

# **One Page: Building Community**

## **Moderation and Community Rules:**

1. Your site should have a single community czar who has ultimate responsibility and authority for building community and interactivity across all platforms and topics.
2. Determine your site's community standards, write them in plain English and post them prominently on your site. If your lawyers also want you to post terms & conditions, that's fine. But be sure that the clear, concise community standards are more prominent.
3. Look in to setting up an automatic spam filter, such as Akismet.
4. Be sure that your community software has automatic filters for profanity and other banned words. Be sure that you can easily edit a dictionary of banned words that is unique to your site.
5. In most cases, allow comments that pass through the filters to be posted without pre-approval. (Alternately, you can require all comments from "new" users to be pre-approved. Users who demonstrate good behavior during a probationary period could then post without moderation.)
6. Have someone scan the user content periodically, immediately removing all off-topic posts. Just as the highway patrol doesn't need to catch every speeder, neither do you need to catch every message offender. Just catch enough to keep the rest honest.
7. Limit off-topic posts by pegging each discussion to a single piece of editorial content – in other words, discussions must be tied to an article rather than a broad topic.
8. Allow users to flag inappropriate content. A moderator should be alerted by e-mail or text message when content is flagged. Overzealous flaggers should also be tracked and banned from the site if they flag too many comments that the moderator rules are actually appropriate.
9. Don't be afraid to ban people from your site.
10. Moderators should actively engage in the conversations, especially in the early days. Moderators can challenge community members to think about issues more deeply and can provide relevant background through links to additional information elsewhere on the site.
11. Reward good behavior. Pull great comments out of message boards and share them elsewhere on the site. (A good model of this is *The Washington Post's* ".COMments" blog by Doug Feaver.)

## **Registration & Identity**

1. Require registration with a valid e-mail address. There are a lot of positive uses for anonymity in journalism, but building a sustainable community ain't one of them.
  - a. Require that your users verify their e-mail address. This will discourage people from making fast comments, and will encourage participants who see long-term value in your community.
  - b. Never require a user's e-mail address to be displayed publicly.
2. Allow pseudonyms. If your user wants to be "KittyCat123," that's fine, as long as you ...
3. Create a "persistent online persona" for each participant. In other words, every time "KittyCat123" does anything on your site – such as comment on an article or submit a photo – be sure that the content links back to a "home page" for "KittyCat123" that lists links to all of that user's activity on the site. This makes it very easy for the community to hold each other accountable for their behaviors. (See *USA Today's* community for an example. It was built by a company called Pluck.)
4. Encourage – but don't require – users to share as much about their real-world identity as possible. Give users a place to summarize their interests and issues. Host user blogs and allow users to "friend" each other (and show those connections).

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