# the truly *Monumental*

## GUIDE TO

## BUILDING

## ONLINE

## COMMUNITIES

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# A NOTE

## FROM *mack*

# This changes everything

On the third morning of MozCon 2012, I had the serendipitous opportunity to have breakfast with Jon Henshaw, Co-Founder of Raven Internet Marketing Tools. We shared a conversation about our individual journeys over coffee and omelets. Among many other nuggets of wisdom, Jon told me this:

*"Build a tool.*

*Within the next year, figure out something that people need and build it.*

*And then give it away for free."*

What started as a challenge to create a simple guide, a tool for other people and companies to use as their community building roadmap, became the catalyst for the craziest transformational journey our company has ever been on in our 10 years of existence. The making of this guide has changed everything.

## Build an engaged audience (and a better business)

The Truly Monumental Guide to Building Online Communities is for companies who want to build an engaged audience around their brand. It's for companies who are just starting out and want to build that community of lifelong customers, and it's also for companies who already have communities but are looking to serve them better and improve their own business in the process.

As you work through this guide, know that there's more than one way of doing this community building stuff. We've provided our suggestion for a process that has been incredibly powerful for us and our clients. Our hope is that you'll add your wisdom and your experiences and make the process your own. In the end, our intention is to teach you how to effectively build community and also to move your company forward.

# With extreme gratitude

Although I'd love to take all of the credit for the creation of this guide, it certainly didn't come to fruition through my efforts. Everything we do in this company is a team effort and this guide has been no different. I cannot thank the Mack Web team enough.

I'd also like to extend a special thank you to a few people and companies:

## Courtness

Our very own novelist-in-the-making, Courtney Brown, is the voice and personality of the Mack Web brand. Without her amazing talents as a writer, this guide would be a lame excuse for a whitepaper. Courtney persevered in translating all of our community building wisdom into this captivating read. Courtness, someday you will make it big and fly away from Mack Web, but until then, we're so incredibly blessed to have your talents on this team.

## Nat

I have a very special place in my heart for Miss Natalie. You'd be hard pressed to find a kinder, more talented designer who will do anything it takes to support the team. Nat is the magic behind every slide deck, everything we ever produce that looks amazing, and of course this beautiful guide. Thank you Nat for the immense effort and life you put into Arthur.

## Distilled

I can't thank Distilled enough for their guidance and compassion over the last year. Thanks for taking the chance on me and giving me my first industry speaking gig so that I could voice my passion for building community. And, Duncan and Will, thanks for teaching me what I really need to know about surviving this company-growing stuff.

## Moz

Without Moz, I'm certain there would be no guide. Thanks for being our community building inspiration. Thanks for taking me in and allowing me to contribute on the Moz blog. Writing for and being part of the Moz community has taught me what a community really is as it is truly one of the most amazing communities in the whole wide world.

## Our Community

It's small and mighty (like Mack Web) but thanks to our very own community. Thank you for your undying support and confidence. We couldn't have done this without you. Hang on kids. This is just the beginning. We're really grateful that you're coming along for the ride.

Now go on and read this thing. We worked real hard on it.

*Mack*

# THE BASICS & BENEFITS OF

## COMMUNITY *building*

# THE BASICS OF
## community building

# Because disorientation is disorienting

Briefly, before we begin, we're going to give you a sneak-peek at what to expect. There's a lot of information coming and we don't want to send anyone into unnecessary overload.

'Cuz we're nice like that.

So, what **Chapter 1: The Basics and Benefits of Community Building** has in store for you is answers to these three Very Important Questions:

**1.** *What* IS AN ONLINE COMMUNITY *and why* DO I NEED ONE?

**2.** *What* BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM BUILDING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY?

**3.** *How* ARE YOU PEOPLE GOING TO HELP ME BUILD ONE?

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If you're very, very lucky you might even get answers to some of these Significantly Less Important Questions:

- *Where* IS MY FLYING CAR?

- *How* DOES COW-TIPPING WORK, ANYWAY?

- *How* CAN I TELL IF I'M A CYLON?

If you already know the answers to these questions and are in a hurry, feel free to move along on to Chapter 2, where we'll be talking about all the tools you need to build and grow your online community.

If you already know the answers to these questions and aren't in a rush, peruse Chapter 1 anyway. There's always more to learn and more to share. And also we're funny and you should like us.

If you don't know the answers to these questions...well, clearly you've never spent a summer in farm country. You should keep reading. Just so you know what you're getting yourself into.

# 1.

## *What* IS AN ONLINE COMMUNITY *and why* DO I NEED ONE?

## The Problem

Just to start things out with a bang, here's a really, really big secret, just for you. Are you ready? (Of course you are, look at you. You were born ready). Here it is:

*The internet is here to stay.*

Gasp, stutter, shock, awe, etc. Feel free to indulge, for a moment, in the appropriate response to such a stunning revelation.

Done? Excellent.

## The eternal questions

With the acceptance of the internet's permanence comes a slew of pertinent questions.

Not surprisingly, these are an updated variation on the same questions mankind has been asking himself since man first wielded fire and began to think beyond subsistence:

- *How does this affect my job? My company? My business?*

- *How can I be heard?*

- *Can I exchange the instant global information network for the flying cars we were promised in every projected future of the sci-fi industry?*

Let's take a look at these, one-at-a-time.

## Changing LIFESTYLES

You might (if you're a technophobe with friends who love you enough to keep in touch in-person or over that fellytone thing that the oldsters use) be able to avoid internet absorption in your personal life.

It's well nigh impossible to remain completely offline in your work life. Even if you manage to keep your office operating on paper instead of by email or digital spreadsheets, even if you decline all G-chat requests and make your co-workers truck themselves over to your desk when they need a word, you can't control the behavior of your audience.

*And unless your products or services are geared entirely to the geriatric crowd (or possibly the Amish), your audience is online.*

So you have to be too.

## A VOICE IN THE *wilderness*

The real problem with the web isn't really its, y'know, existence, per se. It's just how prolific the use is. A basic web presence is increasingly easy to establish. A blog, a Twitter account, a few clever keywords or funny graphics and BOOM!

You have arrived.

This means that the web market is flooded, nay deluged, with content of every shape, size, voice, and quality, all purporting to be the best, the answer, the only serious contender.

*It's not enough to just be there. You have to actively compete for attention.*

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And it's not just with your golden child older brother anymore. It's with that really annoying kid from the playground who charmed all the parents even as he picked on the runts.

It's not just the moguls you have to look out for. You're competing with shock value artistes, with the loud, with the garrulous, with the shameless celebrity hijackers.

Google and its brethren are fighting an uphill battle to separate the wheat from the chaff but the corner-cutters are clever, devious, and lazy.

Which is a frightening combination, really.

So standing out in the crowd without accidentally getting hammered by "The Man" in his quest for the weeds is a difficult proposition. (And if that's not a hopelessly twisted set of metaphors, we will eat a monkey's uncle's hat with a spoonful of sugar).

## *Where's* MY FLYING CAR?

Can't help you.

*And we are so, so sorry about that.*

# The Solution

There is, however, a solution to those other things.

### Good news

And we just happen to know what it is.

### Even more good news

We're completely willing to share with you. In fact, that's the whole point of this document that you're holding in your hands.

(Ha! The irony! As if you're reading a guide to community building tactics on actual paper. Sometimes we crack ourselves up).

Ready? Are you sure? Okay, here goes:



BUILD AN
online community

The End.

Just kidding. About it being the end. Not about the community building. Because, in case you hadn't picked up on it from the title, that's what we're here to talk about:
*building online communities*

# Not Sim City: Building an online community is making the right friends

Just to clarify, when we talk about building an online community, we're not talking literally. We don't want you to get architecture software and start designing cities on your laptop.

In fancy-pants terminology, building an online community means identifying, reaching out to, and entering into relationship with the online component of the diverse pieces that compose the sphere of your business.

In regular people talk, this means, essentially making the right friends. You're just conducting a great deal of that relationship via digital means.

## There are wrong friends?

Well...please understand that our meaning is a little different than your mom's. Presumably, by "the right friends" she meant the nice, respectful kids who liked ice cream socials and didn't go around smoking cigarettes or tipping cows.

To us,"the right friends" actually covers a few different groups (and though we certainly hope there will be ice cream at some point, we wouldn't be totally averse to a little cow-tipping):

1. *Your customers, both current and potential.*
2. *Your peers.*
3. *The leaders, the innovators, the voices particular to your industry.*
4. *The influencers, the visionaries from any field that inspire you.*

# But Mom was right about one thing (well, probably more than one)

*To **make** a friend, you have to **be** a friend.*

As you proceed through this guide, we'll talk a little bit more about the nitty-gritty of finding these people and communicating with them.

But let's just be real clear, right up front.

Community is about relationships.

And relationships (well, *healthy* relationships) are not bought. They are not achieved by being disruptive or annoying (that's usually called *stalking*).

*Relationships are the result of listening and responding. Of caring and taking the time to **understand**. Of providing valuable advice or insight. Of finding the balance between entertainment and profundity.*

This is true of all relationships: business and personal, online and offline.

## A familiar refrain

And this is the fact that is slowly becoming apparent about marketing online: *it follows all the same principles as marketing offline.*

- *Build a good product. Make it better.*

- *Build a good business. Make it better.*

- *Understand your audience, your customers, your partners, your peers. Apply that knowledge.*

- *Be a person among people. Show respect for your fellow man.*

- *Know who you are, what you want your business to be. Find what makes you and your business different and special and then sell the heck out of that difference.*

Sound familiar?

Here's the thing: Having an online community - hell, the process of building your online community - will help you achieve all those things.

Don't believe us?

Read on, Doubting Dan. Read on.

# The Practicalities

## Why, specifically, community building?

In a minute you're going to read all about the specific aims that building communities can help you achieve.

Before that, though, a word from our sponsors (by which we mean us) on the two reasons that community building is a better approach than its digital marketing alternatives. Let's talk about *sustainability and relationships*.

# 1. Sustainability

We know that sustainability has been suborned as a buzzword for a lot of different causes and industries. But there's a reason for that: it's a damn fine word.

Aesthetics aside, the real reason we use this word is because it actually means what we're talking about. (Is there a better reason?)

*"Sustainability" is defined (by this awesome dictionary thing on our computers) as "able to be maintained at a certain rate or level" or "able to be upheld or defended."*

As an approach to marketing, building online communities actually qualifies as both.

## a. Able to be maintained

If you've spent any time at all in the web marketing industry, you'll recognize the words "panda" and "penguin" not as zoo attractions, but as the Google algorithm updates that decimated many of the old ways of "doing search engine optimization."

If you haven't heard of them, all you need to know is this: they symbolize the lengths to which Google will go to try to weed out the poor or low-quality content.

Engines like Google use insanely complex math to automate the crawling-indexing-querying-parsing-returning cycle that is search.

But sometimes, when they update the algorithm to try to exclude those engaging in bad or unethical practices, there are well-intentioned websites that are penalized as well.

So everyone who wants their websites to rank well in Google is on the lookout for methodology that will weather the storms of those Google updates, that won't have to be adjusted every time they change something.

*They want a way of doing SEO that transcends chasing the algorithm.*

*And that's what building online communities does.*

*Think of it this way: Google is trying to train their crazy-math to respond exactly the way a live, actual person would in order to return you the best results.*

*So as long as your marketing efforts align with what a live, actual person would find valuable, you're not in much danger from algorithm updates. So while there's some optimizing left to be done, the first focus should always be on your business.*

Pretty nifty, hunh?

## b. Able to be upheld

In addition to deflecting negative search engine attention, community building can be upheld as actively working in your favor in two separate and valuable ways.

*First is per the old, traditional SEO standards* (and yes, it's kinda crazy to think that SEO has been around long enough to have anything labelled "old" or "traditional." But then we remember: SEO was around back when Pluto was still a planet. No spring chicken, that SEO): *attracting links to your website from reputable sources.*

We'll talk about this a little more a little later, but one of the great things about all these people you're building relationships with is that, if you've built that community the right way, they're going to be naturally linking to your content, your blog, your website.

So you're meeting that criteria.

*But there's a second reason that we uphold building online community as a valid and valuable method.*

*And this is a little thing that we like to call the human element.* When we here at Mack Web Solutions talk about the Human Element, we're referring to a lot of specific things that all fall under the overarching belief that human beings are awesome and powerful and should never be underestimated or undervalued.

In this particular context, the human element refers to the power of having actual human beings who will vouch for your company, your product, your services, *you.*

Word-of-mouth remains the most trusted form of advertising out there. Which also happens to bring us to the other reason that building online community is better than the alternatives.

# 2. *Relationships*

We know it sounds kind of fluffy, but the thing that community building brings you that no other SEO or web marketing effort will do is relationships with actual, live human beings.

And we're not just talking about making new friends (although we do consider that one of the perks), but you're also taking shape and becoming a real person to any and all of the following:

- *Influencers in your industry,*

- *Peers with whom you can (with discretion) share and commiserate and prognosticate,*

- *People who will read, share, and otherwise disseminate your content (and with it, your brand),*

- *Current and potential customers, and*

- *Potential mentors, people who can help you learn and grow.*

Can you, with any honesty, state that you have no interest in connecting with these types of people?

Yes?

Well, that's that.

Clearly you're a Cylon.

Get back across the Armistice Line, toaster.

# 2.

*What* BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM BUILDING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY?

# Surprisingly broad gains from a seemingly niche effort

Too often community building (or, indeed, digital marketing as a whole) can be viewed as a small, segregated part of the wider business experience. Even business owners and marketing departments who accept that some form of online presence is a necessity think of it as an afterthought.

They throw a little bit of money and either exceedingly low or unrealistically high expectations at the internet and then feel themselves justified in disliking the medium when they receive nothing back in return.

For shame.

You're missing out, guys.

*Because here's a facty-fact: done correctly, with the whole picture in mind, the online community approach to web marketing (integrated marketing, if you will) will not only build your brand and widen your reach, it will help you build a better business.*

And to be doubly, trebly, quadruply clear (but mostly just 'cuz we wanted to use the word "quadruply"), let us define what we mean by building a better business. Building a better business means not just hitting and exceeding your fiscal goals, but also looking beyond that and achieving your company's *purpose*.

Why was your company built? What were you/they/the pod people inhabiting your boss' body hoping to add to the world when they started it? What do you care about?

Yeah.

*That* kind of better business.

## Six (big) benefits of building a community

Let's just be as clear as can be (does that make us quintuply clear? hexaclear?) There are some entirely real and measurable obstacles that building your online community can help you surmount:

1. *Meeting your traditional marketing goals,*

2. *Connecting with a web-focused audience,*

3. *Beating out the competition,*

4. *Attracting the right customers,*

5. *Lowered customer acquisition costs,*

and the BIG ONE:

6. *Building a better business.*

# 1. MEETING YOUR TRADITIONAL MARKETING *goals*

Well, what does everyone want from their marketing? Broader brand exposure, awareness, and recognition? Becoming known and trusted in your industry and among your customers? A targeted spotlight on undervalued and new programs or products? Increased traffic and sales?

It's not difficult to list the ways that building an online community can help you with these same goals:

- *a targeted and responsive audience,*

- *the endorsement and advice of industry thought leaders,*

- *a wider reach for your content,*

- *a forum for the causes dear to your heart,*

and, that's just off the top of our heads.

## 2. *Connecting* WITH A WEB FOCUSED AUDIENCE

You've got to *know* your audience to connect with your audience. It's not the generation gap we're talking about when we talk about "connecting with a web-focused audience." (Although making sure that you're appealing to the people who do everything online is going to increase your reach).

What we're talking about is directing your efforts according to the psychology of the audience you're going to find online: people who want a voice, an involvement, to be heard.

The steps required to build an online community, both on-and off-line, will establish you before the plugged-in, technophiles as someone who values their opinions, hears their voices, listens and responds and treats them with human dignity.

In so doing, you're humanizing your brand and you're spending face time with your potential customers.

But here's the rub: this internet thing also makes it reeeeeallly easy for them to check your credentials. They've got the whole internet at their fingertips. They're going to be checking up on you, on your online word-of-mouth. On what we call your "social proof."

*Now if only there was a whole network of online people who liked you and trusted you and said nice things about you...*

Oh, wait.

## 3. *Beating* OUT THE COMPETITION

Done right, building a community will set you up perfectly to crush the vast majority of your competition into a fine paste with which you may do as you please. Lots of people are on social media and where the people are, so too do the companies gather and linger. (More than 64% of B2B companies have a social media presence, if we're getting exact).

Not all of those companies are actually using their social media to build community. (If you take away nothing else from this guide, try to remember this: having a social presence is not at all the same thing as actively building your online community).

*Community building is actually a little bit more than just an integrated web marketing technique. It's an investment in your company, in your knowledge base, in your website. Just about everything that you do to accomplish this building of communities also increases the value of your company.*

You improve your systems and processes and products and services to make sure you are chasing goals that reflect not just

how much money you'd like to make but also what you'd like to contribute to the world and what kind of company culture you're projecting to your audience.

And speaking of that audience, you're also growing closer to them, listening to their feedback, understanding what they need and want. You think that doesn't count as an investment in your company? Silly rabbit.

Plus, there's all the life enrichment stuff that comes from any approach that includes the building of genuine relationships as a central tenet.

As you might be able to guess, there is a slight difference between, well, all of that and sitting on your social media monologuing about yourself and your stuff all day.

Unfortunately (for them), not everyone has figured this out yet or realized that it's worth the expenditure of time or effort.

Some of these poor deluded fools are going to be your competitors. Get there first and they'll be chasing your dust for a good long while.

# 4. *Attracting* THE RIGHT CUSTOMERS

With a community, you'll be acquiring not just more potential customers, but the right ones. We've touched briefly on making the right friends, but online community building can do that on a pretty grand scale. The nature of communities is such that they're full of people who know other people just like them. When you build, find, borrow, share the right audience, you're tapping into a rich vein of possibility (and making some pretty awesome friendships and connections in the process).

It works a little bit like this:

There's a pretty great online video hosting company called Wistia. Let's say that Wistia, in all their awesomeness, does a little research and realizes that the demographic of the Mack Web Solutions community exactly matches up with the customers they want to acquire. What should they do? They could target our community directly and therefore individually. That doesn't sound like a lot of fun.

Or, they could build a relationship with Mack Web and ask us to reach out to our community on their behalf.

When you've spent as much time and effort making yourself awesome and chockfull of value the way Wistia has, this actually isn't that hard.

So they reach out to us - specifically our community manager - and display how genuinely funny they are and how well they know their stuff.

They take their time: they meet up with us at a conference or a coffee shop and get to know us on a personal level.

When we get to the point that we both know that we genuinely like each other and that Wistia really and truly can offer value to *our* community, they start showing off some of their fun, funny, personality-packed videos. Which naturally, being fun, funny, and personality-packed ourselves, we decide to share with our community. (Now if only they featured more llamas). Being awesome as we are, we give credit where it's due and spend some time singing Wistia's praises to our community as we share the proof of their value.

So now our entire community knows who Wistia is, what they do, and how good they are at it.

As time goes by and Wistia keeps up the good work, we share more and more of their content and we foster the relationships that our community members seek to build with a valuable resource. We help guide Wistia to the right ones and vice versa.

Voila! They're in. They're meeting pre-vetted potentials who are a good fit for their services and building their own community too.

And, as an added bonus, with your new shared community members come connections to all the people they know and the organizations they represent.

Getting involved in an online community can help you break out of your lead ruts

and find new markets and verticals.

You won't even believe what's out there until you try it. We call it the web because everything's connected from different directions (in a web-like way). Trace a few of those strands and see where you end up. The opportunities are endless and the data available to us is remarkable.

*This is one of the beauties of community building. You don't have to do it all from scratch. It's about leveraging what already exists.*

The scenario above is perhaps an overly simplistic example, but it certainly captures the essence. It really does work that way.

## 5. LOWERED CUSTOMER ACQUISITION *costs*

With community building in your arsenal, you're going to lower your customer acquisition costs. Which is a fancy way of saying that you get more bang for your buck.

Building your community is also building your business development team. You are investing time and brilliance into developing relationships with your community and, as the damnably true cliche goes, you get out what you put in.

When you're invested in them, they reciprocate. Do this stuff right and your community falls just a little bit in love with you.

They are your brand advocates, your fans. Once you get the ball rolling on demonstrating your amazingness, they're the ones who are going to start spreading the word, all of their own volition. The responsibility (and cost) is out of your hands and not out of your pockets.

This is the nature of building real relationships with these people. They're in it for the long haul, too.

And all it's going to cost you is a judicious application of heart-to-hearts, periodic cupcakes of appreciation, and the occasional llama joke.

That's not so much to ask, is it?

## 6. BUILDING A *better* BUSINESS

Last, but most certainly not least, building a community is going to make your business (your *whole business*, mind you. Not just the online bits) better, stronger, faster.

Because the process of actually building your online community will help you accomplish goals for your *whole* business, not just your marketing.

Have a little patience will you? We're gonna show you how.

**3.** *How* ARE YOU PEOPLE GOING TO HELP ME BUILD ONE?

# Tools, processes, and the occasional llama joke

So here's how this whole thing is gonna work. You've made it through the introduction (barely). If we've done this right, you should have a pretty good idea of the theory behind community building.

Now we're going to walk you through what you need to know to actually do it. Starting with…

## Chapter 2: the essential community building tools

In which we discuss and define all the pieces you need to make online community building a success.

After that, will be, shockingly enough…

## Chapter 3: the actual "how to build an online community" process

In which you find yourselves jumping with joy as we walk you through the actual step-by-step How-To on this community building stuff, including everything from getting started to measuring the results.

## Chapter 4: adaptations for individuals, in-houses, & agencies

In which we talk about how to fit the techniques you learned in Chapter 3 to your own circumstances - whether you're an individual, an in-house marketing team, or an agency.

And then we conclude with... (wait for it)

## Chapter 5: the end (a.k.a. final words of wisdom)

In which we pretty much just reiterate what you *really* need to know and a then send you off with a politely worded, "Don't let the door hit you on the way out."

# CHAPTER ONE *wrap up*

## The Recap

For your re-viewing pleasure, here are the key takeaways we've hurled at you thus far in this completely remarkable community building guide:

- *The internet is here to stay (shocker, we know).*

- *Businesses must earn attention (and build an audience, a.k.a. a community) in order to thrive in the internet era.*

- *There are, as yet, no flying cars.*

- *Building an online community - creating and gathering a network of online supporters and friends via the targeted distribution of valuable content as well as in-person efforts - is the most sustainable approach to marketing on the web.*

- *Community building also has the most ancillary benefits including cultivating actual human-to-human relationships with mentors, peers, and customers alike, attracting those customers at lower cost, defeating your competition, finding new niches and verticals for your business, and, above all, building a better business.*

- *Everyone loves a bit with a llama.*

# What's Next?

Congratulations! Now that we've convinced you that you should be building an online community, we have deemed you ready to move onto **Chapter 2**, which you might remember, is the part where we start defining all **the tools that you'll need to accomplish this wonderful community building stuff**.

So, take a break, get a snack, pet a llama, and we're off.

# THE ESSENTIAL

## COMMUNITY BUILDING *tools*

# THE ESSENTIAL community building tools

## The requisite explanatory sneak-peek

So, as you know, if you've been paying attention, **Chapter 2: The Essential Community Building Tools** is going to lay out for you, well, the essential tools of community building.

Clever, no?

Only, this time, instead of answering three Very Important Questions, we will be addressing this one Very Important Point:

*Community building takes all kinds of tools.*

So that's the big point but there are two other **GREAT BIG NOTE/DISCLAIMER/ REMINDER-TYPE THINGIES** you need to hear about these tools.

## 1. YOU SHOULD SHAPE YOUR EFFORTS AROUND YOUR *goals,* NOT YOUR TOOLS.

We're going to describe a bunch of pretty great tools for you, but you shouldn't let your tools drive your community building. They are tools. They're not goals, they're not strategies. They are the implements we recommend you use to enact the strategies you've devised to meet particular goals.

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# 2. THE BEST TOOL IS *you*.

We mean this in a couple of ways. The first is that essentially these tools work for everyone, but everyone uses them differently. You have to find the right way to use the tools for your company, your organization, yourself.

Also, remember that these aren't sentient tools. They're powerful and useful, but they're nothing without a motivating force and intelligent plan behind them. And that comes from you. Your own hard work, your own creativity, your own diligence. You're the carpenter or gardener or whatever metaphor you'd like to use. They're just tools.

And now that the word "tools" has lost all meaning...onto the tools!

(There will also be rather a lot of talk about llamas, so...that'll be a win).

## community building
### TAKES ALL KINDS OF TOOLS

# Like a many-cogged machine

There are quite a few tools that you need to build your community. We're about to introduce you to the ones you absolutely must know. There are others and we trust your ability to find them once you catch the rhythm of this community building stuff, but these are the ones you absolutely must know to get started.

It's like this: every self-respecting person should know who Batman and Superman are but it's okay if you don't quite grasp the nuances of Nightwing and Krypto right off the bat.

Keep in mind that none of these tools exist in a vacuum. Your online community building is best served by fully integrating all the tools into a unified approach.

Get it? Got it? Good.

First up? Valuable Content.

# Valuable Content

|ˈvaly(o͞o)əbəl ˈkänˌtent|

*noun*

1. the material included on your website (pages, blog, social media posts or bios) which can be counted as a tangible asset to your business, usu. in the form of intellectual property, freq. referring to multimedia or written content separate from the directly self-promotional content necessary to every website: *Ohhh, your locations page has a video demonstrating the practicalities of keeping a llama as a pet in an urban environment? That is **valuable content**.*

2. the material included on your website which adds value to your visitors, audience, users: *Hey, look! It's an online forum for sharing your urban llamas adventures with other camelidae enthusiasts. It's got all kinds of exciting ideas for outings we can take with Llewelyn. What **valuable content**.*

## Beyond Crucial

Okay, serious moment here (don't worry, it won't last too long).

If you absorb nothing else of what is written in this guide, be sure that you take home this simple truth: *You absolutely cannot expect to build a vibrant, sustainable online community without valuable content.*

You can't. Period. The end.

Valuable content is your glue. Your foundation. It's what separates you from your competitors. It's what draws in your audience and convinces them that:

- *you know what you're talking about (and therefore your products and/or services were created by masterful minds and hands),*

- *you care about them and their specific needs,*

- *you will be fun/interesting/efficient/whatever-you-consider-your-defining-characteristic-to-be to work with,*

- *your stuff is worth saving, sharing, and revisiting as a resource, and*

- *causes or movements you support are worth checking out.*

You express yourself through your content. You give people a reason to know you, to engage with you, to introduce you to their friends.

Is there anything else you could ask for from a community building tool?

Seriously, is there? 'Cuz we can't think of anything. (OK, maybe these)

# Bounded only by your imagination

Valuable content comes in every shape, size, and media format. Any web asset that you develop is content. If it fulfills a purpose, it's valuable.

(Still confused, well, here's a great example: This document you're reading right now? Yep, valuable content).

So valuable content can be a simple blog post. It could be a video or an infographic or a parallax page (which could come in the form of a vaguely interactive infographic) or an article or a whitepaper.

It can be a forum or a tool or a game or an app.

There's just one question that it must answer in the affirmative.

Ready? Okay.

*"Will anyone care?"*

(Phrased more open-endedly as "Who cares?" or more crudely as one of our very favorite marketers Paddy Moogan puts it

"Who's going to give a shit"?, this question should be asked frequently during the content creation process).

Of course, it also matters that you execute your content well, that the quality and creativity be high, and that the distribution be conducted in a timely fashion (just because you build it, doesn't mean they'll come).

But the easiest way to determine whether a piece of content qualifies as "valuable" is to figure out who in the world will care that it exists. Who will use it, reference it, appreciate it, share it with their friends, laugh at it?

## Do it for those people

The natural conclusion to answering the "Who cares?" question is that the content you're drafting is for people. It's not for the search engines (though increasingly they do care about the value of your content), it's for the customers and clients and community members that you're trying to engage.

And it's for you. It's an asset that can't be taken away, it's a chance to really find what sparks your enthusiasm, it's the momentum you need to keep growing and building.

The engines should be a distant third in your consideration. Maybe fourth, if you throw the Consortium of Friends of the Llama in there. Because everyone wants to be be friends with them.

In short, content is your most powerful community building tool. So power it up with value and you'll be set to go.

www.mackwebsolutions.com

# Search Engine Optimization

|sərCH ˈenjən ˌäptəˌmīˈzāSHən|

*noun*

1. the process of ensuring that a website meets all the technical, usability, and content-related specifications for good visibility in the search engines: *Now that your website loads efficiently and has earned links from some trusted sources, all you have to do to complete your* **search engine optimization** *is place the keyword "llama lore" strategically on the homepage.*

## Yes, it's part of community building, too

SEO (which you probably know or can extrapolate as the common acronym for search engine optimization) and community building are actually inextricably linked (pun intended).

Community building needs SEO because the advent of Google &Co. has changed the way people seek and find information. Standing out in the Great Google Index of Omniscience is vital. Being highly visible in the search engines means that more people can find the valuable content you're generating and subsequently become a part of your community. Because building it isn't enough if no one's

looking at it.

Contrariwise, SEO needs community building, too. Once upon a time, SEO was pretty much regarded as the process of putting keywords into a few golden spots on your website. While keyword placement remains a factor, it has evolved into much, much more than that.

'Cuz here's the thing: what Google wants most, more than anything else in the world, is to provide its users with valuable content that answers the questions they are posing. Can you guess where we're going with this?

## A non-vicious cycle

By creating valuable content that resonates with people, that they want to share and engage with, you're earning links to your site, answering frequently asked questions, and gaining social media

Which, ultimately, is a both an end goal of community building and a perpetuating step in continued community building.

attention. By doing community building right, you're creating an entire user experience (remember that, 'cuz we'll be talking about it a second) that Google will adore and display.

Pretty cool, huh?

# Social Media |ˈsōSHəl ˈmēdēə|

## noun

1. a general or collective term for any individual or combination of the rampant web platforms for human interaction, most notably Twitter, Google+, Facebook, and LinkedIn: *What do you mean you don't use **social media**?! Have you been dead and/or living in a cave for the last decade? Are you a vampire?*

2. a general term for any activity undertaken on any of the aforementioned platforms: *Your **social media** is looking a little lackluster. It might be time to do more than Tweet about the weather once a month.*

## verb

1. to post, share, or otherwise disseminate via social media platforms: *This infographic on the proven correlations between intelligence and an obsessive love of llamas is the most stunningly brilliant and ground-breaking thing I've ever seen. I'm gonna **social media** the heck out of it!*

## adjective

1. of or pertaining to the use of social media platforms or the behavior and culture associated therewith: *Oh, you actually wanted us all to get together so that we could discuss recent news updates and quip about our days in sentences of 140 characters or less? How **social media** of you.*

Please also refer to TWITTER, GOOGLE+, FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN.

# Twitter

Sometimes referred to as a micro-blog, Twitter is the internet's answer to everyone who has ever found themselves sitting in an empty room when they've found something pithy, clever, hilarious, or otherwise brilliant to share or say.

It is also, as it so happens, a fantastic forum for connecting with your online idols, your peers, and even your customers on a human level. The ultra-brief format compels you to keep interaction short and sweet, without excessive fan-girling or jargon.

Beyond that, it's an incredibly powerful resource for knowledge. If you're following the right people, you're also picking up and applying the little nuggets of advice and brilliance that they're sharing (thank goodness for bit.ly and its brethren. Having to include long links would severely cut down on ease of the knowledge-sharing in 140 characters).

# Google+

Though oft-maligned and much debated, Google+ is clinging tenaciously to life. (And we all know what Google does to products it loses faith in. A moment of silence for Google Reader, please, ladies and gentlemen).

Google+ behaves a lot like Facebook, but with a more professional bent and a few extra features. The format isn't so different: you post statuses or share links with the people in your circles.

But it also has extras like the Google Hangout feature which allows for video calls between circle members or the hosting of remote panels or discussions with a viewing audience. (And also some dressing up like a pirate).

Not to mention that Google has tied its authorship tag to your Google+ profile. Which means if you want to reap the promoted post benefits of Google Authorship in the search engine results, you better get moving on G+. (In case you've been living in a cave, you might want to read up a bit on Author Rank. It's a whole other related ball game but one that's really important to understanding Google+ as a tool in your content, authority, and community building efforts).

## Facebook

What is there to say, really? You probably really have been living under a rock if you've not at least *heard* of Facebook.

Posts, Likes, Comments, Shares. In recent years, all the Facebook features have become considerably more business-friendly (no more having to pretend that your first name is "BuyA" and your last name is "Llama" in order to open an account for your company).

What's important to remember about Facebook is that it's not just a blanket outreaching tool. Everyone you know in your real life may be on Facebook, but that doesn't mean that your entire business audience is. Like all social media platforms, you still need to take the time to figure out exactly who you're reaching on Facebook and target your posts and content specifically toward that cross-section.

## LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the ultra-professional big brother of the other platforms. You can create a profile for yourself and/or your company and fill it with the relevant

statistics for purely business transactions: your resume or the list of your services offered, your work history or completed projects.

(**Quick word of wisdom for LinkedIn**: *Unless you are in a legitimately llama-related industry, it might be best to leave the llamas at home for your LinkedIn posts and updates. Llamas look weird in business casual and even weirder in suits.*

LinkedIn is also a great place to get involved in other communities by joining existing groups (or maybe you'll have the incredible initiative to create and maintain one of your own). You can also post valuable content that will be appreciated by this particular part of your audience.

While you never want to suppress or change your company personality, LinkedIn is the place to keep it most grown-up. While there are enough quirky people in the world that you can safely assume that LinkedIn has them too, it's more of a business-y forum. Put your most professional foot forward (it's like showing up for a high-profile meeting: you may prefer jeans most of the time, but sometimes you gotta dust off the suit).

# A closing note (or three) on social media as a community building tool

## 1. THERE ARE *way* MORE TOOLS OUT THERE

We kind of mentioned this above, but we've barely scratched the surface on social media outlets as tools here. There will be all kinds of other venues and platforms and what-have-yous that you'll find effective for building community. Just remember to keep your goals and target audience in mind. You don't have to be on every social media platform known

to man. Just the ones that are going to work for the stuff you want to accomplish.

## 2. SOCIAL MEDIA IS *all about* PEOPLE

There's also one other very, very important thing that you absolutely must remember about social media. Are you ready?

Social media is all about *people*. Don't attach too much power or importance to the individual tools (eventually some of them will go the way of MySpace and some new great thing will pop up).

Instead keep in mind that the real value lies in communicating and connecting with people.

You get to listen to them and you get to know them and you get to be friends and exchange valuable content and engage with them.

Which, if you've been paying attention, is pretty much the Big Kahuna of community building.

## 3. BE *wary* (NOT BEWARE) OF *automation*

There are tools you can use that will automate some of your social media-related community building: Hootsuite and Buffer and the really fancy and expensive ones whose names we don't speak (lest the envy in our tones should turn the air toxic).

You can certainly put these tools to good use and save yourself a little time and a little elbow grease. Here's the rub: do not become reliant upon them. They are a helping hand, not a substitute for the work. Scheduling a few tweets will not build you a community.

You need to be aware of what's happening on your social outlets, you need to engage *as* actual people *with* actual people.

# Design & User Experience

|dəˈzīn and ˈyo͞ozər ikˈspi(ə)rēəns|

*noun*

1. the aesthetic and usability considerations of a given website: *Oooh, including that llama icon next to all the pages with videos hosted by your charming camelidae mascot is great for your **design & user experience**.*

## Beauty is not always in the eye of the beholder

How you present stuff matters. Community building (done correctly) means a steady stream of visitors to your site, your blog, your social media outlets. Logic, common sense, and proven practice all dictate that you clean house and set out the good china before you invite someone home. You don't want to drag people back to an ugly, hard-to-use website.

Typically, people don't like ugly, hard-to-use websites. They don't trust them, they don't revisit them, and they certainly don't share them (unless it's to mock them).

You're going to have a hard time selling the value of your content (and yourself with it), if your website looks like you don't care.

## The chocolate sprinkles

Beyond just basic common sense, there are a few other good reasons to pay attention to your design and your user experience (or UX as we lazy, acronym-happy folks like to call it).

They help you attract the right audience.

As you work through the community building process laid out in Chapter 3, you're going to be doing a lot of brainstorming and researching on your ideal clients and customers and audiences. You're going to know them and where they are and what they need.

Which means that you're going to figure out what will encourage them to explore your site, to check out your social media, to share your content. Because it's not always going to be enough to just have the content.

There could be dozens, baker's dozens, scores, *hundreds* of sites out there that might provide the correct information.

They're going to choose the ones that are the quickest and easiest to navigate, the most aesthetically pleasing, the most creatively presented.

(Extensive research has also proved that the inclusion of llamas in your design is a guaranteed win. In certain circles).

## And the cherry on top

We're not going to go overboard talking about it, but as an added bonus: design, UX, and consequently user behavior are all factors in the way Google chooses to rank the sites in its index. So doing this stuff right is going to help you out with SEO stuff, too.

Handy, right?

# In-Person Efforts |inˈpərsənˈefərts|

*noun*

1. the act of attending conferences, meet-ups, or other events in order to forward your community building with the flesh-and-blood versions of your audience: *I'm super excited to be attending this petting zoo fundraiser banquet as part of my **in-person efforts**.*

## Squelch your surprise

Believe it or not, in-person efforts absolutely have a place in community building. In fact, without them, you'll pretty much just limp along. Like a pirate with a wooden leg (and not one of the cool ones with a parrot).

It is, of course, entirely possible to build an entire relationship online (think e-Harmony). But doing in-person stuff like attending events and conferences and things serves a few purposes:

- *Fast-forwards the community building process:*
  Meeting live, out in the real world makes you a real person to those you're wanting to develop a relationship with, as well as vice versa. It removes the barriers that the internet presents and allows you to build trust and credibility and to grow closer more quickly. You get a better sense of a person when you've spent even just five minutes talking to them. (And an ever better sense yet if you spend the whole night carousing. Or so we're told. We'd never actually *do* that. No sirree).

- *Establishes your knowledge and legitimacy*
  Depending on the event you're attending, whether an industry conference, meet-up, or a trade show, you get the chance to showcase what you know, to show off what you do, and just generally be fabulous. People believe best that which they see with their own eyes. Seeing and being seen in the flesh means you're the real deal.

- *Gives you material for both outreach and valuable content*
  Attending events gives you fodder for photos, videos, follow-up posts, slide decks, and presentations of the things you've learned. Meeting people at events gives you an automatic approach when you connect with them later on social media.

- *Allows you to make personal introductions to the important beings in your life*
  You never really know someone until you've spent half an hour with their pet alpaca. And that's a fact.

## An important reminder: don't be that guy

When you are, in fact, in-person, don't be a doofus. Don't make it all about you. No one likes the dude who shoves their business card in someone's face and talks about themselves all night. Be authentic, genuine, and natural. Don't sell your product or services. Be a friend.

This is the same advice we give you about online behavior: be yourself and put the focus on how you may be able to help *them*. Take it from us, if you do this, you will most certainly succeed in your community (and business) building efforts.

And you know why? Because people just might actually *like you*.

# Email Marketing |ˈēmāl ˈmärkitiNG|

*noun*

1.  the process of using templated emails to contact your audience, usu. for purposes of news updates, content distribution, or both: *I love getting an anthology of recent blog posts from my favorite llama trainer in my inbox.* **Email marketing** *rocks!*

2.  the assets associated with the aforementioned tactic: *We've upgraded your* **email marketing** *to align with your wise decision to animate a llama as your mascot/ spokesperson.*

## A thing to know about email marketing

Contrary to knee-jerk instinct, email marketing is not dead. It is not outdated. It is not *sooo 2006*.

Email remains a powerful force for reaching and connecting with an audience that has, in some way, already demonstrated at least a modicum of interest in you, your industry, or your products and services. (After all, at some point, they were interested enough to provide you with their email address).

In other words, these are people who might just be ready to take the next step in their relationship with you. Whether that means seeking a bid, buying a product,

upgrading an existing account, or attending your event, one way or another, these are people who are willing to pay a little more attention.

Your job, in return, is to make sure that you're engaged: listening to their feedback, improving accordingly, and giving them stuff they want.

If you're doing all that, email marketing is going to be a sustainable and highly effective way to direct traffic directly to your website, to any of your social media outlets, and assist with your community building efforts.

# The List has earned capitalization

It probably goes without saying (although we've never let that stop us from saying it), but your email List is *muy importante.* Like we said, it's full of people who are committed enough to actively invite your attention.

Building the List is good. Maintaining the List is vital. You don't want the people on the list to lose interest and hit the dreaded 'Unsubscribe' because you're failing to deliver what interests them.

So don't send out blanket emails to everyone on the list. Segment it and compartmentalize it, so that you're sending the right message to the right subset of your community. You're going to get better results that way.

# Also makes julienne fries!

There are actually ancillary benefits to email marketing tactics, apart from the most obvious traffic-attraction and brand awareness type things.

Let's take, for example, the most excellent Launchrock tool. Launchrock allows you to start getting out the word on a product, an event, tool, or piece of that valuable content we've been touting, even before it's done.

By collecting the email addresses of people who are interested in seeing the final product, Launchrock helps you gauge - in *advance,* no less - the attention you can expect to get for your efforts. The kind of

return you can expect on your invested time, sweat, and money.

*In other words, Launchrock helps you answer that all-important question: Who cares?*

And, via the email addresses you've collected, you can keep that interest alive (which is a really big part of building and growing a community). You can remind them of what's coming up, what they have to look forward to. You can reward them for their early interest with driblets and teasers and bonus content.

All via email.

Because even people who don't check their Twitter or Facebook everyday (or even have Facebook or Twitter) check their email.

It's a fact of nature.

Man meets email.

Man suffers email separation anxiety when forcibly pried away from computer.

Man creates smartphone. To check email absolutely anywhere.

# Human Element |ˈ(h)yo͞omən ˈeləmənt|

*noun*

1. the knowledge that, though community building is partly conducted via machine, it is always, always a living breathing person on the other side of the screen (except for when it's a Cylon...but we don't want to appeal to them anyway. They tend to be less about cultivating healthy and meaningful relationships and more about...well, mass extinction): *Don't forget to account for the* **human element** *when you're writing that post on the mechanics of cyber security. Throw in a bit with a llama. People love a bit with a llama.*

## The heart and soul of community building (literally and figuratively)

There isn't much more we need to say about this and what there is to say we've said elsewhere.

*But hear this: the absolute best way to build community is to remember that you are a person among people.*

Proceed with this truth in mind and you're going to do okay.

Unless you just don't understand the rest of humanity. Whereupon, you may need occasional guidance or reality checks.

But in the end, even Luna Lovegood had friends and helped save the world. So you'll probably be okay, too.

# Targeted Outreach |ˈtärgitid ˈoutˌrēCH|

*noun*

1.  the process by which your marketing efforts are directed to the audience for whom they were designed: *Our* **targeted outreach** *will ensure that this comparative infographic on why llamas are better than cats will be seen by people considering the purchase of a pet.*

## Target acquired

Targeting accurately requires a great deal of research and knowledge of what's out there and who your audience is.

By the time you actually get around to creating valuable content on a regular basis, you should already have a working knowledge of your community prospects.

There are ways to sniff out the people who could, should, or might be interested in what you have to say. Disregarding entirely the difference between deductive reasoning and painstaking exploration, we call the process Sherlocking. Other people call it other things. (But we don't bother with them much. Especially the ones who call it stalking. Silly people. What do the police know, anyway?).

For us, Sherlocking involves a lot of Googling, some Followerwonking (sounds dirty, right?) a lot of combing through people's social media trends and connections, a lot of information-gathering and networking and just out-and-out *talking to people.*

Who's out there? Who's active online? Who is worth connecting to offline and how do we meet them? Who shares similar tastes and interests? Where do they hang out? Who do they hang out with? Who do they follow/respect/admire? What content have they liked in the past? What type of content do they share? What type of content do they ignore? Who is listening to them? Do they like llamas?

Asking (and subsequently answering) lots of questions is the best way to know what

you need to do to build the community they'll want to participate in.

(For example, there are certain subsections of society who would be grossly offended by the way we ended in a preposition just there. If you are among them, allow us to rephrase for your comfort and admiration:

Asking (and subsequently answering) lots of questions is the best way to know what you need to do to build the community in which they'll want to participate.

There, see? Mack Web Solutions is attentive to your needs).

## A tactic in two parts

There are actually two phases of targeted outreach. There are those, like Launchrock (or just good ol' reaching out), which occur before a piece of (wait for it) *valuable content* is created (or at least completed). The purpose is to get feedback on your idea, to get the input of people you'd like to lure, er, *invite* into your community and thus ensure that the content will be well-received and *actually* (not just theoretically) valuable.

We call this (in an act of stunning creativity) *pre-outreach*.

Yes, we know. Contain your wonder at our great skill at naming stuff.

And then there's the outreach that occurs once you've finished a piece of content and you want to make sure that all interested parties see it.

This, we call, dunh dunh dunh...post-outreach!

Exciting, no?

# From the grand to the granular

Targeted outreach comes in all sizes.

Maybe you want all of your current customers to see a resource you've developed just for them.

Maybe there's an industry expert, a big voice, that you want to pay attention to a particularly fine video you've created (link to it or embed it or just share it).

The way you reach out depends on what you're trying to accomplish, whether a broad sweep to the many or a respectful poke to the mighty.

So you're going to use the best tools at your disposal for the task at hand. Like, say…social media. Or email marketing. Or a phone call (gasp!)

# The Great Divide is…maybe not as Great as you think

When you start talking about more obviously promotional tactics, it can be easy to lose sight of that ultimate goal of community building.

*But don't let it fool you. Outreach is a necessary part of building your community.*

Because while, "if you build it, they will come" is a lovely sentiment, it doesn't really work so well in reality. It's more like, "If you build it and then tell them about it, they will come."

While slightly less mystic and considerably less likely to end in interaction with ghostly baseball players, this particular mantra is going to serve you a bit better in the community building game.

And it's not as steely-eyed and coldhearted as it seems. You're taking the time to get to know these people and what they like. Yes, it benefits you, but it benefits them, too.

So…there. Ha.

# Making Friends |ˈmākiNG frendz|

*verb*

1. tricking other people into liking you...uh, convincing, we mean. Yes, convincing other people they like you: *No, of course I'm not using your freshly-baked cookies to bribe these kids so they'll hang out with me, mom. I'm* **making friends**.

## But, seriously, folks...

This is the dichotomy you must maintain in building online community: be strategic but genuine.

Yes, you want to put your best foot forward. You want to create wonderful, beautiful, *valuable* things that will appeal to the people who will buy your products or evangelize for your brand.

But you also want to genuinely cultivate your relationship with them. People are cynical, wary creatures. They know when you're faking it or phoning it in. So you have to be sincere.

Really, you're employing all the same steps as when you're making friends in the real world.

(But not the Real World. We're pretty sure the point of that was the *opposite* of making friends. Especially in that Hawaii season. Or Miami. Geez).

# Analytics |ˌanlˈitiks|

*noun*

1. the numbers and statistics that track content and site performance and user behavior to give you a clear picture of the success or failure of your efforts: *According to our* **analytics**, *in just the last three days, over a thousand people downloaded that collection of llama limericks we put on the blog.*

## How can you see to find your glasses without your glasses on to see?

Flying blind isn't going to help you in your long-term community building efforts. (Or the short-term, really).

Look at the numbers, look at the social signals. See what's working and what isn't and then react accordingly. Why waste a lot of time and effort on a campaign that no one cares about?

Spend your time and money where they're being effective and you'll be able to see and document the value of what you're doing.

## Track the right things

There are lots of tools for measuring your efforts and a lot of data you can collect with those tools. We'll be talking about them in more detail in the ever-looming Chapter 3, but we wanted to make sure to put this in front of you early and often:

*Track the right things.*

Know what your data is telling you, sort out the wheat from the chaff. Numbers don't mean anything if you don't know what they mean.

# Community Manager |kəˈmyo͞onitēˈmanijər|

*noun*

1. the person responsible for spearheading your community building efforts through their innate knowledge of your community, its potential, your company, and all the community building tools listed previously: *Wow, look at all the conversations that have started up around this Hangout panel of llama experts. They must have a really great **community manager***.

## No, we're not calling names

Yes, we acknowledge that it seems a little odd to refer to a person as a tool *without being mean*, but it seemed dumb to draw up a list of all the stuff you need to build a community and not include a community manager.

A community manager is your secret weapon. They know all the (other) tools, they know your company, they know your community. And they're ready for action.

A good community manager is actually a part of your community. They manage the daily ins and outs of engagement, value-sharing, scheduling your content and tweets and posts, rallying your internal team into community building action.

(A *really* good community manager can write a llama haiku in under 5 minutes. Ours can).

He or she is the face of your company with regards to your community. They field the feedback, engage with the members, build the relationships, and chivvy customers along until they become brand advocates.

We will be talking a little bit more about the community manager role in Chapter 4, but we didn't think it could go without mentioning if we're really talking about the essential pieces you need in place for community building.

## A note of encouragement to the little guy

We recognize that not all companies can afford the luxury of a dedicated community manager. And you can certainly get started on community building without one.

But if you can possibly manage it, get yourself one. Because our hope for you is that not-too-far into your community building efforts, you will have such an active, thriving, growing community, you won't have a choice but to acquire one. And a good community manager can be hard to find, so you don't want to be in panic mode when you're searching.

Just...stay away from ours, okay? We like her and her haiku skills. Friends don't poach from friends.

# And there you have it

Breathe a sigh of relief, friends. You've made it through the list of tool essentials. Now, of course there are others and we have enough faith in your brilliance and creativity to believe you'll find and integrate them for yourselves.

But in case you want to make flashcards or something, *without* re-reading all the definitions, here's a brief rundown of the ones we consider The (Official-ish) Essential Tools of Community Building:

- *valuable content*
- *SEO*
- *social media*
- *design & user experience*
- *in-person efforts*
- *email marketing*

- *human element*
- *targeted outreach*
- *making friends*
- *analytics*
- *community manager*

And those are they.

# CHAPTER TWO *wrap up*

## The Recap

Just to make sure neither you nor we got lost along the way, a quick reminder of everything we've learned in this section (to indulge our inner kindergarten teacher):

- *Community building is a machine of many gears working in tandem. For optimum results, you need a full integration of tools like SEO, social media, content, email marketing, outreach, PR, and whatever else your brilliant mind can conjure.*

- *Batman is better than Superman.*

- *The tools are great, the tools are awesome, but they remain simply tools. You use them to achieve your goals. You don't set your goals based on the tools you have. (More to come)*

- *What we've given you here are great tools for building community, but we can't stress enough that they are only tools (see, we said it again). The motivating force, the power supply for these tools? That's you.*

- *You don't really know someone until you've met their pets.*

# What's Next?

## You're finally ready to do some stuff

So now that you know what we mean when we use these words "valuable content" and "social media" and "making friends," it's time to start putting them into action.

We know it's exciting, but there's a long haul yet to go, so calm down. Have some soothing chamomile, light a lavender candle, grab a peppermint, and then you'll be ready to move onto **Chapter 3: The Actual "How to Build an Online Community" Process.**

# THE ACTUAL

## "HOW TO BUILD AN ONLINE COMMUNITY" *process*

# THE ACTUAL
## "HOW TO BUILD AN ONLINE COMMUNITY" *process*

## At long last

So now that you know the *why* and the what and the associated *wherefores* of online community building, it's time to delve into the *how*.

**Chapter 3: The Actual "How to Build an Online Community" Process** is exactly what it says on the tin. It's a step-by-step walkthrough of how you take all those Essential Tools from Chapter 2 and put them to work.

And if that wasn't special enough, we've also got Three Very Important Reminders for you going into this section. We'll be talking about them up-front before we actually dive into the details and the process, because they are things you absolutely must incorporate into your mindset before you attempt to actually do the thing.

So here ya go:

## 1. COMMUNITY BUILDING IS *ongoing.*

Like the Song That Doesn't End, community building always comes full circle and deposits you back at the beginning steps again.

## 2. THIS PROCESS IS A *guide.*

We're not disputing the validity of the guide - we've tested, abused, disassembled, and reconstructed the thing over and over again. But it remains a guide and not a scientific treatise. We'll give you the steps, but it's up to you to make them fit your company, your team, your business, your goals.

## 3. PUT YOUR FOCUS ON YOUR *goals* NOT YOUR *tools.*

We know you've heard this one before, but we'll say it as many times as we have to, even if we get really, really annoying (also like the Song That Doesn't End). Let your goals be your guiding light.

If you hit that point - and we all do, eventually - where you feel you've lost your focus or hit an insurmountable barrier, you should always follow Vizzini's advice and never go up against a Sicilian when death is on the line.

Wait...different advice: go back to the beginning (a.k.a. your goals). Backtrack and remember what you were trying to accomplish by reviewing the steps you took to get there.

Unlike the previous Chapters, we strongly recommend that you don't skip ahead of this section. You're kinda missing out on the point if you do.

Plus, there will be a pop quiz at the end. And you don't want to miss out on that.

# 1. COMMUNITY BUILDING IS *ongoing.*

# A word (or 310) before we begin

Before we dive in to all of the steps in this process, there is something about building an online community that you should know up front. You're all clever and knowledgeable and, we choose to believe, reasonably attractive, so you probably already know it, but we're just going to tell you anyway.

*The fat lady never sings.*

Building or growing or cultivating an online community is not a process that has an end. It is an ongoing effort. No matter how large it becomes, it will always need nurturing and attention, even if that's at a different level.

Now, this particular guide starts pretty much at ground zero and walks you through all the things you need to do to build the right community for your company.

That doesn't mean there's nothing in it for businesses who have an established community. The final step is always this: Rinse & Repeat.

So bear with us as we start at the very beginning (a very good place to start). If you've already gone through all the steps we recommend, you can rest secure in the knowledge that you're doing it right. If you find something you missed, well, now you get to learn something new.

If you find something we missed, we'd love to hear about it. The creativity of the human soul is endless and you're all special snowflakes, besides. And we are not so vain to think that we've thought of *everything*. (Almost everything? *That* we're vain enough for).

What have you come up with that didn't occur to us? We want this guide to be a lasting resource for everyone interested in community building at any level and so we'll be updating as new practices or ideas come to light.

## 2. THIS PROCESS IS A *guide.*

# And a disclaimer, too

Okay, just to be clear: what we're about to share with you. It's not a formula for success.

You can't just take what we give you, replace "llama farm" with whatever your business happens to be and "Peruvian hiking enthusiasts" with your desired customer base, and expect results.

This guide is a *guide*. It'll tell you what steps to take and what sites along the path you should look out for and what pitfalls to avoid.

The journey (not to get too cheesy) is yours.

What's that lovely old proverb?: No man steps into the same river twice.

The man and the river are always changing.

And now that we've hurled purple prose and cliches at your head, we'll be blunt.

*What we're about to give you is a proven process for cultivating your community.*

Your job is to figure out how to make it work for you, your team, your goals, and your business. Clear enough? Excellent.

# 3.

## PUT YOUR FOCUS ON YOUR *goals* NOT YOUR *tools.*

# A deep breath before the plunge

So, Mack Web Solutions has spent a lot of time talking about building online communities.

And thinking about building online communities.

And researching building online communities.

And dreaming about building online communities. (Literally. It's *that* pervasive in our company culture. Second only to llamas in our collective dreamscape).

And philosophizing about building online communities.

And, y'know, actually *building* online communities.

All of which is to say, that we've tried out a lot of different approaches and worked out a pretty darn good process.

It looks a little bit like this:

# The great process pyramid of community building (which is like Giza but with less sand)



So the way we've laid this out follows the design of this pyramid. We encourage you to think of this almost as a workbook. We're going to give you good actionable steps for each level of the non-sandy pyramid and you should follow along at home.

Here's what we'll be walking you through:

1. *Set **GOALS** for your whole business, not just for your marketing.*

2. *Identify the appropriate **KPIs** in order to measure success.*

3. *Develop a creative and effective **STRATEGY**.*

4. *Bring your brainstormed strategic brilliance to life during **EXECUTION**.*

5. *Base your future direction off the **ANALYSIS** of your data.*

And, as you've probably figured out, based on our oh-so-subtle hints, you start with setting your goals.

# 1. Goals

## It starts like this: know where you're going



If you remember from our beloved pyramid - and we expect you do since we just talked about it, like a second ago, and you're not a goldfish (probably) - *the very base (and most important part) of everything you do as you're building*

*your community is your goals.*

It's not about the tools we outlined for you back in Chapter 2. Whatever else you may or may not do, don't ever, ever start from tools. They're great, they're essential (that's what we named that section, after all), but they are not the boss of you. You are the boss of them.

*Remind yourself of that as often as you must: The tools are not the boss of you. You are the boss of the tools.*

And the goals you set out to accomplish will drive your forward movement.

## Three Recommendations for Setting Goals:

Here's what we'd recommend as you go about setting your goals:

# 1. SET GOALS THAT *deal with your brand* (A.K.A. COMMUNITY BUILDING GOALS)

The kind of goals we're talking about here stems from the very heart of your company and, unfortunately, can really only be voiced in the deliberately unanswerable questions presented in every keynote or valedictorian speech at every graduation ceremony in the English-speaking world.

(We presume they're present in other countries too, but with our collective smatterings of Spanish, French, and German and the awkwardness of the verb tenses involved, we decided not to get fancy):

- *Who will you be?*

- *What is your passion?*

- *What will you become?*

- *What will you be known for?*

- *How will you make your mark on the world?*

- *Is anyone else developing a severe case of hat hair under her mortarboard?*

This is how you decide what goals you want to pursue for your brand (beyond just revenue). Some connections are easier to see than others. It's not a stretch for a restaurant (or restaurant chain) to make known their commitment to fresh, local suppliers or healthy alternatives.

Some stem pretty naturally out of the lifestyle choices of your majority audience: a bike shop desperately concerned for the environment makes sense.

But how does that play into the decisions you make with your business? Do you recycle and repurpose old parts? Sponsor artists who do? Do you raise funds for environmental cleanup? Do you host a "Bike and Bag" highway cleanup for cycling enthusiasts?

No? Well, shouldn't you be?

Some may be a little more difficult to spin into real life applications: you're a llama farmer because you love llamas. Not because you frequently need to transport heavy loads across the Andes or because you have a passion for homemade llama wool knits. You just...love llamas.

So spread the love. Maybe you want to become THE knowledge source on llamas,

to answer questions and debunk myths (Can a llama really (and literally) lose its head if you lasso it?), to host llama fairs and let people interact with your stock. To share goofy and/or adorable and/or majestic photos of the llamas in your care. To write and distribute llama stories and llama essays and llama haikus.

A passion for just about anything can be catching. (As proven by the Kim Possible-inspired upswing in interest in the naked mole rat, one of the *ugliest* creatures on God's green earth).

When we go through the goal-setting exercise with our clients, we try to come up with one or two goals they have for their brand.

Inevitably, some of them will be about increased revenue or customers or brand awareness. (Fair enough). We want them to set these goals, too (more on that next). But it's really important that in addition to revenue goals they are also setting goals for where they want to take their brand.

These days, almost everyone wants to earn that elusive title of "thought leader" (and who can blame them?), so we see that one a lot, too.

It's in those last one or two that we really find the rough diamonds we're seeking.

Because those goals? To become known as The Llama Guys or the Jolly Green Bicycle Shop or the Freshest Fast Food Around?

*Those are brand goals and that's what you're going to use to set yourself apart from everyone else.*

That's how you're going to find the True Believers and Evangelists in what will eventually become your online community.

That you're going to sell your brand and get your customers and increase your income.

And speaking of income...

## 2. SET GOALS THAT *deal with revenue related* PRACTICALITIES

So, yeah. You start with the lofty visioneer goals. But it's not unreasonable to have

goals that will drive your revenue. Be prepared to answer questions like "How

much money do we want to make this year?" "How many new customers do we want to acquire?"

There's a trick to both of these types of goals. Set both long and short-term goals and affix at least some general sense of a time period. What is your priority for this month? This quarter? This year? The next eighteen months? (See the trend here?).

When we get to the STRATEGY level of this process, you'll be prioritizing and

categorizing your efforts along these lines and knowing what your long and short term goals, both for your brand and for your revenue, will help you shuffle the schedule. Some of your goals you can reach and exceed in one campaign. Some of them will be ongoing for the rest of your life.

And hey! That's okay. As long as you can unify your efforts under the same flag of goals, you're going to do just fine.

## 3. SET *smart* GOALS

Finally, regardless of the type of goal you're setting, try to make sure that they're SMART.

And, no, we don't mean nattily dressed or cleverer than the other kids on the playground. By SMART we mean:

**S**pecific
**M**easurable
**A**ttainable
**R**ealistic
**T**ime-Limited

As long as they fit those criteria, you're welcome to dress your goals up in little spats and top hats, too.

On this grand community building adventure, these goals that you set for your *whole* business (and not just your marketing department) are your touchstone. As you work your way up the (non-Giza) Pyramid, be sure that everything aligns with the goals that you set in this first stage.

And here's the deal: community building is hard work (in case you hadn't gathered already). To avoid burnout or catastrophe

of the nervous-breakdown kind, take baby-steps with these goals. Bite them off one at a time.

Once you start executing your strategy (which is the part that actually helps you accomplish what you want to accomplish), stay consistent and grounded in your goals.

## SIDE NOTE: The hidden advantage to setting goals

Okay, we're gonna let you in on another little secret.

You will get *nothing* done, if you don't have the buy-in you need.

Buy-in is the Marketer's Bane. Whether you're in-house or out, getting the approval and support of your bosses, your client, your team is crucial to actually accomplishing anything worth doing.

Unless you are capable of doing absolutely *everything* (content generation and dissemination, community monitoring and management, targeted outreach and wooing of influencers, planning and execution of events, design and technical implementation of websites and videos and infographics) at a high quality without any extra hands on a minimal budget, you're going to need buy-in.

If you can do all those things, well. Stop reading. You are clearly a marketing deity and our humble efforts are not worthy of your exalted attention. Take the time you would have spent on our little guide here and go get a massage or something. Sounds like you might need one.

*For the rest of us mere mortals, here's a good tip about buy-in: it's easier to get when the efforts you're presenting for approval deal with something the buyer-inners actually care about.*

And, since most of the buyer-inners are, we assume, ensouled beings they're going to care just as much about the brand goals (become THE go-to company for llama adventuring gear) as they will about attaining X number of new customers/subscribers/members/leads.

And if they're vampires or gingers or something, well...they are probably smart enough to realize that much of the purchasing public cares about those things and will think more highly of them if they convincingly pretend to care, too.

In short, goals are good for buy-in, because they help you have a conversation about what you want to achieve. That conversation, in turn, ensures that your whole team is on the same page and being held accountable for the right things.

Knowing what you're accountable for gives you an excellent head start into figuring out what your KPIs should be and how you're going to measure the success of your efforts.

But hear this: neither the goals you pursue nor the KPIs you identify nor any other level on the Sandless Pyramid will work at all if they're not part of a conversation with your client (or boss or team). This whole thing is going to fall apart if you wait until the ANALYSIS level in this process to get your client's (or boss's or team's) feedback.

So don't assume you can go it alone. Communicate.

Now that you have your goals (all the kinds), let's move on to the next step in this community building process: KPIs.

# 2. KPIs

## Making the goals *mean* something



You know what else is good for buy-in?

Proving that you're actually making progress on accomplishing your goals. This is why the next block in that pyramid is determining KPIs.

(And just in case you didn't know, KPIs are *Key Performance Indicators*.)

Which is a pretty way of saying "tangible stuff you can measure to show how things are going."

Which is, in its turn, an even prettier way of saying "if you don't measure this stuff and thereby prove the value of your efforts, you can kiss your community building budget goodbye."

Which would be a shame.

# KPI pre-knowledge

In our testing of this process with the companies we've helped, we started figuring out the KPIs early on in the game for a couple of reasons:

## First

You need to define what "success" looks like before you can devise a strategy to reach it.

## Second

*Figuring out KPIs is a great outline for that all-important communication with your client (or team or boss, depending on who you're working with) on their expectations. It helps you find a place where you're able to track what they can actually understand and care about but where they're also expecting realistic things from you. Which is, generally speaking, preferable to expecting miracles.*

That said, as you proceed past the planning stages and into the EXECUTION level of this process, you may need to adjust your KPIs according to the actual campaigns you devise. And that is a-okay.

And the ever present reminder is this: this non-desert Pyramid of a community building process is yours to tweak according to your needs. If the way we've figured out doesn't work quite as well for you, try and rearrange things until it does.

# So here's the deal with KPIs

There is no exact, definitive list for what KPIs you should be tracking (though there are some that we consider pretty standard) because it all comes back to the goals you're trying to accomplish.

And just like you've got two sets of goals (the brand building ones and the revenue generating types), you've got different types of KPIs.

Let's say that your client has developed a software that tracks the migratory habits of llama herds in the Andes.

So they set the (revenue generating) goal of increasing your software subscribers by 20% by the end of December.

In keeping with our SMARTness, we check that this goal is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-sensitive.

Having determined that it is, we match the goal to a KPI or two.

The most obvious KPI is, well, to have increased your subscribers by 20% by December.

Tricky one, right?

Increasing subscribers shows the difference you make in their bottom line. But that's not the only KPI you want to track for this. Running parallel to this revenue-based KPI, you also want to demonstrate the brand value that your community building efforts are generating. So you pull KPIs that are on the softer side: the improvement in your clients' brand and brand recognition.

This KPI may be a little harder to identify. Maybe it's increased subscribers to your email list, a measured increase in engagement on your blog, or amplified social media reach. These are important

indicators of brand success that you're definitely going to want to share once they

go into action in the EXECUTION and ANALYSIS levels of this process.

Because here's another hard truth about community building: proving your worth is a touchy business. You may not be able to prove that the increased blog traffic directly contributed to the increased sales today.

But you can demonstrate that you're making the company more visible and displaying more value as a source of knowledge to the general public. And that is a pretty darn good way to contribute to future sales (which is a pretty big reason for community building).

Like so many things in life - gymnastics, window washing, cat burglary - it's about balance. Be sure that you're defining those KPIs for both revenue and community building so that you can win the ever-present fight to prove that you're effecting positive change for their *whole* business.

# But because we love you, a little KPI cheat sheet

That said, we love you enough to give you a list of the things that we frequently find ourselves measuring (<--read this post for more of the nitty gritty details) both for revenue and brand/community building type goals. How and when they should be applied and what others there may be?

*That* we leave to you.

### 1. social KPIs

On the social side of your efforts, we'd recommend measuring things like:

- *(Engaged) followers*

- *Social shares*

- *Applause (likes, favorites, +1s)*

- *Engagement (conversations, click throughs, comments, shares)*

- *Traffic driven to the website from social channels*

- *Brand conversations and mentions*

- *Subscribers (email, RSS)*

- *User influence (a metric we get from Followerwonk's Social Authority)*

## 2. *content* KPIs

When it comes to your content efforts, make sure you're tracking stuff like:

- *(Return) visits, views, pageviews*

- *Micro conversions (downloads, form completions, watched videos, etc)*

- *Advanced segments (to track return visits to specific part of your website like your blog)*

## 3. *roi* KPIs

When it comes to measuring return on investment for brand (and community building) type goals, it's the more difficult stuff to measure (especially if you're in a services-based business) but really important nonetheless. You may need to work with your finance department to get some of these things figured out, but hey, they're part of your community building team, too:

- *Direct conversions*

- *Customer acquisition costs*

- *Brand equity*

And there you have it. Now that you've defined both goals and KPIs for your community building venture, let's move on to the actual creative strategy that's going to help you accomplish everything your community building heart desires.

# 3. Strategy

## A man, a plan, a canal, panama



Okay, in case you hadn't picked up on our repeated use of words like "strategically deployed" and "targeted", we don't recommend that you scattershot your community building efforts.

Without a plan, there is no Panama.

Or even a canal.

It's just a man, a ca, and nama.

Which is a man with gibberish.

Kinda like integrated marketing without a strategy.

But not just any strategy. No, no, no. What are we, the French Army?

This should be a scrupulously-researched, reasonably well-developed, all-encompassing strategy.

It's gotta be creative but focused. Detailed but flexible. Targeted but generally appealing (or at the very least, not off-putting). Immediately applicable but perpetually useful. It's gotta be hard-hitting but light-on-its-feet. Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, etc., etc.

Believe it or not, this is not an impossible feat. It takes work and it can't take too long (or else all your research loses relevance and you stagnate when you should be taking flight). But it can absolutely be done.

It starts like this:

# 1. discovery & STUFF

## [A] Identify your audience: know who you're talking to

Figuring out your goals and knowing your brand should give you a pretty good idea of who your customers are and who your audience is.

But make sure you *really* know who they are.

*Set them out in categories and then develop personae around each category: group demographics, pain points you can solve for them, what keeps them up worrying at night, things they like and respond to, places you'll find them online and off, the questions they'll want answered and the words that they'll use to ask them.*

That ever important question: what do they care about?

We're not going into a whole lot of detail on creating those personae, 'cuz, frankly, other people have already talked the whole personae thing out.

Check them out, if you have any questions:

- Personas for SEO in 2012
- The Essential Persona Lifecycle: Your Guide to Building and Using Personas

Make sure you never lose sight of the information you gather in the process. These are the people you're trying to lure into your web...uh, *community* and you need to know who they are before you know how to speak to them.

Keep in mind that as your community (and company) evolves, so will your target audience. Developing personae is a dynamic process that needs to be revisited from time to time. Just FYI.

## [B] Identify the competition: know who else is talking to them

If you've been in business for any length of time, you probably already know who your competitors are.

Do you know who your *online* competitors are?

It may surprise you to know that they're not always going to be the same.

Oh, we're not denying that there will be overlap and probably a lot of it.

But not every company with a real-world presence has one online and not every online information source is interested in real-world transactions. (Is there a WikiPedia Store that we missed somewhere?)

Figure out who exists in the space you're wanting to inhabit and how they got there.

Then figure out how to use that information.

*Spoiler Alert: We'll talk about this a little bit more later, but not all of your competitors must be enemies. There's a lot to be said for strategic partnerships and coopetition.*

Once you've done your competitor research, it's time to identify your community.

## [C] Identify the community

Once you've identified your goals, once you've started to figure out who you want to be and what you want to do, you've already started to form a picture in your head of the audience that you want.

Obviously, a lot of them are going to be your existing customers.

But it's not just them.

It's your *potential* customers.

The people who can connect you to your potential customers.

The big voices in your industry or area or field of interest who can provide you with insight, guidance, and maybe - once you've proved yourself a little - a megaphone.

So you know the types of people you want, now it's just a matter of finding them.

# It's not about the numbers

A quick word about and reminder of what your end goal is as you try to hunt up prospects for your community: we don't call it an online community because we were feeling particularly warm-hearted and hippie-ish the first day we ever discussed this concept.

We call it a community because it follows all the same rules as a healthy, real world community.

It comprises people with a common interest.

*It's about quality over quantity.*

Ideal members are engaged (at least some of the time) and not entirely self-interested.

There is a give and a take and a time for talking and a time for listening and a time for chipping-in and doing.

Members choose to join. Something about this group of people makes them want to be there.

It's about relationships.

You see where we're going with this?

Keep this thought in the back of your mind as you're searching and filtering and identifying your community. The same kind of people that you want in an offline community are the ones that you want in your online community.

# Asking the right questions

The best way to kick off the identification of and search for your future community members is to clarify that murky image of your ideal audience by asking some questions:

- *What are the demographics of your ideal audience (pull out those personae)?*

- *What industries do you currently serve?*

- *What industries would you like to serve?*

- *Who are your partners?*

- *Who is your competition (see you've got that covered now, too)?*

- *Who do you respect in your industry (people and companies)?*

- *To what organizations do you belong? Would you like to belong?*

- *What blogs (industry or otherwise) do you currently read?*

- *Who do you follow on social media?*

- *Whose advice do you follow when you make business*

*decisions? Whose voice do you hear?*

- *What events (conferences, trade shows, meet-ups, otherwise) do you attend?*

There are others, obviously, but these are the questions we typically start with.

In their answers you will find good seeds for your community.

Find them on social, find their blogs, find out where they live. (Virtually, of course. We already told you, *no stalking*).

What you want to come away with is a list of people and companies to follow on various social media platforms and a list of good, relevant blogs to read and follow.

This is where our so-called Sherlocking comes in.

# Finding the lair

Once you've answered the above community member identification questions, you're now ready to go out and find these said members. There are two ways to hunt up community members as part of this Discovery phase of your Strategy development (P.S. we'd recommend you keep track of the results of your community identification with a super fancy spreadsheet):

## 2. BY search

The simplest way of following up on some of the prospects you've got is, of course to Google them. (This is particularly easy if you've got an actual name to work with and not just a descriptor).

You can find their websites, their social media accounts, possibly some embarrassing photos from high school. You can also expand your search to find blogs or websites using search strings like:

*[service/product/target audience intitle:blog]*

**-OR-**

*[service/product/target audience inurl:blog]*

## For example:

Searching *"llama farmer" intitle:blog* will return "llama farmer" results that have the word blog in the title line of the page.

Searching *"llama haiku" inurl:blog* will return "llama haiku" results that have the word blog in - you guessed it - the URL.

Make sure that you assess those blogs for all the qualities you know are important:

- *Are these people legitimately knowledgeable?*

- *Is their content engaging and readable?*

- *Do they post frequently?*

- *Do they respond to comments or questions?*

- *Are they active on social media?*

- *Do they get shared and re-shared?*

- *Do they share other people's content?*

- *Are they someone you're willing to build a relationship with?*

## BONUS:

Sometimes, we also like to use *intitle:resource* or *inurl:guide* or variants on this theme. This gives us an idea of who is already producing content for the topic areas we're interested in, whether it's any good, and what gaps they've left for us to fill. (More on *that* a little later though).

## 3. BY *social*

Figure out which social media outlets tend to attract most of your crowd and focus your attention on those.
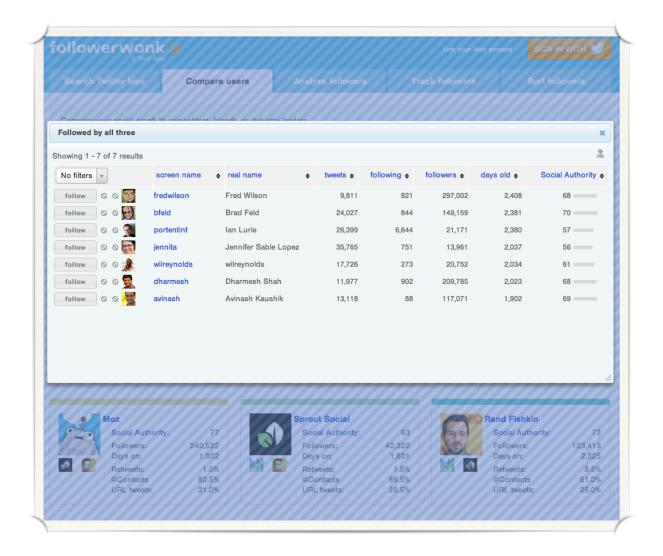
And then there are the tools that will help you do just that for more general nameless searching.

For that we like to use Followerwonk.

Actually, while you're in there, play around with Followerwonk a little. It's got a ton of interesting capabilities for demographic data, for comparisons between different profiles, the social authority of users and much, much more.

*For example, we like to plug two BIG competitors (the ones almost too big to really be competitors) and, say, the Twitter handle for our favorite industry knowledge source into* **"Compare Users."** *(see example below).*

Then we take a gander at where their followers collide. There's a pretty good subsection of your potential audience.

Now take a look at the overlap in who they follow (as you see above). Pretty good bet that that's a list of thought leaders for your industry.

See what fun we can have?

## There's a reason it's called the web

It's called a web because of the intricate interconnections that spin out from each point of convergence when you map out the users and resources available.

In other words, when you look at how everything is connected, it looks like a spider web. Each person or organization is a point on the web. They have threads that

go out to people and organizations they are interested in or associated with.

Each of *those* also has threads that connect them outwards.

And eventually, through a friend of a friend of a friend, we're all connected.

(We're pretty sure that sitting pretty and content at the center of this massive construction and surveying his domain is Kevin Bacon).

But because of the nature of this interconnectedness, the people that you find in your prospecting of community may be connected to other individuals you want to meet that your search didn't turn up.

That's where the Human Element "tool" comes in.

So do some legwork, check out who they're following and promoting, and see if you want to gather and add any to your list.

Once you've got a solid profile with numerous prospects, pat yourself on the back. You have completed the Discovery part of the Strategy section. Reward yourself with a cupcake or something (but only one of the mini-cupcakes. You should wait until you get all the way through the guide before you get a full-sized one).

Now it's time to actually strategize.

## 4. HOLD A *Strategy jam*

Or as we call it here, *jammin'*.

(Yes, we're hopelessly dorky. We know it, we own it, we wear it like a crown).

But as free-spirited as jammin' sounds, we usually try to go into these meetings with a

pretty specific agenda and defined expectations:

### 1. Goals & KPIs identified

If you don't know these, go back to the beginning. Don't get ahead of yourself; you'll regret it. What are you strategizing about if you don't know what you want to

accomplish?

## 2. Assemble the jam team

The best way we've figured out to pool our collective creativity and write an effective community building strategy is to bring select members of the team into a brainstorming meeting once the research was done.

And, for the longest time, what we meant by "select members of the team" was *the whole team*. Never let it be said that Mack Web hides its humble origins. As we grow, we're starting to scale this a little.

That said, our team is so fabulous it's a little bit of a wrench to break up the band.

*Here's the thing that you need to know:* for the Strategy Jam, pull people from every department.

*Designers see and dream up different things than writers than videographers than community managers than strategists.*

*If you're working in-house rather than with an agency, pull someone from support, someone from product management, someone from sales, someone from engineering.*

But make sure they do their homework, first.

## 5. DO THE *homework*

There are two key ingredients to a strategy jam: lots of different perspectives and completed homework.

We try to make sure that no one comes into the strategy jam unprepared.

They've reviewed the goals and possible KPIs.

They've reviewed the personae and competition information.

They've reviewed all digital assets as it stands and identified anything lacking in the foundation: site optimization, navigation, blog integration, social optimization, etc.

They've reviewed audience pain points and brainstormed possible solutions.

They're coming to the meeting with a couple of ideas.

## 6. JAM, *man*

Don't restrict those ideas.

Don't edit, don't mock, don't be shy.

You're going to refine them eventually, of course, but for the strategy jam, throw 'em all out there.

Even if you don't think you have the budget or the capabilities.

Even if you're not completely sold on the concept.

Even if you're not sure you can sell the client or your boss or whoever your buyer-inner is.

Here are the only two filters you're allowed to apply during the strategy jam:

*1. Will it work toward one or more of our goals (as defined by our KPIs)?*

*2. Will someone - specifically the right someones - care?*

As long as it meets those requirements, let it fly, brother.

## 7. POST- JAM, *prioritizing*

Now it's time for the filter. You neither want nor need to do everything you've jammed up at once, so it's time to start organizing and matching ideas to goals, KPIs, and reality-checking everyone.

So first, review (again) your goals and KPIs. Then, take your list of ideas from the jam and go through the following questions:

- *Which ideas are completely unfeasible or will require additional budget and buy-in?*

- *Which ones have already been done and can't be improved upon?*

- *Which ones aren't worth the fight? Which ones are?*

- *What got missed?*

- *How does this match up to the high-level vision of what you want to accomplish for the year?*

We typically split the year into four roughly equal quarters and figure out what we can afford to do in each quarter. We also pay special attention to which ideas are most important to accomplish first (especially for those companies who don't have a community established) and which ones we want to build toward (ideas that will require more of an audience before we spend the effort).

When we're prioritizing, we figure out which of our ideas can actually help us achieve the goals we're determined to accomplish (both the revenue and brand building kind) throughout the next year.

Then we select our tools.

# 8. *select* YOUR TOOLS

Once you know what delightfully creative things you're going to do to accomplish your goals, figure out which tools you're going to use to get there.

Our go-to tools are again, all the ones we mentioned in Chapter 2. Consistently we're using things like:

- *content*
- *SEO*
- *social media*
- *email marketing*
- *outreach*
- *etc.*

Then within those, we may specifically use:

## Content:

blog posts, infographics, whitepapers, case studies, video, Google+ hangouts, webinars, meet-ups, etc.

## SEO:

our own prowess to optimize of all of that said content.

## Social media:

we may choose to use Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. That all depends on goals and target audience.

## Email marketing:

we prefer MailChimp these days.

## Outreach:

we do much of this via social media, email, via hangout, or in-person.

*And while we've provided this very general tool guidance, a big reason why this approach is going to work for you is that* **you're going to use your own brain**, **your own creativity to come up with new and ever-more brilliant ideas.** *Good for you, brain.*

Once you've selected your tools, go for the high level pitch (and may the force be with you).

## 9. *pitch* TO YOUR TEAM, BOSS, OR CLIENT *(on a high level)*

Ok, so now you've identified, homeworked, jammed, prioritized, and selected so that you can accomplish the stated goals (phew).

Next step? Pitch a high level game plan and get it approved by the client or your boss or your team (before you get into the working details).

### What high level looks like

We try to keep this real short. No more than 1-3 pages where we communicate:

- *Goals we're working toward,*

- *Associated KPIs,*

- *Theme of the strategic campaign we'll be executing*

- *Approach for each channel (social & community, content, SEO, email marketing, etc.)*

We provide a very succinct explanation of the direction we'd like to head for the next quarter, get their feedback, and hopefully their buy-in. There's no point in going forward and fleshing out all of the nitty gritty of the what and the who and the how if you have no support or approval from you client (or boss or team).

Only after you've got that nod should you start going into the fine details like who's doing what and when (which comes next).

*A **tip for pitching** - you're going to get so tired of us saying this, but here it is: Always bring it back to the goals and the KPIs. Show them what you plan to accomplish and what you will be measuring to demonstrate that accomplishment. That's a universal language. (Also, be prepared with a llama joke. That wins 'em over).*

# 10. *create* A DETAILED, STRATEGIC EXECUTION PLAN

*Once you have approval from your client, team or boss, it's time to start fleshing out the nitty-gritty for the immediate campaign, the next quarter.*

Yes, you probably want a completely detailed, entire 12-month picture of what's in store, but you can't react and be agile if you're stuck on a juggernaut you set free at the beginning of the year.

Don't you *dare* plan the whole year in detail. Fate and the Voice of the People will set angry llamas upon thee and, with sharp kicks, fierce glares, and vile expectoration, they shall smite thee for thy presumption.

Yea, verily yea.

So instead of risking the wrath, have a general understanding (high level) of where you're headed for the next 12 months, but then plan out the following only for the next 2-3 months:

## [A] The what: campaigns, content, and tools

This is the stuff you're ready and armed with. Now get into the details. What specifically are you going to be doing? What specific tools (or channels) are you going to use to do it (content, social, SEO, email marketing, etc.)?

## [B] The who: team

Who's doing what? Who's responsible for each task? Planning this out in advance forewarns you of the type of coordination and cooperation that you'll need between your internal team and external partners. (More on assembling your team in Chapter 4. Hold tight in the meantime. We've got some ground to cover).
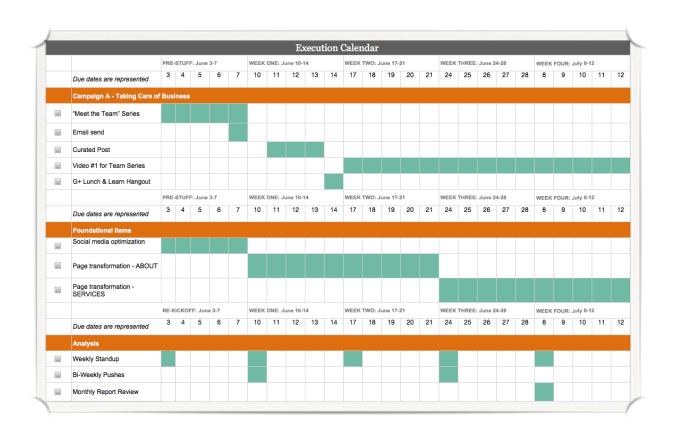
## [C] The when: execution calendar

When is stuff going to be done? This isn't set in stone, deadlines change, but keep it updated so you can hold everyone accountable for their assignments. We usually use a spreadsheet (love those spreadsheets) to communicate high level with the client (sample coming below). Then, as a team, we use Basecamp for checklists and assigning tasks.

As you reach the end of your first campaign/quarter (typically a 3 month span), take a look at the data (don't worry, we'll be talking about this in the ANALYSIS level of this process) and revisit your overall progress. Check back to your general 12 month plan, re-check your goals and KPIs.

Once that's all in order, it's time to start strategizing for the *next* quarter.

Alrighty then. Once you've pulled together *all those pieces* into a coherent and cohesive document, have another mini-cupcake. Congratulations. You have a strategy!

### Execution Calendar

| | | PRE-STUFF: June 3-7 | | | | | WEEK ONE: June 10-14 | | | | | WEEK TWO: June 17-21 | | | | | WEEK THREE: June 24-28 | | | | | WEEK FOUR: July 8-12 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Due dates are represented* | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| **Campaign A - Taking Care of Business** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | "Meet the Team" Series | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Email send | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Curated Post | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Video #1 for Team Series | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | G+ Lunch & Learn Hangout | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | PRE-STUFF: June 3-7 | | | | | WEEK ONE: June 10-14 | | | | | WEEK TWO: June 17-21 | | | | | WEEK THREE: June 24-28 | | | | | WEEK FOUR: July 8-12 | | | | |
| | *Due dates are represented* | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| **Foundational Items** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Social media optimization | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Page transformation - ABOUT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Page transformation - SERVICES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | RE-KICKOFF: June 3-7 | | | | | WEEK ONE: June 10-14 | | | | | WEEK TWO: June 17-21 | | | | | WEEK THREE: June 24-28 | | | | | WEEK FOUR: July 8-12 | | | | |
| | *Due dates are represented* | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| **Analysis** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Weekly Standup | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Bi-Weekly Pushes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ☐ | Monthly Report Review | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

# 4. Execution

## Get your hands a little grubby



So here it is. The moment you've all been waiting for. The part of the community building process where you actually learn...how to build an online community!

It's time to jump in and start doing the things that you've just strategized during this oh so amazing EXECUTION level of the community building process.

But as a warning, before you do:

## Nothing ever goes quite to plan

This is something every small child figures out the first time they try to eat an ice cream cone on a hot summer's day, but we seem to need the reminder over and over again. (And maybe also some ice cream).

So here's your reminder. Some stuff is going to work. Some stuff isn't. Some stuff is going to take on a life of its own and become something completely different from what you thought it would be. And that's part of life. And also part of the community building process.

Fortunately, you've got a good touchstone for when things go wrong. Can you guess what that is?

Why, your goals and KPIs, of course (we're not sure why you'd think we weren't going to mention them...*again*). They remind you of what you're trying to accomplish. The strategy that grew out of them gives you a roadmap toward the future so that you can't be lead astray by shiny, new nothings that tempt you from the path.

(And, yes, you've apparently become Little Red Riding Hood in this metaphor).

When things get crazy, return to your goals and figure it all out all over again.

## 5 very important GUIDELINES FOR EXECUTION

And before we push you fledgling community builders out of the nest, we've got lots of guidance (5 very specific guidelines for execution to be exact) on both goal-winning and community-building.

(And now you've become birds. Sorry for the downgrade).

## GUIDELINE FOR EXECUTION #1

# Foundational work and community building work are simultaneous

As part of the strategy brainstorming, you should have considered what needed to be done to the website to make it the best it could be. Kicking the tires to make sure everything is in working order: site optimization, blog integration, social optimization, technical glitches cleared away.

In theory, you want those things cleared up before you invite gobs of people to see your dirty laundry. After all, a good host does not have a dinner party with laundry strewn around the house, with chairs too few for the guests, with upended furniture blocking the path from the door to the dining room (unless it is one of *those*

parties).

But *a)* *not every site needs a foundational cleanup* and *b)* *you simply can't afford the time lost if you try and right all the foundational things without launching into the community building things at the same time.*

## Self assessment

The first thing to do is figure out if you *need* any foundational work done. Your Foundational Execution Checklist may look something like this:

- *Are there technical glitches that impede use or speed of my site?*

- *Is the navigation structure clear, simple, consistent, and appropriately ordered?*

- *Is there a blog where the majority of your community building content efforts will take place?*

- *Should I decide to use them, do I have video and graphic capabilities available?*

- *Is the website optimized?*

- *Do I provide a good user experience?*

- *Do all of my pages include features or information valuable to my desired audience? (Lest you should forget, this is the Valuable Content part we've already talked about).*

- *Is our social media presence up to par (consistent graphics, profiles, and information)? Is it optimized?*

Most sites, unfortunately, do need at least a little of this foundational work and they can end up taking a heavy toll on the first quarter budget. But focusing only on foundational content is a great way to lose buy-in and creative momentum.

So you find a way and you do both.

You prioritize your efforts and resources so that you can do at least some of both from the very beginning. It's hard and exhausting, but you do what you gotta do.

## GUIDELINE FOR EXECUTION *#2*

# It's not about you (the 80/20 Rule)

When you're ready to start actually making a splash - when you've found that crucial balance between cleaning up a website mess and moving forward with your hopes and dreams - it's time to start pulling those community members you identified into your sphere.

There are two solid ways to do this. The first involves an elaborate network of ninja-trained kidnappers and the complete set of *Encyclopedia Brainwashia*. The one bad thing about this approach is that it relies heavily on the projected development of Stockholm Syndrome.

Which is why we recommend you go with the second method: sharing value.

*The first and most important rule of this (and really any human interaction) is:* **Don't make it about you.**

Can you repeat after me, please? It's not about me.

Which brings us to the 80/20 rule of sharing value online.

## The almighty 80/20 rule

For a very important step, building your community with value is actually a fairly simple idea. It requires a lot of work and a lot of creativity, but ultimately, there is only this one rule. We call it the 80/20 rule and we'll explain why in just a second, but the basic principle is this: Give more than you ask.

*Nobody wants to be friends with the guy who's talking about himself all the time. Nobody. Not even the weird loner kid who sits in the corner eating paste.*

*The same holds true of your online community. If you're using all your resources for self-promotion, nobody will want to build those crucial relationships with you.*

Which is where the 80/20 part of the thing comes in.

When you're putting out valuable content via social media or what-have-you, only 20% of it should be in promotion of your own products, services, or even posts.

The other 80% should be valuable content (that your audience will love and appreciate) *generated by somebody else.*

We've talked about all the blogs and knowledge sources and thought leaders that you've been hunting up and reading or following, right? Well, now it's time to put that to use beyond just learning stuff yourself and finding new connections.

When you find a great, relevant article or video or infographic or post or tweet that someone has published, share it. Give credit where credit is due (we do approve of ethics, after all), share any independent conclusions you may have drawn, but don't be shy about using your voice to promote valuable content wherever you may find it.

Even if it's a so-called competitor, if they have good stuff to say, share it. Your customers will derive necessary value (and they may think well of you if they notice you taking the high ground, like Kris Kringle in *Miracle on 34th Street*), your 'competitors' will appreciate and may even reciprocate your generosity. And now

you've got a partner-ish type organization, rather than a teeth-baring rival.

## Because why claim one win when you can claim four?

There are some pretty nice ancillary benefits to following the 80/20 rule.

First, it means that you're off the hook for creating and publishing quite a lot of content. Obviously, you should still be doing some, but if you're only responsible for 20% of the content you share, you can get quite a lot of mileage out of considerably less effort.

Plus, it saves you the trouble of re-creating content that someone else may have already written. Let's not reinvent the popsicle here. The ones we have are quite nice and sufficient for the day, thank you.

Second, you can provide your community with diverse content from a variety of voices and perspectives and knowledge bases other than your own. So you're actually providing even more value than you could on your own. (Unless you have a couple different personalities tucked away).

Finally, well, let's not be disingenuous, here: sharing other people's content is a nice act of both generosity and ego-

stroking. If you are consistently sharing the content of someone you admire, eventually they're going to notice. And they're going to like you. And there's a decent chance that they will, in some capacity, join your community.

See how well the 80/20 rule serves you?

## Two corollaries to the 80/20 rule

First of all, 80/20 is the ratio that we recommend as optimal. Tweak it at your need. If you find a 70/30 or 59/41 or 67/33 ratio works better for you? Well then, do what you gotta do.

Second, about that 20%? Even though this is your own content, go easy on the self-promotion, huh? Check back on that definition of "Valuable Content" we gave

you in Chapter 2. And remember what we said earlier: Even when it's about you, it's not about you. It's about your customers and your audience. It's about the resources they need and the knowledge *they* crave.

As we've said, there are all kinds of ways to add value to your customers. We talked about this a little in that definition. (So, again, if you skipped it, you should go back and take a look. We're didn't write this thing 'cuz we like the sound of our own voices. Well, not *only* 'cuz we like the sound of our own voices).

Keep the needs of your audience in mind, make sure that your idea of value is the same as their idea of value, and you're going to do just fine.

## GUIDELINE FOR EXECUTION *#3*

# Engagement grows a community

### There's more to this community stuff than sharing value

*It's not enough to broadcast. You have to actually build relationships with the people you want in your community.*

Read and review what they have to say.

Contribute to the conversations they are part of.

Engage *with* them.

Start making the necessary overtures to become friends.

### The pipeline of engagement

And just because we love you, we've got a nice little (and super simple) tool that can help you track the budding relationships that you're figuratively watering. (And we over stretched that metaphor because we don't love you that much).

We call it the Engagement Pipeline. It works like this:

*1. Make a spreadsheet*
Open up your spreadsheet generator of choice (or use ours) to create a simple worksheet. (Yes, *simple.* We have no hard science to back this up, but we're pretty sure that the fancier you make it, the less likely you are to use it). Include these columns:

*a. name of the person you want to engage,*

*b. his/her bio description,*

*c. your goal for targeting that person (e.g., guest blogging opportunities, content sharing, a simple followback (for now), conversation, etc).,*

*d. his/her Twitter profile link (or other social media profile, depending on where you'll be engaging),*

*e. link to his/her website*

*f. keywords (summarizing his/her thing: What drives her? What has led us to him to begin with? Word to the wise: should that be a trail of gummy bears, be on the lookout for gingerbread houses),*

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*g. date you added him/her to the pipeline, and*

*h. updates on your social media conversations or relationship building.*

### 2. Fill it in

Fill out the spreadsheet with, y'know, actual people you actually want to engage with and what you hope to gain from the encounter.

### 3. Actually engage

Which, FYI, does *not* mean going in all greedy-grubby and asking for what you want. Use the stuff we've been teaching you about, y'know, charm and human being-ness. Follow them, add them to a list (private lists are good for this), retweet them, share their content, @reply to them. Do some of these things or all of these things, but be sure to do them consistently. (But not in a stalkerish way. Remember? We talked about this).

### 4. Track your progress

Make it a habit to keep your spreadsheet updated. You're going to be really happy you did, down the line. Being able to see how well your relationship building is going (or trim away the deadwood where it *isn't*) will be tremendously helpful. And who doesn't love tremendous things?

### 5. Rinse and repeat

Remember what we said about the fat lady? This is not something with an ending. As your community starts to gain momentum, you're going to meet new people and entities. You're going to get a feel for who or what doesn't fit and you're going to prune your list, even as it grows.

## Above all else, be genuine and patient

And remember, this is not an instantaneous process, either. You can't buy friends or magic them out of nowhere. (Or at least...not the kind of friends you want for this stuff. How you conduct yourself in your private life is entirely up to you).

Good friends are earned through attention and hard work and proving yourself.

*Don't get discouraged and don't give up. Communities take time to gain traction.*

Give it the time you need and, when in doubt, throw out a llama joke or two.

Nobody can resist a llama joke.

## GUIDELINE FOR EXECUTION #4

# Making community part of your routine

### A part of your life, a part of your team

Once we started to grasp the importance of all this community building stuff, we quickly also realized that it wasn't enough to tag a half hour of reading blogs onto our existing schedules.

To fully integrate the sharing of knowledge, of value (and the consequent building of community) into our lives, we ended up completely re-prioritizing our daily routines.

In order to efficiently execute our strategies, we *did* have to add time for more knowledge gathering, but more importantly, we had to change the way our team communicated.

*Our strategies draw on the strengths of the entire team.*

Which means the entire team has to be involved in executing them.

No more enclosing each team member into a silo where he huddles in isolation and does his work without reference to anyone else (except for his *precioussss*).

You don't get things done in a silo. (Unless you're grain. In which case you can do what you're supposed to be doing which is pretty much just...sitting there).

*You don't build community in a silo and you don't accomplish goals in a silo either. It needs to be one seamless, well-communicated routine.*

### Flowers are better than weeds (unless you're allergic to beauty)

The second benefit to building our daily routines around the business of online community-ing was that we actually built some online community.

You'll have noticed that, when it suits us (and when there is no way to illustrate with llamas), we use the garden metaphor for this process. There are good reasons for it: an organic process that requires

constant tending and time to bear its delicious fruits.

Communities, like gardens, can be sensitive things. They're not going to shatter like glass if you don't use kid gloves when handling them, but they will suffer from your neglect.

By ensuring that we had a daily routine focused on our community building, we also ensured that our garden was well-tended.

## What's in a community building routine?

Now that we have vaguely alluded to the type of work we expect you to do as you're executing your strategy, and sufficiently impressed upon you the necessity of the routine, we'll be clear about what your routine should consist of.

(We know. You're welcome).

Please note that this is our suggested community building routine for your community manager, if you're lucky enough to have one.

If you're not so lucky and you've got a patchwork community manager made out of the spare minutes of a few different people, you'll want to collaborate and

coordinate to make sure you're covering all your bases.

It goes a little like this:

### 1. *Read*

As a community builder, every day should start with a little bit of reading. If you remember from our earlier chat about identifying your community, you should have a nice, diverse collection of blogs that you like, that are relevant to your industry, that you find valuable.

Now read them.

Not every blog updates every day, so we typically find it helpful to use a feed aggregator like Feedly to keep track of who's publishing new posts. This is going to be a major source of the value that you need and that you share (but more on that in a second).

There are a few other solid places to look for knowledge. If you've got a favorite news outlet, we assume you're already keeping track of the headlines and thinking about how they apply to your life or the lives of your community.

If you don't read the news, you should think about finding a way to keep tabs on the events of the day. You never know what you're going to learn or need to

respond to. You don't want to be the jerk that fails to respond to (or fails to pull an obliviously pre-scheduled post on the day of) a major tragedy or national crisis because you didn't watch CNN that morning.

Another great place to collect reading material is on the social media platforms you follow. Other people are constantly sharing helpful articles from sources you may not have discovered. If you're friending or circling or following the right people, they should definitely be adding value to you, too.

So soak up that knowledge like a llama in the sun.

## 2. Review

There are two things to keep in mind while you read:

*What can I learn from this?*

*Would my community find it helpful/ valuable/entertaining?*

The knowledge for yourself you should assimilate, store away, keep track of for the next time you're lacking inspiration.

If the answer to the second question is "yes", then, it's time to move on to...

## 3. Share

First, a note of differentiation. When we've published a piece of our own content, the sharing process is usually a little more than we include in our daily routine. We use the same social media for it, but we post a little more frequently. Our rule of thumb for our content is at least three (different) times of the day, on different days of the week, on different platforms, to maximize the reach of that 20%. We also put out email marketing and, when appropriate, we do individual outreach as well.

That said, we pretty much follow all the same steps with our 20% as we do with the 80%. So these guidelines are equally relevant to both types of sharing.

So whether you've found or originated or been referred to a piece of valuable content, you're going to be putting out on your social media, disseminating to your community that way.

*Please remember, though, that this is what works for **us**. It's a guide. It's up to you to test out the fine details and see what works for you.*

**Different strokes for different folks**

If you recall from the definitions of all the community building tools in Chapter 2 (or from, y'know, having been on the web at

all in the last decade), there are a handful of different social media outlets. The big ones (Twitter, Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn) all have different voices and different functions. It's important to keep that in mind as you leverage them for the sharing of value.

First of all, just be aware of which subsection of your audience you're addressing with each platform. Choose your voice and content accordingly.

There's likely to be overlap in your Twitter, Facebook, and even Google+. There's going to be considerably less overlap with LinkedIn.

The implications of this are, like many things, twofold. The first is that when you find good value to share, it is likely to appeal to the audience on at least three of those outlets. You may have to look for a slightly different cross section for LinkedIn. (Remember, it's the suit version of you, not the jeans or khakis).

The second implication is that, even if you're sharing the same piece of content across the spectrums, you'll need to devise a different blurbish context-type thing for each outlet. This is both in answer to the minute differences between the audience subsets and in acknowledgment of the overlap.

After all, the people who appear on both your Twitter and Facebook feeds probably won't mind or be surprised to see you sharing the same link on both forums. But by exactly replicating the message, you appear more automated and less humanized. Which is the exact opposite of the point of social media and relationship building and community growing and all the wonderful things we're doing.

**An example, just 'cuz we care**
So, if you're a distributor of extreme hiking goods and you happen to find an excellent resource on the different types of packs for llamas and alpacas, you should come up with a different intro for that link for each forum.

*For Twitter:*

*Turns out there actually \*is\* a difference between a llama lumbar bag and an alpaca's haversack. Thanks @llamalove. [link]*

*For Facebook:*

*Attention, all livestock hikers and packers! Check out this great resource on gear for your woolly, Peruvian friends from Llama Love. You'll never again have to worry about finding the right pack for your trip or your four-hoofed companion.*

*For Google+:*

***The Definitive Guide to Llama and Alpaca Gear***

*Our thanks to +LlamaLove for this exhaustive encyclopedia on the fine distinctions between the different brands and styles of trekking packs for your llama or alpaca. Including available dimensions, weight distributions, and even compartment options, this list is invaluable not only for buying the right gear but for planning your expeditions.*
*#llamas #llamagear*
*#keepmyllamaoutofmygranola*

### For LinkedIn:

*Llama Love has put out a necessary resource for livestock hikers and hiking retailers alike. Their exhaustive list of llama luggage will not only help hikers select the right packs and harnesses, it is an excellent insight into how to meet to broadest range of packing needs with the most efficient outlay of overhead.*

See what we're getting at? Know your audience, know your outlet, and act like a human being, and you're going to be okay.

**Don't falter, lean on your team**
You want to be posting and sharing diverse value on a consistent basis. This can actually be harder than it sounds. You can schedule posts to go out at different points in the day (we usually use Hootesuite for this), but you need a lot of material to fill the need.

Obviously, you gotta find what works for you, but we've found a pretty good system that we're going to share.

Because we're just that nice.
First of all, we do have a dedicated community manager. Her job is to oversee this sharing of appropriate value at appropriate times (among other things. We'll be talking more about team roles in Chapter 4).

But asking her to find all the value, too? Both unreasonable and not in the best interest of the company.

*After all, it's not just our community manager that we want to do the daily reading and learning and growing. We want that for the whole team. So it only makes sense to have the whole team contribute to the knowledge we share, too.*

To that end, we've got a set of mutually accessible spreadsheets (we use Google Drive) that each team member is responsible for filling with recently read articles and appropriate blurbs for sharing. Then our community manager just has to skim through them each day and choose a few to share.

The advantages here should be pretty clear. It's efficient and it also means that we're getting that lovely diversity in the value we share. No one on our team reads all the same things, is interested in the same topics, has the same perspective. By sharing material from every team member, we manage to share wider selections of value and thereby appeal to wider audiences.

Huzzah!

### 4. *Engage*
**Conversation, not monologue**

So, you've got the hang of what constitutes value, of the 80/20 rule, of considering your channel, and of distributing the load among the team.

Excellent. Well done, you.

Unfortunately, the job is only part done. Because you're putting that value out there for a couple of reasons. One of them is, yes, to simply be a proven resource to your audience.

The other is to entice them into a closer connection. (Again, not in a creepy way. In fact, let's just assume from here on out that we never mean these things in a creepy way. Unless we specify that we're deliberately being creepy, okay? Thanks).

Yes, you're putting forth knowledge, but you're trying to do it in a way that actually encourages them to draw near, to see you as human, to ask questions or reply to queries.

*Because, in case you hadn't picked up on it, building relationships is integral to building community and building community is what we're all about.*

So that means it's time to engage. To respond. To seek out actual conversation.

Which takes you back to Guideline #3 and the Engagement Pipeline. Once you've got that set up, we've got some final tips on engagement etiquette and behavior and things:

**[1] Respond**

If someone retweets or comments on a post, respond in kind. If someone leaves a comment on your blog, thank them, ask them questions or answer theirs, demonstrate sentience and responsiveness.

**[2] Research**

If someone is consistently and helpfully active on your social media, it's time to do a little research. Check them out. Who are they? How did they find you? How can you help them? How can they help you?

And then take action to draw them even deeper into your community. Reach out personally to them. Follow them back. See if they have a blog, where they are on social media, what they're all about. Find your approach.

Invite them to a hangout or webinar. Ask them to guest blog. Ask them to contribute to a beta project or a curated resource or, heck, ask them out for coffee if they're near by.

## [3] Be a friend

Remember, you have to be a friend to make a friend. Now you've noticed the shy kid hanging out on the bench next to yours at lunch time. Invite them over a for a chat, be kind and genuinely interested, and you've made a friend for life.

## [4] Be proactive

But it's not enough to just respond. You also have to seek out. Hopefully you've been doing some of this immediately following the research stage, as you found blogs and influencers and peers that you wanted to build relationships with. If you haven't, it's time to start.

Go comment on the blog posts and social media statements you like. If there's an expert you want to open a dialogue with, go ask her a question or thank him for a piece of content you found valuable. Go

join a Twitter chat your target is a part of and talk to her there.

## [5] Follow up

Be persistent, but not annoying. If they're doing their part of this right, they're keeping an eye on the people in their circles, followers, friends, commentators. Which means that if your name pops up often enough (with *helpful* comments, people. There's only so much appreciation you can earn with "Excellent post, bro. Far out!"), they're going to be checking you out, too.

If they like what they see? Voila! A member for your community.

## [6] Reciprocity

AKA, the friend of my friend is my friend (sorta). Keep your eyes open, as you engage with your initial prospects, for opportunities to be drawn into their communities as well. You can meet more people who are willing to be active online participants in community.

People who may benefit from your knowledge or your services. Or who may, in turn, have knowledge or services that will benefit you.

Sometimes it's not a matter of befriending the shy kid. Sometimes it's a matter of

merging friend groups with a kindred spirit. Now everyone can share the sandbox.

## GUIDELINE FOR EXECUTION *#5*

# Only friends get to ask for favors

### Don't be *that* guy

Here's the beauty of having lots of friends: that's a lot of resources you can draw on when you need them.

Let's be really clear, though. Are you listening?

### Friendship first, favors later

Most people can sense when we want something from them. If they think the only reason you're making nice is because you need them to do something for you, they're not going to respond as openly and willingly as they will for a genuine friend.

A big, strong guy with a truck is going to be really suspicious if a semi-acquaintance buddies up to him a week before she's moving house.

On the other hand, a big strong guy with a truck almost reflexively to help his friends on moving day.

Which response would you prefer?

### From each according to his ability (because no day is complete without a little Marx)

Different friends can help you with different tasks in different ways.

The most obvious, of course, are the influencers you manage to befriend, the big names and voices in your industry or in other related fields. They can take longer to grow close to, just because they're busy and important, but they're worth the perseverance and in-person efforts.

In addition to mentoring and sharing their wisdom in experience, in addition to

drawing you into and introducing you to *their* communities, they can also help promote the 20% (or whatever your ratio happens to be) of your content that you originate. They can publicize (and patronize) your events and elevate your brand with their attention.

But even more humble acquaintances can help you out.

By which we mean they can help you *outreach*. (Remember this is one of your powerful community building tools.)

## Sociability is a must

We've already talked a little bit, in scattered ways, about the benefits of reaching out *before* you write your content. You can determine whether or not your content will add anything to the universe and you can also get early buy-in from your potential audience by asking for their input and advice.

A simple truth about human nature: we care more about things we were personally involved with.

That's why our moms are willing to listen to the excruciating detail of the adorable antics of our pet alpacas and random women on the street are not. Mom cares because she's invested blood, sweat, tears,

and a lot of baking into our wellbeing. (And because she loves us).

The woman on the street did not. (Unless *she's* a stalker. But even then: personal involvement. It is the father of enthusiasm).

But having friends is good for more than just researching and guinea pigging.

It's also good for sharing your content and value *after the fact*. Your less influential friends might not have the reach of the industry bigwigs, but they do have *some*.

*And this is not just a numbers game. It's about reaching the **right** people. Even if the little guy only has one follower, you're going to get a valuable, lifelong relationship out of it if that one follower happens to be the right follower.*

Plus...little guys don't always stay little. You can grow together and reap the mutual benefits of friendship.

But notice...it's not the mutual benefits of acquaintance. It's the mutual benefits of *friendship*.

We're gonna say it one more time, just to be really, really clear. Ready?

*Friendship first, favors later.*

## Deep breath and let it out

So that was EXECUTION. Feel free to go back and reread and experiment as much as you can. But just to recap before we move on:

- *Follow (and execute) the creative strategy you so creatively developed*

- *Check your foundations, but don't let that delay your community building efforts*

- *Be generous with your time and promotion*

- *It's a conversation, not a monologue*

- *Get your team into a routine*

- *Friends can ask for favors*

- *Eat more ice cream*

Got it? Excellent.

# 5. Analysis

## Test, measure, analyze, scrutinize, assess, and other fun synonyms



In real life, the healthiest among us spend time in periodic self-reflection.

Am I happy? What do I like about myself? What should I change? What do *other* people like or dislike about me? Are they right or should I make new friends? Do I spend too much time talking about llamas?

(The answer to that last one is, of course, *no*. You can never spend too much time talking about llamas).

And since we've repeatedly made the point that your online presence and relationships aren't so very different than your offline life, it shouldn't surprise you that taking time to measure your successes and analyze your failures are also a part of this process.

### The most important part

By "the most important" we don't mean that you can live and die by this alone. Obviously, if you're not doing all the other parts, there's nothing to measure or analyze.

Nothing is disposable.

But this step is the pay-off. It tells you what's working and what isn't and gives you some clues on what to try next. (Because remember, *the fat lady never sings*).

## Analysis & execution, hand-in-hand into the sunset

Despite the fact that we have described them in a linear fashion, these two levels of the community building process: EXECUTION and ANALYSIS, should often

coincide and intermingle. You don't wait until you're done executing something to check up on its progress.

*In fact, if you're not conducting ANALYSIS as you're executing your community building strategy*

*#youredoingitwrong*

Sorry.

# Bringing back the KPIs

So remember waaaay back, when we were talking about defining the signs that you were actually accomplishing things?

Key Performance Indicators, we called 'em.

As you're in the process of executing your community building efforts (in the EXECUTION stage that is) and striving for those lovely company-wide goals, you should be doing both weekly and monthly check-ins to actually see and communicate the kind of performance your key indicators are indicating.

## Weekly

This is where your KPIs should shine. Because not only are you testing your success, you're also, well, making sure that you've set them up properly. (Hey! Everybody's human and these things can be tricky. Better to catch it now than 30 days in). You can adjust them as needed before too much time passes.

We also recommend weekly check-ins with your team. If you can't do it in person, you've got phones and Google+ and other video conferencing platforms. Have a 10-15 minute standup meeting to get everyone on the same page and hold everyone accountable.

## Monthly

Each month, use relevant and meaningful reports to communicate progress on your KPIs.

*These reports should be a more in-depth analysis of your progress with the community building and goal-accomplishing, drawn up neatly for your boss or client or team. It should clearly communicate not just what you've done, but how it's valuable.*

What it should *not do* is bore anyone to death.

'Cuz here's the deal with reporting: there is nothing worse than spending hours

putting together a report that no one will read. (Except possibly being trapped on top of a washing machine by a horde of angry ferrets).

So don't. (Try to avoid the rodent-appliance combo, too. Not good. Not good at all).

## Don't report just to report

Typically, we draw up a monthly report and the things we talk about are these:

- *The positive highlights of the month (pick 3)*

- *The efforts undertaken (quick bullets)*

- *The traffic your efforts have driven to various relevant pages (new landing pages, blog posts, PDFs, etc) from various relevant channels and sources (social, search, email marketing, referral, etc) to complete specific tasks that illustrate some sense of*

- *accomplishment of the goals that you've set forth*

- *What could have been done better, what should be done going forward*

- *Upcoming plans and opportunities*

We've found that these categories, correctly understood, pretty much cover everything you need to know to determine what went right, what went wrong, and what we should do next. It's also your opportunity to communicate efforts being made to accomplish both revenue and brand goals.

## Not just the whats but the whys

Make sure that you understand *why* a piece of content didn't perform well. Was it poorly timed? Poorly executed? Poorly promoted and publicized?

Was your information incorrect or did someone just get there first?

In your outreach efforts, was there something wrong with your approach?

Maybe you used an email when you needed a phone call?

## Not just the whats and the whys but the whos

Taking this time to measure also gives you some good ideas on what's going on with your audience (which is really important for community building success).

Did a particular piece of content get a massive influx of visits thanks to a Twitter promotion from an influencer? How do we develop the relationship with that influencer so that he'll repeat the favor next time?

Is our audience unresponsive because they're all perfunctory social media users who mostly care about their brothers' cat videos or because we've really failed to spark their interest?

Who is new to the audience this month and how did they find us? Why did they join and what have they contributed? What new friends did they (or might they) bring with them?

## And the hows, too, just for good measure

Are more people finding you via social media or search?

If it's social media, what outlets bring the most visitors? Which posts got the best response?

If it's search, what keywords are they using (although this is trickier now due to

the Google [not provided] saga)? Did they know to come look for you by name or did they stumble upon a resource you've provided?

If they followed a link from someone else's site to yours, what link did they follow? What content really brought them there and how could you give them more of it?

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## Two streams, one river

There are two ways to gather this kind of information and they are certainly not mutually exclusive.

The first is to use analytics software and platforms to track all the stuff that you've been doing (Google Analytics is a big one for this, but there will be others).

From this data you can put your noggins to work extrapolating the things you want to know about your audience as a whole.

The second method is, quite simply, to ask.

Pick a cross section of your users or a handful of the ones you know really well

and survey them. This gets you less big picture information, but you can ask for a greater degree of precision and specificity.

Not just what they did or didn't like but specifically *why they did or didn't like it*.

What resources are they missing? What do they need to know that no one has told them yet?

It's a lot of work to pull all these data streams together, but ultimately, it's uncompromisingly necessary for effectively moving forward.

## And also the 'wows'

*The point of this monthly report isn't just to drown the reportees in numbers. It's to prove to them that you're adding value and significance to their companies. That your community building efforts really are effecting positive change in their businesses.*

Interpret the data for them. (Which brings us back around to the importance of the

KPI conversation and effectively communicating everyone's expectations).

# Everything really does come full circle

We promised that the last step was always going to be Rinse & Repeat. Because, remember...what was the motto for the process? (Because we promised you a pop quiz, too).

If you answered "The fat lady never sings," get up out of your seat. Get yourself to the nearest drug story/grocery store/ stationary store. Locate and purchase a packet of those little shiny foil star stickers.

Go back home. Resettle in your (hopefully) comfy chair. Fish out a gold star.

Done all that?

Excellent. Award yourself that star. You've done well.

If you answered "llamas", follow the same steps. Award yourself a star of every color *but* gold. 'Cuz you're wrong, but you are *fabulous*.

If you answered something other than "The fat lady never sings" or "llamas"... you should maybe go back and reread Chapter 3. Or just spend some time thinking about why llamas are amazing. Then you may proceed.

# CHAPTER THREE *wrap up*

## The Recap

We covered a lot of ground and there's really no way to review all of it with any kind of succinct-ness.

- *The fat lady never sings. And neither does community building end.*

- *The process is a guide, not a roadmap. It's up to you to make it work for you.*

- *Rivers make excellent metaphors for all kinds of things.*

- *Let your goals drive, not your tools, and you can't ever be lost for long.*

- *If you talk about yourself all the time, not even the weird, paste-eating kid in the corner will be your friend.*

## What's Next?

Well, you are definitely on the downhill slope, now, friends. The worst is over. You're headed into friendly little **Chapter 4: Adaptations for Individuals, In-Houses, & Agencies**, which will give you some tips on how the community building Process (appropriate echoes, please) functions a little differently depending on whether you're an agency, an in-house operator, or an individual.

You're almost there. And you've earned that full-size cupcake. And maybe some ice cream. So indulge...and then get moving.

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# ADAPTATIONS

## FOR INDIVIDUALS, IN-HOUSES, & agencies

# ADAPTATIONS
## FOR INDIVIDUALS, IN-HOUSES & *agencies*

# One last thing

You're almost done (we hope you enjoyed your cupcake), we just have a few tips for you based on who you are (how's *that* for the human element?). Specifically, we'll be talking about handling your team.

Before we start doling out advice to the individuals, in-house teams, and agencies among you, there are Three Very Important Human-Elementy Things to remember about building online communities:

## 1. Building community requires a team

Regardless of who you're building community for, there's a lot of work to be done. (Never fear, individuals of the world, we've got some tips for you).

## 2. There are many roles in community building

With all the stuff that needs to get done for community building to work (and you know that's a lot, if you've been paying any attention at all for the last kajillion pages), it's no wonder there are many hats to be worn. It's up to you to dole them out, double them up, or wear them all yourself.

Okay, kinda naggy moment (because it's *important*): Regardless of the team you've assembled (or not assembled), you're going to do fine, as long as you have that goals-

strategy-consistency thing going for you.

## 3. All of community building is about people and communication

Most of business (and, in fact, most of *life*), involves other people. No matter what you're trying to accomplish, chances are you'll be working with other people to get it done. Which inevitably comes with challenges (unlike working with llamas which is nothing but pure delight). So remember that you're a team, suck it up, and have actual conversations and communications. You'll get through it.

Now, you're free to skip to the section that best describes your situation, but we don't recommend it. Apart from hurting our feelings, there are things we can learn everywhere.

And now that we've officially become the next Mr. Rogers, let's make the most of this beautiful day...and keep reading.

# Some of these things are not like the others

There are some differences between doing this community building thing for yourself as an individual, doing it for your company, and doing it for your clients.

The basic steps are the same. Goals, KPIs, Strategy, Execution, Analysis, Sharing Value, the 80/20 Rule, getting in there and engaging, the human (and offline) element, Llamas: these things are constants.

But some of the organizational things do change and we'd like to take a minute to acknowledge that.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY FOR *yourself*

## Simple as it gets

This one is pretty much the basic package. Your resources are probably a little more limited in some of the content generation and community management fields, but if you can establish a consistent online routine as we've suggested in Chapter 3, be present offline, listen to your customers, continue to make improvements to your products and services, and never give up, you'll be well on your way toward building a decent online following and community.

The big bonus here is that, as long as you're taking the likes and need of your audiences into consideration, you're pretty much the master of your own fate.

There's no need for the buy-in from higher-ups.

There's no need for interdepartmental communication.

There's no need for team organization woes (unless of course you should decide to recruit some outside help from strategic partners).

Revel in your independence.

Now that you've reveled appropriately, there are still a few decisions you have to make for yourself on this whole community building thing.

The BIG Question you want to ask is are you operating as an individual or a brand or a fusion of the two? These then are your options:

## 1. BUILD *your* COMMUNITY UNDER *your own* IDENTITY

If you're working to build your own individual community and you don't have a team or partners to share the load, we applaud you for being a trooper. As you're building your audience, you may choose to use your individual identity (i.e your handle on Twitter is your personal account), mention your company name in your profile, and call it good. Certainly then you would share value (your own and others), show your personality, and engage and build relationships under your identity.

If your end goal is to build a community around your company, as soon as you have the resources, start building community under your company's brand identity and leverage your efforts on both sides (if you're the one doing the community building for both).

## 2. BUILD *your* COMMUNITY UNDER *your brand's* IDENTITY

Perhaps you'd prefer to stay away from bringing your professional social presence to the forefront and you'd rather build community under your brand's identity. That would work well too.

Just keep in mind that people like to know who they're talking to, so you may want to include a little note on the company profile that correspondence is coming through you (and provide either your name or your personal handle). And know that your brand's personality will be different than your personal one and that you certainly can be building your reach by leveraging the relationships of both followings.

## 3. OR *do both*

Should you dare to do both: build community for yourself *and* the company and manage both a personal identity and the company's, have at it. Just remember to be consistent. Be unique on each identity. And of course, know your goals. No matter what you choose, stay focused on your goals. That in itself will help you decide how you build your community.

# BUILDING COMMUNITY FOR *your company*

## A slightly more complicated dance

Again, working in-house you're pretty much following the same steps, doing the same dance as the solo community builder.

The good and bad thing about doing this for your company, though, is that you should not and will not be the only one.

So you get to share out the burden but you also have to worry more about selecting the right team and overseeing and corralling any rogue elements.

## A word on buy-in

The biggest thing to keep in mind as you approach community building for your company and with a team is to be fully aware of the team's perspective at all times. By that we mean that not everyone believes in community building because they either don't understand it, don't know anything about it, or haven't experienced the results that it's capable of providing. That means that you need to be thinking about buy-in at every stage in the community building process.

So before you provide your team with some resources that will educate them about community building, and before you explain the benefits (see Chapter 1, kids), and the goals you'd like to accomplish through your community building efforts, first understand *their* perspective.

Where do they stand on the subject? Are they skeptical? Why? (You may want to take some of these guys to coffee or lunch and better understand where they're coming from so that you can eventually

get them on the team by the judicious use of pastry, if necessary).

Are they excited? Great! (Use those guys as your allies).

*Remember that buy-in doesn't just happen before you begin your efforts. It happens all. the. time. At every stage.*

Whenever you're formulating goals and KPIs, creating your strategy, executing, and analyzing. Every part of this community building process that we recommend requires an ongoing conversation that is meant to continuously communicate what's going on, why you're doing what you're doing, and what you expect to get out of it.

If you spend the time (and snack-related bribery) on buy-in (and building an internal community among your team) you will increase your chances of success. Because you can't go this alone. Or it will fail.

## The many hats of community building

There are a bunch of moving pieces that go into building an online community for your company. Depending on the size and scale of your organization, you may have one person for each role, you may have thirteen people for each role, or you may have one person doing three of these roles.

The trick, though, is to make sure you've got all the bases of your community building team covered:

### Project management

You need a ringleader. A "the-buck-stops-here" kind of a guy. An organizer. A task master. You need someone who's going to keep your entire team in check and your entire strategy in motion. We call it a project manager. You may call it your mom. Your call.

### Community management

As you may remember from Chapter 2, this person is *muy importante* to the success of your efforts (really, how can you call yourselves a community building company without a community manager?). They are going to work the necessary magic both on and offline (with goals and strategic focus in mind) to grow and help your community thrive. This person needs to be an excellent communicator and relationship builder (more on her

importance below so sit tight).

## Strategy, creativity, analysis, direction

Your project manager will most certainly be a part of this team, as well as your community manager, but it would be ideal to have a person (or several people) who are responsible for creating and facilitating strategy for all efforts. Certainly this involves having the ability to take those goals and KPIs and turn them into magic marketing goodness.

## Design & user experience

No matter how big your team is, you're gonna want a designer. Someone who will drive the look and feel of everything visual for your brand and community building efforts. Someone who will be on the lookout for what's best for the people who are going to be participating in the experience that you'll be providing. And someone who will tell you no when you ask for dancing llamas on your home page (we clearly *love* llamas but dancing? That's where we draw the line).

## Content

As we've said, rather a lot, actually, content is the lifeblood of all community building efforts and you're going to need a ton of it. So find an amazingly talented content strategist (not just copywriter)

who will help you ensure the big picture of goals and strategy.

## SEO

That's right. Get one of these guys. Although you always want to put your focus on your business (where it belongs), it's still really important to understand what Google is doing and how to effectively optimize your content (and your user experience) so that you're given the proper search engine attention. Plus a good SEO is going to be a tremendous help on the data front and you need one of them. Data FTW!

## Email marketing

Again, depending on the size of your team, you may have one person responsible for several tasks including email marketing. They, too, need to have the big picture of what your company is trying to accomplish with these efforts and not work in a silo.

## Reading & learning

This is a great place to involve your entire team no matter their role. Everyone can play a part in finding awesome content to share with your community or to apply to your own team or situation.

## Outreach

This particular hat does not belong to a single lucky person, it belongs to everyone

on your team. Every person in your company is a representative of your brand. They don't have to be present on social media, but their personality and their contributions to your company have so much to do with community building. Especially when it comes to outreach. So rally the whole team for this stuff and use your internal connections to externally build your community.

### Website stuff

Like we said back in Chapter 3, there will probably be all kinds of stuff that you'll want to do with your website in order to fully leverage your efforts. So it's probably a real good idea to have someone assigned and dedicated to covering your bases on the website and ensuring that your goals and strategic direction are at the forefront of all requests.

### Offline stuff

Remember, you can't build a community without an investment in the offline component. If you've got the resources, have someone dedicated to focusing on offline events, gatherings, conferences, meet-ups, and relationship building all with your goals and strategic focus in mind. Trust us. It will make a big difference.

Those are a lot of hats. Fortunately, they can be doubled or tripled up. You've just got to get the right people.

## Putting the team back together

There are a few specific roles that a good community building effort requires. (Llama handler is, at this point, still sadly optional).

All of them are important in their own ways, but we're going to take a minute to talk about three in particular.

## 1. THE *community manager* ( A.K.A. THE GATEKEEPER )

We've already told you a little bit about ours (don't be shy, you can meet her here) but here's the number one thing you need to know: community management is hard work.

It's not something you can do in your free time or in-between other projects. It's not something that you can assign to someone already overburdened.

*In case you hadn't figured it out, community building requires attention, engagement, and consistency on a daily basis.*

There's all the value-sharing we've discussed in great detail. Plus there's the engagement with your following and your followed alike.

But there's also the publicizing of company events and new products and service changes. Your community manager is going to be monitoring your social media for mentions, opportunities, complaints, and applause that require response. She's also going to be, by default of monitoring your social media, on the front lines of your customer service and product support.

She needs to be ready to field questions, to recognize gaps and opportunities, to interact gracefully with customers, peers, and idols alike.

She's pretty much a minor deity and her time should be adequately revered.

## 2. AN INTEGRAL ROLE WE HAVEN'T MENTIONED: *the thought leader*

Okay, here's the thing. With most companies, you're going to have two voices. You're going to have the voice of the company-at-large, as represented by your content team.

It's their job to do pretty much all of your foundational content (the stuff that lives on your website) and probably most of the community building content, too (usually the stuff that lives on your blog).

But with most companies, you're also going to want a face and voice that represent the vision and leadership of the company.

This is the person that you send to speak at events, that gets asked to do guest posts on other people's blogs, whose material you rel author (which is code for making sure Google is properly attributing trust to your Thought Leader) so that she becomes recognizable to Google.

When she produces a piece of content, it should be genuine thought leadership. The wisdom she's gathered or the insight she has into the future of the industry or even

- not to be too grandiose - the world.

Now, this paragon of spokespersonhood shouldn't be working alone. The rest of the team can suggest ideas and help with execution (because most certainly you will be working from goals and strategy), but ultimately, the words and the vision should come from the visioneer.

In the end, you may have a few of these as different department heads distinguish themselves with their eloquence and intelligence. And that's great.

But do try to make sure that you have one.

If you're lucky, yours might even be as awesome as ours.

## 3. PROJECT *manager* ( A.K.A. *el Jefe* )

We hereby deputize you (or some other someone in your company) to take on the role of Project Manager.

The great thing about getting the whole company involved in the producing and gathering and sharing of value and the building of community is that you've got a lot of hands and voices contributing.

The bad news is...you've got a lot of hands and voices contributing.

This means that your Project Manager (or some other fancy name you can think up) has got to be really clear about laying down the rules and keeping up the communication.

He'll be like Wyatt Earp and Alexander Graham Bell all rolled into one.

### 'Cuz where would we be without the telephone?

There are two Alexander Graham Bell (AGB) things your Project Manager will need to do.

The first is make sure the whole team is communicating internally. While you're (hopefully) dividing the labor, you should certainly not be dividing the vision.

The common pejorative for this kind of workflow is "working in a silo". It's rigidly straight up and down, with no sideways communication or flow of ideas. Writers write. Designers design. Engineers engineer. Accountants account.

There's no cross-pollination of skills or ideas.

*Cut that nonsense out, alright? Everyone there has a vested interest in making the company succeed. So tear down the silos and let the grain flow free.*

The, uh, grain is your creativity and stuff. In case you weren't clear on the metaphor.

The second AGB way to be involves ensuring that all your external communication is unified. Even if you've got a bunch of people contributing different ideas and pieces of knowledge, you want to be sure that everyone is on

the same page about what message the company is trying to send (again, that's why you have goals and a strategy...in case we haven't mentioned it a million or so times).

In fact, this is really kind of an extension of internal communication. You're ensuring that every employee knows all the Big Why stuff about the company: your mission, your values, your goals.

That way everyone attached to the company is sending the same basic message and projecting the same basic ethos.

Which is all for the good.

## Layin' down the law

This is where your inner Wyatt Earp gets to come out and play. Don't be shy: anyone who can be traced back to your company should be admonished to consider the company reputation in their online interactions.

Like Hammurabi, we typically encourage our clients to codify their expectations into a social media policy. The policy addresses basic dos and don'ts, confidentiality reminders, and simple etiquette.

The idea, of course, is to ensure that everyone in the company knows what kind of online behavior and attitude they should affect as even unofficial representatives of your company.

Keep 'em in line, Tex.

Order must be maintained when you're building community for your company.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY FOR *your clients*

# Keep the lines open

As in the two scenarios above, working as an agency on behalf of your clients involves all the same pieces and most of the same recommendations: daily routine, build your team carefully, monitor messaging and behavior.

The biggest element to remember when you're acting as a third party consultant is communication, communication, communication.

From the very beginning you have to be clear about your expectations and theirs at every stage of the proceedings.

Tell them what you're doing, when, and why. Listen and respond when they have questions, suggestions, or doubts.

## Communication encourages quality

*First of all, be sure that you know your client's company inside and out. Do whatever research you have to do, ask whatever questions you have to ask, poke around in as many supply cupboards as you must to really get a sense of who the client is, even when they're not quite sure themselves.*

(Should you happen across someone's stash of snacks, well, that's just a bonus).

If you've got the manpower and they've got the budget, you can even consider implanting someone in-house so that they really soak up the culture and the values and the mission. (Face-to-face helps absolutely everything).

However you do it, it's important that you integrate the teams. Even when you're working without physical proximity, you need to remember that you and your client are all in this together. One big happy family.

This unity is imperative to putting out the right content, attracting the right audience, getting the work done.

And you know the best way to ensure unity?

Why, communication, of course.

(Well, that or superglue. But one of these is messier than the other and will seriously deplete your stock of nail polish remover trying to tidy up).

## Communication engenders buy-in

By keeping them up-to-date and explaining the rationale behind your actions, you're paving the way to greater understanding of and empathy for the process you have to follow to get results.

This is important not just because we care about being a human among humans but because, well, this integrated marketing stuff is a long game. You need continued support from your clients even when there

are no Insta-Results! in the offing.

Understanding the significance of each action should hopefully grant them the patience they need to see gains.

*As we've said before, this entire community building process is an ongoing, two-way conversation. You've got to communicate throughout in order to earn buy-in and make it a success.*

# Communication aids completion

Part of being sure everyone is on the same page, both on your agency team and your client's in-house marketing people, is clearly delineating who is responsible for what actions and when.

Unless your client has completely turned over the community building into your no-doubt capable hands, you'll be dividing the labor of the content generating, knowledge sharing, and community building between you.

This is a good state of affairs. You're blending your community building savvy with their inherent understanding of and passion for the actual business of the company. 'Tis a potent brew, to be sure.

Unfortunately, though, doubling the cells of the whole team means that you've got twice the opportunities to let something slip between the cracks and vanish to the elusive land of dryer-eaten socks and never-where-you-left-them keys.

In avoidance of that terrible fate, we typically provide what we call Communication Plans in order to, well, communicate how we see the collaboration process working.

Though there's no guarantee that you can make things run more smoothly and quickly by talking it out (communicating with a chatterbox, for example, is an excruciatingly inefficient mode of transmitting information), this piece is a close cousin to the communicated expectations.

*By setting up, in advance, clear processes for any group projects or collaborations, you avoid unnecessary waffling.*

(We'd never try to inhibit *necessary* waffling, of course. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, after all).

The best example of this is the pre-arranged content review process we develop with each of our clients at the outset of a new project. This is a step-by-step outline of how each piece of content is vetted, edited, and finalized. We generate this together and all agree to its terms before generating any content.

As we mentioned in Analysis, we also make a point of checking in at least once a week, just to make sure no one has strayed too far off the reservation or has found a

new opportunity or otherwise needs our agency's help handling something.

## And in summation...

As we've said, apart from these little tips, everything else remains the same, no matter if you're building community on your own behalf or at someone else's behest.

The most important thing to remember (and to convey to your behest-er, whoever that might be) is patience.

Building online community takes time. If you need a refresher on this (and it's okay that you do; we talked about it a looooong time ago), go back and check out the conclusion of Chapter 1.

And then, just, do the work and be patient. As our beloved leader paraphrases: Good things come to those who work their asses off. (We're pretty sure she stole that from someone else. Shhhhh).

### Some final words

Blubber. Oddment. Tweak.

## The Recap

This chapter was largely about how you organize your internal team and the details are worth remembering, but here's the stuff you really need to know:

- *Unless you are gifted with divine powers of multi-tasking, community building is a group effort.*

- *Together Wyatt Earp and Alexander Graham Bell would have made one great project manager.*

- *You can mix-and-match who fills what community building role or roles, but you can't ignore any of them.*

- *Remember to be a person among people; you're not going to get anywhere if you don't communicate.*

## What's Next?

Congratulations, all that remains is our graceful exit from your lives. (Or as close as we ever get to graceful. Or exiting, really. We're kinda clingy). Chapter 5 wraps everything up with **The End.**

# THE END

(A.K.A *final words* OF WISDOM)

## Parting is such sweet sorrow

Despite the fact that what you're reading now is a glorified end note, we thought we'd follow tradition and give you our last Three Very Important Reminders.

Be ready, because we've been stockpiling wisdom for months just so we'd have something profound to say here. We expect you will appreciate the effort.

Okay, here it goes:

## 1. Despite being called The End, this is not really the end

Not for you and not for us. We're not going anywhere and we'll be around to elaborate or update the guidance we've provided on building your community as needed.

*Businesses and communities both evolve, constantly. Each milestone you hit (which, really, just sounds painful), is going to bring you unexpected victories and challenges. We hope this guide gives you the foundation you need in order to adapt quickly.*

And we're always here, just in case you need a helping hand. Or a llama haiku. (Seriously. We've got a list).

## 2. It's really just connecting with other humans who share your passions and causes

We've just spent the last hundred pages or so dissecting the community building process into itty-bitty bits, so we're going to take this opportunity to pull you away from the microscope and back into the wider world.

Yes, your end goal is to attract the right people to become lifelong customers and brand advocates, but even that is only the median view.

*Here's the big picture: connection to the right human beings can make us better people who run better businesses.*

So stop seeing the means as the means and the ends as the ends and enjoy the experience of connecting with other human souls.

## 3. Don't give up

Trust us when we say, you'll want to. And, not to hurl cliches at you yet again, but keep in mind that with great effort comes great reward. (When you're really lucky, that reward is chocolate).

*Set some goals, make a plan, get out there, and do it.*

We'll be cheering you along the whole way.

Uh, without the little flippy skirts and pom poms. But possibly with the occasional cake.

# Join *our* community

Yes, yes. We know. We just did the inspiring final words and all that good stuff a second ago, but...well...there's always just a little bit more, isn't there?

First of all, we'd like to proffer a formal invitation to join our community.
We figure you'll take us up on it. After all, you just read our very long guide on building an online community, including the section on joining and leveraging other people's communities.

Let this be your first opportunity:

**Twitter**
**Facebook**
**Google+**
**LinkedIn**
**The Mack Web Blog**

Besides, did we or did we not offer our helping hands and non-cheerleader cheerleading? How can we walk with you through the challenges and bask in the reflected glory of your triumphs if we're not in touch?

Just do it. You know you want to.

## P.S.
That was your reading comprehension quiz, by the way. Will they or won't they

make the right choice about joining our community? We eagerly await your pass-fail response to the prompt.

Those who pass get the unmitigated pleasure of building a relationship with our wonderful selves.

Those who fail shall be trampled by a herd of disappointed llamas (which is so much worse than being trampled by ornery or startled llamas; those absurdly long eyelashes make disappointment almost palpable so the emotional element is painful, too).

## P.P.S. A closing note: Who the heck is Arthur (and why the llamas)?



We've already received (and we anticipate receiving more) questions about why The Truly Monumental Guide to Building

Online Communities is called Arthur and why there are so many llamas.

So we thought we'd reward those who made it all the way through with the answer (like the bonus scene hidden at the end of the credits).

So here's the deal with Arthur and the llamas.

Last year, the team took what was supposed to be a day trip up into the Rocky Mountains (which we can do, 'cuz they're right there). We were hiking in the backwoods and Courtney slipped and twisted her ankle pretty badly.

To make matters even worse, it started to pour. It was one of those summer-in-the-mountains, apocalyptic deluges. It didn't last long, but in attempting to drag our fallen comrade to some kind of shelter we, well, not to put too fine a point upon it, got lost.

Horribly, horribly lost.

So we were lost in the wilderness with no map, GPS, or cell phone reception. We had an injured party, we lost the food pack in our scramble to escape, and we'd seen signs of bears all over the place.

Not good.

We don't like to talk too much about the next four days and nights. They were uncomfortable and frightening.

And in the end, we had to eat someone on the team (who shall remain nameless), just to keep from dying of starvation (Natalie eats a lot for such a little thing).

It all came to a head on the fifth day when, in our halting trek through the trees, Mack, our fearless leader in all circumstances, came face to face with a mountain lion.

For a heartbeat, no one moved, no one breathed. And even when we saw the lion's muscles flex as it prepared to pounce, we couldn't seem to respond.

The tableau of terror was broken by a sudden warbling cry and the muted thunder of two-toed feet.

Pelting down the nearest hillside at full-speed was a funny little man astride a pure white llama, shouting a full-throated battle cry of, "Aaaaaaarrrrrthuuuuuuurrrrr!"

The sudden ruckus startled the lion, but only for a moment. He turned to face the new threat with an angry snarl.

What followed was a quick and brutal fight between beast and man-and-beast. In the

end the llama was brought to his knees, but the little man prevailed and the lion chose to retreat.

We rushed to the little man, just in time to see him slide off his valiant mount.

His wounds were numerous and his eyes already glazed over with impending death, but he gave us a reassuring smile and choked out, "Map. Compass. In the saddlebag. You're...not...far now."

"Oh, sir," we remaining few cried out in our distress. "Who are you? How can we ever thank you?"

His eyelids slid to half mast, but the sweet smile remained, despite his grievous injuries. "Happy to...help. No...thanks...needed."

But we were insistent and his fading voice grew more distant as he said his final words. "I've...always wanted...to be a...guide. A...community...building guide. Arthur...the...guide."

They were his last words.

When we finally made it out of the woods, we swore to fulfill his dying request.

And so we have.

# The End.

## P.P.P.S. The truth?

A certain member of the team got tired of calling this guide increasingly ridiculous, long winded working titles (The Mack Web Solutions' Truly Excellent and Fantastic Guide to Building Online Communities for All and Sundry, Our Awesomely Comprehensive and Objectively Beautiful Guide to Making Online Friends, the Handy-Dandy Guide to Not Being a Cyber Hermit) whenever we were discussing it.

And so on a cranky day (yes, even we have them, we're afraid), said member of the team expressed her exasperation and was asked, "Well, what would *you* call it?"

And ala George Harrison in *A Hard Day's Night*, the team member murmured, "Arthur" in a shockingly bad Liverpudlian accent.

And so Arthur was born.

As for the llamas? Well...someone on our team just thinks they're funny.

Plus, well, the llama is a doe-eyed member of the *camelidae* family, beloved in petting zoos for its soft wool and absurdly long

eyelashes; known for its intelligence, curiosity, herd instinct, and ability to carry significant weight over long distances in tricky terrain; also renowned for its regurgitation defense and powerful kick.

That makes it pretty, lovable, smart, knowledge-hungry, social savvy, hard-working, and totally kick ass.

Which, frankly, sounds familiar to us.