



In the past few years, you may have heard the term “Community” used in conversations you never expected to hear it. Community has probably popped up in talks about learning, knowledge management, the web, and content delivery. Community? Many of these conversations have probably focused on what people want online communities to offer and may not meet your preexisting understanding of the term itself.

As a result, I'd like to introduce (or reintroduce) you to the term Community and address the critical elements that will make online communities successful in the context of what community really means. Here is background information and some interesting resources to learn more about physical communities and those you may find or want to build online.

This information is a shortened list from the Learnativity.com website. For the full references see > [www.learnativity.com/community.html](http://www.learnativity.com/community.html). Enjoy.

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## What is a Community?

In the physical world, communities are typically groups of people (a town, for instance) held together by some common identity or interest. The same holds true for virtual or online communities in that they, too, are comprised of people with shared identity or interests coming together for a shared purpose.

This shared interest or intent offers a strong forum for members of the community to build relationships and affiliations out of which they can learn from one another and make an impact on the society or culture around them.

Coming from two Latin words meaning “with gifts,” the term community suggests a general sense of altruism, reciprocity, and beneficence that comes from working together. Communities help generate a shared language, rituals and customs, and collective memory of those that join the group.

## What is the History of Community?

Communities in society have always been supported by whatever tools are available to their members at the time. Before writing, communities were very small because the enabling communication vehicle was the member's voice. Members shared their issues and concerns, triumphs and stories in person because that's all they had.

Once writing was developed monks and scholars continued to meet in person, but were able to extend their communities by writing down their stories and sharing them with people beyond the sound of their voice. Socrates supposedly said that writing would lead to the end of civilization because people didn't have to be amongst one another any more. With Gutenberg's printing press, more people were able to contribute to the community and share their messages. Paul Revere's postal service became another tool, extending some communities wider... and then there was the telephone, the car, the airplane, and the Internet.

None of these tools has replaced the community. They have simply extended community's reach, its depth, and its potential impact.

## What are the Qualities of Good Online Community?

1. Strong connection between participants
2. Critical mass of content from community members
3. Integrated rich content and transactions
4. Choices between competing merchants alongside unbiased consumer testimony
5. Timely
6. A sense of fun and discovery

### EMAIL LISTS ABOUT COMMUNITY

Online Community Report  
<http://www.onlinecommunityreport.com>  
Towntalk  
<http://www.dynapolis.com/towntalk/>  
Learning Communities Egroup  
[http://www.egroups.com/group/learning\\_community](http://www.egroups.com/group/learning_community)

### GOOD BOOKS ABOUT COMMUNITY

*Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity.* E. Wenger, 1999.

*Communities in Cyberspace.* M. A. Smith, 1998.

*Net Gain: Expanding Markets Through Virtual Communities.* J. Hagel, A. G. Armstrong, 1997.

*Hosting Web Communities.* Cliff Figallo. John Wiley & Sons, 1998.

*Smart Business: How knowledge communities can revolutionize your company.* J. Botkin, 1999.

*Community Building on the Web: Secret Strategies for Successful Online Communities.* Amy Jo Kim, 1999.

*Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace.* R.M. Palloff, K. Pratt, 1999

*Creating Learning Communities.* J. Levine, N.L. Shapiro, 1999.

*The Community of the Future.* The Drucker Foundation. 1998.

### RECENT COMMUNITY ARTICLES

“Learning in Communities.” E. Wenger, W. Snyder. LINE Zine Summer 2000.  
[www.linezine.com/1/features/ewwslc.htm](http://www.linezine.com/1/features/ewwslc.htm)

“Knowledge Diffusion through Strategic Communities.” J. Storch, P. Hill. Sloan Mgmt Review Winter 2000.  
[mitsloan.mit.edu/smr/past/2000/smr41.html](http://mitsloan.mit.edu/smr/past/2000/smr41.html)

### ONLINE COMMUNITY TOOLS

Here is a small sampling of tools that can help you develop an online community.

**Pensare** develops knowledge communities that drive teamwork, learning, creativity, and business results. [www.pensare.com](http://www.pensare.com)

**Addapt.org** offers a community tool that helps develop high-trust business partnerships among individuals and organizations. [www.addapt.org](http://www.addapt.org)

**Real Communities** is building scalable, standardized, configurable, and integrated community infrastructure software. [www.realcommunities.com](http://www.realcommunities.com)

**Communispace** enables professional learning communities for collaborative learning and knowledge creating work. [www.communispace.com](http://www.communispace.com)

**Participate.com** offers integrated online community management software. [www.participate.com](http://www.participate.com)