The Galactic Guide to online community success

The Guide to becoming a Jedi Community Manager

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**Space…The final frontier…**

**A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…**

Ok, ok - you get the picture. Many association executives see online communities as that final frontier – it’s a vast unknown universe. It’s easy to understand why online communities are still gathering momentum within the association world. People are intimidated, afraid and intrigued by online communities because they’re constantly evolving, unknown living organisms. Even though online communities can seem scary, they’ve taken off among associations, like the Millennium Falcon on a rescue (or bounty) mission.

For all the sci-fi geeks out there, here’s a few thoughts to help you manage the online community asteroid fields you may encounter and become the community Jedi Master you were meant to be:

1. **Be adaptable.** During intergalactic exploration, you’ll probably discover alien life. And chances are, the alien life you discover will consist of many creatures previously unknown to “humans” (see: members). When you start a community, you’ll learn each of your members behave differently in the same system. Some are lurkers, some are champions, some always have something to say, and some don’t know the community even exists. Understanding these types of users can go a long way in providing resources to them – and you’ll learn what members value the most.

**Tip:** Make sure you’re using different outreach strategies for different types of users. Sometimes adding a new chapter or component is like bringing young Luke right into Mos Eisley Cantina without explaining where to buy a drink or where the regulars always sit.

1. **Preparation.** When preparing for space travel, you need a lot of equipment -- the right ship, weapons, gear, computers and team. When it comes to communities, reliable tools and proper preparation can make a huge difference in ultimate success. Without a strong platform and captain at the helm, it can be hard to get your community to blast off.

**Tip:** Every membership group is different, so think about the benefits you already provide and what your members request most. Put their needs before a shiny new platform. If you’re stuck on where to start, take a look at our latest community platform [checklist](http://blog.higherlogic.com/why-a-dedicated-community-platform-wins-over-ams-add-ons).

1. **Timeline**. Sometimes you want to make the jump to light speed. However, when time allows, you should follow an outline and be patient. Many communities don’t just explode with user engagement overnight, but with the right steps you can build something that will last!

**Tip**: Even the Rebel Alliance didn’t take on the Death Star without doing some research and setting some goals first. Be realistic about the time it takes to grow community members and engagement. Make sure you don’t over-segment your member groups at the beginning (open forums rock!) and keep track of discussions, resources and what members are asking for.

1. **Create a Self**-**Sustaining Environment.**

*THE MARTIAN*, a novel and film about a man stranded on Mars, illustrates how an astronaut, Mark Watney, could theoretically survive on a desolate planet by leveraging his understanding of data. Throughout the novel, Watney uses a combination of botany and mathematical skills to grow potatoes, generate heat, create water, and maintain everything he needs to survive – with only the tools he had. Once he figured out how to make these things, he needed to manage them over specific periods of time to ensure survival.

A community manager can take away a lot from this approach. Mark used the tools and knowledge he already had to create a a self-sustaining environment. The best communities are self-sustaining ecosystems with community managers who know exactly how – and when – to leverage their platform’s tools.

**Tip:** Find champions in your community – there are plenty of Mark Watneys there who can offer knowledge and expertise in different areas. Try to set up automation rules to help encourage and manage community members’ participation.

1. **Understanding the data.** Data is all around us. We use it for many things in our daily lives and don’t even realize it at times. For outer space adventurers, interpreting data, like directions and speed, is critical for survival. Leverage the data your community gives you! But don’t be fooled into measuring unhelpful data – not all information is created equal. Your community should be judged not by the number of members, posts, replies, and documents. It should be judged by the engagement benchmarks your organization deems most important and the value it brings to your membership.

**Tip:**Schedule time weekly and/or monthly to review community data and pull reports from your community. Try looking at the data in different ways, to see how you can plan engagement tactics down the road.

1. **Be Resilient.** Things are going to go wrong, just accept it. Mark Watney never planned on being stranded on Mars for years. Luke never dreamed that Darth Vader was his father (and was more than surprised to discover the woman he loved was actually his sister…) If safety during space travel was guaranteed, I’m sure more people would be doing it. As it is now, only the brave attempt it. Some things you try might fail, but that’s ok. Everyone goes through a similar process and eventually some things will stick, and your community will be better for it.

**Tip:** Want to try something new? Consider reaching out to your group of community champions, or using a BETA group of users first!

1. **Enjoy the ride.** You are doing something very few people have dared to do. You are building a foundation for future members of your organization to network and collaborate for many years to come. The best astronauts truly enjoy what they do and know that they’re paving the way to the future. The best community managers operate the same way. It’s not just your job - you should be passionate about helping members find real value from the community you’re all building together.

**Tip:** So…every once in a while just sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride!