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Q&amp;A with Graeme Boyd, Xbox

**Graeme Boyd is consultant community manager for Xbox EMEA, in charge of managing the Xbox Community Network as well as Xbox's other social media platforms across Europe. Contagious spoke to him about how these communities benefit Xbox and the company's plans for the future.**

**Contagious / Xbox has been running relationship programmes with independent communities for over five years. How different are these communities from Xbox's 'owned' communities in terms of the way members react and respond to brand initiatives?**

**GB / The Xbox Community Network (XCN)** was founded just before we launched the Xbox 360 and grew out of a desire for us to get closer to our key evangelists in the online space. They are our biggest fans and fiercest critics. We knew they were out there talking about our brand and products, and we understood the growing power of the community influencer - a regular person who probably has a day job or goes to school or university, and is therefore doing it for the love rather than remuneration. We also knew our PR teams weren't picking them up at the time. So striking up a relationship with these influencers was the perfect way to generate even more grassroots buzz by giving them opportunities and information they could use.

Our community agency **Digital Outlook** started by scouring the web for a handful of the most influential European blogs and fansites, and their first outing was a trip to London to get a sneak peek at the new console. Since then we've grown the XCN to just under 100 members and reach over two million gamers in 16 European countries. We drop them games and hardware to review, get them exclusives and invite them to events. **It's not about bribery or telling people what to think – it's about giving them stuff they wouldn't normally get so they can offer value to their audiences.**





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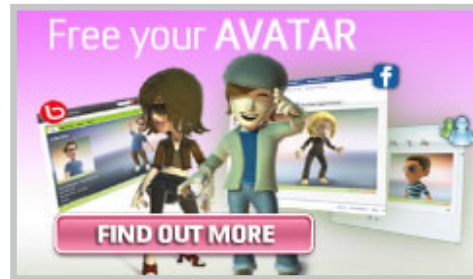
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Which leads us on to how the XCN community differs from our other 'owned' communities, for example our Xbox.com forums, our Facebook pages, Twitter feeds etc. Where we have a degree of editorial control (in that we can tailor the message to the platform) on those 'owned' communities, there is no such expectation from the XCN. This way we can get quick and dirty feedback about what the XCN community thinks and feels - good or bad - and that gives us credibility as well as some great market research.

Our 'owned' communities are very different. They are about building digital touchpoints where our fans and followers can connect directly with us. Our goal is to be everywhere that people are talking about Xbox. They don't need to come to us to continue those discussions, but if they do, they should get value-add content and information they can distribute elsewhere. **Ultimately, I want to build a network of interconnected social media destinations where fans can come together, talk with each other, get content they can share with their friends, tell us what they think and - crucially - get a response.**

**What is the primary benefit for Xbox in engaging with communities both independent and 'owned': is it reputation management, PR or brand engagement?**

People are always talking about brands in the social media space. You can ignore those conversations - and thus get no real benefit from them unless you are a faultless, spotless brand with no problems and no cares in the world - or you can try to get involved to add value. But you have to be very careful. **You can't just pop up when someone is talking about you, say 'HELLO!' and manipulate the**



Xbox / Facebook

**conversation to your own ends;** but you can show that you want to listen and engage, either through reaching out to existing online communities in the style of the XCN, or creating relevant touchpoints where people can come to you.

So the answer to your question is all that and more. We use our communities to respond to technical issues, address problems, distribute news, tell our customers about marketing campaigns, and hopefully drive a greater connection with our brand by showing them that we're people who love Xbox too, and that we want to talk about it with them.

There's a really crucial point here too: lots of brands (and we're not immune to this) assume that if they start up a Twitter feed or a Facebook page then they're suddenly active in the social media world and part of the conversation. **The truth is that the majority of consumers don't want to talk directly to brands unless they have something to**

**complain about. So it's very important to create content and engagement for your social media touchpoints, things for people to gather around, discuss, and believe in.**

**What level of interaction is there between the different community types and do you encourage this?**

We should encourage this. A person's interaction with social media is not monogamous - they will engage a number of channels every day, cherry-picking touchpoints they connect with the most. The thing we're working on at the moment is connecting our touchpoints in an effective way so consumers can flow between them. To that end, we've been toying with aggregators that take feeds from video sites, our XCN sites, photo sharing sites, audio sites, our official news outlets and so on, bringing all that good stuff together in one place so people can engage with it easily. The goal is to create a hierarchy-based network of social media destinations, each one delivering what it does best (i.e. video should be on YouTube, photos on Flickr, etc).

**On Facebook you currently have one community page for the whole brand. How does a brand like Xbox, which has a plethora of sub-brands and games, decide what to base its community/communities around?**

This is something we've been debating internally for months. When we initially launched our Facebook presences, they were also planned to appeal to a 'broader' audience and focus on the games and product features we have that are aimed at that audience - music games, kids' games, and so on. We did not put age restrictions on the pages. The upshot of that is that we can't



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legally communicate news or info about a large percentage of our games and products, including some of our biggest-selling titles like *Halo* and *Gears of War*. And as our product offering has broadened to film and music we've discovered there's even more we can't talk about - for instance, if we have a 15 or 18-rated blockbuster movie coming to our **Xbox LIVE** movie service we can't promote it on the Facebook pages. The moral of the story is: think carefully about age-gating your pages!

On top of that, Xbox is a brand that sits above countless other brands, so it can be very difficult to reconcile that with a single Facebook page. We might post a FIFA Football update that appeals to, say, 50% of our audience but is completely irrelevant to the people who hate football and want to hear about the new Halo game. Multiply that problem by 100 and you can see the issue!

The great opportunity in social media is hyper-targeting and hyper-relevance - giving a smaller group of people something that's of great interest to them. Ideally those hyper-targeted, hyper-relevant touchpoints will aggregate up into an umbrella brand, or a social media mothership.

**How much resource is Xbox putting into its community initiatives at a local, regional and global level? Is the effort managed in-house or via third parties such as agencies?**

We're in a period of flux on this. Traditionally 'Community' at Xbox has been a discipline within the Global and EMEA Digital Marketing teams, supported by an external agency team. The challenge we have now is that the importance of community outreach and social media has exploded to such an extent that we need to



scale up that resource quickly and in new ways. Social media is always on, and if you want to play in that space you need to match that. You need to think a lot quicker, be more reactive.

It's difficult to out-source that. Does your agency always have all the info they need and the mandate to step in when something goes wrong? Do you trust them implicitly to maintain your brand's tone of voice and come up with the correct messaging in an instant? And if it explodes who takes the responsibility?

In my opinion the best advice for brands is to get their own hands dirty with social media and not just rely on their agencies. Brands need to say: 'this is something we want to get involved in, we are going to tell someone internally that it's their baby, that they have to own it and love it and nurture it'. Brands can't think it's a part-time job, an add-on to someone's current day job or stick it on the end of a brief because everyone else is doing it. It needs to be taken as seriously as your PR, your official website or your CRM.

**How does Xbox leverage these communities for other marketing platforms such as new game launches and events?**

This is where communities come into their own as marketing channels where we can send out the messaging - and get instant feedback!

A great example of this is the activity we did around **E3** last year. E3 is like Christmas for the videogames industry. It's a huge trade event that takes place in Los Angeles every June. All the big console manufacturers and games companies gather to show off their latest and greatest for the coming holiday season and beyond. Dedicated gamers love it and they eagerly consume every scrap of info they can before, during and after the event.

Last year, in combination with our EMEA PR team, we wanted to blow out our E3 coverage in a way we never had, and our communities needed to be a huge part of that. We set up a live, appointment-to-view Xbox.com video stream of the Xbox Press Conference (which kicked off with **Paul McCartney** and **Ringo Starr** introducing *The Beatles: Rock Band* and ended with **Steven Spielberg** revealing **Project Natal**, our controller-free gaming system) and drove traffic to it by pre-promoting through our communities as well as the usual PR channels. At the same time, we worked together with the PR team to select 10 key influencers from our XCN community and some broader social media influencers (like **Charlie McDonnell**, a YouTube sensation with 300,000 subscribers and over 30 million views of his videos: [www.youtube.com/user/charlieissocoollike](http://www.youtube.com/user/charlieissocoollike)) and fly them out



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to LA to be on the scene. We collated everything they photographed, tweeted, filmed, podcasted and blogged over the course of the event and housed it on an E3 blog, also hosted on Xbox.com, as well as their own channels and websites.

The result was traffic far in excess of anything Xbox.com had ever experienced before at E3, and crucially 50% of that traffic was driven through social media or community channels.

**How does Xbox measure the success or otherwise of these initiatives and is the effort being rewarded by a clear ROI?**

That's (perhaps literally) the million dollar question. We've got a few indicators. Because we ask our XCN member sites to tell us which updates (news, games for reviews, events) they tell their audiences about we can get a strong measure of reach through this channel. Since we allow customers to purchase digital content (game add-ons like new cars, tracks, weapons etc as well as full games, films and much more) for their Xbox through the web we can track clicks to purchase. And we can always fall back on the Fans/Followers/Friends model to measure the success of our social media touchpoints.

The problem with that particular fall back is that, again, there's no definitive measure of success. **How many Followers on Twitter do you need? How many Facebook fans, or video views? And is level of engagement or propensity for people to share content more important than those measures?** We're dealing with a new discipline with new measures of success, and I don't think many of them lead neatly to the classic 'path to purchase' model.

Every brand engaged in social media has a responsibility to define their own measures of success and assign an ROI to that. Personally, I'm keen to

draw up a scorecard which assigns an agreed value to each action a user can take on a specific social media platform, then totals them up to create that ROI. Multiple metrics aggregated into one overall measure of success.

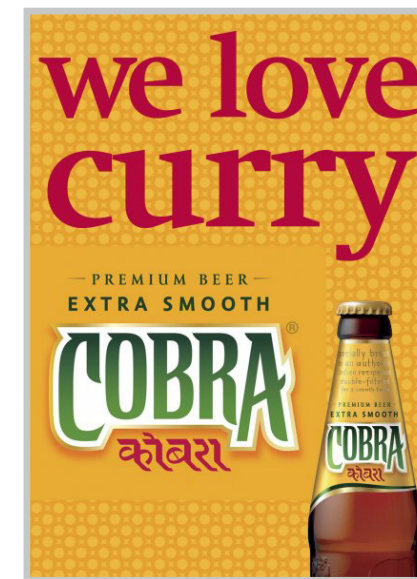
It's a challenge, but one we have to crack or social media will continue to be viewed as 'fluffy' marketing by some (often very important) people.

**Gaming is by its nature very competitive; serious fans can be obsessive. How do you think these communities differ from those for brands from other sectors?**

I like to keep an eye on what FMCG brands are doing in social media. They are often low-interest sectors without the level of consumer passion or evangelism that a brand like Xbox is lucky to enjoy, so they have to work harder to engage people. The trick is not to assume people want to talk with you as a brand, but to give them something to talk about and wrap your brand with that. I really like what **Cobra Beer** did on Facebook recently ([www.facebook.com/welovecurry](http://www.facebook.com/welovecurry)) - they found a way to make their brand relevant and interesting to people by getting them involved with fun apps and quizzes (note that they have another brand page on Facebook that only has 183 Fans compared to We Love Curry's 63,000). **P&G's 'Mother Nature'** Facebook campaign for **Tampax** ([www.facebook.com/mothernature](http://www.facebook.com/mothernature)) is interesting too - I'm very impressed at the way they've made it fun and interesting for females to talk about feminine hygiene through their social networks.

It goes to show that with the right tone of voice and value-add you can create a conversation around anything.

[www.xboxemea.com](http://www.xboxemea.com)



Cobra Beer /



Tampax / Mother Nature