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Why choosing the right BI platform involves paying close attention to its community

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Finding the right business software

Finding the right business software can be hard—especially when there are dozens of options to choose from that all purport to do the same thing. But when you find the right tool? It's heaven. You're more confident, get answers to your questions, and productivity soars.

So how do you guarantee that you're choosing the right product?

Think back to the last time you were on the hunt for a new job. That process is a lot like finding the perfect product. Who the employer is and what they stand for is just as important as the role; similarly, *who* uses the product and *how* people work with it can enhance the product's capabilities and ensure your success with the tool and its deployment.

Step One: Survey

When looking for a new job, the first thing you do is research. Who is this company? You want to learn about the product or services it provides, its mission, the culture, and the role. You might see who in your network works at the company, so you can talk to them directly about their experience and what is expected from someone in the position of interest.

Before you buy a product, you also do your homework. You identify the problem the product solves within your organization, and you evaluate your options. You look at the company's website, read analyst and customer reviews, and tap into your network to see what peers are using for a solution.

In other words, you evaluate the **community** that surrounds the product.

Step Two: Investigate

It's not only the hiring managers who decide whether or not you're a good fit. You evaluate the company to determine if it's a good fit for you: looking at the job itself, but also considering your potential coworkers. The people at the company will become your community.

How do they treat you and each other? Are they welcoming? Are they supportive? Do they help each other, or are they contradicting each other? Do they have answers to your questions? Do they seem happy and motivated, or are they miserable and uninspired?

These indications of support make all the difference as to whether or not you might be successful in the job.

This goes for when you're evaluating a product, as well. Discover a community of people who use the product, because they will provide you with invaluable insight.

Verifying the quality of their questions and responses sets the stage for successful product adoption and continued use.

Community can also provide insight into how people feel about the product: Are they frustrated? Are they delighted? Are they indifferent? The answer might indicate how the product would land with people in your own organization. It can also show you how much support and what kind of resources will be available to you as a user of the product.

Step Three: Align Your Resources

When you have questions about your software, wouldn't it be nice to know that there are people out there who can support you and collaborate with? Whether you're the only one on your team using the product or working with others, being able to get advice from people who have implemented the solution can be a real time saver—plus, who doesn't like a few tips and tricks?

User manuals and documentation can only get you so far. What about the unique use cases? Asking experts using the product in the wild means getting answers much faster than manually troubleshooting alone.

What To Look for in a BI Product's Community

Now that you understand the value of a strong community, use this checklist to guarantee you're purchasing and using the right solution for yourself and your organization.

Make sure the BI product community is:
- Company-hosted
- Active
- Diverse
- Creative

Excellent communities will:
- Support honest engagement
- Support product feature suggestions
- Facilitate meeting other users offline
- Extend to social media, like Twitter or Facebook

Is the community company-hosted?

When a company hosts a community on their website, it means they care about their customers. It's a good indication that the company wants to make it easy for people to connect, talk, and help each other.

When customers are talking to each other, the company has a unique opportunity to understand conversations about their product—and if the company is smart, they'll be able to do something with that information, from improving features, processes, and more.

Is the community active?

It's important for communities to have regular, lively conversations. Becoming part of a community that has fresh discussions with quick response times is important for you to be successful. Asking a question, only to have it sit and never get answered, won't help move you forward.

When evaluating product communities, take note of when the last question was asked and how long it took to get a useful response. If the latest activity has occurred within the last day, if not sooner, you're in good company.
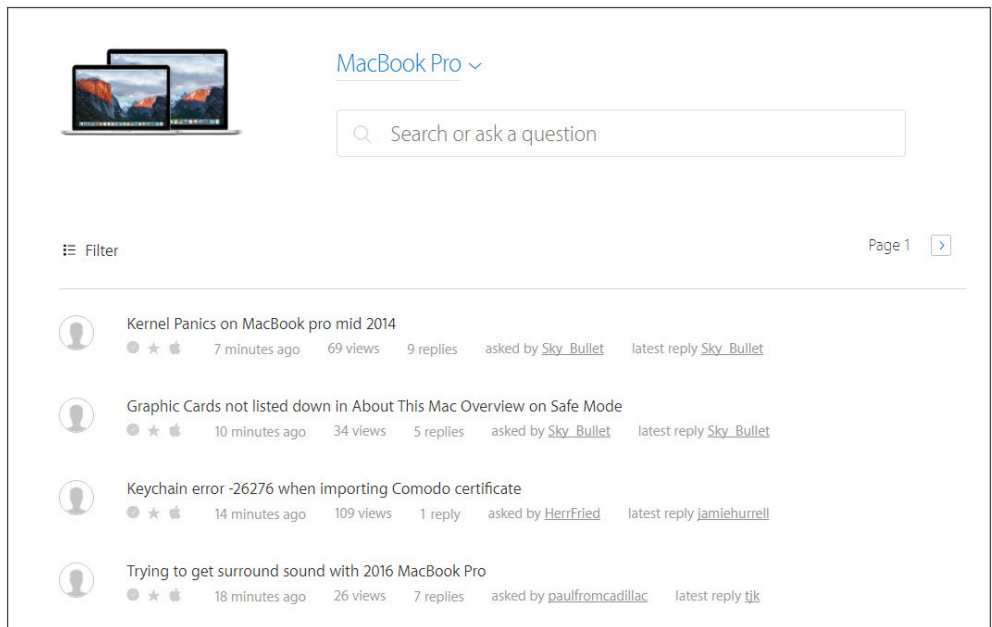

In this community we can see people are actively engaged based on the time stamps. The latest activity occurred 7 minutes ago

Is the community diverse?

Consider who participates in the community. Is it always the same one or two contributors? Are they employees of the product—are you able to tell? It's a good sign if employees from the company are staffed to participate in the community, but be wary if they're the only active members.

The more participants from different backgrounds, the better. More points of view improve the quantity of shared knowledge available to you—and helps everyone reach success with the product.
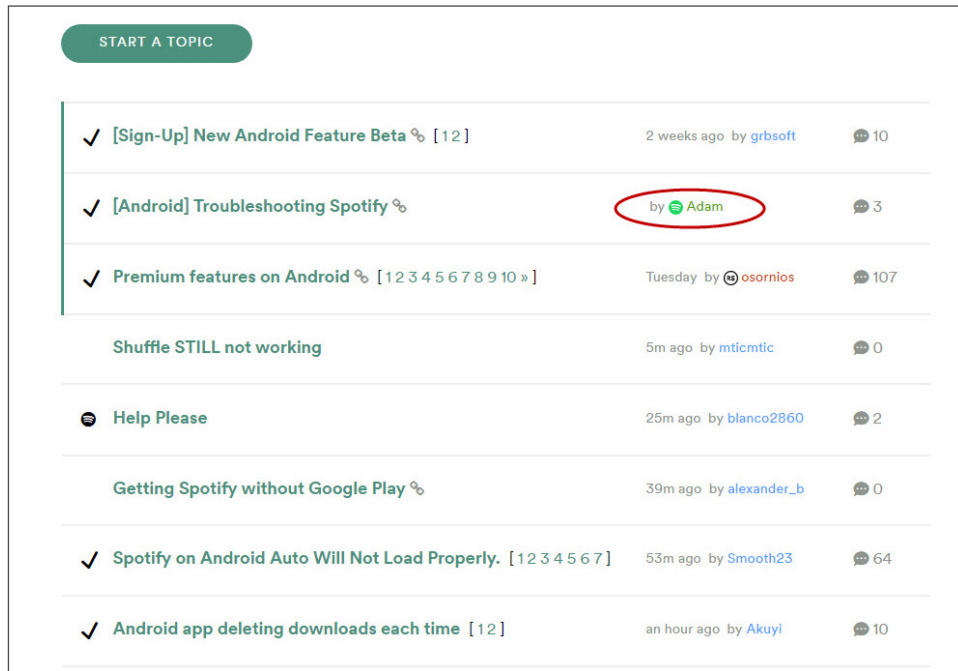

In the Spotify community, several members are participating — including an employee, as indicated by the logo next to his name.

Is the community creative?

Keep an eye open for creative community programming. For example, MVP initiatives identify active community members fluent in the product as go-to resources for other community members. This type of program shows you that there are people who are engaged and loyal to the product, and are willing to say so. As a result of this, you can rest assured that someone (and not necessarily an employee) will be there to assist, you should you need it.

Also, look to see if you can find evidence of the community being engaged in out of the ordinary ways. Contests and social campaigns can showcase the community's creativity and commitment to the community.
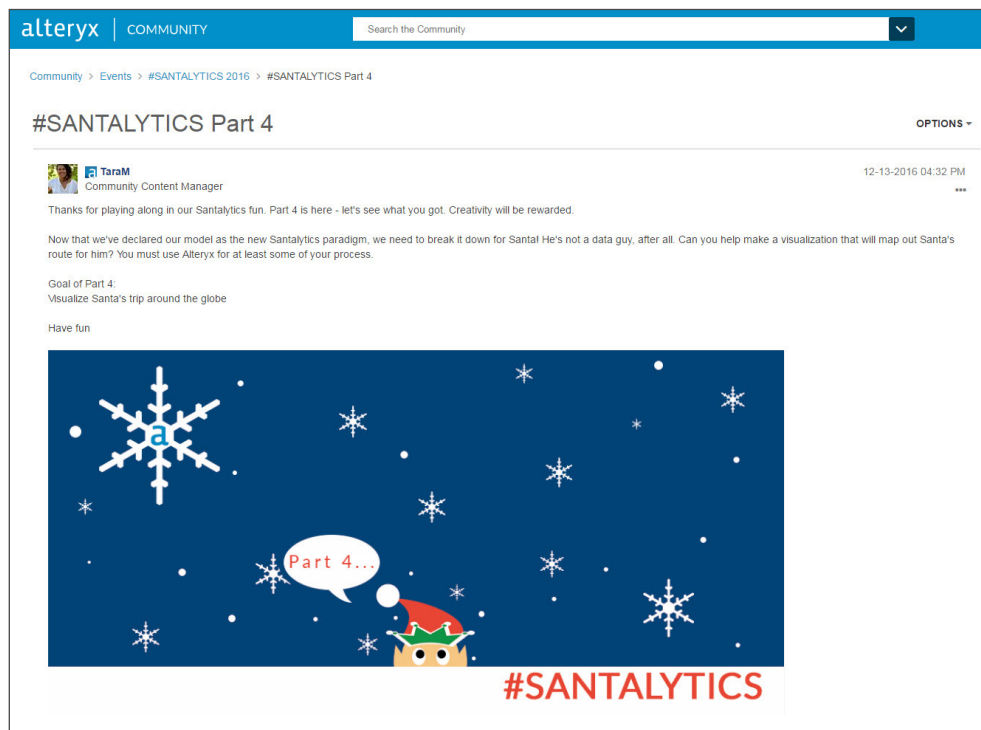
The Alteryx community launched a #SANTALYTICS campaign throughout the month of December to engage it's members during the holiday season.

Does the community support honest engagement?

Excellent communities are able to share feedback, whether it's positive or negative. As a customer, you want to know what you're getting into with a product. For example, when you buy something on Amazon, you often check reviews to gauge sentiment on the product itself.
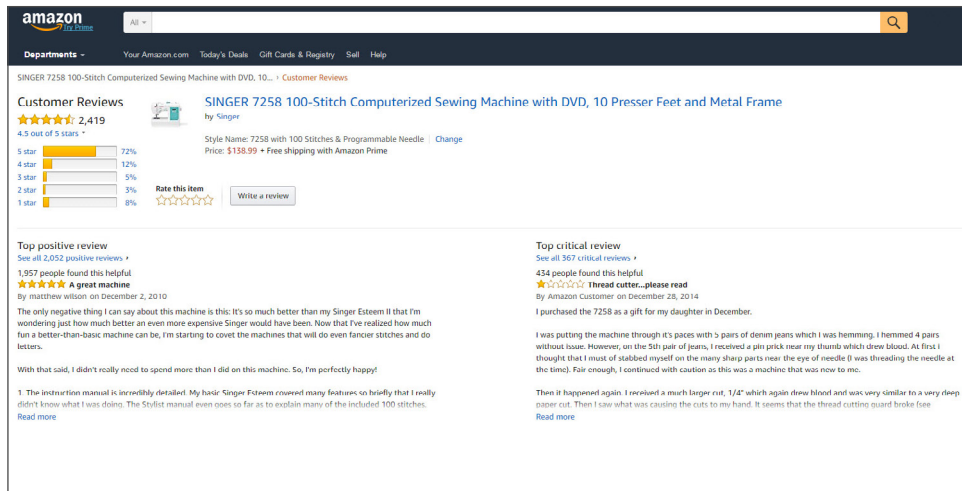
Amazon reviews let you see both the good and the bad of a given product, ultimately helping you make an informed decision in your purchase.

So when it comes to business software, do a search of the product's competitors on the community website. What comes up? Is the community defending the product you're investigating? Are people providing valuable feedback that hasn't been edited or moderated by the company? Knowing that the company isn't abating comments about what people say about it compared to its competitors shows the company (and its customers) really believe in its value.

Does the community support product feature suggestions?

If you are part of a community, you want to make sure your voice is heard. After all, you have first-hand experience with the product, and can offer valuable direction on how the company could improve it.
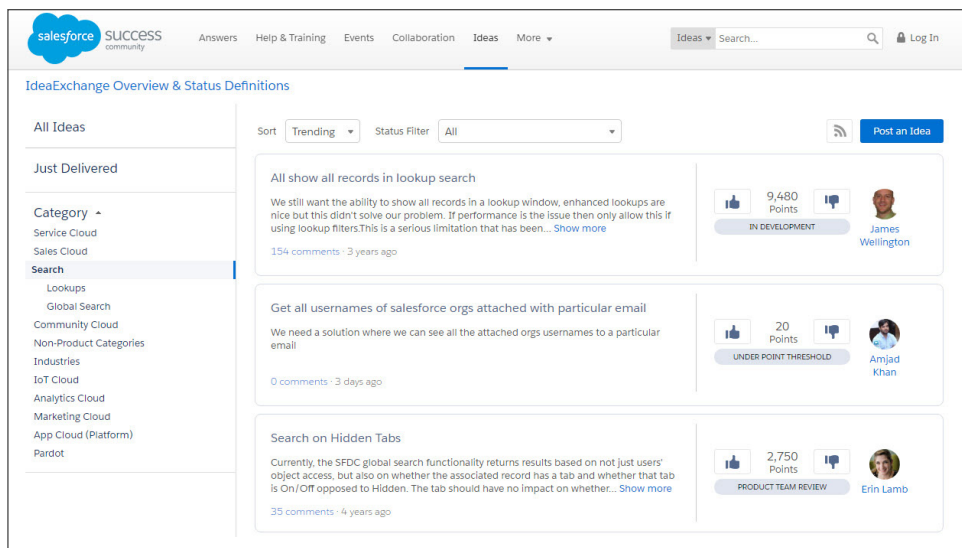
By providing a status on the stage of an idea for a feature, the Salesforce community feels confident that it's being listened to.

In other words, your experience should help shape product development. And when you are able to stand together with others in the community to vote up or down particular ideas, you amplify valuable feedback to the company.

In this vein, make sure that community members are heard—you don't want precious ideas and feature requests going into a black hole. The product team at Salesforce does a great job providing transparent stages to let customers know where in the development lifecycle a given idea is, and provides two-way communication between the community and company to ensure a productive dialog and optimized feature development.

With a community that supports feature requests, rest assured that the future of your product is bright and your expectations are met.

Does the community facilitate meetings offline?

Product communities should sponsor, or at least encourage, in-person events and user groups. Ask yourself: Are there ways for people to engage with other users live, regularly?

Meeting with others to talk about shared product experiences opens the door to many possibilities, from learning techniques for insightful product use to networking with industry professionals.

Talking to people online, via email, or on the phone is helpful, but becomes much more useful when underscored by personal relationships. Plus, it's not a bad idea to pick up new skills that you might not have known were available to you.

Does the community extend to social media, like Twitter or Facebook?

A community should extend far beyond the domain of the company's website. Not every person communicates with people in the same way.

Check to see if there is any activity about the company on other channels as well. Twitter is always a good place to start. Does the company have a handle that it uses? How many followers does it have? Are people engaging and tweeting with the company as much as the company is pushing out content? Are people talking about the product or company without the company's official account getting involved?

You can do a similar search on other social media outlets – think Facebook, Reddit, Pinterest, etc. It may not be reasonable to expect the same level of activity on each outlet, but knowing that the community exists beyond the company website is a good indication of a strong following.

Conclusion

While a community should not be the single criteria used to choose your solution, when faced with two products that are otherwise equal, the one with the more active community should be the determining factor. Knowing that an active and vibrant community exists will allow you to make a decision you can feel confident in.

Remember, the more active and diverse the community is, the better. Look for a community that encourages creativity and open feedback. See if opportunities to connect with the community offline or on social channels exist. Find the people who are most active and watch how they engage. This will tell you a lot about the product and the culture that comes with it.

And once you've made your selection, join the community. The more you give, the more you get out of it.

Why the Tableau Community?

The Harvard Business Review describes it best when it says "A brand community exists to serve the people in it", not the other way around.

And that's the way Tableau approaches community – we want you to be successful.

The Tableau community is unlike any other community. It is a group of passionate people who go above and beyond to help each other succeed. From the Tableau Community forums which has over 100,000 members asking and answering hundreds of questions each week to the over 500 user groups who meet regularly virtually and in-person to talk about data and Tableau. People all over the world are connecting, and that doesn't even include the community that takes place on different social channels like Twitter and Facebook.

Rarely do you have a community of people who feel so connected through means of a software product that they consider it family.

> The Tableau community is my comfort zone. It's like my family. You can ask a question of anybody, and they're so selfless, willing to answer and help. They don't really shy away from talking or from helping you. So for me it's my comfort zone. For me it's just like how family is.
>
> — POOJA GAHNDI

If you have a question, chances are someone else has it too. The community is on a mission to help you succeed with your data and Tableau.

> " We feel joy each time we learn something new about Tableau. (And for me, that occurs on a regular basis — because of this forum, because others feel the same way about it as I do and therefore help me learn something new on a regular basis.) We take pride in this product. We take pride in what we can do with it. We take pride in being able to help someone else unlock another corner of the product's capabilities.
>
> — JOE OPPELT

In every community, there are always a few natural leaders. The Tableau Zen Masters and Tableau Ambassadors are those people in Tableau's. Have a deep technical question, but don't know where to start? The Zen Masters are a great resource. Want to be more involved in the community, but are having trouble knowing where to dive in? The Tableau Ambassadors can guide you. But they are only a handful of the people that are out there willing to help.

> " I remember my first experience with forums and my astonishment when my question was responded to within minutes. It was very reassuring.
>
> — ŁUKASZ MAJEWSKI

One of the biggest reasons Tableau hosts a community is to get feedback. One way this is done is through the Ideas section. This makes it easy for customers to make suggestions about what they would like to see in the Tableau products. You can also get a sense of which ideas are in which stage of the product development cycle by using the Tableau visualization.

Additionally, you'll start noticing Tableau employees commenting on ideas, asking questions, or announcing that a given idea is in Beta or Released. How do you know they're a Tableau employee? Look for the Tableau sparkle next to their names – you'll find them throughout the rest of the community too.

Also the fact that employees and developers are contributing here makes users feel connected and being listened to.

Speaking of Tableau employees, Tableau employees see real potential in continuing to improve the product, and join from various backgrounds. There is a community of extremely smart people who work at Tableau, research how people use Tableau, and apply what they learn into practice.

The Tableau Community far exceeds the walls of the forums. From Twitter to Facebook to LinkedIn, it is one of the most engaged groups of people. Community members are constantly coming up with new ways to share how they use Tableau, and recognizing each other. The #MakeoverMonday project started with an idea from the community, and has grown into a phenomena that continues over a year later.

But it's also in person meetings too. There are over 500 Tableau User Groups around the globe. From local to industry groups, passionate Tableau users gather to share what they've learned, network with each other, and improve their skills. The Tableau Virtual User Group was an event that brought together thousands of people all at once – proving just how strong this community is.

When you join the Tableau Community, you are becoming part of something much bigger than you probably expected. You are becoming smarter. You are forming relationships. Your journey with a new product, suddenly has become as fun and exciting as landing that dream job.

About Tableau

Tableau helps people transform data into actionable insights that make an impact. Easily connect to data stored anywhere, in any format. Quickly perform ad hoc analyses that reveal hidden opportunities. Drag and drop to create interactive dashboards with advanced visual analytics. Then share across your organization and empower teammates to explore their perspective on data. From global enterprises to early-stage startups and small businesses, people everywhere use Tableau's analytics platform to see and understand their data.

Community links

Tableau Community Forums

Tableau User Groups

Tableau Ideas

Other resources

How People Use Tableau

Checklist: 6 Must-Haves for Your Advanced Analytics

Building Effective Dashboards