

# Improving Employee Retention with Online Communities

## Best Practices for Building and Managing Employee Communities

Much is being written these days about communities—both social networking communities and communities of interest specific to each organization. Communities have emerged as a critical tool for building and maintaining customer loyalty and satisfaction, but such communities can be an equally effective tool in improving employee retention. Building a thriving employee community promotes a sense of shared experience, as well as a sense of influence, which are important elements for building a strong bond within the organization. Adding regular feedback processes to the community to create a shared voice for the employees takes this connection to the next level.

Studies have shown that successful communities emerge when the members have a sense of presence and influence. For an employee community, these elements help distinguish an employee's perception of being less of an interchangeable part and more of a vital component of a collective body that has a voice in shaping the organization. Indirect feedback and peer-to-peer dialogues through vehicles like blogs and forums are certainly an important component to communication, but a true employee voice is established when there is regular and consistent feedback. When the employees believe that they have a voice that carries influence, it deepens their commitment to the organization and encourages ongoing feedback, creating a continuous, positive dialogue.

Soliciting feedback from employees is certainly nothing new or revolutionary. However, the track record for such initiatives is certainly not a good one, as data is often collected but not truly used to make critical business decisions about the employees. More directly, employees rarely see any of the resulting analysis from the process and too infrequently see any physical evidence that there is change that flows from their participation. Creating and managing a panel of respondents from an active employee community can address these historical problems and perceptions.

First, the community provides a central forum to recruit and manage an employee panel. Recruitment begins by clearly articulating to the prospective respondent the benefit of taking part in the process and how much time they will be asked to invest. Managing survey fatigue is a key element to making these panels effective, and respondents need to know that you will respect their time. Once a respondent agrees to be part of the process—a double opt-in is best to ensure that they are aware of what they are agreeing to—the next step is to build deep profiles of each respondent. This will allow for much more targeted feedback initiatives that focus on specific issues or concerns within specific groups or departments.

After the employee respondent is engaged and profiled, you need to provide them visibility into the process. Studies have shown that 50% of respondents feel properly incented to participate in exchange for visibility into the results of the survey in which they participate. A respondent portal or dashboard should be integrated into the employee community experience to provide respondents a summary of their active surveys along with the associated results from those surveys. Such access provides respondents an on-demand and real-time view into the feedback process. If you choose to use incentives for participation, a respondent should also be able to view their earned incentives and consume them as appropriate.

When the panel (or panels) has been properly built, the feedback process can begin. To maintain or increase response rates and continued participation you must protect the employee respondent's rights. Taking a survey is an act of trust between the respondent and the surveyor and violation of that trust will have negative implications. Standards should therefore be set to ensure that the respondent is treated properly. For example, no survey should take longer than 15 minutes to complete and there should be an accurate visual indication of the progress of completing the survey. Employees will respond positively to this protection of their rights and their subsequent willingness to participate will help drive up response rates and therefore the value of the collected feedback.

The final step toward building the sense of influence is demonstrating to the community that their voice is not only heard, but that the organization is taking action based on their feedback. The organization must clearly communicate results from the feedback process to the employees and a set of actions that are directly tied to the results, with regular status updates of the progress of ongoing initiatives. This truly reinforces the sense of influence and ensures that the community members believe their time providing feedback is time well spent. This has a "rising spiral" affect of strengthening the community and encouraging more employees to participate in the feedback process.

The advantage of building a respondent panel from your employee community is that you can gather regular and consistent feedback. This not only keeps you current with the thoughts and concerns of the employee base, it provides the ability to spot trends and evolving employee sentiments over time. The process is extremely cost effective as well—once the initial start-up process is complete, the cost associated with each survey is extremely low. Progressive organizations take regular feedback a step further by integrating employee feedback directly into business processes that directly impact employees to promote a corporate culture of active listening. The ability to actively and easily obtain timely feedback from the employee community provides such organizations with an obvious advantage in increasing employee satisfaction and improving retention. Such panels create a win-win scenario where the organization receives tremendous value from their online employee community and the community is strengthened by the sense of influence that is gained by employees having a collective voice to provide their feedback to the organization. The end result is timely, consistent, and regular feedback data, gathered in a cost effective way to maintain a close understanding of employees and their needs.

**About Vovici:**

*Vovici's Enterprise Feedback Management solutions represent 25 years of industry leadership, and our software is the established leader in providing a comprehensive view of customer, partner and employee feedback. The combination of Vovici's software-as-a-service model and the most open feedback platform of any feedback tool on the market make it easy to integrate feedback processes directly into systems and applications. We deliver the enterprise-class requirements demanded by the world's largest organizations in a secure, reliable, and efficient hosted environment.*