# Engaging users – EdReNe recommendations (2010)

In order to be a success any educational repository needs to attract a high number of returning users. Many successful major web sites support this goal by building active and engaged user communities and the same trend is now seen for educational repositories that were often initiated long before the advent of the social web.

These efforts have been the focus of many of the discussions within this theme, and have led to the following recommendations:

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| **1100%(83%)** | Analyze user behaviour to support development |
|  | **Selected comments:**“But remember also to analyse the users who stopped or didn't use the system.”“I strongly support the idea of user behaviour research being done in advance of proposed development work. It often isn't done as people think they "know" what users do (or will do). ““One of the most important ways of determining development needs is to examine what people do rather than what they say.”“Understand, measure, take action”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf) (http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR\_Engaging\_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) (http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **296%(74%)** | It should be easy for users to invite friends |
|  | **Selected comments:**“This is a good way to encourage use but not all communities are open and so friends may need to belong to the community before they can be invited. ““The word-of-mouth recommendation is very important in the teachers world as they are often sceptic to advertising.”“Yes, although most of the users you'll have thanks to oral communication and promotion: teachers advising colleagues to use your website in the teachers' room”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **395%(91%)** | Make it easy to participate – for all members |
|  | **Selected comments:**“Barriers to participation are the single biggest problem.”“Barriers to entry should be kept to a minimum. This is about engaging the maximum number of users rather than selecting sub-sections.”“Participation makes it more likely for people to come back - though they shouldn't get the feeling that they have to participate.”“This is quite hard! You'll always have users saying they find the website too difficult, while others find it perfect like it is.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **492%(83%)** | Keep it simple |
|  | **Selected comments:**“Keep it simple is good advice if you have a single objective. However, in education it is sometimes complicated. ““Simplicity is the most difficult thing to obtain. But it is a goal in itself.” “Especially because engaged users can have totally different backgrounds and skills.”“It should be easy to be a low-committed user also; with no picture, no contributions and so on.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **587%(52%)** | A strong community cannot be built quickly – plan for long term sustainability |
|  | **Selected comments:**“It is better to build on existing communities than try to create new ones.” “Unfortunately there is all too often a mismatch between the time needed to develop the community and the period of funding allocated to it. It is important to plan for long term sustainability, particular financial.” “if you really have what people want, your community is going to be big in a short amount of time. The question is how sustaining it is and how long-lasting, but if it is well nourished by responsible people also a quickly built community can be very strong.”“It's about habits that cannot be changed from today until tomorrow”“Really depends on the type of community. If you hit a niche you might be lucky and the community will grow quite quickly. Sustaining it will however take a lot of work.““The first years are the most important. Build your image as the website created by the users.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **683%(70%)** | A dedicated and skilled community manager is essential |
|  | **Selected comments:**“Most likely several, probably part-time, will be needed.”“Our experience is that online COPs need a key facilitator to encourage and motivate the users. Without this, users log in less frequently. ““Where there is no moderator or strong leader/manager, then activity tends to die off and the community withers.”“Communities of teachers working in disparate and often geographically disperse schools tend to slacken if they are not ‘stimulated’ or when not given objectives of focus. A ‘skilled community manager’ is a key figure in maintaining a healthy online teacher community.”“A community is unlikely to flourish without the input of a skilled facilitator who knows when and when not to intervene.”“There is so much work in sustaining a social network, and so many things that need done that only people who really understand and actively use the social web have a good shot at making it happen.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |

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| **778%(65%)** | Build trust and defend your brand |
|  | **Selected comments:**“Trust is the only way you're getting content from your users and on the other side have your users do some marketing for you and recommend your site to colleagues and friends.”If trust, reliability and reputation are established the brand shouldn't need to be defended. “The users must feel safe as part of the community, and they must know that response on comments and questions they contribute with will be done in a respectful manner.” “In many ways the community does that for you if you do a good job.”“Be online at Twitter, Facebook, ... Follow what they say about your website/brand. React if needed. Keep communication positive. Be honest. Don't promise the impossible.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **874%(61%)** | Describe why you want an online community – to yourself and all involved stakeholders |
|  | **Selected comments:**“This will be complex. Any one individual may belong to several communities and use each community for different purposes. It is probably better to build up sets of community scenarios.”“Less fashion, more function. A crefully written spec should justify all features that purport to ‘engage users’ and have some metric on what that increased engagement will be.”“Experience...with setting up communities indicates that much more sharing takes place within them than outside.”“Also communicate it to the users, do not only ‘describe' it in strategies and papers...”“To know why you want people to join the community is essential for the ability to run the community.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **970%(35%)** | Reward user activity |
|  | **Selected comments:**“Of course. No-one will return unless there is some reward. However, different people respond to different types of reward: points, recognition, prizes, good downloads, etc and a range of rewards is probably necessary. It is also likely that reward mechanisms will need to be regularly refreshed.”“While altruism is all very good, a reward structure for the contribution of resources and/or the introduction of new members is effective. Hence the number of loyalty programs in the commercial world.”“Feedback, communication is reward enough.”“Rewards or incentives should not exclude types of users. Not all users are doing everything equally well - and those who 'only' download resources may use them well in their classes - and talk about their experiences with colleagues which are not at all using learning resources from your repository.”  **Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |

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| **1065%(39%)** | Keep moderation to a minimum |
|  | **Selected comments:**“Censorship of exchanges is inappropriate for a professional service and should be kept to an absolute minimum. However if the meaning of moderation is to stimulate debate or to suggest alternative pathways or threads, then more rather than less moderation is required. However the key is the skill of the moderator.”“Let the community do its work.” “Do not be afraid to moderate when and if necessary.”“In communities like this the risk is already minimal so moderation should be easy.”“Don't moderate much, but stay visible. If you want your site to seem alive it's good that moderators are online for questions or that they stay active in discussions they find interesting.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **1165%(26%)** | Make the community the centre of your web site – never hide it |
|  | **Selected comments:**“The community aspect is key to user engagement but the repository can be a layer beneath the community web site or a part of it - there is no hard and fast rule.”“Some users do not want to participate in an online community but they do want to access useful learning objects. While the community is the lifeblood of a site, it should be possible to participate more passively.” “It is vital to have a community of users as an integral part of the site and to have a clearly identifiable link to the community on the front page, and to have an easy route of entry to that community, but to state that should be the centre is perhaps a little too strong.”“The community is rather important but should not always be at the centre of attention.”“Depends on why you want users to come to your site – are you welcoming consumers and not just contributors.” **Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |
| **1230%(13%)** | Encourage and facilitate real life meetings between users |
|  | **Selected comments:**“While this is clearly desirable it is likely to be effective in a some scenarios (e.g. regional school group) but much less practical in others (global open-sharing web site).”“The whole point of an online community is to make them feel connected. Focussing on real life meetings could disenfranchise some rural users.” “It must be the users own initiative to meet in real life. In small countries people often meet in real life on different occasions anyway.”“These will happen organically and at the users own cost.”“We have the experience that virtual communities work best when users know and can meet in real life.”“Face to face meetings - even only occasionally helps to build stronger bonds in an online community. ““Yes, whenever budget makes it possible.”**Read more:** [Synthesis report](http://edrene.org/results/deliverables/EdReNeD5.4TSR_Engaging_users.pdf), [workshop proceedings](http://edrene.org/workshops/engagement/index.html) |