# Designing a Portal and Community with the Community Generator

**Norbert Fröschle**
*Fraunhofer-Institute, Germany*

## INTRODUCTION

What is behind a Web portal—indeed, it is a community. People in virtual groups and rooms. But, what is an *Internet business community* and how is it possible to *social-engineer* these communities? This article deals with this topic.

## BACKGROUND

### Definitions

A virtual community is, in the sense of Rheingold (1993), a group of people communicating or interacting with each other by means of information technologies, typically the Internet, rather than face to face.

The idea and phenomenon of virtual communities, the genetic DNA of how computer networks are populated by people—in private-closed, public-open or semi-public spaces—offer a rich background for business practice.

Hagel and Armstrong (1997) outlined the commercial application of communities behind Web portals with a growing number of community-contents, loyalty and customer relationships, member-profiles and transactions in "Net Gain: Expanding Markets through Virtual Communities." Additionally, Participate.com ex-post measured the benefits of virtual communities with instructive results (Cothrel, 2000).

On this basis Fraunhofer-Institute, in Germany, developed a common definition for "Internet business communities" (Bullinger, 2002, p. 25). Internet business communities are economic networks for professional relationship management of employees, customers and business partners.

The essential principle is a membership; on that condition services for specific users and user groups can be customized.

After the registration, non-members get a user account, which conduces to protect the community-access, read permission, write/change permission, or billing. During the login members are asked for their username and their personal password; subsequently the data is compared to the data of the existing user account. The purpose of the login is to identify the member and also permits to create closer user profiles; current member profiles are the basis of every Internet community.

Schubert (2000) specifies nine different types of profiles: profiles for identification (username, role, contact information), system profiles (User-ID, rights and operations), session profiles (access paths, click streams), socio-economic profiles (age, gender, hobbies), preference profiles (user preferences), profiles for interaction (logfiled data), sub-community profiles (matching of preferences), profiles based on a specific case (provision of preconfigured opportunities) and transaction profiles.

### What are the Objectives of Internet Business Communities?

The central benefit of Internet business communities is *sharing*: share of know-how and relationships between members—for the benefit of the individual, of the company and of the new unit *community*. objectives of Internet business communities are (Figure 1):

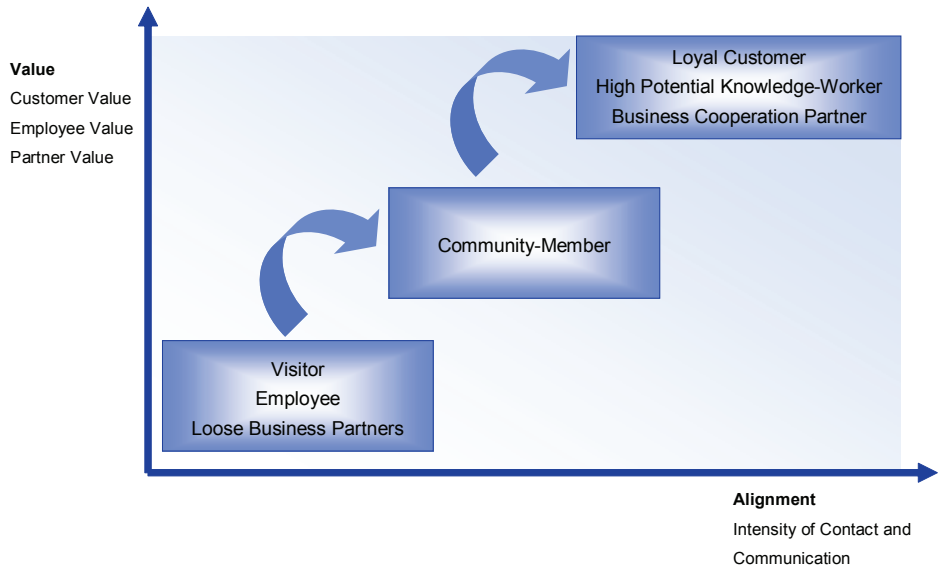
- to turn a visitor into a community-member and then into a loyal customer;
- to turn an employee into a community-member and then into a high potential knowledge-worker; and
- to turn a loose business partner into a community-member and then into a institutionalized business cooperation partner.

### The Unique Selling Proposition

In Internet business communities, distinct from static Web sites, members know each other. In Internet business communities, distinct from portals, members may communicate with each other. In Internet business communities electronic marketplaces can be populated, distinct from common online-marketplaces often only consisting of catalogue databases. Furthermore Internet business communities have three essential and constitutive cores:

- **Core I (Prosumership):** Customers, employees, and business partners are co-working on the value creation of the network.
- **Core II (Development from 1-1-Relationships to N-N-Relationships):** Distinct from broadcast media community-members are both, sender and recipient.

*Figure 1. Objectives of Internet business communities*




Individuals (who want to belong to each other) share exclusive goods among each other trough community-tools.

- **Core III (Business Supply and Business Usage):** A company as an economic benefit-maximizer uses Internet business communities to drive its business targets like cost-cutting and profit realization. Internet business communities can be seen as the missing link between businessmen, products, digital contents and Internet business.

In an explorative comparative study Fraunhofer-Institute analyzed 133 "wild-life" Web sites with private-closed community-rooms and membership groups and derived seven types of Internet business communities (Bullinger, 2002, p. 37-97):

- Customer- or Product-Communities (Type 1), for example club.nokia.com or mcafee.com
- Company-Communities (Type 2), for example SAP corporate portal or mckinsey.de/knowmatters/quarterly
- Service-Communities (Type 3), for example groups yahoo.com or gmx.de
- Project-Communities (Type 4), for example dl2100.de or egov-goodpractice.org
- Knowledge-Communities or Communities-of-Practice (Wenger, 2000) (Type 5), for example experts-exchange.com or openbc.com
- Online-Shops Communities (Type 6), for example amazon.com or dell.com
- E-Market Communities (Type 7), for example supplyon.com or ebay.com

All seven types are characterized through the provider-operator-configurations (e.g., one or more providers and operators, e.g., equivalence of provider and operator), the functional main orientation (information, communication/cooperation, or transaction) and the domain as its center of gravity.

Van Waarden (1992) defined a framework for the socioeconomic analysis of networks (dimensions: members, functions, structure, institutionalization, convention of interactions, distribution of power) which can be used for real and virtual communities. Kim (2000) wrote a leading handbook about how to run a virtual community. The challenge still was how to design a Web portal and a community—for scientists and practitioners.

## DESIGNING A PORTAL AND COMMUNITY:COMMUNITY GENERATOR

Fraunhofer-Institute has developed an easy and consistent method and tool called "community generator," elaborated and proved in many different research, education, and commerce projects. With the help of the community generator, values can be set in the three dimensions of communities —contents/functions, users/usergroups and rights—and the virtual community is designed.

Three steps are necessary to generate a community in general (Bullinger, 2003, pp. 557-561):