

# THE FACES OF YOUR COMMUNITY: NTEN



## Higher Logic: Who is NTEN?

**NTEN Team:** NTEN believes that nonprofits will be able to more effectively and efficiently make real change in our communities and the world if they use technology strategically.

**HL: A wonderful goal! Tell us more.**

**NTEN Team:** This means that every staff person in an organization needs to have the tools and the training to do their job well. We are a membership organization supporting nonprofits of all sizes and types, as well as the vendors, consultants, and service providers that work with nonprofits. All NTEN staff engage with the community. The team that is most often out of the office or out on social media includes: NTEN's Community Program Coordinator, Bethany Lister; Membership Director, Megan Keane; and CEO, Amy Sample Ward.

**HL: Describe your first community.**

**Megan Keane:** My first online community, or first in-person community? I come from a very big extended family, so that was a community of sorts! The first online community I took part in was the San Francisco Women on the Web (SFWoW) email

list. I joined over 10 years ago, and the group is still going, although activity is far less as group dynamics have changed, and folks interact in other online spaces as well.

**Bethany Lister:** My first experience with online communities was through "alternative music" chat rooms in the 1990s. I initially learned HTML so I could re-share Smashing Pumpkins pics. A/S/L, anyone?

**Amy Sample Ward:** Many of the early online communities I was part of or created were replicas of offline communities: email list for a soccer team out of season or groups of friends from camp staying connected online. My first experience in seeking out a group online, being strangers united by a common thread, was when I was diagnosed with Celiac Disease. I had never heard of it, didn't know what to do and wanted to find others in my situation.

**HL: How many members are in your community?**

**MK:** We have about 50,000 in the overall NTEN community. About 6,000 have created an account on our community.

**HL: How do you define community and community management?**

**MK:** I define community as a group of people that have some sort of shared affinity with one another, whether that is interest(s), geographic location or a

**AMY SAMPLE WARD**

**CEO, NTEN: The Nonprofit Technology Network**

**MEGAN KEANE**

**Membership Director, NTEN**

**BETHANY LISTER**

**Community Program Coordinator, NTEN**

## COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT TIP:

Invest in a time management tool or set of tools. Everyone's system will be a little different, but having a way of managing the flux of information and staying responsive to users is crucial.



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certain cause. I always like the analogy of the party host to describe a community manager. You're there to welcome guests, circulate, get people talking to each other and provide useful information, like where the bathrooms or refreshments are. And yes, sometimes you have to be the bouncer or mediator.

**BL:** I love Megan's comparison of a community manager to a party host. I initially discovered that I wanted to work in community management after regularly hosting networking nights for a small nonprofit. You get to be the life of the party without the spotlight actually being on you!

**HL:** Tell me how you start your workday.

**MK:** I check email to head-off any fires. Then I usually make a to-do list. I'm a big fan of writing things down the old-fashioned way. It helps me get everything out of my head, and then I can plan my day's tasks.

**ASW:** One of the most important community groups for me to check in with first, every day, is the NTEC staff (don't forget that inside your organization you have a community, too!). I skim email for urgent issues, requests for support, or other priority needs from staff. We also have a standing meeting each morning for sharing what's on your plate, where you may need help, or if you're held up on progress.

**HL:** What is one tool you'd recommend to all community managers?

**ASW:** I think all community managers have to be incredibly skilled with inbox management. As a facilitator, connector, supporter, and sometimes coach to your community members and leaders,

you will receive a tremendous amount of messages—in email, private messages in LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook, personal messages within any other online community platform you use for your groups and even voicemails. Taking the time to learn and test which tools help save you that time, aggregate messages, and help you track who you need to get back to can save you a few headaches, but can also ultimately help you be the best community manager you can.

**HL:** Where do you go and who do you ask for community management advice?

**MK:** We have a Community Builders Community of Practice (#CommBuild) that holds weekly tweet chats where I get a lot of good suggestions. The Community Manager Roundtable is an excellent resource. I also get a lot of great information from Ben Martin (Online Community Results).

**BL:** The #CommBuild community is a great resource for community management advice—what a welcoming and generous bunch of smarties! I also go to the Tech Club organizer community for help (Elijah van der Giessen with NetSquared is one of my role models!)

**HL:** What skill(s) do you feel a community manager must have?

**MK:** Good communication and writing skills. Community is "messy"—there's no right or wrong way of doing things. You have strategies and policies, but also many grey areas. Community managers have to be intuitive and comfortable with making judgment calls.

**BL:** Communication, listening skills and qualities like appreciation and humility are essential.

**"A community manager must be a good communicator and writer. Community is "messy"—there's no right or wrong way of doing things. You have strategies and policies, but also many grey areas. Community managers have to be intuitive and comfortable with making judgment calls. Not everyone is comfortable with this level of ambiguity."**

**Megan Keane**  
Membership Director  
NTEN



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**HL: Does your organization celebrate Community Manager Appreciation Day?**

**MK:** Not in any formal way, but we're sure to send out some tweets of recognition! Instead, we hold a member appreciation month, and using the hashtag "#ntenthanks," we give out thanks to folks in our community, and community members are able to give thanks to each other (and sometimes us). It turns into quite the love fest!

**BL:** I've experienced NTEN's Member Appreciation Month first hand as a community member (before joining NTEN staff). Megan asked me to speak on an awesome, star-studded community webinar about NTEN's programs. It really lifted me up and made me feel appreciated for my contributions. I try to regularly give shout-outs to our community members, but I cannot wait for the month-long, all-appreciation-all-of-the-time that is Member Appreciation Month!

**HL: If you weren't a community manager, what would you do?**

**MK:** It would have to be something where I get to interact with people on a daily basis. It is the community interaction that gets me energized and excited about my work.

**BL:** Perhaps volunteer wrangling or outreach. I really enjoy being excited with people.

**HL: What are your top five favorite sites, blogs, or communities right now?**

**MK:** Besides ours (wink)? In no particular order: Beth's Blog, Mashable, Nonprofit Tech for Good,

Minds on Design Lab (ModLab), and The Onion (for all these years, it never fails to make me laugh aloud).

**BL:** I love the community I've surrounded myself with on Twitter. As a Tech Club organizer, I appreciate NetSquared's Community Organizers Handbook and look forward to the quarterly organizer calls with other NTEN and NetSquared Tech Club organizers. I enjoy Model View Culture, B\* Media, and Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training, which all do great advocacy work.

**HL: Is your title important to you? If you could change it, what would it be?**

**MK:** A title is a helpful descriptor, but it's not who I am. Although, maybe "Master of the Universe" wouldn't be a bad title.

**BL:** I went fishing for the first time a few years ago. My stepfather took me out. I somehow caught a lot more fish than him and so I made everyone address me as "Master-Fisherwoman Master" for the rest of the summer. It has a nice Roald Dahl feel to it, does it not? Titles aren't important to me—I just want to be happy in my work.

**ASW:** I think the titles that are most important are the ones we give to our community. And this is always difficult, because some words and categories seem a bit overused and cliché, even if we really mean them in earnest! We've tried to use titles like Community Champion, Leader, Organizer and many more. It's important to us that we can find appropriate titles to share with those in the community, to lift them up and ensure they are recognized for all that they do.



**SHOUT OUT:**

There are many reasons to celebrate building an online community for your membership. Write this down—Community Manager Appreciation Day (CMAD) takes place the 4th Monday of January every year. CMAD is a way to recognize and celebrate the efforts of community managers around the world using social media and other tools to improve customer experiences.



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**HL: Would you share your top tip for growing activity and engagement in your community?**

**MK:** Add a little special something to your interactions with your community. Whether that's sharing something funny, sending the unexpected personalized thank you card and swag or just responding in a thoughtful way. That's what makes your community stand out and makes it meaningful and enjoyable to be a part of.

**BL:** Appreciation and authenticity go a long way in stewarding and upgrading interactions.

**ASW:** Practice what you preach. If you, as the community manager, ask people to post a certain kind of message or to post content in a certain channel, but you don't do it yourself, you will lose credibility, trust, and participation.

**HL: It seems to be a trend that most community managers are young professionals. What is your theory on this age discrepancy?**

**MK:** Even though community management is not a new development—it's been around since before the Internet—the job title only recently emerged into the mainstream, and it's evolved as more companies and nonprofits realize the importance of social media in their work. There's an assumption that young people who grew up with the Internet are the only ones that understand the ins and outs of social media. While I don't agree with this generalization, it's great to see younger professionals educating older peers, and vice versa.

**ASW:** I'm not sure it's that simple. I have seen very rare instances of a "community manager" role positioned in an organizational chart at a "senior staff" level. I think the placement within the

organization is a bigger contributor to the average age of people in those positions. I would love to see both sides of this coin change, of course!

**HL: Are community managers under paid?**

**MK:** This varies so much. You can't really make a generalization, as every organization defines the role of community manager differently; some are more of a social media manager and others are more of a digital strategist. Plus these communities vary so much as far as scale and subject matter, so salary numbers are all over the place.

**BL:** This very topic was proposed as a conference session for the Community Leadership Summit I recently attended. (Also a session topic: How to get taken seriously at standup meetings.) Part of the O'Reilly Open Source Convention, the CLS is mostly attended by community managers of open-source software projects. Perhaps in the software world community managers are valued less than developers or other project participants.

**HL: What does community management look like in the future?**

**MK:** I think the same basic principles of good community management will still be the same. Community management guidelines remain as they've been since the early pre-web days. The platforms and tools change, but the same community management tenets apply.

**ASW:** I don't think we can really know what a community management role will look like in two years, let alone 15 or 20 years. The community manager role is not decided or created separately from the community and the reason they are coming together.

**Fill in the blank. Community managers are \_\_\_\_\_.**

**BL:** Listeners, appreciators, connectors.

**MK:** Connectors who are constantly connecting with others, and then connecting others to each other.

**ASW:** Awesome! It takes a unique skill set, incredible patience, and unending energy reserves to be successful as a community manager.

