

Harley-Davidson Founded in 1903 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Harley-Davidson has twice narrowly escaped bankruptcy but is today one of the most recognized motor vehicle brands in the world. Make it easier for users to express themselves; don't set limits on length of responses; allow user evaluation of the relevance of posts. One fan inspired a digital video and Twitter campaign dubbed E Pluribus Unum—"Out of Many, One"—where Harley riders from all walks of life show their diversity and their pride in their bikes. Companies large and small can build brand communities. When New York's Signature Theatre Company built a new 70,000-square-foot facility for its shows, it made sure there was a central hub where casts, crew, playwrights, and audiences for all productions could mingle and interact.⁶⁵ Online, marketers can tap into social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs or create their own online community. Members can recommend products, share reviews, create lists of recommendations and favorites, or socialize together online. Online forums can be especially helpful in a business-to-business setting for professional development and feedback opportunities. The Kodak Grow Your Biz blog is a place for members to learn and share insights about how Kodak products, services, and technologies can improve important company or industry business performance.⁶⁶ The Pitney Bowes User Forum is a place for members to discuss issues related to Pitney Bowes equipment and to mailing and marketing in general. Members often answer each other's business questions, though Pitney Bowes customer service representatives are available for any particularly difficult support questions.⁶⁷

Maximizing the Benefits of Brand Communities A strong brand community results in a more loyal, committed customer base. One study showed that a multichannel retailer of books, CDs, and DVDs enjoyed long-term incremental revenue of 19 percent from customers—what the authors called "social dollars"—after customers joined an online brand community. The more "connected" a member of the community was, the greater the likelihood he or she would spend more.⁶⁸ A brand community can be a constant source of inspiration and feedback for product improvements or innovations. The activities and advocacy of members of a brand community can also substitute to some degree for activities the firm would otherwise have to engage in, creating greater marketing effectiveness and efficiency as a result. To better understand how brand communities work, one comprehensive study examined communities around brands as diverse as StriVectin cosmeceutical, BMW Mini auto, Jones soda, Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers rock and roll band, and Garmin GPS devices. Using multiple research methods such as "netnographic" research with online forums, participant and naturalistic observation of community activities, and in-depth interviews with community members, the researchers found 12 value creation practices taking place. H.O.G. benefits include a magazine called Hog Tales, a touring handbook, emergency road service, a specially designed insurance program, theft reward service, discount hotel rates, and a Fly & Ride program enabling members to rent Harleys on vacation. Building a positive, productive brand community requires careful thought and implementation.⁷⁰ One set of researchers offers these recommendations for making online brand communities more effective:⁷¹

1. In dire financial straits in the 1980s, Harley licensed its name to such ill-advised ventures as cigarettes and wine coolers. Although consumers loved the brand, sales were depressed by product-quality problems, so Harley began its return to greatness by improving manufacturing processes. It also developed a strong brand community in the form of an inclusive owners' club, called the Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.), which sponsors bike

rallies, charity rides, and other motorcycle events and now numbers more than 1 million members in some 1,400 chapters. Keep the focus on topic; divide the forum into categories; encourage users to preselect interests. They divided them into four categories—social networking, community engagement, impression management, and brand use—summarized in Table 5.5. Set appointed times for topic discussion; give rewards for timely, helpful responses; increase access points to the community. Launch contests; use familiar social networking tools; create special opportunities for visitors; acknowledge helpful members. The company also maintains an extensive Web site devoted to H.O.G. with information about club chapters and events and a special members-only section. Harley is active with social media too and boasts more than 3.3 million Facebook fans. Enhance the timeliness of information exchanged. Enhance the relevance of information posted. Increase the frequency of information exchanged. Extend the conversation. 2.3.4.