Social Communities: Don't end up making them virtual ghost towns.
-by Sanjay Abraham

More than a technology or platform, a Social Community is about people. There could be technology worth millions but if people are not engaging, the social communities are bound to fail. There are companies which feel that the social community is just another channel like email or phone and is not adding any real value to the enterprise. In some the community is almost dead. There aren't any discussions, posts, likes or any engagements. Is social business and social community a fab or a fad? Is it really happening? Before we pass any judgment, let's understand that technology is just to facilitate. You always need people to drive it.

How does a social community add value...?

External

- ➢ Drives sales

- ➢ Reduces service costs/ Deflects support calls (Remember every call to the contact center has a cost attached and that sums up to be HUGE!)

- ➢ Grows brand advocacy.

- ➢ Builds brand loyalty

Internal

- ➢ Enhances Communication (across the omni-channel)

- ➢ Aligns Employees to organization culture (CEO and the lowest rung employee sharing the same organizational value, speaking the same language)

- ➢ Social onboarding of employees – no more power point driven 'useless' induction programs, email spamming for content sharing.

- ➢ Better task & project management- deadlines met and no overruns in cost or time

- ➢ Knowledge Sharing (Experts sharing knowledge to all who need and right when needed)

- ➢ Collaboration & Content Sharing (Single version of truth. Safe & Secure file sharing/ via EFSS)

- ➢ Crowdsourcing of ideas to enable ideation & enterprise innovation.

Let's understand **'People are key'.** Without people there isn't any community. Neither physical nor virtual.

I liked a recent Forrester's® guide which proposes a 'POST methodology' for setting social strategy and it starts with **people**.

Building Social Strategy

POST

P- People| O- Objective| S-Strategy| T- Technology

1) Study the **people** you intend to target with social media

2) Define the **objectives** you hope to achieve

3) Create a **strategy** to reach your goals

4) Choose the appropriate social **technologies** and platforms.

Understanding the types of community members- There are 7 types of people based on their levels of engagement. There has to be different strategies to engage these people.

People	Actions required
Creators	Provide platform and knowledge access to create
Conservationists	Moderate good discussion to get valuable insights
Critics	Add ratings-and-reviews functionality
Collectors	Provide 'Snack able' content.
Joiners	Inspire them to go beyond 'maintaining profile' to engage.
Spectators	Feed them with more content
Inactive	Inspire them to join and get benefit of social.

Strategize based on people and their expectations from the social community.

10 steps to ensure social community success

1. Never build your strategy around technology alone- People are equally important if not more.
2. It should have alignment with organization's objective and senior level buy-ins. The community manager alone cannot make it a success unless it has top bracket sponsorship.
3. Test the waters before you take a plunge. Do 'Community Shadowing' [get insight on how communities on social networks like Linkedin, Facebook etc work.]
4. Let communities be an integral part of the enterprises' workflow. Community as a separate communication channel won't survive. It should be a part of the day to day business processes of the enterprise. **Social should be what people use to get their work done on a daily basis.**
5. It should not just be the marketing or the IT which should drive the community but a cross functional team comprising of IT, Marketing, HR, operations etc. The senior management should keep a tab on all matters related to community management.
6. Use methods like gamification for community adoption. **Gamification is not just about leaderboards or badges.** It's the secret sauce to drive engagement loyalty.
7. Build strong community Advocacy program. Empower advocates to drive engagement through activities like training, content sharing, answering queries etc.
8. **Measure**. What can't be measured could be missed. Social community too has defined metrics. Each community should be measured based on KPIs. **Use analytics, dashboards and data visualizations** to have insights about how the community is fairing, where it lacks and what needs to be done.
9. Keep all community related matters well documented. Must have are strong community guidelines & playbook. Enforce Security, Safety and ethics through moderation.
10. Follow industry best practices and build a 'Center of Excellence' for social business and community related activities.

Social communities could add lot of value if it's properly built and nurtured within an enterprise.

I am all pumped up to share more on how you could make your social community more effective. Let's clear the farrago and help the enterprise leverage on social by empowering the communities. Am sure the idea intrigues you too. How about giving me a shout?

Sanjay Abraham is an 'Enterprise Solutions Consulting, Product Marketing & Business Development' professional. He staunchly believes, 'Digital Transformation' could radically change the way business is done today and that presently Enterprises get just 43% value from existing technologies. His areas of expertise & interest include Enterprise Collaboration & Mobility, EFSS, Analytics, Enterprise Social- Social Business, Social Intranet, Social Onboarding, Social Communities, Enterprise Innovation Management, Social Product Life Cycle Management PLM, Social Project Management, Gamification & Engagement Loyalty.

Sanjay holds a Bachelors in Engineering (Computer Science) and a PG Diploma in Business Management. He has worked with top names in the IT sector like Avaya GCL & Mahindra Satyam. His client list includes top bracket names across Banking, Insurance, Retail, Telecom, BPO/ITeS, Public Services and other verticals. His contact coordinates are:

Linkedin*:in.linkedin.com/in/sanjayabraham*. ***Twitter****: @asanjay100* ***email****: abraham@ctprd.com*