

From Social Networks to Virtual Communities of Practice. Beyond e-Inclusion through Digital Literacy (I): the Case of the Crafting Community

By Ismael Peña-López ([@ictlogist](#)), 27 October 2008

In a conference on Friday 24th October 2008 — [Accesibilidad e Inclusión Digital: el papel de la Alfabetización Digital](#) — I used the crafting community as a flagship of a community or network enhanced and empowered to a higher level by the Internet at large and by Web 2.0 applications specifically.

[Marc Botella](#) kindly suggested that I made clear the reasons for choosing such a community, so to avoid falling into stereotypes about crafting in particular and women in general. I hadn't even thought about this: the online crafting community is so rich that, only if you do not know it, could you be thinking on stereotypes. Though, just because not everybody knows it, I agree with Marc that some explanation might be due.

Main characteristics of the online crafting community:

- Solid existing “real world” community.
- Long tradition of learning by doing.
- Long tradition of sharing among peers. It is a institutionless and hierarchyless community.
- Shops, workshops and coffee shops are a meeting point rather than a place where to make businesses.
- Broad range of socio-economic, education profiles and age (i.e. very far from the “bored housewife” topic).
- Non-geek and usually low-tech profile. In any case, technology is *definitely not* a goal, or something you discuss, but a tool and something to forget about. But,
- Intensive and broad use of a wide range of applications, most of them web 2.0 and/or cloud applications.
- Expert use of rich media production, edition and diffusion tools: rich text, photography, audio, video...
- Use of social networking sites and social networking tools in other sites to strengthen community links.
- Use of social networking site *not* as an alternate world or community — in opposition to the offline world — but as an extension of the existing communities and networks.

- Use of social networking sites to enlarge the community, and benefit from the low transaction costs of communicating through the Internet to build a critical mass of minority interests (the “long tail”), be it to buy and sell or just to exchange knowledge and practices.

Summing up: a very heterogeneous community that gathers around a common interest (crafting), and intensively uses technology to deal about this interest, proving a high and practical digital literacy level, which normally comes not from a technical background.

A second derivative is that digital literacy and virtual community building act as a driver against exclusion — because of the stress in networking — and for e-inclusion — because of the intensive use of ICTs.

NOTE: definitions and statements come from direct observation. An accurate research should be performed so to statistically validate their significance. Sincerest gratitude goes to [Mercè Guillén](#) who led me by the hand into the world of “e-crafting”.

(Continued: [*From Social Networks to Virtual Communities of Practice. Beyond e-Inclusion through Digital Literacy \(II\): the Case of the Catalan e-Justice Community*](#))