

5 Steps to Getting Started with an ONLINE MEMBER COMMUNITY

Attract and Engage Members Virtually – All Year Long

Industry research shows that networking is a top reason that members join an association. It also suggests that staying up to date on industry news, regulations, and trends is one of the most valued benefits across all generations and career stages, making it a top driver of member retention.

Providing an online community is an ideal way to deliver a great member experience and keep members engaged every day.

It's an efficient way to deliver member value, and a convenient way for members to stay connected with your organization and other members anytime from anywhere.



Here are five steps to help you get your association's online community off the ground:

STEP 1

Develop goals

Define your goals for the online community, such as recruiting and engaging members, making collaborating more efficient, or simplifying customer service.

Consider what members want.

Gather their feedback through surveys, and review industry research on the topic.

Talk with each department in your association to gather feedback and encourage support for the project. Also, recruit a core group of members to become early adopters and champions of the online community.



74% of members turn to their association for a professional community.

Association Trends 2020: From Disruption to Opportunity, by Community Brands

STEP 2

Define success metrics

Establish metrics to determine how well you're tracking toward your goals. Consider metrics around:

Acquisition and retention rates

Satisfaction ratings

Engagement from a particular member demographic

Number of logins, page views, file uploads, and discussion posts

72% of members say online networking has been a helpful channel for building community and sharing information during the pandemic.

Association Trends 2020: From Disruption to Opportunity, by Community Brands



STEP 3

Create a plan

1 **Decide** who will be on your community team. Include a mix of staff from across the organization. Ask a board member to join the team, and include your early adopter members as well. Be sure to define roles and responsibilities for each team member.

3 **Create** a content calendar that includes a steady stream of useful content to visit the community more often. This can include industry news, commentary, job search tips, and career development opportunities.

2 **Map** out the member journey in the online community so you can continuously drive members to join and explore the community, and then foster long-term engagement.

4 **Plan** your community rollout, including teaser communications to let members know the community is coming.



68% of members say industry information is a more important member benefit today than it was before the pandemic.

Association Trends 2020: From Disruption to Opportunity, by Community Brands

STEP 4

Select online community technology

Look for an online community vendor that supports your association's key goals.

Make sure that the platform:

- Lets you customize the look and feel of your community to support your association's brand

- Allows you to personalize content so you can deliver great member experiences

- Integrates with your association management software (AMS) so you can easily track metrics and gather information about member interactions in one place

79% of members say it is very or somewhat important that their organization provide targeted, valuable content.

Digital Evolution Study by Community Brands



STEP 5

Launch your online community

Let members know the online community is live, and give them instructions on how to join in.

Ask early adopter members to start posting.

Encourage networking by providing one-to-one connections and opportunities to network based on details you collect through your online community platform.

Make it fun by using gamification badges to reward members for their participation.



With networking as a top reason members join a professional association, your online community is a major selling point. Be sure to promote it in your member recruitment and onboarding activities. You'll attract new members and get more members more involved.

Learn more about the industry's most powerful online community to increase member engagement, retention and loyalty, Nimble Communities.

[Learn more](#)