Community Leaders
Magazine

Fall 2023

ADVANCING YOUR COMMUNITY CAREER

MAXIMIZING USER CONTRIBUTION

VETTING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

SPOTLIGHT CONVERSATION WITH RACHEL HAPPE

Rachel Happe
Founder of Engaged Organizations

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Hello Everyone,

We're absolutely thrilled to have you holding the latest edition of the Community Leaders Institute magazine. This edition is a treasure trove of captivating topics, thought-provoking articles, and in-depth explorations of subjects that hold immense significance for all of us. From the realms of AI to the art of career building, from the latest community frameworks to a special spotlight on one of the pioneering Community Leaders, Rachel Happe – there's bound to be something which resonates with each and every one of you within these pages.

This issue is also a celebration of a significant milestone for our team. With new ownership and management in place, the commitment to crafting an enduring and timeless institute for those who consider community an integral part of the customer or client experience has never rung truer. We're diligently toiling behind the curtains, creating fresh content, crafting ebooks, conducting research, organizing training sessions, hosting events, and much more. But that's not all; we're also extending an open invitation for your articles and submissions, welcoming your wisdom and work. We are more than just creation, we want to empower curation. Best of all, it's unfolding at our revamped community hub, MyCLI.co. Our aim is for this space to become your go-to destination for honing your skills and steering your career towards the lofty goals you set.

Thank you immensely for entrusting us and supporting our mission. We're always receptive to you and your feedback – feel free to reach out anytime at info@communitleadersinstitute.com.

Now, go delve into this edition! Enjoy!
Adrian Speyer
VP Marketing & Community

Table of Contents

Meet The CLI Team

Bill Mcglade
President

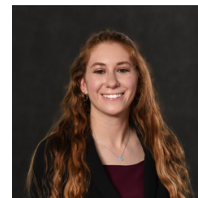**Scott Lebwohl**
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Daniela Poliszuk
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Sabrina Rom
Digital Marketing Coordinator

Community plus sales, not community vs. sales: How we work together at Common Room

By: Rebecca Marshburn

The way customers find, buy, and adopt products has changed, and go-to-market teams are racing to keep up.

Case in point: GTM professionals are paying a lot more attention to customer (and potential customer) activity in community spaces, either on owned channels like Slack and Discord or unowned channels like LinkedIn and Stack Overflow.

This has people talking about the intersection of community and sales—specifically in terms of responsibilities and risks. Community teams are wary of sales folks using community spaces as lead lists, and sales teams are worried about being locked out of community insights that will help them have more contextual, value-based conversations.

It's a discussion worth having. It's one we've had (and continue to have) at Common Room.

What we talk about when we talk about community

In its simplest form, a community is when people come together around a specific interest, activity, or goal. And today, they come together online —on Slack, Discourse, GitHub, Reddit, and many other digital touchpoints.

Naturally, communities sprout up around companies and their products. This is especially true in the B2B SaaS space, where product-led growth is the norm. Communities are a way for users to come together to learn about features and functionalities, provide feedback, share ideas, help each other get more value out of a product, and deepen their learning about their industries and its best practices.

We believe that every individual joins a community for their own reasons, and that it's important to meet members where they are. For some community members it's about learning. For others it's about connecting. And for many, it's about trying before buying.

Lots of community members want to experience the value of a product, and they're looking to have conversations with people who can help them do it—up to and including sales professionals who can set them up for success and help them achieve more.
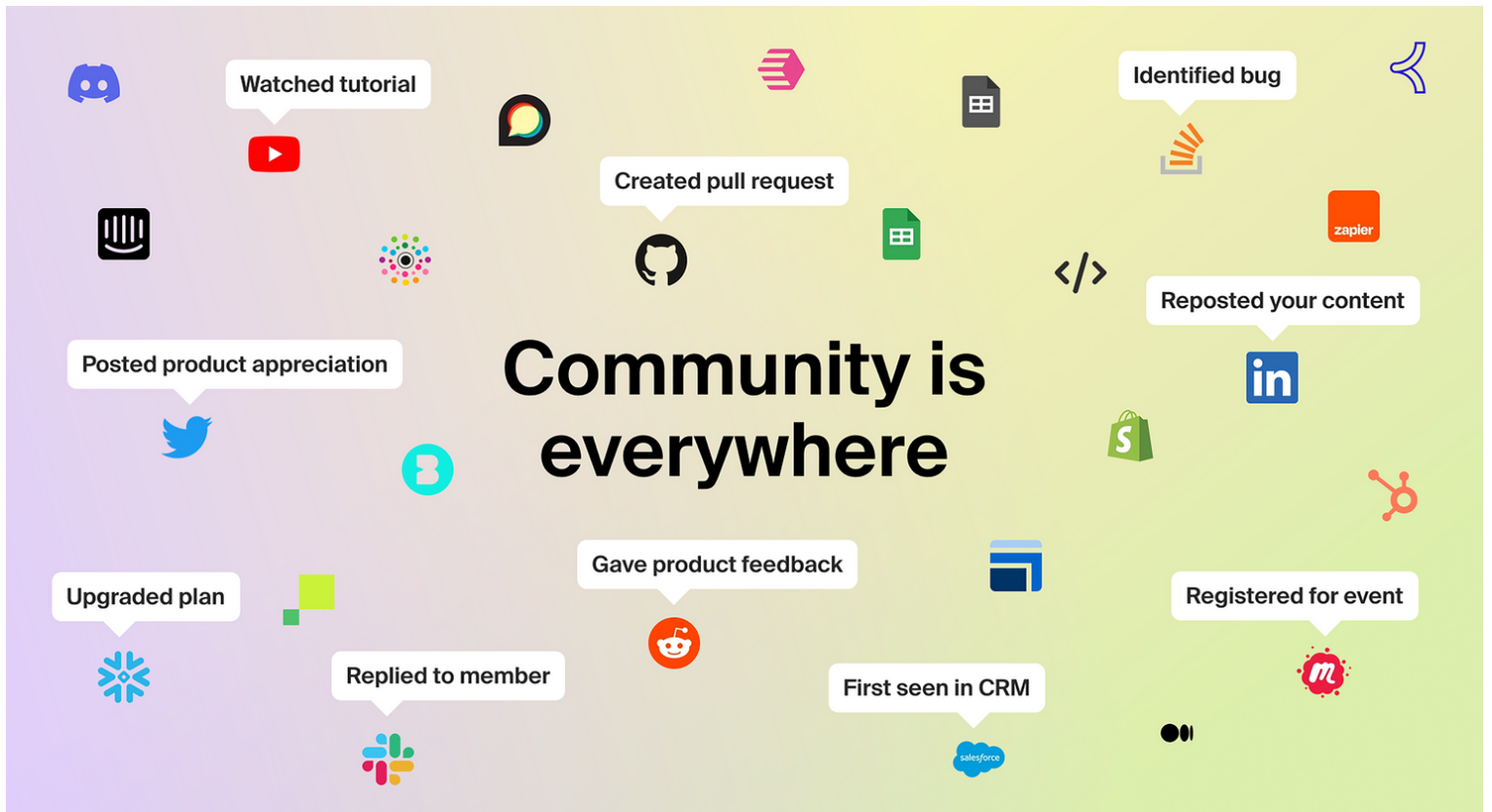
What we hear from our own community members, customers, and internal teams is quite similar:

Communities are a place of value exchange. They're mutually beneficial spaces, whether that benefit flows from member to member, member to company, or company to member. The reciprocal education, ideation, and enablement that occurs in communities creates opportunities for value creation and value capture for all parties.

The gap between community and sales teams isn't one of belief—it's one of approach. That is, how each team approaches creating and capturing value while tending to its own objectives.

Put simply, community teams want to empower their members (and turn them into brand champions) via education, connections, and resources that help them achieve their goals with a product or within a larger practice. This ultimately impacts marketing and sales by increasing awareness, distribution, and lead generation. Compared to their sales colleagues, community teams operate on a longer timeline.

It's different for sales teams—they measure time in quarters. They want to quickly and consistently identify community

Community is everywhere

Watched tutorial
Created pull request
Identified bug
Reposted your content
Posted product appreciation
Gave product feedback
Upgraded plan
Replied to member
First seen in CRM
Registered for event

members who are ready to go deeper into the product because they match the characteristics of someone who would get immense value out of becoming a customer. Their goal is to set up calls and have conversations with people who are ready to make a purchase and unlock more product value.

Both teams want to create value for members, and both teams want to capture value that ladders up to overarching business goals in the long and short term.

In our experience, a lot of the confusion about how to reconcile these approaches stems from the difference between the community channels you own and the community channels you don't.

'Big C' community vs. 'little c' community
We talk to lots of companies every day about community, including organizations that say they don't have one.

That's because they associate community with company-maintained forums, company-run user groups, and places for daily conversations, such as company-managed Slack workspaces.

But the truth is you have a community whether you interact with it or not. There's the activity you nurture in owned channels (your "little c" community) and the

activity happening across unowned channels without your input or control (your "big C" community). You may have both, but if you sell a product, you most certainly have the latter.

Owned communities are ones that people have to proactively join. They're communities of product where people come together to explore how a technology works, get questions about it answered, and work together to improve it. Or they're communities of practice where people come together to improve their skills, gain more knowledge, and work side by side to hit certain goals. Sometimes
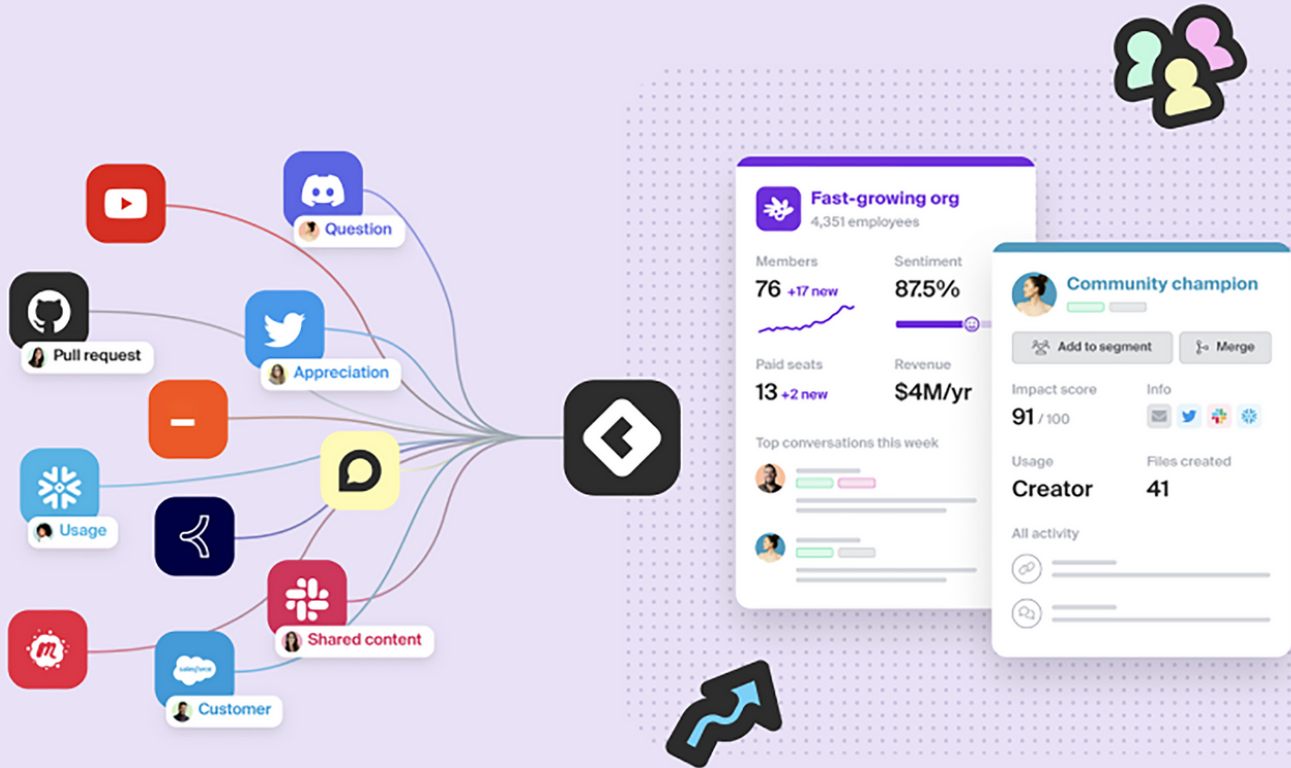
Owned communities	Unowned communities
Activity on owned channels that are hosted and managed by companies.	Cross-channel activity unrelated to official company programs.

they're a combination of the two: part support center, part learning center, and part social gathering spot.

Unowned communities are more ambiguous. They're not fixed, dedicated spaces so much as a collection of activities spread across channels: comments under a YouTube video, starred repositories on GitHub, product recommendations posted in a subreddit. People can organically create, join, and leave them without even realizing that's what they're doing.

Whether community members are coming together in an owned or unowned channel, keeping up with what they're saying, what they're doing, and how they feel about it (or even getting visibility into this activity in the first place) is hard. It's even harder to know exactly who's doing what, let alone connect the dots between their activities in one channel versus another. Hence the term "dark funnel."

And that makes participating in or influencing this activity next to impossible.

We created Common Room to help organizations understand the engagement happening across these channels, combine those signals with the product and customer data they already have, and use those insights to take the right actions at the right time across the entire customer journey —quickly and at scale.

Community expectations

Expectation of privacy | Expectation of publicity

But owned and unowned communities are very different creatures. And as you might imagine, member expectations shift between the two.

Meeting customers where they are (and meeting their expectations)

Common Room is designed to give you a 360-degree view of the people who make up your community across both owned and unowned channels.

We think of these channels as a spectrum with the expectation of privacy on one end and the expectation of publicity on the other. Where a channel falls on that spectrum indicates implicit assumptions about how a company engages community members. In other words: Different platforms come with different expectations and behavioral norms.

For example, channels like Slack are strongly associated with owned communities and the private end of the spectrum. People come to these channels

with the expectation that organizations want to provide education, answer questions, and help them grow. They don't expect to receive unsolicited and unconsented messages from sales teams that are only trying to pitch them as opposed to getting to know their pain points, goals, and use cases.

On the other hand, channels like LinkedIn are more associated with unowned communities and the public end of the spectrum. People come to these channels to crowd-source solutions, give opinions, and share experiences. There's an expectation that a sales representative may reach out based on their activity, whether it's a comment under a post or a private message.

Ultimately, it's up to every organization to determine what its goals are, what it's comfortable with, and what that looks like in practice across different channels. That being said, there are certain best practices we follow internally at Common Room.

Common Room

Your community, product, and CRM data. Together.

The best way to build your community. The best way to build your business.

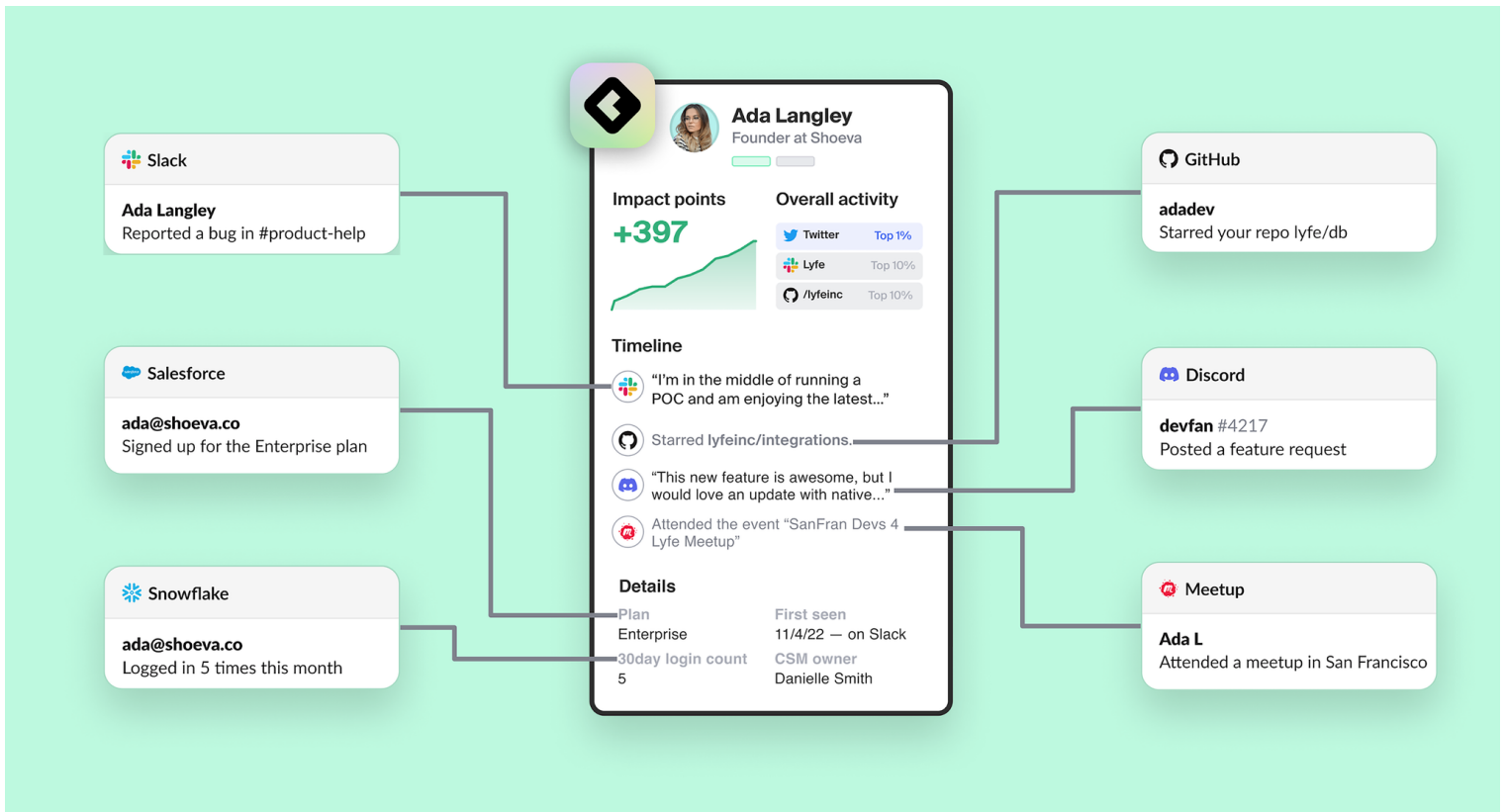HubSpot   webflow   dbt Labs   Airtable

Figma   Grafana Labs   asana

Common goals instead of competing priorities

You can create complicated frameworks and flowcharts, but we believe true partnership between community and sales teams is based on mutual respect.

For us, that means:

Empathy

We work to understand each other's goals, how success is measured across different teams, and the ways community may help.

Communication

We talk openly and honestly (and sometimes very colorfully) about how and for which purposes it makes sense for salespeople to get involved in our community.

Collaboration

We look for opportunities to work together (and coordinate who should take the lead) to improve alignment and visibility.

How we work together changes depending on whether it concerns our owned community space, the Uncommon Slack, or activity happening on unowned channels.

When it comes to our owned community, I'm the captain of the ship and sales is a member of my crew. But when it comes to our unowned community, I'm just the first mate. I can help supply sales with insights into activities happening across channels and provide key context for where community members are in their customer journey, but they're the ones steering the ship.

Sometimes owned and unowned channels overlap, and it's in those situations where having a shared guiding principle is essential. We boil it down to a single question: Will doing something increase the likelihood of a person recommending our community and product to their peers or not?

We've set up guidelines (bulleted below) about what it means to share with our Uncommon community rather than pitch it. If a member of our Slack community asks a question or surfaces a challenge we feel like our sales team can help with, we use the following protocol:

- The salesperson introduces themselves.
- They personalize their message based on the context Common Room provides (and make sure it's value-additive, not self-serving).
- They ask permission to follow up with the community

member.

- They don't ask for a meeting.
- They include a voice note (because we're humans just like our members, not robots).

When I ask how things are going, it's with the understanding that my sales colleagues will be transparent about how community interactions are received. In other words, what was a glow (what went really well) and what was a grow (what could have gone better).

If an interaction was a grow, we work together on ways to improve it. That may mean offering a different mechanism for value, such as connecting a prospect to someone in their industry who can help with their goals or sharing a piece of relevant content with them that they can review on their own time. Or it may mean stopping outreach altogether and giving a member space.

💬 Here's an example of community and sales working together at Common Room:

A new member joins our Slack community and the community leader (me) sends them a welcome message. That member introduces themself in our #say-hello channel and we identify that they match our ICP (ideal customer profile) criteria through the insights Common Room gives us.

That member posts a question in our #common-room-product-help channel and we see that they're not on a paid plan but that

additional paid functionality would help them achieve their goal.

I let our sales team know and one of my colleagues sends them a no-pressure, no-pitch direct message to introduce themselves. In it they let the member know that they're available if they're interested in learning more about how paid versions of our product can help them get where they want to go.

To codify these types of exchanges, we're working on building an internal code of conduct in addition to our external code of conduct. While the latter also applies to our internal team, we believe we have the responsibility to go above and beyond those expectations as we chart the partnership between community and sales.

Above all, it's essential that every team member sees themselves not as their role or title, but as a community member. Their goal should be to learn and share as much as anyone else and model the behaviors we want to see in

our wider community.

Putting partnership into practice

We use Common Room to help us walk our talk.

With team notes, we can document relevant information about different community members, tag our colleagues with questions and concerns, and generally make sure everyone is on the same page.

As for our Slack community, workflows help me make sure that when a new member joins, the first touch is always from me. Team alerts and auto-categories help me stay up to date on any questions or issues and, when it's appropriate, route individuals to a member of our sales team.

I also use segments to build and manage cohorts of folks my sales teammates might be interested in getting to know when the time is right.

For example, we know that people who join our Uncommon Slack
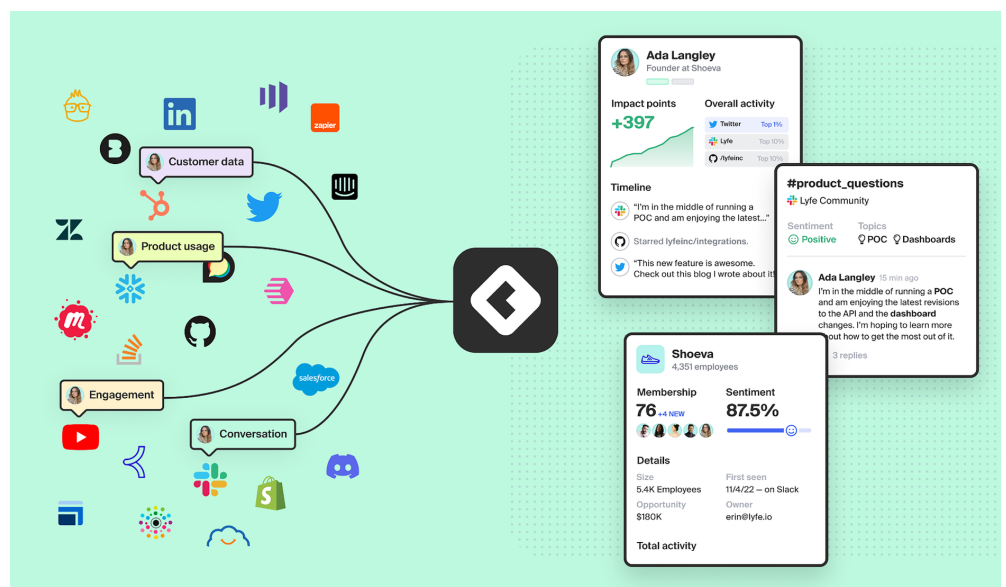
community before they become customers feel more confident in knowing why and how they'd like to grow and support their community using Common Room.

The daily chatter of our Slack community provides a faster path to success for them.

So I've built a segment that automatically adds folks who have interacted with us across our social media channels and who are in the industries or have the job titles that get a lot of value from Common Room. Then I reach out to them with an invitation to join our Uncommon Slack. This ultimately makes future sales conversations easier and more valuable for both them and our sales team.

Likewise, I know that our community members will see more value if they actually use our product, so I can also identify members who match our ICP and invite them to create an account.

There are guardrails that can be built into Common Room, as well. With our restricted viewer role, we help companies give some team members view-only access to Common Room so they can access reports, segments, and team notes, but not certain contact details for community members.

Some companies believe DMing a member of a Slack community is never a good idea. We don't, as long as it contextually makes sense and provides value to the community member.

Tyler Hannan, Senior Director of Developer Advocacy at ClickHouse, summed it up perfectly during a recent community education event when he said: "There are companies that are well-known for having a very firm line of separation. Community is here, sales is here, and never the twain shall meet. The twain should meet when it's respectful."

Even if certain channels are off limits, that doesn't mean community and sales teams can't work together. We recently published a case study with Census about its Slack-based community of practice: the Operational Analytics Club.

Census has a strict no selling policy in this space, but the company's Marketing Chief of Staff and Director of Developer Marketing, Allie Beazell, will make insights from the community available to the sales team to help it gain valuable context and have more value-based conversations set up outside of the OA Club. As Allie put it: "Whether it's connecting with our members about their questions and what resources they need or connecting with our sales team to help them better understand our target buyer and their paint points, Common Room has been a great source of insights as we scale."

I share both of Tyler's and Allie's "better together" philosophies. I'm even a little looser about the intersection of community and sales than Allie—and these differences of approach are exactly why I love having deep

conversations about community building.

I firmly believe that community and sales should be complementary, and that sales teams should have access to member information for better, more valuable conversations. I also believe community and developer relations professionals should have the power to traffic control access to those insights and what those conversations look like, especially when they're happening on owned channels.

Sales teams aren't the only ones under pressure to drive business impact. Community and DevRel folks are increasingly being asked to prove the ROI of their work (and to do it with fewer resources).

Today's customers gravitate toward communities, whether they're owned or unowned. That gives every team a chance to contribute to customer success and business growth.

There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer for every company. There's only what's best for your customers, your business, and your team members.

We're gearing up to release more product features that will help teams work better together, but we believe mutual respect is always the best starting point. I hope visibility into our approach helps make this discussion a little easier for everyone involved: you, your colleagues, and, most importantly, your community members.

Keep the conversation going in the Uncommon Slack
Join the chat with thousands of community, developer relations, and go-to-market leaders talking about topics like this in the Uncommon community Slack. See you there!

Author: Rebecca Marshburn, Head of Community at Common Room
Rebecca [she/her] is the Head of Community at Common Room, the intelligent community growth platform that empowers community, DevRel, and GTM teams to better engage and support members, build products users love, and measure the impact their work has on the business. Rebecca leads Common Room's Uncommon community, a healthy and fun space for community-first builders to share best practices, ask questions, and level up each other's knowledge. Say hello to Rebecca in the Uncommon community Slack or on Twitter and LinkedIn.

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Maximizing User Contribution: Let Them Do The Job

Community must be core to a business' value proposition engine, not a casual feature.

By: Lais de Oliveira

Here is a simple yet often overlooked premise for community: for it to be effective, its participants must do "the work" that creates its intrinsic value.

In a business context, that means enabling users and customers to create value for each other. Businesses known to leverage community for success understand that user participation is fundamental to enhancing value creation.

From Hubspot and Waze to Duolingo and Taylor swift, they enable their people to get the job done, turning customers, users, and fans into participants.

How do they do it?

In this article, we will review the importance of adding your users and customers to your value creation engine and introduce the User Contribution Journey and Lifecycle frameworks to help you enhance customer experience and success.

Key Premise: Let Them Do The Job.

Clayton Christensen's Theory of

Jobs to Be Done states that we "hire" a product to get a job done. If successful, we hire it again. If not, we "fire" that product and look for a different solution. Translating this idea to community: if your business incorporates community as a solution, you must activate your customers' participation to solve the problem defined in your brand promise (your business' raison d'etre).

In practical terms, people participate in delivering your value proposition by contributing. Their job is to create value. Yours is to enable high-value interactions between them.

For a community to yield concrete results and be relevant for customer success, its operations must be intricately connected to the business core value proposition. The most robust business-based communities (or community-driven businesses) grow based on this premise: the "Job to Be Done" must be done by your users.

Contribution is relevant to customer success when it:

1 Is aligned with your business core value proposition. This way, community isn't a distraction, nor a fancy feature,
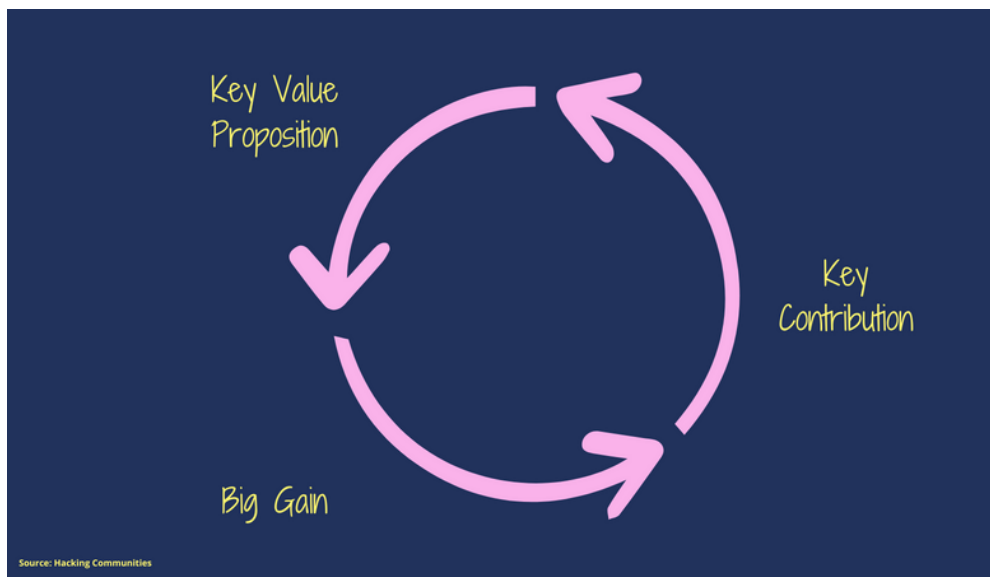
Credit: Hacking Communities by Lais de Oliveira

but a key asset to your business success.

2 Happens systemically. Users don't solve their own problems but participate in a system that will eventually yield value back (the more they contribute, the more value they gain);

3 Builds relationships, not transactions. People interact consistently. Eventually, your product becomes the excuse (place or proposition) people meet around. What matters is the interactions around the table.

If classic community building is about designing consistent interactions to build trust, in business that means designing products like relationship-building systems: between customers and your brand, and customer-to-customer (C2C).

When following the three pillars above, User Contribution creates a self-fulfilling community prophecy, meaning an abundance-minded space where your gifts keep on giving.

In most communities, the more people contribute, the more they become relevant, gain value, and return for more. Allowing users to contribute should enhance their big gains, leading to ultimate customer success.

The specific role participants play, as well as how much and how often they interact will vary depending on your business model. People can contribute in various ways, from writing an article to answering each other's questions or adding new people to your user base (or community). **But in most cases, community means efficiency.**

For a quick example of a templated business model and its unique type of contribution stemming from its value proposition:

Knowledge-Sharing Communities (e.g., VC Portfolio, Fellowships, Forums)

- **Key Value Proposition**: Accelerate time to learning / gaining knowledge / solving problems
- **Key Contribution**: Share knowledge. How? Answer/ask questions, host a workshop, participate in events, have 1-on-1s, and other forms of interaction.
- **Key Gain**: The more people engage, the more likely they are to gain (fast) value when needed

If you zoom out, this model is similar to communities around proposition is optimization: to accelerate time to solution sourcing, be it gaining knowledge, service marketplaces and product development, where the key value finding a service provider, or identifying a bug.

The universal value proposition of most communities is related to optimization through participation: reducing the amount of time and effort spent by users in finding solutions. Your responsibility is to define wisely how users can contribute.

### Getting Technical: Community Business Model

Whatever contribution means in your business, the premise remains: let them get the job done.

Borrowing the visualization from the Business Model Canvas (BMC): Customers must be present on the canvas's right and left sides.

The right side represents the usual aspects of growth and marketing, most often associated with community: our customers, where can we find them, and how do they engage with our business (Customer Segments, Channels, and Customer Relationships, respectively). Since advocacy is usually the most desired outcome

Community Around	Knowledge-Sharing	Solutions Sourcing	Product Dev.
Key Value Prop	Optimization: reduce or accelerate time/effort to Big Gain		
Fast Track: Big Gain	Reduce mistakes, learn and grow (faster)	Find solutions, product or service (faster)	Develop a better product version (faster)
Key Contribution	Share knowledge. Answer/ask questions, host workshops, participate in events, 1-on-1s	Share solutions. Craft how-to content, review providers, add or refer new ones, report bad providers	Share feedback. Identify bugs, participate in beta-testing, ideate new features etc.

Credit: Hacking Communities by Lais de Oliveira
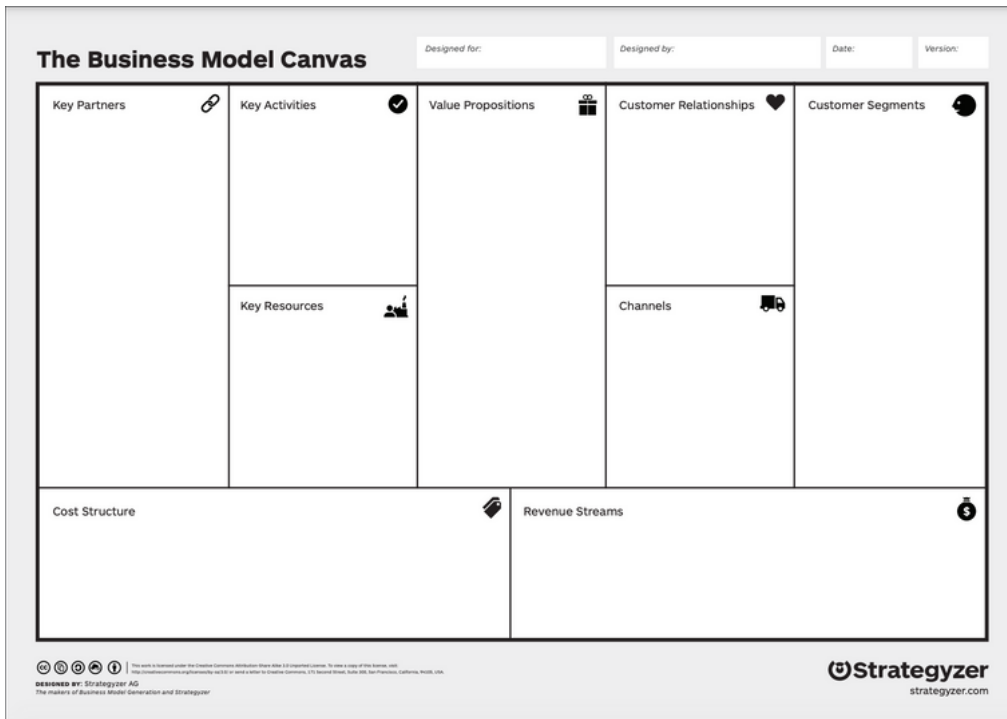
Credit: Business Model Canvas by Alex Osterwalder

of community strategy, many businesses place community under marketing teams, neglecting that growth is an outcome of community as part of product and operations.

The left side represents product development and operations: what we need to deliver value, how we do it, and whom we can partner with to make this process more efficient (Key Resources, Key Activities, and Key Partners).

The right side summarizes Revenue Streams—the left in the business' Cost Structure.

Achieving customer success through community requires customers to take ownership and contribute to delivering your business' value proposition. That means adding your customers to the product/operational side of the canvas. This idea might sound counterintuitive to traditional business concepts for various reasons, but primarily because it challenges the stereotypical notion of a customer as someone whose only task is to pay and get their problem solved by your team. By moving them from a passive position of solely "value consumers" to an active role of "value creators," we're also adding customers to our Cost Structure since community operations require investment in infrastructure and interaction design.

Building a community around a business requires getting comfortable with breaking the wall separating the kitchen from the dining room, allowing customers to see through your operations and understand how to create value with your business.

In other words, people are likely to engage, contribute, and interact with others precisely because, in doing so, they are reaping the benefits of being part of said community.

The success of a business-based community relies on your ability to carve a clear path for users to create value for each other in alignment with your core value proposition. More importantly, it is about successfully communicating how they gain value from contribution (i.e., why they should create value).

Ultimately, community optimizes operations by leveraging the collective to source solutions, identify bugs, and solve problems. Thriving communities are abundance-generating machines that enhance value creation and accelerate its delivery. The ultimate success of which is efficiency.

Practical Learnings from Waze, Duolingo and Hubspot

I spoke with key community leaders at the aforementioned in order to get applicable examples for this article. Each conversation was worth its entire article, if not a book - and be sure I'll keep sharing the gems learned from them in future content.

For now, here are a few insights that encapsulate the ideas shared above.

Make it Relevant and Accessible

As defined by Vivian Reidler, who spent eight years designing a product-based community at Duolingo, "community contribution has to move a needle to the business".

The language learning platform valued at $6.2B started from a mission that rallied the community: to develop the best education in the world and make it universally available. Reidler said, "Everybody who joined the community agreed to this and wanted to help. What Duolingo did, since the beginning, is enable them to help."

In Reidler's words: "[Users] are not your employees; you can't tell them what to do. You need to have a system that encourages them [to get the job done]."

Duolingo's early success wouldn't have been possible without the contributions of several users who helped them to expand their course offerings into multiple languages. Her team designed an incubator program: a community-driven effort in which user teams could create specific courses leveraging the company's existing template and platform.

According to Reidler, the business "needed the community to keep the courses accurate and rich." As a team, they built a system that enabled and allowed the community to run with it. "We tried to stay out of the way," she shared.

Duolingo's community architecture evolved as the company grew: whereas at the beginning, top contributors were found in forums where users would help each other learn their own language, today, the company boasts a more complex system to spark participation based on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations - the specifics of which is worth a whole new article.

A key factor of success for Duolingo's community efforts is based on the fact that the Community Team OKRs were directly aligned to the main business core metrics, a trait shared by another of my favorite examples of community and product integration: Waze.

Make it Measurable and Indispensable

At Waze, the Communities Team's OKRs stem directly from the company mission and OKRs. Following a squad methodology, the Community Team's presence is spread across the entire organization, which enables them to embed community in all business operations and leverage it for success. The community-driven navigation app boasts one of the most robust community operations and architecture I've ever encountered.

Their Global Head of Community, Hila Roth, states that "community must follow the company's mission". With a data-science background, Roth was able to leverage data to validate how community efforts led to business success.

She made community indispensable by proving its impact in product development and by enhancing the quality solutions provided to users (e.g., community-led efforts significantly reduced the time it took to identify bugs, compared to in-house testing).

Roth grew her team from one to over fifty people and, to this date, they manage thousands of active contributors organized in a complex and effective system that stems from product development to cover multiple roles and layers of commitment, from map editors to beta-testers and localizers.

As product, CX, community, and operations teams, our job is to carve a clear path that enables users and customers to get the job done. It is crucial to have a data-driven approach while ensuring their contribution stays relevant to the business value proposition.

Make it Clear and Delightful

Starting from the stark simplicity of the obvious: to get people to do something, you must have clarity on what you want them to do. The non-obvious part is that you must decide how to do it - which widely depends on your business model and participant profile.

In conversation with Hubspot's Christina Garnett, she highlighted data's importance in providing choice when carving those paths. According to her, customers have different needs, capabilities, and preferences for demonstrating love. Using the analogy of Gary Chapman's five love languages, she highlighted the importance of understanding how people prefer taking action and contributing within your community. As shared in this article: "If swag doesn't make you feel valued, each subsequent gift has diminishing

returns, and customer love turns cold."

An advocacy expert, Garnett, identified the various ways customers prefer to demonstrate love, breaking down the most likely (and effective paths) to make contributions simple and possible to her top users. For her, it is about meeting them where they are and providing them with choice - while keeping it relevant to your business.

The key to her success is a data-driven approach to identifying the multiple shapes that customer love could take. The more you know about your users, the easier it will be to identify critical ways they prefer to interact, communicate, and contribute to your business.

Another underappreciated element of clarity is onboarding. According to Greg Daine's ChurnRX report on 23 Ways to Reduce Churn in 2023, customer lifetime is 2.4 times higher for those who chose onboarding vs. those who waived it. In the same report, Daine establishes that integration can double customer lifetime commitment.

Onboarding helps reduce the time your customers spend trying to understand how to navigate and make the most of your community.

Next Steps: Introducing User Contribution Journey and Lifecycle
Let's go over key steps to activate user contribution.

Quick recap:

When you design community interactions that are aligned with your key value proposition, these are also likely to be relevant to your users. By contributing, they create more value to themselves and others within the community.

User Contribution Journey (UCJ) is a framework for activating value creation through users. Designing it helps a clear path for people to grow within your community (through participation and contribution), from new to top contributors.

In sequence, we'll brush through the concept of User Contribution Lifecycle (UCL), a framework that stems from the UCJ, extending its data through time to understand and predict the time elapsed from the moment someone joins your community as a new member to when they become a top contributor, and finally to when they "retire" and open space for new contributors.

Understanding your business' UCJ and UCL helps you optimize and enhance value creation through community, allowing people to invest in their own support system.

Here are a few questions that must be answered to get your team aligned and started:
- What is your key value proposition?
- In what ways can your community participate in its delivery?

- How can you make it easy for your users to contribute?

Referencing Chapter 17 in Hacking Communities: "It is your responsibility as a community builder to create communication systems that build and maintain trust while providing tools to empower people to help your community grow."
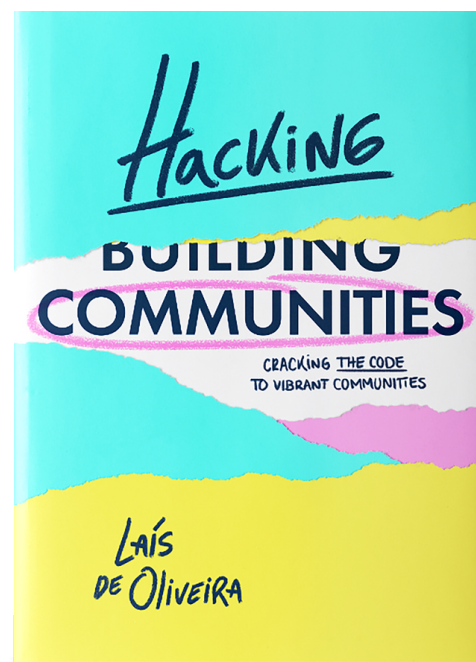
Hacking Communities: Cracking the Code to Vibrant Communities by Lais de Oliveira

Inside this book you will discover the foundational principles and frameworks to further develop yourself as a strong community leader.

Our job is to enable people to grow our community and to grow, themselves, in the process.

Author: Lais de Oliveira

With over a decade of experience in community building, entrepreneurship, and innovation, Laís de Oliveira is the Author and Founder of Hacking Communities, a consulting and educational platform that helps organizations and individuals create and grow vibrant communities. She is also the author of the book Hacking Communities: Cracking the Code to Vibrant Communities, published in December 2020.

WHERE ARE THE CLI MEMBERS?

51.32%

3.78%

2.32%

33.43%

2.78%

1.53%

1.35%

3.49%
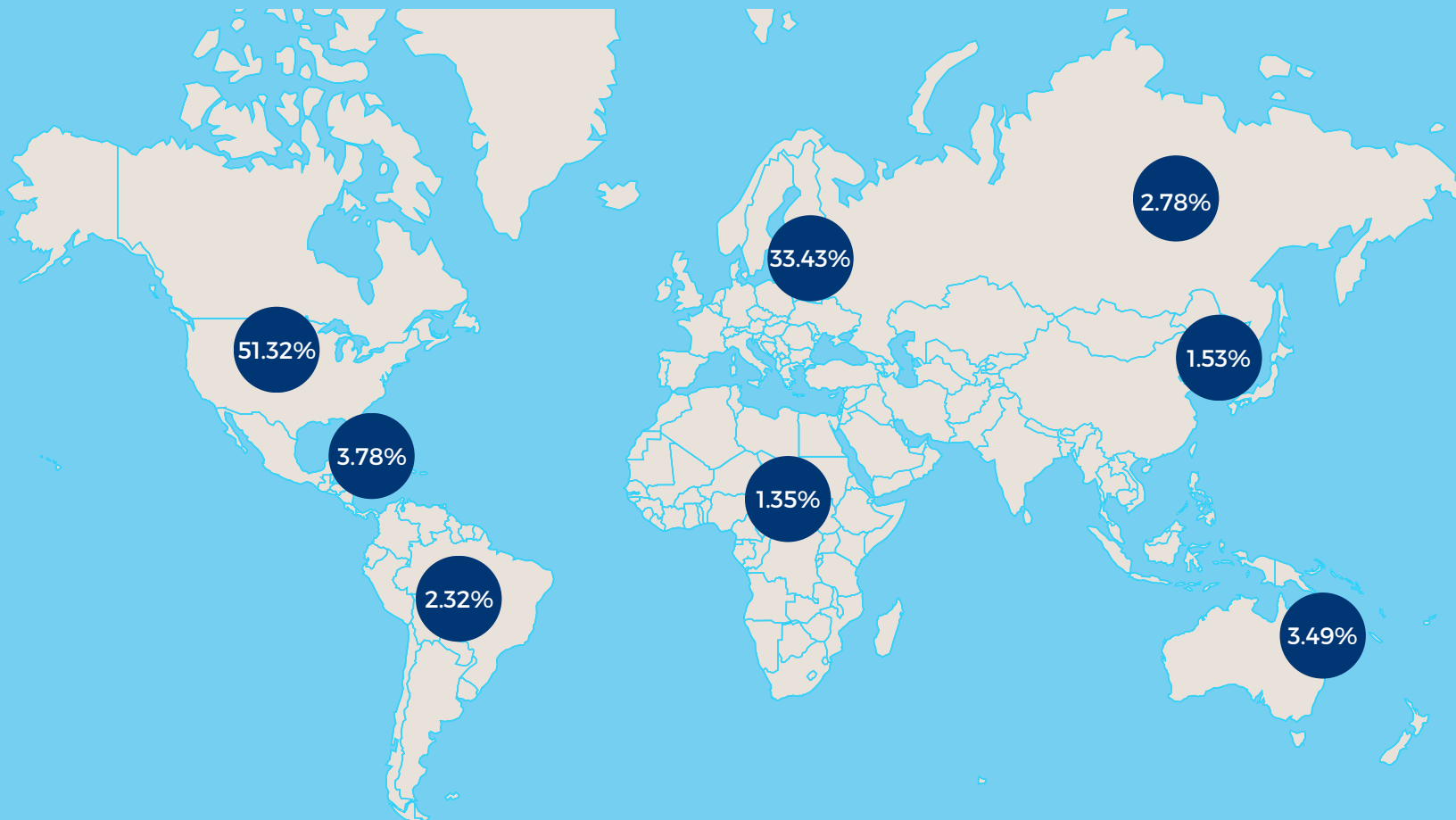
Know Where to Show up: Vetting Social Media Platforms for Community Growth Marketing

By: Carolyn Zick

There is no shortage of social media platforms at the moment. Learn how to pick the most effective ones for your community

What is to follow in this article is a no-nonsense way to sort through the noise and select which platforms will be most impactful for your community. We're going to take into account things beyond what type of person shows up on what platform to get to the root of how your community can show up online in a powerful way for the long term.

> **This framework can be used to sift through social media platforms as they exist at this moment, and it can also be applied to how you select to engage on any future platforms that arise."**

💡**An important note before we get started:**

Using this social media platform vetting process assumes that you, the community expert, have a very accurate and strong understanding of who your ideal members are and what attracts them to your community. If you haven't gotten those foundational details sorted out, focus on those before determining where to show up online. This vetting process only works as well as you understand your community.

Additionally, setting specific goals for your community's social media presence is key to unlocking whether or not a presence on a particular platform will benefit your community. Your social marketing goals need to be Specific, Measurable, Action-based, Realistic, and Time-sensitive (aka. S.M.A.R.T. Goals).

As an example, a poor "goal" for community social media would be "get more members." Great. How many more? One? One million? By when? Next week? Fifty years from now? To reframe that as a S.M.A.R.T. goal could look like: Have a 5% increase in new memberships that stay beyond their first week by Q4 of this year.

With that out of the way, let's vet some platforms!

💪 **Social media is a powerful tool for community building, but it takes brand resources and responsibility to make your strategy effective.**

Throwing a post on your brand's social media profile that announces your community is unlikely to garner viral results without forethought and strategy.

Likewise, selecting to have a presence on a social media platform without weighing the platform benefits against your community's needs is a recipe for time wasted on ineffective marketing efforts.

To determine where to showcase your unique and wonderful community online, we're going to need to start with an audit.

🤓 **The Social Media Audit**

Answer the following questions about your current social media for your community:

The Current Presence:
- What platforms do you currently own profiles on for your community?
- What are your current follower counts on these platforms?
- Which of these platforms have been actively posted to with

original (not repost) content in the past two months?

- Do you have performance data for any of these platforms? Focus on impressions, reach, and traffic to the community website metrics if you aren't sure where to start.

The Current Content:

- What type of content is currently being created for social media?
- What type of content is currently being created for other owned spaces (for the community itself, or for a blog, email newsletter, website, etc)?
- Are there additional types of content that team members have the skills to create?
- Is there a library of content already formatted and ready to be used or repurposed for social media?

The Current Investment:

- How much is being budgeted for organic social marketing (not paid ads)?
- Is there room in that budget for additional work?
- What team manages the current social media presence?
- Does that team have the ability to take on additional work?
- Is upstaffing required to manage another social media platform?

That's a deep dive to take on social media, but understanding these things will help you tremendously in the new platform vetting process we are about to embark on.

📋 **The Vetting Parameters**

Use the following parameters to gauge whether or not a platform makes sense for your community. We'll go over some examples after exploring the ways to grade a platform's benefits for your community.

What are the platforms' user demographics?

Finding a brand new social media platform's user demographics might be tricky, and looking into the current big players' data can be a daunting task as well. Using tools like Statita or other trusted data aggregators can be really helpful as well.

What type of content gets shared on this platform?

Start by listing all types of content that is supported by the platform as well as any limitations like character count or file size. It can also be helpful to seek out comparative analysis of the supported content types to see if there is a clear winner on the platform. A great example of this is the reach of a short format video on Instagram vs. the reach of a still photo directly after the launch of

their Reels feature in 2020. Reels reached significantly further.

Does this platform foster communication?

How can you get in touch with users on this platform? Some options may include: group chat, direct message, user groups, reply with video, voice message, share/remix user posts. Check to see which of these functions business accounts are also allowed to do, it's not always a given that if a user account can communicate in one way on a platform that a business account will also be able to do the same.

How can this platform be managed?

Does the platform integrate with any social media management software your team already uses? Can posts be uploaded and scheduled in advance? Are there security concerns related to how the profile can be managed? Can administration accounts be created? Can Two-Factor authentication be enabled? Does the platform security conform with security protocols implemented by your company?

📝 Let's compare notes!

Keeping the answer from your Social Media Audit, your ideal community member demographic information, and your social marketing goals, let's explore how a potential new social media platform stacks up. With data in hand, start comparing the following things:

Demographics

Does your ideal member hang out on the prospective platform? Are they the majority of users or the minority? Is there any information on the frequency with which your ideal demographic engages on the platform or how frequently they post?

Content Lift

Will this platform use content you are already creating, something that can be repurposed with low lift, or content that will need to be created from scratch? If the latter is true, it will also be important to evaluate what skills or software may be required to create that content. Video content is often higher lift than still image or text-based content.

It is also worth noting that certain types of content perform well across a range of platforms, so for example if your community is already creating short format vertical video for one platform, it may be worth considering which other platforms support that content form.

Communication Styles

Can you get in touch with your audience in meaningful ways on this platform? Are the types of communication available on the platform similar to what you offer within your community? While this may not always be the most relevant piece of information, knowing how users expect to communicate on a specific platform can give some indicators as to how they may feel most comfortable communicating within your community.

Security and Management

Does this platform pose any management concerns? Will your team be able to add it effectively to any existing social media platform management system they already have in place? Does the platform depend on individual personal accounts to act as administrators or can brand accounts be made? Are there platform security settings (or lack of) that go against your company's online security protocols?

Time and Bandwidth

Chat with the Marketing Team about their current skills and workload. Everyone will need to be on the same page about who will handle this new social media presence. Based on the content creation needs and projected management time required, determine the estimated per-week time and effort input to this platform. Having these discussions cross functionally is a huge benefit if the Community Team is separate from Marketing or PR.

🧪 Let's Experiment with Some Examples!

There is no perfect fit platform that will check every single box for your community. But using all the questions we've answered to this point, we can weigh our options and make informed analysis of any social media platform. Let's play with some completely made up examples:

Lights, Camera, Action!

Nerds on Film (NoF) is a community of professional content creators who make tabletop role play game (TTRPG) video content. These members pay annual dues to enjoy the company of their fellow content creators and learn professional videography techniques. The NoF Community Team is considering whether or not they should start a TikTok account for the brand.

Pros:
- Great demographic fit, there is already a vibrant TTRPG community on TikTok
- The NoF Community Team is already creating short format videos of their longer YouTube video content, so TikTok content is low lift
- Their team is already familiar with TikTok and how to use it

Cons:
- The team has security concerns about the platform

The Verdict:

TikTok could be a really great fit for them, if their team determines whether or not the security risks are worth it. They decide to focus on getting quality data and information about the security risks of the platform before creating an account.

A Mammoth Undertaking

Denver UX (DUX) is a regional community of UX professionals who gather online to share job opportunities, educational resources, and grow the region's pool of UX professional talent. The DUX Community Team is considering getting involved on a Mastodon server focused on US-based tech talent after their brand left Twitter (aka X) last month.

Pros:
- The Mastodon server they are investigating seems like a vibrant and active space full of folks who share their ethos
- The team feels like they could share some repurposed content from their LinkedIn presence
- Mastodon is as a whole, very focused on community building

Cons:
- The team is unsure if there are many people from Denver in that server
- Mastodon is very focused on community- meaning it's a space that would require the team to spend a lot of time fostering relationships

The Verdict:
Another tough call, the DUX team decided to make personal Mastodon accounts and get a feel for the server instead of putting a brand presence forward. They don't allocate company time to pursuing relationships on Mastodon with Denver-based UX professionals, but they are hoping that their personal endeavors will result in greater awareness of their organizations.

For the Dogs

InnoVetNet is a community of veterinary professionals who gather online to study for continuing education exams and certifications, as well as to share tips on making their practices more innovative with new technologies. The InnoVetNet team is considering starting a YouTube channel to showcase highlights from their monthly member interview live streams they host within their community.

Pros:
- The interviews are already happening on a monthly basis, so the raw footage exists
- They feel that their content could easily reach the right folks with proper optimization on YouTube

Cons:
- Their team is already stretched thin on time with their robust monthly event schedule
- Nobody on their team knows how to edit videos for YouTube, and there isn't budget to hire an editor

The Verdict:
The InnoVetNet team decides to put off their YouTube presence until they can hire a professional video editor to go through their back catalog of member interview recordings. They are building this into the budget after assessing the benefits of creating a well optimized YouTube presence.

Stay focused on the needs of your community and how your social media presence can help you achieve your community goals.

When you keep your goals at the forefront of the decision-making process and have a realistic view of what your team is able to input to a platform, deciding where to show up online becomes a less daunting task. Revisit this framework as a team when a new platform is being considered, especially focusing on the reality of the amount of effort showing up well will require.
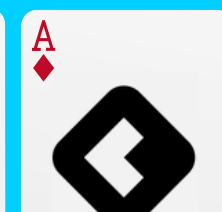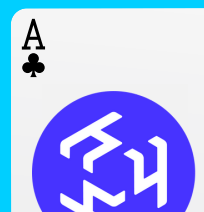

Author: Carolyn Zick

Carolyn Zick is a social marketing expert and a community building nerd. She is the Owner and Founder of Bad Axe Enterprises, a social & community media company. Get in touch with Carolyn on LinkedIn https://www.linkedin.com/in/carolyn-zick/ or via email carolyn@badaxeenterprises.com

Unlocking AI-fueled community building

By: Morgan Wood

As AI revolutionizes numerous industries, community building is no exception. Embracing this technology, as Aristotle once observed, is an embodiment of the idea that "change in all things is sweet".

> **By courageously embracing this change, community managers can leverage AI to dramatically increase the quality of their content and engagement.**

With artificial intelligence, we can not only adapt to change but also improve the process and results of community building. Let's explore how AI promises to bring transformative progress to our communities.

The best place to begin? Prompting will be the key to your success.

We've handpicked prompts under eight essential categories for you to start experimenting with. With them, you'll find it easier to create captivating content, build a vibrant community, plan exciting content, design straightforward policies, celebrate wins, and spark engagement. Let's dive in!

Content Creation

- Generate a series of weekly posts on [topic] that our community members will find educational and engaging.
- Help design a creative infographic that breaks down the complexities of [topic].
- Draft an insightful and concise blog post on [trending topic].

Event Planning

- Provide a detailed plan for an online event around [insert topic] that our community would find engaging.
- Create a promotional campaign for our upcoming event [event details].
- Help develop a post-event survey to gather feedback from attendees.

Education and Training

- Design a beginner-friendly tutorial on [insert topic] that our community members can easily understand and learn from.
- Propose a list of experts who we can invite to host a webinar or training session on [topic].
- Draft a set of FAQs on [topic] to serve as a learning resource.

Policy and Guidelines Creation

- Help draft a comprehensive set of community guidelines that promotes respect and inclusivity.
- Suggest ways to ensure our community guidelines are

clear and easily understood by all members.

- Propose a plan to enforce community guidelines effectively while maintaining a positive community atmosphere.

Feedback Collection

- Design a user-friendly survey to gather feedback on [topic or event].
- Generate prompts for a discussion thread dedicated to collecting member feedback and suggestions.
- Suggest ways to analyze and action the feedback collected from our community members.

Celebration and Recognition

- Create a unique and engaging post to celebrate our community's [milestone].
- Propose a format for a 'Member of the Month' feature to recognize the contributions of our members.
- Help devise a creative way to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of our community.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

- Suggest ways to make our community more inclusive and welcoming for all.
- Provide tips on how to make our content more accessible to members with different abilities.
- Draft a post that encourages members to respect and value the diversity within our community.

Community Partnerships and Collaborations

- Identify potential communities or organizations that align with our interests for possible collaborations.
- Suggest strategies for maintaining healthy and beneficial partnerships with other communities or organizations.
- Create a proposal for a collaborative event with [community or organization name].

Conclusion

The intersection of AI and community building presents an opportunity to drive engagement, inclusivity, and growth in unprecedented ways.

By applying AI-driven prompts in these key areas, we can enhance our content, cultivate stronger communities, plan impactful events, and foster effective collaborations.

As we journey into this new era of community building, let's remember that the right prompt can unlock a world of possibilities, making our communities not just functional, but thriving and dynamic spaces. Happy prompting! Initial communities or organizations that align with our interests for possible collaborations. Suggest strategies for maintaining healthy and beneficial partnerships with other communities or organizations.

Author: Morgan Wood, Head of Community at Hivebrite
Morgan is a dynamic and accomplished community engagement expert with a passion for developing and executing effective community strategies. With extensive experience working with communities throughout her career, she has a proven track record of developing innovative programs, recruiting new members, and increasing member retention.

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Brand **Organize** **Engage** **Empower** **Monetize**

Community & Crowd: An Exponential Organization attribute for growth of modern businesses

By: Aleksandra Sadovnikova

In today's interconnected digital landscape, the traditional concept of community has undergone a profound transformation. The advent of technology and social media has expanded the possibilities for connection and collaboration, giving rise to new forms of communities.

And the business itself has changed. Nowadays, the concept of Exponential Organizations and its core attributes provides organizations with a framework to harness exponential technologies and organizational methodologies to achieve rapid growth, innovation, and resilience.

This article explores the importance of redefining the community based on the ExO approach and highlights how Community & Crowd attribute can become a powerful engine for exponential growth.

A traditional understanding of a community

In human societies, the traditional view of a community has been rooted in a geographically defined group of individuals united by common **interests, values,** and **cultural bonds within a specific location**.

Historically, communities have played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of belonging, support, and identity among their members. **Face-to-face interactions** and **physical proximity** have been the cornerstone of community building, allowing for deep interpersonal connections and a shared sense of purpose.

However, with the technological advancements and the globalization of communication, the concept of community has evolved beyond its traditional boundaries. **Virtual** and **digital** communities have emerged, breaking down geographical barriers and connecting individuals worldwide based on shared interests and passions.

Despite these transformative changes, the traditional view of community remains a fundamental aspect of human social organization, highlighting

the intrinsic need for **connection** and **mutual cooperation**.

Together with a community definition goes an audience. You can find many a definition for this word and its connection to a community. The most popular, however, describes an audience as a group of people who receive a message or communication but may not necessarily interact with one another or share a common identity. There have been lots of discussions whether a community may be a part of an audience, or vice versa, but you will see that the term "audience" has a bit different meaning in **Community & Crowd** attribute.

It is necessary to mention that often when businesses speak about communities, they intend only customers, obviously as the end-users of their products or services. Community building itself is based on this approach, but a community is much wider than it was thought to be, especially in the Exponential Organizations.

What are the Exponential Organizations?
Exponential Organizations (ExOs) represent a groundbreaking paradigm shift in the business world, revolutionizing how companies achieve rapid growth and innovation. This transformative concept, introduced by Salim Ismail and Peter Diamandis, emphasizes leveraging exponential technologies, organizational structures, and cultural mindsets to drive extraordinary outcomes.

By embracing a flexible and adaptive organizational structure, ExOs can rapidly scale their operations without the typical burdens of increased costs and resources.

A core principle of Exponential Organizations lies in embracing external networks, leveraging the power of crowds, and collaborating with a global pool of talent. The culture of experimentation, agility, and embracing failure as a learning opportunity further distinguishes ExOs from traditional entities.

In the era of unprecedented technological advancements and market disruptions, adopting the principles of Exponential Organizations is becoming imperative for companies seeking to thrive and maintain a competitive edge in an ever-evolving business landscape.

The Exponential Organizations approach is based on 10 attributes that needed to be implemented by any modern organization who strive for 10x increase in performance. They are combined into two acronyms: IDEAS (*Interfaces, Dashboards, Experimentation, Autonomy, Social*) and SCALE (*Staff-on-Demand, Community & Crowd, Algorithms, Leveraged Assets, Engagement*).

Why is having a community important for businesses?
As mentioned before, the ways in which businesses are created has changed, and you can see that in the example of Exponential

Organizations. An important aspect of businesses nowadays is the fact that companies have finally understood the role customers can play in a business' growth and innovation.

The ExO approach highlights people's importance through the **Community & Crowd** attribute, as well as Social and Engagement.

So, why is a community essential for modern organizations?

First, having a well-built community is a strategic imperative for organizations seeking sustained success and growth in today's competitive landscape. Communities provide a platform for customers to connect, share experiences, and interact with one another, creating a supportive environment that enhances their overall satisfaction. By fostering a sense of community among customers, companies can cultivate a loyal and engaged customer base that becomes an invaluable asset.

Second, actively involving customers in the business provides a deeper understanding of their needs, preferences, and pain points, empowering organizations to tailor products and services accordingly.

Businesses that prioritize customer feedback demonstrate their commitment to **continuous improvement**, fostering a **positive reputation** and **trust** among their clientele.

Customer feedback also serves as

a catalyst for **innovation**, inspiring businesses to develop new offerings and refine existing ones to align better with customer desires. Look at **Lego** with its **Lego Ideas**, that gives customers and fans a possibility to create their own designs and sell the ones most upvoted by the community.

Third, a thriving community serves as a **powerful marketing engine**, where satisfied customers voluntarily share their positive experiences and recommendations with others. Harnessing the collective voice of a community amplifies the impact of **word-of-mouth**, leading to organic growth and brand awareness.

Engaged community members, feeling a sense of belonging, become passionate advocates who eagerly spread the word about a brand's products or services. This word-of-mouth marketing holds tremendous credibility, as potential customers are more likely to trust the opinions of their peers rather than traditional advertising.

In overall, a brand's success as well as company's growth depends deeply on customers and their feeling of being heard and engaged into the interaction with a company or organization.

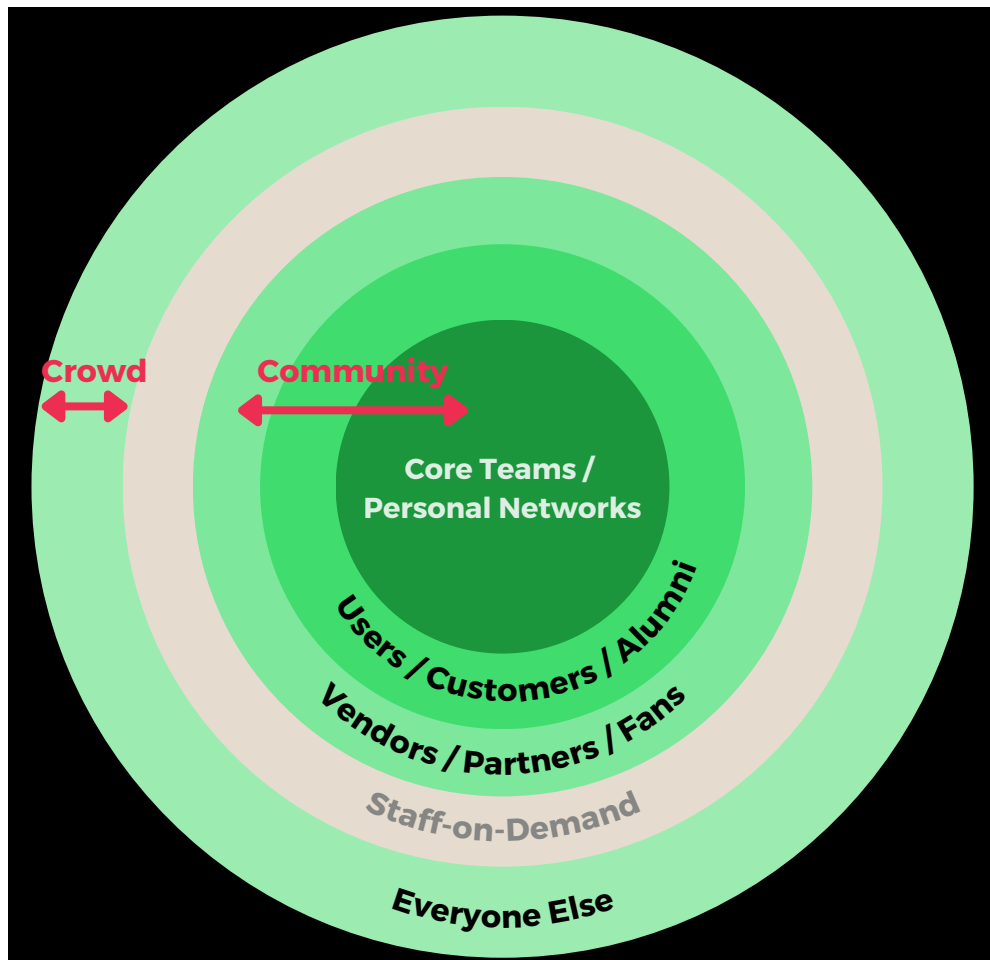**Understanding the concept of Community & Crowd in the ExO environment**

Typically, when discussing community, it often refers to an established group of individuals coming together for a common project, product, or shared characteristics like nationality or place of living. However, the definition of community, particularly in the context of business, is wider, encompassing additional aspects that can evolve over time.

A community's definition for Exponential Organizations differs from a traditional one.

It refers to "a large global group of individuals who are passionate about the organization's **Massive Transformative Purpose** and are directly involved in the main functions of that organization. These individuals are loyal to a shared goal and devoted to solving the grand challenges around the organization's purpose. Often these individuals have a special bond with the company — and that may make them willing to donate time, expertise and even money to make and keep the company successful".[1]

It doesn't say that ExO community should be made up of customers only. In fact, customers are one of the **stakeholders' tiers** in such a community.

A community in the Exponential Organization includes different stakeholders. Among them are *core team of an organization, customers and users, vendors, partners, and fans*, and all these stakeholders have their specific roles in a community life.

Crowd

Community

Core Teams / Personal Networks

Users / Customers / Alumni

Vendors / Partners / Fans

Staff-on-Demand

Everyone Else

Exponential Organizations 2.0, ASIN: B0C6YGMDVW https://openexo.com/

For example, **core teams** can be community and social media managers, customer support agents who are involved in creating and implementing engagement strategies, monitoring, and analyzing engagement metrics, and providing support and resources to the community and the crowd.

Customers and users (traditional part of any business community) engage with the company and contribute to its success in various ways, such as providing feedback, sharing their experiences, and promoting the brand to others. As mentioned before, they act as advocates for the company and contribute to its growth and success.

Vendors, partners, and fans contribute to community and the business by collaboration, support, and promotion.

For example, a **vendor** can work closely with the company providing products that may enhance the company's offerings.

A **partner** may collaborate on joint marketing campaigns or development. One of the examples is **Airbnb** and **Uber's** integration to make easier travelling from one Airbnb location to another using Uber.

A **fan**, being enthusiastic about a company's purpose or product, may engage with a company on social media channels and promote it via own networks. *Coca-Cola* used the fans' engagement in the "*Share a Coke*"

campaign by personalizing coke cans and bottles with names.

Moreover, the difference between traditional and ExO view on a community is that Exponential Organization sees its community members not as addition to the business, but as **pseudo-employees** (because they are not employed by a company but involved into its development).

The concept of **Crowd** is simple, it refers to everybody else outside the Community. We can define them as individuals who "do not have a relationship with the organization, but potentially can be motivated by reward or interest to participate in a way that is valuable and meaningful to the organization".[1]

It's important to remember that Crowd is a **backbone** of the Community because people from the Crowd may change their status one day and enter the Community as stakeholders and play their role in the business growth. This pool of individuals can be leveraged by companies through various crowdsourcing techniques to generate new ideas, solve problems, or improve products and services.

Going back to an audience, in this context it's seen more as marketing term and is based on personas in your community building design (like Buyer Personas in marketing). There can be an audience of vendors or an audience of learners in your community (and outside, too), and each audience will have specific

interest in joining the community, as well as strategies to reach out to people.

In conclusion
It's time to re-think the way you structure communities and explore new models of engagement for different levels of involvement into the business growth and development.

Communities are not linear anymore and are not based only on customers. Instead, they are made of people who play various roles in a company as well as outside of it.

As we navigate the digital age, understanding the evolving role of community and integrating the attributes of Exponential Organizations will be pivotal in staying ahead of the curve and fostering meaningful connections with stakeholders.

Transforming your community through these invaluable insights will not only elevate your business but also create a lasting impact on the lives of those you serve.

Embrace the exponential mindset, and let your community become a driving force in shaping a brighter future for your business.

Mentioned book:
1 - Exponential Organizations 2.0: The New Playbook for 10x Growth and Impact. Salim Ismail (Autor), Peter Diamandis (Author), Michael S. Malone (Author), Ray Kurzweil (Foreword). ASIN: B0C6YGMDVW. Publisher: Ethos Collective (June 6, 2023)

Author: Aleksandra Sadovnikova

Aleksandra Sadovnikova (Chelyubeeva) is an ExO Consultant, community strategist and founder of How To: Community Project, and a former Singularity University ambassador. Her MTP is "Human-to-Human improvement for better opportunities" as she truly believes that people can thrive and reach the best results through open collaboration, respect, and human-centred approach.

Aleksandra currently works on gamification experiences for OpenExo community and teaches entrepreneurs, startups, and companies about implementation of Community & Crowd attribute into business strategy.

How To: Community website: howtocommunity.com

EXCLUSIVE
PREMIUM MEMBER
BENEFITS
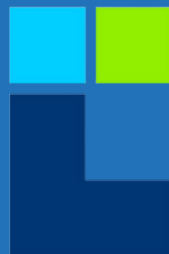
With a CLI premium membership, you get exclusive perks!

BENEFITS INCLUDE:

1 All-In-One Community Platform

An interactive community platform where you can make connections, share & engage with content, and join groups pertaining to your specific interests.

5 Member Only Job Board

A community industry job board that includes a wide array of opportunities.

2 CLI Digital Events

CLI digital events filled with networking and insightful speakers.

6 Exclusive Opportunities

Attend networking sessions, meet and greets, and exclusive CLI dinners.

3 Premium Content Library

Access our educational content and training lessons that can help you level up your career.

7 Vendor Directory

Connect with our list of trusted technology partners to advance your leadership goals.

4 Member Directory

Access to the CLI member directory where you can connect with people from all over the world.

8 MyCLI Perks

Access to MyCLI perks where you can save up to 50% on local dining, retail, entertainment, online shopping, travel, and theme park tickets. For more information on MyCLI Perks, see the next page.

SHOP SMART & SAVE

MyCLI perks

Members save up to 50% on local dining, retail, entertainment, online shopping, travel, and theme park tickets.

		Yearly Purchases	Typical Savings per Purchase	Yearly Savings
EAT	Breakfast/ Coffee	52 purchases	$2.50	$130
	Lunch	24 meals	$3	$72
	Dinner	52 meals	$5	$260
	Pizza	24 purchases	$8	$192
				$654
SHOP	Apparel	8 purchases	$15	$120
	Misc. Shopping	8 purchases	$12.50	$100
	Flowers/Gifts	4 purchases	$10	$40
	Home Projects	2 purchases	$50	$100
	Oil Changes	4 services	$10	$40
	Self-Care (Spa, Gym, Makeup, etc.)	6 purchases	$30	$180
				$580
PLAY	Theme Park Visits	4 passes	$50	$200
	Bowling/Laser Tag/Mini Golf	4 purchases	$5	$20
	Concerts/Sports/ Event Tickets	4 tickets	$20	$80
	Movies	6 tickets	$2	$12
	Golf	4 rounds	$15	$60
				$372
TRAVEL	Hotel Stays	7 nights	$15	$105
	Car Rental	5 days	$27	$135
	Cruise	2 tickets	$58	$116
	Flights	2 tickets	$20	$40
				$396

TOTAL SAVINGS: $2,002

How Members Save

- Up to **$2,000** or more a year
- Average **34% OFF** dining
- **$71** average savings per hotel stay
- **$103** average savings for *Walt Disney World®* Resort tickets

> "Great to save on things I know I'm going to be buying anyway!"
> – BRICE T.

> "This program helps me stay in my budget!"
> – PATRICIA C.

> "This experience is great! There is such a wide variety of choices to receive discounts from."
> – JERI D.

*Your annual **MyCLI premium membership** automatically enrolls you in MyCLI perks

Sign up for a premium membership today and start enjoying all your benefits!

SCAN ME

Community Management & the Future of Organizations

A spotlight conversation with Rachel Happe, Founder of Engaged Organizations

Interviewed By: Adrian Speyer

As artificial intelligence rushes to touch us in everything we do and is starting to become ubiquitous, the importance of community has never been greater. Communities serve as the lifeblood of organizations, fostering engagement, driving innovation, and creating shared value. To delve into the fascinating world of community management, we had the privilege of interviewing Rachel Happe, renowned community strategist and founder of Engaged Organizations. With her vast experience and ability, Rachel shared valuable insights into the field, discussed what motivates her, and offered guidance for organizations looking to establish strong community foundations.

A Journey Shaped by Community Leadership
Rachel's journey into community management began in 2007 during her tenure as the social software analyst at IDC. It was there that she first encountered the professional role of online community manager and recognized its crucial importance in fostering valuable networks.

> ❝ I saw community leadership as critical to the success of networked operational models. Organizations, because of rigid functional alignment, struggled to compete with and adapt to networked models because they lacked community leadership roles. ❞

Drawing from her upbringing in a family deeply involved in community leadership, Rachel understood the significance of strong communities from an early age.

"I appreciated the role and skill set of community managers because I grew up with a mother who was a community organizer and a father who was a minister of a church in which he was not the final decision-maker, the congregation was. My grandmothers were from small towns, and I consider one of them to be the OG of community – she was constantly reaching out, helping out, and making sure everyone had what they needed. So, I was immersed in strong communities and surrounded with community leadership from a very young age."

Rachel as a young woman got a front seat to an impressive campaign led by her mother and she organized community.

"My mother helped lead one of the only successful corporate boycottsin history, and I witnessed the daily work and successful results of fostering a community," Rachel shared. "I knew the role of community managers was vital to community success because I

experienced its impact."

Inspired to Empower Community Leaders

As Rachel told us, she never intended to start a company.

"In 2008, I was laid off in the market crash, and upon reflecting on the opportunities I saw and my skill set, it was clear that I was uniquely qualified to understand and communicate the value of communities and community management. My personal, educational, and professional experience gave me insight into complex systems, power relationships, operational management, strategy and metrics, innovation management, start-ups, product design, market analysis, strategic communications, enterprise software, and information architecture. In a career that sometimes felt random and opportunistic, all my experiences came together in a Venn diagram in which in the middle sat the ability to design new, distributed operating models – communities – and translate them in a way that made sense to business leaders."

Motivated by her belief in the value of community, Rachel took a leap of faith and founded The Community Roundtable.

As Rachel told us, "I also saw how isolated online community managers were in 2009. Not only were they typically the only people in that role at their organization, but no one understood what they did or the value they generated. Community managers themselves

often didn't fully understand this or how to connect it to business goals. I wanted to empower community leaders by connecting them, learning from them to understand their work, and giving them the data to believe and communicate their value. I felt particularly committed to this because much of the work of community management was similar to the emotional labor - the work - that women did for a long time without being recognized or financially rewarded for the value they contributed. It's obviously not just a role for women, but women are often expected to serve in that role without acknowledgment."

She took on the challenge with three data-based goals in mind:

1 How long did it take the average community to reach exponential value?

2 What financial metrics of generative value and community ROI need to capture to be believed?

3 What were the operational and management benchmarks and investments needed to create a successful community?

As Rachel explained it, "I wanted to empower community leaders by connecting them, providing data to support their work, and equipping them with the skills to communicate effectively."

The Community Roundtable Legacy

Through The Community Roundtable, Rachel achieved significant milestones. She produced data demonstrating the value of communities, created financial measures for community ROI, and established management and operational benchmarks for community success.

The 2020 State of Community Management report was the culmination of a decade of research and resulted in a consolidated chart showing the shared investments and generative value of communities. With it, the goals Rachel set out in founding The Community Roundtable were achieved. As she told us:

"[It] was the culmination of years of work at understanding the value of communities and translating it into financial terms so it could be clearly understood by others. What it shows is the investment in management by the organization and the investment in time and contribution by members and the value both receive. It is calculated for average members and contributing members to show both how critical it is to cultivate engagement but also the ROI generated even by those who use the information in the community but don't participate.

Rachel expressed pride in the legacy she has left behind at The Community Roundtable. "It was a lot of work, emotional energy, and at first financial sacrifice, but

Shared Purpose

$261
$1,262
Investment

Community Management and Infrastructure

Culture Change & Communicaitons Efficiency

Organizational Objectives

Member Objectives

Attention, Insight, Experitse

Expertise, Efficiency, Ideas

$104
$1,067
Employee Value Add

Return
$1,176
$7,352

Employee Value Gain
$1,072
$6,285

Shared Value

■ Average Member
■ Contributing Member

it resulted in a meaningful body of work and a network of amazing friends," she said. In the end, Rachel added, "I feel like I won, which is how great communities make people feel."

Engaged Organizations: A New Chapter

Rachel's motivation in starting The Community Roundtable was ultimately to understand how all organizations would have to adapt in order to compete in the Internet age. With her goals for The Community Roundtable met, in 2021 she founded Engaged Organizations to apply what she had learned about operating effective communities to organizations.

"I can now prioritize deeper collaboration with clients, which gives me insight into the nuanced challenges and opportunities in applying community approaches in complex organizations and cultures."

And it's been a great experience for her, so far. One of her most recent collaborations involved working with Microsoft Hardware to foster a culture of learning among its 40,000 employees. The project aimed to strengthen collaborative networks, democratize expertise, and empower employees to connect and belong across divisions.

Rachel described the work as "exactly the type of complex, hairy problem I love. It has resulted in cost savings and efficiency but what satisfies me the most are things like getting a group of executives from across different business groups to collaboratively develop a strategy - and take on accountability for making that happen even though they have no structural mandate to do so. To me, that shift represents a change in mindset about how to approach decision-making and accountability, which, if you have ever worked in a large

organization, you know, is no small feat. It confirms my perspective that people don't mind changing when they do it together; what people don't like is being told to change. Engaging and including people makes a huge difference in energy, momentum, and sustainability.

The project with Microsoft is the type of work that excites me. When it is successful, you can feel the energy of employees shift because they are working together to address problems and generate ideas – it creates a sense of possibility and freedom. The knowledge equity that comes from transparency is also exciting. Expertise is no longer locked away or restricted to those with privileged access, which creates shared value; employees learn more quickly, and the knowledge supply chain and innovation of the organization accelerates.

I love nothing more than to figure out how to orchestrate outcomes where everyone involved feels like they won by getting more value out of an effort than they contributed. It feels like I have cheated the existing system, which is structured on the assumption that if one person or group wins the other must lose. I reject the implicit assumption that someone must lose but I also love a good challenge!"

Future Evolution of Community Management

Of course, with someone with Rachel's vast experience, we had to ask about the future of community and community

management, especially with the rise of AI. Rachel acknowledged the potential impact of AI in accelerating the deluge of content and increasing misinformation. However, she emphasized that AI cannot solve human problems entirely.

"In 2011, I keynoted at the Enterprise 2.0 conference, where I first talked about technology breaking humans. AI is accelerating this dynamic and the pressure on individuals. You can see this everywhere. The U.S. Surgeon General has made Workplace Wellbeing and Mental Health one of his priorities. When people are overwhelmed, their focus narrows, and they become more reactive and emotionally shut down. This is shown in engagement and employment data; the Gallup State of the Global Workplace in 2023 report highlighted that stress is at record highs and 'quiet quitting' is pervasive.

The irony is that what helps people recover from stress is connecting authentically with others, but the more stressed people are, the less likely they are to reach out. It's why the illusion of connection created by technology is so dangerous; it can make people feel like they are connecting, but it is often not rejuvenating or energizing. We need communities to thrive but post-pandemic, people have no extra energy to cultivate those communities 'on the side' at work and unless organizations fund those roles, organizational culture will falter - whether employees are in the office or in hybrid/remote environments.

Communities do another vital thing; they help us learn by collectively evaluating what is meaningful. That is true for sports equipment, and it is true for professional expertise. Communities determine what individuals believe is true. That has huge implications for organizations because it is what will drive interest, engagement, revenue, and loyalty. Done well, communities also supply a calm, safe respite from anxiety.

For community professionals, the explosion of AI offers the potential for more visibility and support, but it also presents increasing tension between existing governance models and communities – a tension that will be challenging to navigate. Community professionals who are also business strategists will be better able to help organizations manage the growing tension, but it is unclear whether organizations understand their value. Regardless of what organizations do, people will need communities even more."

Community Management in the Age of Remote Work

As an expert on internal communities, we asked for Rachel's take on how community will adapt to the changing dynamics of remote work and distributed teams. Rachel highlighted that community cultivation and leadership have always been fundamental to human success. Or as Rachel clarified "said in a different way, community building has always been a part of great leadership.

The greatest leaders know that structural control and governance only goes so far and that without community engagement, friction and the cost of change is infinitely higher."

Rachel pointed to a list of great historical leaders and pointed out that these leaders used many of the practices we see in the profession of community management today. Rachel's list included:

- **Defining a compelling shared purpose that was larger than themselves, coupled with the vision and inspiration that inspired the creation of shared value.**

- **Identifying and articulating urgency and opportunities.**

- **Fostering and investing in a strong network of advocates/secondary leadership as a way to extend and cultivate trust.**

- **Communicating in a way that is accessible, engaging, and collaborative.**

- **Connecting strategic goals to daily experiences and behaviors.**

- **Cultivating and reinforcing community values, beliefs, and artifacts.**

- **Creating a regular cadence of events and opportunities to engage.**

- **Elevating the leadership of others and passing on leadership.**

As Rachel shared "While this approach is not new, what has changed is that personal communications channels are now networked, transparent, and accessible. Not only can a leader communicate and interact with an entire network in near-real-time, but the network can also see how the leader interacts with others, which increases or diminishes trust and affinity.

For leaders it makes new things possible; instead of relying on a small group to provide feedback and input to important decisions, a large network can be tapped to do so in ways that increase the speed of information and understanding rather than slowing it down. It scales the ability to connect and interact without the cost of travel and time and it reduces the need for intermediaries (governance).

Online community platforms allow every employee in an organization access to engage in important decisions and changes. Transparency and access are at the crux of the opportunity for organizations to use online communities – whether they are remote, hybrid, or in-person. Where once the organizational hierarchy was built to make the flow of information more efficient because of the limits of physical space and channels, that hierarchy now creates bottlenecks that block access to the latest information. The result is that a solution developed in one region might never be seen by another, resulting in multiple approaches, some of which are more effective

than others. Things get learned, forgotten or lost, and re-learned over and over. Opportunities are lost because of capacity issues or slow responses. Employee performance measures reward solving problems rather than finding solutions that already exist.

Organizations are bloated with too many levels of hierarchy, too much governance, too much content, and too many competing communications channels all of which create massive inefficiencies, employee frustration, slow innovation, and poor customer experiences. As the speed of the communications environment outside of organizations continues to increase, those inefficacies grow. Organizational governance as we know it is hindering effectiveness, efficiency, and opportunity.

This inefficiency is making organizations less competitive. In the content management market, WordPress is the platform used by 43% of global websites - but WordPress is not a commercial entity. WordPress is an Open-Source product with a huge network of small and large product, solution, and service providers that offer extensions, support, and expertise. The product is simply better and more flexible than many of the products sold by companies because it is not constrained by fixed boundaries, resources, and processes and that is all enabled by an online community. "

In Summary
Rachel concluded by pointing out

that online community platforms now offer organizations the opportunity to create integrated, cohesive, and adaptive cultures. These platforms ease transparency, access to information, and the efficient navigation of complex organizations. While the potential rewards are immense, organizations must be willing to redesign themselves and embrace community-centric governance.

As Rachel noted,

❝ **Too often, online communities are seen as a tactical solution to one use case, but they offer so much more potential, and the biggest limitation is a fixed mindset about what organizational governance is needed and what it means to lead.** ❞

Connect with Rachel!
🌐 Website
in LinkedIn

Advice for Community Manager's Starting Out:

Rachel's advice for those just starting out is the following

1 Articulate clear, specific objectives and define what success looks like.

2 Secure support from important stakeholders, including budget commitments – and ensure there is capacity for this program management work.

3 Explore and connect with existing expertise, research and professionals with experience.

4 Bring in a community strategist to support the development of a business case, strategy, planning. It will increase confidence.

5 Hire a community manager and ensure they have access to peers and expertise.

6 Invest in educating executives with experts who can provide context, experience, and credibility and who reinforce the capabilities of the community team.

7 Prepare and plan for 3-5 years of growth until the program can be considered 'steady-state.'

8 Plan for bumps; as familiar as community building has become there is still a lot of challenges and because you have to grow with the community – and they might have their own ideas – make sure you have wiggle room in budgets and plans.

Embracing the Dao in Community Management

By: David DeWald

As online communities continue to evolve and grow, the role of the community manager has become increasingly important. These digital spaces serve as a virtual meeting ground for people from all walks of life, providing opportunities for connection, collaboration, and growth. In this chapter, we'll explore how the ancient Chinese philosophy of Daoism can inform and guide the practice of community management, leading to more harmonious and balanced online spaces that meet the needs of all their members.

The Dao and Online Communities

At the heart of Daoism is the concept of the Dao, a cosmic force that underlies all reality and governs the natural order of things. According to Daoist philosophy, the Dao is both the origin and the destination of all things, and its principles can guide us in living a balanced and harmonious life.

In the words of the Daoist sage Laozi: "The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name." (Laozi, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 1)

While Daoism may seem like an unlikely source of wisdom for online community management, its principles can be applied to the challenges and opportunities that arise within digital spaces. By embracing the Dao, community managers can learn to navigate the unique dynamics of online communities, striking a balance between the needs of individual members and the collective goals of the group.

The Dao of Community Management: Harmony and Balance

In Daoism, harmony and balance are seen as the essential qualities of a well-ordered life. This can be applied to community management in several ways, including:

1. Recognizing the interconnected nature of online communities: Just as the Dao is present in all things and connects them in an intricate web of relationships, online communities are made up of a diverse array of individuals, each with their own unique perspectives and experiences. By recognizing and valuing these connections, community managers can foster a sense of unity and belonging among members.

2. Promoting balance between competing priorities and needs: A key principle of Daoism is the idea that seemingly opposing forces can actually be complementary and interdependent. In the context of online communities, this means embracing the need to balance the interests of individual members with the overall goals of the community, as we will explore in greater depth in this article.

3. Cultivating flexibility and adaptability: Daoism teaches that the most effective way to navigate change and uncertainty is by remaining flexible and adaptive. For community managers, this involves being open to new ideas, learning from the experiences of others, and being willing to adjust strategies and approaches as needed.

The Dao of Communication: Listening and Responding

Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful community management, and the principles of Daoism can provide valuable guidance in this area. By embracing the Daoist approach to communication, community managers can foster a more open and inclusive environment, where members feel heard and valued.

1 Listening deeply: According to Daoist philosophy, true wisdom comes from listening, observing, and learning from the world around us. As community managers, we can apply this principle by being attentive and responsive to the needs, opinions, and experiences of our community members. As the Daoist sage Zhuangzi once said, "The wise man listens to what others say, and chooses the best of what he hears." (Zhuangzi, The Complete Works of Zhuangzi, Chapter 23)

2 Responding with empathy and understanding: The Daoist concept of empathy and understanding encourages us to treat the experiences and emotions of others as if they were our own. By doing so, we can build trust and foster a sense of camaraderie within our communities.

3 Encouraging honest and open dialogue: Daoism teaches that the truth is often found in the balance between opposing perspectives. In the context of online communities, this means promoting a culture of open and honest dialogue, where members feel free to express their opinions and engage in constructive debate.

The Dao of Conflict Resolution: Embracing Change and Finding Common Ground

Conflict is an inevitable part of any community, and online spaces are no exception. By applying the principles of Daoism to conflict resolution, community managers can help their communities navigate these challenges with grace and wisdom.

1 Embracing change and uncertainty: Daoism reminds us that change is a natural and inevitable part of life. By acknowledging this reality and approaching conflict with a willingness to adapt, community managers can help members navigate through difficult situations and find mutually beneficial solutions.

2 Finding common ground: The Daoist emphasis on balance and harmony encourages us to seek out the common ground that exists between seemingly opposing viewpoints. By focusing on shared values and goals, community managers can facilitate constructive dialogue and promote a sense of unity within their communities.

3 Practicing patience and restraint: Daoism teaches that patience and restraint are essential qualities for navigating conflict and change. By adopting a calm and measured approach to conflict resolution, community managers can prevent misunderstandings from escalating and encourage members to work together towards a peaceful resolution.

The Dao of Leadership: Guiding Without Imposing

In Daoist thought, the most effective leaders are those who guide and inspire others without imposing their own will. By embracing a more subtle and nuanced form of leadership, community managers can foster a sense of autonomy and self-determination among members, leading to greater engagement and satisfaction.

1 Leading by example: The Daoist concept of "de," or virtue, teaches that the most effective leaders are those who embody the principles they seek to instill in others. By demonstrating a commitment to the values and goals of their community, community managers can inspire members to follow suit.

2 Empowering members to take action: Daoism emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and personal responsibility. By providing opportunities for members to take on leadership roles and contribute to the community, managers can foster a sense of ownership and investment among members.

3 Providing gentle guidance: The Daoist principle of "wu wei," or effortless action, teaches that the most effective form of leadership is one that works with the natural flow of things, gently guiding rather than forcefully imposing. By adopting this approach, community managers can help members find their own path to success within the community, while still maintaining a sense of

direction and purpose.

Embracing the Dao in Practice: A Path to Harmonious Online Communities

As we've seen, the principles of Daoism offer valuable insights and guidance for the practice of online community management. By embracing the Dao, community managers can create more balanced, harmonious, and inclusive digital spaces, where members feel valued, heard, and engaged.

It's important to remember that the Dao is not a fixed set of rules or guidelines, but rather a fluid and adaptable philosophy that can be applied to a wide range of situations. As community managers, we must be willing to adapt and evolve our approach, learning from the experiences of others and adjusting our strategies as needed.

In the chapters to come, we'll delve deeper into specific Daoist concepts and explore how they can be applied to the unique challenges and opportunities of online community management. We'll begin in Chapter 2 with an exploration of the principles of yin and yang, and how they can be sed to balance the competing

needs and goals of our communities.

As we continue on this path, it's essential to keep in mind the words of Laozi:

"In the pursuit of knowledge, every day something is added. In the practice of the Dao, every day something is dropped." (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 48)

By embracing the Dao and applying its principles to our practice, we can continually refine our approach to community management, shedding old habits and assumptions in pursuit of a more harmonious and balanced online world.

In closing, let us take inspiration from the words of another ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius, who once said: "If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people." (Confucius, Analects, 1.1)

As community managers, our work is not just about the immediate needs and goals of our communities, but also about planting the seeds for a more harmonious and interconnected digital future. By embracing the Dao, we can help guide our

communities towards that brighter future, one step at a time.

Author: David DeWald

David DeWald is a well-known online community management pioneer and historian with extensive experience in building, maintaining, and managing online communities. He has been involved in the field since the late 1990s and has worked with various organizations and businesses to establish and grow their online presence.

David is also active within the community management industry, sharing his knowledge and insights through various channels such as blogging, public speaking, and participating in online forums dedicated to the topic. Among his peers, he is respected for his expertise in community engagement, moderation, and development.

The Community Circle Model: A Framework for Building Strong and Engaged Communities

By: Tanja Laub

In today's interconnected world, building communities has become a crucial aspect of many organizations' strategies. Communities offer a unique platform for fostering connections, sharing knowledge, and driving innovation.

However, the complexities of community development, with numerous factors at play, can be overwhelming. From identifying target audiences to activating user engagement, establishing roles and responsibilities, selecting the right technical platform, and defining rules and guidelines, there is much to consider.

To navigate through these complexities and showcase the interconnectedness of these diverse elements, I have developed the Community Circle Model. Drawing upon my 16 years of professional experience in community building, I have extensively tested and refined this model in numerous workshops and training sessions over the past four years, witnessing its effectiveness across various contexts.

> **The Community Circle model provides a versatile framework for success in community building, offering valuable insights that can be applied to a wide range of community initiatives.**

Whether you are at the early stages of conceptualizing a community, actively developing one, or seeking to improve an existing community, this model is designed to guide your efforts. It is applicable to communities focused on internal or external target groups, operating in social networks or on owned platforms, and whether they primarily exist online or offline. By leveraging the Community Circle framework, you can ensure a holistic approach to community building, fostering engagement, and achieving long-term sustainability.

With the Community Circle model, you will gain a deeper understanding of the key elements necessary for building and maintaining a thriving community. By exploring the four main sections of the framework—Strategy, Culture, Platform, and

Community Manager—you will discover how each element contributes to the overall success of your community. Furthermore, you will recognize the interwoven nature of these elements and how they rely on one another for optimal community engagement.

Strategy: Setting the Foundation
A solid strategy is the backbone of any successful community. It sets the direction and purpose of the community, guiding its growth and ensuring alignment with organizational goals.

Culture: Creating a Sense of Belonging
A strong community culture fosters a sense of belonging and creates an environment where members feel comfortable engaging and sharing.

Platform: Providing the Right Environment
The platform serves as the virtual or physical space where community members gather, connect, and share.

Community Manager: Guiding and Nurturing the Community
Community managers play a crucial role in guiding and nurturing the community, supporting member interactions, and fostering a positive community environment.

The graphic representation illustrates the interrelation and equal importance of each element: Strategy, Culture, Platform, and Community Manager.
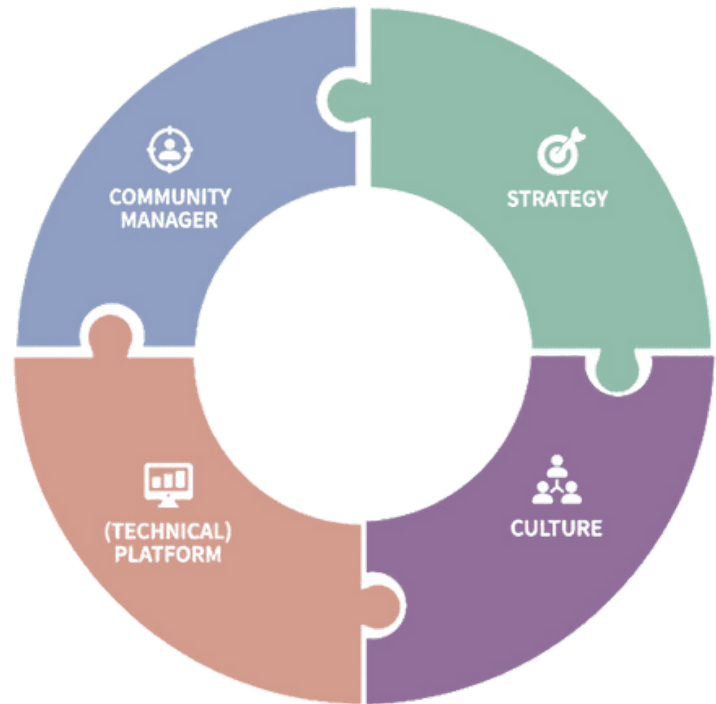
By combining and effectively developing these elements, you can nurture a strong sense of belonging and engagement among members. When all four elements are in place and working harmoniously, your community will thrive, fostering meaningful connections, driving knowledge sharing, and achieving long-term sustainability. The Community Circle model empowers you to build and nurture an active, resilient, and successful community. Let's have a closer look at the four core elements and the engagement methods.

Community Strategy: Mapping the Path to an Engaged Community
The Community Strategy section is an essential component within the Community Circle model, providing the necessary foundation for building and maintaining a thriving community.

By developing a comprehensive strategy, you establish a clear direction and purpose, guiding your community's growth and ensuring alignment with its overarching goals. Without a well-defined strategy, your community may lack a common vision that inspires and engages its members. Furthermore, securing resources and support from your organization to build and sustain the community becomes challenging. A strong strategy is the key to fostering member engagement and obtaining the necessary resources for community success.

Without a clear strategy, you have a gathering without a clear direction and not a community. A compelling and shared vision drives member engagement, fosters their intrinsic motivation, and secures the necessary resources for community success.

Within the Community Strategy section, several key subsections play crucial roles in shaping your community's growth and development:

Purpose & Goal: Defining the core purpose and goals of your community establishes a solid foundation aligned with your organization's values and aspirations. By clarifying your community's mission, vision, and objectives, you provide a clear focus for community members, guiding their engagement and fostering a shared sense of purpose.

Target Audience: Understanding your target audience is essential for tailoring your community's offerings to their unique characteristics, needs, motivations, values, and interests. By gaining deep insights into your audience, you can create a compelling experience that resonates with their expectations.

Resources: Allocating the necessary resources, including budget, time, and expertise, is vital to support the successful operation, engagement, and outcomes of your community. Adequate resource allocation ensures that you have the means to sustain and nurture your community effectively, driving active participation and achieving desired results.

Roadmap: Creating a comprehensive roadmap provides a well-structured and organized approach to community development. By outlining key milestones, activities, and deliverables, you can track progress and ensure that your community evolves in a purposeful and strategic manner

Data Analytics: Measuring the success and impact of your community is essential for gathering valuable insights. Data-driven analysis empowers you to

make informed decisions, identify areas for improvement, and continuously enhance the community experience.

Marketing: Effective marketing strategies are essential for promoting your community, attracting new members, and increasing engagement. By leveraging various channels and techniques, you can effectively communicate the value and benefits of your community to your target audience.

Development: Communities are dynamic entities that require continuous improvement and adaptation. By establishing feedback loops, gathering member insights, and staying attuned to changing needs and trends, you can ensure that your community remains relevant, engaging, and aligned with the evolving expectations of its members.

The Community Strategy section of the Community Circle framework serves as the foundation for building and maintaining a thriving community. By establishing clear goals and direction, understanding your target audience, allocating necessary resources, creating a roadmap, utilizing data analytics, implementing effective marketing strategies, and focusing on continuous development, you can cultivate a community that inspires and engages its members. A strong strategy not only drives member engagement and fosters a shared sense of purpose but also

ensures the availability of necessary resources for community success and continuously evolves to meet the needs of its members.

Culture: Fostering Belonging and Connection

Culture is a fundamental element in building a thriving and engaged community. It encompasses the values, beliefs, experiences, language, symbols, and rituals, and the rich tapestry of emotions that shape the community's identity and create a sense of belonging among its members. Through fostering a strong community culture, you establish an environment that encourages active engagement, collaboration, and meaningful interactions.

> **" Without a vibrant culture, you have an audience, not a community. What is lost are meaningful engagement, shared experiences, and authentic connections that define a strong community. "**

Let's explore the key elements within the Culture section that contribute to the formation of a vibrant and connected community.

Sense of Community: At the core of a vibrant community lies a shared sense of community. Here, we focus on cultivating shared beliefs, values, and experiences that unite members. By creating commonalities, symbols, rituals, and a shared language, you foster a strong sense of identity and belonging, enabling members to connect on a deeper level and establish meaningful relationships.

Environment: Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment is crucial for community engagement. We aim to create an inclusive and welcoming environment with low barriers to participation. By setting a positive and respectful tone, moderating discussions effectively, and showing appreciation for member contributions, we cultivate a safe and supportive space where individuals feel comfortable engaging, sharing ideas and knowledge and collaborating with each other.

Core Group: Within the community, a core group of dedicated members plays a pivotal role in driving engagement and fostering community spirit. It is essential to identify and nurture the members of the core group. This group consists of passionate individuals who are deeply committed to the community's mission and actively contribute to its growth and development. By empowering and involving the core group, you inspire other members to actively participate, share their insights, and contribute to the community's success. The core group is therefore creating a ripple effect of involvement.

Onboarding: The onboarding process sets the stage for new members to integrate into the community. Through an effective on-boarding process, we guide new members, familiarize them with community values and norms, and provide resources and support to facilitate their active participation. By providing a seamless and engaging onboarding process, you facilitate a smooth transition, enhance members' initial experience, help newcomers to feel valued, and increase their likelihood of becoming active and engaged community participants.
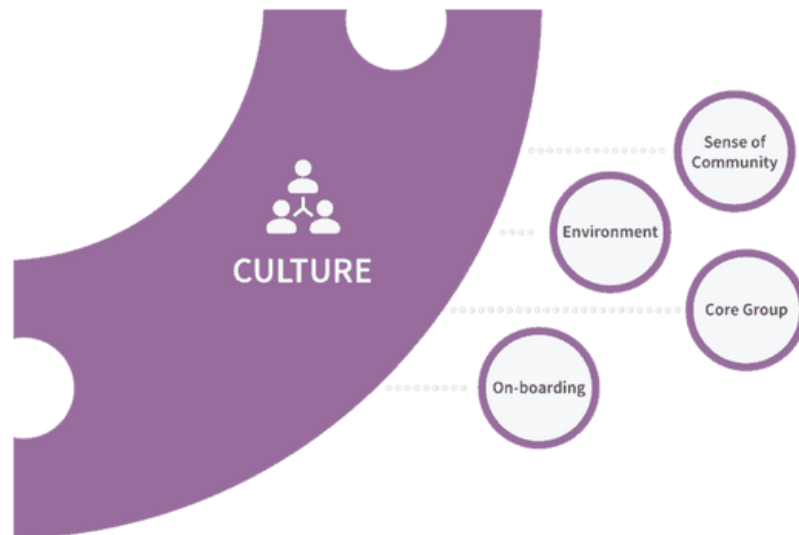
Through emphasizing these culture-building elements, you create an environment where members feel a strong sense of community, fostering engagement, collaboration, and a shared commitment to the community's purpose and goals. The culture of your community serves as a catalyst for active participation, meaningful connections, and sustained engagement. By nurturing a positive and inclusive community culture, you encourage active participation, build trust among members, and create a strong foundation for collaboration and growth.

Platform: Providing the Space for Connection

The platform serves as the space where community members come together to exchange ideas and experiences. It can be a physical location or a digital platform. Whether you choose in-person meetings, social networks, or your own owned platform, each option has its unique considerations and implications. In the component of the (technical) platform, I introduce the key components that shape the meeting space of your community, including digital tools.

Without a dedicated platform for exchange, you have a loose network rather than a cohesive community. The right (technical) platform provides a permanent space for community members to connect, collaborate, and build meaningful relationships.

Let's explore these elements and uncover how they contribute to creating a thriving and connected community.

In-person Meetings: When selecting in-person meetings as the primary mode of connection or your community, you need to carefully consider factors such as location selection, space design, logistics, and organization. These factors are essential in creating a conducive environment where community members can come together, connect, and collaborate effectively, fostering meaningful face-to-face interactions.

Social Networks: Choosing groups in social networks as the main platform for your community presents unique opportunities and challenges. Evaluating the pros and cons, including audience reach, engagement features, privacy settings, and limitations within the social network, is important.

**Owned Platform**: Deciding to build and maintain your own platform provides you with greater control and flexibility over your community's digital space. As you consider this option, you will need to assess platform criteria, select a suitable provider, evaluate functionality and features, and prioritize usability and user experience.

Digital Tools: In addition to your chosen platform, various digital tools can enhance community interactions, facilitate communication, and provide valuable insights through analytics. Depending on your specific needs and goals, exploring tools such as communication channels, moderation tools, and analytics tools can optimize the community experience.

By carefully selecting and utilizing the appropriate (technical) platform, you create an environment that encourages community members to connect, share, and collaborate.

Community Manager: Guiding and Supporting the Community

As the primary facilitator and advocate of the community, the Community Manager plays a crucial role in nurturing engagement and driving the
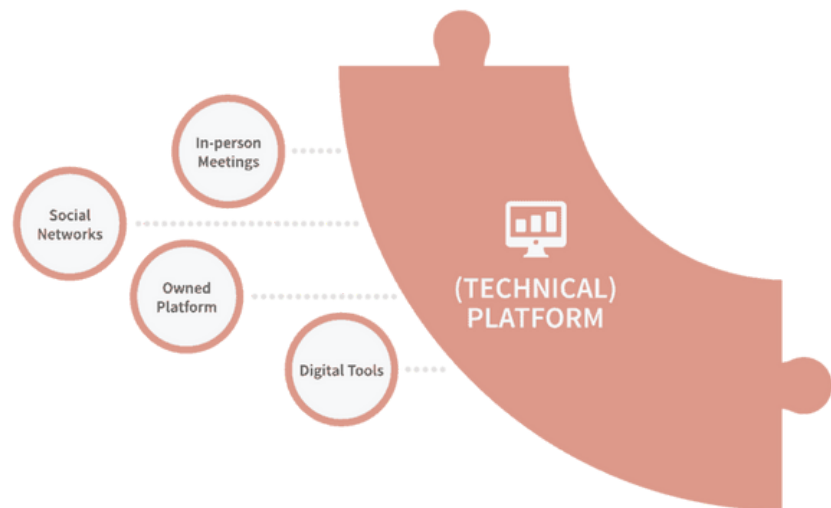
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growth of the community. With a diverse skill set and a deep understanding of community dynamics, they create a vibrant and inclusive environment where members can connect, collaborate, and thrive. By utilizing effective tools, implementing streamlined systems, and leveraging their expertise, community managers empower the community to flourish and achieve its goals.

Without a dedicated Community Manager, the community lacks direction, coordination, and support, leaving it adrift and disconnected. The community manager's expertise and guidance are essential for fostering engagement, building relationships, and harnessing the full potential of your community.

Let's delve into the distinct dimensions of the community manager's role, encompassing the diverse variations they encounter while engaging with different target groups and navigating various platforms.

Capabilities: Successful Community Managers possess a unique skill set and a combination of attributes that enable them to effectively carry out their tasks and roles. These may include content development, moderation, event organization, community advocacy, and relationship-building. Community Managers should have excellent communication and interpersonal skills, a deep understanding of community dynamics, and the ability to facilitate meaningful interactions and discussions among members.

Systems & Workflows: community managers serve as a vital interface between the community and the nature and platform of the crisis communication plan. The tools utilized can vary based on different departments within the organization. They collaborate with cross-functional teams to align community goals with organizational objectives and ensure that valuable community knowledge is shared and utilized effectively. Well-defined structures and processes enable community managers to capture, organize,

Variations: community managers fulfill diverse roles depending on the specific nature and context of the community they serve. They interact with diverse target groups, external or internal and have different main platforms like in-person meetings, social networks or owned platforms. These unique variations require community managers to adapt their strategies and approaches to meet the specific needs and challenges of each context.

Tools: community managers utilize a range of resources to optimize their work and enhance community management. These resources include implementing etiquette guidelines, developing a comprehensive plan for topics and activities, a handbook and a community. They enable community managers to navigate the complexities of community management and foster a thriving and harmonious community environment.

and leverage community-generated knowledge, fostering informed decision-making and driving innovation throughout the organization.

A skilled and dedicated community manager plays a pivotal role in building and nurturing an engaged community. They serve as the catalyst for engagement, facilitate meaningful interactions, and create an inclusive and supportive

environment where members can thrive. By understanding the variations in their role, honing their capabilities, utilizing appropriate tools, and implementing effective systems and workflows, community managers can drive the growth and success of the community they serve.

Building Engaged Communities: The Synergy of Strategy, Culture, Platform, and Community Manager

Building a successful and engaged community requires the integration and synergy of all four key elements of the Community Circle framework. Each element plays a crucial role in shaping the community's foundation, growth, and sustainability. Without any one of these elements, the community-building process is incomplete, and the desired outcomes may not be achieved.

The **Strategy component** sets the direction, goals, and purpose of the community, providing a compelling and shared vision that drives member engagement, intrinsic motivation, and secures the necessary resources for community success. It establishes a clear roadmap and ensures that the community stays aligned with its overarching goals.

The **Culture element** fosters a sense of community, shared beliefs, values, and experiences that create a vibrant and connected environment. It enables meaningful engagement, authentic connections, and shared

experiences that define a strong and cohesive community. Without a vibrant culture, the community risks becoming an audience, lacking the essential elements that define a thriving community.

The **(Technical) Platform element** provides a dedicated space for community members to connect, collaborate, and build meaningful relationships. Whether it's in-person meetings, social networks, or owned platforms, the right platform choice ensures seamless interactions, permanent connections, and a sense of belonging within the community. Without a dedicated platform, the community remains fragmented, lacking a cohesive space for members to come together.

The **Community Manager** serves as the primary facilitator and advocate of the community. community managers fulfill diverse roles depending on the nature and context of the community. They engage with internal and external target groups, navigate different platforms, and adapt their strategies to meet specific needs and challenges. Community managers possess a diverse skill set and knowledge of community dynamics that are crucial in nurturing the growth and engagement of the community. Without a dedicated community manager, the community lacks guidance, support, and the crucial interface with various departments within the organization.

> **These four elements of the Community Circle framework are interconnected and woven together, creating a holistic approach to building and sustaining a thriving community. Each element relies on and complements the others, forming a strong and cohesive ecosystem.**

Strategy sets the direction, Culture fosters the sense of community, the (Technical) Platform provides the space for connection, and the Community Manager drives engagement and collaboration.

By understanding and integrating these interconnected elements, community builders can create an environment where members feel inspired, engaged, and connected. It is the harmonious interplay and balance of strategy, culture, platform, and community manager that lays the foundation for a successful and vibrant community.

Engagement: Driving Active Participation and Meaningful Interactions

A strong and engaged community is built upon a solid foundation of the four key elements. Without these foundational elements in place, no matter what engagement strategies you employ and no matter the quantity of tactics you try you won't be able to fully unlock the true potential of your community.

When all four elements are in place, you can explore various engagement tactics and methods, including:

Communication & Collaboration: Effective communication and collaboration are vital for community engagement. By establishing clear channels of communication, encouraging open dialogue, and facilitating collaboration among members, you create an environment that fosters active participation and collaboration.

Content Strategy & Planning: A well-defined content strategy ensures that you deliver valuable and relevant content to your community. Through thoughtful planning, you can create engaging content that resonates with the community's interests and goals, keeping members informed, inspired, and connected.

Events & Activities: Organizing events and activities provides opportunities for community members to connect, learn, and engage in interactions. Whether it's hosting webinars, workshops, virtual meet-ups or face-to-face-gatherings, events bring members together and facilitate meaningful connections.

Gamification & Reward Systems: Gamification techniques can enhance engagement by adding an element of fun and additional motivation. By implementing gamification elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges, you can encourage members to actively participate, contribute, and achieve certain milestones. Reward systems can further incentivize engagement and recognize the contributions of community members, fostering a sense of accomplishment and loyalty.

ENGAGEMENT
ACTIVE MEMBERS

Communication & Collaboration · Content Strategy & Planning · Events & Activities · Gamification & Reward Systems · Empowerment · Super-User Program

Empowerment: Empowering community members to take ownership and contribute to the community's growth is key to sustained engagement. This involves providing opportunities for members to share their expertise, lead initiatives, and contribute to decision-making processes. By giving members a sense of ownership and responsibility, you create an environment where they feel valued, empowered, and motivated to actively participate and contribute.

Super-User Program: Recognizing and empowering highly engaged and influential members through a super-user program can have a significant impact on community engagement. Super-users serve as advocates, mentors, and role models, inspiring and influencing others to actively participate, contribute, and engage within the community.

The implementation of these engagement tactics and methods not only allows you to create an active and engaged community environment, but also to support the continuous evolution of your community and achieve its goals. In doing so, you create an environment where community members feel connected, motivated, and excited, and are happy to contribute to the growth and success of the community.

Guiding Your Journey: The Community Circle Framework for Building Dynamic and Engaged Communities
In the ever-evolving landscape of community building, the Community Circle framework serves as a guiding compass for creating thriving and engaged communities. Strategy, culture, platform, and the community manager are intertwined, mutually supportive, and thus form the backbone of any successful community. They provide the necessary framework for active participation, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. By purposefully integrating these essential elements, community builders establish an ecosystem where meaningful connections flourish, collaborative efforts thrive, and collective goals are accomplished.

Choosing the appropriate platform, whether it's in-person meetings, social networks, or an owned platform, provides a consistent space for community members to connect, collaborate, and cultivate meaningful relationships.

The role of a Community Manager is vital in facilitating interactions with diverse target groups, ensuring smooth operations and adapting strategies to meet the unique variations of each community context.

A clear and compelling strategy sets the direction and purpose of the community, driving member engagement and securing the necessary resources for success.

Cultivating a vibrant culture fosters a sense of belonging, shared experiences, and authentic connections, transforming a mere audience into a cohesive community.

By integrating these four elements, community builders unlock the true potential of their communities. Engagement tactics and methods, such as effective communication, strategic content planning, engaging events and activities, gamification, reward systems, and the empowerment of community members, become powerful tools for driving active participation and collaboration.

in the pursuit of community building, it's essential to remember that engagement is not just about generating activity for the sake of activity. Rather, it is the meaningful connection and interaction that lead to tangible outcomes. As community builders, our efforts should be geared towards fostering interactions that drive real impact and create value for both community members and the organization. By aligning engagement activities with specific goals and outcomes, we can measure the success of our community-building initiatives and ensure that they make a meaningful difference in the lives of the members and the community as a whole.

As you embark on your community-building journey, remember that the Community Circle framework is more than just a compass – it's a roadmap that guides your path. The road to building a successful and engaged community may have its challenges, but with the Community Circle as your guide, you possess the tools and strategies to create a community that inspires, empowers, and makes a lasting impact.

Author: Tanja Laub, Senior Community Strategist
For more than 15 years, Tanja has been advising companies and corporations strategically on all aspects of community management - from the development and conception of a strategy to user communication and the development of company platforms. She also trains employees to promote active participation within the communities and to utilize engaged communities in an entrepreneurial manner.

As a lecturer, she teaches at technical universities, passing on her knowledge to the next generation for over 4 years. In addition, she regularly gives lectures at international conferences and contributes to the fact that the profession of community manager is perceived more professionally.

Visit Tanja's website here: https://www.communitymanagement.de/

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A Guide to Advancing Your Community Professional Career

By: Todd Nilson

The community management field has evolved through significant changes, emerging as a recognized profession. Recent events like the pandemic and the rise of Web3 communities have fueled interest, but the market is maturing and becoming more specialized. This doesn't signal the end of community management; it's merely evolving.

With over a decade of experience as a community strategist and 15 years as a technical recruiter, I've guided many in this field. I aim to offer 'real talk' about managing your career in this dynamic profession.

Career is a Journey, Not a Destination

Until recently, community management was an emergent career category. Many of us found ourselves in this field by happy accident.

Community careers exist on the borderlands of traditional practices. This can result in a career path that feels volatile, but it also opens up a world of opportunities. The key is to keep scanning the horizon, ready to adapt and change as new opportunities arise.

Before you embrace a career in community, you should reflect on your goals. Are you seeking a dedicated growth career, or is community management more of a lifestyle choice? There's no right or wrong answer to this question. Many community management roles are remote, making them conducive to a freewheeling, independent lifestyle. However, if you're unsure about what you want to achieve, you may find yourself in the wrong sort of job, leading to unnecessary headaches.

In the world of community careers, there's a dichotomy between being a mercenary and a missionary. The vast majority of community professionals I've met are wonderful, kind-hearted people who simply want to help others connect, collaborate, and create. They are missionaries, true believers in the power of communities.

However, to truly excel in this field, it's important to balance the missionary zeal with a bit of mercenary pragmatism. This isn't about being solely focused on making money, but about understanding the value of the community to a business or social mission. Being a mercenary means connecting the work of the community with tangible value. It means understanding how to communicate with those responsible for the success of the enterprise or organization.

In other words, we could all stand to add a little more "merc" to our missions.

> **By balancing our passion for community with a keen understanding of business value, we can navigate the evolving landscape of community management and carve out a fulfilling and successful career.**

Getting Started: Embrace the Role to Become the Role

For those seeking an entry level role in community management, the path may seem daunting. However, the key to breaking into this field is simpler than you might think: act the role to become the role.

Community management has its roots in informal communities, spanning interests from sports and games to movies and more. There's a community for virtually

every interest, and many of these communities need dedicated moderators and managers.

If you're looking to gain experience in community management, don't shy away from these volunteer opportunities. Find a group of people who share your interests and offer your help. Whether it's a subreddit, a Facebook Group, or an outdated discussion forum, these platforms provide invaluable hands-on experience.

Many aspiring community managers worry about making mistakes or not living up to expectations. This is where the value of volunteering your time with lower stakes communities comes into play. Low stakes "hobby communities" are one of the best places to learn and grow.

They are also a good place to overcome the "imposter syndrome" that plagues so many truly bright, talented community professionals who are just starting out.

Start small. Take on a moderator role in a low stakes community related to your interests. Get involved in content creation, connect people, and track metrics.

The Chaos and Opportunity: Embracing the Unknown

For those of us with a bit more experience, you have probably felt overwhelmed by the recent ups and downs of the job market. Sadly, this chaotic environment isn't likely to settle down anytime soon.

As community professionals on the borderlands of traditional roles and structures, we are somewhat more vulnerable to organizational uncertainty. But within this chaos lies opportunity.

The first step in navigating this landscape is acceptance. Accept that you will encounter blank stares from others in the organization who have trouble relating what they do to what you do. Be ready to educate and connect what you do with its value to the business. This is an opportunity to advocate for the importance of your organization's community.

As community pros, we are in a far better position than many traditional roles (accountants or lawyers, for example) that are at risk of being outmoded by artificial intelligence and automation. The chaos we navigate daily makes us more resilient and adaptable.

The variable reporting structures in community management further illustrate this point. You may find yourself in a department

of one, the Community Department. This can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, you may have a direct line of support to an executive. On the other, if that executive leaves, you may find yourself in a precarious position.

Alternatively, you may end up in marketing or customer service. If you're in a forward-looking organization, you might even find yourself in the Customer Experience, Growth, or Customer Advocacy department. Each of these placements opens up different career opportunities and challenges.

The key is to stay vigilant. Embrace the chaos, seize the opportunities, and continue to advocate for the value of community management.

Careers Thrive on Lifelong Learning

So how do you keep your skills current and marketable in this ambiguous and volatile work environment?

When it comes to the education necessary for a community professional, there isn't a one-size-fits-all answer. The field of community management is diverse and constantly evolving, requiring a blend of formal and informal education.

For community professionals, continuous learning means staying abreast of the latest trends and developments in our field, but it also means delving into classic business disciplines. Understanding the fundamentals of marketing, finance, and operations can provide valuable context for your work and enable you to communicate more effectively with other departments.

Learning to speak the language of management is also crucial. This doesn't mean adopting corporate jargon, but rather understanding the priorities and concerns of management and being able to articulate the value of community management in those terms.

Side Quests: Careers are Non-Linear

Navigating a career in an emergent field like ours requires an agile mindset. It's not a simple progression from moderator to community manager, then director, and finally to VP or Chief Community Officer. Even if you're one of the few who climb the ranks within a single company, it is more likely that you'd be recruited as the CCO at an entirely different company. It's more common to play hopscotch from one organization to another, taking on

increasing responsibilities along the way.

But there's more to a non-linear career than just traversing companies in order to advance. Along your journey, you might encounter opportunities to veer off the beaten path. In gaming terms, these are your "side quests." They might involve developing skills in data analysis, customer experience, or even something as unexpected as cultural anthropology. These aren't dead ends, but rather opportunities to diversify your skillset and make your resume stand out.

I often compare my career to an adventure on the high seas. Community strategy is my fifth career, following stints as a journalist, a college literature instructor, a software trainer, and a recruiter. Each of these experiences has added a unique layer to my professional identity, and I wouldn't be where I am today without them. It's our job to synthesize these side quests and articulate how they've enriched our journey.

So, I encourage you to embrace the side quests. Be bold. Take on unique challenges and opportunities, and use them to enhance your credibility as a community professional. The winding path can yield unexpected riches.

Build Your Personal Board of Directors

Finally, many professionals find that they make better career decisions when they've got a

trusted mentor to advise them. Mentors can provide invaluable guidance, but one downside is that perspective and suggestions may not necessarily align with what's best for you.

Instead of relying solely on one mentor, consider assembling your own personal board of directors. This approach allows you to gather a variety of perspectives, which can improve your decision-making process as you navigate your career path. Consider arranging a series of one-on-one meetings once or twice a year with your board to discuss career strategy.

Diverse opinions can help you explore all the possibilities of your career. No single mentor has all the answers, but engaging with five or six might help you discover the path that's right for you.

Conclusion

In this guide, I've aimed to shed light on the underlying mindsets and strategies that can shape a thriving career in the community profession. But it's about more than just mastering the art of interviews or crafting the perfect resume. It's about a deeper, more personal question: Why are you in this field?

If you're drawn to community management because you believe in the power of connecting people, in making the world a better place through collaboration and shared purpose, then you're in the right place. This isn't just a job; it's a calling. And if that resonates with you, if that's why you're here, then the rest of your career path will naturally fall into place.

Author: Todd Nilson, President and Community Strategist at Clocktower Advisors

As a community strategist with over 25 years of consulting experience, Todd Nilson has honed his expertise in community-building, digital workplace transformations, and marketing strategy. His additional background in competitive intelligence research, game thinking, recruitment, employer branding, and virtual collaboration practices make him a well-rounded expert in his field.

Todd's leadership has been instrumental in delivering transformational technology workshops and projects for top-tier brands such as Activision, Facebook, SAP, The Truth Initiative, Steelcase, Schneider National, Sargento, Greenpeace, and Medtronic. His track record of success in community strategy makes him a sought-after consultant for businesses looking to enhance their digital presence and build strong communities around their brand.

Contact Todd at todd@clocktoweradvisors.com

Analysis of Community Marketing Trends among CMOs

By: Tammy McGlade

We recently completed an informal survey with an array of Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) across various industries, and it heralds a significant pivot in the marketing world. A pivot towards an approach that places community at its core. Welcome to the era of community marketing, where we delve into how organizations harness the power of community not just to meet but surpass their marketing objectives.

Community's crucial role in marketing strategies reverberated consistently throughout our discussions. As one CMO remarked, "The community is our driving force; it dictates the direction of our marketing strategy." How does this philosophy translate into budget allocations? The answers might not be what you anticipate.

Regarding ROI, the landscape is shifting away from traditional, quantitative approaches. One insightful CMO mused, "The community's impact cannot be defined by figures alone. It is about a connection, a feeling, a sense of belonging – those are hard to quantify."

UGC, or User-Generated Content, is making its mark as a powerful catalyst within the community marketing sphere. It's not just about giving consumers a voice but also about creating a resonating echo within the community. "Our most successful campaigns are those powered by our community's content. It's raw, relatable, and invariably compelling," shared a CMO.

When asked about preferred platforms for community engagement, social media emerged as the undeniable front-runner. However, the dilemma between growing the community and retaining its existing members proved a common challenge. A seasoned CMO shared, "It's an art, really – knowing when to focus on growth and when to consolidate. It's an ongoing process of fine-tuning."

The terrain of community marketing, though rewarding, is full of challenges. A balance must be struck between fostering engagement, juggling budget constraints, and accurately measuring ROI. As one CMO candidly admitted, "Building and sustaining engagement is a labor of love. It requires persistence, creativity, and an openness to learning from our community."

Despite these hurdles, community interaction remains an unwavering focus, with unique engagement strategies emerging from our dialogue. Intrigued? Well, you'll have to wait to discover these intriguing methods.

To summarize, our exploration signifies a clear shift: community marketing is no longer the dark horse of the marketing world. It's at the forefront, redefining norms and expectations. As one CMO astutely commented, "Marketing is no longer a monologue. It's a dialogue that thrives on the synergy between our community and us."

The age of community marketing is here, reshaping marketing blueprints and setting the stage for unprecedented connections and collaborations. Stay tuned as we delve deeper into these exciting trends in our forthcoming report, which will be available for all CLI Premium members.

Unity in Action: Breaking Down Silos for Community-Driven Success

The age-old adage, "Unity is strength," is making an incredible resurgence in today's business landscape, thanks to the rise of community-centric marketing strategies. As a pioneering force in strategic communications, we at epIQ Creative Group have had the unique privilege of witnessing a remarkable shift in our clients' approach to marketing. This approach leverages cross-functional teamwork with community-specific goals. This approach is breaking down silos,

forging solid connections, and steering organizations toward their revenue aspirations.

In the face of evolving consumer expectations and an increasingly interconnected world, businesses are shifting away from traditional, compartmentalized structures. Instead, they're moving towards a holistic, integrated model where various departments align their efforts to achieve a common goal - nurturing the community and harnessing its potential. This shift is not just transforming organizational cultures, but it is also driving tangible results and offering fascinating insights.

Previously perceived as standalone entities, marketing departments are now at the epicenter of a collaborative network, actively engaging with other departments such as sales, product development, and customer service. This expertise convergence is instrumental in developing a comprehensive understanding of the community's needs, expectations, and motivations. For instance, one of our technology clients initiated regular 'community roundtable' meetings where representatives from each department share insights, discuss strategies, and align their objectives to meet community-focused goals. This has led to more targeted campaigns, tailored products, and enhanced customer support.

These collaborations result in a more authentic and engaging brand narrative, where every touchpoint is an opportunity for

meaningful interaction with the community. Take the case of a client in the consumer goods sector who harnessed the power of such collaboration to turn their community members into brand ambassadors. By involving their product development and customer service teams in marketing initiatives, they effectively conveyed the value of their offerings, leading to heightened consumer trust and a surge in word-of-mouth referrals.

Equally noteworthy is the impact of these cross-functional collaborations on revenue expectations. A finance sector client demonstrated the potential of this approach by integrating their marketing and sales teams, fostering a collaborative mindset that prioritized community needs over individual departmental targets. This shift in perspective, reinforced by shared KPIs and revenue goals, led to a more synchronized buyer's journey, significantly boosting their conversion rates and overall revenue.

However, the journey toward breaking down silos and fostering a cross-functional, community-centric culture is not without challenges. It requires open communication, willingness to adapt, and a shared commitment to the community's interests. Yet, the results – improved brand loyalty, increased customer satisfaction, and positive impact on the bottom line - make it an investment worth making.

What we are observing at epIQ

Creative Group is the dawn of a new era - an era where the power of community is not just recognized but harnessed, where bridges replace silos, and where every department, regardless of its function, contributes to a shared vision and purpose. It's an exciting journey, filled with possibilities, and one that promises to reshape the future of marketing.

Our clients, who have embraced this shift, are witnessing the transformation of their marketing strategies and realizing their revenue aspirations. Their

experiences are a testament to the power of community and collaboration, providing valuable insights and lessons for businesses worldwide.

Our clients, who have embraced this shift, are witnessing the transformation of their marketing strategies and realizing their revenue aspirations. Their experiences are a testament to the power of community and collaboration, providing valuable insights and lessons for businesses worldwide.

Author: By Tammy McGlade, Director of Marketing & Client Success @ epIQ Creative Group

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Community building is easy when you know your ideal member. Start with the IDEA Framework.

By: Deb Schell

As a new community builder, you might be thinking about launching a Facebook group, Slack channel, or Mighty Networks. It's worth knowing if your community concept is one that others can relate to and resonate with, which takes time.

When I first started my community, I yearned to provide a space for people to find resources and calm. But by the end of my first year, I was exhausted. I'd provided plenty of content and experiences but struggled to gain traction. Now I know why: I hadn't identified clearly who the community was for. A wide variety of topics meant I was trying to serve everyone under the sun.

Yes, I had a compelling goal: to offer relief from anxiety and stress. But, as I see now, this theme was way too large. My "finding calm" umbrella was compelling enough to attract people, but it hadn't provided a specific solution for a specific audience.

I'd recruited amazing people to speak, and I valued every single session. But as it turned out, I'd promoted their services, offers, and products, while having no profit to show for my own. In my attempt to provide a calm space for others, I'd worn myself out.

But as entrepreneurs know, success comes from setbacks—assuming we're willing to learn from them. In my case, the bright spot came from the members themselves. After connecting with these individuals from June through December each week, I noticed a portion of them had something in common: They were community builders themselves.

They were leaders who shared my belief that people come first. They had similar goals and challenges, and I sensed I could help them. Not only that, but they told me so, point blank! Over time, they told me exactly what they wanted, which allowed me to reshape my community. Listening to their needs, I launched anew. This time, it was just for them, and it addressed their biggest pain point —isolation—by including structured cohorts.

When I joined the Location Indie Community, I transformed from someone who worked at a corporate job and wanted to travel more to someone who is location independent and can travel anytime.

This didn't happen overnight, it happened over 2 and a half years when I built relationships with the members of the community and learned from them. The best part of being a member of an online community is to find people who just "get you" from the beginning. That transformation was the same one that my friends in the community were also going through at the same time. They, too, wanted to become location independent and travel and we transformed together.

Over the same period of time, while I was warning on building my business, my friends in the community were doing the same, working on marketing and promoting their services, or products out to the masses and trying to make a living as a creator, or as a virtual assistant, although some did have full-time remote worker jobs, but the majority of the members in Location Indie were people who wanted quit their 9-5 job to start an online business.

If I had known the term then, I would have realized that I was Location Indie's ideal member or ideal client- a person who fits the profile of the community creator's target audience. They have a problem that the creator can help them overcome or resolve with their assistance, support, knowledge, network, or resources.

The friends I met in Location Indie remain among my best friends. I see them on Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn, and I support them anytime they are doing something amazing. And I know that if I needed it, they would pick up a phone and talk with me.

You never know the magic you can make when bringing people together. The more you know about your members the better you'll be able to engage them. Even if your community never has in-person gatherings, find a way to connect with your members, too.

Start with the IDEA™: Identify, Discovery, Evaluation, Assembly
One of the most challenging aspects of community building is finding your ideal members and reaching them with your message. You'll need to give them good reasons why your community is deserving of their time, energy, money, and attention.

To gain members committed to your community's purpose and interested in showing up to learn, connect, collaborate, and contribute, you'll need to have a few strategic elements in place. When you launch a community, you want to make sure that you invite the right people into the room.

The people who will participate, and show up on your events, or share resources in the community, and support other members. Community building is all about building relationships with the members, and connecting the members with each other.

To help you get your community concept all the way to the finish line, I developed the **IDEA™ framework**: Identify, Discover, Evaluate, and Assemble. The following section will outline a blueprint for you to follow, take action, and streamline your community-building journey. But before we jump in, I want to emphasize that the foundation for a community strategy is essential.

Identify
The first step in building an online community is to **know who you are bringing together**. This can be the most challenging part of any community builder's experience because your community concept may serve many different people. The key to creating a sense of belonging in an online community is to clearly define who it's for and who it isn't. When others hear about your community, they should know easily if they belong.

Discover
When working with clients, I am asked about the meaning of "discovery" when launching an online community. It is a process in which you **become curious about who will make up your online community**. It means getting to know actual humans, and it requires a few skills that can be learned, developed, or resourced. **This is NOT an avatar**. Avatars are based on assumptions – discovery is based on validation with actual humans who you want to work with that may become your actual community members in the future. Once you've had conversations with the 10-20 people who best fit your ideal member, it's time to review what you've learned.

Member Experience

When speaking with your ideal member, you'll learn how they have experienced an online community and how they are currently participating or showing up in online communities.
This will help you identify the best way to provide your members a unique and memorable experience.

Personal Challenges

Depending on how open and willing they are to share their challenges that relate directly to your community concept (refer back to community concept for more). You may learn how your ideal members have overcome roadblocks and managed to move through difficult times. You can ask them who they leaned on most in these times and discover if a community would help them in solving a problem they have right now.

Transformation & Readiness

During chats with ideal members, you'll identify critical aspects of the community structure that will lend themselves to inspiring transformation. When reviewing the notes from your conversation with the ideal member, think about their journey. Look for evidence that they want to solve the problem your community addresses.

For example, if your community will help people who struggle with procrastination, note when interviewees mention this issue, such as a time when they delayed taking action. Pay attention to how long it took them to address

that delay. Seek out examples of them putting effort into overcoming that procrastination. If they haven't said they have this exact problem, they may not be ready to take action.

Ideal Member Survey

You've sent out the survey, and now it's time to look at the results. Depending on the size of your audience, you may have hundreds of responses to review, or maybe you have a dozen. Whatever the amount, set aside adequate time to review the responses.

Using your available digital tools, create a spreadsheet or notes document to help you organize the results. For example, Google Forms can automatically add the responses to a spreadsheet, separating each response into individual columns.
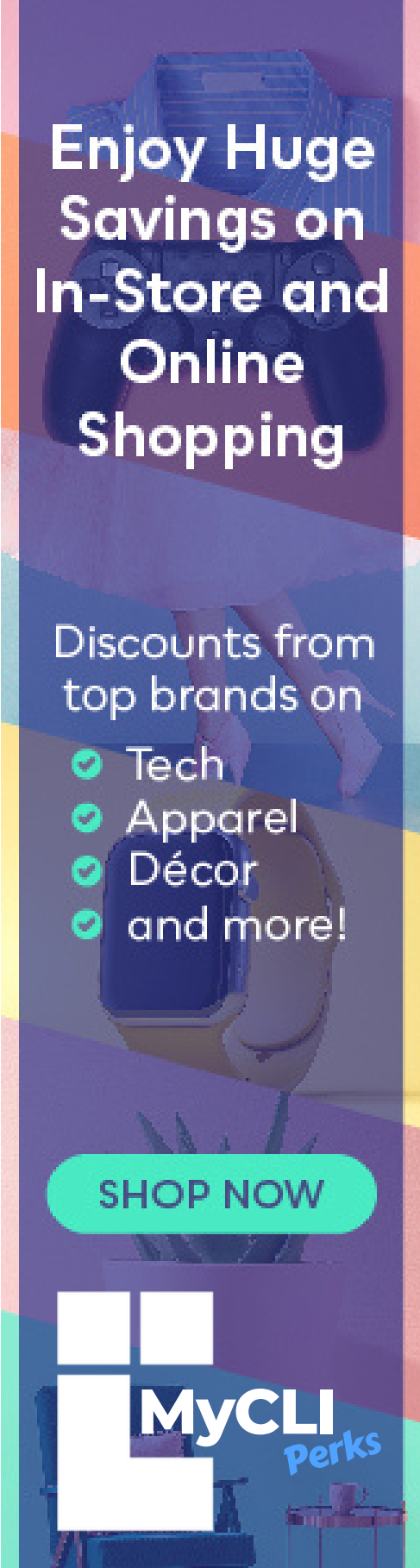
Key Themes to Examine

Start reviewing responses for each individual to see how they chose to respond or if they left things blank. As you move from one person to the next, you will start to see repetitive themes emerge.

The Problem

As you reflect on the responses, pay attention to the problems they share with you. Ask yourself: Does the same problem come up repeatedly? Note each instance, and look for common problem threads. When patterns emerge, you're onto something.

The Solution

If you've found that people resonate with the problem, then the next critical factor is to make

sure you understand how they want to solve it. Some people deeply desire to spend time on personal development by reading alone, journaling, and connecting with nature. Suppose your respondents say they've attempted to solve this problem independently but don't have the motivation, determination, or discipline to keep themselves accountable. In that case, a community could be a good fit for them. If they also express interest in helping others navigate this challenge, the community may be a beautiful fit. If you see people say they aren't ready or don't want to help others, they may have more success solving the problem independently.

Member Experience
The members of your online community want to have a good experience and you want them to as well, so make sure you are providing them with an experience that leaves them wanting more at each step in their journey. Learn from them what they really enjoy doing together and how they can contribute ideas for new experiences. Find different ways to connect with them. For example, if your community is focused on business networking, it would be nice to share what your members do for fun when they aren't trying to get customers or clients. Search out fun experiences you can bring to the community including activities like game nights, watch parties, and scavenger hunts. I've been part of an online community that conducted a murder mystery night! At the end of the day, your

members want to have fun, and so do you!

Evaluate
The responses you collected in the discovery process will give you what you need to determine the next step in your community-building process. Because community building takes work and time, reviewing your results will prevent wasting resources.

Assemble
To this point, we've discussed the IDEA framework, including Identity, Discovery, and Evaluation. Now it's time to talk about how to assemble your launch plan. Planning when, how, and where to launch an online community usually takes about 3-6 months.

Deciding when to launch depends on a few factors and will ultimately be determined by your existing business model. For example, if you do large launches at the beginning of the new year, then launching a community simultaneously will drain too much from your team. The best advice I can give is to think about what has worked for you in the past.

A community strategy constantly changes
The biggest draw to an online community is that members can receive feedback about their problems, projects, or ideas. Getting immediate suggestions from a group of peers in a safe space is extremely valuable; indeed, it's worth paying for. If you have a book idea, you probably won't post that on your Facebook

page or in an Instagram story. But if you were part of a support group with new and experienced authors, you may be more inclined to share.

Within that safe space, you would feel encouraged to share your true thoughts, knowing you'd gain feedback to inspire you and clarify the concept, not tear it down. Contrast this experience with that of posting on social media, where someone might just say, "Nice idea." An intentional community will foster real conversation about where to take the idea.

Your online community can be just that place, where like-minded people get critical feedback and meaningful support. With this format, you'll have the power to gather the right experts and peers, then cultivate an environment which allows them to thrive.

Community building, like entrepreneurship, is all about making decisions. It takes time to think through these decisions, and that requires you to slow down.

Decisions you'll need to consider:
- **A community concept** is what makes your space unique. You need to decide on a specific idea, and only one, that is yours, not someone else's. This was discussed in the beginning of the article as identifying your strengths and what you are "known" for so that you can build an audience and community around your life experiences.

- **Your ideal members** are who

you want to be a part of your community. You must decide who is a good fit for you and your offer, program, course, or membership. You should focus on one specific group of people to start, then you can expand your network once you have succeeded with your first small community. You can't serve both beginners and advanced individuals in the same course, because they are at different levels of understanding. (In the example earlier with Robyn, these two groups wouldn't have launched at the same time; she decided to start with the people who have more experience and want to invest with her and her coaching certification.)

- **Clarity** can be achieved once you know what makes your community unique, the problem the community solves, and your ideal members. You must decide on one problem, and only one, that will be solved, specifically one that people can't resolve

on their own and need support.

- **Community architecture**, which we've been discussing in this chapter, is the next phase after deciding the destination, design, and structure of an online community. This includes deciding if your events or meetups will occur in person, online, or if you'll offer hybrid options. It also includes deciding on the content you'll offer, how you want to experience the community as a host, and what the experience will be like for the members.

The marketing world tends to promote complex offers to provide the prospect of options. However, giving your potential members too many options will lead to them taking no action at all and never signing up. The more complex it is, the harder it will be to explain and understand. When someone doesn't see immediately how they fit into your community, you may lose them as a member before they've even joined.

Here are a few things to consider about a community structure:

1. Consider your bandwidth to lead, host, develop, market, promote, and grow this program or membership.
2. New community builders should start with one structure and try it for a time to see how it fits, then decide on the next steps.
3. If you don't have a team, really consider how each structure will work for you. If you are working a full-time job and you are a single mother of two, you just will not have as much time as a single individual with no children who is doing this work full-time and has a virtual assistant, a marketing team, and hires tech support for the community design and website management.

Author: Deb Schell
Since 2020, as a community strategist, Deb has guided more than 60 entrepreneurs in building, launching, and growing an online community. As host of the Community Strategy Podcast, Deb has interviewed over 100 business and community leaders to learn firsthand what strategies work for online community builders. Her forthcoming book, Creator to Community Builder: Find Calm While Building An Online Community is anticipated for Fall 2023 release.

Contact Deb Schell at Deb@FindCalmHere.com for more information.

Upcoming Events

How to Approach
Driving Bottom-Line Value
From Your Community

Evan Hamilton

Oct 19, 2023
01:00 PM Eastern

COMMUNITY LEADERS

CLIX Fall 2023
November 16, 2023
8:30 AM - 2:00 PM EST

COMMUNITY LEADERS VIRTUAL SOCIAL HOUR

Thursday

2 PM ET

First Thursday of every month

Helping Volunteers
Find Purpose in Your Community

Megan O'keefe

Dec 14, 2023
01:00 PM Eastern

COMMUNITY LEADERS

https://mycli.co/events

Stay connected!