

University of Thessaly



**Department of Electrical and Computer
Engineering**

Diploma Thesis

Community management

Best practices for community managers

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Completing my Diploma Thesis signifies the end of my undergraduate studies for the title of Computer and Communications Engineer in University of Thessaly and I would like to thank some people who have helped me throughout these years.

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Περίληψη

Τα τελευταία χρόνια, μαζί με την τεχνολογική πρόοδο και την άνοδο του Web 2.0 και των Social Media, ο όρος **Κοινότητα** έχει αποκτήσει πολύ μεγαλύτερη σημασία και έχει συνδεθεί με τις επιχειρήσεις, το marketing και τις πωλήσεις και τα κέρδη των εταιρειών. Επίσης έχει βοηθήσει μη κερδοσκοπικούς οργανισμούς να κάνουν γνωστές τις δράσεις τους στο ευρύ κοινό, να αντλήσουν χρήματα και να αποκτήσουν περισσότερα μέλη. Ως αποτέλεσμα, το επάγγελμα του **Διαχειριστή Κοινότητας** έχει αναθεωρηθεί και έχει γίνει πολύ πιο σημαντικό. Εταιρείες και οργανισμοί έχουν αρχίσει να προσλαμβάνουν Διαχειριστές κοινότητας προκειμένου να αυξήσουν τις πωλήσεις τους, την αναγνωρισιμότητά τους και την παραγωγικότητα του προσωπικού τους.

Σε αυτή την μελέτη γίνεται προσπάθεια να προσεγγισθεί το επάγγελμα του Διαχειριστή κοινότητας, εστιάζοντας σε θέματα που αφορούν τη δουλειά του και πιο συγκεκριμένα:

- Ποια καθήκοντα αναλαμβάνουν και πόσο σημαντικό είναι το καθένα
- Ποιες προκλήσεις αντιμετωπίζουν
- Ποιες στρατηγικές ακολουθούν
- Τι εργαλεία χρησιμοποιούν
- Με ποια μεγέθη μετράνε την πρόοδο και την επιτυχία της δουλειάς τους

Στο πρώτο κομμάτι της μελέτης τίθενται οι θεωρητικές βάσεις σχετικά με τις online κοινότητες και τα βασικά του επαγγέλματος του Διαχειριστή κοινότητας, όπως τις ικανότητες που χρειάζεται κλπ. Στο δεύτερο μέρος διενεργείται μία έρευνα που απευθύνεται σε επαγγελματίες community managers εταιρειών που εστιάζει στα θέματα που αναφέραμε παραπάνω. Στο τελευταίο κομμάτι, γίνεται συζήτηση πάνω στα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας και βγαίνουν συμπεράσματα από τις παρατηρήσεις.

Abstract

Through the last years, along with the progress of technology and the rise of Web 2.0 and the Social media, the term **Community** has become much more meaningful and more associated with business, marketing and companies' sales and profit. It has also helped non-profit organizations raise awareness of their causes, raise funds and recruit more members. As a result, the occupation of the **Community Manager** has been reconsidered and has become much more important. Companies and other organizations have started hiring community managers in order to improve their sales, brand recognition and personnel's productivity.

This study is a try to approach the occupation of the community manager, focusing on issues concerning their job and more specifically:

- Which tasks they undertake and how important are they
- What challenges do they face
- What strategies do they follow
- What tools do they use
- What metrics do they use to measure success and progress

In the first part of this study we are going to set the theoretical base around online communities and the essentials of the community manager's occupation, such as the skills needed etc. In the second part a survey, addressing professional community managers in business, is conducted focusing on the issues mentioned. In the last part, a discussion on the results takes place and conclusions are drawn from the observations.

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1st part

Virtual online communities

Community

Definition

The most common definition, according to The new Oxford American Dictionary is: “A group of people living together in one place”. However, in this study, the second definition provided by the same dictionary is more suitable: “A group of people having a religion, race, profession, interest or other particular characteristic in common”.

A lot of definitions have been given to the abstract term “Community” depending on the various disciplines of politics, business, religion, sociology, biology etc. However, there have been identified three core elements that compose a community.

The first and most important one is **consciousness of kind**, as Gusfield (1978) refers to. It is the essential connection felt among the members of the community toward each other and the sense that they differ from non-members, as a collective entity. According to Weber (1978), this feeling makes them perceive themselves as part of the community and gives them a sense of belonging.

The second is a **number of traditions and rituals** accepted and shared among the members of the community, they form its identity and culture and they are influenced by the shared values and common beliefs. Rituals “serve to contain the drift of meanings;... [they] are conventions that set up visible public definition” (Douglas and Ishwerwood 1979, p. 65) and social solidarity (Durkheim [1915]1965).

Traditions are sets of “social practices which seek to celebrate and inculcate certain behavioral norms and values” (Marshal 1994).

The third is **the sense of moral responsibility towards the community and its members**. A sense of duty and obligation to preserve and continue the existence of the community and protect it in cases of threat.

Categorization

According to the circumstances in which a community is formed, the way they function or other criteria, community may be categorized as follows:

- Community of **place**, if the criterion is the place its members reside, work or spend a significant amount of time. Such communities are neighborhoods, towns, workplaces, customers of a restaurant etc.
- Community of **interest**, if the criterion is one common interest or passion that the members share with each other. These members, often interact with each other, exchanging thoughts and ideas about that very interest, eg. movies enthusiasts,

gamers, fans of a particular music genre etc.

- Community of **Practice** has to do mainly with individuals who have the same occupation or hobby. Wenger (1999) notes that they interact with each other with the purpose of learning more about it, sharing knowledge, resources and methods and becoming better in what they do. For example, such communities can be teachers sharing perspectives on educational procedures they have used in classrooms, software developers sharing programming techniques etc.
- Community of **Purpose** has to do with individuals trying to achieve one similar objective. For example the Linux community, an open source software community, who are working on refining and improving a computer operating system. Other examples are communities of consumers, reviewing products they have bought, with the purpose of helping others make better choices when buying similar products.

Virtual Community

According to Ridings, Gefen and Arinze (2002) a Virtual Community is the kind of community in which a group of people with a common interest interact regularly in an organized way over the internet. The virtual community concept is almost as old as the concept of internet. However, its exponential growth began in the 1990s thanks to the appearance of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the spreading of e-mail, chat rooms and later social media and social networks (Flavián and Guinalú 2005). In accordance with the social perspective, discussed in the above paragraph, one of the main characteristics of virtual communities is that, due to the use of internet as a medium, these communities overcome the space and time barriers concerning interaction that exist in spatial communities, says Andersen (2005).

According to Preece (2000), a virtual community may be formed by:

- people with a **wish for interaction** among them, in order to satisfy their needs. By interaction, we mean any form of communication, oral or written, and collaboration in succeeding to satisfy these needs.
- people that share a particular **interest**, which is the reason for the existence of the community. The needs mentioned before and, as a result, the interaction among them are orbiting around this interest.
- people with certain **norms** that guide their relationships. For example, a hierarchical schema applied on the community, may constrain communication channels among members and grant more privileges to the members, higher in the pyramid.
- people with **computer systems** that favour interaction and cohesion among the members. Virtual communities are often referred as online communities, mostly because they are facilitated into web platforms, such as chat rooms, forums, blogs, social networks etc. These platforms are designed in such a way that interaction among members is fostered and a number of regulations can be set where needed.

Brand Community

A brand community is a community that consists of people that identify with and admire a particular brand, whether it is an organization with a social cause, a small cafe or a large company. As a community, it has all three elements mentioned: "shared consciousness, rituals, traditions and sense of moral responsibility" (Muniz Jr and O'guinn(2001)) and thus, members interact with each other, sharing experiences of the brand.

The concept of the brand community is relatively new and was majorly cultivated and put into practice along with the rise of virtual communities. This happened as, according to Kalman (2005), marketers started using technology-mediated methods and, more precisely, online tools to reach their audience and, as Kozinets (2002) notes, engage customers into interacting with each other to share ideas, discuss their views towards the brand and get information on which to base their strategic decisions

Apart from brand enthusiasts, Kalman (2005) provides an expanded definition of brand community. He introduces a model that also includes (Figure 1):

- brand admirers; i.e. those who truly prefer a brand
- non-committals those who just happen to select a brand
- and prospects; those who have not yet decided to buy / act

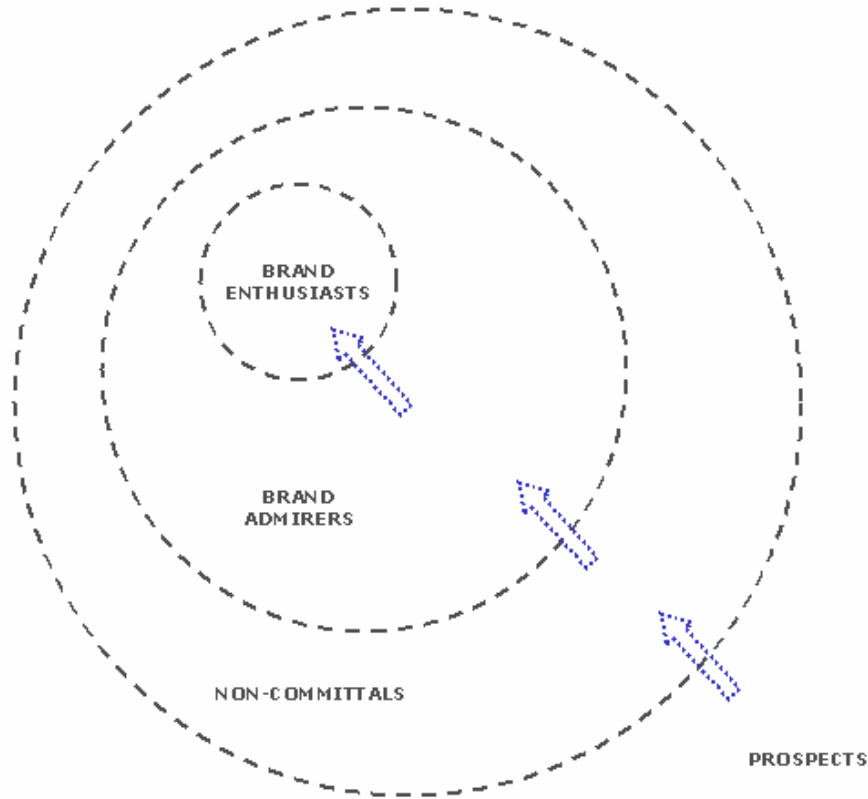


Figure 1

From now on, when referring to the term community we mean virtual brand communities.

The benefits of a brand community in business

So, what are the benefits of employing a community manager for companies?

Marketing tool

Marketers' efforts are focused in moving consumers deeper into the center of the brand, with the purpose of increasing retention and revenue per customer, attract new customers and increase brand recognition and perceived value, while trying to lower the required cost. Investing on building and managing an online community, potentially creates a new marketing tool for business to achieve that, explains D'Angelo (2010).

Community members often convert to loyal customers. These individuals tend to make more and bigger transactions and it's highly possible that they refer to their friends about the company and share their buying decisions with their social media contacts. This results in acquiring new members to the community, who potentially are new customers. Slack, Terrance, Keene and Johnson (1999) found that in B2C e-business companies, word of mouth is the No. 1 driver of traffic to websites. Finally, when members share links to a website with their contacts, using social media, it also results in the website ranking higher in search engine results. This happens because the number of links to a website, found in other websites, is a criterion in page ranking algorithms.

On the other hand, running social media campaigns is much cheaper than online or conventional advertising campaigns and, sometimes, is much more effective because it reaches a much more targeted audience, which tends to spread the word about the company. What's more social media allows members to directly interact with the company and with each other, which may lead to an increase in brand loyalty.

As Bennett (2012) also notes in his blogpost, we can conclude that, using community management as a marketing tool, community managers can increase the customer base and sales, while lowering the marketing expenses.

Crowdsourcing

A community can also prove to be a valuable resource for a company. Members may interact with each other asking for help about how to use a product, troubleshooting or recommendations on what to buy. Many companies adopt a public rating/reviewing system, which asks customers to opionate on the product or the service they have purchased. According to a study by Pastore (1999), as much as 62% of internet purchasers said that customer reviews and recommendations influence their decisions, when buying online. As a result of community members' interaction, companies potentially increase sales, get feedback about their services/products and lower the cost of customer support.

This type of participative online activity and other paradigms of voluntary undertaking of tasks by the members of a community is what Estellés-Arolas and González-Ladrón-de-Guevara (2012) call *crowdsourcing*. In exchange the volunteer receives some kind of need satisfaction, be it economic eg. some discount, or social recognition eg. a public shown badge in the community as a great community contributor etc.

Customer service

Bensen (2008), a community strategist, in a blogpost points out that managing a community can support customer service. All complaints or questions asked online, either in the company's Facebook fanpage or Twitter account can be directed to the correspondent department and answered directly. Some companies even have a separate customer support Twitter account so that their customers tweet their questions and requests directly there. As a result the customer is getting the answer or help a lot faster than calling the company's customer service.

The community manager

A community manager is a professional who acts as a liaison between the brand, be it a company, an organization or a public person and the brand community. The position of a community manager is rather challenging, as it requires a wide variety of different tasks and responsibilities, as well as a set of skills to be capable to cope with the challenges that come along with his role.

Job Definition

Job titles and functions

The position title of a community manager may differ in different companies or organizations, as well as the tasks they undertake. According to D'angelo (2010), who did a research on job advertisements, the purpose of the position is to promote the company and increase sales by communicating and interacting with the brand community of the company. However, the majority of the positions used in job advertisements include the words "Social media", such as "Social media Specialist" and "Social media manager", in contrast with the minority of using the word "Community". Positions with "Community" included in their title, focused on the interaction with the community members, like answering to questions and replying to comments made by members, while the rest focused on simply pushing information via posts and status updates.

In addition, according to her analysis, D'angelo (2010) categorized the community manager's functions and responsibilities as follows:

- Community Management:
 - Engage and participate in community members discussions
 - Respond to community members' questions and complaints
 - Recruit/retain new members
 - Coordinate/plan/hold events or activities
 - Develop/monitor/enforce guidelines
- Content Development:
 - Write/post content
 - Edit content
 - Write external content
 - Maintain consistency
 - Create media
- Management:
 - Strategic planning
 - Internal collaboration
 - Integration with brand/mission
 - External collaboration

- Training
- Supervision
- Legal compliance
- Fundraising
- Research and Analysis:
 - Metrics/SEO (reporting/accountability)
 - Research relevant content (from external)
 - External conversation about brand/service
 - Product/Service (own) for improvement
 - Competition
- Technical
 - Administer software (backend)
 - Manage user interface
 - Administer user accounts

Another researcher, Gill McWilliam (2000), probably taking into account the advantages of crowdsourcing, has distinguished full-time professional community managers from part-time volunteers and has set different tasks and responsibilities for each kind. Specifically, he has distributed tasks and responsibilities as follows:

- Professional community managers:
 - Set broad goals and implement development
 - Attract visitors to the website
 - Oversee calendar and special events
 - Train and supervise volunteer managers
 - Administer archiving of content
 - Monitor evolving areas of interest
 - Set editorial guidelines
 - Ensure site coherence
- Volunteer community managers:
 - Welcome new members
 - Encourage participation
 - Identify interesting new topics
 - Nurture shared values
 - Arbitrate minor infractions

Required skills

Being a community manager requires a wide variety of skills, due to the nature of the different tasks they undertake. Mr. Ryan Lytle, Community Producer at Mashable, in his blogpost in Mashable on 27 January 2013 refers to some of the skills that a community manager needs to have in order to adequately correspond to his duties.

Communication skills

First and foremost, a community manager is the voice of the company, an evangelist and an advocate, who ought to excite people about the products or services that the company provides or the organization's activities. The means of communication can be asynchronous, such as an article describing a new product, a thread in a forum or a post in social media accounts or synchronous, such as voice or video calls, discussion in chat rooms or instant messaging platforms. Therefore, community managers need to be able to research and synthesize information, be creative and have notable writing skills, in order to write a well-structured article that will intrigue customers and followers. They also need to be eloquent and witty, in order to participate in a conversation and provide stable arguments to support their opinion.

Another equally important skill for community managers is that of listening carefully, thinking analytically and critically in order to obtain and process important insights and feedback from the members of the community. Furthermore, they need to be able to manage the information they gather, listening to the community, and creatively find solutions to problems, come up with new ideas on how to improve the company's processes and again present their findings to people related to these processes in a meaningful and comprehensive way.

Finally, community managers need to have leadership skills and act as a liaison among community members. They need to engage with them, foster interaction and encourage participation in the website and other communication channels, deal with crises and intervene when arguments arise among them. All in all, they are responsible for keeping the community healthy and active, while also trying to achieve the company's goals.

Social media, marketing and technology

Since most of the brand communities are facilitated online, the community manager should be familiar with using a list of software and online platforms and tools, which are mentioned in the next paragraphs. They need to be internet-savvy and passionate about social media, as they should be able to manage social media accounts, email marketing providers, blogs, forums, wikis and other communication channels.

As community building and recruiting new members and potential clients are basic tasks, that community managers undertake, they need to have good understanding of marketing's basic principles. Applying them to adjust the tone or the language they use, when creating content and building social media campaigns, could be proved very effective, when searching for and trying to approach new individuals.

Another important skill is that of using CRM (Customer Relationship Management) platforms and tools that provide metrics and analytics, in order to track, measure and demonstrate progress and added value, to their supervisors. Last but not least, they may be required to know how to use internet technologies for website building, such as HTML and CSS or have basic skills in image, audio and video editing, using corresponding software.

Project management

Community managers need to be highly organized, multi-taskers and detail-oriented. They need to be self-motivated and be able to work independently. However, they also need to have a teamwork spirit and be able to and work in groups inside the company with other departments. For example, they might need to suggest changes on the services, the products or the communication channels to the production team, according to the feedback they got from the community. In addition, they need to have project management skills, such as setting goals, objectives and deadlines and be able to solve problems quickly by dividing and distributing the workload to the right people, communicating with them effectively and in such a detail that their tasks are well-defined.

In some communities, events play an important role, as they provide opportunities for direct interpersonal communication, networking and collaboration among members. As a result, community managers, in such communities, need to have event organizing and management skills.

Building and managing a community

Let's now examine the process of building a community, the challenges associated with them and what are some of the most usual strategies used. There are numerous challenges that a community manager can face while, at the same time, not every community manager faces the same difficulties when building a community, as different communities have different characteristics. Therefore, we will try to describe some of the most common ones in each step of building a community.

Moreover, an algorithm in building a community, cannot be defined, as there are many factors that may influence the development of a community, such as the human factor, the circumstances and luck. Therefore, there may be many different approaches in the process of building and developing one. In addition to the challenges, we will also try to describe the best practices in each step.

There is no previous research concerning the most important challenges or the best practices, mentioned above. The information below is gathered from marketing and community management related blogs.

Planning

Bacon (2012) argues why before taking any actions, a strategic plan has to be set. Its first purpose is to define the target group of the community and the main characteristics of the average member. This way they can recognise their needs and find smart ways to structure the community, in a meaningful and interesting way to make it more appealing. Its second purpose is to document the different goals of the community, the actions needed for the community to be built and a time period in which these goals are to be met, the success criteria of a goal and the implementation plan, which describes the actions needed and the people responsible.

Some of the biggest challenges of setting a strategic plan can be:

- the lack of focus and direction, when setting realistic goals. This is a result of the uncertainty involved when dealing with people's behavior
- the lack in human resources or the difficulty of recruiting influential people to help achieving the goals
- mapping the community goals to the company's strategy. A brand community is designed and built to serve the purpose of supporting the goals of the company. However, sometimes it is difficult to plan goals for the community, in such a way that they meet the company's goals.

Once the strategic plan is created, implementation starts. Andrews (2002) suggests that building a community includes three steps:

1. Starting the online community
2. Encouraging early online interaction
3. Moving to a self-sustaining interactive environment

Starting the community

A brand community may already exist, if the company or the organization, has been operating for some time, has acquired some clients that buy, use and talk about its products, services or activities. However, there are cases that the company is new and few or no people are aware of its existence. Either way, the community needs to be facilitated, meaning that communications channels need to open, so that the members can be reached by the community manager and communicate with each other effectively. A communication channel can be a forum, an IRC channel, a Facebook page or group, or even a monthly published magazine in which members can subscribe.

Considering the available resources, facilitating the community online is, undoubtedly, the best way to start a brand community, due to low cost and high reachability, as we have already mentioned. There are many ways to facilitate a community online, utilizing tools, such as social media, mailing lists, forums etc., that are mentioned in the following paragraphs. Most of these tools are either free or relatively cheap and very easy to setup and use.

There are different challenges that community managers may face when they start a new community, depending mainly on the characteristics of its members. First and foremost, if a community doesn't already exist, eg. when a new company starts, community managers may face difficulties in attracting early adopters and recruiting new members. Potential members may have not heard of the brand before and there is not an already established community to welcome them. As a result, starting it may prove itself quite expensive, both in money and time, to invest to.

It's quite rare nowadays, but there is also a chance that the average target member may not be internet-savvy or may not have adequate internet access, which may be crucial when considering to facilitate the community online. Examples could include communities of elder, poor, or disabled people.

Encouraging early online interaction

Wang and Chen (2012) suggest that after having set up one or more communication channels, community managers have to attract the first members, start interacting with them in order to inspire them to participate and contribute to the community. They need to encourage conversation among members and create relationships among them, in order to increase engagement, commitment and participation in the community. They also need to recruit volunteers to help them attract and welcome new members, monitor members' online behavior and participation and help them in their first steps into the community. Below we will try to describe the best practices used to recruit members and the challenges that each one has.

Participating in already existing, related communities

Foster (2009) suggested that, when trying to start and build a community, a good approach is to start participating in already existing related communities, eg. start related topics in forums, post comments to blogs and start interacting with potential members. These potential members are usually active members of the existing community, that interact frequently with the community and it is highly possible to be willing to also participate into another community and, additionally, they are better educated concerning the proper behavior of a community member.

However, entering a community with the sole purpose of trying to recruit members could be considered as spam with high possibility that the recruiter be banned from participating in the community by the moderators, eg. the forum administrators. This way the aspiring community may also gain some early negative publicity. In order to avoid such a scenario, the community manager needs to earn some credibility in that community beforehand, by participating actively, even though this approach can prove itself time-consuming.

Participating in offline events related to the community

An offline, but equally efficient, approach that community managers use, is participating in events as brand representatives, advocating and promoting the company or organization they work for. They may either participate as speakers in conferences, presenting subjects related to the company's activity or have a stand in a trade show exhibiting their company's products or services, while also expanding the customer or member's network. Finally, they may be just attending related events, meeting people and promoting the community and its goals.

Even though this approach may have a smaller reach, contrary to a post in a forum with hundreds of members, it may actually prove more engaging because, the audience has, itself, chosen to attend the presentation, or meet the exhibitor and discuss about the objectives of the exhibition. However, in terms of a new company, an event's podium may be inaccessible and a stand in an exhibition may be unaffordable. Sometimes, even the expenses of physically attending an event may be difficult to afford for a new company.

Using inbound marketing techniques

Steenburgh, Avery and Dahod (2009) use the term Inbound marketing to describe the activity of using Web 2.0 tools and online applications, such as blogging, search engine optimization (SEO) and social media, as marketing techniques, to pull customers, find out and purchase products or services from a company. These techniques can also be considered as community building techniques. It is suggested that publishing content consistently on social platforms and modifying the company's website in ways that encourage interaction and participation, may attract prospects, pull them deeper in the circle of the brand (figure 1) and increase their engagement.

An example of inbound marketing activity could be a combination of managing a blog, publishing SEO-friendly content related to the community, allowing people to comment on it, sharing links to it in the community's social profiles and sending newsletters to mailing lists, and starting discussion on the content's subject, asking and replying to comments. This way, community's members are getting more engaged, moving deeper in the circle of the brand, while the community draws the attention of their contacts.

While managing a blog and sharing content in social media is relatively cheap, creating and publishing fresh and interesting content consistently can be really challenging for community managers. It is quite time-consuming, considering that community managers may have various tasks and it requires good writing and communication skills and creativity. In addition, sufficient human resources are required to support synchronous conversations, when community members speak different languages or live in different time zones.

Moving to a self-sustaining interactive environment

Building a community is not an easy task. It requires commitment, consistency, patience and creativity. It takes a long time to design, plan and implement a strategy and there is no guarantee that everything will go according to plan or if corrective actions might be necessary. However, after a long time of trial and error the community reaches a milestone when it is alive and active, with little or no external help by a community manager. Members are engaged enough to feel part of the community and, as a result, they become evangelists, spreading the word and recruiting new ones, start conversations, participate and contribute to the community's goals.

When a community starts escalating it becomes increasingly difficult to control. One of the most common challenges in managing an escalating community, that has started to increasingly gain popularity and importance, due to the number of members or its vigorous activity, is the intrusion of malevolent members. These malevolent members can be categorized according to their motives as follows:

- Advertisers - spammers: According to Potdar et al (2010), these individuals enter the communication channels and publish advertising content, related or unrelated with the community, with the intention of promoting their brand.
- Phishers and scammers: Anderson et al (2007) note that these individuals are trying to deceive members, publishing links to harmful content, or trying to deceive members to expose valuable data, such as their credit card number. This way they make money, by

exploiting them, selling them or threatening members.

- Trolls: According to Цвик (2012), these individuals publish outrageous or offensive content, teasing and provoking members to answer. Their motivation can be either personal reasons, eg. conflicting interests and values or different views on the community goals and purposes. They may also be paid by competitor communities to sow discord among members and bring chaos and disorder to the community.

As already mentioned, human resources are essential, especially when community members reside in different time zones. It's impossible for a single individual to monitor a community's activity all day long every day. What's more, an argument can start anytime by a misunderstood comment or a malevolent user on a social network or in a forum and can cause a crisis, if it is not treated properly and on time.

After that point, community managers need to plan a strategy to manage the scaling community and keep its actions in track with the company's goals. A good practice is to acknowledge the most active contributors of the community for example by openly recognising them among the community, asking them to contribute in a more active role in the community and assigning them with simple tasks and granting them access to different processes. For example, promoting the five most active forum members to moderators, and assigning them the task of welcoming new members, monitoring the activity and the discussions in the topics discussed or other tasks, on one hand makes them feel special and therefore more engaged and on the other hand the workload of managing the forum is distributed to more people.

Tools

I, now, examine the tools that community managers utilize to effectively communicate and manage their communities (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Social media

Undoubtedly, the social media has become the number one tool in the hands of community managers. Ahlqvist et al (2008) define social media as digital means of communication that utilize internet technologies to facilitate the creation, editing and sharing of user-generated content whether it is text, music, photos, video or other visual or audio digital material. Their exponential rise and popularity is associated with and greatly fostered by the development and improvement of Web 2.0.

In his publication, Tim O' Reilly (2005) explains the term "Web 2.0" which is a phrase that is used to characterise the changes in the way websites are built and people use them. Until before 2004, during the web 1.0 era, websites were static and the content provided was generated by the creators of the website. On the contrary, Web 2.0 websites are dynamic and allow users to create their own content, collaborate and interact with each other. Finally, web 2.0 is not a new version of internet technology comparing to web 1.0. According to Hoegg et al (2006), it is rather a new philosophy in the way software developers build web applications building and users use the internet.

The very essence of collaboration, content creation and sharing was the key points that made internet more social and fostered the creation and development of vibrant virtual online communities, around every aspect of life, including business, hobbies, art, causes etc.

Below, we list the most significant categories of social media, the greatest websites associated with them and how they affect the creation and development of communities.

Social Network Websites

Ellison and Boyd (2008) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to:

1. create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system
2. connect with other users
3. view the connections made by others within the system.

A profile is a unique page that contains information about a specific user provided by himself/herself, such as age, location, occupation, interests, habits etc.generated by questions. A profile may also include a picture uploaded by the user and other multimedia content. Some websites allow users to search for or suggest they connect with people with similar interests.

One of the main features Social Network Websites provide individuals with is communication. Users can communicate with each other by sending messages. Moreover they can include links to other websites or multimedia content, such as images, music, video etc.

Among other features that Social Network Websites provide their users with, there are two most significant features that foster the creation and development of a community:

- Groups: A user can create a group and invite other users to join and interact with other users in the group. These groups usually orbit around a particular topic disclaimed by the title of the group, set by its creator. This way a small community can be facilitated and administered by the creator of the group. Moreover, the administrator can grant or

revoke access to data and functions from the members of a group, such as posting and inviting new members, imposing a hierarchy among the members of the group. Groups can become an effective communication tool for communities.

- Pages: A page is more like a profile of a business, a brand, an organization, an artist, a product, a cause etc. It is a tool that represents the entity to users in the social network. Users connect with the page and consume the content that the administrators of the page publish and engage with the entity represented by the page by interacting with the published content. Pages may also contain useful information about the entity they represent, such as contact details, the location of a shop, significant milestones and achievements in the career of a famous person and also photos and videos that they publish. The set of people connected to a specific page can be considered as a fraction of the total community of the entity.

The most popular social networking websites, at the time of writing, are Facebook with more than a billion active users, Google+ with more than 500 million users, Qzone which is very popular in China with 480 million users, LinkedIn which is a social networking site for people in professional occupations, Vkontakte which is popular in Russia, Orkut which is popular in Brazil and India and others.

Blogs

In 1997 Jorn Barger coined the term 'weblog', which derives from two words: Web and Log. A log is a *regular or systematic record of incidents or observations*. So in a weblog these records are digital and are stored in the form of a website. Two years later, in 1999, Peter Merholz coined 'blog' when he "broke the word weblog into the phrase 'we blog'". At first, blogs were nothing more than personal websites individuals created, recording content they were interested into, like digital public diaries. Then, in 1999, Pyra labs launched one of the first tools that helped people create their own blogs. That was Blogger, which became popular after being acquired by Google in 2003. Since then, lots of other companies have developed tools to help users create and maintain blogs. While social networks users' connection needs to be reciprocal, users can connect and follow other users' accounts or blogs without having to do the reverse.

These tools can be categorized based on their content and the way the content is being delivered or written. Some of the categories are:

- Personal blogs: It's the most common category, where an individual publishes content such as everyday life observations, opinions on different subjects etc. in a regular basis, just like a diary. Personal blogs can sometimes become a medium of expressing creativity for the individual. Someone can publish poems, literature, images, video clips and music he has created. Blogger and Wordpress are the most famous personal blog hosting services, providing its users with a plethora of tools to easily customize the look and feel of their blog, add multimedia content, let others comment on their blog posts etc.
- Micro-Blogs: Micro-blogging is the practice of publishing small pieces of digital content, such as text, music and video clips, images. These publications can be consumed much more easily than a regular blog post, as they need less time. Popular

micro-blogging services are Twitter and Tumblr. Twitter limits posts to 140 characters, with more than 500 million users as of 2013. Tumblr, with 90 million users as of 2013, half of whom are under the age of 25.

- Corporate and organizational blogs: This kind of blogs are used by companies and organizations to share content internally, in order to document their progress or form a culture among its members, as well as externally as another marketing, branding and public relations channel. As a result a brand community can be formed around a corporate blog, consume the content published in the blog, share it in their social networks, comment on it and discuss it with other members.

Photo sharing services

A famous old Chinese proverb says that “A picture is worth a thousand words”. Undoubtedly, photography and visual media are great means of communication as they are more intuitive than text and can convey complex and strong messages via triggering senses, bringing memories and spawning feelings.

The progress in digital photography technology, along with the rise of the data transfer speed over the internet, made it cheaper and easier for users to share photos online. Image-hosting websites have been created to provide users with space to store photos and share them in a site or with their contacts in social networks or add them in their blogs. In addition, other user’s could rate and comment on the photos, while some websites evolved to online photo marketplaces, where professional photographers sell their photos. Some websites also provide users with tools to edit their photos optimizing their colors or adding text and other elements.

Such websites have given the opportunity to companies, organizations, artists and other individuals to upload photos of their products, services, facilities, events etc. so that they could enhance the communication with their community members and their engagement with the brand. Moreover, companies buy photos and images to use in their marketing campaigns.

Famous websites are Pinterest, Flickr, 500px, DeviantArt etc, while most social networks also provide its users with photo sharing features.

Video sharing services

As with images, there are video hosting websites that allow users upload and share videos. Companies, organizations and especially artists promote their work using videos as it is much cheaper than television broadcasting and much more effective, as videos can be shared among users in social networks and blogs leading to bigger reach and expansion of the brand community. Users are also able to share, rate and comment on videos and they can follow other users’ accounts to get notified about their activity, like a new video upload.

Some examples of use of video sharing services are:

- Music groups promoting their work with video clips, live footage from concerts or rehearsals.
- TV channels sharing recorded broadcasts, so that their audience can watch them again or later.
- Sports-related blogs and websites that enhance their articles with highlights from games.

Dominating web-hosting services are Youtube and Vimeo.

Mobile social media

Definition and categorization

A study during the second half of the 00's smartphones took over the world. A study from AppleInsider (2012) counts more than a billion smartphone users, while Kaplan (2012) states that most of the web-based applications and social services have also been transferred to mobile devices, as mobile device applications. Mobile social media is a term to describe these applications (Figure 3).



Figure 3

However, there are lots of other social media services that are mostly mobile oriented and make use of smartphone features such as portability, internet access, Global Positioning System (GPS), Compass, Camera etc. These applications allow smartphone users create and share all forms of digital content, such as photos, videos, coordinates etc.

Kaplan (2012) also considers two criteria by which we can categorize mobile social media applications:

- Time-sensitivity: The time delay between the exchange of data among users
- Space-sensitivity: Users' current location

and differentiates mobile applications in four categories:

1. Space-timers (location and time sensitive): The content exchanged is both time and space sensitive. Users create and share content in which their current location matters, and is attached in the form of global coordinates. This piece of data is then visualized into a map and semantically carries information about the location where the user is, or where he created and shared the content, whether this is a plain text, a photo, a voice message etc. Foursquare is such a location-based application is, which allow users to share with their friends information about the place they currently are, for example a

cafeteria, a museum or an airport. This public announcement of one's arrival in a location has come to be called "check-in".

2. Space-locators (only location sensitive): The content created by the user is relevant with a specific location, but can be consumed later as a reference. Such applications are Yelp! and TripAdvisor that allow users write reviews about specific places and businesses, such as restaurants, cafeterias etc and share this content publicly. Other users can later read these reviews in order to make better decisions.
3. Quick-timers (only time sensitive): This category includes traditional web-based social media applications transferred to mobile devices to increase immediacy. Users can update their social networking profiles while on the road and enhance these updates with audio and visual content.
4. Slow-timers (neither location, nor time sensitive): This category includes common web-based applications transferred in mobile devices, irrelevant with time and location, such as music and video streaming services, Wikipedia article reading, etc.

Communities in mobile social media

In addition to traditional social media, companies also use mobile social media to reach their community and increase sales and customers' retention, making use of mobile devices' location services. For example, motivate their customers share photos from their visit in their outlets with their friends, or promote an advertisement to users who check-in in specific places, like a football stadium, a theater etc. Another example is when users share updates when they participate in a company's event. This way they provide them with a live broadcast about what is happening in the event, sometimes enhanced with photos or videos.

Tagging

Tagging is the procedure in which a user assigns information to specific words in his social media posts. This information can be a link to another user's account, world coordinates for a location in which a photo was taken etc. This can be achieved by setting special characters before a word, enabling location services. Tagging a location is also mentioned as geotagging.

The most usual characters used are:

- The "@" sign, followed by a username, is used to assign a link to another user profile. For example UNICEF's account in Twitter can be tagged as @UNICEF
- The "#" sign, followed by a word, is used to group posts containing that word. It is common that a specific word is announced in events or special occasions, eg. world days, so that people attending them can add it to their posts. For example people use #thanksgiving to post wishes. So if someone searched this word he could see all the wishes other people posted in real time.

Virality

The power of social media is indeed content sharing. Users can share digital content with

each other. The more a piece of information is shared through the internet, the more the popularity it gains, the more people talk about it. The term virality has been given to this phenomenon to describe the way in which content can be spread in social media, just like a virus (Figure 4).



Figure 4

Companies aim at creating viral content so that they reach the broadest audience possible. Marketers often use the slang phrase “create a buzz” around a message. The term viral marketing, introduced by Juvetson and Draper in 1997, has also the same meaning. According to Pastore (2000), It refers to the marketing technique in which a consumer tells other consumers about a product or service, sometimes also called word-of-mouth marketing. The technique describes a way of acquiring new customers and, as Modzelewski (2000) notes, it is based on the influence that peers have on each other.

Other digital media

Newsletters

Newsletters are small publications containing news of interest around a main topic delivered to a group of people who have subscribed to a list in the form of email. They are similar to newspapers and leaflets, but in digital form. Companies use newsletters to keep their community updated with the latest news about their products and services or other news, eg. events and offers. Community members interested, subscribe to a mailing list, providing their email address and they receive a newsletter when published.

Forums

An internet forum is a website which allow users post public text messages visible to everyone. A user creates an account and selects a unique nickname. He can then start a discussion, usually called thread, with a specific topic, or participate in other people’s threads.

All threads are related to the subject of the forum. Subjects can be every aspect of life from science and politics to fishing and poetry. Posts are mostly tips, tricks, point of views, experiences on the different threads, usually in the form of text, but they can also feature photos, videos and voice or music.

Forums are built on a hierarchical structure, which means that users according to their level of participation and status, share different privileges and responsibilities. There are users responsible to moderate discussions, welcome new members, resolve conflicts among members etc., while forum administrators can be thought as community managers.

Wikis

Wikis are websites that allow users create, edit and delete its own content dynamically, using a web browser. Users create a profile and collaborate with each other, submitting content to the wiki, using a rich text editor, provided by the website. Content can be organized in different pages and include text, photos, videos and links to other pages, either under the same site or to other sites.

A wiki can serve as a knowledge management tool for a community. For example a community interested around a movie series can collaborate in a wiki submitting trivia details about the actors and the cast, the characters, etc. It can also serve the purpose of documentation in a community. For example an open source software development community can keep track of the progress of the versions or the different features of the software they build.

The community structure is usually hierarchical, which means that, even though peers are equally responsible for the final version of the content, there are moderators who supervise the progress and set the guidelines under which the community is subject. However, there are wikis in which users have different permissions to read or edit some areas. These permissions are granted by the moderators of the wiki (Mitchell, S. (2009).

Unarguably, the most famous wiki is Wikipedia, the largest online encyclopedia which, by the time of writing, has more than 39 million collaborators and hundreds of millions of readers in 275 languages.

Digital press

Newspapers and magazines have long started publishing their printed content on the internet, while all the more readers have turned to digital means for reading the news. Applications for mobile devices have replaced newsstands and have enhanced the experience of reading the news with digital content such as photos, video and interactive digital content. Digital press can also include blogs that publish news daily, if a post can be considered as a news article and news coverage can now be generated by everyday people. In addition, readers can now comment on the articles and share their views on the subject with other readers.

Members of a community can be reached through articles and advertisements in digital newspapers and influential blogs. In fact, sometimes, companies pay influential journalists to write about their new products and services in order to attract more eyeballs and raise awareness. This may also result in acquiring new community members, but also get feedback from readers' comments.

Non-digital tools

Offline events

Even though today most communities are facilitated online, using all the digital means mentioned above, it is not unusual that events are organized by the community manager in order for the members to meet in person. These events have a special purpose, eg. celebrating an anniversary, or announcing a new product or just to bring the local community together to meet each other. The main benefit of organizing an offline event, such as a regular meeting of local members, a celebration event for an achievement or a conference, is that it brings members closer and thus fosters engagement, relationship creation and bonding among members. Finally, Lin (2007) suggests that offline activities can increase loyalty to the community and sense of belonging.

As mentioned before, community managers may also participate in events, related to the community, eg. a conference or an exhibition, as a community representative or spokesperson in order to express the community's views, inspire and recruit potential new members and stay up-to-date on matters related to the community.

One-on-one communication

By using more traditional and direct forms of human contact like face-to-face communication or voice calls or sending a birthday handwritten card to a member, community managers may achieve to increase bonding between members and the community. It's more common in small communities or in B2B companies in which the community manager - representative calls or visits important community members in their personal or working space to interact, share insights or just keep in touch. Personal contact make members feel that they are an important part of the community and increases the sense of moral responsibility towards it.

Metrics of progress and success

As mentioned at the beginning of this study, a brand community can be considered successful from the scope of a business as long as it meets the goals of the company it supports, which are to help it remain viable and become profitable by increasing revenue and lowering costs, such as marketing and customer support. In order to keep track of a community's progress and success, different metrics and indicators can be used such as statistics and automated data, surveys and structured feedback, observational tests etc.

Using online tools to facilitate your community, like forums, can easily bring you data to measure a community quantitatively and monitor its size and growth both in new members and in engagement. Some metrics used, that Cothrel (2000) has highlighted, are:

- **Followers in social media pages:** As mentioned before virality helps the diffusion of a

message among users of social networks, thus the more the followers the bigger the reach and the higher the possibilities that a message goes viral.

- **Likes in social media posts:** Based on the number of “Likes” that a Facebook post gets or “Favorites” a post in Twitter (a tweet) gets, community managers can get insights of the impact that their communication with the community has. The bigger the number the bigger the impact. In addition, comparing posts’ impact, they can reach conclusions about what is important for the community and what kind of information they like to receive.
- **Comments in social media posts:** Comments and replies to social media posts in company fanpages are community’s response to company’s voice. They are important because they reflect the members’ opinions on what the company’s shares, which surely serves as a great feedback. Moreover, discussions may be triggered by comments among fans resulting in increasing engagement. Sometimes community managers post questions in order to prompt interaction among members.
- **Number of new members and posts in forums:** If the community is facilitated in a forum, these numbers that are automatically generated by the forum service provider can serve as an indicator of the community’s growth and health. The same applies in wikis where instead of posts and discussions, growth can be measured by the number of contributions and new pages.
- According to *Google Analytics* community managers can monitor traffic on the company’s website:
 - **Pageviews** is the total number of pages viewed. Repeated views of a single page are counted
 - **Unique Pageviews** is the number of visits during which the specified page was viewed at least once.
 - **Average Time on Page** is the average amount of time visitors spent viewing a specified page or set of pages.
 - **Bounce Rate** is the percentage of single-page visits (i.e. visits in which the person left your site from the entrance page without interacting with the page).
 - **%Exit** is the percentage of site exits that occurred from a specified page or set of pages.
- **New, returning, frequent visitors in the website:** Retention in the community is another important metric. It leads to member-to-customer conversion because repeat visitors can be reached by the seller a lot more often. Evidently, repeated visitors also make bigger transactions. In a study, Bain & Company show that return visitors have made 57% larger purchases on average, comparing to first-time buyers.
- **Number of participants/applicants in online or offline events:** Same as above, the number of people interested to participate in online or offline events are important indicators of community size and growth.

Even if numbers and statistics can just give the community manager a glimpse of the community’s state, these indicators need to be interpreted from the scope of business

objectives and translated into new goals and decisions. For example, a rise of 5% in forums posts during the last quarter may be good news for the community, but if a lot of posts in a forum are complaints about slow customer support response, then this is a clear indication that the company might need to hire more people for this position.

Surveys are digital questionnaires, that can easily be created by online tools, shared online, across the members of the community to fill in. Results can be gathered automatically and provide insights about various aspects, such as feedback about the forum moderation, members' relationships, a new product or service etc. Answers can be given in many forms, such as multiple choice, plain text, checkboxes or a rating scale with ranging levels. For example a 5-level answer could include:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Observational tests can measure the effectiveness of a process and can be conveyed by observing members' behaviour towards something. For example, someone can observe if community members can easily use a forum or the reaction of the community towards a member who violates the forum rules.

2nd part

Methodology

As someone could presume, different communities mean different characteristics, values, ethics, needs and culture and, as a result for the community manager, different approaches, challenges, strategies and tools. Which are the most common challenges that community managers face? Which are the most common practices followed to build and manage a community? And which tools are used the most to help them perform better in their various difficult tasks?

In this study an anonymous online survey was conducted, in order to determine the views that community managers in business have on these aspects. The survey was sent via email to businesses, registered in Crunchbase, a crowdsourced business database. Three emails were sent in total, one primary invitation to participate in the survey and two reminders, of which the first was sent 15 days after and the second 30 days after the first email. A total of 213 surveys were completed, of which 210 were valid.

The survey was addressing business community managers / social media managers and was divided in 5 parts:

- Demographics, such as age, gender and info about the company.
- The importance of the different tasks that they take up in their job, such as getting and managing feedback from community members or monitoring members' online activity. The questions have derived from the most important tasks in the work life of a community manager, described in this study. The importance was measured using a 7-level Likert Scale, from 1 - "Not important" to 7 - "Very important".
- Challenges concerning community's characteristics and job difficulties, such as the fact that members have different educational background or the insufficient human resources. The questions derived from researching different blogs and websites about community management and identifying the most usual ones. How challenging each issue is, was measured using a 7-level Likert Scale, from 1 - "Not challenging" to 7 - "Very challenging".
- Strategies they follow to effectively grow and manage their community, such as running online contests and using social media. Same as above, strategies for building and managing communities were gathered from suggestions found in blogs and websites about community management. Strategies were then categorized as Offline and Online, depending on if they involve the use of the internet as a communication channel or not. The frequency, in which community managers use them, was asked using a 5-level Likert Scale.

For Offline strategies

- 1 - "Never"
- 2 - "1-2 times a year"
- 3 - "Monthly"
- 4 - "Weekly"
- 5 - "Daily"

For Online:

- 1 - "Never"
- 2 - "1-2 times a year"
- 3 - "Monthly"
- 4 - "Weekly"
- 5 - "Daily"

- Tools they use to manage their community, such as newsletters, Facebook and twitter. Participants were asked to pick which of the most common tools they use in their job and which of them do they consider the most important.
- Metrics used to evaluate progress, such as website analytics and the number of followers in social media. Participants were asked to answer how important each of the metrics are for a) the community manager and b) the company. A 5-level Likert Scale was used to gather the answers:
 - 1 - "Unimportant"
 - 2 - "Slightly important"
 - 3 - "Important"
 - 4 - "Very important"
 - 5 - "Critical"

Survey results

Demographics

Participants were asked to give some demographic data concerning themselves and the companies they work for. The results show that $\frac{1}{3}$ of community managers who answered are women and the $\frac{2}{3}$ remained are men (Figure 5).

Figure 5

In addition, the youngest community manager of the sample is 18 years old, the oldest is 63, their average age is 31 and the maximum concentration is in the 26-35 category (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Furthermore, concerning working experience, the majority of the participants have been working for more than 5 years, yet their working experience as community managers is inversely proportional (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Figure 8 shows the volume of the responses received by each country.

Figure 8

The companies to which the questionnaire was sent were already categorized by Crunchbase website and thus, the same categorization was used. The Crunchbase categories are: Legal, Search, Network/hosting, Education, Enterprise, Consumer electronics/ Devices,

Communications, Games video and entertainment, Consulting, eCommerce, Mobile / Wireless, Consumer web, Software and Advertising. Figure 9 shows the percentage of the replies received by each company category.

Figure 9

Tasks

Figure 10 shows the tasks ordered by importance.

Figure 10

Challenges

Figure 11 shows what our sample's community managers consider challenging concerning the community characteristics, while Figure 12 shows their views on how challenging other issues concerning their job are.

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13 shows a further analysis of men's and women's views on the different challenges.

Figure 13

Total Expressed Challenge is used as a scale metric that counts the total concern over the different issues, depicted in Figure 14, which shows the difference. Moreover, Figure 15 shows the sample's response on how challenging they find their job-related issues compared to community characteristics issues.

Figure 14

Figure 15

Strategies

The following figures are aggregated charts of the frequencies in which community managers follow different strategies in their job. Figure 16 refer to the offline strategies, while figures 17 and 18 refer to the online strategies.

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Tools

Figure 19 shows the percentages of the community managers who use the different tools, while Figure 20 shows their views on which tool they consider as the most important in their job

Figure 19

Figure 20

Metrics of progress

Finally, Figure 18 shows the community managers' views on the importance of each metric of progress and success, from the scopes of a community manager and of the company.

Figure 21

3rd part

Discussion on the results

A community manager needs to be experienced

Looking at Figure 7 one can notice that, even though the majority of the participants have had a working experience of more than 5 years, their working experience as community managers is significantly smaller. This fact may suggest that, someone needs to have some previous working experience inside the company they work for or on a particular field related to the company's subject.

On the other hand, as we have already analyzed in the required skills of a community manager, having all the qualities that a community manager is required to, could be enough for someone to get hired, which can explain our sample's segment with an overall working experience of less than a year. For example, someone with great communication skills and a marketing degree could also be applicable for the job.

Where are you from, community manager?

In total, participants that answered the questionnaire were from the following countries, alphabetically: Armenia, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the US.

The most responses, almost half of the total, were received from the United States, probably because the Crunchbase is a website based there and so is the biggest part of the sample. Following, a lot of responses came from Greece, probably because they saw my Greek last name in the email and they were more keen to support a Greek student.

Tasks and their importance

According to the participants' views on the importance of the different tasks that community managers undertake, the most important tasks are those connected to feedback they get from community members and how they utilize it to help them come to conclusions and make decisions. Following are tasks that have to do with the communication between them, representing the company and the members of the community.

As discussed earlier, one of the benefits that a company can obtain by creating a position for a community manager, is that they are a communication channel between the company and its clients. That said, a lot of precious information can be collected, as feedback and be used in favor of taking better decisions and improving the products and services according to the customer needs. Thus, communication skills and technical skills for managing feedback data

are essential for a community manager's CV.

On the other hand it seems that nurturing the community and dealing with members comes second in importance. A probable explanation is that, due to limited human resources and time, priority is given to issues that are also important for the company, such as member to customer acquisition, which can be achieved by improving its products and services. Moreover, customer communities are more impersonal and conflicts are minor and of little importance, comparing to other smaller communities, like in a non-profit volunteer-based organization.

Men are more concerned about the challenges than women

Another obvious observation that can be pointed out is that men express a lot more concern about all of the different challenges comparing to women. There is not a single challenge in which women express a higher concern. Furthermore, to make things clearer, according to the Total Expressed Challenge, mens' mean value reaches 52.33, while womens' is 48.24 in a scale from 0 to 91, which is a more than 4 points more concern for men.

Community characteristics challenges VS Job related challenges

Another observation that can be highlighted, is that all the challenges concerning community characteristics are considered a lot inferior to those referring to job related challenges. To be more precise, comparing the average perception on the level of challenge concerning the different community characteristics and the job itself, in the 7-level Likert scale, the first kind exceeds the second by more than one point!

It can only be suggested that community managers may be thinking of community characteristics as unavoidable, while job challenges are much more important for them, as they face them everyday and influence their effectiveness.

The battle of the Tools

At first glance, the vast majority of the participants use Twitter and Facebook Pages, with LinkedIn, Blog, Youtube and Google+ following. In fact, Twitter is used by more participants than Facebook. However, the most important tool is Facebook pages, leaving Twitter far behind. Moreover, we can see that blogging is also very important, probably as part of content and inbound marketing procedure. In addition, we observe that more than 40% of the participants use at least 10 different tools.

Another observation, that needs to be highlighted, is that some community managers use social networks that focus on foreign countries, e.g. VK (VKontakte), the popular russian social network or Xing, a chinese social network, probably because their community is comprised of Russian or Chinese inhabitants. It's also very common for international companies to maintain different Facebook pages for different countries, addressing the local market and posting updates in the correspondent languages.

A community's progress metrics value differently for the community manager and the company

What really needs to be pointed out that what is important for the community manager, concerning the community's progress, is not necessarily as important for the company and its goals. Furthermore, observing the mean importance for each metric and the differences of the importance perceived between the community manager and the company, it can be highlighted that the bigger the mean importance the more important is the metric from the scope of the company. On the contrary, the smaller the mean importance, the more important is the metric from the scope of the community manager.

Moreover, looking at the context of each metric, some metrics are customer-oriented, such as member to customer acquisition and some are community-oriented such as followers, likes and comments in posts. The metrics with the higher mean importance are those that are also more important for the company.

Referrals

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