



## The silence of the lambs | The Xpragmatic View



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 by [Marc Buyens \(@mbuyens\)](#), Xpragma  
[marc.buyens@xpragma.com](mailto:marc.buyens@xpragma.com)  
 url: <http://www.xpragma.com/view106.php>

Social networks now exist for several years and some of the behaviour of such communities is reasonably well understood. Enough to know that there are potential pitfalls. However, somehow we always seem to forget. Twine, a perception of social interactions.

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### Feedback and Suggestions

A couple of days ago, Radar Networks, the owner of [Twine](#) turned off further commenting on the [Twine Beta Feedback and Suggestions](#) twine. You can read the related posts [here](#) and [here](#).



The feedback twine is for *"providing suggestions to the Twine team and for reporting possible bugs or other issues that need fixing"*. The twine has been one of the most vibrant parts of the service since the beginning. But now, commenting has been turned off. As a result, the possibility for an active dialogue with the development team has more or less been shut down.

Of course, things have evolved quite a bit since the start. Initially, postings and comments on this twine were rather formal. However, as people got to know each other's interests and preferences, made connections to each other, etc. this became more of a popular discussion forum than a bug-reporting tool.

To some extent, these discussions were even more vibrant than in other social communities since the early adopters of Twine, in general, are a rather "homogeneous" group, most of them somewhat biased towards the more technology savvy part of the Internet population.

So yes, the last few months, some of the discussions often became rather lengthy and off-topic. And yes, there were sometimes postings that very likely, were not too pleasant for Radar Networks to read.

But what did they expect?

### Social networking dynamics

We fear that this, again, is an illustration of the problems you get into when there is a clear disconnect between the ambitions and the wishes of the platform provider and the social networking dynamics of the solution they create.

And they should have known better. Radar Networks might then have the ambition *"to pioneer the mainstream adoption of the Semantic Web"*, reality is that, with the present platform, they are still essentially delivering a very "classical" Web 2.0 social network platform.

There is nothing wrong with this, but then you must not be surprised that this community will exhibit a behaviour that is also very "classical" for such social network. A behaviour that, in the

mean time, is reasonably well known and understood. Some of this includes:

- Participation inequality: only a minority of the members will deliver the bulk of the postings and comments. Some of them are likely to dominate the discussions, which might have a negative impact on the willingness of other members to participate.
- Greater degree of openness: members will exhibit a greater degree of openness in their comments than they would have in a face-to-face situation.
- Cross-influencing: members will cross-influence each other's opinion which can lead to behaviour and preferences that are different from what would be in an isolated environment.
- Taking ownership: certain members are likely to actively support the further development of the platform, by writing guidelines, how-to's, even developing add-on tools. However, while doing so, they also take personal and emotional ownership of the product.

Some of this behaviour might be less desirable, but it is the reality you have to live with. So, design the interactions with your user base in such a way that you get maximum gain and minimal loss.

It is nice having a top-100 list of the most active "twiners", but when doing so, do not complain that some of them take a bit too much time on stage. It is nice asking for (constructive) feedback, but then you also have to accept that you will get some less pleasant remarks. It is nice, being CEO, to actively participate in the postings and the discussions, but do not be surprised that, after a while, people will see you and treat you as just another fellow member.

Commenting has now been turned off and a new [Twine Users Forum](#) has been started. It is unclear to us what problem this will solve.

Either you, Radar Networks, pay attention to what is written and discussed in this forum and then you have the same situation as with the Feedback twine, or you simply ignore this forum. The latter is of course the last thing you should do.


For the moment, we assume that most of us will keep using the service. However, something is definitely broken. Correctly planning and managing interactions is difficult. We know. We told so before. But also, so very much needed.


## About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.

 <http://www.facebook.com/marcb254>


 <http://www.linkedin.com/in/marcbuyens>


 <http://www.twitter.com/mbuyens>

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Xpragma bvba - Mechelsesteenweg 254 - 2820 Bonheiden - Belgium  
Tel. +32-(0)15-340 845 - [info@xpragma.com](mailto:info@xpragma.com) - [www.xpragma.com](http://www.xpragma.com)

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