

Lithium

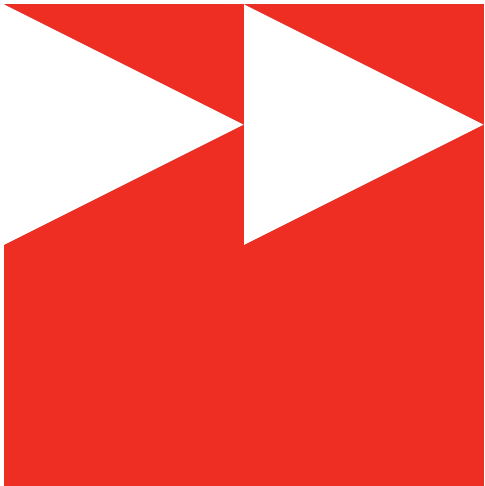
▶▶ FUTURE SHOP

Future Shop

Connect, Share, Learn



Future Shop Connect, Share, Learn



About Future Shop

Future Shop is Canada's largest retailer and e-tailer of consumer electronics. With over 135 stores from coast-to-coast and over \$3.5 billion in annual revenue, Future Shop is dedicated to providing customers with expert technology advice both in stores and online.

Canada's #1 Technology Company

Future Shop's overall goal is to deliver trusted, personalized service with the customer in mind. The company's online channel, Futureshop.ca, strives to extend the company's brand promise with its mandate, to deliver an expert guided experience for customers that creates loyalty, trust, and customers for life.

Futureshop.ca is executing on its mandate with a Lithium-powered online community called the Future Shop Community Forum whose motto is "Connect, Share, Learn," and the results are impressive. The Future Shop customer community is Canada's #1 community of technology and consumer electronics enthusiasts. With over 80,000 members and 150,000 posts to date, the community is thriving with a four-fold growth in traffic over the last year. Best

Buy, Future Shop's parent company, recognized the forward-thinking nature and success of the community by awarding its creators the company's \$1 million Chairman's Innovation Award.

Future Shop's community is available in both English and French, has 14 key discussion categories ranging from home theatre to home office to appliances, with some boards boasting over 10,000 posts to date. The community's main target audience is consumers, but the site also serves merchants and vendors who are able to gather direct customer feedback, and in-store Product Experts. Not only can Product Experts increase their personal brand equity by helping customers online, they also have an opportunity to improve their product knowledge and learn from customers and each other. Future Shop encourages them to log-in to the community from kiosks on the store floor.

As proof of the community's importance and support within the organization, several hundred recipients including Future Shop's top management receive a weekly report compiled by the community's manager that includes key activity statistics and highlights issues and hot topics. With its high degree of visibility, the community is quickly becoming a go-to vehicle for departments across Future Shop to accomplish business goals:

Customer Support: Because the community helped build a self-service knowledge base that customers tap into to find answers to product information questions, Future Shop has lowered its customer service costs related to product information calls into its support center.

Marketing: Marketing not only amplifies promotions through the community, but also reaches out to the community as a key source of product input and feedback.

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The Future shop community is fundamentally about enhancing the online customer experience for our consumers. That said, savvy groups within the organization are beginning to tap into the power of community to improve initiatives such as recruiting and marketing promotions.

Robert Pearson,
VP of e-Commerce, Future Shop



For example, the project manager of a rewards card project tapped the community to suggest card features and names.

Corporate Communications: Corporate communications uses the community to keep its finger on the pulse of Future Shop customer sentiment. Should an issue bubble up in the community, it can be investigated, addressed, and de-escalated in a matter of hours.

Recruiting: Recruiting reached out to the community, a natural pool of Future Shop sales talent, to bolster holiday season recruiting efforts. As an incentive, Recruiting guaranteed interviews to community members who submitted their resume via the community. A French Community superfan was hired through this system, in large part due to his impressive participation in the community.

Keys to Success: Innovation and Promotion

With its community, Futureshop.ca took an innovative approach to extending the Future Shop brand promise of personalized service and product expertise online. The company paired its customer community with a virtual product expert - an avatar named Aaron or Fred, depending on whether you prefer English or French - who serves as a user-friendly gateway to and promoter of the community for new users.

Aaron (or Fred) lives on the Futureshop.ca homepage, and encourages users to "Ask an Expert" if they have a technology-related question. The avatar helps users find answers by scanning conversation threads and highlighting relevant information, and if the user doesn't find

the answer they're looking for, they can ask Aaron to post their question to the appropriate discussion board in the community. This facilitated approach to new user engagement has contributed significantly to the community's growth and popularity.

Future Shop actually began to build momentum for its community right out of the gate by executing a well-planned launch. In addition to garnering coverage by print and online media and key blog sites, Future Shop enticed users to visit the community by inviting them to an online debate between well-known technology experts. Future Shop continues to promote the community with strong visibility on the homepage and by syndicating to key department pages a "Hot Threads" widget that highlights relevant discussions.

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Customers, Employees, and Vendors Win With Community

Delivering an expert-guided experience for customers is the top priority for Future Shop's community, but along the way it delivers benefits to multiple Future Shop constituencies.

Customers

- Get trusted, personalized advice on technology and tech products
- Find answers to their technology-related questions 24/7
- Connect with other Canadians sharing a passion about technology

Product Experts

- Build their own personal brand equity,

using the knowledge they have learned on the floor to help people online

- Improve their product knowledge by learning from customers, vendors, merchants, and other PEs

Merchants

- Connect with customers and Product Experts to get direct feedback
- Share their thoughts and views on existing and emerging technology

- Provide their vendors with access to a targeted group of Future Shop customers

Vendors

- Get direct access to Future Shop customers who are interested in what they are selling
- Participate in discussions that Canadian technology influencers are having about their products online

Bringing the Community to Life

Future Shop prides itself on being on the leading edge of innovation, a spirit which helped bring the community to life. That said, the idea of a customer community, let alone pairing it with a virtual product expert avatar, wasn't instantly embraced internally. The community was the brainchild of Robert Pearson, Vice President of e-Commerce for Future Shop, and Thierry Hay-Sabourin, Senior Manager for community.futureshop.ca. Along the way, they had to scrape resources together from a number of different areas, navigate around roadblocks, constantly communicate with internal influencers, and convince a lot of nay-sayers that this was the right direction to take. Thanks to a small group of passionate people, the project not only got completed, it won the support of the entire organization.

When it came to partnering with a company to provide community technology and services, Future Shop looked for a partner that could help the company realize its unique vision and deliver a compelling online experience for Future Shop customers. Requirements included multi-language support, the ability to integrate the community with the avatar concept, and SaaS delivery to ease upgrades and ensure a feature-rich community that would stay on the leading edge.

Managing a Thriving Community

Because of the prominent role the community plays in the success of Future Shop, the company leverages 24x7 active moderation services from Lithium. Around-the-clock moderation ensures that Future Shop always has its hand on

the pulse of community sentiment and is never in the position of playing catch-up on what's going on in the community.

In addition to oversight by a Future Shop community manager and Lithium moderators, the community benefits tremendously from a key group of highly engaged community members, or superfans, who are frequent contributors to discussions. These superfans volunteer their time to participate in a welcoming committee for new members, create their own widgets and tools that benefit the community (e.g. a widget that displays a user's posts broken down by discussion category), and provide feedback on proposed site enhancements. Future Shop recognizes its superfans with "Kudos King or Queen" contests, gift cards, and simple thank-you's directly from the community manager.

Future Shop Connect, Share, Learn

It really came down to who could deliver a robust set of features via a SaaS model. Had we done this on our own, we would have had to pull resources off of other strategic projects, so leveraging an existing platform with a strong track record of success made good sense.

Robert Pearson,
VP of e-Commerce, Future Shop



About Lithium

We help great companies build brand nations for their most engaged customers. With Lithium, clients such as Best Buy, AT&T, Research In Motion Limited (RIM), Univision, and PayPal turn their customers' passion into marketing, product development, sales and customer service assets. For more information, visit lithium.com, or connect with us on Twitter, Facebook and our own nation - the Lithosphere. Lithium is privately held with headquarters in Emeryville, California.

To visit the Future Shop community, go to community.futureshop.ca.

To read more about customer communities powered by Lithium, please visit www.lithium.com.

Community Advice to Others

When asked about advice for peers deploying an online community, Future Shop quickly zeroed in on three key things:

Have a really clear, simple goal. In Future Shop's case, the goal is "Connect, Share, Learn." The company evaluates every proposed change or initiative within the context of the stated goal, bringing clarity and efficiency to the decision-making process.

Recognize contribution. Future Shop sees members devoting a lot of time and energy to making the community productive, engaging, and fun, and finds that small acts of recognition go a long way.

Be transparent. Future Shop finds that there's no room for spin in a community setting. Their advice is to answer honestly and be true to your word; the community will hold you to it!