

Online Communities

Online (or also virtual) communities are online platforms or virtual rooms where a group of people is interacting with each other on a regular basis. In contrast to [market places](#) online community members are united in a common activity or interest. They can get to know each other, interact post questions and get answers. The main characteristic thus is the member interaction.

The community movement emerged out of the raise of [Web.2.0](#)¹⁾. Before that user generated content has been no issue in the internet world. Only the technical evolution in changing content of websites and interacting with other users allowed the huge development into the community world and finally social network world. But not only the network world is changing. Also the real firms reacted on the internet growth. With so called [Social Media Monitoring](#). The last years they learned to observe, analyse and interpret the postings of the people. So they are able to react to all positive and negative opinions of them.

Types of online communities

You can find several approaches in order to categorize online communities. As fast as the internet world is changing as fast are communities growing and developing.

By Functionality

- **Internet message boards:** Is a general term for any online “bulletin board” where you can leave and expect to see responses to messages you have left²⁾.
- **Virtual worlds:** A [virtual world](#) is a computer-mediated reality which presents the user with an experience which can be reasoned about as if it is a world, but the representation of that world is not required to be analog to a possible physical alternative³⁾ e.g. [Second Life](#).
- **Online chat rooms:** Place online where a group of people can get together and chat about a particular subject or just to chat. Usually you will need to sign in at least so you have a name in the room and then you can see who else is in the room. Some chat rooms allow you to talk to one individual without the others seeing your conversation⁴⁾.
- **Social networks/Social Media:** Social media describes the online technologies and practices that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives. Social media can take many different forms, including text, images, audio, and video. These sites typically use technologies such as blogs, message boards, podcasts, wikis, and vlogs to allow users to interact. Prominent examples are e.g.⁵⁾.
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [MySpace](#)
 - [Youtube](#)
 - [Twitter](#)

By Motivation

- **Leisure:** Users spending their leisure time in the internet in order to talk with other users, to chat, to post questions and get answers. The topics are broad. Over the last few years **Social Network Games** have developed into a major factor among the potential leisure activities in Social Networks. Currently three of the top four apps on Facebook are Games. Popular games have immense user-numbers, currently topped by *CityVille* with more than 90 million and *Farmville* with more than 45 million active monthly users.⁶⁾
- **Relationship:** Platforms like E-Darling, Elite Partner or “ “Friends Scout 24” are highly succesful with the aim to find for the users “the real love”. A lot of money is made on these portals.
- **Fix something:** Users have a problem and they are asking the virtual community to solve the problem. Topics can be “do it yourself”, “Cars”, “Hobbies”, “Internet / PC / technical problems” etcetera.
- **Self-Improvement:**⁷⁾ If you want to improve your life, want to change your job, or need to get help on a certain personal issue e.g. medical questions than you will find plenty of advisory communities online.

By Purpose

- **Peer-to-peer Community:** Fan forums, special interest communities
- **Community** revolving around editorial/authored/branded content
- **Customer Relations/Support:** Managing technical support and feedback with community elements
- **Innovation/Ideation Community:** Solving problems, improving products
- **Platforms:** Allowing any type of user generated content to be published e.g. youtube, flickr⁸⁾

Most popular online communities

[Online Communities - an overview](#)

Social communities

- [Facebook](#)
- [XING](#)
- [Linked-IN](#)
- [My Space](#)
- [Twitter](#)

Conclusion

Online / Virtual communities are the place where the internet user is posting its opinions and is receiving its information. The community world has grown to an unmanagable world of plenty of blogs, boards, communities, chats and portals. In times of Web 2.0 and consequential the [Social](#)

Media Movement companies shouldn't underestimate the power of these channels. In 2011 only 7% of all money spend on online advertising in the US went into Facebook, while Google and Yahoo! took a combined share of 52%.⁹⁾ Being part of it and creating valuable content can influence the success financially and image wise of a company.



1) Buss A., Strauss N. (2009): Online Community Handbook: Building Your Business and Brand on the Web, 2nd edition, New Riders, CA, p. 4-8

2) unknown author. "Forum and Message Board Definition". <http://www.forum-software.org/forum-message-board-definition> . 12.09.2011.

3) unknown author. "What is virtual reality". <http://searchcio-midmarket.techtarget.com/definition/virtual-reality> . 12.09.2011.

4) unknown author. "What is a chat room". <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/chat-room.html> . 12.09.2011.

5) Randy Duermyer. "Social Networks". <http://homebusiness.about.com/od/homebusinessglossar1/g/social-networks.htm> . 12.09.2011.

6) Dona Collins, "Infographic: Social Gaming by the Numbers", Tipewiremagazine.com, 16 June 2011, retrieved 3. Jan. 2012, <<http://www.tipewiremagazine.com/2011/06/infographic-social-gaming-by-the-numbers.html>>.

7) Richard Millington. "the four types of online communities". <http://www.feverbee.com/2008/09/the-4-types-of-online-communities.html>. Web. 12.09.2011.

8) unknwn author. "Types of online communities". <http://www.texastee.de/2011/01/types-of-online-communities/>. 12.09.2011.

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9)
Richard K. Miller, The 2012 Entertainment, Media and Advertising Market Research Handbook, Loganville (Georgia), 2011, p. 167.

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