
Community Sites Can Make You Rich and You Can Start One For Under A \$100 In A Single Afternoon

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What is a community site?

- Any site whose content attracts like-minded people and whose website/software allows those like-minded people to instantly communicate, interact, and comment on the site's relevant content.
- A community site's content can actually be created by the community members.

Goals for a Community Site

- User's experience a sense of belonging – "community".
- User's develop strong ties to the site and return often.
- User's help build the site's content by contributing "to their own community".
- User's help grow the site by viral means. For example, recommend to a friend, posting links on other sites, rewards programs and contests.

Member Created Sources of Content

- The forum posts created by the members
- Articles submitted by the members
- Comments left by member about the content on the site; they could both create the content and then create more content commenting on the content.
- Ratings and reviews of content left by the members.

External Sources of Content

- Your existing content such as articles, auto responder text, ebooks.
- News services such as AP, yahoo news, prweb, etc.
- RSS feeds
- Videos from youtube, vsocial, or pay to have them created.
- Pictures from Flickr and other picture services.

What is the best software to use to build community sites?

- Joomla
- Mambo
- Phpbb
- Vbulliten
- Wordpress
- Drupal
- Vbulletin

How do you decide which niches/markets to build a community site in?

- Magazine articles
- Newspaper articles
- TV stories
- Alexa.com
- <http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/>

How does the criteria for deciding on the topic differ from deciding on building e.g a mininet around - or is there a difference?

- Building a mini-net around a single product is a lot different than finding a topic for building a community.
- One community I'd like to build has refused for many people to buy products. Yet they love to talk amongst themselves and a large company would love to target them for branding campaigns.
- Perfect for a community, bad for a product.

When will "The Next Big Thing" be ready? Can you give us a bit of insight about it?

- It has been ready since January but we have been improving and making sure it is bug free for 4 months.
- We will start accepting applications for the initial group of users as soon as next week.

How do we keep getting people back to the community site?

- Letting them create the content is key.
- Letting them comment on, and discuss the content is key.
- Letting them communicate instantly with each other (not in private necessarily) is key.
- Letting them spread the word in a viral way is key.
- Press releases, feeder sites, JV deals, and such keep fresh recruits coming in.

How do you evaluate a market that you'd like to enter and monetize with a community site?

- Is there a topic that creates great passion?
- Is there enough people involved with it to create a sustainable site?
- Are the venture capital companies funding such “demographics”.
- Are the target demographics appealing to advertisers; do they spend ad money on them?
- Is there a lasting source of “conversation” that can help foster community and the creation of content?

What if there are already free community forums? Are free sites viewed as a good market indicator vs. a challenge?

- Free sites are good indicators.
- Free sites are also an opportunity for us to buy into the market; free site owners don't always know how to monetize like we do.
- Free sites are great sources of recommendations for our site.
- Free sites are a great source for us to buy cheap ads for our sites.

What's minimum amount and type of information before going live?

- You have to have enough content that is of interest to the end user to help foster the initial discussions.
- Having at least a few hours worth of “browsing” content is enough.
- Having at least 10 or so “topics” of content is necessary to help foster interaction.
- Having the tools to interact from the start is a “must have”.

Why is Myspace so popular? Anything we can learn from this and niche down? Features should adopt in our community sites?

- Social Networking is possible due to the web's instant communication, feedback and gratification capabilities.
- People want things to happen "right now" and they love to feel that they are a part of something "bigger"; religion, communities, sports fanatics, iPod users, etc.
- They have a say in not only creating new fresh content for the site, they have the ability to instantly discuss their opinions on the very same content that they help create.
- Social networking sites also allow individuals to become something that they are not in real life.

How do you monetize a community site?

- Upsell offers to “exclusive” areas of the site.
- Selling ad space on the site.
- Selling affiliate products to the list.
- Selling the site itself.
- Adsense

If there are free sites in my market how can I evaluate profitability and get them to cooperate and/or compete with them?

- Produce videos, podcasts, and articles on your site of interest to their people and let the other site know about them.
- Multi-media files cost big cash to host so they will more than likely let you host them. If they don't, just put bounce backs in the content.
- Produce content of value that they can send to their list like articles and pdfs.
- Create an affiliate product for them to promote
- Ask if you can republish some of their content on your site.
- Mention them in your blog and use trackbacks.

How to select / determine market potential for building a profitable community site? Are there certain characteristics one should look for?

- Look for
- Large body of potential members. A few hundred can be profitable but thousands are better.
- Ever fresh content source so they can continue conversation. A single event doesn't make for longevity.
- Demographics that money is being spent on.

Am I right to think they can apply to trades and professions?

- Yes, I have friends making money in professions markets. Trades would work.

Should the site owner moderate all comments fed back by members/ visitors?

- No, instant gratification and communication is key to success.
- Set it up so the user's police themselves by putting "report bad stuff to us" links and such in the forums.

What are the key components required before launching the site? i.e. a blog, a newsletter, what else?

- I'd say a cms system to administrate your initial content and any additional content you provide.
- A commenting mechanism that allows for immediate "interaction".
- A forum for immediate interaction and conversation.
- A few autoresponder messages.
- Enough initial content so the site doesn't look deserted and enough content to spark enough ongoing conversations so they can maintain themselves.

Can adsense be applied to such a site or does that detract from its purpose?

- Yes, millions a month are possible and are a key component of ongoing profitability for you and any potential buyers down the road.
- I know people who make millions from their community adsense accounts.

What software/tools should be used to give community members the chance to chat live with each other?

- Forums
- Private messaging
- Chat rooms
- Video and audio IM that is integrated into the site.
- A list will be included in the final action plan.

If I were to build my first community site tomorrow - what 10-step method could I follow?

- This is much more than a screen shot.
- I'll put action plans into the final report.
- Identify the market.
- Estimate profitability of market
- Identify potential content sources
- Design exit strategy
- Choose software for site
- Design marketing campaign
- Etc.

You have mentioned Joomla and Mambo - which of these would you still recommend for developing community sites and would you get a programmer to create the site for you or would you advocate learning the system yourself first?

- Joomla is where I'm working now but mambo is fine.
- Joomla seems to have the open source community support going forward.
- I have my sites programmed and installed for me.
- You need to know how it works to tell the programmer what to do.
- I use InstantCommunitysites.com

How do you start things off to get the discussion going and people posting?

- Create podcasts and submit to itunes
- Bring in guest “speakers” and announce.
- Press releases
- Offer incentives for joining now like free bonuses and even cash prizes for the first person to create a 100 posts, etc.
- Create an affiliate product in the market to sell and give them free access. Builds the list even if they don't buy.

What kind of site layout is best to get people coming back.
i.e. what do you include apart from the discussion board?

- Your Blog
- Give them their own blog
- Podcasts
- Articles
- Reviews
- Commenting
- Chat rooms
- Guest speakers
- videos

How best do you integrate affiliate products into the site?

- The mailing list built
- Adsense
- Banner ads
- Recommended resource pages
- Videos that show how to use them
- Host teleconferences
- Use your own domains to redirect

Is there any software to build a big community site easily?

- Joomla
- Mambo
- Phpbb
- Drupal
- Phpnuke
- InstantCommunitySite.com

Once your site is up, what is the single fastest way to get traffic to the site to start generating income?

- Affiliate promotions for a related product and give the site as a bonus.
- Affiliate programs for the site upsells
- Press releases
- PPC

How do you maintain continuity, and build up traffic on, a community site whose subject you are ignorant of and uninterested in? I know you can find free or paid moderators (i.e. experts in their field) to come and post, but how does it work in the beginning? I do have my own fairly successful forum, but it was on a subject I already knew a lot about. And for several weeks to months, I was the major (and often, only) poster. So, how do create and build the momentum when you know nothing about it?

See next slide for answer

Don't Know anything about subject

- Guest moderators
- Take an interest
- Have employees
- Press releases
- Become an expert
- Advertise to build fast

Are there case studies of good and bad community sites?
What mistakes do people usually make .

- I'll have to do a video on this one.

How to find and select themes to focus the sites on?

- See where the money is flowing
- Check the search patterns at yahoo buzz and such.
- Check out the top sites on alexa and look for similar sites

The best place to find experts to contribute to the site?

- Search for them using the engines.
- Yahoo groups
- Google answers
- About.com

Do you outsource all the site building or have you come up with a way to get the build automated with a few clicks (such as custom software or scripts)

- Both.

When thinking about what community to serve... is it best to think about a niche or a demographic? Is a demographic too broad?

- A demographic is perfect.
- Niches can work if the niche is easily identifiable and spends money.

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