

The Branded Community

By [Rob Frankel](#)

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Whether your operation is running offline or on, the next few years are going to rock your business like nothing ever before. The reason it's going to get a good shake up, is because the strategies and tactics have been irreparably tweaked by -- you guessed it -- the web. And the biggest wave that's about to hit are branded communities.

What is a branded community? It's what people used to call a "consumer database" -- on steroids. It's an organization of end-users that is so loyal (and this is pretty powerful, so sit down for this) that their activity and response rates totally blow normal strategies' results off the map. And I'm not talking about a few points here or there. I'm talking major league cranking:

Typically, for example, a direct response effort through traditional means is expected to generate response rates of 1%. If you do better than that, you're smoking. If you do less than that, you're out of business. If you use a targeted list, hitting anywhere between 3% and 5% is considered pretty good. Either way, you can kiss a minimum of 95% of your budget goodbye.

Branded communities, on the other hand, can expect response rate of 10% to 25%.

Yeah. That's what I thought at first, too. But it's true. And that's why branded communities are going to change the way we do business -- big time.

First, you've got to understand that I call them "branded" communities, because just dumping a bunch of e-mail addresses into a listserv ain't gonna cut it. The whole thing has to be built on a strong branded foundation. That's what creates the interest and involvement from your branded community. Next, you have to care about the people in that community. Give them what you can; help them where you can. Let them know that you're as much a part of that community as they are. Build out programs. Create an environment that furthers everyone's interests, not just your own.

When you combine those factors, you get a more positive, more responsive community. The members of your community are more loyal to your brand, because...well why wouldn't they be? You're doing a whole lot more than the next guy to help them and those who share their interests.

More reasons to establish your brand on the very front end, amigos. Because the brands we develop today have to be stronger than a simple logo or catchy tag line. They have to be click-proof, impervious to that bored user's itchy mouse trigger.

And the branded community is the strongest weapon in your arsenal.

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