



## EVOLVING MEMBERSHIP COMMUNITIES

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In this *Briefing Note* Lincoln Crowne & Company's *Nicholas Assef* discusses how the internet has changed the way in which individuals interact as members of larger communities.

These observations are relevant for any organisation that runs a community of users. In its work with clients LCC has repeatedly seen that senior management has not spent enough time analysing what makes up the fabric of their membership base, and how the internet can be used to not only recruit and retain members / users, but to transform their experience into one of real enjoyment. .

### KEY THOUGHTS

- The internet has brought membership communities together rapidly and deeply in a borderless environment.
- Online membership communities are now very much 'peer to peer' driven as opposed to traditional models of leadership driven.

### OBSERVATIONS

	Yesterday	Today & Tomorrow
<b>Cost</b>	Membership fee	Membership typically based on free registration.
<b>Access</b>	Difficult due to geographic remoteness. Often not convenient to interact.	Search engines allow simple location. Internet allows immediate access. Users may therefore be involved with multiple organisations.
<b>Involvement</b>	Physical attendance produce barriers from time availability through to 'shyness'.	Anonymity and ease of access result in rapid interaction. Advent of avatars allow image issues to be overcome. Promoters should also investigate blogs, discussion boards and other social tools which allow members to extend their experience (basically spend more time involved).
<b>Leadership</b>	Hierarchical / Clear leadership. Due in part to physical involvement.	'Swarming' with multiple influencers & influences. Leadership is generally unclear to the community, and of little interest. The community has evolved to have a large 'peer to peer' element to it.
<b>Traction</b>	Often 'linear', with membership growth slow over many years.	Can be rapid, in particular if direction to the community is via viral means.
<b>Choice</b>	Low and local. Choice has been historically based on where the member could 'get to' in order to participate.	Multiple and global. In fact individuals might be members today of multiple organisations and interest groups.
<b>Information</b>	Limited and slow to distribute.	Information saturation. Through websites, mobile phones and emails ( <i>examples</i> ). Content is now varied (from film clips to blogs) and allows the member an enriching experience that will continue to bring them back.
<b>Connectivity</b>	Limited due to physical restrictions in attending meetings, etc.	Real time deep experiences. The community is online all the time.
<b>Communication</b>	Slow and cumbersome. Mail, Phone, interaction of members.	Real time and rich. Information can be circulated in many different forms.



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