

Blend Content & Community to Create Truly Interactive Websites



Introduction

Websites need to evolve.

Visit any website today and they're much the same as those in the 1990's. They're entirely one-way: the publisher of the website provides information to visitors. The visitors, on the other hand, have few options to interact, save for a "contact us" form or a handful of social sharing buttons. Those same visitors are afforded no options to engage with one another.

Blend Content & Community

People come to your website to satisfy a goal. They have a question that needs answering or they came to [browse your job listings](#). You need to make sure you're providing them with the information they seek. But that's a given.

Visitors want and demand much more. They want to be entertained. They want to hear from like-minded peers. And they'd love to engage directly with those peers. In addition, they want to talk about your products and services. So give them what they want, right then and there. On your website. The trick? To [incorporate community elements](#) (i.e. interactive features) alongside your content.

Let's consider **six reasons** for blending an online community to make your website interactive.

Reason #1

Bring Conversations onto Your Home Turf

You're bound to find conversations about your products and services across the web: comments on Twitter, posts on Google+, questions in LinkedIn Groups and reviews on sites like [G2 Crowd](#). Wouldn't it be great, however, to bring some of these conversations onto your website, where you can more closely monitor and engage in them?

Give visitors options to engage with your content beyond likes and shares. Use community features (e.g. forums, discussions, Q&A, ideas, etc.) to engage visitors in conversations. In sports, "home field advantage" refers to the benefits afforded by your home arena.

Your home field advantage is the ability to immediately spot and monitor conversations happening on your site.



For your website, your home field advantage is the ability to immediately spot and monitor conversations happening on your site. For instance, you can be immediately alerted to new discussions or [new ideas](#) on your site, monitor that activity and encourage participation.

In addition, hosting these conversations on your site afford you with data that you don't get on LinkedIn, Facebook or Twitter. Not only can you assess broad activity trends, the engagement data also gives you cues to the sales readiness of site visitors.

Reason #2

The Transparency of User-Generated Content Leads to Credibility and Trust

In a [Local Consumer Review Survey](#), BrightLocal found that "79% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations." The trust we place in online reviews is the reason we use Yelp to find a good restaurant or TripAdvisor to find a good hotel.

Take advantage of this trend by facilitating customer discussions and reviews about your products directly on your website. Your bosses are bound to say, "But I don't want negative reviews on our site."

Get them to think about it differently: negative reviews are bound to surface on a review site that you don't control and by promptly addressing a negative review on your site, you demonstrate responsiveness and transparency.

In fact, [the Retail Consumer Report](#) (conducted by Harris Interactive) discovered that among consumers who received a response to their negative review, 33% followed up and posted a positive review, while 34% deleted their original negative review!

Promptly addressing negative reviews lends increased credibility to your positive reviews. In addition, reviews published on your site help elevate your position in search engine results pages. The terminology that customers use to describe your products are the same terms other customers are searching for.

I see this phenomenon quite a bit when researching consumer products: I'll see an

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Amazon product review page listed high on the search results page (e.g. if I'm searching for a banana slicer, this [Amazon product review](#) may appear). If I'm satisfied after reading the review on Amazon, I can click over to the hyperlinked product page and buy it. Similarly, if I'm satisfied with a review on your website, I can click over to the "request a trial" page to try it out.

Reason #3

Get an SEO Lift with User-Generated Content

User-generated content on your site can have a larger SEO (Search Engine Optimization) benefit than the content produced by your Marketing team. Why is this? Because of the way search engines are evolving.

Google's Hummingbird update signaled a shift to the semantic web: Google now looks to decipher the searcher's intent. As a result, content that provides answers to searchers' questions rank well.

User-generated content can [provide a tremendous SEO lift](#): Discussions or Q&A are centered around questions that customers want answered, along with corresponding answers from users.

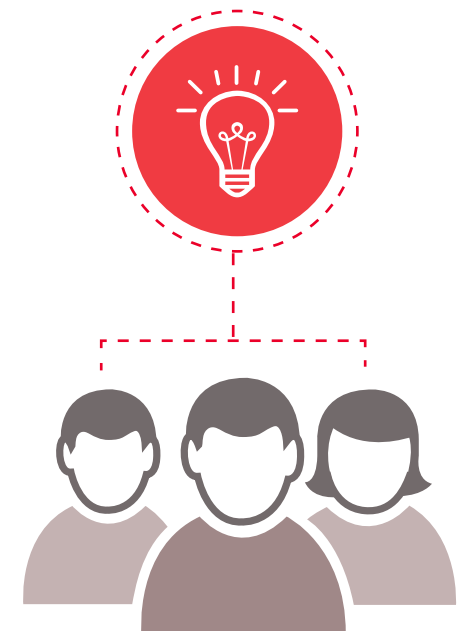
In addition, user-generated content often includes long tail keywords not addressed by your website copy.

Steven Roth, who helps manage the website for [SchoolDude](#) (a provider of cloud operations software for schools) notes that the long tail keywords in SchoolDude's website discussions are indexed by Google in a matter of minutes. Users searching on related keywords may discover SchoolDude's website minutes after the user-generated content was published (download: [our case study with SchoolDude](#) [PDF]).

GET AN SEO LIFT TO YOUR PRIMARY DOMAIN

Consider a common scenario: the need to fix a consumer product. Your first stop is a search engine. In the search engine results page, you find the answer! The answer is provided in a branded, online community, hosted by the product's manufacturer. Way to go, manufacturer!

User-generated content on your site can generate outsized SEO gains.



As outlined earlier, user-generated content, with its long tail keywords, provide perfect answers to users' questions. So that's a win for the manufacturer.

On the downside, however, many companies' online communities reside on a separate sub-domain. For instance:

- manufacturer.com (website)
- community.manufacturer.com (online customer community)

The result? All of the domain authority for the online community content is associated with community.manufacturer.com. Their primary domain (manufacturer.com) is seeing **ZERO** SEO benefit from their customer community!

Jennifer Sable Lopez (@jennita) is Directory of Community at Moz. At the FeverBee SPRINT conference in San Francisco, Jennifer presented a talk titled "How to Make SEO an Integral Part of your Community Strategy."

During the Q&A portion of her talk, Sable Lopez was asked about community platforms hosted on a secondary domain (see the community.manufacturer.com example above). Jennifer noted that the **use of a secondary domain is poor SEO practice.**

Instead, the community should be hosted as a folder (or set of folders) under the organization's primary domain. In other words, content and community should be hosted together on the same site.

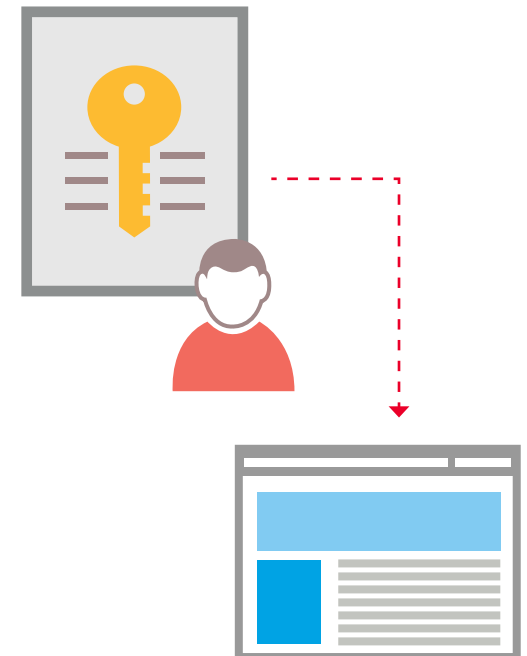
[How to Make SEO an Integral Part of Your Community Strategy](#) from [Jennifer Lopez](#)

Going back to SchoolDude - you can see how they do it right:

- schooldude.com (website)
- schooldude.com/community (online customer community)

The result: all domain authority accrues to schooldude.com. This means that the user-generated content in SchoolDude's community helps reinforce authority not just for itself, but for its main domain and website as well.

User-generated content often includes long tail keywords not addressed by your website copy.



Reason #4

Facebook Organic Reach is Dwindling, So Shift the Focus Back to Your Website

Managing a brand's Facebook page in 2009-2012 was a fun time. It was more effective to publish content to your fans' newsfeeds than it was to publish content to your website.

Within seconds, you'd see 50+ Likes on your post and 10+ comments. As you garnered more success engaging with your fans, you accumulated more and more Likes on your page.

DEMISE OF ORGANIC FACEBOOK REACH

But something happened along the way to Facebook Page nirvana: the demise of organic reach. According to [research from social@Ogilvy](#), in February 2014, organic reach on Facebook averaged 6%, a decline of 49% from levels seen the prior October.

The [full report from social@Ogilvy](#) is titled

"Facebook Zero" and addresses the notion that organic reach on Facebook will approach ZERO in the near future. If you ask Facebook, the solution is quite simple: spend money on Facebook Ads. Give us money to reach your fans!

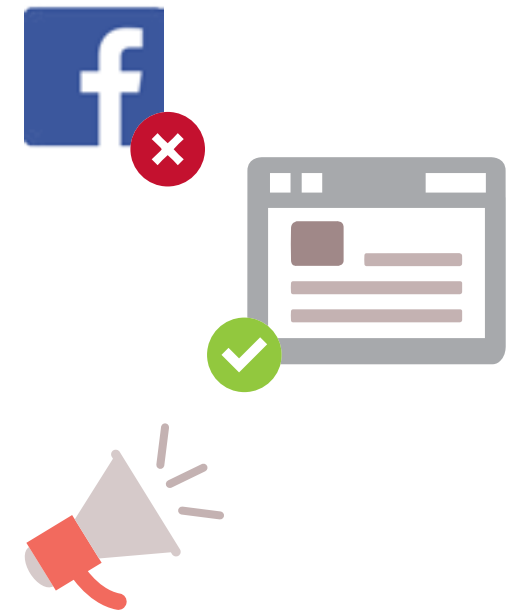
Let's consider why it's far better to engage with your fans on an owned and managed online property: your website.

YOUR FACEBOOK PAGE WAS NEVER YOURS TO BEGIN WITH

In the early days, marketers were tricked into thinking that Facebook Pages were owned media. After all, we got to upload our logo, make a stunning cover image, get access to analytics (Facebook Insights) and share captivating photos, blog posts and webinar invites.

But then Facebook changed the way it presented updates in its Newsfeed. This made it much harder for brands' Facebook posts to be seen by their fans. As a result, your owned media on Facebook became earned media (at least 6% of the time) and paid media (assuming you're willing to spend on Facebook Ads).

Organic reach on social networks is dwindling. Invest in your own, interactive website.



Your website will always be yours. You own the data. You make the rules. You reap the benefits.

DRIVE DEEPER AND MORE MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES WITH CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS

By facilitating visitor interactions directly on your website, you give fans numerous options to explore further: product pages, product videos, news clippings, press releases, blog posts, executive bios and more. You provide visitors with the information they need, while conveniently moving them along the sales cycle.

Read a related post, [5 Reasons Customer Engagement Should Happen Directly on Your Website](#).

Reason #5

Improve Key Website Metrics via User-Generated Content

Marketers constantly think of ways to increase activity on their websites: total visits, unique visitors, new visitors, pages per visit, time on page, time on site, etc. They spend a lot of time thinking about (and producing) content for their sites.

Let visitors and customers generate content for you, however, and you can scale your “content team” far beyond the members of the Marketing department. Let’s consider how user-generated content can drive improvements in common website metrics.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT FROM SITE VISITORS

For most websites, active involvement is a mouse click. I arrive at the homepage and click on an interesting link. From there, I find another page to visit (click). And then I scan the site’s header and find a different section of the site to check out (click). After a few more clicks, I may get bored and leave.

Where you can find more content for your website? From customers and users, of course.



Now, consider a more engaging experience. I click on the same interesting link from the homepage. On that new page, I see product enhancement ideas listed next to the product details. I click on one of these ideas and see that it was submitted by a customer. The idea has received 55 votes and is scheduled to be delivered in Q2 of next year.

From there, I click to a blog post authored by the submitter. I enjoyed her post, so I click “Like,” then share it on Twitter. After that, I check in on the “Activity Feed” for the site and see that my recent activity is listed at the top.

Guess what just happened? I stayed on the site much longer, I engaged with more content and I enjoyed myself. Those are all wins.

Related Website Metrics: time on page, time on site, pages per visit, bounce rate (minimize)

PARTICIPATION MAKES RETURN VISITS MORE LIKELY

Ever post a question in a LinkedIn Group? When someone replies to your post, you’ll

receive an email notification. What happens next? You log back in to LinkedIn to read the answer, comment on the response and/or send thanks to the responder.

The same thing happens on websites that include an online community. As you submit questions, post comments and publish replies, you’re more inclined to return to that site to participate in the follow-on activity. You check to see if your reply garnered subsequent replies.

Related Website Metrics: return visitors, return visitor-%

A WEALTH OF RELATED CONTENT

Websites often provide links to additional content that relate to the current page (e.g. blog posts, news articles, customer case studies, etc.). Related content helps reduce bounce rate and increase the number of pages per visit. Why? Because visitors keep finding more great information to read and share.

Now consider a website with an online community. When visiting a discussion post related to your product, the amount of

As you submit questions, post comments and publish replies, you’re more inclined to return to that site to participate in the follow-on activity.



related content is limited only by the amount of contributions provided by site visitors. Not only can visitors seek this related content, but they can engage with the content as well.

Related Website Metrics: time on page, time on site, pages per visit, bounce rate (minimize)

A DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS

With increased participation on your site, visitors will discover a community of related professionals who are there to help. As they get their own questions answered, they'll gain an interest in giving back. They may start by referring users to other posts on the site.

And soon enough, they'll start to share their own knowledge and expertise with the community. The result? More engaging website content and more loyal website visitors.

Activate visitors' desire to help others with an online community on your website.

Related Website Metrics: time on page, time on site, pages per visit, return visitors, return visitor-%

Reason #6

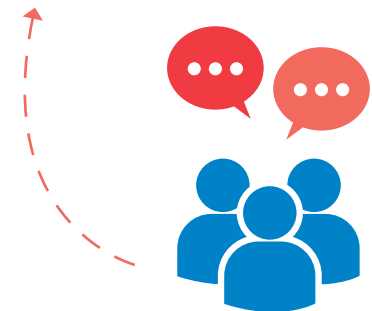
Turn Community Members Into Advocates

In a survey conducted by Gartner, "buyers stated that their number one source for understanding the differentiation of a technology provider was peers of the same size in their industry (60%). Professional communities (36%) and same size peers in their region (25%) also made the top 5." (source: [Gartner blog post](#)).

As outlined in the discussion of website metrics, engaging and community-oriented websites have visitors who come to those sites on a regular basis. And when they visit, they stay a while.

They've earned the trust of their most active users. Those active users are perfect candidates to become advocates for your brand.

Activate your community's brand advocates.



HOW TO USE ADVOCATES TO PROMOTE AN UPCOMING WEBINAR

You're hosting a live webinar next month. The typical process involves [listing the webinar details on your website](#), sending a number of email blasts to your customers and purchasing advertising programs with media partners.

Now consider what you could do with the thriving community that's part of your website:

- Publish a blog post in the community, announcing the webinar details.
- Start a Discussion thread in the community, asking members to submit their webinar questions, directly in the Discussion area.
- Privately message 10-15 of your top community members, asking them to share the blog post on social media.
- Publish a "challenge" in the community. To complete the challenge, users must share the webinar link on Twitter, Google+ or LinkedIn. When the challenge has been validated (by the community software), users receive 25 reputation points, which helps them move up on the Leaderboard.

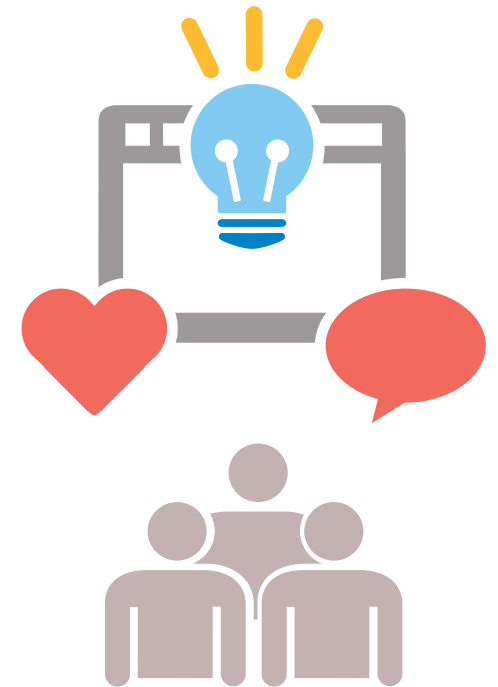
By spreading the word to your engaged community, you'll not only generate registrations from your most loyal users, you'll also enlist this army of volunteers to promote the webinar on your behalf. Turn your members into brand advocates.

How to Get Started

Today's vendor landscape provides siloed solutions: on the one hand, there are thousands of CMS solutions for managing content on your website. On the other hand are a smaller number of online community solutions. Very few bring both capabilities together in a single solution.

DNN's Evoq Suite provides one such solution. Get started by [visiting the DNN website](#).

Consider what you could do with the thriving community that's part of your website.





About DNN

DNN provides a suite of solutions for creating rich, rewarding online experiences for customers, partners and employees. DNN products and technology are the foundation for 750,000+ websites worldwide. In addition to our commercial CMS and social community solutions, DNN is the steward of the DNN Platform Open Source Project.

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