

Making Your Static Site a Community

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I have a client with a financial services Web site that helps people track and control their spending and plan for the future. They have asked me to provide some recommendations for turning their password protected site into a full-fledged online community, something similar to Facebook.

As I considered the opportunity to provide this feedback, I decided there are others out there who could benefit from similar counsel, so I would like to offer the following:



Six Things I'd Do to Turn My Static Web Site into a Vibrant Online Community

1. User Profiles

- I'd add to the username and password criteria for each user.
- I'd make it a lot more like Facebook, where the user can input various pieces of information about his or her lifestyle, profession, family, likes/dislikes, etc.
- I'd include multimedia capabilities so the users could upload a profile picture, as well as pictures or video about their quest for financial freedom.

2. Share-Ability

I'd use a tool like ShareThis.com to make every page on the site and in the community sharable. The easier it is for people to share information with their social networks, both inside and outside of any specific community (whether it be Facebook or this



financial services site), the better. The whole shift in online communication is one of sharing tidbits of information with your online friends.

People expect interactivity.

I'D MAKE
IT A LOT
MORE LIKE...

facebook.

3. Forums and Discussion Boards

I'd incorporate the ability for users to create discussions focused on specific topics and solicit feedback from other community members, similar to how people use groups in LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) to solicit information. It would also be important for company representatives — the financial coaches, etc. — to participate in these online forums to guide the conversation and respond to inquiries.

4. Instant Messaging

I'd add as many ways as possible for the members of the community to interact both with each other and with representatives from the financial services company. Provide for online chatting, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, online contact forms, text messaging, mailing addresses, etc.

Use all the communication technologies to connect and stay connected, both online and offline.

5. Support Through Social Media Platforms

Publicize the financial services community, its features and benefits, on multiple social media channels:

- Establish a Facebook page
- Create a LinkedIn group
- Publish videos on a YouTube channel
- Maintain a Twitter account
- Publish photos in a Flickr photo-stream

This off-site activity should be used to drive people to the financial services Web site. This is what I call *inbound marketing*.

6. Content

The company should use Web pages (home and landing pages) rich with content geared specifically for its buyer personas.

Through in-bound marketing tactics, the company should see increased site traffic and interest in its community. If not, do some testing to solicit feedback on different home or landing pages to see why people aren't signing up to become a member of the community.

Other Recommendations?

Do any of you have additional recommendations on how to take a static Web site and turn it into a vibrant online social network?

Do you have experience with Ning or BuddyPress? These are both pretty easy tools you could use to build your own social network.

Please share your suggestions with me at www.codellamarketing.com.



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