COMMUNITY LEADERS

MAGAZINE

COMMUNITY LEADERS INSTITUTE

MARJORIE ANDERSON TO CHAIR CLIX, MEMPHIS

4/5 APRIL 2022

COMMUNITY LEADERS
INSTITUTE

CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE

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RD Whitney

RD WHITNEY
CEO & Founder
September 22, 2021

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WELCOME

Welcome to the second edition of **Community Leaders Magazine**, the magazine for community professionals like you, brought to you by Community Leaders Institute (CLI). CLI is on a mission to unite, support, educate and nurture communities and community leaders through certification, training, events, networking – and of course, community.

Each month, Community Leaders Magazine brings you the inside track from across the community ecosystem – including compelling thought leadership, practical how-to guidance and interviews with community managers and leaders so you can see how your peers have overcome the same challenges you're facing.

THIS MONTH WE HAVE A FEAST OF INSPIRING STORIES AND COMPELLING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

This month we have a feast of inspiring stories and compelling thought leadership, covering everything from the Rise of the CCO to the importance of creating a stronger virtual strategy. We're looking at gamification, tips for monetising community, new tech tools, changes at Facebook HQ and what they mean for CMs and redesigning companies as communities.

Ashley Friedlein from Guild continues his series with a look at where Community Based Marketing fits in the sales and marketing funnel and Richard Millington pulls the ultimate trick out of the hat with some solid evidence around community ROI.

We believe the shift toward community driven is accelerating, and that we're stronger as community leaders when we come together to learn, share, ideate and innovate. With so many facets and types of community, we're your perfect opportunity to connect and share stories, learnings and experiences across community divides, to raise the bar for all.

We have lots of plans afoot, with some exciting developments in the pipeline, so stay tuned and if you haven't yet done so – sign up at www.communityleadersinstitute.com to get your next copy delivered to your inbox.

Heidi

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MARJORIE ANDERSON TO CHAIR CLIX, MEMPHIS

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This is YOUR magazine – let us know what you'd like to see more of. Send your feedback to amy@communityleadersinstitute.com

Or, if you have an idea for an article, would like your community to be featured, or would like to submit content – we'd love to hear from you.
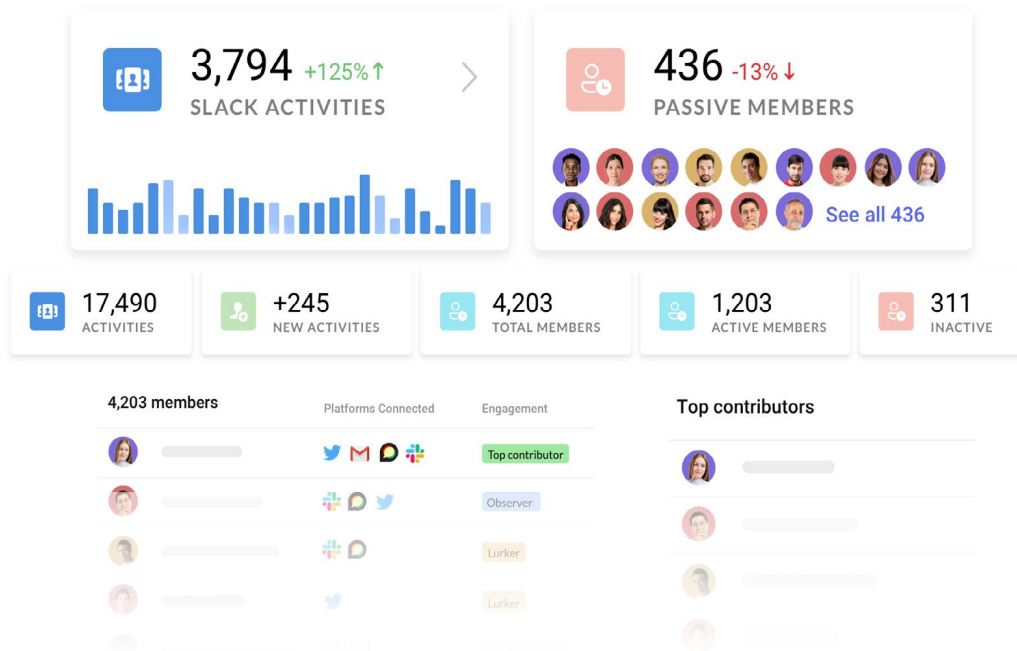
How did your community perform in 2021?

Quality data can really change your trajectory of community success. AhoyConnect helps you connect the dots, understand the real value and ROI of your community.

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FACEBOOK CERTIFICATION
IS IT FOR ME?

We asked 3 community professionals who completed the FB Community Management course what they got out of it and whether it was worth it. The answer; a resounding yes. Read on for the low-down

Jo Capel
Cassius Digital and VanLife Community

Kate VanderVoort
Founder & CEO, Social Mediology

Samantha Harradine
TribeGeeks Community

WHY DID YOU TAKE THE COURSE?

JC: I'd been working in social media for 8 years and had been growing my own Facebook Group community since 2017. I loved working on the community growth aspect more than anything else and knew I wanted to take it further and make this my core expertise. When I opened my own agency, Cassius Digital, I wanted to obtain more recognised certifications to back up my experience and become a specialist in community management.

KV: I've been a community building strategist and consultant for 12 years, so already have an established reputation but wanted to become certified for the credentials and to become a part of the new community forming around the certification. I love connecting with other CMs and this community is filled with people managing Facebook communities - every context and experience is different. It's wonderful to exchange ideas and give/receive support.

SH: I was part of the founding program last year, chosen from 70 million admins in the world, so it was a real honour to get involved. We run TribeGeeks, a FB group dedicated to teaching people how to build, grow and monetise their own groups, so it was a no-brainer to learn the materials which would help us support our clients creating FB groups.

HOW MUCH STUDY TIME WAS NEEDED?

KV: I'm probably unusual – I stumbled across the Certification, registered for the exam and did it 48 hours later!

JC: I really wanted to score highly so studied for 10 weeks using the FB Blueprint learning materials to make sure I understood exactly where I needed to expand my knowledge. All the learning materials are self-paced which was perfect for me

SH: There were just 245 of us on the program, only half of which passed, so it definitely isn't a walk in the park. Study time will vary depending on experience, there are 8 modules so many students do these over 8 weeks.

DID YOU JOIN THE FB STUDY GROUP AND WAS THAT HELPFUL?

JC: Yes, it was a brilliant resource and an opportunity to connect with other students. I'd highly recommend it to anyone working towards the certification.

KV: I didn't - but I'd recommend doing so, I just happened to dive straight in. The practice tests are invaluable in helping you determine whether you're ready.

SH: Our founding program group was a learning cohort in itself and offered a tremendous opportunity to connect with other group leaders and learn from each other. The community is so supportive which is incredibly powerful – whether you need help with learning materials or simply accountability.

WAS IT "WORTH" IT - WOULD YOU RECOMMEND IT?

JC: Definitely. It's been one of the most valuable certifications I've undertaken in my career in social media marketing. I was already growing my own community which had scaled to over 40,000 members organically within a couple of years. My main objective is to help other community leaders grow robust and engaged communities that create positive impact in the world. The certification has been instrumental in achieving that and I'd recommend to anyone who has ambitions to increase their current skill set or start on the path to becoming a CM.

KV: Yes. The certification is useful for anyone focusing on bringing people together on Facebook. I'd also recommend to social media profs specialising in organic content. The previous FB certifications have been very advertising focused, but this is much more about building an organic audience.

SH: Without hesitation yes. A brilliant accolade for professional community managers and an invaluable, indepth understanding of building, growing and managing a FB group, for anyone trying to do so.

SPARK COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

WITH A STRONGER VIRTUAL STRATEGY

As people seek new and better ways to link with like-minded peers and learn from industry experts, many see professional associations and their member communities as the best way to forge those connections.

Professionals have long relied on associations for industry knowledge, thought leadership, and networking. Their associations help them learn, grow, and find a sense of belonging. But in an increasingly digital world, their expectations of how associations deliver value are shifting.

Members no longer want to wait for an annual conference to follow industry trends, expand their knowledge, and network with colleagues. Instead, they're turning to online communities, social media, and virtual events to connect and learn any time of the day and throughout the year.

Associations can give members more and meet their elevated expectations by stepping outside of their traditional engagement tactics. **Strengthening your virtual strategy is the key to delivering more frequent, far-reaching, shared experiences for your community members.**

VIRTUAL EVENT IDEAS TO DRIVE ENGAGEMENT

- Member Communication (Recruitment, Onboarding, Retention)
- Thought Leadership Webinars
- Panel Presentations
- Success Stories / Case Studies
- Sponsored Events
- Roundtable discussions
- Product Launches
- Chapter / Special Interest Group Meetings
- Continuing Education
- Focus Groups
- Career Fairs
- Alumni Events
- Fundraising
- Awards & Recognition
- Social / Holiday Events
- Workshop / Master Class Series (scheduled over several weeks)
- Virtual Conference (many tracks & sessions over multiple days)

VIRTUAL EVENTS ARE VITAL TO MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

A bolder, broader approach to virtual events can help your association reach more members, create deeper connections, and deliver enduring value. Virtual events allow you to:

CREATE A CATALYST: Virtual events promote member engagement, inspiring action beyond a single conference. Live and on-demand events and webinars bring members together and repurposed content in the forms of resource downloads and networking sessions keep members continually coming back.

DELIVER A MORE PERSONALIZED EXPERIENCE: More frequent virtual events and on-demand recordings allow attendees to seek out and connect with the content most relevant to them at the moment they need it, leading to a more personalized experience and helping them get the most out of each event.

INCREASE INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY: Some members can't or won't travel to your in-person events. Offering a cadence of virtual touchpoints ensures you'll reach all your members, and everyone has equal opportunities to access your content and participate in the community.

COLLECT POWERFUL DATA AND INSIGHTS: Members' event attendance and content consumption will help you identify—and continuously deliver—what members want and need. The insights gained from their engagement are powerful tools to help you enhance future event experiences, refine your member value proposition and serve up personalized content.

VIRTUAL EVENTS DELIVER MORE MEMBER VALUE

Members are looking for more and different solutions from their associations today. Advances in technology have increased their expectations of the digital experience, and a quest for better balance has them asking for more flexibility. Virtual events position you to meet these needs with:

EASE & CONVENIENCE: Members are short on time and, often, are faced with tightening budgets. Virtual events eliminate the need to travel, which combats those concerns. Plus, virtual allows you to extend your reach across geographies, which increases your opportunities to attract more attendees

and forge new connections.

ANSWERS & EDUCATION: Members seeking on-demand answers, learning or upskilling, and opportunities to build their networks have a desire to connect now, not later. Virtual events help you deliver what they want when they want it.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE VIRTUAL EVENT STRATEGY

With a strong virtual events strategy, associations have the power to meet members' needs and create significant ROI. But how do you create and maintain a sustainable approach to virtual event engagement?

LEVERAGE YOUR PARTNER ECOSYSTEM: The onus to build and deliver compelling virtual events isn't entirely on your internal staff. Look to thought leaders and industry experts. Leverage your vendors and sponsors who can offer knowledge and expertise to enhance your events and content (and create new non-dues revenue opportunities for your association!).

ENCOURAGE MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS: Your members are more eager than you may realize to share their experiences and wisdom. Encourage their collaboration and invite them to contribute as roundtable participants, panelists, moderators, or speakers.

Make use of your content—over and over again. Your staff, partners, and members are creating valuable, relevant content every day. Get more mileage from it by repurposing conference sessions as on-demand webinars, convening colleagues to discuss research reports, and pivoting social posts to interactive discussions.

ENABLING YOUR ASSOCIATION'S SUCCESS

Members don't want another one-way webcast. They want dynamic, captivating, and immersive experiences. The best way to equip your association to execute those events is by investing in the right technology solution.

A subscription to a robust virtual events platform is a critical part of every association's tech stack. The right technology provides more than just a portal for hosting an online meeting; it allows you to use compelling content and active engagement to create more fulfilling member experiences.

Today's platforms allow you to create a branded hub your community members will keep coming back to. They offer a space for your team to learn, experiment, and advance your content strategy. Most importantly, they provide intuitive functionality, innovative interactivity, and dedicated support to make your events hassle-free—for you and your members.

Kristen Wright is the CMO of Forj, the Member Experience and Virtual Event platform purpose-built for associations and professional communities. Forj powers personalized virtual events and online engagement to fuel learning and connections for the long-term. To learn more, visit: www.forj.ai.

MAKING COMMUNITIES COUNT

Forj is a leading virtual events and member experience platform for associations and professional community organizations.

With our platform and Client Success team, you'll attract more members and sponsors, deepen their commitment, and grow your community.

Together, we'll ensure every voice is heard, everyone learns, bonds are strengthened, and long-lasting relationships are forged. It's where empathy and belonging meet good business sense.

www.forj.ai

FORJ

THE RISE OF THE CCO

THE CHIEF COMMUNITY OFFICER THAT IS.

For years, community has lived under the banner of marketing, customer success, or other business units. Though there's some crossover with those departments, anyone working in community knows that it's an animal all its own.

Today though, we're seeing more companies invest in building communities, as well as community being recognized as a standalone entity.

Increased investment means even more opportunity for those working in community. The most forward thinking organizations are even starting to bring community to the c-suite in the form of a Chief Community Officer (CCO). In Community Predictions 2022, experts in the community space discussed the coming year as a potential catalyst in the rise of the CCO – though 2022 might not be the year of the CCO, it looks set to be a foundational year for the Chief Community Officer.

First though, let's discuss some of the basics.

WHAT IS A CHIEF COMMUNITY OFFICER?

A CCO is a c-level executive responsible for all community efforts at a given company. The role encompasses community building, strategy, outreach, and engagement. A CCO is the main advocate and driver for any community-focused initiatives and pushes for

budget allocation and other high-level approval to ensure the success of the community.

A CCO is also responsible for hiring senior community staff to help execute on their overall vision. They're less focused on day-to-day management and more on long term projects and strategic efforts to build out the community function at your business. Finally, they're the person who informs the other c-level employees about community performance and initiatives.

Jenny Weigle, a Chief Community Officer herself, explained that employing a c-level community person won't be super straightforward; "In the creation of this role, companies need to be REALLY clear in who they are targeting, I think this lack of clarity could be a deterrent in the creation of a role of CCO."

With that in mind, how do you know if 2022 is the year your organization is going to implement c-level role for community?

ARE YOU READY FOR A CCO?

Implementing a CCO isn't something to be taken lightly. It requires energy, resources and should be well-thought out. The truth is there's no single indicator that you're ready for a CCO, but there are a few signals you could look for:

• You're a community-led company
• Your current community efforts are stalling
• You're having trouble getting buy-in from senior leadership

If none of these apply, you might not be ready though, and you wouldn't be alone. If that's the case, what does 2022 look like exactly?

Kiely Monteiro, the Community Manager at Floqast, sees 2022 as a stepping stone to finding a space in the c-Suite. "We'll start seeing more directors of communities or even VPs for larger organizations. I think there will be a lot of potential to grow into strategic higher-level roles."

The reality is that, even if 2022 isn't the year your organization brings in a CCO, the foundation is going to be laid for the eventual rise of a C-level community person.

MOVING FORWARD

The community landscape is changing and community is becoming more and more central to an organization's success. We can't ignore that this level of responsibility means that representation is necessary. If you're interested in learning more about the future of community roles, Community Predictions 2022 has you covered. The free eBook details changes coming to community job positions, responsibilities, reporting, and salaries. Find out all you need to know for the coming year and download your copy here.

By Nuala Cronin
Higher Logic

COMMUNITY GAMIFICATION:
THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

It is a truth now universally acknowledged that a community of a certain size and age is in need of gamification.

Toby Beresford, Head of Client Engagement - Veneficus (UK)

Gamification is the art and science of using gamelike features to encourage greater participation in your online (and sometimes offline) community.

Gigya noted back in 2013, for example, that introducing gamification drove a 13% increase in commenting amongst community members. Since then, gamelike features have been integrated into most online community platforms: vanilla forums gamification features for example allows managers to "reward members with ranks" and offers user profiles that "display a member's reputation, badges and recent activity."

If you're a fan of King.com's smartphone megahit "Candy Crush Saga" you might have come across these features when interacting with other candy crushers in their forums. Powered by Vanilla, you can see how King have taken the basic "vanilla flavour" gamification and pimped it up with Candy Crush style badges. Which player wouldn't want to be in the "Jelly 1 Million Club"?

Typical user profile, betchiegrl29, on the Candy Crush Saga community

For platform provider Vanilla, the Candy Crush Saga community is "an excellent example of gamification done right." But is it really? And how do we tell the good and the bad from the merely ugly?

THE GOOD

One company that has crystallized the value of community gamification is Stack Overflow. Founded in 2008, this tech led Q&A community now serves over 100 million users a month making it one of the top 50 websites in the world.

Stack Overflow has gamification in its very DNA, despite founder Joel Spolsky describing it as a "dusting of gamification", it is self-evidently highly gamified; as you can see from my own Stack Overflow profile which includes reputation points and badges:

Toby Beresford Profile on Stack Overflow

Indeed, Spolsky is surprised by his own success: "To be honest, it was initially surprising to me that you could just print a number after people's handles and they would feel rewarded. Look at me! Look at my four digit number! But it does drive a tremendous amount of good behavior. Even people who aren't participating in the system (by working to earn reputation) buy into it (e.g., by respecting high-reputation users for their demonstrated knowledge and helpfulness)." he writes on his blog.

The market agrees it's a success, earlier this year Spolsky sold

his company for $1.8 billion to Dutch firm Prosus. A resounding endorsement for a gamified community product.

For me, the most interesting aspect of this, is how the internal gamification system on Stack Overflow has spilled out into the world at large. When asked on Quora, if Stack Overflow reputation points increase your chance of being hired, Ryan Mann, a programmer with a degree from Kaplan University and a StackOverflow reputation of over 4900 points, said "I've used it on my resume for two jobs now and both employers said it helped them pick me over others, so I think it works."

Gamification has allowed the community to sort out an internal pecking order and has enabled outsiders to look in and make their own evaluations - getting outside the host system is a resounding endorsement of the reputation system.

So if Stack Overflow is an example of "good" gamification there must also be plenty of bad examples out there too. Not every tech Q&A community is worth $1.8 billion after all.

I had a hunt around and in the "free Q&A" space, competitors are surprisingly sparse. Stack Overflow has done an extraordinary job of gobbling up market share. Gabe Zichermann, author of "The Gamification Revolution" wouldn't be surprised - the subtitle of his book is "how leaders leverage game mechanics to crush the competition." Good gamification discourages community members from going elsewhere. Why would a programmer like Ryan Mann, answer a question on another site if it didn't contribute to his StackOverflow reputation, that now helps him get jobs?

THE BAD

CodeProject boasts over 15 million members but has got its gamification, at least from the start, profoundly wrong, it's bad!

Toby Beresford's profile on Code Project

In Code Project your first 350 reputation points are earned, not for activities that benefit the community, but for activities that benefit the community organiser - signing up earns 100 points and signing up to the various mailing lists on offer a further 250.

So before a user has even interacted with peers their community reputation points are already sky high - despite doing nothing to benefit the community.

While CodeProject does later introduce points for community participation - for the harder job of solving problems for example, they only gain 10 points per answer, a value dwarfed by their previously earned points for just signing up.

This makes for bad gamification because when point allocation is not properly aligned to community member goals, it disincentivizes further participation - it's a real turn-off.

THE UGLY

CodeRanch at first sight isn't gamified but, look closely, and you'll see a strange pie slice icon in the top left corner.
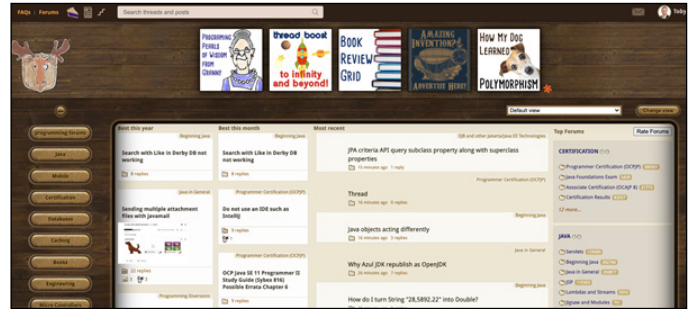
CodeRanch is a tech community around the Java programming language

It turns out that the pie slice is a type of internal tip system. It's horrendously ugly but not necessarily bad gamification. Once they've bought slices of pie (current rate exchange rate is $1 per slice). Users can award pie to others which then highlights that post in the list with, you guessed it, the pie slice icon. According to CodeRanch, It's also used as an in-forum currency to pay for other activities such as "ability to two thumbs up; ability to thumbs down".

So it's a bit ugly but it's heart is in the right place. Perhaps it's the mixed metaphor: I suppose ranches and pies might go together in some people's minds but it's a bit of a stretch for me. Beautiful gamification should feel like a natural extension of the existing community experience.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

So, we've seen how gamification can be good (Stack Overflow), bad (CodeProject) and ugly (CodeRanch). While at a glance they may seem similar, the difference, as ever, is in the design of the details.

If you'd like to learn more about community gamification design then I'm hosting a free webinar with the Community Leaders Institute on December 9th – click here for details. There's also my book "Infinite Gamification" (www.infinitegamification.com) which is for teams wanting a structured design process to think through gamifying their community.
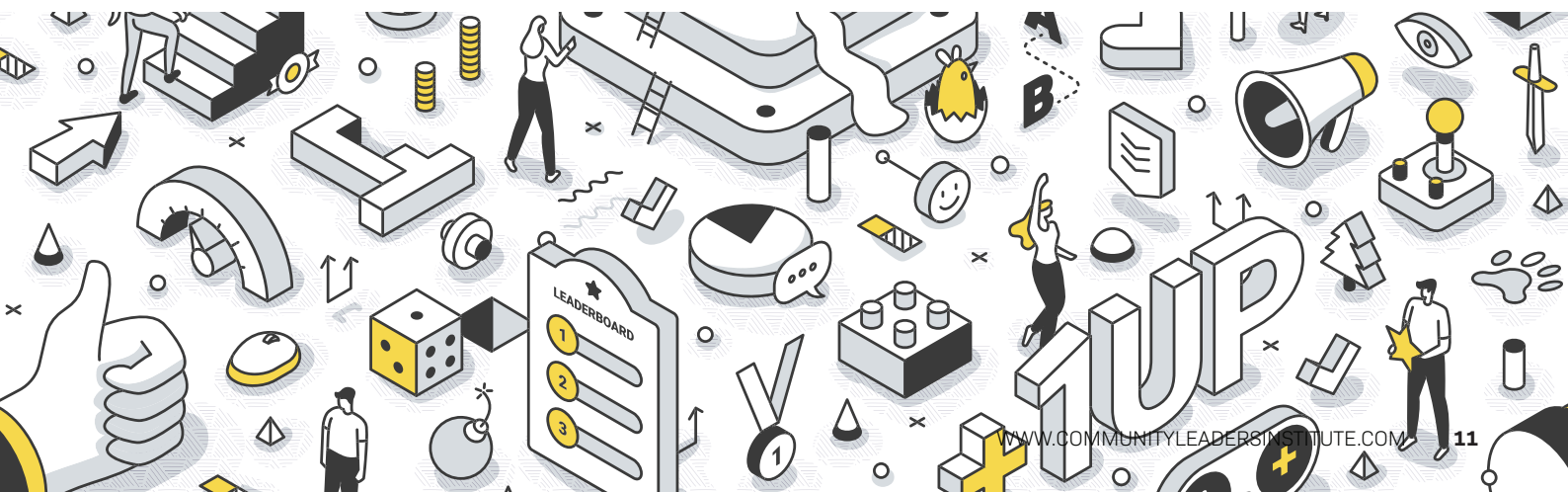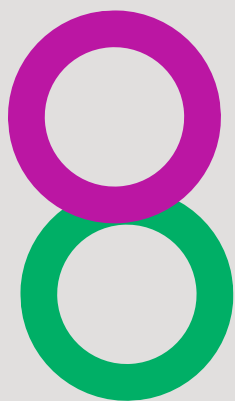
8 FEATURES OF AN EFFECTIVE NETWORKING TOOL

A n effective networking tool is an invaluable addition to your community – and to your live and virtual events. Brella's Jani Lehtimaki shares the 8 must-have features to look for:

1 Attendee matchmaking capabilities

A networking tool helps your event attendees (or your wider community) browse through possible connections and engage with them. But for larger events or communities, finding the "right" people to connect with can still be challenging. A needle in a haystack. The solution? Intent-based matchmaking.

An Intelligent matchmaking feature sets your networking tool apart. It analyzes thousands of data points and connects the top matches, delivering the best, tailored connections which saves participants time and adds immeasurable value to the experience you're providing.

2 Meeting scheduler

The ability to schedule meetings is also a vital component of an effective networking tool. Networking time is limited, so schedulers maximise participants time, enabling them to schedule in-person meetings during live events - or on-line appointments. It should fit seamlessly into the tool.

3 Live chat function for engagement

You can serve your event attendees all the top matches on a silver platter, but it's meaningless if they can't start a conversation and interact with each other in real-time. Make sure your networking tool has live chat – it's the most effective way to facilitate virtual interaction ahead of an event. It also enables your community to get to know each other, more casually, and to prepare for upcoming meetings. If you're running an event and attendees don't want to commit to pre-booked meeting slots, it's the perfect quick-fix on-the-spot solution. Within a community, it's a powerful way for serendipitous conversations.

4 Agenda creation

Networking is essential, but if you're running a live or virtual event, attendees will also be looking to learn new things, share ideas and find answers. Make sure your networking tool has a built-in agenda which enables participants to easily view and customize their personal agenda around their needs and interests. A single agenda which combines both their networking meetings with educational sessions they're attending removes the potential for timetable clashes which happen when these elements are separate.

5 Easy integration with your event platform

Effective networking tools can run on a community or event hosting platform and be fully integrated into your existing assets. A single, convenient, user-friendly and integrated solution helps ensure full visibility of data and analytics and a seamless user experience

6 User profile customization

In an increasingly digital world, personalization is more important than ever. Your community want to get to know each other. Your event attendees want to know who they're talking to online. Personalized user profiles build engagement. They enable unique interactions and make attendees feel better connected. They also allow sponsors to showcase their brand and create familiarity and recognition, and create a better user experience for all.

7 In-depth analytics and reporting

How do you measure your attendee or community engagement? How do you understand where the value was, what content was most popular, what your customer's user journeys look like? Numerical insights and data are crucial to your event strategy, and your networking tool should provide you with plenty, including trending topics and attendee behaviour and feedback helping you identify what works and how to customise future experiences

8 Monetization through sponsorship

A competitive networking tool can offer real value for sponsors.

First of all, matchmaking means profits. Sponsors finance your events to get more visibility and new clients. The matchmaking feature connects them directly to their qualified leads, which scores more relevant meetings and higher chances of closing new deals.

Second, pre-engagement will help your sponsors nurture their leads. Once they match with their prospective clients, representatives can engage with them via live chat and schedule plenty of meetings.

Last but not least, data analytics is fundamental for your sponsors. Post-event numbers can provide your sponsors with valuable information like how many meetings were requested and booked, detailed overviews of their leads, engagement rate, and much more.

JANI LEHTIMAKI IS THE CO-FOUNDER AT BRELLA, AN EVENT PLATFORM TRANSFORMING NETWORKING THROUGH INTELLIGENT MATCHMAKING

CASE STUDY
CLICK HERE TO LEARN HOW LENDIT FINTECH DROVE 22,000+ MEETINGS OVER 5 YEARS TO FINTECH PROFESSIONALS

Brella

The event platform that inspires, engages and connects attendees
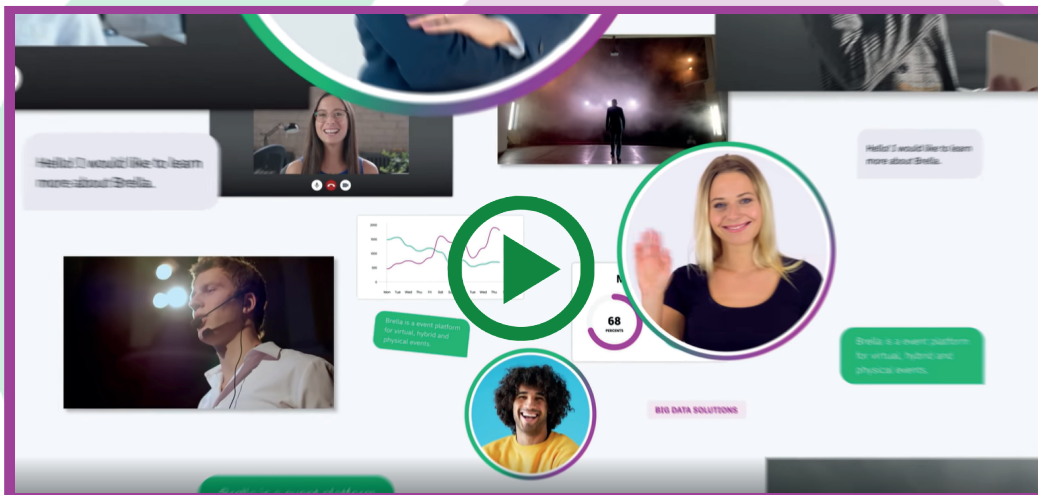
MATCHMAKING & NETWORKING   **SPONSOR MONETIZATION**   **AUTOMATED WORKFLOWS**   **DATA & ANALYTICS**

Quadruple ticket retention with AI powered matchmaking

See Brella in action

Trusted by thousands of communities and event organisers

Proving a Community ROI: By Shutting It Down

The inimitable and omniscient Richard Millington from Feverbee shares how he created the ultimate experiment to prove a brand community's ROI. He shut it down. Read on to find out what happened next

The Ultimate Test of a Brand Community

For the past decade, my community consultancy, FeverBee, has wanted to measure the value of the community by undertaking the ultimate test; closing the community down.

The problem here is a brand community is a lot like a party, you can't cut the power for a while and expect things to immediately start back up a month later. People will have moved on. You might prove the community's value, but it will be a bittersweet moment.

Last year we persuaded a client to do the next best thing; we hid the community for four months and waited to see what would happen. During that time we saw support staff become overwhelmed with customer queries that would otherwise have been handled in the community. We discovered it was 72% cheaper to answer a question via the community than support. And we found the satisfaction scores of customers plummeted to one of the lowest levels on record.

"IT'S 72% CHEAPER TO ANSWER A QUESTION IN A BRAND COMMUNITY"

What Is a Brand Community Today?

Before we dive deeper into the research, we need to update our image of brand communities. The image most people have of brand communities is woefully out of date.

If you imagine a brand community, you might imagine Harley Davidson riders going on long adventures together or Apple fans queuing around the block to buy the new iPhone. But these are cult brands, not brand communities. They're fun to talk about, but impossible to replicate. The number of cult brands is very few (there are more articles about cult brands than cult brands themselves).

Richard Millington will be speaking at CLIX, 4-5 April 2022, Memphis, Tennessee

Where Community Leaders Come Together

The majority of brand communities today are hosted on an online platform where members ask questions and share advice with one another. For example, in Sephora's community (a client), customers can help each other find the best make-up products for them. In Atlassian's community, developers ask questions and get help to set up and use Atlassian's products. The Apple brand community is another good example.

Unlike a cult brand, the real benefit isn't some fuzzy idea of loyalty or 'brand love' (the evidence to suggest brand communities increase loyalty is sketchy at best). Brands are usually far more pragmatic. The intended benefit is most commonly to build a scalable system for supporting a brand's customers.

Or to be even more precise, it's to reduce support costs and increase customer success.

"THE INTENDED BENEFIT IS TO REDUCE SUPPORT COSTS AND INCREASE CUSTOMER SUCCESS"

How Do You Know If a Brand Community Is Delivering Results?

In theory, measuring whether a brand community reduces support costs should be simple.

First, you calculate the cost of a call (total support costs/number of calls). Then you look at how many answers there are in your community. Then check how many people viewed those answers. Multiply those numbers together and you can estimate the value of the community.

The problem is, no one has any real idea of whether a person who lands on an answer actually got what they needed. Someone might ask a question, get an answer, and solve their problem. Another person might visit five answers, not find a solution, ask their own question, still

not get a good response, and then call customer support.

Likewise, a single answer might be viewed by thousands of people. But it's impossible to know what percentage of them would have called support (and which percentage did call support). You can try pop-up polls and surveys, but these fall victim to a response bias.

A year ago, a client of ours (a software company with $1bn+ in revenue), faced this exact problem. They knew the community was solving lots of customer questions, but couldn't prove how valuable it was. Until they could prove their value they couldn't get the support, resources, and recognition they needed.

After a lot of persuading, they finally agreed to our radical experiment. To hide their community for four months.

How We Measured the Value Of A Brand Community

Another important thing to know about brand communities is the overwhelming majority of visitors come via search. For our client, 93% of visitors arrived from a search engine. This audience types a question into Google and arrives at a discussion posted by another member. Very few problems are unique. Which means most have been asked before.

We assumed if we removed community content from appearing in search (which is as easy as adding a single word in the website's HTML code), this audience would have to go elsewhere to get answers. This is like removing a popular restaurant or tourist attraction from all the maps and street signs. The locals still know it's there and can visit, but the visitors don't and won't.

What Happens When You Remove a Community from Appearing in Search Results?

In February 2020 we finally removed all community pages from search results and nervously waited to see what would happen. You can see the results below:
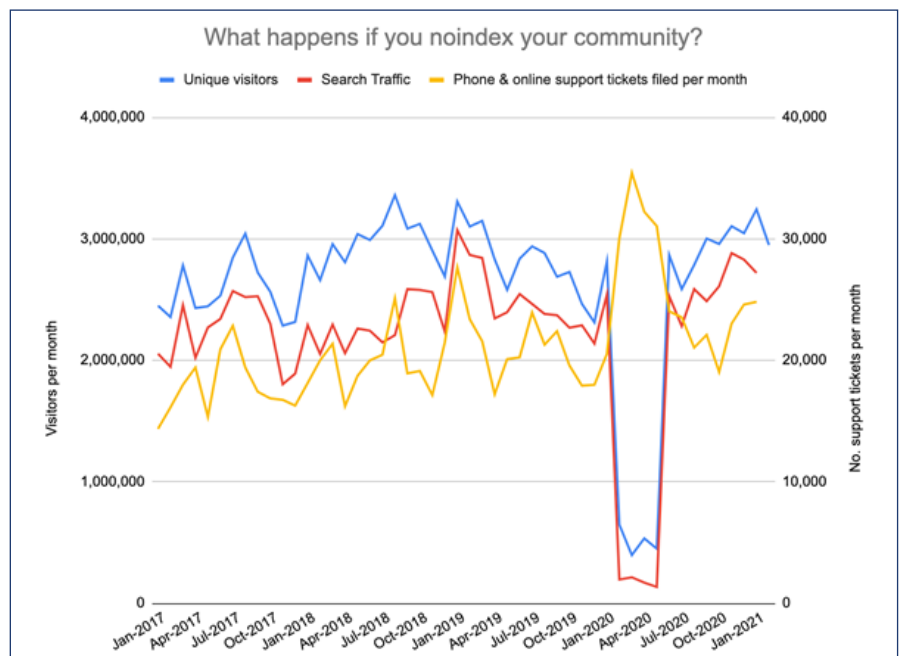
Featured Speakers include:

Majorie Anderson: Community Strategist, Storyteller, People Connector

Ashley Friedlein: Founder of Econsultancy and Guild

Eric Ly: Co-Founder of Linkedin

Venessa Paech: Co-Founder of Australian Community Managers and SWARM

David Spinks: Author of The Business of Belonging, Founder CMX

During the period we no-indexed the community, the **number of visitors plunged by an average of 83%.**

While some found the community through other channels (the website), most simply filed support tickets or called customer support instead. **The number of tickets (calls/online ticket forms) to other support channels increased by 58%.**

This suggests the majority of community users prefer the community as their primary support channel.

The increased volume of tickets overwhelmed the support team and led to a **sudden drop in the average speed of response by 35%.** In turn, this precipitated a **decline in customer satisfaction scores from 4.3 (out of 5) to 3.8.**

Based upon this data, we could also determine precisely how many people who visited the community would otherwise have contacted support. **For every 207 unique visitors to the community, just 1 would otherwise contact support.** This metric alone doesn't sound too high. But the community attracts 2.95 million unique visitors per month. We can therefore determine **the community is resolving approximately 11,840 'contacts' per month** which would otherwise have gone to customer support.

Knowing this, we can calculate the value of the community. We ascertained the cost per contact was $18 through typical support channels. Which meant we could estimate the community was reducing support costs by around $213,000 per month (or around $2.9m per year).

Aside, we also discovered some support staff, when stumped by a question, were searching for answers on Google and arriving at the community.

The most exciting discovery for executives was just how much cheaper it is to resolve a question in the community via other support channels. If the community is 'deflecting' approximately 142k calls and support tickets per year with an annual budget of $725k. This means the **'cost per contact' in the community is just $5.10 (or 72% cheaper than support channels).**

And even this data notably understates the value of the community. We didn't close the community down entirely, a significant percentage of people still visited. And this data only covers benefits through a single prism; reduced support costs. It doesn't include the value of customers reading articles created by members of the community to get more from the product. It also overlooks just how valuable the community is for gathering insights, identifying the bigger customer concerns or quickly spotting issues in the community before they blow up into a major PR disaster.

What Happened Next?

Once the experiment was over, we found the community regained almost all of its previous search traffic (this is likely due to the lack of competition for brand-related search terms).

The more important change was in how the community was understood and perceived. The conversation shifted from whether a brand community is worth the cost to 'how do we drive as many people as possible to visit the community before calling support?'

The 80/20 principle applies as much in customer support as it does anywhere else. 80% of the questions fall within 20% of the topics. It doesn't make sense to have paid customer support staff endlessly repeating the same responses to each customer when a community can do it at the fraction of the cost.

The big win is to ***make the community the first-place customers turn to*** when they have a question. If the majority of questions are answered in the community, paid support staff can focus on questions which are more complex, require the customer's personal data to resolve, or are from 'higher value' customers. The other benefit is it matches a customer's preference. A community lets most visitors find the answer without having to type in the question. Better yet, it's easier to get an answer in the community than be placed on hold.

Becoming a 'Community-First' Business

There are some very practical things most brands can do to drive customers to the community first. The obvious one is to give the community more prominence and visibility on the homepage. Make sure community support is positioned above options to contact support channels. Before filing a ticket or picking up the phone, a customer can check the community.

Brands can also implement a federated or cognitive search tool which will show results from the community alongside any other documentation listed on the site. This helps guide more people to the community.

Another big win is to show related community discussions as a customer begins typing their support ticket. If the customer begins writing a ticket and sees answers from the community popping up in the side-bar, they don't need to file the ticket.

But the biggest win is simply to have a thriving and fully supported community in the first place. Invest in the community's development, give the team the space to nurture it, and support them as it becomes increasingly integrated into the community's system. Communities need internal champions to thrive. Be that internal champion.

By Richard Millington
Founder, FeverBee

RICHARD MILLINGTON IS THE FOUNDER OF FEVERBEE, A COMMUNITY CONSULTANCY, WHOSE 300+ CLIENTS HAVE INCLUDED APPLE, FACEBOOK, GOOGLE, SAP, SEPHORA, HP, AND THE WORLD BANK.

FEVERBEE HELPS ORGANIZATIONS USE POWERFUL PSYCHOLOGY TO BUILD THRIVING ONLINE COMMUNITIES WHICH SCALE SUPPORT CHANNELS, GENERATE POWERFUL INSIGHTS, AND IMPROVE THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

THE 6 STAGES OF AN ONLINE BUSINESS FOR SOLOPRENEURS

When I zoom out from my day-to-day grind as a solopreneur, I identified 6 distinct stages of growth. When I say solopreneur, I mean someone who has an online business, perhaps a few virtual assistants, but is running their online business without office space, employees, or high overheads. A tiny business can still be highly profitable.

There are so many people online that you've probably never heard of, making 6 and 7 figures online. So what are these 6 stages?

Let's dive in.
▪ Stage 1 = the learn stage
▪ Stage 2 = the idea stage
▪ Stage 3 = the focused stage
▪ Stage 4 = the 1-on-1 stage
▪ Stage 5 = productising your knowledge and expertise
▪ Stage 6 = systems and automations

These are the action steps that worked for me when I transitioned from a consumer to a producer.

STAGE 1: THE LEARN STAGE

When you're getting started you don't know anything. You don't have a skill you can sell. Or you have a skill or expertise you can sell, but no idea how to market and sell that service. You consume content to learn things you didn't know before.

Nothing wrong with learning and consuming, it's a must. But some people stay in the hampster wheel of never-ending learning and consumption. Always learning, never implementing.

STAGE 2: THE IDEA STAGE

In the idea stage, you have an idea for what you want to do now.

Maybe it's coaching people. Maybe it is some freelance skill like video editing or graphic design. Whatever it is - it's an idea.

Now it's time for implementation, taking action - taking that idea and bringing it into reality. Every product and business in the world was once an idea in someone's mind before it became a reality.

This is the part where you put your idea in writing. And outline the numbers.

You need to download the idea from your head and put a plan in place. I borrowed this concept from Grant Cardone, he calls it "the millionaire math". Whatever your aspirations are - the goal is simple. Earn a living from passive or recurring income. Earning a living from active income is just a job. Earning a living from passive or recurring income is what makes an online business worthwhile (otherwise, you might as well just have a job).

THE FORMULA IS SIMPLE:

Open up a Google Sheet or grab pen and paper and write down all your living and business expenses - that's your minimum goal to cover. Then, figure out what you want to sell. Let's say your living and business expenses are $3000. Great - you need 6 people paying $500/month for something of value. Or 30 people to pay you $100/month for something of value. Now you know your goal, you need to focus on the most important part which is ACQUIRING YOUR FIRST CUSTOMER.

Eliminate any distractions that do not contribute to this step. Many people find this incredibly difficult – it's easy to keep busy – and need to be taught specific strategies to get that first customer. When I did my numbers in 2018, I needed $1600/month. I figured that if I can simply find 80 people to pay me $20/month for something of value, I'll have the minimum I need to live on. Within 8 months, I was earning $2,500/month in passive income.

I was super focused on simply getting that done. If you're interested to learn how to do that and about how to continue and progress through the rest of the business growth stages as a solopreneur, I discuss this in much greater detail right here in this online magazine.

Written By
Eran Bucai

COMMUNITY IS A TEAM SPORT

The pandemic gave new meaning to a truth that has always been there - people have a fundamental need for authentic, personal connection.

Whether at work, at home, or with hobbies, we have seen communities that bring people together thrive. We have seen companies that are community-first, with users that love their product, set a new standard for how to build and innovate.

We have seen the rise of community-led growth and we've learned that community is more than a place that people gather to learn and share—it is how companies today build, grow, and create loyal, happy users.

DEMYSTIFYING THE COMMUNITY FUNCTION

A few months ago, we posted a popular poll on Common Room's Twitter: Where should the community team sit in an organization? Many respondents believed that community should be its own function, and we've seen many community-led companies bringing on Chief Community Officers this past year. Marketing organizations came a close second.

Ultimately, community is a team sport. Every community team performs 5 essential functions: They quarterback, they nurture, they amplify and educate, they report, and they support and triage.

Quarterback: We've seen community managers and developer advocates be the quarterbacks from the community to internal teams—whether by being the voice of community for feedback to the product, sharing a community report of a product launch, or routing visibility to the right teams (sales, customer success, product, support, and more).

Nurture: Healthy communities are self-sustaining, but they don't become that overnight. Community managers and dev advocates build relationships with individual community members, making them feel heard, seen, and appreciated. Great community leaders understand where members are in their journey and create nurture and champion programs to start the flywheel of advocacy.

Amplify and educate: Community is about skilling up. This might mean creating content like YouTube videos and blogs that help your community learn, or finding and amplifying content that is community-created.

Report: As community-led growth accelerates, community teams need more concrete, qualitative ways to measure and show the impact of community on the business. It's the new imperative, and it's one of the key reasons we've built Common Room.

Triage and support: Communities 10 years ago started out as a place to get questions answered. They have evolved so much since then, but support is still a key function that we see across teams.
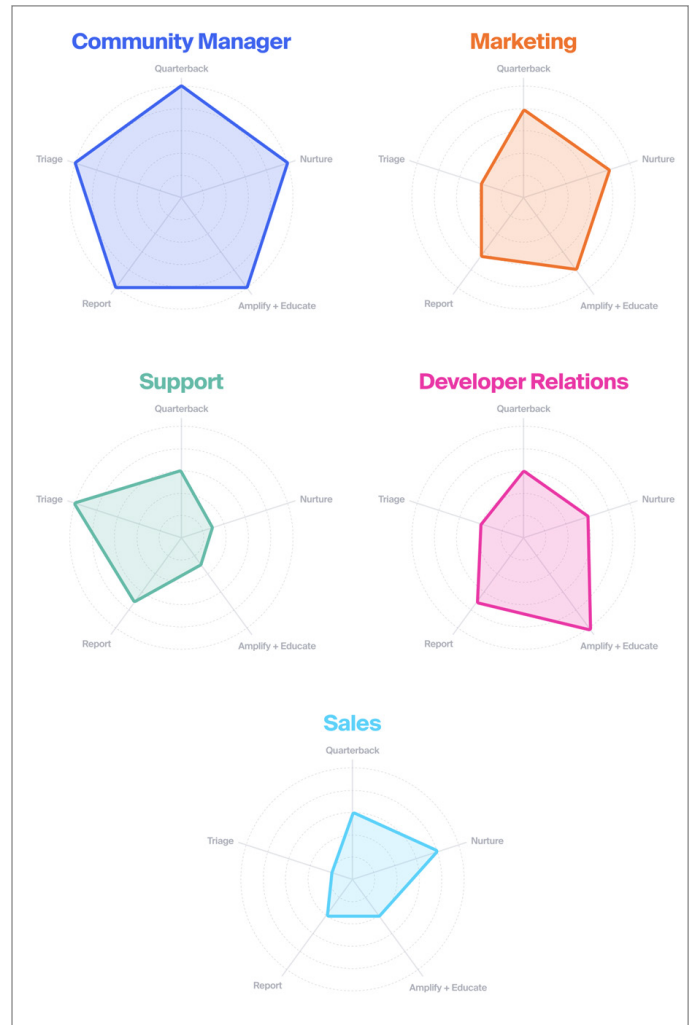
THE TIME TO INVEST IN COMMUNITY IS NOW: THE COMMUNITY MATURITY CURVE

Just as community members have a distinct maturity curve—from joining a community to get questions answered, to participating, to becoming advocates, we see that organizations also follow a community maturity curve.

- Phase 1: Seeding the community
- Phase 2: Facilitating growth and sustained engagement
- Phase 3: Showing community impact on the business

PHASE 1: SEEDING THE COMMUNITY

Organizations typically build their community on one channel to start. We call this the seed stage of your community. At this stage, nothing matters other than giving to your community.

If you have an available or open-source service, providing

product support and helping community members get hands-on is critical to how you give. Our own community Uncommon is in this phase right now. Yes, we're very meta.

Key metrics include sentiment, engagement, and member acquisition/growth. While it's attractive to lean on community channels as support channels, it's important to view a predominantly support-based community as a reactive and temporary phase.

The gold standard is getting to one of advocacy—the organizations that treat community purely as a support motion are missing the point. In the seed phase, bring on community leads who have deep (technical) knowledge of your product and/or who love to interact with people and are passionate and authentic. Sometimes this is one person, in most cases it's a couple.

PHASE 2: FROM SEED TO GROWTH - MOVING FROM REACTIVE SUPPORT TO PROACTIVE RELATIONSHIP AND PROGRAM BUILDING

As communities mature, community teams begin to facilitate more ways for members to interact with the brand, the product, and each other.

Every organization we work with that has more than 50,000 community members interacts with their community on at least four channels. These channels can consist of a chat-based community, like Slack or Discord, a searchable forum, like Discourse or Stack Overflow, a social media account, like Twitter, and a repository or support queue, like GitHub or Intercom. Organizations that engage on at least 3 channels start to think about recurring events hosted on platforms like Bevy or Meetup, and training and certification programs.

Building great communities involves an investment in multiple channels of engagement, communication, and education spanning from support forums to training and certification programs, events, and much more.

Community teams in the growth phase focus on identifying community contributors and content creators whose work extends the reach of product best practices, knowledge, and use cases. They build ambassador programs to officially recognize and reward these invaluable community members. They create training and certification programs to educate the next cohort of product champions. They partner with select community members to build CGC (community generated content).

PHASE 3: SHOWING COMMUNITY IMPACT ON THE BUSINESS

The most sophisticated community-led organizations we work with are seeking more concrete ways to measure and report on the impact of their work. They want to understand how nurturing and cultivating community leads to positive business outcomes.

In the impact phase, community leaders believe it is critical to understand and demonstrate how their work with the community leads to product adoption and revenue, so we combine community engagement metrics with product usage and revenue data. Many of our community leaders at this stage are sharing Common Room metrics in their board decks and executive reviews.

A BETTER WAY TO BUILD

Across the maturity curve, the best community-first organizations put community at the heart of how they build, how they engage, how they learn, and how they grow. They are led by developer advocates and community managers who deeply internalize and evangelize the importance of community as a cross-functional team sport.

Community isn't new. But the intensity of investment in community-led companies and teams is recent. Our mission is to support those leaders and those investments in community. As we continue to learn and build for the more than 2 million members we help our customers serve, our customers will be able to support and grow their communities with high velocity, and we'll be there to support and grow with them with every new member they welcome.

Linda Lian, Co-Founder and CEO, Common Room

Linda Lian is the co-founder and CEO of Common Room, the community intelligence platform for community-driven companies

Community isn't a place. It's how.

Common Room
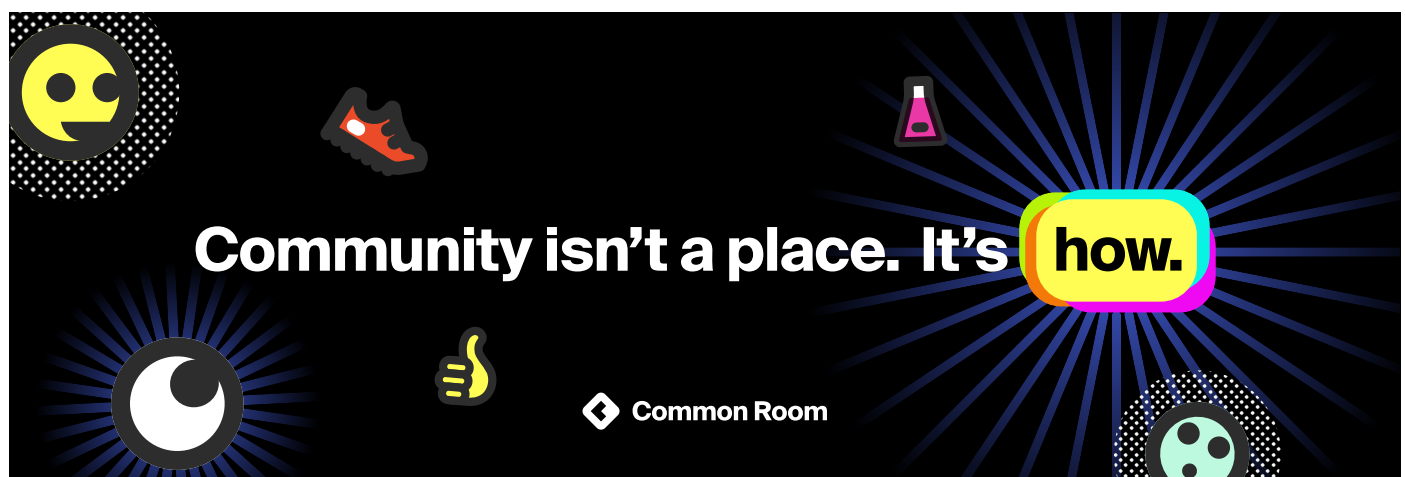
Growing a Monetized Community: The Secrets of Success

Heidi Williams spoke with Lisa Johnson, the Passive Income Queen, about launching her memberships – which propelled her to a multi-seven figure business. Lisa teaches people how to create memberships and courses and how to achieve passive income by ultimately creating successful communities.

Heidi Williams: What's the Secret of Your Extraordinary Growth?

Lisa Johnson: I think it's based on two things: One I'm very honest about the mistakes I've made, I don't believe that anyone is really further ahead than anyone else we all just know different things and can teach each other those skills. If people think they're always looking up to somebody they don't believe they can get there. The second thing is that I have come at it from a different angle. In my first year online I saw a lot of things I didn't like in the industry, some things felt really unethical so I was going to leave the industry. Then a really good mentor said to me, "You can leave the industry and moan about how corrupt it is, or you can make so much money in the industry that people listen to you and then you can change it". So, I've come at it in a different way which is "How can we show everybody else that you can make just as much money as these big Gurus with more integrity and without using things such as scarcity marketing, pressure selling and all the other things that we see on a day-to-day basis".

HW: What Kind of Communities are Your Members Creating?

LJ: I have people that have memberships in hula-hooping, courses in how to potty train kids, photography, so many different things. One of our members Lauren wanted to create membership but didn't know what on. We explored what she liked and it turned out she really likes going to the theatre. She proceeded to put a membership together that people paid to be in and where members could talk and ask questions about everything to do with theatre. After this took off, she realized that she could make a bit of money on top by buying and selling tickets to new things that were coming out because she could do it in bulk. She made a million pounds and continued to make money when all the theatres shut down. Another client, Caroline, was already amazing at helping people on a one-to-one basis who had been through narcissistic abuse and trauma. We encouraged her to put things out like courses and mem-

berships and she began helping people on a one-to-many scale.

HW: You've Made Over $5m and Facebook is a Huge Part of Your Marketing and Outreach. How Sustainable is That?

LJ: I think that if you only have your business on Facebook you don't have a business. I saw so many people panic about what happened to Facebook and Instagram in October, and it made me think you should never just rely on one platform. The best thing you can do is have an email list because that's yours, you own those emails. Everybody has the same opportunity to read those emails once you send them out rather than some kind of algorithm. Social Media is a good add-on, it's a good way of getting people to know, like and trust us because they see our faces.

"YOU HAVE TO BE CREATING COMMUNITIES NOT CREATING PLACES WHERE YOU CAN SELL THINGS"

HW: You've Grown Really Fast - How Have you Done That Without Overdoing It?

LJ: I don't think you can overdo it. People only see one in about ten posts anyway and I think that if you're teaching someone something you need to say it multiple times before it goes in. The secret source is being consistent. I never disappear for three weeks. That doesn't mean I am personally there all the time, there are different ways of doing it that mean you don't have to be. The second thing is that I have kept everything real. I have told people when I've made mistakes, when I've lost money, when I've been bullied online. I have told people the bad that has happened in business not just the good. I've had a chronic disease for the past two and a half years and I have talked about that the whole time. There are so many people that think if they have anxiety or depression or an autoimmune disease that they can't do things and seeing somebody else do it means that they then get the confidence to start.

HW: How Have You Avoided The Burn-out of Live Launching?

LJ: I love launching. I would never burnout with launching and I think the most important thing is to do everything months in advance. Three or four months before your launch you should do one tiny thing a day which means you have everything done by launch day. I love the live launch approach, I think it's the best way of launching but we only launch once or sometimes twice a year now so we have had to think, "How can we get money continually coming in not just with the membership but from other courses and other knowledge we have?" We recently put out some Evergreen courses and that's generating £25,000 a month completely passively.

HW: Is Evergreen Launching Ever the Right Strategy?

LJ: Not at the beginning. Lots of people go, "Well Evergreen sounds easy, let's go for that first", but unless they've successfully launched a few times, Evergreen is not going to work because you use a lot of the things you know have worked from Live launching to do an Evergreen Launch. At the beginning, you want to get money in as quickly as possible and Live launching is the best way to do that.

HW: How Important is Community in Your Memberships?

LJ: Massively. We have around nine hundred to a thousand people in our membership at any one time. People might come in there to learn something but we also have people in the group that are there because they love the people so you have to be creating communities not creating places where you can sell things. People go, "Oh I'm going to create this Facebook group so I can sell a lot of people something in one go" and that's the wrong way to think about it. If you come at everything with the attitude of, "How can I help these people the most?" you will sell anyway. In groups always think about giving more than taking.

HW: Do you Find That the Engagement in Your Paid Group and Free Group is Equal?

LJ: With a paid membership you will always get more engagement because they are paying to be there. When people pay, they pay attention. We did a 3-day challenge for members to make an extra £500 and we did it in the free group first. At end of the challenge, we calculated how much people had made. We did the same in the paid group with a lot fewer people but there was more accountability. That group made about ten times the free groups' figure.

HW: What Separates Memberships That Fail and Memberships That Thrive?

LJ: Just one thing. The memberships that fail haven't grown an audience big enough. People want to do it too quickly when actually you need a huge audience first. Put other things out, put one-to-ones out and put courses out. Do all this before you do a membership then when you do the membership you have a big enough audience to create a real buzz around it. The first time we launched we had only about 1200 people in our audience and we had 163 people come in, in the first weekend to the membership. Since then, every time we open the waitlist is full.

"IN GROUPS ALWAYS THINK ABOUT GIVING MORE THAN TAKING"

HW: Tell us a Bit About Your Affiliate Program and How It Works?

LJ: I had seen lots of people in the US launch with affiliates and I had always been like, "Maybe one day I can do something like that". But a lot of what I saw I didn't love. I was worried that if we used other people to sell for us and they didn't have the same values as us it could affect our brand. So we went about it in a very different way, we made sure that every single affiliate shared our values. We decided to not use any big names because all I had seen in the US was the same kind of ten big names all affiliating for each other and I realized that people didn't believe them anymore. We decided to use our clients who only had 200 people in their audience but what better advocate for something than someone who has already made money from doing it. We were a bit worried about the risk of doing it because nobody had really done that before, but it worked. We were blown away, we made just over £4m on one program in eight months using affiliates.

HW: Tell us About Your Memberships

LJ: I have a couple: 'One-to-Many', is my main signature program and that's out again in March. We do that once or twice a year and it's about how to make passive income from memberships and courses right from the beginning all the way through to creating the content and how to re-market it so you are making money over and over again. Then we have a program about how to do an affiliate launch because lots of people have been asking for it.

Lisa Johnson helps entrepreneurs make money from courses and memberships online. With lots of free resources available go to www.lisajohnson.com for more information.

CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY

Communities exist for member engagement and for your organization to remain close to your constituents. Engaged members are 6X more likely to spend with your organization and they drive event attendance. These are not stats to ignore.

There are many ways that organizations are breeding community today. They include DIY digital communities, leveraging social media sites, off the shelf community platforms, CampfireSocial's professional networking model, webinars, and even in person meetings. All have their inherent benefits that bring people within your industry together to form meaningful connections. Yet not all work to drive deeper relationships that in turn can provide your organization with data, insight, and revenue that can be used to create a richer member experience. Being thoughtful about your community approach is vital.

Your organization should not spend financial and human resources on a community if your goal is to simply provide a member benefit. Rather, communities should only be deployed if you are looking to create a data-driven member experience.

As you think through your community approach in our evolving & hybrid world, I wanted to share what I've learned from studying communities and how they impact trade & professional associations and event organizers.

Here are 10 elements that should be top of mind in your community selection process:

1 YOUR ORGANIZATION IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF YOUR MEMBERS ALONE

Communities should be inclusive of your members, exhibiting sponsors, staff, students, and all who touch your industry vertical. Take your exhibitors for instance – they can provide more value than just check writing. Exhibitors can provide content, trends, and are incentivized to lead discussions as they want to use content & relationships to drum up new business. Everyone in your organization adds value. Be sure to provide them the mechanism to do so.

2 DIALOGUE SHOULD START AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

Allow your users to generate the conversations that matter most to them rather than trying to control the conversation by dictating themes or topics. People are more inclined to contribute when they set the stage for what they want to discuss. Plus, your organization will have the opportunity to listen and learn about what matters most to them. If you are concerned about spamming or inappropriate dialogue, you can find a solution that

provides safeguards to report users or content and institute consequences for those who 'misbehave'.

3 DATA, DATA, DATA - INCLUDING SOCIAL LISTENING

A properly designed community will allow you to understand how your ecosystem thinks, behaves, and transacts every single day. If your community platform does not provide you with behavioral and social listening data, run. You can redeploy this powerful intel to generate a more meaningful member experience and more community momentum. You have the unique opportunity to produce content that reflects what your audience cares about.

4 DON'T USE LINKEDIN

Ouch! We all love LinkedIn, and it is a phenomenal platform. BUT it is exclusionary in that only people in the know can participate in dialogue rather than allowing the dialogue to live in front of your entire ecosystem 365/24/7. LinkedIn also uses data for its own purposes rather than leveraging the data & insight to produce an even better member experience (see #3). Why give away this valuable intel when you can own the voice of your industry?

5 UX/UI MATTERS

Community platforms have changed over the years from Q&A forums to pure social networks. Modern audiences are used to social networks that allow for the dissemination and consumption of bite sized content, the ability to tag connections, organize their content, and leverage photos to engage. Your community strategy should resemble what audiences expect and allow for normalized behaviors. Keeping up with a modern user experience leads to increased participation.

6 INVEST IN HUMAN RESOURCES

Communities are critical components of your member offering and as a result, should not be deprioritized. Given that community interactions lead to holistic engagement with your organization including events, it makes sense to dedicate staff to ensuring that your community is properly moderated, the data is collected and analyzed, interactions are appropriately monetized, and that value continues to be cycled back to your users.

7 LONG LIVE THE CONVERSATION

Communities should encourage a mix of informative posts and in-depth discussions or groups. Posts may be just a post, but many posts may lead to deeper conversation that can engage a multitude of your users for longer periods of time. These conversations are the ones that you need to be paying extra attention to. Leverage your social listening (#3) to understand what is so important and why this topic is top of mind and then use this intel to produce whitepapers, micro events, or even make this topic a focus for your next event. These groups can be used to prime your audience for your main event and then keep the conversations that take place at your event alive indefinitely. Think of all the data you can collect!

8 PROFILES ARE INDICATORS OF USAGE

What separates a community designed for awareness vs. a true engagement tool is the use of a profile. When users have a profile, they are more inclined to participate. The reason? People want the credit for their contributions. Without a profile, where is the incentive to participate? Be sure to make the profile creation process simple.

9 FOLLOW PEOPLE WHO MATTER MOST

Community members are used to the rules of the road for popular social networks. Experiences are curated based on the content and people you are connected with. This is equally important for your community. People are more engaged when content that matters most from the people who matter most to them is placed in front of them. Users are more inclined to connect with new peers when those folks mutually follow the same thought leader.

10 PEOPLE LOVE TO CHAT

Your community should offer a mechanism for side conversations. Many folks are rightfully sensitive about giving out their email and phone number, but they still want to take community discussion 'offline'. Many community platforms offer a chat function that contains conversations within the platform, creating a safe space to build a relationship.

Communities can be powerful when designed to reflect the evolving needs & behaviors of your constituents and your organization. When you offer the right tool, your members, exhibiting partners, students, staff, and other key segments will embrace your technology and act as true partners to contribute to the growth of your industry.

Written By: Erica Bishaf
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WHERE DOES CBM (COMMUNITY-BASED MARKETING) FIT IN THE SALES AND MARKETING FUNNEL?

BY ASHLEY FRIEDLEIN

Community-based marketing (CBM) is about bringing people together around a shared interest and using this to build deeper and more valuable relationships with prospects and customers.

While there is nothing new about online communities, a combination of the rise of the passion economy, a heightened need for a sense of togetherness post-pandemic, and the waning effectiveness of other marketing channels, all mean that 'community' is very much back in fashion and organisations are wondering how best to harness its power.

While B2C marketing funnels tend to be broad and shallow, reaching large volumes with lighter engagement, B2B relationships are more commonly lower in volume but much higher in value, and this is reflected in the size and approach of B2B communities.

The diagram below shows a classic marketing and sales funnel moving from awareness through interest and desire to the point of action, or sale, and into customer loyalty and advocacy post-conversion, illustrated with how CBM fits into the picture.

Like many other marketing disciplines,

CBM can have an impact at any point of the customer journey, however it has more impact at certain stages of the marketing funnel. Let's take a closer look at those stages where it is most effective.

Interest & Consideration

CBM is well suited to the interest and consideration stages of the marketing funnel. In B2B this might mean communities of 100s or 1000s of prospects who are interested in what you have to offer, want to learn more, are happy to engage with your brand in a more intimate way, but might not yet be in active buying mode.

They may well be doing their due diligence on you as a potential supplier, or future partner, by getting closer to you to see how knowledgeable, credible, responsive, influential etc you are.

Communities as this stage can be quite broad e.g. at a brand level. Or they can start to narrow down a bit – reflecting the narrowing sales funnel – into special interest topics, geographic groupings or by job function and levels of experience. Ideally you want communities that are big enough to gain a natural momentum, without becoming too large as to become noisy or anonymous in feel. This allows

you to build closer connections and be more targeted with the content you're sharing.

For example, HR Recruit is the UK's leading human resources recruitment specialist. Their HR Network on Guild provides a supportive, professional atmosphere for HR professionals to connect with HR Recruit and with their peers. This helps HR Recruit build more trusted and deeper relationships with candidates and employers.

Desire

Just by joining your community a member is signalling some interest and consideration. However, to move them further down the funnel, and create desire, you want them to engage, to see your expertise in action, to build their own impression that you are credible, authoritative, trustworthy, responsive etc.

At the point of joining your community your prospect may have no immediate buying need. They will likely have questions, challenges, pain points and opportunities they are exploring and your community can help them with those.

Your opportunity is to become the obvious choice once the buying need does arise. You are nurturing relevant prospects so that when they become a lead they are much more likely to convert and more likely to do so quickly because their community experience accelerates their decision making.

Communities at this stage may become smaller groups as the desire crystalizes around more specific areas of interest. You can create closed environments with valuable prospects who have expressed a desire to go narrower and deeper. You can educate and reassure prospects, growing the mid-funnel pipeline and improving the flow to conversion, proving yourself to be a good choice of supplier to your members when the time is right.

For example, the Delivering Sustainability in your Business

The role of Community Based Marketing (CBM) in the marketing funnel

Awareness

Interest / Consideration

Desire

Action / Conversion

Loyalty / Advocacy

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Community Based Marketing (CBM) allows you to get closer to your qualified prospects, showcase your expertise, build your credibility, and nurture relationships into leads for conversion.

KPIs: grow the mid-funnel pipeline and improve flow to conversion.

Customer communities allow you to keep customers engaged, super-serve key accounts, gain insights to drive your product/service development.

KPIs: improved customer loyalty (reduced churn), customer satisfaction, customer advocacy.

community on Guild is hosted by Catherine Weetman who is an international speaker, workshop facilitator, coach, consultant, host of the Circular Economy Podcast and award-winning author. Her community cements and confirms her reputation as an expert in her field who is at the centre of her sector – the obvious person to turn to if you need advice or want a speaker on this topic.

Loyalty & Advocacy

We all know that it is more cost-effective to retain an existing client than win a new one, especially in a B2B setting, and community-based marketing is perfectly suited to increase loyalty and promote customer advocacy.

As well as simply keeping you front of mind, online communities allow you to keep customers engaged. You can use customer communities to co-create and collaborate with your customers to refine your product or service offering, to prioritise your content or product roadmap, to refine your proposition. You can super serve key accounts with their own dedicated micro communities to provide 'concierge' levels of service to surprise and delight your most valuable customers.

Membership organizations and media businesses with subscribers and members are, rightly, focused on adding value to their propositions by providing high quality peer communities. These help increase engagement, particularly amongst senior executives and decision makers, and thereby reduce churn and increase opportunities for up and cross-selling.

For example, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) is one of the largest membership organisations in the UK, focusing on providing support to those working in HR and people development. As a response to the immediate needs of their most senior members, the CIPD set up an HR Leader COVID19 support group on Guild. The group is an invite-only safe space for senior Human Resources Directors to connect and share concerns and questions during the pandemic and beyond.

ASHLEY FRIEDLEIN IS THE CEO & FOUNDER OF GUILD, THE PLATFORM FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES AND NETWORKING. GUILD IS USED BY PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND BUSINESSES AROUND THE WORLD TO ENGAGE THEIR MEMBERS IN SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS, NETWORKS AND COMMUNITIES OF EXPERTISE. GUILD IS SIMPLE TO USE, AD FREE, MOBILE-FIRST AND FREE UNLESS YOU WANT CUSTOM LEVELS OF SUPPORT, FEATURES OR INTEGRATIONS. ASHLEY IS ALSO THE FOUNDER OF ECONSULTANCY, A COMMUNITY OF OVER 600,000 MARKETERS AROUND THE WORLD LEARNING ABOUT DIGITAL MARKETING AND ECOMMERCE. ASHLEY HAS OVER 20YRS EXPERIENCE IN STARTING AND RUNNING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES. ASHLEY IS A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, ADVISOR, COLUMNIST, COMMENTATOR, AND BLOGGER. ASHLEY SPEAKS WORLDWIDE ON DIGITAL / MARKETING TRENDS INCLUDING THE RISE OF COMMUNITY WITHIN MARKETING.
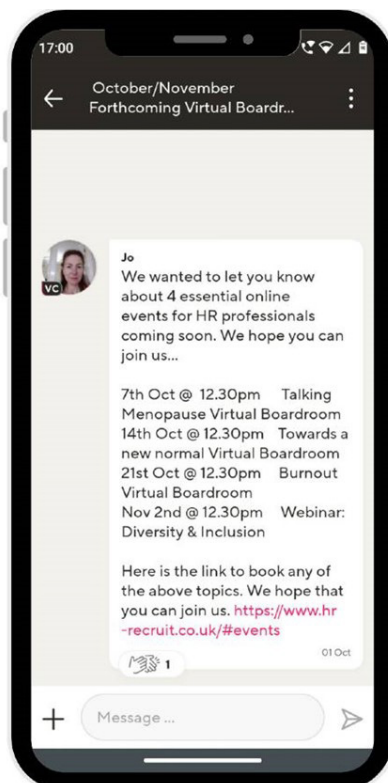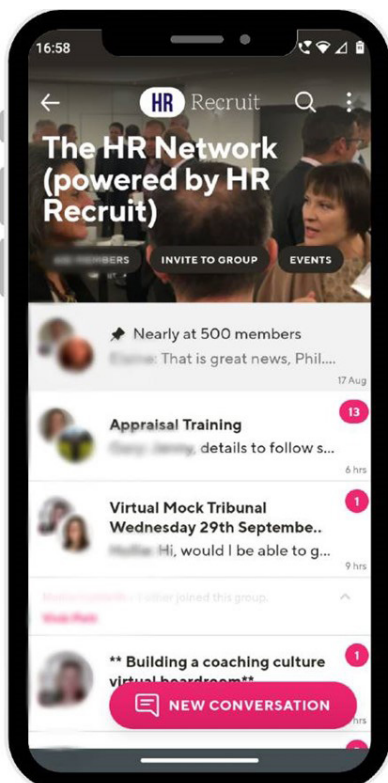
THE ESSENTIALS IN A COMMUNITY MANAGERS TOOLKIT

CREATIVE

CANVA

Canva is an online graphics tool that is extremely simple to use due to its vast range of templates and design elements. It's a quick and easy way to create social media graphics, presentations, posters and other visual content.

Google keep

Google Keep is a free note-taking app that makes it easy to type, dictate, draw, or snap a photo to create a note. Your voice recordings can be transcribed making it easy to write notes on the go and labels can be added for organizational purposes.

Concepts

Concepts is a flexible space to think, plan and create on its infinite canvas. It manages to combine the ease of pen-and-paper style drawing with the powerful tools of a vector graphics app.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

JIRA

Jira is a proprietary issue tracking product that allows bug tracking and agile project management. It covers the project management bases with a comprehensive tool's suite, such as project planning, task creation and management, and reporting.

Trello

Trello is a collaboration tool that organizes your projects and to-do lists into boards. It's an intuitive app that helps you coordinate and track your work whilst facilitating collaboration with internal and external teams alike.

Asana

Asana is an excellent project management platform that holds a suite of tools including task assignment, workload management and plenty of app integrations. It has a highly intuitive and flexible interface that makes it easy to work with teams of any size.

COLLABORATION/ FILE SHARING

Office 365

Office 365 is a subscription service that combines several traditional Microsoft applications with some new ones, all of which are cloud-based. This enables employees to work better together through tools such as team chat, online meetings, co-authoring and sharing files and group emails.

Google Workspace

Google Workspace packs everything you need for a productive and connected office. It includes Gmail, Meet, Drive, as well as other Google apps whilst also including new collaborative chat features to make it easier to create and develop documents.

Slack

Slack is a workspace that connects you with people and tools you work with every day no matter where you are or what you do. You are able to get real-time messaging through calls and chats, a searchable record of all your files and conversations, and integration with a growing number of handy bots and apps.

AND SOME SECRET WEAPONS

Klaviyo

Klaviyo is a digital marketing platform focused on email marketing automation for e-commerce businesses. Klaviyo has a drag and drop email composer along with various pre-built email templates for common email campaigns. It is integrated with Shopify and plenty of other platforms such as Justuno, Salesforce, Strip and more.

Britix24

Britix24 is a social enterprise platform that includes tools for project management, customer support, internal communications, and even website building.

Figma

Figma is a web-based design tool with real-time collaboration. It helps teams create, share, test and ship better designs from start to finish whilst making the design process faster and more efficient.

4 KEY CHANGES

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY ON FACEBOOK IS BRIGHT

Lianne-Carla Savage, Certified Community Manager, was at the recent Facebook Communities Summit and shares her key takeaways on the 4 key changes and developments coming to a Facebook group near you!

1 BUILD THE COMMUNITY YOU WANT AND STRENGTHEN CULTURE

This is all about creating a space that is truly your own and onboarding your members well and includes;

- Visual customizations - custom colours, fonts and reaction emojis

- Feature sets - want a feature that used to be exclusive to a parenting group or a learning group? Now you can!

- Floating action button - this brings an easy way to post along with you, no matter how far down you scroll down the group.

- New member onboarding - set members off on the right foot with a custom intro, highlight your admin team and show new members the rules one last time before they go and play.

- Community awards - this lets members highlight and give props to the comments others have shared.

2 DEEPEN CONNECTIONS

Communities are nothing without the connection and feeling of belonging they create. Here are a few things rolling out in the coming months designed to do just that...

- Subgroups - I spent 2hrs 40mins hosting a live audio room and if there's one word that came up above all others it was subgroups. This is a feature admins have been wanting for so long.

- Community messaging - Another way to connect and converse with community members.

- Recurring events - Does what it says on the tin. Less hassle for admins, more clarity for members.

- Columns - Designed for those of us who like to create deep quality content. Columns will really help us feature the best of what we do.

- Group experts role - Simple yet effective refinement. This will now allow the area of expertise to be specified.

3 MANAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

Making day to day admin life easier? Yes please!

- "Featured Posts" as announcements - a single pinned post because the option to have multiple announcements. Now they are getting another revamp with featured content cards.

- Notifications for "Group Rule Changes" - Changed the rules but members didn't realise? Not any more! Rule updates will push out a notification

- Admin Assist updates. – Is getting even better.

- Community Chats - After some work behind the scenes to build out the infrastructure, real-time text, video and audio chats are on the way.

- Community Access for non-Facebook users - I didn't realise how useful this would be until admins spoke about real world connections who would love to be part of the group without wanting the rest of Facebook. In particular local community message boards stood out.

4 SUSTAIN YOUR COMMUNITY

It's so great to see the support Facebook is giving towards creating financially sustainable groups. It's been a pleasure to have the opportunity to lead the way on this by hosting live audio rooms throughout the summit on a range of topics: Financial Sustainability, The Business of Community & The Community Management Certification were (of course!) a few of my favourites.

- Fundraisers - the ability to host fundraisers via communities with space to go deep on the story behind the fundraising AND Facebook not taking a penny from the cause - awesome!

- Shops - Shops within groups is on its way. This means more admins are going to have access to an easy pathway to make sales and create financial sustainability for their community.

- Paid subgroups - For some communities and leaders, paid subgroups are a brilliant option for generating revenue.

Lianne-Carla Savage helps community leaders drive revenue & retention through gamification. She is one of the world's foremost experts on community-driven marketing and one of a handful of Certified Community Managers globally who have become Meta Certified Lead Trainers through the Meta Trainer Network. Want to know what's working now to grow, engage and generate revenue through Facebook groups?

Check out The Profitable Communities Masterclass.

TECH FOCUS:
ENGAGEMENT ENHANCING TOOLS

A quick-start look at 3 start-up tools to help you connect, engage and better serve your members

1. Waves

CREATE PERSONALISED COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES IN YOUR SLACK COMMUNITY

QUICK PITCH: Waves recognises that it's hard for new members to make those first crucial connections, in large communities. It matches community members together into small, private subgroups based on shared interests and background. Community managers are able to provide their members with personalised community experiences and members are given a safe space to engage and contribute.

INTEGRATION: Waves runs on Slack communities, no additional sign-ons required.

DIFFERENTIATION: Most networking apps facilitate 1-1 video call matchings, but Waves facilitates chats because it helps CM's gather insights from member conversations to improve the community.

IDEAL FOR: Slack Communities with over 1500 members whose goal is to facilitate and create meaningful relationships between members.

PRICING: Monthly payments. Price varies based on size of the community.

2. Intch

A PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING TOOL FOR COMMUNITIES

QUICK PITCH: Intch helps founders solve their business tasks via the professional networks of other founders, mentors, and VCs within the community. It works as an extension to your community and uses ML matching algorithms that match requests with the relevant people within the community. It includes all the necessary tools for introductions, follow-ups, feedback, direct contacts, and emotional triggers.
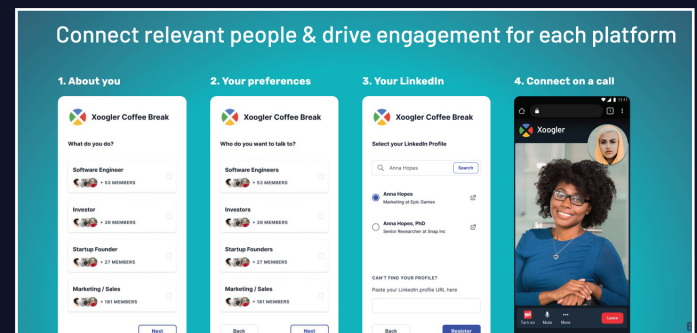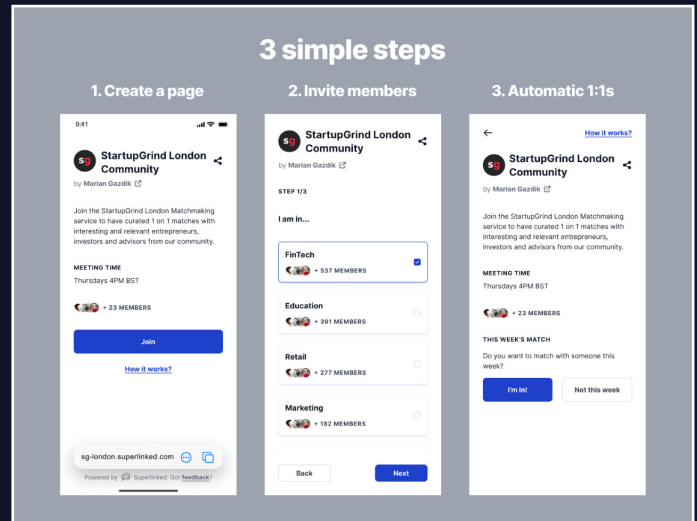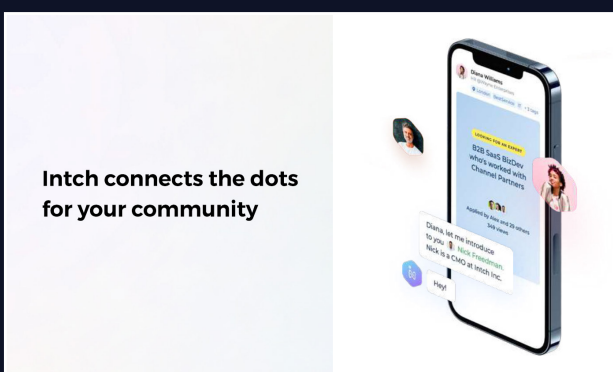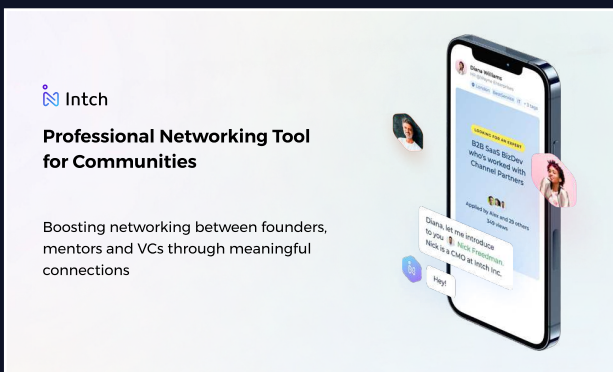
INTEGRATION: App and profile-based website

DIFFERENTIATION: Intch is unique in focusing on the exchange of social capital to facilitate networking and ranked #1 on ProductHunt: https://www.producthunt.com/posts/intch.

IDEAL FOR: B2C communities and B2B communities. Particularly powerful tool for Accelerator programs and VCs – significantly increases response rate and collaboration within founder and investment communities.

PRICING: Currently free for users. The founders and investors are interested in developing this solution to improve professional networking.

Video https://youtu.be/Igoe6xchNuk

N Intch

Professional Networking Tool for Communities

Boosting networking between founders, mentors and VCs through meaningful connections

Intch connects the dots for your community

3. Superlinked.

YOUR COMMUNITY, SUPER-LINKED.

QUICK PITCH: The vast majority of community members are passive, and engagement drops quickly, with less than 5% of community members posting. Community managers rectify this by tagging members and introducing them manually. As the community grows, these efforts become ineffective and time-consuming. Superlinked brings the community together one conversation at a time, using an automated AI-powered matching engine to introduce members for highly relevant weekly calls, around the goals of the community (e.g., mentorship, recruitment, learning). Increasing engagement, participation and value for all members.

INTEGRATION: Superlinked can be used as a stand-alone app and/or be fully integrated with the community platform using APIs.

DIFFERENTIATION: Superlinked is fully branded and customisable. Calls run on their embedded video platform, providing detailed analytics on engagement, participation and feedback.

IDEAL FOR: Large professional communities that are looking to increase engagement, identify helpful members and deliver on the community goals.

PRICING: $199/month per community, free trial available

SURVIVING A WORLD
WITHOUT COOKIES

By Barry Tonoff, Credspark

"THAT WHAT WRONG WITH MEDIA TODAY. ALL THEY HAVE IS QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS. THEY NEVER HAVE COOKIES!"

Cookie Monster

Cookie Monster had a different type of cookie in mind. In reality, the reverse of his quote is more true in today's advertising and media markets. "That what wrong with media today. All they have is cookies, cookies, cookies. They never have questions!"

Next year, digital media companies and publishers will have to face Cookie Monster's worst nightmare: **A world without cookies**. The digital landscape will be upended as major players like Google and Apple are responding to regulators and the fatigue and frustration of users/customers, as well as their growing savvy and concern about their digital data footprint and privacy. Giant digital advertising networks (Google, Facebook, etc) and advertising-supported media have been thriving on the sugar high of a mercenary, stalking-based tracking model to target relevant content and advertising to users. They've fattened themselves with the browsing and transaction history of individuals, as well as other appended personal data like home ownership, income, and even current location to create powerful "surveillance marketing." Yes, relevance is very useful; but only if it's permission-based. If that data is accessible and can be harnessed for virtually any reason (misinformation, political targeting, scams, etc.) by anyone with a credit card, the damage begins to outweigh the value.

A Shift in the Balance of Power
At CredSpark, we've been advocating that this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for media and publishing organizations to shift the balance of power away from the Tech giants that currently monopolize the collection and tracking of user data. At the dawn of the Internet, media companies focused on content instead of audience relationships and they ceded that vital connection to the giant digital networks, relinquishing the control, insights, and opportunities that can be garnered from first-party audience data. A new Cookie-Less World provides an opportunity to build deeper, richer audience relationships and generate invaluable first-party data and insights to drive smarter business decision-making; inform new advertising products; and provide more value for your audience. Where do you begin?

Fewer Cookies, More Questions
So how do digital media and other advertising-based models survive in a world without 3rd party cookies? You opt for something more nutritious.

The key to thriving in a post-cookie Internet is building and deepening your own, first-party audience data. And it's possible to achieve that without mimicking today's current predatory practices. Much to Cookie Monster's dismay, **the answer is more questions**.

Stop thinking of your content in terms of a broadcast model. Start thinking of it as a conversation starter. Transform your content into question-based digital experiences that invite your audience to dig deeper, explore more, and provide their own insights and opinions along the way.

1.) You're providing a richer, more compelling, permission-based user experience.
2.) You're driving new audience engagement.
3.) Each new engagement creates first-party data.
4.) That data can be used to create premium ad products for sponsors, inform new content development, and super-charge audience/market research.

You'll be creating a new, more audience-first model while building tangible, proprietary value for your organization. Your sponsors will sprint to you because you know your audience the best. You can see examples of this in action in our Client Example Gallery

Use Context as a Community Builder
Context is a key signal for relevance and audience development. In fact, it forms the basis of Google's solution for targeting in the absence of 3rd party cookies (FLOC or Federated Learning of Cohorts). At CredSpark, we believe context can be used to not only serve relevance to audiences, but also create active and engaging communities around content topics. Building rich, interactive experiences around topics and across media (text, video, audio, etc.) create enormous opportunities to engage audience members at the individual level and the group/cohort level, generating data that can surface prospects for additional subscriptions, event registrations, relevant sponsor products, and more.

Finally, User Experience is Crucial
Is your audience passive? It may be because you've created a passive digital experience for them. Again, think outside the broadcast-model box. Progressive user activity and engagement is so important—especially in a world dominated by mobile content consumption. Gamification doesn't have to mean creating expensive alternate realities for your audience. Simply, use the concepts of it to create immersive content experiences that invite users to take a next step. And at each step, make sure you're providing value along the way to encourage their continued participation. An exceptional experience creates more engagement, which in turn, creates more data and value for your audience and your organization.

The Cookie May Crumble...
But it presents an incredible opportunity to create an audience-first organization that views content, engagement, and audience data as a synthesis, rather than three separate pursuits. It lays the foundation for enhanced returns on content development, increased sponsorship opportunities, and deeper and richer relationships with your audience. And there's nothing sweeter than that.

5 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING

On-boarding new members is a hugely important part of any Community Managers' job. It is the process of guiding members through the steps of becoming a successful user and leaving them wanting more. Here are 5 tips to help with your onboarding sequence which will engage community members and encourage them to keep coming back.

1 SEND AN IMPRESSIVE WELCOME EMAIL

Your welcome email is one of the most important parts of a community members' onboarding journey. It should be engaging and powerful whilst triggering something that makes them want to open the rest of your emails. If you fail to create a strong impression it will lead to low open rates which will ultimately result in members unsubscribing. Keep it short and friendly. You should introduce the community and give your members information about how joining can help them. If they believe you can help them succeed they will be more likely to open your next email.

2 FOCUS ON THE BENEFITS, NOT THE FEATURES

A common mistake is to tell subscribers about the features such as the fees and logistics when the main selling point for a subscriber is the benefits. Highlighting what your members will gain from the community is a powerful way to get them on board. Subscribers are much more interested in how you can help them than they are about the mechanics of the community. message boards stood out.

3 PERSONALIZE

Personalization of your emails can drive higher open and click-through rates and enhance your customer's experience. Not all users' journeys are the same, some might have found you through promotion, others through social media or recommendations. Some users will immediately start looking around the community others will forget they signed up – particularly if it's free or low cost. Segment your users and tailor your welcome messages to your specific users experience and you'll see increased levels of open and click-through rates.

4 OPTIMIZE YOUR EMAILS FOR MOBILE USERS

Due to the popularity of mobile devices to check and interact with emails, neglecting to optimize for mobile will impact engagement. Use a responsive email template as they're designed to automatically fit the screen on which they're being viewed which means you don't have to worry about your email rendering correctly.

5 ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Sending out feedback emails is an excellent way to make your customers feel valued and appreciated, and that you're here to respond to their needs. You can ask for feedback to evaluate a new product or the user experience you offer. If subscribers have not visited your page in a while you can ask them why they've been inactive to gauge how you might improve their experience.

REDESIGNING COMPANIES
AS COMMUNITIES

The word company, according to Wikipedia originates from an old French term meaning "a society, friendship, intimacy, body of soldiers" and, before that, to the latin word "companio" which means "one who eats bread with you". In the past, merchants used festive gatherings to discuss business matters – the gathering together of people with strong bonds and shared practices, so the notion of company as community has a solid and ancient foundation.

However, the industrial revolution created a more mechanistic view of companies revolving around scale, production and delivery. David Spinks, author of The Business of Belonging, wrote an interesting article titled " What if your business is actually a community?" wherein he proposed that "community doesn't fit in your business...it is your business".

HOW CAN WE RECLAIM THIS VERY ESSENCE OF COMPANIES AS COMMUNITIES?

I propose four crucial mindset shifts that would help us redesign companies as communities
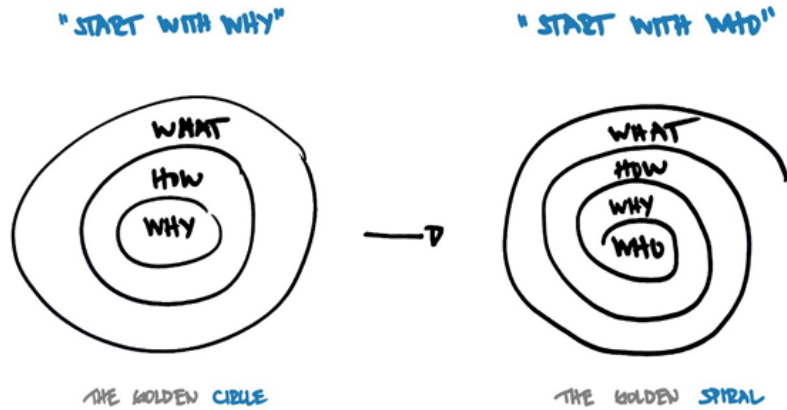
1 MOVING FROM START WITH WHY TO START WITH WHO

I began advocating for "Start with Who" after reading a medium article "Start with Who" from a mentor of mine, Michel Bachmann. Simon Sinek, in his popular book, "Start with Why" emphasises articulating organisational purpose as a way to galvanise people into action but Michel proposes that instead of the golden circle, we need to adapt to a golden spiral with "who" at the center of our practice. These are some of the questions to ponder on from Michel's article:

WHO are we and what do we stand for?
• Articulate who you are and who you want to become
• Invite a nucleus of people who embody the desired future
• Inquire what creates value for you and how you want to be together
• Define a coherent set of shared values & principles
• Identify who is missing and how to weave them in

For companies who want to redesign themselves as communities, starting with who can also mean identifying the different stakeholders, making their inherent strengths be visible and capturing the voices that needs to be heard.

"START WITH WHY" — THE GOLDEN CIRCLE (WHAT / HOW / WHY) → "START WITH WHO" — THE GOLDEN SPIRAL (WHAT / HOW / WHY / WHO)

2 FROM PERSONAL GAINS TO COMMUNITY GAINS - HUMANIZING BUSINESSES BEYOND PROFIT

Businesses designed as communities are not run solely for profit. They have broad community impact. They engage with a variety of different groups in their community and deliver impact to meet the different community needs. These are companies who move beyond surface-level community interaction and are focused on getting into deeper relationships that place community strengths, assets and needs at the core of their work.

In shifting from personal gains to community gains, ask yourself the following questions:

Aligning the vision: How can we make the people in the company see that things could move in a different and better direction? What is possible for the company? How can you make these possibilities be visible?

Make visible pathways of change: What is the end in mind? What change is your company stirring in the world? What are the short term and long term actions necessary to stir the change?

Invite emergence: What are the new ways of working that are emerging? What trends do you notice? What new frameworks are emerging?

Companies designed as communities are committed to positively benefiting society through practices that are sustainable, impactful and regenerative. They know how to harness the power of communities for deep transformation.

3 SHIFTING OUR MINDSET FROM TRANSACTIONAL TO TRANSFORMATIONAL

How true are these statements for your business? Do a quick self-assessment, rating yourself on a scale of 1-10, 1 being not at all practiced and 10 part of your company's DNA?

a) Vision - we focus on having an integrated vision rather than focusing on mutual gains.
b) Our leadership style is distributed rather than one-directional.
c) We believe in fostering commitment rather than compliance within teams and stakeholders.
d) Our communication channels are open rather than closed.
e) We value interdependence in our relationships rather than mere support.
f) Our goals and intentions are focused in the long run not just the short-term.
g) We believe and work for systemic change rather than selective wins.

For us to design companies as communities, we must challenge our lens and practices and move away from the transactional model to a more transformational one.

When we take the lens of transformation we go beyond surface level community interaction. This means we:

1. Re-author our vision and narratives by making sure all the voices are accounted for in creating the mission and vision.
• How can we share the new narratives that are forming?
• How might we invite intergenerational perspectives and vision in these new stories?

2. Redistribute power and leadership by having a leadership style that grows the middle line, rather than a hierarchical one. How might we…
• Go from "top-down" to middle-out"
• Engage, encourage and energize middle managers to step in?
• Determine the "just enough leadership" that needs to happen in the organization?
• Create decisions from consent, consensus and consultative levels?
• Cultivate deeper trusts in our company culture that will allow for distribution of leadership to naturally occur?

3. Intentionally engage by moving away from the carrot and stick approach to motivate members

4. Practice transparency by having transparent and open channels of communication

5. Foster interdependence rather than over-reliance and micro-managing.
• Who do we need to collaborate and nurture relationships with?
• How can we create deep networks and connections?

**6.** Work on transformative goals that are for long-term.
• How might we move the community towards its shared aspirations and create the trust, relationships and convictions necessary for the community to move forward 7 generations from now?

7. Focus on deep systemic-change.
• How can we make systemic change as outcomes in our activities?
• How can generational shift be part of the culture of the company?

4 LEADING AND GROWING THE COMPANY IN, BY AND FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGH INTENTIONAL ENGAGEMENT.

Engagement is a big buzzword, and it's one of the main metrics that we, as community builders, measure our communities. But high engagement carries a price to our members; it takes a toll on the engaged-exhausted team members as the Harvard article "1 in

FROM AUDIENCE TO COMMUNITY
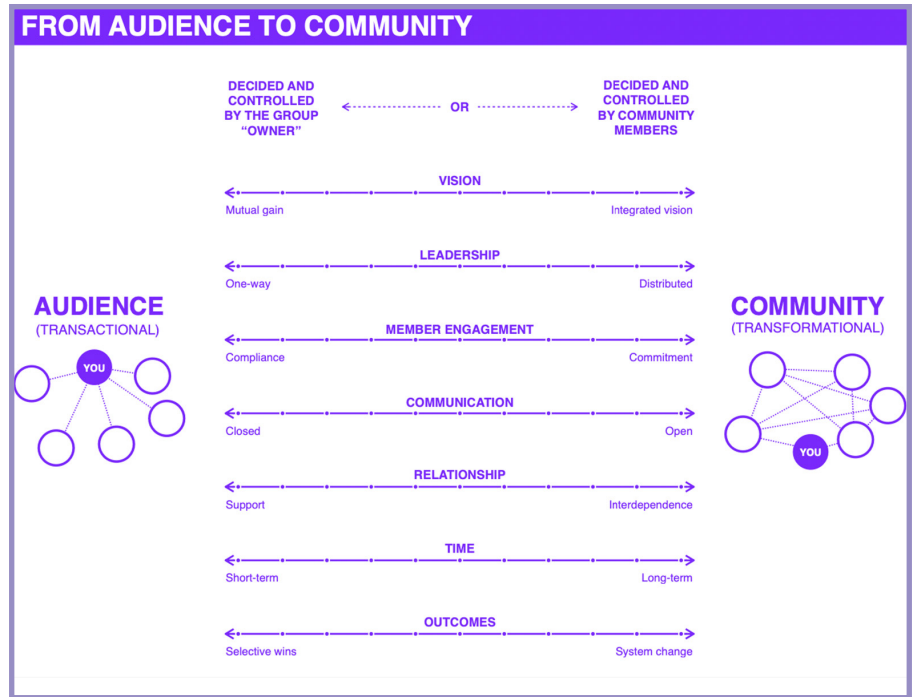
5 Employees Is Highly Engaged and at Risk of Burnout" by Emma Seppälä and Julia Moeller emphasized.

Asking our members to be highly engaged has a pitfall - It carries with it an expectation that there is one right way where members are expected to participate, a specific tempo or energy that people need to bring in to the community or organization. I prefer to see engagement as A SLIDER.

In a nutshell, my slider theory of engagement is, "Diverse people need differentiated ways to engage in activities that are regenerative."

Differentiation in the field of education is a framework or philosophy to enable students of all levels to attain their full potential. Differentiation means providing a diverse classroom of learners a range of different avenues for understanding new information to acquire content; process, construct, or make sense of ideas; and develop teaching materials and assessment measures so that all students can learn effectively, regardless of differences in their ability.

Differentiated engagement in the context of community involves providing different avenues for people to engage in ways that are regenerative. This means empowering people to intentionally choose practices, activities and actions that are nurturing for them. It means having the ability to opt in and out of activities based on the depth and breadth of what is possible for community members at a given moment. High engagement should not be the metrics of success; rather, we need to look at Intentional engagement.

As companies move from surface-level community interactions and step in as businesses with broader community impact, accountability to the local community and champions of social good, we are now running on the triple bottom line that John Elkington mentioned: People, Planet and Profit. These businesses are not run for the sole purpose of generating personal profit for shareholders. Rather, these are enterprises who espouse a set of values that highlight growing the company in, by, and for their respective communities. These are companies who understand the different stakeholders and have made it their mission to make these stakeholders' vision and voices be heard. These are companies who firmly believe that tight-knit and intentionally engaged communities can powerfully address social change and be beacons for transformation. These are companies who have redesigned their companies as communities.

How Associations Can Lean Into the Power of Community

By Marjorie Anderson

Everyone is leaning into the word "community" lately. What's more interesting is that community building is being lumped in with email lists, marketing, and other activities that don't necessarily facilitate actual community building.

At the heart of this work is building relationships and trust with the people we serve as associations. More importantly, we have a responsibility to facilitate bringing those people together and connecting them in ways that help enrich their lives. Sometimes this is in the form of events. Other times it shows up as local chapters or volunteer opportunities. And yet, we don't lean into this as a benefit of membership or engagement with us. Instead we offer swag, new products, and discounts – all of which many members already expect as table stakes when they choose to renew their annual dues.

"COMMUNITY BUILDING IS BEING LUMPED IN WITH EMAIL LISTS, MARKETING, AND OTHER ACTIVITIES THAT DON'T NECESSARILY FACILITATE ACTUAL COMMUNITY BUILDING"

The opportunity that lies at the feet of associations is less about new and shiny objects, and more about enabling members (and non-members) to feel a sense of belonging the minute they register on the website. The purpose of associations is to bring people together around a shared interest, industry, or topic. Inherently, association missions are embedded in community building, but operations seem to dictate otherwise. Here are some ways that associations can lean into community and use it as the bedrock for memorable and meaningful experiences.

LET YOUR MEMBERS LEAD THE WAY. Associations rely heavily on feedback from member satisfaction surveys. Many times, the questions in those surveys speak to whether the benefits are worth it to renew or figuring out how satisfied someone is with the association. But what if you, instead, ask your members whether they felt connected to others in the profession because of their engagement? Or what if you ask them to tell you what is missing from their experiences that would help them meet their goals? Shift the focus from extrinsic motivators to more intrinsic motivators. This is a true sign that you care what your members need and then make a commitment to bringing that to life for them in the best way possible.

"SHIFT THE FOCUS FROM EXTRINSIC MOTIVATORS TO MORE INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS."

STOP EXPECTING COMMUNITY TO GROW ITSELF. Associations put a lot of thought, care, and muscle behind their membership programs. Same goes for volunteer management or chapter programs. And yet when it comes to building community, budget and resources are always scarce. Whether true or false, consider for a moment that you are putting far too much pressure on your volunteers, chapter leaders, and member benefits to support what a well-resourced and staffed community strategy and program can support. There are more instances than not where associations implement community technology without a strategy or, at the very least, a dedicated community manager and expect things to thrive. This is a false perception of what it takes to build a community. You're dealing directly with people and it takes more that cool tech to help them find belonging and trust you enough to make a commitment to engage meaningfully (not just click a link). Put muscle behind your community programs and you will see a healthy return that will carry you into the future.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT ENGAGEMENT. Clicks on a link is not engagement. Why? Because anyone can click a link, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It doesn't tell you what happens because of that clicked link. There's no guarantee that I read the content on that page or paid attention to that webinar. When we're talking about engagement, we have to be clear on the desired behaviors that will get them to feel more connected, like their needs have been met, and like they have "found their home." Inviting them to a site with the expectation that they will magically want to buy your membership or apply for a certification is not the right approach. Instead, think about the behaviors you want members to exhibit when they visit that will offer value for them and for the association.

BE INTENTIONAL. Building a sense of community with your members (not FOR) is rooted in intentionality. Every action you take to deliver useful content and memorable experiences has to have your members at the heart of it. Is the thought leadership you produce useful for them? Does the event model you use consider accessibility concerns? Does your program speak only to a certain demographic within your association membership? It takes a lot to dig deep and figure out the answers to those questions. It takes even more to admit where you're missing the mark and make the needed changes. Don't stick to old ways of doing things because it's easier. Do the hard work, talk to your members, and adjust accordingly. With intention.

"WHEN WE'RE TALKING ABOUT ENGAGEMENT, WE HAVE TO BE CLEAR ON THE DESIRED BEHAVIORS THAT WILL GET THEM TO FEEL MORE CONNECTED"

ASSOCIATIONS ARE ABOUT PEOPLE. The way they operate should be about people. And not just your paying members or those who purchase products or those who give countless hours volunteering. Building community means that you figure out ways to build trusting relationships with the collective all along their journey. Not just when it brings in revenue for your association. Doing this hard work up front sets you up for long-term loyalty and compounding ROI well into the future. And when associations shift their mindset to be more community-focused, the benefits are lasting.
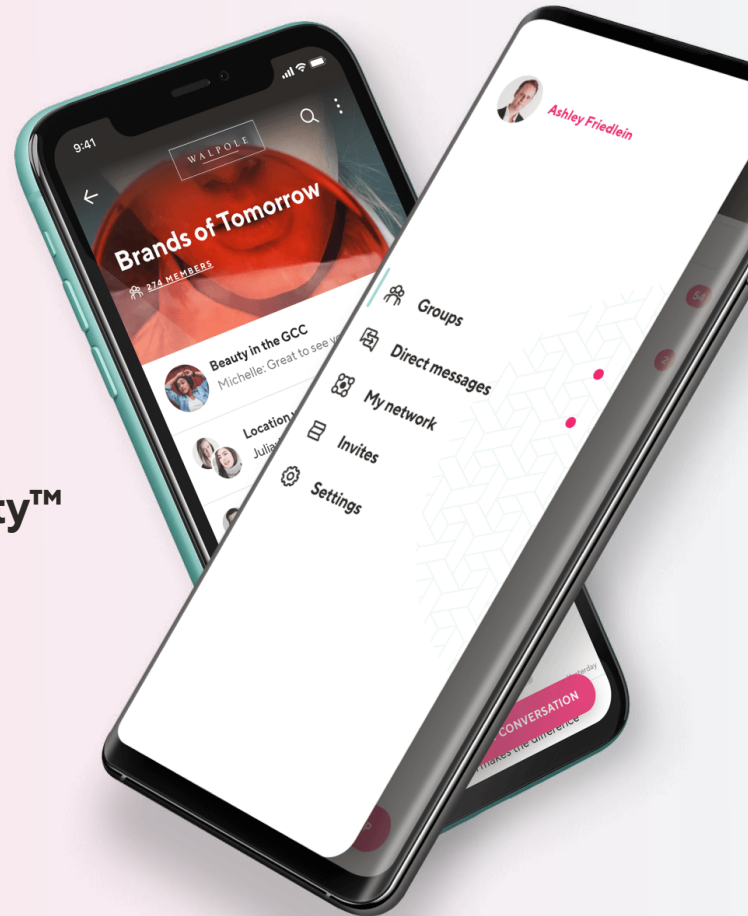
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CREATING EQUITABLE HYBRID COMMUNITIES

By Hugh Lashbrooke
Head of Community Education at Automattic

B y this stage, we've probably all heard of "hybrid events" - it has, after all, become a bit of a buzzword in the community industry of late - so how do hybrid communities differ from events? There's a fair amount of nuance to it, but broadly speaking hybrid communities have a more holistic focus as they incorporate all interactions of the community, not just the singular events.

As something of a summary, a hybrid community facilitates valuable online connections strengthened by in-person interactions. The impetus is on the connections formed rather than the format of the interactions themselves. This places significantly more emphasis on the quality of relationships rather than how people meet or where they connect.

CONNECTING ONLINE & OFFLINE SPACES

One of the things that hybrid communities are much more well-suited towards is creating spaces that promote inclusion and equity in real, tangible ways. With the emphasis on creating connections and using in-person events as a vehicle to strengthen those connections, barriers are reduced for people from under-represented groups to become more deeply involved.

So...let's look at some ways we can create more equitable environments.

CREATING EQUITY

There are three focus areas here - if you keep them all in mind and really put in the work to get them right then you'll find you're well on the way to fostering a community that actively encourages all people to join.

TOOLS

In this context, I'm using "tools" to refer to the platforms and software you use for your community to connect. While I would always favour open-source options over others (you can read my post on how to build a robust community platform on WordPress), I don't want to be prescriptive here. What I will say is that you need to be providing accessible platforms for collaboration and connection. Here are some considerations to keep in mind when selecting your community platform(s):

- Live interactions
- Asynchronous conversations
- Accessibility
- Localisation
- Multimedia
- Documentation
- Open-source licencing

TRAINING

Community education has become quite a hot topic of late - I've seen many communities focus on providing structured training for their community members, and I couldn't be more excited about it. My work focus right now is building a learning platform for the WordPress community, so this is something that's really top of mind for me and I can really feel and see the intense urgency of this kind of work.

Learning together creates a sense of community that is incredibly tough to match in any other way. I would go so far as to say that being part of a learning cohort, even remotely, binds people together more than any regular in-person event can. In addition to that deeper sense of community that is created, remote learning gives more people

the chance to join in, which allows for greater diversity amongst participants and allows all community members to upskill in the same way and at the same time.

As a community builder, your job here is to create practical content that teaches your community new skills.

TEAMWORK

Building tools and creating relevant training for your community is all well and good (definitely good), but if you're doing it on your own and not collaborating with your community itself then you're missing a key ingredient. Working with your community and recruiting a team of people who can work alongside you is of inestimable value.

This needs to be done with care and must include documentation, onboarding, defined tasks, appropriate access levels, and any other consideration that allows you to effectively share the keys to your community with other people. It's a fair bit of work to implement effectively, but I can promise that you'll never regret it. You need to collaborate with your community to facilitate interactions.

RETHINKING IN-PERSON EVENTS

So we've looked at what a hybrid community is and how you can build equality into your community model, but we haven't really touched on the other aspect of hybrid communities - namely, in-person events. What do in-person events look like for a hybrid community?

Broadly speaking, the model for in-person events within hybrid communities is that they will involve collaborative discussions that flow from online interactions. This

highlights the emphasis on authentic relationships regardless of how people connect. It could include live training sessions, demos or other workshops - anything that triggers discussions and relationship building in the context of learning.

For more on this, I encourage you to look into the social learning theory expounded by Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner.

ADOPTING A HYBRID MODEL

Many cmmunities are already entirely focused on either in-person or virtual connections. There's nothing wrong with that of course, but what if they wanted to evolve into a hybrid model? What processes do they need to put in place to make that a realistic possibility?

I believe there are three things you can provide that will pave the way to natural, organic, and authentic connections between members of any community. I call these the three S's of creating community connections - I have previously written about them in detail, so will give a brief overview here:

SPACE

The first thing people need in order to form connections is the space to do so. That may seem incredibly obvious, but as the person encouraging these connections, you need to put some thought into it. This space needs to serve the needs of your community effectively - what kind of people are you wanting to attract? How many people do you anticipate will join you? How do you want them to interact?

You may not know the answers to all of those questions up front, especially when forming a new community or transitioning to a hybrid model, so a good exercise to go through is creating a membership identity for your group. No matter who you are wanting to bring into your community, the considerations listed earlier in this article will be a great place to start.

STRUCTURE

Once you have your space you don't want to remain in the Field of Dreams/Wayne's World approach of "if you build it, they will come". You need to go a step further and make the space accommodating and usable by giving it some structure. This structure can take many shapes, but the most common thing that forms the backbone of a community structure is a code of conduct. Essentially, a structure refers to the rules and guidelines your community has that tells them how they are expected to behave, interact and connect.

SEEDS

With a space to connect and structure within which to do it, the final piece of the puzzle is seeding content. You need to do what any good leader does - lead by example. In a community context like this, that means you need to seed discussions. You need to create relevant content, initiate conversations and guide people to connect.

The idea behind these seeds you plant is that they will grow and flourish into a community full of healthy, vibrant discussions that happen smoothly and organically, allowing you to step back from planting and allow things to happen within the structure you have provided.

IN SUMMARY...

To grow an equitable, hybrid community, you must use accessible tools to collaborate with your community, providing relevant training that meets their needs on a platform that enables authentic connections to inform in-person interactions.

COMMUNITY
LEADERS
INSTITUTE