aggressive across multiple dimensions (new users, percent actives etc...)

Time spent in community activities, tools and products

Track as much as you can, even if you don't understand yet why you're tracking things. It's easier to mine data you've got than to wish you'd been compiling data all along. Be very cautious, however, of acting too quickly to cyclical fluctuations in participation. Watch the bigger trends.

Track everything.

Try to track the visitor as well as the visit. that is, try to learn about the user demographics and interests as well as their on-site activity behavior.

Understand the goals of your community and select the appropriate set of metrics that drive your behavior. An opinion sharing site, for example, necessitates a different set of goals than a QnA focused one.

Understand your purpose and design your evaluation strategy off of that. For every piece of data you COULD collect, ask yourself, how can I meaningful USE that piece of data. Some data tells us nothing actionable.

Watch for spikes in activity: Either correct the error or fan the flames.

What are their business goals? what do they want the community members to do - and why. Figure that out and then design the community interactions to support those goals.

Question 19:

What are the best resources (books, blogs, white papers, people) concerning this topic of online community metrics?

Summary:

The most valuable source of current and insightful information about online communities continues to be other knowledgeable professionals. A variety of people, blogs, books and events are listed below in the detailed responses.

Detailed Responses:

I enjoy conversations with community building peers - such as Joe Cothrel (of Lithium), Barbara Steinberg. I also value the wisdom of crowds (book) and the cluetrain manifesto as indirect guiding thoughts.

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Marc(Smith) at Microsoft is one of the better resources I've used.

Hm, you made me realize I don't have that information well organized into one of my online community cheat sheets. I had better do that. I tend to turn to my friends.

I love the stuff from Microsoft Research (netscan etc..)

People...particularly other community hosts and managers

Microsoft Research Community Technologies Group
<http://www.research.microsoft.com/community>

I actually haven't found anything that does a good job of talking about capturing, reporting, etc community metrics. Definitely an opportunity for someone.

Charlene Li has some interesting things to say about measuring Web 2.0 apps and measuring user *engagement*.

ForumOne (natch!), Ross Mayfield, Howard Rheingold

Mike Rowland Joe Cothrel

Blogs, online community summit, peers met at the summit.

Blogs:

<http://citizenagency.com> (Tara Hunt)

<http://headrush.typepad.com/> (Kathy Sierra)

Clickz, forum one

Final Comment

We really appreciate the survey participants taking the time to respond to a survey this detailed. Thank you! We find getting qualitative feedback in this format extremely valuable, and hope you do as well.

We continue to be encouraged by participation and feedback to these surveys, and plan to do several more this year.

Best,

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About Forum One Communications & The Online Community Research Network

Forum One Communications <http://www.ForumOne.com> is a web strategy and communications firm which assists organizations in using new technologies to enhance communications and collaboration.

The Online Community Research Network (OCRN) <http://www.onlinecommunityresearch.com> is a collaborative effort of online community professionals to better understand the principal challenges of building and managing online communities. The Research Network coordinates the collection, analysis and dissemination of useful information among online community professionals.

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