

Facebook Groups and Online Communities



Joining an online community, like a Facebook Group, can be a great way to find your target audience for your business or organisation.

For example, you could be managing the social media for a running shoe company and find a group for people interested in running. Or, if your business services a local area, you could join the local suburb group.

However, online communities are *social* groups - they are casual spaces for conversation, so direct selling is often frowned down on, if not explicitly banned in some groups. In the same way that at a dinner party, you wouldn't pull out a PowerPoint presentation, direct sales pitches are not seen as polite in most online community spaces.

However, you can provide genuinely helpful information for that community, which just happens to be from your brand. For example, the running shoe company could share in their group a blog post from their website, which is a listing of upcoming running events, or even a blog of tips for the best breathing techniques for running. These blog posts are genuinely helpful for runners, it avoids a direct sales pitch, but also brings their likely audience directly to their website - a prime place for them to view your products.

In many cases, Facebook groups will not join on behalf of a business page so that you would be posting as an individual - yourself. Keep this in mind as you may become seen as a representative of the company, which is fine as long as you are aware of this going into it! As a social media manager, this can be awkward if you're working for several companies or brands, but everyone chooses how to walk that line themselves and strike that balance.

Best practice for engaging in online communities recommends:

- Ensuring you read the rules of each online community if it's a forum or group—each one will list what kind of posts are not appropriate. Some groups will explicitly state if sales are allowed, or if on certain days. Follow those rules.
- Listening before posting—reading content for a few weeks before engaging means you can understand the kind of content people are posting and what the community culture is.

- No direct sales—if someone does show interest in your services, recommend they get in touch offline or via a private message. Don't pitch in a public space.
- If you start a conversation, follow up to continue it. If someone responds to your post, it's courteous to respond. Genuinely join the community by engaging in conversation every few days.

Facebook Groups are not the only community groups online. LinkedIn has groups, but there are also other spaces like Quora or other online forums which might also be useful spaces to interact with. There are some very active forums still to this day for niche things like four-wheel driving or camping!

Creating a Facebook Group

Creating a Facebook Group run by your business can be a great way to be seen as a thought leader in a space.

Like the example earlier, a running shoe company creates an online community for runners. It puts them in a great position to point to resources, events and promotions from their company.

Of course, it is still a social space, so regular heavy promotional content will not build community and connection - but once a quarter, you could leverage the group in this way if it's something they would genuinely engage with anyway (such as a competition).

However, unlike a Page, the goal of a group is a *community*: which means that other people can join the space and post conversations about whatever they like. This means that strong community management, setting rules or guidelines and sticking to them is particularly important in this space.

If you're looking to start a group, I've got several handy resources here:

- [7 Reasons to Set up a Facebook Group for Your Business](#)
- [How To: Set Up A Facebook Group \[CHECKLIST\]](#)
- [8 Must-Do Tactics to Grow Your Vibrant Facebook Group](#)

And of course, [Community Guidelines](#) are essential for managing a group.