Why Add Conversation to Your Website

There are several reasons why you might want to add conversation to your website and form your own online community. Some of those reasons are described below.

1. *Create a Positive Brand Experience* - It creates a positive brand experience which is valuable and differentiates you from your competitors.

2. *Create Loyal Customer/Members* - Once your customer/members begin to interact as part of your online community they engage and begin to bond to brand/cause. The greater the interaction, the greater loyalty that ensues.

3. *Get your Message Across without Advertising* - People today turn a deaf ear to advertising and most the time it's not heard and if is heard it's not very credible. However, if done properly you can get your message out with far more amplification and believability with an Online Community.

4. *Find New Prospects (Viral)* - By using viral aspects of your Online Community your customer/members can reach out to their network of friends and contacts to bring them into the community or at least introduce them to the image of your brand.

5. *Control your Message* - Your customer/members are talking about you whether you like it or not. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad. You might as well listen in. You now have the opportunity to correct negative comments. It might be change something in your organization or explain an misconception.

6. *Get Customer Testimonials* - An Online Community is a great place to pick up testimonials for use in your marketing programs.

7. *Customer Help Desk* - When your customer/member asks for help in your Online Community you can quickly and easily respond. Others listening may have the same issue and you help them to.

8. *Increase Website Traffic* - Now there is a reason for customer/members to keep coming back to your website so they can continue their conversations. This really increases your website traffic.

9. *Optimizes for Search Engines* - Search engines are looking for volume of use of a website and key words. With significantly increased website traffic and the abundance of key words used by your Online Community your search engine ranking will greatly improve.

10. *Product Development* - You can use your Online Community to bounce ideas off of about new products that you are considering. Or even better yet, ask them what they want.

11. *Product Testing* - An Online Community is a great place to test. You can send samples out and get feedback back. You can run survey's, run focus groups, and have your customer/members chat about the thing you are wanting to test.

12. *Data Mining* - You can collect data about your customer/members. You can have them fill out information on their profile pages or ask them to complete a questionnaire about themselves.

13. *Spend Less on Marketing, Saves Money* - Your community can become evangelists for your company/non-profit. Through viral and word of mouth aspects, they take on some of the load for marketing in your organization.

14. *Make Money, Maybe* - Sometimes you may even choose to profit from your Online Community. You could sell display advertising on it and provide links to buy products or services. However you have to be careful and not make your community to commercial.

What are the Downsides: The following are some of the potential downsides of creating an Online Community for your organization.

1. *Development Costs* - The cost of developing your own Online Community website and tools is very high. However, fortunately there is ready to use off the shelf software ready to use. Ping Mini offers robust ready to use Online Community software for a modest monthly price enabling you to start immediately.

2. *Staffing Costs* - An Online community website will not manage itself. It has been estimated that it takes 1 full time person to manage 50,000 customer/member users on the site. For many and most, a person assigned on a part time basis can manage the site, especially in the early days before traffic escalates.

3. *Public Criticism* - One downside is that someone posts a negative comment for everyone to read. Although this is hard to accept (people are saying the same thing outside your community, you just don't know it) it provides an opportunity to turn it into a positive. You can react by changing something inside your organization or set straight an misconception.

   It is best not to censor a negative comment but deal with it head on. The reason is that the online community is part of a culture that values transparency and free expression. If you censor you may find your censor all over the Internet in blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

4. *Undesirable Content* - Occasionally you will receive offensive content. Your assigned Community Manager can be trained to deal with this behavior and how to censer it.

5. *Customer Sense of Entitlement* - The great thing about an effective Online Community is that customer/members can become deeply involved with the brand and take on ownership. They can become angry if changes are made without consulting them. It is important to anticipate the problem and to walk a delicate line between making your customers feel important vs. letting them think they are in charge.