

Customer Communities

Online customer communities and social networks provide a means for customers to connect and collaborate with each other, answer each others' questions, solve each others' problems, and have an inside track into things they care about. They also provide a valuable way for companies to support, engage with, learn from, and empower their customers.

They also are changing the ways organizations do business in this customer-empowered, Web 2.0 world. Different companies have taken different paths in defining the ownership of community initiatives, but community is, almost by its very nature, a cross-departmental thing. Interactions with community members, therefore, don't always fall neatly within the established (and often guarded) lines that define business units.

How you approach the development and ongoing management of your customer community will depend on your company's size, culture, organizational structure, and industry, among other factors. What value *you'll* get from the community will similarly depend on a number of factors, not least of which is the value that your customers get from being part of the community.

RESEARCH TOPICS:

- Product Reviews
- Vendor Landscape
- Industry Trends
- ROI Analysis
- Organizational Challenges / Community Ownership
- Community and Social Media Strategy
- Case Studies
- Best Practices
- Types of Customer Communities
 - Service & Support Communities
 - Brand/Affinity Communities
 - Professional-Peer Communities (a.k.a. Communities of Practice)
 - Private Communities
 - Partner Communities
 - Developer Communities
 - Lead Customer Communities
 - Independent Communities

CONSULTING

We work with select clients on different types of engagements related to customer communities. While every client has unique needs and every project is different, our consulting focus is on the business value of online communities, in particular on measuring the ROI of communities and making them profitable. While there are many factors that contribute to the success of an online customer community – e.g., technology, staff, executive buy-in, best practices, and more – we've learned that the most neglected component is involving customers directly. Fully understanding how your customers, in their various segmentations, want to interact with you and the community often makes the difference between a successful and unsuccessful one. As this is our core expertise, our consulting approach emphasizes bringing your customers (and partners, too, if applicable) into the conversation, often using our Customer Scenario[®] Mapping methodology.

Consulting engagements include:

- ROI / Business Impact Assessment and Planning
- Technology Platform Evaluation
- Coaching and Mentoring

RESEARCH

Our research focus is on the strategies, technologies, and best practices that help ensure successful communities, with “success” being measured from both your and your customers’ perspectives. We discuss strategic issues and business challenges (especially ROI and organizational management). We write in-depth product reviews of the technology platforms – and the companies behind them – that support customer communities, as well as other promising and relevant Web 2.0 products that connect enterprise organizations to their customers. And we write case studies, best practices, and how-tos that provide practical, actionable guidelines for community sponsors, managers, and anyone else looking to create, manage, and grow a successful long-term customer community.

Company / Platform	Product Review / Profile	Analyst Coverage*	Informal Coverage
Awareness		✓	
HiveLive <i>LiveConnect</i>	HiveLive's LiveConnect Platform	✓	
Jive Software <i>Clearspace Community</i>	Jive Software's Clearspace X	✓	
Leverage Software <i>CommunityConnect</i>	Leverage Software's CommunityConnect Platform	✓	
Lithium Technologies	Lithium Technologies Online Community Platform	✓	
LiveWorld		✓	
Mzinga		✓	
Small World Labs		✓	
Telligent <i>Community Server</i>		✓	
Webcrossing		✓	
CollectiveX <i>Groupsites</i>			✓
CustomerVision <i>BizWiki</i>			✓
Ning			✓
Socius			✓
Wetpaint	Building a Customer Community with Wetpaint		✓

* See ["Online Community Platform Company and Product Update: Strong Results for First Half 2008"](#)