

HOW TO ESTABLISH AND RUN A SUCCESSFUL PRIVATE ONLINE COMMUNITY (POC)



Establishing and
running POCs for Co-
creation and insights

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HOW TO ESTABLISH AND RUN A PRIVATE ONLINE COMMUNITY (POC) FOR CO-CREATION AND INSIGHTS

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WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS eBook



- 1) The growth of social media has fuelled a dramatic increase in use of Private Online Communities (POCs) to co-create with customers
- 2) POCs save you money and provide richer insights from an engaged audience
- 3) To reap the full benefits, POCs must be set up and run properly. This eBook shows you how

The dramatic growth in use of social media by consumers has led to a corresponding increase in the use of Private Online Communities (POCs) and their acceptance as a valid research tool.

POCs are the perfect tool for interacting with your customers to build brand advocacy and to conduct research and co-create with an engaged audience. However simply

owning a POC doesn't guarantee results. To develop it into a real asset for your organisation, it needs to be set up and run effectively.

This eBook will show you how to define the scope of your POC, the role of the community manager, how to recruit and replenish community members and, above all, how to effectively incentivise and engage them to get the most from your POC.

It is the ideal companion piece to our eBook on how to apply a range of tools and techniques to use your [POC for research and co-creation](#).

Now is the perfect opportunity to engage with your audience using POCs. To find how to effectively set up and run one of your own, read on....



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CHAPTER 1

What is a Private Online Community?

What is a Private Online Community (POC)?

Despite widespread use, there is still some confusion regarding POCs, probably because:

1. There are a number of terms used for client owned online communities –the aforementioned POCs, Branded Online Communities (BOCs) or Market Research Online Communities (MROCs).

2. These terms are also often mistakenly used in reference to online panels, especially “private” panels that clients have custom built for research purposes.

Panels and communities are quite distinct. Put simply, a panel is a group of consumers that a client will conduct surveys with – perhaps once a month or so. The client asks questions and panelists give their answers in a fairly structured way.



However with a POC, not only can clients ask their community members questions using qualitative and quantitative research techniques, but also members can interact with the client (or host) and among themselves. The nature of the community allows them to do this in a much more unstructured and ad hoc way. And it's opening up these boundaries and restrictions posed by more conventional research that enables communities to get you closer to your customers.

We differentiate between online communities for co-creation and community panels by the number of members they contain - ideally between 50-500 for co-creation and more than a thousand of members for community panels. Large communities can also be used for quantitative online research in addition to using sub-communities for co-creation.

For a POC to develop into a long term resource for a organisation, it is crucial to get the establishment and management of it right.

A community can last 3 weeks, 3 months or 3 years depending on objectives and available budget.



CHAPTER 2

Why Should a Brand Own a POC?

Why should a brand own a POC?



Private online communities should be part of every brand's customer strategy. They can be used for [co-creation](#) and for other more traditional marketing research objectives.

Communities create potential for genuine dialogue and relationship building both among consumer members and with the brand owner. If run correctly, these communities can develop into a powerful research resource that also [builds brand advocacy](#).

The research element is not restricted to just asking questions –when your community members are interacting with one another it's a great place to simply listen. It's a bit like finding out what your customers and potential customers think of your brand, once you've left the room!

Brands want to know what the connected consumer of today, thinks and feels so that they can align their marketing approach for maximum impact, for advocacy.

This is especially relevant as consumers are now also publishers on earned media where "followers" or "likes" are earned based on merit.

A POC can also boost low incidence of niche respondents that otherwise make research projects cost prohibitive.

Owning the sample in a private online community or community panel means that you only pay for sample acquisition only and can then use it as and when required.



CHAPTER 3

The Establishment Process for a Private Online Community

The Establishment Process

Setting up and managing a POC from scratch can be a daunting process, so we would suggest breaking it down into the following stages, which we will cover in this eBook. The “Run Activities” stage is a topic in it’s own right and examined in more detail in our eBook on [the research applications of POCs](#)

Define Scope

- Size of the community
- Specific objectives and target members
- Customisation

Recruit

- Utilise appropriate resources and channels to recruit members
- Appoint an Online Community Manager (OCM)

Engage

- Talk to members from the first day they join
- Connect them with each other
- Plan activities for the duration of the community

Run Activities

- Execute research activities
- Encourage co-creation
- Reward participation and share results

Replenish

- The OCM will minimise member attrition
- Some members will inevitably drop out
- Define a replenishment cycle



CHAPTER 4

Define Scope

Define Scope

What are the specific objectives and scope of your POC? Is it mainly for the creation and enhancement of your products or communications? Or is it for more traditional marketing needs such as customer segmentation, pricing research, purchase habits, usage and attitudes?

What is the scope in terms of duration, geography, community size, profile of participants? Should your community be branded or should it be "blind" so community members do not know who the owner is? If you are engaging creatives or early adopters for co-creation of products it should be okay to brand the community. However for broader research a branded community may well cause bias among members who know the brand paying their incentives!

However if a primary consideration

is to build advocacy then a branded approach may be favourable.

You will also need to consider statutory regulations that affect certain sectors, for example Pharma, Alcohol, Tobacco or Gambling carry additional codes of conduct for research and advertising.

These are all questions that need to be answered before you start looking for someone to build, recruit and manage the community.

It is usually better to have one supplier/partner deal with all these tasks for a more seamless integration. It is important that the online platform functionality is adaptable, if it cannot already support a wide range of research techniques then it is unlikely that it will be flexible enough to accommodate a brand's research and co-creation needs.



CHAPTER 5

Recruitment

Recruitment

The best way to recruit members to a community is to use your existing assets! Because your brand will already have interactions with consumers both online and offline, the best starting point is to utilise what already exists.

If you have a Facebook fanpage, you can invite your fans to join your Private Online. DigitalMR has developed an application, meaning existing fans can be seamlessly invited to participate in research and can access the private community environment from their facebook login. Once community members are inside the private environment it is possible to segment further, so that sub-communities of the fans based on specific research requirements may be created. And because the platform utilises a "Facebook" look and

feel, participants feel at home straight away and will be ready to participate in co-creation projects right away.

Other options include inviting Twitter followers, members of a loyalty scheme or simply people from your CRM or direct

emailing database. Also If you run an [active web listening](#) programme this is a powerful tool to indentify and recruit key influencers to your community. For more see our eBook on [Finding and engaging influencers](#).



Community Member Types



Recruitment Methods

1. Use existing email database
2. Buy email database
3. Social Media
4. Consumer Panels
5. Banners on relevant websites
6. Face to face/offline



CHAPTER 6

Motivation to join and participate

Motivation

In addition to providing a higher purpose to members for being part of the community it helps to use gamification and also extrinsic motivation for higher engagement and lower attrition.

Incentivising membership and participation depends on the nature of the community and type of brand it supports. For example some luxury brands, charity brands, aspirational and iconic brands automatically create an emotional bond among users and admirers. These groups of people require little additional incentive to participate in POC activities!

However for most of us a little incentive is required to recognise and reward the time and attention participants give to their community.



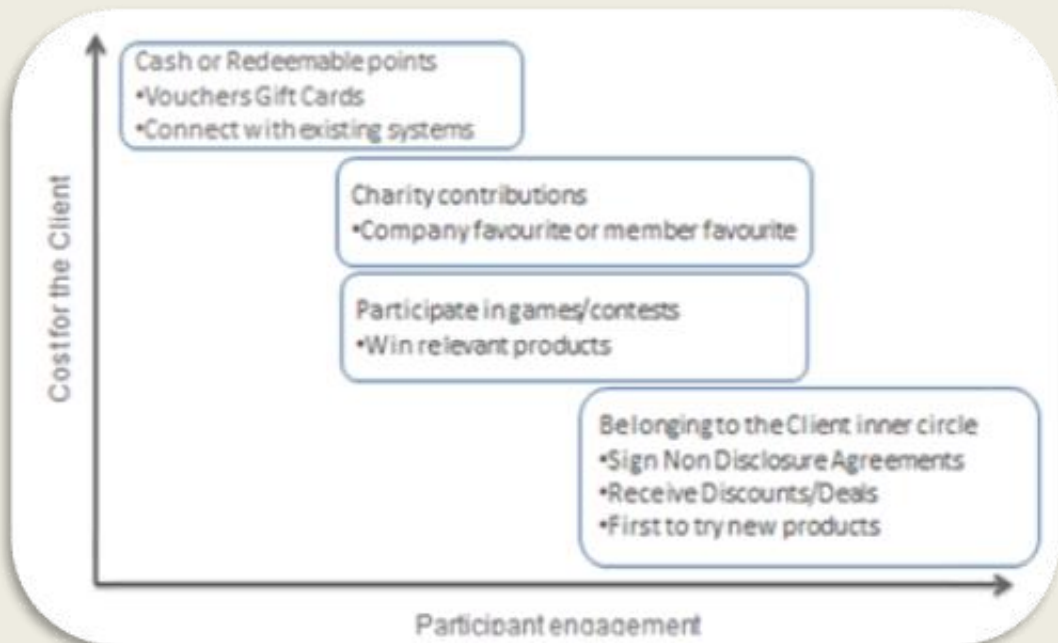
Although cash rewards can usually be effective in the short term, it helps to be a bit creative in order to build long term buy-in to a POC project. These options can include product tests and giveaways or contributions to charity.



The chart below shows a range of incentives available. The aim is to stimulate participation through active engagement rather than simple financial reward. It helps generate more of an emotional attachment to the community and affinity with the brand which in turn develops online advocacy. Two keys to developing engagement are:

1) Use interesting research tools and techniques (see [How to use POCs for Co-Creation and other research](#))

2) Use an experienced community manager, whose role we will explain in the next section.



CHAPTER 7

The Role of the Community Manager

The Role of the Community Manager

It takes a lot of resource to recruit a community of customers – so you want to keep hold of them for as long as possible! To save money in the long run and maximise the usefulness of your community, it makes sense to invest in a capable online Community Manager to minimise drop-out and keep members engaged.

Engagement is what sets a POC apart from other types of research. Highly engaged community members are more likely to take part in research initiatives, more likely to take the time and care to let you know their true feelings (and more likely to discuss brand related issues among themselves).

But this level of engagement doesn't just happen overnight. It needs to be nurtured and managed on an on-going basis by an experienced Community Manager. Think of your community comprising a large number of guests for a big dinner party. You have a large room full of individuals with shared interests, but they don't really know each other and may be reluctant to interact initially.

As host, the Community Manager is there to welcome new joiners, break the ice, provide games and activities for people to get involved in, and subjects for them to talk about. When the conversation begins to flow you are then in a position to listen with interest.



However, while dinner parties have a start and a finish, a long term community is ongoing and constantly evolving. Once members are interacting, you need to maintain freshness and active engagement. There needs to be enough interest and motivation to keep them interacting with you and with each other. It's very much a reciprocal relationship. If your community becomes neglected and members begin to leave, not only is research weakened, but advocacy is lost and you'll need to work even harder to get it back.

Whereas the previous role of the research manager may have been more project-orientated, the Community Manager is more about long term continuous development. Over time you build deeper relationships with consumers and in turn they will provide you with deeper levels of insight. If you are able to make your guests feel welcome

and value their involvement, they will begin to feel that they are a part of your inner circle, that they are informed about the outcomes of surveys and discussions, and that they have a stake in processes such as product development.

Because social media allows customers to interact with organisations at the time of their choosing, it's only fitting that research platforms should try to enhance this experience further. Research has previously been restricted in the degree of interaction it can provide. But by adopting a social media approach and treating your "sample" as guests or collaborators you can now become the perfect host and really engage with your customers for co-creation, allowing their views to be listened to, acknowledged and acted upon.



CHAPTER 8

Keeping your community fresh

Keeping your community fresh

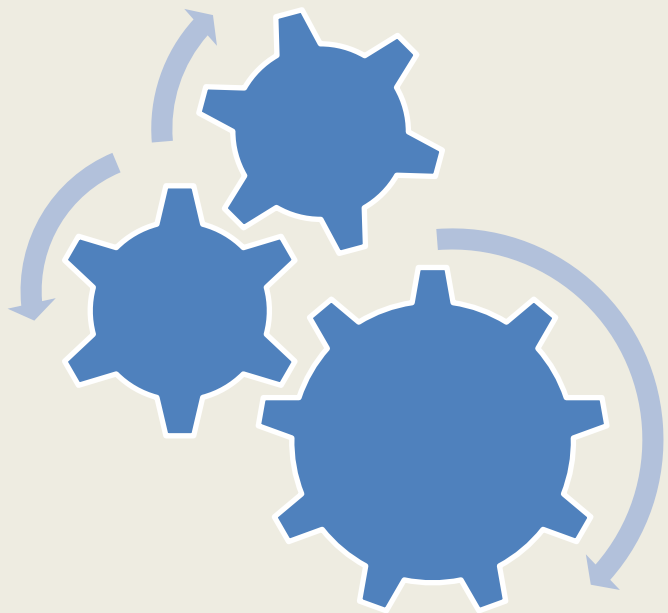
The community manager will play a crucial role in keeping your community active and stimulated.

The other key area to focus on is the range of tools and research techniques that can be deployed to maintain interest and help you better interact with your communities and customers. [Click here](#) for more on this topic.

Replenishment

Once the community is up and running, the hope is that member attrition will be kept at a minimum. However there will inevitably be a degree of drop-out and there needs to be an ongoing process to “top up” the community. This will keep your

sample size up, giving you more flexibility for research projects, and also keep the community fresh, welcoming new people with new ideas and opinions.



CHAPTER 9

Research Applications

Research Applications

There are many ways to apply the activity tools for market research and co-creation:

- Idea generation for new product development
- Ad and product concept testing and refinement
- Product testing
- In-depth tracking of brand perceptions and competitors
- Observe occasions of product usage for customer experience evaluation (ethnography)
- Evaluate and explore new target groups
- Discuss various topics and identify perceptions relating to the product category
- Identify trends
- Evaluate customer experience and improve loyalty
- Usage & Attitude



Common Applications of Community Research

Launch Monitor

Testing concepts and DAs pre and post launch to refine and track new launches

Finding Influencers

Who are your brand ambassadors and how will you foster their input?

Innovation

Ideation sessions with key targets to develop new concepts and upgrades

Communications

Understand how to use your customers' language in marketing campaigns



Rapid Polling

Answers to your burning questions delivered overnight

Advertising

Stimuli evaluation and alternative video concept testing

eDiaries

Ongoing written, video and photo diaries delivering continuous qualitative insights

Events

Tailor live events to the requirements of your attendees

In addition to all the ways described above a community owner can also let the members of the community discuss among themselves and just listen for “gems”.

We love ideas at DigitalMR, if you have a new idea on how you would like to use your POC for co-creation, [get in touch](#) to explore the possibilities further.



CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

Conclusion



The era of brand control and one way communication is long gone. We are now witnessing a transformation of our society that fundamentally changes the way we market and sell products.

Private online communities are one of the most important tools for marketers today and has been *the fastest growing method* in the market research industry over the last two years.

Of course simply owning a POC is not enough. It needs to be set up and managed properly and in order to get the most out of this valuable resource you also need to use the right tools for the job within the community.

A POC should become a long term resource for your organisation that will generate insights, help you co-create with your customers and develop greater online advocacy among them.

Using the stages for POC establishment and management outlined in this eBook will ensure your community is a place for vibrant exchange of ideas and opinions for years to come.



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