



Communities for the People, By the People: The Google Local Guides Connect Story

 **SNAPSHOT**

SPEAKERS

Traci Cappiello (Google) and
Kelly Schott (TheCR)

COMPETENCIES

Strategy, Culture

MATURITY PHASES

CMM1, CMM2

HIGHLIGHTS

1. **Want to know about Google’s people-first strategy?** Traci shared 3 core values that are at the base of their forum’s culture.
2. **Interested in some career lessons learned?** Traci’s top 5 experiences were shared.
3. **Ever wondered which country allows for the best global moderation coverage?** Read on in the Lessons Learned to see where Google stations their moderation support team.

OVERVIEW

- **Background Traci Capiello.** Traci is the Program Manager of Community at Google. She works on the Google Local Guides Program. She is also a member of the program. She is a Level 10, one of the highest levels of Local Guides. She has been in community in some way shape or form for over 20 years.
- **Background Local Guides.** This is a community of people all around the world who simply love helping others by sharing their experiences on Google Maps. All in all, the program has over 120 million local guides around the world. They help people to make better decisions by using reviews and photos for food, businesses worth visiting, experiences worth having or places worth seeing. They literally put those places on the map using Google Maps.
 - Traci manages and leads efforts for community experiences on and offline. Specifically, www.localguidesconnect.com, is their online community forum and Connect Live is their annual event for top local guides around the world.

BEST PRACTICES

- **People-first community building and management.** This is the base of Google's culture.
 - **Connect.** This is the official forum that supports their global community program. They have over 1 million local guides who are registered and even more who visit Connect, who aren't necessarily unregistered visitors. The forum has important core values that support Google's people-first initiative. They are:
 - **To be welcoming.** There is one single forum for 33 languages vs. a community for each language. They know that people want to connect at a geographic level and language level, so they have been working to add the geographic tags. The 2018 redesign took their out-of-the-box original forum to a fully customized experience that didn't segment the community by language. These 33 languages represent 95% of their global program.
 - Traci's team nurtures positive experiences. Their moderators are truly community managers and builders. They constantly welcome new people, but they also create content by leading by example.
 - Traci values the community so much that she doesn't call them "users". She instead prefers to call them "members".
 - From a business perspective, they had 200,000 new registrations in the forum last year. Twenty-seven community members became their super users. These super users are "Connect Moderators."
 - The benefit of being a Connect Moderator is the assurance of a positive experience. First and foremost, they are always having fun. They are the voice of the community, so Traci will host a hang out with these moderators to preview news with them. People come from all the different time zones. They are made aware of changes before anyone else and asked to give their feedback for sharing the changes with the rest of the forum.
 - **To be thoughtful.** This is another Connect core value, which helps them to celebrate the membership base with content programming members want to see. They want their members to continue to share, so they created a content series which highlights them to the rest of the forum. An example was an accessibility campaign. Almost 3 years later, members are still contributing to that campaign in order to help those with accessibility issues have positive experiences around the world.

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- They drive respect in all areas by tagging, posting, etc.
 - These core values have resulted in tremendous growth, i.e. 100K new topics created, over 300K replies posted and over 1K meet-ups (self-organized activities by community members) promoted via Connect.
- **To be helpful.** Members support and guide each other under Google's example.
 - With the redesign, they have implemented user ideas (using Idea Exchange) across their product (Maps), the program (Local Guides) and the forum (Connect). Over 7,000 ideas were shared that not only provided valuable feedback that informs the product and program teams, but also promotes actions that directly impact their experience on Connect. Major campaigns are born in the community. The members see Google highlighting their self-organized campaigns across the world, their virtual meet-ups, etc.
- **Balance of people-first initiatives with the business goals.** Traci and her team work hard to think about the people who are impacted by the changes that are made to the program (Local Guides), but with the lens and focus on online forums. Therefore, Traci incorporates the following:
 - **Start with the business goals.** Tie the people-first initiatives to the business goals, which could be as simple as tying the profile of the forum users to the non-forum users. Concurrently, start with the community needs. What do they want at the end of the day? To connect with each other? Find answers? A useful app? If so, how can that be tied to the business needs? Evaluate each side separately and then marry the two without trying to make IT happen.
 - For example, Traci measured the people who are active in their forum against those in their program and/or in their app. She wants to dig deeper to find the tipping point where their activity has the opportunity to cannibalize their usage elsewhere in the program or the product.
 - Next, are people in the forum happier or savvier with the product? Are they increasing quality elsewhere? What is often overlooked is the operational cost. How can that be reduced while also giving people the elevation or the permissions that they want, i.e. their Connect Moderators?
 - Members do not need to maintain a certain level of activity each month. They are not employees. Traci doesn't want to force participation because she feels that pressure will backfire. However, she does reach out to them monthly to let them know a recap of their monthly stats. If they haven't been active for a while, she'll ask if they are ok. It comes from a place of care for them as a person.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Traci shared her lessons learned:
 - **Numbers.** Numbers are always important. Traci built many of their programs from the ground up with scrappy efforts. What Traci would tell her younger self early on in her career is not to do anything without numbers. If you can't measure what you do, why do it? It will save you the effort of justifying yourself as a professional and the work that you do. Even if you inherit a project, stop to redefine the strategic approach immediately. Don't just keep something going without first ensuring that it aligns with the organization's business goals.
 - **Strategy.** A strategy keeps you focused and moving towards your goals.
 - **Usage.** Be your own community member by using your own products/programs.
 - **Self-care.** A cruise is a perfect vacation if you are feeling burnt out. There is very little Wi-Fi and what is available is terribly expensive. It's the perfect excuse to unplug and recharge. The main message is to make sure you take care of yourself by taking time away.
 - **Care about the people.** Google's philosophy is to care about the people and all else will follow. No doubt, it is amazing to work with an organization that has this baked into their culture.

- One of Traci's jobs when she first started was to initiate meet-ups, which began in NYC where she works. However, once they started to grow, they needed a more scalable model. Their solution was to inspire, educate and celebrate community members. Traci helped facilitate ways that members could host these meet-ups on their own on a proprietary site that's available at g.co/localguide/meetup. That was the tool. They had an educational presentation available, stickers, assets and information for how to get started. When they started to see members adopt this idea through an accessibility campaign in 2017, it had a lot of call-outs. One in particular was "Help us to add more accessibility information to Google Maps". Over 200 meet ups came out of that campaign alone.
 - All meet-ups must be approved. Traci and her team make sure that no one is misrepresenting themselves and that the content is relevant, etc.
 - A content editor puts together all the recaps from these meet-ups.
 - It's not resource intensive, yet the pay-off is huge.

- Traci explained that they don't currently have a proper onboarding process for their community forum, although they are planning to launch one soon. It will come with an email upon registration in the community forum and then it will be supplemented by an onboarding flow that includes the core actions needed to be a productive member of the community.

LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

- The program has a series of onboarding emails that show members how to contribute to the program. They also provide a landing page if members are on the web (g.co/localguides).
 - The goal for the community forum is to make sure that the front page has everything that members need to know. The only content that they force is the “trending by local guides”. Their content is on top, followed by “Trending by Googlers”. Everything else is customizable.
- The community moderation support team is located in Bulgaria because the people there speak so many languages. This team flexes to all time zones to support their global community. The community is very rarely left alone, if at all. In general, many Bulgarians have travelled extensively or relocated, so they already have that globally-minded lens. This is how Traci was able to let the reigns go on this front.
- They do leverage Google Translate. There isn’t a brand profile in the community, but as individuals the content is generally English.
 - They always try to tie things back to personal experiences. For example, if someone says that they don’t eat a lot of bread in their culture (and maybe the person on the receiving end of the message is not sure if that’s what was meant in the translation), someone like Traci who was born and raised in New York might say how bread is ingrained in her culture and here’s her favorite bagel spot. This has really helped the satisfaction rate within the community because moderators model the desired behavior they want to see in the community.
 - Another best practice is to have a buddy interpret the translation, as well.
- Kelly asked Traci what she sees as motivators in her community, especially as it spans across the globe.
- Now that they have 27 super users in their forum, the prevalent motivator is altruism. They just want to help other people. They see potential in the forum and the benefits.
 - They are also motivated by recognition and timely recognition.
 - The user-generated content humanizes the program.
 - Status is a motivator. They look and feel different than other members in the community while still feeling like other community members.
- To help manage the Idea Exchange, they use Khorus. They export the ideas and put them into a proprietary Google dashboard tool. They are then able to see what’s outstanding, the status of the idea and when it was last updated to the community. It’s still very manual.

LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

- There is an SLA for when they get back to the member about an idea. If it's an idea that can't be implemented, they'll let them know.
- The annual event is a big energizer for the community. If Traci had to make the case for getting their engineering team behind a community initiative, it would be to meet these members. It really helps them to understand the feedback when they get it in person.
- They had a supported meet-up pilot program last year. Over the course of 3 months, they had 9 meet-ups in 8 countries. Members were offered financial support for their most active community members, depending on their country. Some people had \$300, some had \$1500. They were picked out of their most active meet-up posts in markets all over the world.
 - These are more resource-intensive – especially the pilot – but the payoff is well worth it. This is especially true if it can be tied to global efforts or product adoption, etc.
- If a moderator has dropped in participation, Traci mentioned earlier that they send them an email with their activity stats. This is still a bit of a manual process.
 - They highlight the key stats that they want to incentivize.
 - They don't send them stats for time in the forum because the member can find that out in his/her profile with aggregate statistics. Instead, they send them the activities that they want them to do, such as the number of likes they give, the number of posts they give, the number of replies, the number of approved solutions. This is created on a monthly basis. It is very well received.
 - This year they also introduced a year-end email to show them their stats for the year. So, they send this email, give it a week to see if there is any activity and if not, they send another email saying that they've noticed participation has slowed down, is everything ok?
- Kelly asked Traci to give her advice for creating a people-first perspective for community:
 - Look to see if happiness or customer satisfaction is measured. That is something that can be positively influenced.
 - Help your leadership to put themselves in the shoes of your members. Ask them what they would really want in terms of motivation and rewards.
 - Kelly added that the SOCM this past year highlighted that tying in the value and making people feel empowered helps create a people-first perspective.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

- Kelly asked participants to discuss how they involve members/users in their community strategy:
 - One member just launched their community. He blogs and is starting to get feedback from users on what they'd like to see, which has been great because he started off not knowing anyone and now they are engaging with him.
 - For another participant, they have a super user group, which they call "Ambassadors". Her goal is to get the Ambassadors connecting more with other members of the group in the first 2 quarters of 2020.
 - Another member uses her community's champion groups to help with decision making and involves them in strategy conversations, including product, marketing, positioning, etc. It helps the various groups within the organization to learn more about their customers. That is, fortunately, a real plus with this participant's organization. Staff love to reach out to learn from customers and ask for feedback.

RESOURCES

- Traci's deck can be found at: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3fg6kislsylc3zv/AADx5k2b0C2S-LD9B_9QKGqWa?dl=0&preview=The+Community+Roundtable +People-First+Initiatives+with+Traci.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3fg6kislsylc3zv/AADx5k2b0C2S-LD9B_9QKGqWa?dl=0&preview=The+Community+Roundtable+%2F+People-First+Initiatives+with+Traci.pdf)
- As mentioned in the chat: <https://communityroundtable.com/community-manager-podcast/podcast-traci-cappiello-google/>
- Google Local Guides Connect meet-ups: <https://maps.google.com/localguides/meetup>