

Starting a Discussion Thread

Resource type: provisional guidance

Last updated: December 2015

Essentially there is no fixed way to start a discussion thread. The 'best course' will be determined by a multitude of factors including for example; the size and make-up of the group, the nature of the subject matter, or the level of engagement you hope to achieve.

However there are a few steps that we would generally encourage as a means to 'set the ball rolling'

Corporate welcome:

- The bulk of participants in an online discussion will access the content via their email accounts. Therefore a recognisable name in the opening message can be an important strategy to engaging participants from the outset.
- A welcome voice from a known figure is often a sure-fire way to get busy-people's attention. This could be a Network Convenor, Senior Manager, Project Director, or other VIP etc.
- Getting encouragement and buy-in from 'the top' is sometimes needed to endorse the value of the event and stimulate involvement from all participants.
- Messages should be kept relatively brief, outlining the hopes and aspirations for the event, inspiring everyone to play an active part, ensuring that 'all voices are heard'.

Facilitator welcome:

- This is the primary opportunity for the event facilitator to set the scene for the coming days. To remind participants why they are there in the first place and why they should stay.
- A schedule for the coming day/s with themes and concepts laid out, perhaps linking to some supporting materials.
- You might like to introduce the project team and/or key participants that will be contributing throughout the event.
- If you're happy with your proposition statement, it may be a simple case of revisiting and reusing sections of that.
- Ultimately this is the point at which the discussion will be framed by setting out your key questions e.g. what is the issue you are trying to solve? What do you know already and what would you like to know? How can the information be used and what are your aims going forward?

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Kick starter contributions:

- Kick-starter contributions are written and submitted in advance of the discussion and then the project team will typically post them on behalf of the author at a relevant point in the discussion.
- Written by key participants, champions, subject experts, or perhaps somebody with a unique angle on the subject.
- Often they will be used towards the beginning of a thread to provide some food for thought, or indeed to emulate a sense of initial activity.
- They are essentially short, bite-sized responses or reflections - about 2-3 paragraphs long - and are something to engage people in the discussion. We would not expect a polished essay – something more like a short blog with some thoughts, or provocative statements, to get people excited and posting.
- The project team should be able to provide editorial suggestions before posting to ensure that the kick-starters are in line with their event aspirations.

Related content:

1. How to distract busy people and get them to look at emails
2. What makes for a good kickstarter
3. Tricks of the trade – posting on behalf of others / sequencing and scheduling
4. Closing a thread/closing a discussion/post event activity/outputs?

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