Personify®

What to Expect:

How to Grow an Online Community in the First 90 Days after Launch

What we'll cover

Who doesn't love finding "their people"? If the last year is any indication, the idea of connecting with a community of shared interests, passions, and purpose is innate in all of us.

This year also confirmed what we already knew — successful communities aren't relegated to face-to-face interactions. In a new world of global connectivity and remote connections, relationships do and can thrive in a digital environment.

76%
of internet users participated in an online community in 2020.
— Global Web Index

That's why so many associations have turned to building online communities to empower members to connect with one another and deepen the association's relationship with their members.

We've broken down what to expect in the first 30 days, then 60 days, and finally, 90 days after launching your community. After reading this guide, you'll learn how to:

1   **ATTRACT AND ENGAGE WITH MEMBER INFLUENCERS AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATES WITHIN YOUR ASSOCIATION**

2   **DRIVE ENGAGEMENT BY INSPIRING CONTRIBUTORS AND GUIDING NEW USERS**

3   **ENCOURAGE CUSTOM GROUPS THAT DEEPEN THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MEMBERS**

Setting the right expectations for your community

Setting the right expectations for what a thriving community looks like for your association and your members is key.

Here are a few important expectations to present to your board, your staff, and your members:

AN ONLINE COMMUNITY IS A SAFE, PRIVATE PLACE.

The privacy and safety of an online community page are what separates them from social platforms. On sites like Facebook it's not as easy to create closed communities and ensure that members are interacting in a way that furthers your association's mission and protects from intentional and unintentional harm.

AN ONLINE COMMUNITY IS NOT A "SET IT AND FORGET IT" EFFORT.

Good relationships aren't static — they grow and they evolve. Your community should embrace and reflect that. Which leads us to our next important expectation...

FLEXIBILITY IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST NEEDS AND BENEFITS OF AN ONLINE COMMUNITY.

If your community is successful, you'll be learning things about your members you've never known and hearing feedback from members at a pace you never have before. This is a good thing! Changing elements of your online community as a response to the emerging needs of your community is exactly where you want to be.

AN ONLINE COMMUNITY SHOULD HELP YOU "TURN OFF THE NOISE."

Another benefit of an online community that you don't get with social media platforms is that your community can act as the ultimate hub of truth when it comes to association events, courses and training, policies, and opportunities. You have control over document versions, updated profiles, and published posts.

What to expect in the first 30 days

The first 30 days after launching your online community there should be a lot of promotion of your community across your website, in member emails, and over social media. Hopefully, this work is a continuation of what you've been doing leading up to launch.

You'll also want to identify member influencers who have expressed excitement over the community over social media and who you see interacting in the first few weeks after launch. Beyond these influencers doing the amazing job of filling your newsfeed and pumping your community up, these influencers are often willing to act as community moderators, volunteer to help recruit content creators, and lead the charge when it comes to starting new, custom groups.

Find your support system

On the association side, you've likely assigned one or two community advocates on the board or on staff — people who can champion the success of the online community and support its mission. Check in with these advocates regularly in the first 30 days after launch. It's too early for reliable data, but It's good to understand the level of activity, talk about the new insights you're already gaining about your members' usage and interests, and be ready to celebrate these efforts in internal meetings and strategic discussions.

30-DAY CHECKLIST:
Delight and deliver

Build hype and deliver the best experiences on your members' first interactions with the community.

✓ **GET THE CONVERSATIONS GOING.**
Feature a new member, announce a new event, or ask a fun, relevant question.

✓ **IDENTIFY MEMBER INFLUENCERS WHO CAN HELP YOU TAG PEOPLE AND START NEW GROUPS.**
Consider sending them some swag items or offering them special discounts.

✓ **MEET WITH YOUR INTERNAL COMMUNITY ADVOCATES REGULARLY.**
Start to set up the right data points and reports you'd like to run.

What to expect in the first 60 days

Benjamin Morton, Senior Product Consultant for Personify CommUnity, offers a good reminder as you head into the second month of your newly launched online community by saying, "**Tech doesn't make people talk. People make people talk.**"

This will be your mantra as you are able to enjoy the fruits of all the labor you put into setting up the back end of your community and working out some of the kinks that naturally reveal themselves in the first 30 days. Ultimately, your second month will be about keeping the conversations going, thinking of creative ways to use your community beyond the newsfeed, and recruiting the superstars who will lead the charge in member-generated content.

Personalize your community for your members

Keeping Benjamin's wise words in mind, one of the most important things you can do is encourage people to join the conversation. Tag members with relevant expertise or insights in specific posts, and have fun with all the multimedia options like videos, gifs, and infographics. The more you can light up your newsfeed with engaging, relevant conversations, the more likely people will communicate and start to develop custom groups and volunteer to be a part of other pieces of content and campaigns you're planning.

60-DAY CHECKLIST:
Reflect and reward

Let your members know you hear them, appreciate them, and that there are rewards for helping the community grow and thrive.

✓ **KEEP THE CONVERSATIONS GOING.**

Tag relevant members, post videos and pictures, and encourage custom online groups when you see a lot of interest (you can't go wrong with a "Pet Owners" custom group).

✓ **GET CREATIVE WITH OTHER FEATURES OF YOUR COMMUNITY.**

Now is the time to start building out your resource library — a place for relevant articles, directories, important documents, association videos, etc. — events calendar, and other features that your members say they want.

✓ **START ACTIVELY RECRUITING MEMBERS WHO CAN BE A PART OF YOUR CONTENT MACHINE.**

Don't be shy about messaging the people in the thread asking if they'd contribute to a blog or webinar. And reward active members with discounts or swag.

What to expect in the first 90 days

Congratulations! You've made it to the third month of growing your online community, and you're practically a pro. Hopefully, you feel like your launch has been successful and your community is well on its way to thriving. But it's ok if you don't quite feel that way. In our experience, whether you feel like you're succeeding or struggling depends a lot on the type of support and engagement you're seeing from your association and members.

Just remember, with Personify, you're not alone on this journey. Relationships take time, and a lot of the first year of your online community is listening to your members, learning about them, and offering solutions to their evolving needs.

DAY
90

The Golden Ratio of community content

That being said, you also want to use these 90 days to check your data for any trends and start planning for the golden ratio of online communities: the ratio of staff versus member-generated content. You want there to be a good balance, and you can start to see the member-generated content you're looking for when you see members start posting new topics and beginning their own custom online groups.

Reflect and plan

Celebrate your early wins and respond to emerging needs that your community needs now and will need in the future.

✓ CHECK IN ON YOUR MEMBER PROFILES.

One of the biggest markers of a thriving online community are fully complete member profiles. Check to see how many members include all their information, uploaded a profile picture, etc. Reach out to the ones who haven't.

✓ MAKE YOUR REGULAR STATUS MEETINGS MORE MEANINGFUL.

If you're still following the road map for the first 30 days, you've been meeting with internal advocates and volunteers. Now, you can come to those meetings with data and a plan for action based on real use cases.

✓ REVISIT YOUR RESOURCES.

It's not uncommon that about this time associations start to see the benefit of hiring a part or full-time Community Manager. Consider if the resources you've been dedicating to growing your online community could use some help.

The heart of your online community strategy

The last thing we'll say as we wrap up the right expectations to set for your team and your members regarding your online community strategy is to ensure that relationships stay at the heart of your community strategy. And how do you do that? With an annual review.

We know, that sounds a little boring and backward. But the trick to making the annual review of your community interesting and successful is not making it about tech.

Keep the annual review of your community human-focused by talking about the content that has resonated most and identifying your most engaged and least engaged members.

Instead of spending the bulk of your time talking tech features and capabilities, ask what you learned about your members. How you can better help them build connections with each other and your mission? This approach is the best way to grow your online community.

"Don't let tech make decisions for you."

Benjamin Morton

SENIOR PRODUCT CONSULTANT FOR COMMUNITY POWERED BY PERSONIFY

Put relationships first for an online community that thrives on its own

While it's true that relationships take time to build trust and connection, one of the biggest benefits of online communities is that it has evolved how engagement works. Connections can now happen fast with just a few clicks and a new post. And they can happen from members down the street or across the globe.

For members who struggle with face-to-face conversation, they now have multimedia tools like videos that they can easily post to start engaging in the community. Some members don't like the noise of the newsfeed and crave the safety and familiarity of their favorite custom breakout groups.

Online communities should empower your members to build relationships with each other and with your organization on their terms. If you can make your community safe, clear, easy-to-use, and relevant, members will help you do the important work of raising awareness for your cause, recruiting new members, and inspiring greater investment in your organization.

Grow a stronger community. Leave a lasting legacy.

Personify helps you manage and grow your community with integrated software solutions that strengthen the connection between your organization, your members, and your mission.

WE'RE IN THE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING BUSINESS.

Looking for a committed, understanding partner to help you grow? Let us mix, match, and mold our Community Experience solutions to meet your emerging needs and help you create better relationships with your community. We love to listen, and there's nothing we find more gratifying than deepening the connections that drive your success.

LET'S TALK

We build strong connections with our customers so they can build strong connections with their communities.

70K+ organization staff use Personify solutions every day.

25% of the U.S. population interacts with Personify through associations, events and nonprofits.

20 years of industry leadership make Personify the trusted choice for a technology partner.

Personify®