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A New Community

There are many types of communities out there, for example church, neighborhood, school, and each type of community means different things for different people. However, there are also online communities that tend to be overlooked when thinking about "community." Examples of these online or virtual communities are chat rooms, forum boards, and web sites. This paper I will focus on forum boards and the communities they form. I will show the differences between how people communicate online and off-line, some of the advantages and disadvantages of forum boards, as well as what some forums specialize in.

A forum board is a place to post a wide range of topics and, like blogs, the members of the forum reply to your original post. "Conforms offers Free Remotely Hosted Message Boards which are completely customizable with hundreds of features already built in allowing you to build the kind of web community you want" (conforums.com). When I got my first computer with internet access, I didn't know how to do anything with it, or navigate the net for that matter, and I would always get frustrated with the computer. About two years ago, while surfing, I saw some forums, but at the time, I didn't know where I was. I was curious, I signed up to see what these forums were all about.

After I realized what they are and by signing up with several other forums, I found myself in a community that is world-wide. Although some web sites have a forum, it is mostly controlled by the moderators of the company that owns the site. On normal forum boards it is mostly laid back, letting you post whatever is on your mind, as long as it's reasonable. In some instances the forums are closely monitored, for example, you can't post any pictures that contain nudity because it goes against the terms of use that you agreed to once you signed up. However, there is no rule that says that someone can't post a link to another site up for others to view.

The way people communicate off-line is totally different. If it is understood what you are talking about, you don't have to say it over and over again like online. The word or series of words can be omitted, and its message will still be understood until someone changes the topic and catches every one off guard. Communicating off-line is also different because people can see who you are, and can also see your body language, which enhances communication.

People on forum boards communicate via a posting system and you need to come back to your post later to see if you have received any response to your posting. The members of your group can make very long posts, up to a maximum of 500 words per post in most forums, or chose to simply say "hi." Forum boards are broken down into different subject matter or topics, and then once the subject matter is selected, a new list pops up showing all the posts related to that subject matter. From here you can make another post, or just read some of the other messages already there. Sometimes short hand words are used such as tx or tnx, depending on who posted, for thanks or thank you.

There might also be some acronyms in some posts, things like LOL or even LMAO, which means “Laughing Out Loud” and “Laughing My Ass Off” respectively.

Although communicating off-line has a purpose, online communication have many worthwhile advantages. The most important advantage is that people can't judge you by the way you look. You may have to work on getting your personality out there, so that the people online feel that they know you a little better. This is not the only advantage of chatting or posting on forums, there is another advantage which I share with many others. Often we feel that we can actually communicate over the net and not be intimidated by other people. This is why some people think that other forum members turn to each other in times of crisis and feel like they are just one big, global family.

The disadvantages for being online are numerous, but like the advantages I will only discuss a few of them here. One of the biggest disadvantages is that you cannot actually identify who is online. You can't even tell if they are lying to you in their profile. A person you think is male, they might actually be female or vice versa. For heavens sake you can't trust the age of the person! Another disadvantage is that you can't interact with the people physically, as you would off-line. There are ways to communicate in real-time over the net via of IM, or Instant Messenger services or IRC or Internet Real-time Connection networking. Some problems result from this as well; especially if you can't make it go smooth, such as meetings or regular chat rooms because it's hard to keep track of the conversation which is constantly changing. Another disadvantage of forums is all the pop-up ads that appear. This is especially true when all you get is advertisements for sex related stuff, like “how to please your woman” and “how to enlarge your penis size 5 inches,” which can be offensive to many people,

especially if they have children. Also there are too many ads for travel destinations, cheap fares, and other such nonsense. I can understand on forum sites why they do this, it is their main source of income, and permit them to provide their services free of charge.

Forums also have a wide range of topics or subject matter that the site specifically deals with. For instance, one forum might be a made-up squad doing missions in an RPG or Role Playing Game, while another one is more like a Final Fantasy type of game where you need an IM service to battle each other. I am involved with two squads that are of a Robotech basis. Robotech being a very popular television series back in the year 1985, and is set up like the Navy or Air Force ranking system. An example of real sites that I'm with that is set up like this is silverx.conforums.com and oni.suddenlaunch.com. In the RPG section of the site, there are several missions with the most recent one at the top. Each person posts after the last post to follow along with the story that the other members create as the story goes on.

Another type of forum is an online type of game where you battle each other to declare a victor. This game isn't played on the forum site but in a chat room, with each person taking turns attacking the other person. However this type of forum is good because you can post whatever you want to, and a majority of the site is dedicated to the game. One section just deals with members win/ loss records, and another only includes the gaming rules. An example of this type can be seen in dicemaster.conforums.com and ff12.conforums.com, both based on the Final Fantasy games.

Virtual communities can mean different things to everyone online. I like being in a virtual community, especially if you know the people in your community. It's like having a family on your computer, or just a close tight knit group of friends, to help

support you whenever you feel down, and just knowing that they care is enough to brighten any ones day.

Works Cited

Conforums.com. Copyrighted 2002-2003. 5 Dec 2003.

<<http://www.conforums.com/index.html>>