

Raising Forums

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Managing forums is much like raising small children. Change is difficult for them to process and if left to their own devices and without focus, they run wild, finding ways into all sorts of mischief. However, just like children, running a forum can prove rewarding when done right and the best way to put a forum on the right path is to plan ahead.

There are three decisions, if made at the onset of the forum, which will save the administrator and the users much frustration.

1. The target group must be chosen.
2. The interface needs to be designed.
3. The rules of the forum must be set and a moderator assigned to uphold them.

1. Choose the target group

If a forum is designed for a business, the target group is usually fairly well set, seeing as a business is designed for a specific purpose and group of customers. Nonetheless, even businesses need to be aware of their target group when designing a forum to ensure that their forum coincides smoothly with their type of business. If the business focuses on customer service, then the forum's target group and topics should focus on customer service instead of the recipe of the month. If the forum completely misses its target group, it becomes unsuccessful due to unprofessionalism and too wide a net.

2. Design the interface

Next, the interface of the forum needs to be designed. Just as the target for the forum needs to dove-tail with the target of the rest of the website, so the interface needs to match the rest of the site. The colors and styles need to be appropriate for the type of business that owns the site as well as being classic enough to survive the waves of change through time. People's taste changes constantly, but people are creatures of habit all the same. When it comes to customers' personal web pages, they change the colors and style with their moods. However, when they use a company's site and forum, they want the same basic layout every time they log on. They do not want to hunt for buttons or links. When Facebook, for example, changed its format to what it is now (buttons rearranged, links moved), the users complained mightily. Therefore, one of the most effective ways to earn complaints and lose users is to change a forum's interface.

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3. Set the rules & assign a moderator

Finally, the third way to prevent chaos on a forum is to set rules and moderate. Controversy and debates can be good things. They generate interest and many comments; however, without supervision, they can get out of hand. Many individuals still retain that one aspect of childhood that is not so pleasant and they will post comments that are insulting and inappropriate in the worst of ways, which is where a moderator comes into play. The moderator simply plays the part of a referee to ensure that everyone in the sandbox is playing nice, and to kick the rule breakers out of the forum.

Once the target group, the interface, and the code of conduct with moderator are in place, a forum is on the right path to running smoothly. PhaseWare's SSC provides you with all the tools you need to raise the forum your company deserves. Try it free today.

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