



KNOWLEDGE HUB

Online Chats

Tips for Hosting a Successful Online Chat

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What is an online chat?

Online chats are one of the best examples of using a discussion forum for community building.

Members meet at a set time to discuss issues of community relevance. These chats can generate tonnes of conversation, and build deep connections between the people taking part.

Before you get into the meat of starting your own online chat, it's important that you know what is involved.

An online chat is when members use the group's discussion forum to talk about a common interest with others during a predetermined time. It is led by a designated moderator who will ask questions and facilitate the discussion.

Now that you have a better grasp of what an online chat actually is, you might be wondering whether running one is worth the effort for your community.



Why you should host an online chat?

An online chat is more than just a fun event for your members. By participating in the conversation and injecting your relevant comments, you create opportunities to connect with new members. It also helps to:

- Enable members of your community to be identified as influencers.
- Make new connections with relevant members.
- Share valuable and informational content with your group.
- Boost your activity through increased mentions and discussions surrounding your group.

Now that you know an online chat can benefit your group considerably, you need to know exactly how to run your own online chat.

How to choose the best time to hold an online chat

This is going to differ with groups. Here are some variables to consider when deciding when to host your online chat:

- What's convenient for your participants?
- Where are your participants located?
- Are there other events going on around the same time?

Obviously, you can't cater to everyone, but try to settle on a time that's convenient for most people.

You can always look at your Google Analytics for the times and dates that members tend to visit the group the most and plan around these.



How to promote your online chat?

An online chat isn't that exciting if only two people show up. The more active members you can get, the more beneficial for everyone.

So how do you get people to join in the conversation?

Leverage your existing group functions. For instance, add a new Event to your group about the online chat, send out a range of Group Messages promoting the chat and highlight the event as a new Group Announcement.

When adding the online chat to your group's events listing, ask members to say if they would like to participate.

You can then create a list of participants and @mention them before the online chat starts.

How to manage the online chat

You've planned and planned and now it's finally time to launch. Assuming you didn't skimp through the previous points, you've probably got at least a few people tuned in at the proper time.

Since you've planned your content in advance, your first step will be to kick off the chat with a welcome message that introduces the chat and sets the tone. Draft the first message in advance, to make sure the chat begins at the time your participants expect.

A few rules to adhere to during the chat:

- Questions and answers follow the following format (Q1/A1 structure for questions/answers)
- Frequency of questions in most chats ranges from five to 10 minutes
- Engaged chats have a minimum of 3 questions or as many as 6 to 10
- Adjust the number and timing of questions to fit your audience

During the chat, remember that you're the host and can nudge the conversation along. It also helps to 'like' the best of your participants' answers.

Respond and probe deeper when you can, and encourage collaboration with follow-up questions.



Not only will this put the spotlight on your participants as the subject matter experts, it will create a livelier conversation.

As your chats grow and you get more participants, it's a good idea to get more people from your team involved to help manage them and join in. This will help you cover more ground and prevent participants from feeling ignored.

Don't forget to close the chat and thank everyone when it's time to bring the online chat to an end.

What do I do when the online chat has finished?

First, give yourself a well-deserved pat on the back. However, you're not quite finished. Now it's time to measure, curate and learn.

Measure

Look at the number of replies and views and have a quick look at the number of responses you had against each question.

Was there a particular style of question that received more responses?

How many members participated?

You may also wish to check out Google Analytics to view the number of people who were logged in and looking at the online chat.



Curate

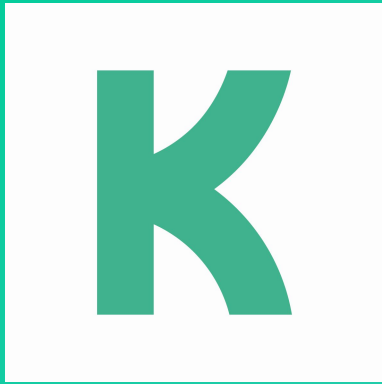
Make sure to curate the best responses and conversation for later reference. If the conversation was particularly interesting or memorable, also consider bringing some of the best content together into a blog post or an article for the group.

Highlight prominent community members and mine the responses for “quotable” nuggets.

Learn

You'll find that some of your best learnings will come from looking back at the metrics and going through the content.

These insights will help you tweak the delivery of your next chat.



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