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Starting your own online community by Bloomtools

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Online communities are a great way to get your customers and prospects interacting with your business. Establishing a community group on your website is also an effective way to boost your site traffic and generate leads. For more information on these groups and the people that participate in them, read my other article.

To build a group around your business on your own site, you can use a blog or an online forum. A blog is a page on your website where you regularly communicate to your audience in the form of a journal. Blogs can contain any content that the author chooses, from personal experiences to political commentary, and entries are dated and displayed with the most recent first. Blogs are a great way to position yourself as an expert, and if you write regular posts with quality information, you will attract loyal readers that will interact with your blog and give you valuable feedback. To learn about starting your own business blog, read my other article here.

An online forum is a discussion room on your website where users can post comments and messages on a variety of topics. A forum can create a more interactive community than a blog, but is much harder to set up and manage. You have control over the topics and can moderate the discussion, but you will need to give the participants some freedom when it comes to what they communicate about. Forums are a great way to engage with your audience and get them coming back to your site regularly. An online forum will require specialised software to be added to your site by your website developer. Find information on Bloomtoolsâ€™ simple to manage online forum tool for businesses here.

Starting your own online community can be quite slow initially. This is because people wonâ€™t take the time to contribute to small groups with few participants. However, once the community starts to grow, more and more users will be attracted to the group and motivated to contribute, further growing the group. So donâ€™t be put off if your group doesnâ€™t instantly have hundreds of active members â€“ promote the group to your database of contacts and in other online chat rooms and forums and wait patiently for it to bloom.

When startingÂ a community, some things to keep in mind are:

Trust the member's input â€“ donâ€™t moderate their inputs too heavily. Of course, offensive or illegal content should immediately be removed, but generally you should allow constructive criticism of your business to appear on your forum. You can get some great customer feedback through this and will make users feel that you value their opinions.

Make it easy to contribute â€“ people will be instantly turned off from contributing to your site if the process of registering and posting messages is too complex. Only ask for essential information during registration (you can always find out more about them later) and make it really quick and simple for them to add comments to the forum.

Allow members to get credit by measuring their contributions â€“ users of your forum should be able to increase their status in the group. They should be categorized based on their level of participation within the group, such as â€˜newbieâ€™ or â€˜expertâ€™. This rewards the best users and makes them f their contributions are appreciated, which will strengthen their brand loyalty and encourage them to participate more and to tell others about your business.

Allow other members to respond to contributions â€“ in order for your forum to be truly interactive,

users need to be able to respond to the contributions made by others. This can create excellent in-depth discussions between participants and foster the community feeling within the group.

Starting an online community group on your own website is definitely a worthwhile strategy for building your brand awareness, attracting visitors to your website and generating sales leads. They can also be a great way to gather feedback from your audience to improve your business. However, you need to be dedicated to promoting and maintaining your group in order for it to benefit your business.

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