

# Online Community Metrics

Best Practices Survey / March 2006

Survey Coordination:



Forum One Communications  
San Francisco / Washington, DC

## Executive Summary

In March 2006, Jim Cashel (Forum One Communications) sent approximately 100 invitations to participate in a research circle involving online community metrics. We received 60 completed surveys. Participating organizations ranged from small to very large, with a bit over half representing commercial groups, the balance representing non-profits. The respondents, most of whom we know professionally, represent a very senior and experienced group.

The survey results provide a great deal of information and require some diligence to comb through. That said, to our eye the most valuable information in the survey results include:

- Registered User Privileges (page 6): an excellent list of features and perks that can be offered your best users;
- Metrics Options (page 8): a comprehensive list of unique metrics that respondents value;
- Management Tactics (page 11): strategies for improving site metrics;
- Desired Metrics (page 15): a long metrics wish list (take note tools companies!)
- Advice (page 17): best tips for community managers concerning metrics.

We also find it noteworthy that very few communities have significant paying users (page 8), and that good sources of information on community metrics are scant (page 20). The best source of information remains other professionals – enjoy the survey!

## Survey Results

### Questions 1-3:

Name, Organization, E-mail Address

[responses suppressed]

### Question 4:

Approximate number of online communities in organization?

1	38%
2-10	28%
11-100	20%
> 100	14%

**Question 5:**

Approximate total page views per month?

< 100,000	27%
100k - 1m	24%
1m – 10m	36%
> 10 million	13%

**Question 6:**

Approximate total monthly unique users?

< 10,000	33%
10k – 100k	40%
100k – 1m	17%
> 1 million	10%

**Question 7:**

Approximate total number of registered users?

< 1000	11%
1k – 10k	24%
10k – 100k	45%
> 100k	20%

**Question 8:**

Approximate percentage of monthly unique users that are registered?

0%	7%
1% - 10%	20%
11% – 50%	30%
51% - 99%	17%
100%	26%

**Question 9:**

What registration information do you require?

**Summary:**

E-mail: 70%

Name: 64%

Location: 45%

Age: 25%

**Detail:**

all employees are registered users

Basic business card and status as a customer in some cases.

Country/region and nickname.

depends on community - some are private and all need to apply, some are open

DOB email

email address only

email address, username, password, age, gender, favorite genre.

email, job title, country, newsletter subscription yes/no, share name with other groups yes/no

First Name Last Name Title Organization email address Phone Desired user name  
Position Why you want to join? Optional information: Bio Organizational url  
Expertise Personal certifications Professional Organizations Items published or  
contributed to Areas available for consultation Fax Cell & basic contact info

First name, Last name, Email address, Birth year

first name, last name, email address, birth year.

First name, last name, email address, date of birth, post code (zip code). Other  
information optional.

First, Last, Email, Location

Firstname, lastname, email address, username

In [XX], we serve children ages 8-14, so we are restricted in the information we can  
collect. We ask their birthday, sex, and their own and parental email addresses. We  
ask in what city, state/province and country they live. We also ask them to indicate how  
they heard about [XX].

Member Name, Password, Email and Zip Code

member name, password, year-of-birth, gender, zip code, state, secret question

N/A Several Communities are open to all members of the Dept. others are limited to specific work groups, areas of specialism and projects.

name age gender zip email

name username password first and last name zip code DOB age gender health plan

Name only - it's an intranet-application

name, cc, email

name, email

name, email

name, email

Name, email address, password, telephone number

Name, email address, zip, product type, industry

Name, email details (business only), address, telephone and mobile number, website, fax number which community they want to belong to

Name, email, password, gender, State, Country, Zip Code

Name, email, zip code and confirm over 13 (the latter about to be implemented) Then there is extensive optional fields requested by the users about their kids, if they have had a child in the NICU, picture, etc.

name, job role, address, email

Name, organization, email address

name, organization, password, community

None. Users are permissioned via Active Directory.

Our online community members are comprised of invited participants, we enter initial registration info and they update as needed.

People apply to become members of Communities or are selected based on their role. For some Communities, non-members can view content and lurk.

Subscribers: Name Full address E-mail Fee Registered users: Name Full address E-mail

This is an intranet, so nothing additional is required beyond existing employee data (in HR system)

Userid, name, business unit

Username, password selection, email address (verified), organization (b2b community), title (b2b community), opt-in information

Valid email Also ask for volunteered info on: - Profession - Geographical location - Hobbies - Web, blog

Validated email address to post.

Varies by community. Can range from email address to detail business and personal information.

We are a kids community, so we are limited by COPPA regs. We collect: - Kid First Name - Kid DOB - Kid email - Kid Gender - Parent Email and sometimes: - Parent City - Parent State - Parent Country

### **Questions 10:**

What are registered users allowed to do that non-registered users are not?

Subscribers: Access all message boards (+ all content) Registered users: Access only free message boards + free content)

- Customized content and 'My Page' - Stored bookmarks - Post to Message Board - Submit events to the calendar - Contact another registered member

ability to post content interact with other members view certain areas of site

all users are registered

Contribute content, view higher value featured content

create and manage a home page, post pictures, create backyards, vote, send messages,

Depends on access levels i.e. administrator, facilitator/contributor. All members can share documents, post/reply to messages, etc. Only administrator/facilitator can edit views of page, add content, etc.

Each community establishes its own permission levels for their portal content.

Edit, create, post, delete

full access vs browse

Load documents, add data to lists and delete their own, get involved in teleconferences.

Non-registered users can only read messages, registered users can post and subscribe to message boards or threads.

non-registered users don't have access to our online platforms

Note: We do have unique users that are not included in the 40,000/month. But if they don't log in, we don't count them (which is why 8 is 100%). Users that are not logged in cannot enter data of any kind. They can't send messages, comment on news stories, etc. And their search abilities are limited.

personalize their listening experience - save presets, see personalized recommendations, buy subscriptions (broadcasting and listening), vote, participate in

message boards.

Post Use downloads section

Post and send instant messages.

Post and use other member functions such as Private Messaging

post comments to CMS and forums, download library papers, promote their events

Post content through web interface rather than through email.

post message in forum

Post messages, personal pages, upload content

post messages, update their own web pages or section, post news items and events, edit their profile for publication to other members.

Post messages.

post on message boards; enter live events

post to discussion groups, comment on blogs, upload components, upload tips, access professional network features

Post, join/visit some private forums

Post, rate

post/reply in discussion forums, access to other content/tools

posting privileges

Receive regular email newsletters Access special content Contribute ideas for upcoming projects Give feedback on ongoing projects Play against other users on multiple player games

Registered users are allowed to subscribe to the newsletter, post in the forums and send private messages to other members.

Registered users can add data to the community and non-registered users can only read.

registered users can post content and have access to all content on the site (non-registered users can only access some of the content)

special content, participate in discussions

there are some documents they can see, can book to attend our conferences and webinars

to post blogs and podcasts and participate in the discussion boards

Varies by community. Can range from accessing documents, to viewing member profiles, to access discussions, participating in live meetings, viewing best practices, etc.

View contact information of other members Participate/initiate discussions Contribute or suggest contributions View restricted access areas Role-based access provides additional editing capabilities to individual communities/topic areas

View details for jobs posted on job board, view some premium content

**Question 11:**

Approximate percentage of registered users that are paying users?

0%	84%
1% - 10%	10%
11% – 50%	4%
> 51%	2%

**Question 12:**

Which community metrics do you track?

	very important	moderately important	not applicable	Respondent Total
page views	71% (34)	23% (11)	6% (3)	48
unique users	79% (38)	15% (7)	6% (3)	48
posts	67% (32)	29% (14)	4% (2)	48
registrations	63% (30)	21% (10)	17% (8)	48
ratio: page views per post	21% (9)	48% (20)	31% (13)	42
ratio: posts per thread	26% (11)	48% (20)	26% (11)	42
ratio: searches per post	12% (5)	37% (16)	51% (22)	43
reputation changes	20% (9)	32% (14)	48% (21)	44

**Question 13:**

Which other metrics do you track?

- # of users of different types - # of contributing users - same metrics as above but for only certain areas - average rating of posts per user or area - top 10 page views, users, posts

- Ratio: visits to community to total site \*visits\* (not page views) - Ratio: Posts to Visits (to community and general site) - # of New Topics - Ratio: Repeat to Unique \*Posters\* - Top 10 most frequent posters (who are most likely influencing conversation?) - # of users who start new threads - Top Search keywords - Popular URLs posted (what does the community find interesting outside of the site - we have developed new content or new content partners based on this info) - Average length of posts - Summaries of the 10 most commented on threads - Special Nonprofit stuff --

Measuring Impact: Mainly via keyword searches and anecdotes.

# of CoPs/SIAs/Workspaces # Contributions # new Topics # new Discussion Forums  
# new members/total members # member logins # page views # visits # unique  
visits Average visit length Front page metrics per community top ten topic views top  
five view within every topic individual knowledge object views (total #, today,  
yesterday, this week, last week, this month, this year)

% of core members involved on web site, phase of Community maturity, existence of  
community routines, community objective posted, value generation (\$, tonnes, hazard  
reduction)

Answer rate of online Q/A. Specifically 2 day answer rate (% of questions asked that  
are answered within 2 days by the community) and 3 month answer rates.

Attachments posted. Threads started. (?? Interested to know more about what you  
included under 'reputation changes'. Do you mean user rankings?)

company size, geography, time on the site, download of documents, attendance at  
webinars

Do they end up purchasing any of our products on another website. Frequency of  
visits

Downloads per month

extensive metrics on use of the site. We also monitor and track communication  
between users.

Files uploaded Replies to posts (topics) Web pages added and/edited participation  
with editor groups online learning courses undertaken online learning courses  
contributed chat participants

hits contest entries # of countries who visit # of art/writing submitted # of users from  
specific ads or affiliates browser usage

Language and Country of active users Average Ratings Received per person and  
overall Number of logins

Location, age, some preferences, newsletters signed up to, emails into programmes,  
the website, other

Long running pages, load per server, peak load, new member referral source,  
geographic distribution, age distribution, average visits per member per day (ignoring  
those who don't visit on a particular day)

member lifecycle - length of membership to membership stage (membership stage  
tracked by level of participation) I also track interactivity ratio and strive for 25% in  
public communities, 75% in private

new threads average first-answer time non-answered threads relevance metrics  
(poll) utility metrics (poll) moderator work load metrics (poll)

number of events hosted by the community number of attendees at events posts per individual, by community wiki edits per individual membership survey e.g. for 'perceived value'

Number of registered members visiting a forum Number of unregistered guests visiting a forum Number of views of messages by all visitors Number of views of discussions by all visitors Number of messages posted to a forum Number of total visits to a forum Number of new members joining a forum Average Visitor viewed pages Penetration from main site to community Most requested page in community etc...

Page views per visit Page views per visitor Posts per visitor Reads per visitor Reads per new registration Visits per new registration

page views per visitor

Premium members, new forums

referring URL's

repeat registrants and non-registrants month over month. posts per user will become increasingly important.

response rate

specific activities like voting, message sending, newsletter registrations, user feedback

sub-group ownership and membership, feedback economy

Time spent per unique user. % conversion. Lifespan.

too long a list

Total time spent online Total number of documents uploaded/downloaded Total number of logins per day/week/month Total number of posts per user Proportion of user profiles that are fully completed Qualitative satisfaction/utility feedback from community members Qualitative satisfaction feedback from clients Renew rate of community client contracts

total visits per community total gadget (portlet)executions

types of activity on the site too many to mention

visits average visit length geographic origin of visitors file downloads searches search terms

visits vs visitors, newsletter subscription rates, rss syndication, views to external links (like photos on flickr and views of our blogs)

We do a satisfaction survey every 6 months, primarily looking for raw sat score as well as if the member would recommend the community or not. We also tie the sat survey back to our loyalty index/

Which general areas are getting the most attention, how active blogs are vs discussions

**Question 14:**

For metrics you identify as “very important”, what tactics are most effective to improve those metrics?

anything that involves a network dynamic - someone tells someone who tells someone. we get very few registrations and paid members from search, most come to the site on direct referral

by the leading of facilitator

Controversial topics, and brand strength within market

Deposit valuable assets, word of mouth

editor function

First, I need a soap box. Just because a metric is very important does not necessarily mean that it must be improved. For a doctor, the pulse is a very important metric, however, he doesn't want to see it increased beyond a certain point. For example, 'posts' is very important to understand the level of activity, but an increase could be because of a flame war. Also, an increase can overwhelm the community and cause quality contributors to leave. - improving unique users: promote, foster posters that ask questions and opinions. - Improving posts per thread: we practically hide the new thread button. We encourage users to first search and browse existing discussions.

good editorial - good moderation - good facilitation - effective social network building and facilitators' knowledge of the community

high quality services

High visibility of community on home page of website and collaboration of community and content on the site.

Hot topics. Adequate promotions (easily visible, ubiquitous). Availability of appropriate staff--experts if needed, moderator. Ease of access (RSS, etc.).

I run a blog- posting on other blogs, writing in-depth content that gets picked up by other bloggers, etc.

Increased engagement of members through an important business case, a good leader and well setup routines.

information about what the system can do for them

inviting special guests that have a built-in audience that might be attracted to the site, and/or bloggers that cover special global events.

It depends, we watch all of our metrics closely and use them to determine the success of certain content features, whether we need to update or fix areas, etc.

Live online events Email notifications Face to face meetings to reinforce community norms

many different tactics, depending on circumstances

marketing and communications look and feel of website - improved cross-links

metrics are only relevant as the surfacing of a business goal or issue. For instance: pageviews = sessions\* avg session length, and have a significant compact view. Sessions is a combined measure of loyalty when combined with uniques. Uniques is mktg reach. Searches combined with sessions and answered threads can be used to measure # resolutions. Each of these dimensions has specific tactics or strategies.

New content, email alerts, seeded message boards, live chat with hosted conferences on specific topics, directory listings to move lurkers to participants

newsletter pushes to message boards are huge programming and integrating content culled from message boards on home page and condition centers, into article pages, and on any other dang page I can get it into

outreach

Outreach and communication efforts Integration into course presentation Integration into course development Integration into career field management

Outreach on a continuous basis including SEO, paid ad campaigns, newsletters, etc. For registrations, ensuring the benefits of joining are clear and concise with an easy form to complete to obtain information desired.

Page Referrals to track paths, and our 'Single Sign On system, which most of our dynamic services are connected to (not all are as yet).

Page views - Publishing article / object related to the discussions. Unique users - Publishing relevant articles Posts - Opening relevant threads Posts per thread - Opening relevant threads In call cases: implication of knowledgeable people in writing / opening, and serious moderation to keep threads relevant and clear.

Promoting the site, improving our conversion and lengthening lifespan.

Providing incentives and rewards for people answering questions. Making it easier for people to search for answers in order to cut off duplicate question volume.

relevant, interesting content and the marketing that goes with that.

'Reputation' in our context is determined via aggregated survey responses to community events, community-sponsored SIGs and CoPs, newsletters, community portal and team sites (UI), repository content and overall community value. These responses are tracked over time. Tactic is to improve performance (better events, more interesting newsletters, better site organization, better content management, etc.).

Right now the tool data and larger webtrends data is not integrated. It would be nice if it was. Tool does not give data in form or as easily as I would like

right now, marketing and awareness

seeding and facilitating discussions, SEO

Since the upgrade to [XX], it hasn't been difficult to drive any of this. We have seen a huge improvement in all metrics just since we changed the UI. Most of how we are keeping things moving 'up and to the right' is through internal evangelization and teaching more employees and continuing to release new features and be responsive to our community members.

site performance, marketing, partnership building

Stable membership, interesting forums

The most important parameters are growth rate - for which periodic membership drives are most important - and frequency of return.

Word of mouth is our main tactic. Site optimization is our second one. Marketing and PR are tertiary. We do almost no advertising.

**Question 15:**

What is the page view to post ratio in your community?

< 5:1	25%
6:1 – 20:1	56%
> 20:1	19%

**Question 16:**

If the page view to post ratio varies across communities in your organization, what accounts for the difference?

Breadth of community, role of community manager

Community culture - some communities are more centered on a mailing list only approach and do not utilize there web site, others prefer a more web based approach.

culture of community and type of community. my '[XX]' communities are much more interactive but less deep content (more transactional) for example than the professional collaboration communities where messages tend to be longer and more reflective.

depends on nature of conversations taking place on the boards

Different forums owners

Events, broadcasts, activity in the news, quizzes and games, all the other things we do which are perhaps not directly community related, but are offered by [XX]. Our 'listen again' facilities get many many hits which are outside the forums, blogs and so on.

Haven't dug into that relationship. However, we do route all our forum messages to support engineers and have communities that are better at helping themselves than others. The differences really are related to the products that the communities are built on. Software communities typically perform better than hardware as far as being self-supportive.

How much participation from our users is important

Interactivity level of content. Topics.

Less active users

moderator activity; trust inside the community

People post when they trust the surrounds and other members of the Community

Specialized vs. generalized nature of the topic (more traffic likely on generalized topics).

support vs brand b-b vs b-c customer facing vs supply chain vs internal community maturity It can be used to measure (in part) the success of loyalty programs against the community

The different goals of the various communities. Broadcasters are the most active, as they are promoting themselves, getting technical support, offering support to other broadcasters, soliciting artists seeking airplay, etc. Artists are less active but still participating in self-promotion. Listeners are most passive.

The number of people interested in the community subject, and the rate at which the community publishes flagship objects (articles, downloads, papers).

The post ratio does vary across our topics in community for different reasons. In our computer forums, there are members who are just reading the posts to get information or answers from experts. In our leisure area, members are much more likely to post comments on topics of their interests. In our legislation area, members get extremely heated and post at a much higher rate on political issues.

This metric is not important to us. Discussion board posts aren't high on our list of good knowledge-transfer mechanisms. The only ratio we track is searches per visit, because it tells us how people are using the portal (search vs. browse).

Type of community. B2B has a higher pv/post ratio as decision makers read more before contributing. B2C is lower because consumers don't read before posting. They have a question and want an answer without researching it to much.

yes. different types of users. different levels of sophistication

**Question 17:**

If you were to add and track new metrics, which business problems would you like to better understand?

- tying RSS results to page views for a total count - Understanding true reads on a particular blog entry (rather than guessing about what people read on the home page and what they read on the permalink page and how to track each)

- Who are my influencers? Who is able to post three times per month and yet generate lots of discussion with just those three posts? - What are the common topics? - Which discussions are being repeated? - How to better measure the impact the community has on the organization's goals.

1. Cost vs. benefit of portal content management; benefits would include cost reductions for other systems (e.g., Exchange public folders and e-mail). 2. Search abandonment. 3. Relevance of search returns.

A measure of trust within a Community. The business impact of informal knowledge transfer

Ad usage and how to maximize.

All of the metrics listed above would help us understand if our community members found our services worthwhile.

better understand retention better understand what users value better understand where registered users come from/life cycle tracking

Contribution of community features to overall health of CR (good will, identification with mission duration of subscription, usefulness of CGM to company and customers). Contribution to bottom line (subscription attraction , retention.)

conversion rates from visitors to action takers in pretty much all contexts

explanation for sudden spikes in traffic

Frequency of individual member visits (we have this overall, but not broken out by member or non member), reading patterns of individuals, a clean set of metrics on blog posting and commenting.

Global distribution of users and their activity Stickiness of users

how many times a visitor comes before registering. what does a newly registered member do first? how long until a registered member stops posting?

How to draw in stable users

how to get more people to login so we can track registered members' interests. how to entice participative members to become external evangelists for our products/services.

I would like to understand what our users want when they are visiting our page.

In my experience the metric that has the most potential to prove the value of a community initiative, but the technology disconnect between site registration systems and community software platforms precludes tracking, is retention. How does a community participant's longevity compare to those that do not participate. Do the findings of the classic McKinsey/PeopleLink study about value of participation/customer engagement through community features on a site stand up?

Leads generated. Tech Support calls avoided. # of members by different loyalty/behavioral type categories (e.g. we have 100 'super fans' who defend us to the death).

No clear way to know whether the community helped solve individual business problems/impact other than ad hoc follow-on contact.

Number of repeat listeners/stream (stream stickiness) Number of page views/user in the community (ad CPMs) Number of 'last posts' per user ('mentor' identifier) Number of votes per user (indicates tastemaker)

referrals and engaging extended communities

some of interest, that can be measured at one level or another Loyalty Resolutions Positive leadership

This community is just getting off the ground. As we evolve and identify business problems this question will have answers. Until then, the metrics we're using are only supposed to confirm that our users are finding the community tool useful.

Tracking the conversion rate, across all our separate services would be good. Also, the UK ratings systems for TV and Radio (BARB and RAJAR), online, are, as yet, still separately quoted. For 'pan-platform brands' or semi-converged content, this means (obviously) a correct picture might be more difficult to obtain.

use of community features during purchase specification phase. ability to track influence.

user segmentation - our mission is broad - to serve professionals in media, so we get a lot of different types of people and it would be helpful to better understand who they are and what they are looking for

Value generation to the organizations that community members belong to.

visitor behaviour i.e. what they read, no. of downloads, lurkers, etc. Our tracking system is very crude, can't do much with it.

What keeps people coming back? ... repeat users. How people transition from lurker, to asker, to contributor and what we could do to ease the transition for people from each phase.

why they aren't posting, only viewing better profiles/interests of members

Would be great to know if converting readers into posters is critical. It's hard to tell how beneficial the site is to a user by just readership.

**Question 18:**

Your colleague is establishing a new online community. What advice would you have concerning community metrics?

A community takes time to build and they should not have high expectations until after the first year.

Always ensure you know the purpose for which you are measuring. Measuring for the sake of it is pointless. Have a strategy in place and determine what objectives and goals will help you achieve your community purpose. ensure that your measures relate directly to goals, strategy, etc and use results to evaluate, improve, etc. Always ensure that your measures feed directly into your strategy and if necessary adjust them if you are measuring the wrong things.

Baseline early on metrics, but be cautious of what those initial metrics indicate. Don't longterm success based on initial metrics. Metrics are an indicator and you need to be careful in how you use them. Collect metrics that matter. Need to agree on what those metrics provide in terms of value to the organization before collecting them. Plan to supplement metrics with user/member testimonials and stories that show the value of the community.

Be wary of the accuracy of free services and if you have money, spend it. Your metrics are such an easy way to measure the success of new content on your site.

Beat on your software w/r/t metrics before you buy it if metrics are important. Think about registration data - don't ask for anything that a) you won't use and b) is not useful to the community

Before you launch: 1. decide business goals for the community 2. decide metrics to track such 3. make sure you have an online harness that gives you instant read on them 4. Religiously follow a weekly/ regular routine to track progress on business goals through identifies metrics

Choose tools that provide metrics. Poll frequently.

collect as much data as you can

Comparisons are the most important thing - how many visitors register? How many registered users become paying members? How many viewers post?

Define the goals and business objectives of the community first, and then let metrics flow from there.

Depends on the type of community they want to start. I would tell them to drive as few metrics as possible and only the ones that drive the intended behaviors. Do you want long threaded discussions? Concise answers? Collaborative editing? Each business goal of the community has different metrics. I would also encourage them to worry less about # metrics and more about what people, anecdotally are saying about you and your community. If you want to know what people think... ask them in your community. :-)

Develop and implement metrics and a standard reporting process, including a monthly report to the business that demonstrates a rigorous approach to community initiatives. And not just report but act upon what the monthly measures indicate. Are business objectives for community activity being met? If not, why not? What promotional efforts are needed to drive activity? Is more active moderation needed to spark activity? Are events warranted to build the habit of participation? What new features will support business objectives? What seeds of new opportunities are revealed in active community areas?

Do not be overly concerned about collection and measurements of data.

Don't measure things simply because you can measure them. Measure only what's actionable and has a significant impact on performance.

Don't neglect them. Keep good records from day 1. Don't do it yourself if you're not good at it, unless there's no other choice. If that's the case, do it yourself but keep it simple and consistent -- every month from now on. Distribute numbers judiciously, to those who can help you get additional resources and to those whose work may complement yours.

Ensure you are using a solid measurement tool. Understand the differences between log analyzers and real time metrics capture methodology. Understand that you are only going to see approximations for many metrics due to the way browsers store pages. Lastly, move away from standard traffic measures. Use activity based metrics which tie into your organizational goals for the site and business overall.

First, don't rely on metrics to claim your community successful. Use metrics to understand your community better. Do not worry about page views (unless you are paying for them in which case you actually want to decrease page views). Measure how many \*people\* who are contributing and reading. The % of community traffic vs. overall site traffic will help justify the reason for your community. Don't try to compare metrics across sites you don't own -- they may not be using the same method of measuring.

Get as many as you can for as cheap as you can. As things come up, it's useful to slice and dice numbers. Community is a nebulous mass that makes many numbers people nervous, so the more numbers you can get, particularly those that are directly attached to revenue (eg referrals) the better off you'll be.

go for the basics first, don't measure everything

have a purpose, find a champion, get high level of support and a few trinkets to periodically keep people engaged and to have fun.

Instrument the site from the beginning. Start with a clear purpose and strategy, and choose metrics accordingly.

It's important to have detailed site metrics available and to track these over time in order to gauge the strength of your community. Any fluctuations in site usage should be identified quickly and a strategy developed to re-engage members or to make modifications to sections.

Keep it simple and focus on measuring what you want the Community's outcomes to be. Measure in the language your company understands and reports on.

keep it simple. look for a few key indicators. Metrics only tell part of the story.

make sure you build tracking of important metrics into the system. especially for specific high value activities (more than page requests and visitors). try to tie them to a business model. once they are built in, look at them.

measure everything possible - come up with a game plan and strategy for what you seek as significant. Is it a certain average posting number for each user that continues to grow? Is it a mentorship of new users by old users? Is it something else? Once you know that, you can find a formula, even if it's rough to test against.

Measure everything, be careful what measurement software you choose (make sure it and it's costs can scale). And at the same time, while you're measuring everything, focus on improving just a few of those metrics otherwise you could find yourself getting 'bogged down in the details'

one of the keys to non-support communities is to change behavior of the members to make them more participative members which in turn (theory) leads them to more loyalty and hopefully some 'free' evangelism for the company. Community elements implemented should strive to get more participation and thus be tracked.

Open the floodgates of marketing - don't worry about too many people showing up day one. Market and seed the community - build great content early on even if you have to force it. Be very active and set the example for 3 months.

Quantitative data is just as important as qualitative. If you have online hosts as well as moderators, this is where they can help increase the understanding of your clients/users. This can be fed back into the business as useful intelligence.

Relate them to the strategic objectives of the proposed 'community'. I would also advise them to seriously consider the over-use of the word 'community'. I would suggest relating the metrics to peer-reviewed CoP stuff if suitable, and emerging conversation lifecycle metrics

Set goals Find a way to measure 'stickiness' of your community - how many of your users come to just get their answer and leave vs. how many come to be a part of the community?

set up your QSL databases and link them to your outreach database

start simple. track a few things first and build. track number of registrants, top boards (based on page views and posts), top answer people

Start with engagement through good community management, expect low participation if not on topic, focus on one target group at a time.

Tie your metrics to other metrics of direct importance to the bottom line and long-term success of the company.

track everything you can, then filter

Track things that allow you to monitor future server needs to track and control bad community members.

Very useful to identify busiest period and hence when to seed the boards in preparation

**Question 19:**

What are the best resources (books, white papers, people) concerning this topic of online community metrics?

Amy Jo Kim's book. E-mint is also good for informal advice.

APQC ([www.apqc.org](http://www.apqc.org))

Book - Cultivating communities of Practice Experience - give it a go!

certainly plenty of sites (which forgive me but I forget the name of), seo search guides, and for software webtrends and newcomer google analytics are invaluable in tracking activity.

clay shirky's writings, ross mayfield's blog, corante's many-to-many blog

clickz Forum One

e-mint, rheingold, Like to know some more - only me in my organisation and sometimes feel isolated!

Good question. Joe Cothrel.

I received good advice from Dr Richard McDermott. Also found useful information and support on the Knowledge Board.

I wish I knew. It seems that Marc Smith and Danyel Fisher of Microsoft are the only folks researching and publishing on meaningful community metrics.

Internal documents - not enough sharing between online community professionals

Marc Smith from Microsoft.

Most of what I've learned was through experience. Most white papers are too basic in their approach. However, WebTrends and Omniture have the best basic information to use.

none that I know of -- we are still learning what the right metrics are. What are badly missing are metrics for 'engagement'. most metrics are still focused on 'eyeballs' given old style marketing and advertising.

Not sure there is just 1 good one - number of decent papers in Sloan Mgt review, processes from vendors like Communispace etc

online articles, communities of practice on communities of practice No single book stands out.

Wenger's book on CoP, case studies

**Question 20:**

Whom else should we contact about this survey?

[responses suppressed]

**Question 21:**

Any other comments or advice? (Selected responses.)

A question of 'what defines a community' has come up in the past. Is a blog a community? Or does it have to be a bulletin board / forum? ... would be interested to hear comments on this.

i think using 'post' as a primary indicator of community activity is too narrow. We should think of community in a broader way and count other forms of engagement. it seems to me that we almost always see activity growing linearly with exceptions like wikipedia that achieves a hockey stick growth curve (I don't know what kind of function this represents). What drives the hockey stick? it would be nice to have business metrics -- e.g., dollars of value per member. we might be able to get some initial numbers from recent sales (ivillage, neopets)

It strikes me that there is some generic website metric bias in this survey. Are people *\*really\** using page views to understand their communities? Maybe I need a lesson on how that helps because I can easily jack my page views up by simply forcing users to see only one reply at a time (which a lot of community software does! (i.e. craigslist). How does that help understand participation, contribution, or even *\*activity\**. Knowing how many times an unknown number of people clicked on 'next page' doesn't help me foster community. I found it difficult to answer questions 6-8 about unique users. I am unaware of accurate ways to measure unique users particularly at a time when cookie blocking is built into web browsers and more users are winding up with dynamic IP addresses (thanks to wifi and broadband ISPs requiring dynamic addressing). Again, if I am completely missing something, I'd love to know, but I find that over 10% margins of error in trying to pin down 'unique' users among the unregistered visits is less than helpful. I prefer to measure what I can accurately than accept inaccurate measurements just because the other guys are willing to accept bad data. (Can you tell I am opinionated about the issue of community metrics?)

The internet requires the development of new metrics related to engagement of community participants. We are developing some of those -- Marketing and advertising agencies don't yet understand the difference between broadcast media, and interactive media. new metrics are required.

The 'landscape' of online community is now much more complicated (sophisticated?). There are different 'tribes' of operators, offering many different kinds of digital social experience: Community and groups User Generated content The Blogosphere Web 2.0 participatory methods (inc peer to peer) Virtual environments Multi-user gaming The mixing of online and offline sociability portable community knowledge networks Wireless sociability (presence sensing) Conversational interfaces (chatterbots - Phil Hall's term) Participatory media (sociable media) Things have moved on folks!!!!

watch-out for implicit assumptions on the type of infrastructure and context that several of your questions had



## Final Comment

Thank you everyone for your participation! We find compilations like this extremely useful and hope you do to. We continued to be encouraged by these surveys, and plan to do several more this year. Feel free to contact me with suggested topics.

If you'd like to discuss these (and other) results in person, please note the Online Community Camp we are hosting May 25<sup>th</sup> in San Francisco. Information is at <http://www.forumone.com/section/services/strategy/occ> . We'll send out a separate mailing about this.

Best regards,

Jim Cashel  
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## About Forum One Communications

Forum One Communications <<http://www.ForumOne.com>> is a web strategy and communications firm which assists organizations in using new technologies to enhance communications and collaboration. Services include communications strategy; information architecture; user interface issues; graphics design, web development and programming; audience analysis; web marketing; and web metrics work. For further information see our website or drop Jim Cashel a note [Cashel@ForumOne.com](mailto:Cashel@ForumOne.com) .