

## What is an online community?



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Community websites are often based on a 'forum' set-up, where registered users (and, in some cases, 'guests') can post and reply to messages.

From its very birth, the internet has been used to bring people together. Beginning with early computer engineers sending each other notes, soon other people started getting in on the action. Systems such as the BBS (Bulletin Board System – a forum on a computer that you had to tell your computer to dial directly to via a phone line) and Usenet (which stored huge numbers of email-like messages) were popular from the late 1970s all the way to the mid-1990s.

But these methods were completely overtaken by forums running on the World Wide Web once it became popular in about 1995. Some online communities act a little like social networks, or question and answer formats, but forums are still very popular.

**Here are some well-used online communities:**

- **Grannynet:** Grannynet is a website for grandmothers looking after grandchildren. It has articles on everything related to being a grandparent, from activities for children to information on grandparents' rights. You can chat to other grandparents within the lively online forum and buy gifts for grandchildren in the shop. Grannynet is 'a one-stop shop for grannies who like to be in the know'.
- **Mumsnet:** One of the most popular communities in the country, this message board for mothers covers topics far beyond the confines of parenting. It's become such a phenomenon that it played a key part in the run up to the 2010 election, with leaders of all three major political parties engaging with 'Mumsnetters'.
- **DigitalSpy:** Britain's biggest TV and showbiz forum. From arguing over your favourite soap plots to gossiping about celebrity antics in the VIP section – if you're after some entertainment tittle-tattle, you'll probably find it here.
- **British Expats:** If you're living abroad, and feeling a little homesick, or considering making a leap into foreign climes and would like some advice from those who've been there before you, British Expats is a great community of people willing to help.
- **Why not visit the 'Community' tab on the Digital Unite website to join the discussions on our very own online community?**

*Alex Duin is a freelance journalist specialising in technology.*

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