

# Virtual Community

Real People

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# Intro: Communities

- Real communities are filled with real people
- Virtual communities are filled with...  
virtual people?
- Of course not, the experts all agree:
  - Figallo, Turkle, to name a couple
- Real communities are filled with real people, and that's why they're hard to build

# First Rule of Virtual Community

You are dealing with real people

- This rule is sometimes lost in the pursuit of good design or community objectives
- The services of any virtual community need to be directed first toward the people using the community
- That's a good thing, right?

# Wrong.

- Because of real people, virtual communities are a *lot* more difficult to design than, say, toasters
- *And* it's not something the technology can fix...
- Software doesn't care that the users are real people, and real people are almost impossible to reprogram

# One Approach: Usability

- Usability studies are useful, don't get me wrong...
- But if you follow the usability experts, your community will look like *Yahoo!*
- ... and that's where your members will go
- What's more, even *Yahoo!* has dead communities
- Thus: it takes more than great design

# What do People Want?

- The technology matters, but people will struggle through if they find something of value...
  - Like content, for example... content they are looking for *now*
  - *And* they are looking for the personal touch
  - *And* they will take the shortest possible route to find find it (*that's* where technology comes in)

# What Will People Give?

- The experts – people like Rheingold or Hegel and Armstrong – say that a community must value members' contributions
- But in so many communities, members don't contribute *anything*
- Why won't people share? Hint: it's *not* because they're greedy, shy, or incapable

# Second Rule of Virtual Community

Make it easy for people to contribute to the community

- Mailing lists are vibrant, busy communities
- This is because contributing is as easy as sending an email
- *That* must be the standard for virtual communities



# How to Make it Easy

Lessons I've learned:

1. Send the community to the user (as, say, an email newsletter)
2. Fill the newsletter with stuff they'll read (satisfying the content *now* criterion)
3. Add a 'reply' function embedded in the email

# Third Rule of Virtual Community

Give people something interesting to respond to

- People won't comment if there's no topic
- They *won't* get excited about press releases
- You have to express a point of view
- Be honest

# What Makes Communities Rock?

- In a word: people
- Real people
- Expressing real opinions
- This isn't simply the best way to build a successful online community – it's the only way