



How to profit from your connections and relationships

A Flightdec guide to self-managed Community Building

USEFUL FOR BUSINESSES, COMMUNITY GROUPS AND SCHOOLS

If you are an organisation in the habit of routinely posting to Facebook and sending out an occasional PDF newsletter by email, you are well on the way to making some rudimentary steps to community building. But it's scratching the surface of what's possible and you can dramatically improve that basic process without much extra effort.

When you promote content about your organisation, interests and activities – for example, news items, events, useful information and ideas for sharing – the goal, over time, is to engage as many of the right people as possible with your organisation. We call it 'community building'.

It is one of the most powerful, yet simple, things an organisation can do to inform and build positive relationships with your community. But it is often relegated to a 'nice-to-do' status, rather than an 'essential-to-do' status.

COMMUNITY BUILDING: a Flightdec definition

A community is a group of people (large or small) that you define as important to the vitality and wellbeing of your organisation. It may be a community-of-common-interest but might also be quite diverse and segmented.

When an organisation gives more and raises the importance of its community, the community gives back and raises the importance of the organisation.



Consider just a few benefits:

- An organisation that communicates openly and often with its community is better connected, supported and enjoys a stronger reputation. You are valued as a leader and facilitator, and the goodwill that results has incalculable benefits, especially in times of stress
- Well informed stakeholders help mitigate the risks from unhelpful misinformation and speculation, and this reduces stress and tying up time answering needless queries
- Where two-way communications are encouraged, valuable two-way feedback is available and the organisation itself is better informed.

For community organisations and businesses, all of the above translates into a more profitable working environment where it's possible to do things smarter and more efficiently.

With digital communications at your finger-tips, it has never been easier to build a supporting community through regular communications.

These guidelines are for those who elect to self-manage, which we encourage, but there are an infinite number of layers that take it into a more sophisticated and professional space. So if outsourcing is your preference, please contact Flightdec at mail@flightdec.com

Start with the right thinking

Organisations communicate in various ways but are often unsure why they're doing it and whether it's the most effective method. For example, many people think communications are only about what you wish to tell people (e.g. come to our event) and how the message reaches people (e.g. make a PDF flyer and send an email).

For the organisation this might feel a bit scattergun, which means your audiences are sure to agree.

So, begin by sorting your thinking in a systematic way with the five basic elements of communications.

1. **Send the right messages** – how do we generate good copy, images, headlines, music, etc that will capture attention, give people something rewarding and burnish your reputation?
2. **To the right people** – who is important in our segmented audiences (core and secondary)?
3. **At the right times** – when is the best time to communicate and how often?
4. **Using the right methods** – what communications or media channels are best and most efficient?
5. **Using appropriate resources** – how much time, effort and money is appropriate?

Then, as with anything you do, start planning with what you want to achieve and create a set of SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound). That will give your activity direction and keep you motivated as you work towards your goals.

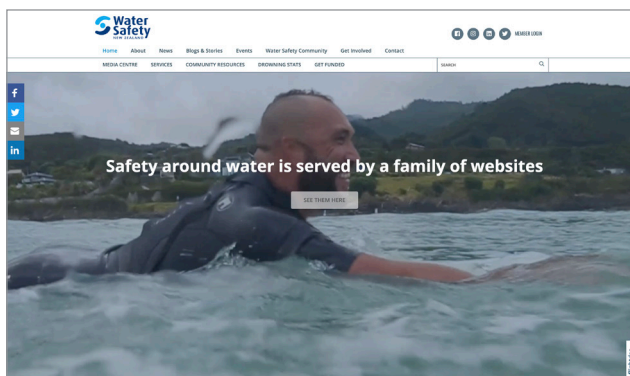
How to make community building super-charged

Put your website at the centre of your community-building strategy and actions.



This might work against everything you have done before. After all, many websites are static and unloved, while social media and emails are awash with dynamic content. Yes, social media is easy and instant while a website takes a bit more time. But the instant option is not always the best option.

Your website should be the most important element in your communications and community-building thinking.



So the trick is to make your website the authority on everything your organisation is doing, not just the static information that hardly ever needs changing. That means your news items, events, blogs and articles should be posted to your website as your first priority. And your website should have things that draw people back again and again.

Why wouldn't you just use Facebook to do that?

First, not everyone is on Facebook, so it excludes too many people in your community.

Second, where else, but in a website, can anyone with a browser see all your information (recent and archived, and long and short), including events, news and survey questions, in one place where it's easy to go from item to item.

Third, you own the website and fully control the reliability of content and interactions.

Consider this situation. You are promoting an event. If you promote all your event information in an email, what happens if you change the date or details for the event? The out-of-date email is still current in hundreds of browsers, you can't change it, and many people might not notice an updated email.

Short snippets of information in an email, with links to the appropriate website pages, help the reader and allow them to quickly scan email content, with links to web pages that are always up-to-date.



By making the website the trusted place to find the correct information, your various communications act like spokes around the website hub. You manage the processes more efficiently, avoid fragmented communications and drive lots more people to your website.

A simple action plan

Following is a simple process that you can implement easily. It places the website at the centre and uses social media, email and other forms of communication to build wide-spread engagement.

Start with a monthly plan

The plan example (below) assumes an average of two posts per week to the website (aiming for Monday and Wednesday). You might start with less activity, then increase the frequency, over time. The website posts might be a combination of news items, blog posts, events and occasional media releases and articles.

Note: to share the load, you might identify say four people in your organisation who can write a fortnightly blog post or news item – that provides at least eight posts per month.

Having posted two website items per week, each post then prompts a social media entry (with link to the website). Perhaps, in addition, there are a few extra social media posts that make up say 12 posts per month.

Then your plan is dedicated to at least one E Newsletter despatch per month.

Monthly plan

M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
W		W					W		W					W		W					W		W				
S		S	S				S		S	S				S		S	S				S		S	S			
E																											

Web Post Social Media E Newsletter



Note: whether you use social media or other communications methods, it's a good idea to have an email strategy. Many successful organisations work hard to build a valuable email database, given that it is one of the very best ways to ensure messages are getting across. In doing that, it is much better to use an email platform, such as Mail Chimp, than plain emails and attached PDFs. That's because an email platform makes it easy to add attractive graphics and text within an attractive email; it includes a data management system (to segment audiences), it includes analytics on mailings; plus it allows the capture of sign-ups directly from your website.

Tactical activity

Occasionally you might wish to overlay one-off activity onto your monthly plan, for example, promotion of a special event.

In this case the idea is to start with an event post into the website, with all the required information about the event, but you then make additional posts (e.g. news and blogs) – with links back to the event post – to multiply the activity and reach more people.

In the plan (below), an event post is made, along with a media release (about the event). This then prompts a series of website posts in support of the event.

Overlaid onto your monthly plan, this tactical plan is obviously incorporated into your regular social media, email and other communications activity.

Tactical plan

M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	
Event Post																					
B							B							B							B
N														N							
M																					

Blog post **News post** **Media release**

Flightdec Kaupapa

Why Flightdec exists: We are challenged to harness the power of the internet, to better connect and empower people, so that wellbeing, social cohesion and sustainability can be improved for more people.

What we do: We build and support high quality websites, which can be hyper-connected to other websites, to safely and more reliably share valuable information and resources.*

* Shared content, through the posting of information, news and resources, etc, helps people tell their stories, find quality information, develop assets, build relationships, make sales and promote themselves.

7 guiding principles for your community-building effort

1. If the organisation truly believes in the benefits of community building, moving from a 'nice-to-do' status to 'essential-to-do' status requires agreement and full commitment at all levels of the organisation. A proper commitment is impossible if it's an outlier run by individuals.
2. Make a commitment to keeping on track by putting your plan in writing, then briefly documenting and reporting to others in the organisation on a regular basis.
3. Think of community building as a marathon, rather than a sprint. The real rewards come over time, so don't be impatient and give up too quickly if the results are not immediate.
4. Consistency of effort is important. Create your action plan and commit at least one person, and a chunk of regular time, to your website, social media, email and any other communications.
5. Start your activity with what you believe will work and then learn, experiment and make changes as you go – see the next page.
6. Focus on rewarding the reader with good quality and attractive content. That means thinking about making content digestible, e.g. videos and graphics; and making every post interesting and useful for a reader. And always grab people's attention with compelling headlines, and attractive and appropriate pictures or graphics. Above all, make it interesting for readers – not everything you wish to tell people will be interesting for them.
7. Communications is a two-way street. Encourage dialogue, reverse discussion and plenty of community input.



Keep track and improve as you go

How do you know your activity is working? What impact is it having on those you wish to engage? What can you learn to improve your messages, your post timings and the audiences you are targeting?

Use your SMART goals to set a few big parameters for tracking progress. At a basic level, you might use Google Analytics to track traffic levels to the website, noting when you get good responses to posts and when you get lesser responses. But you should also be looking at less tangible goals, such as gauging the satisfaction levels of the people you wish to engage. So, ask questions in communications and run feedback places on your website. You might also engage a group of stakeholders who can be asked their opinions from time to time.

The following is among a range of analytics monitors you can freely employ.

- Google Analytics
- Social media metrics
- Share analytics, e.g. using AddThis.com
- Email analytics, e.g. using Mail Chimp.com
- Monitoring interactions and comment on posts and social media
- Conversations (or research) with stakeholders.

As previously mentioned, it's a good discipline to set up a page or two that reports on your performance measures. For example, how many emails were sent over a period, to how many contacts, which prompted how many responses? And how did your external communications impact on traffic to the website and what were the main pages people went to. You might report monthly, having used the first report as a template for all your following reports.

Notes

A key analytic for many organisations is the number of names and quality of the email database. Email provides a cheap, consistent and reliable way to reach-out to your community and is likely to be much more valuable and reliable than social media contacts.

The art and science of gaining more traffic to your website is called Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This is not covered here but suffice to say that all of the above provides essential support to your SEO.

Footnote. An important feature of your Flightdec website is its ability to share posts with other agreeing Flightdec websites (as back-links to your website). This adds to the power of website posting because every post receives extra exposure, automatically, in many places beyond just one website.



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