



AACC Online Community Drives Increased Engagement Association Delivers on Full Promise of What an Online Community Should Be



Since 1948, Washington D.C.-based [AACC](#) has been dedicated to achieving better health through laboratory medicine. The association brings together more than 50,000 clinical laboratory professionals, physicians, research scientists and business leaders from around the world to focus on clinical chemistry, molecular diagnostics, mass spectrometry, translational medicine, lab management and other areas of laboratory science. AACC also provides programs that advance scientific collaboration, knowledge, expertise and innovation.

When AACC launched its original online community in 2013, there were difficulties. While members – who range from highly experienced lab professionals and researchers to young trainees just out of school – appreciated participating in discussions with peers and accessing resources such as an online forum dedicated to their particular practice and numerous sub-communities, the Telligent/Zimbra platform used to host the online community suffered from a number of technical challenges.

AT A GLANCE:

AACC

- Founded in 1948
- Headquarters: Washington, DC
- 8,000 Members
- [www.AACC.org](#)
- Public Social Media: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube



Challenges – A Legacy Platform That Limited Opportunities

“We see our online community as a critical driver of membership and retention,” said Simona Ciampi, Associate Director, Online Member Engagement at AACC. “It should provide every opportunity for members to share, collaborate, mentor and learn. But with our existing platform, several key features were not available or didn’t work properly, and getting support from Telligent was a nightmare.”

For example, the platform did not support daily discussion digests, which are key to keeping members engaged. This meant that Ciampi was forced to manually create “fake” digest emails to send to members. In addition to taking significant time, these fake digests did not allow members to participate in discussions by responding to the email. Member participation was also limited by a very unfriendly user interface that made it difficult for members to message each other privately.

Another critical challenge was that the mobile version, which should have allowed members to access the community from their smart phones, never functioned properly. The main menu for accessing services simply would not open, and this problem was never fixed.

Compounding these challenges, during AACC’s critical first year of implementing the community, the vendor was bought by another company. One of several downsides of this was that all the direct links to online support materials suddenly changed, causing no end of frustration as Ciampi tried to resolve various issues.

“I was able to overcome many of the challenges of the Telligent platform, but it was very time-consuming for me, and ultimately our members were never able to fully engage in all the activities an online community should support,” added Ciampi. “Moreover, we discovered through a membership survey that many members were limiting their use of the community due to those technical challenges, so we knew that with better technology there would be increased engagement.”

MEET SIMONA CIAMPI:



Associate Director,
Online Member Engagement, AACC

Simona serves as Associate Director, Online Member Engagement for AACC. With a strong passion for bringing people together with a purpose, she drives membership retention and acquisition through online engagement strategies, including social media outreach.



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Higher Logic – A Complete Platform

Because of these limitations, Ciampi began looking for a new solution in mid-2016, a full year before the end of the Telligent contract. Sometime earlier, during her training as a community manager, Ciampi attended a Higher Logic-sponsored Feverbee workshop, and following that workshop, she continued to run into representatives from Higher Logic at other events. As her search for a new online community platform intensified, she was impressed by Higher Logic's industry participation and the accessibility and support of people from the company. Moreover, Ciampi and other members of the AACC staff were familiar with how streamlined the Higher Logic user experience was because of their participation in the [ASAE Community](#), which is powered by Higher Logic.

Determined to switch to Higher Logic, Ciampi set about convincing management that it paid to do so as soon as possible, despite the existing contract. She used Higher Logic's extensive online resources and case studies to demonstrate the benefits. Critical to this was Higher Logic's annual [Community Benchmarking Study](#), which, among other benefits, provided best practices around usage statistics and enabled Ciampi to reliably benchmark AACC's potential for activity growth against similar communities. Higher Logic's longstanding focus on providing solutions for the association market also meant that Ciampi would have access to association-specific advice and tools that the existing vendor could not offer.

Prepared with these arguments, Ciampi convinced management to make the change, and she worked with Higher Logic to document and schedule the deployment and migration. The entire process took approximately seven weeks, including porting existing conversations to the new platform, a beta test period with a limited number of members, and rolling out a communications plan to inform the entire membership. Ciampi says that working with Higher Logic was a pleasure, and the few integration and design challenges that arose were promptly resolved by Higher Logic. The new community was launched in mid-February of 2017.



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Engagement, AACC

The Benefits – Increased Engagement

“Higher Logic makes me look like a superstar because of all the things I can do now that I couldn’t do before,” said Ciampi. These benefits include the following:

- The fully automated daily digests are now a powerful trigger for members to see what is happening in the community and stay engaged. And because Ciampi doesn’t have to create them, she has more time for other tasks. More important, members have the ability to interact with the community right from the daily digest email, which encourages more responses by eliminating the need to log into a separate system.
- An easy-to-use, responsive design enables mobile members to participate in the community anywhere, anytime, encouraging more activity.
- The new and very friendly private messaging interface is very popular, once again encouraging more participation.
- Higher Logic also makes it easy for members to search for other members with similar interests, a key feature missing from the previous platform.
- Higher Logic supports an unlimited number of communities, and AACC has launched 42 of them, including the AACC Open Forum and many related to chapters, topics of interest, and organization events.
- One of the communities is a forum dedicated to AACC’s annual scientific meeting. AACC members now regularly use this community to get information about the event, get answers to questions, and set up social events that will take place at the conference, such as happy hours and baseball games.

All these benefits have translated directly into increased activity on the community. When Ciampi compared activity during January, February and March of 2016 to just mid-February to the end of March 2017, she found an amazing **150 percent increase in activity**.

“Our new online community is now a highly valuable extension of AACC that is encouraging more members to participate and increasing the value we provide to them,” said Ciampi. “But it is also viewed as just a very cool place to be. And there are still other modules that we can add in the future, such as mentorship, that will deliver even greater value.”

HIGHER LOGIC

Higher Logic is an industry leader in cloud-based community platforms. Organizations worldwide use Higher Logic to bring people all together, by giving their community a home where they can interact, share ideas, answer questions and stay connected. Our goal is to help your organization with deeper engagement and meaningful interactions for your members, customers and prospects.



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