

IS YOUR COMMUNITY DOING WELL? COMMUNITY BENCHMARKS INSIDE!

INCLUDING

BUILDING TOP GROWTH
OF THE FUNNEL ENGINES

HIRING A TEAM MONETIZING COMMUNITY EVENTS GUIDE + MUCH MORE!

79
CHAPTERS!

ALSO INCLUDED
Youtube Algorithm Deconstructed

TOOL COMPARISONS LEARNINGS FROM THE NFT COMMUNITY SPACE GROWING COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY MASTERS

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE



NOTION

THE 164,000+
COMMUNITY STORY



AIRBASE

THE 2,800+ PRIVATE
COMMUNITY STORY



AVALON

OUR OWN 50,000+
COMMUNITY STORY

COMMUNITY MASTERS

**VARUN MAYYA
ELSON JOY**

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PART ONE

OUR STORY



INTRODUCTION

Whenever I see someone talk about any topic on Twitter, I click on their profiles to see if they're actually well versed in what they're claiming. It makes sense for you, the reader, to do the same with this book.

In 2017, I put up my first video on YouTube. I'd long planned to make a series of startup tutorials on YouTube after almost eight years building startups, both venture funded and bootstrapped.



The series was to be titled MetaStartup, and the goal was to get maybe a few hundred quality views. Little did I know that the channel itself would grow to nearly 60k subscribers in relatively little time! On a high from the newfound audience, I moved to Instagram and grew there from 0 to 125k followers. My other co-founders followed suit, both reaching more than

a 100k followers each on the platform. They say when you've done something once it tends to be a result of luck, but doing it thrice means you understand a thing or two about the thing in question.

A year or two later, we were tired of constantly churning out content. YouTube and Instagram are volume games— if you stop putting out content, you lose both followers and relevance. Instagram also pulled a major pivot on us; becoming TikTok right in front of our eyes and invalidating years of hard work, choosing to donate our views to kids ready to dance to the next Justin Bieber song.

We needed a way to:

- A) Allow our audiences to interact and add value to each other without our involvement (so we could stop keeping them entertained 24x7).
- B) Get off the social platform flywheel and actually own our hard work for once. When a platform like Facebook kills organic reach or an Instagram pivots to a TikTok clone, thousands of livelihoods are destroyed. We weren't willing to go down easy.

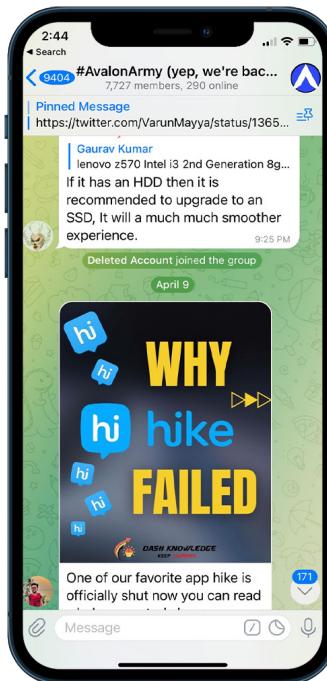
So we started looking for platforms. We tried Telegram in 2018, and scaled that community to 9,000 people. We turned the community to read-only at the end of 2019 and lost a bunch of members.

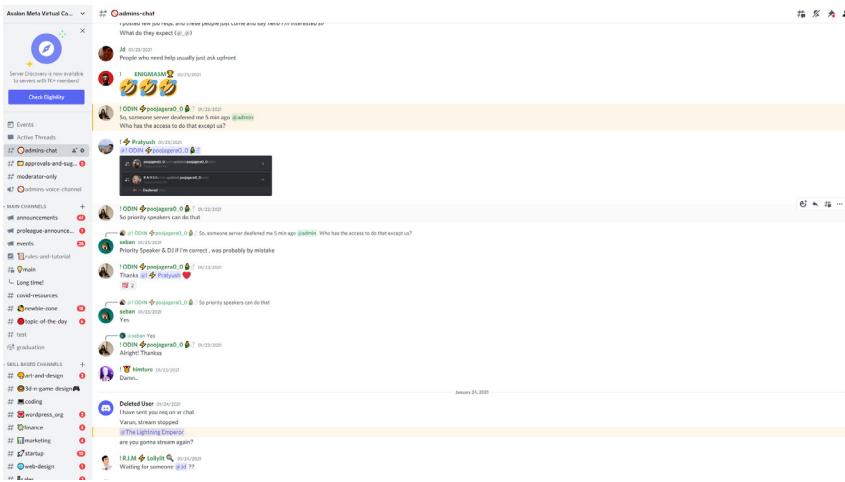
Telegram can get *really* noisy after a certain scale. Every time I'd wake up, I'd join the conversation but lose context almost immediately, even with slow mode on. I eventually stopped tuning in. We think the optimal size to run a Tele-

gram community is <200 people, and only if what you need is just a chat interface. Anything above that, and the chat becomes a circus. We tried to scale Telegram by running 20-odd groups, but that is a nightmare both for the managers as well as the users.

We then tried Slack. Slack has major limits with voice and video – only 15 people in an audio/video room. Combined with the fact that Slack costs \$6.67/user/month, we found that costs would be ridiculous for our size of community. We needed message history (large communities can eat through 10,000 messages within a day or two) so we couldn't go with a free plan either.

Finally, we arrived at Discord. We moved to Discord on the exact day they launched their new communities feature; and ended up scaling the community to 50,000 people. We became one of the largest non-creator communities in India at the time on the platform. We sunset our Discord after a year-long run, finding that the platform was too complex for the average user and had a lot of gaps between what we needed and what was offered.





However, we had a great run, learned a lot of things, and had great metrics — 193,000 speaking minutes a month, 68% Month 6 retention, and over 10M chat messages.

Having built products for a decade, we decided to build a better, white-labeled Discord; filled with features Discord doesn't have (an in-built Zoom, custom domains; custom design; custom app; forums; and a TON more). We raised a few million dollars for this business from over 40 investors, including folks like Kunal Shah, Better Labs, and individual mega creators who'd run their own Discord servers like Tanmay Bhat. We've hired 14+ senior engineers from companies like Fampay, Unacademy, Byjus and more to build a world class "DIY" Discord for the world.

It's been a year since we've been building and have seen over 2,200 communities and 110,000 users use the platform — we've learned so much more about communities being on the back-end of a community platform.



Scenes By Avalon Raises Pre-Series A Funding Round

The funds will be used towards further product development and growth of the platform

By Prabhjeet Bhatla May 25, 2021

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Scenes, a community platform by Avalon, announced on Tuesday that it has raised an undisclosed amount in pre-Series A funding round from angels including Kunal Shah, Gaurav Munjal, Kalyan Krishnamurthy, Tanmay Bhat as well Tanglin Ventures, Better Capital, Whiteboard Capital, iSeed Ventures and Blume Founders Fund.



Avalon Team

Most of our insights on building a community are documented in this book. If asked to build a community again, we're fairly confident we'd be able to given a few months; no matter the domain or the context or the platform. When we were first building a community, there weren't any great resources on the topic. This book is our way of giving back and also a way to document our experiences for ourselves.

We hope that you learn something from this. We're always available at varun@buildonscenes.co or elson@buildonscenes.co if you are planning to start a community and have questions that this book doesn't answer.

1

WHY DO HUMANS NEED COMMUNITY?

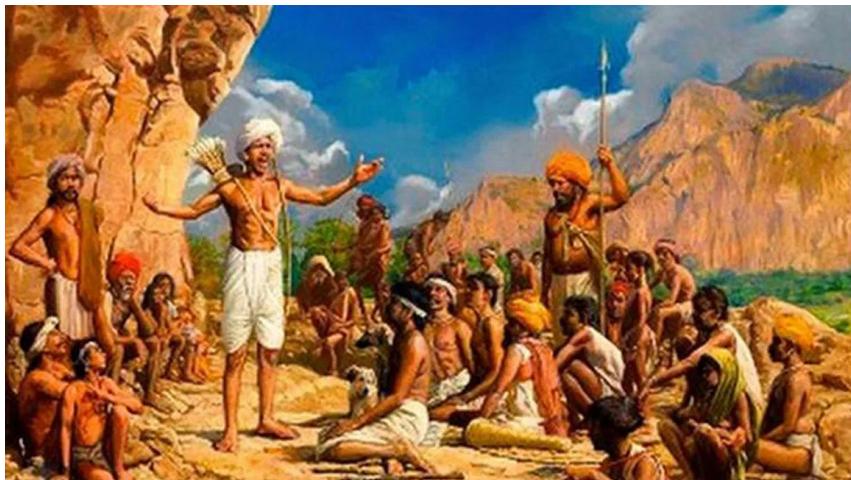
Nassim Nicholas Taleb (my favorite author) once spoke about a concept called the “Lindy effect”.

The Lindy effect theorizes that if something has existed for a long time, it will continue to exist for even longer. Something that has existed for long implies a resistance to change or destruction.

With respect to human beings, the Lindy effect simply means that if humans still do something that we did 200,000 years ago, it is probably going to continue for a very long time — perhaps because it is wired into our brains.

I start this book by arguing that the concept of “Community” is not new to humans. I will make my appeal by presenting this simple concept to you in images:

Humans like to discuss stuff in groups.



Hello. Sign in or register | Daily Deals | Sell | Help & Contact | [Halloween →](#)

[My eBay](#) [Bell](#) [Cart](#)

eBay Shop by category ▾ Search for anything All Categories ▾ [Search](#) Advanced

The eBay Community > Discussion Boards > Buying on eBay > New to buying > Bidding with PayPal

[Register](#) [Sign In](#) Help

New to buying

[Board](#) [Search](#)

[Reply](#) [Topic Options](#) ▾

[Message Listing](#) [Previous Topic](#) [Next Topic](#)

chlmr_8s4zonj (0) View Listings Community Newcomer Posts: 3 Registered: 30-11-2015 Report Inappropriate Content Message 1 of 6 (500 Views)

Bidding with PayPal on 30-11-2015 5:32 PM [Options](#) ▾

Hi, I am trying to bid on an item but when I try it comes up 'buyer does not have a linked PayPal account'. I have linked my PayPal account to my eBay account so not sure why it comes up with this?

0 Kudos [+1](#) [Reply](#)

stephaniemarie1993 (215) View Listings Community Newcomer Posts: 3 Registered: 29-07-2012 Report Inappropriate Content Message 2 of 6 (468 Views)

Re: Bidding with PayPal in reply to chlmr_8s4zonj on 01-12-2015 10:46 PM [Options](#) ▾

This is to do with the seller hope you have resolved your issue

0 Kudos [+1](#) [Reply](#)

hjsrpop (127) View Listings Community Newcomer

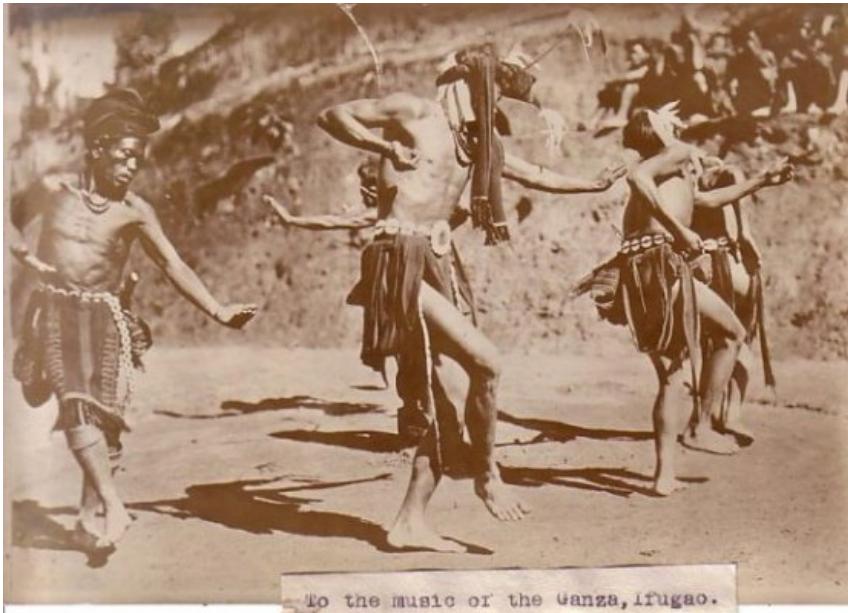
Re: Bidding with PayPal in reply to chlmr_8s4zonj on 26-12-2016 7:49 AM [Options](#) ▾

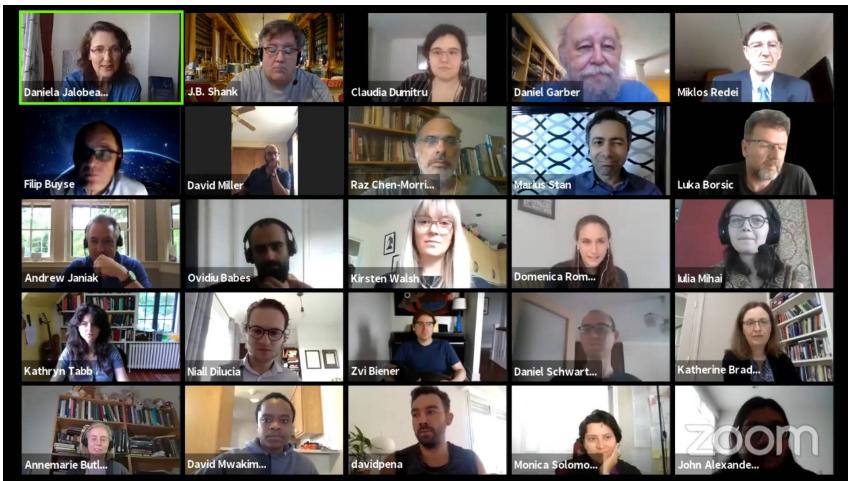
Hi, we're you talking about...?

Bidding error

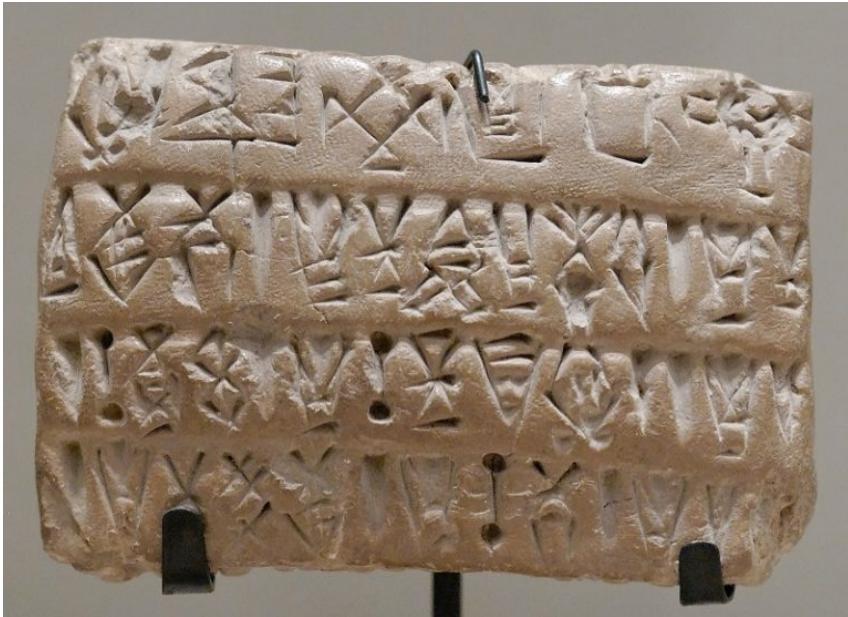
Humans induct people into communities via live events.

In fact, most communities you've been "inducted" in to have been via a live event.





Humans pass on information to their communities asynchronously



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ROBERT C. CLOWRY, President and General Manager.

RECEIVED at *170*

176 C KA CS 33 Paid. Via Norfolk Va

Kitty Hawk N C Dec 17

Bishop M Wright

7 Hawthorne St

Success four flights thursday morning all against twenty one mile wind started from Level with engine power alone average speed through air thirty one miles longest 57 seconds inform Press home ~~Dec 24~~ Christmas . Orevelle Wright 525P

The screenshot shows a Notion workspace titled "OS". The left sidebar contains navigation links: Notion, Quick Find, All Updates, Settings & Members, Favorites, Workspace, and sections for OS, Tasks, Docs, Meeting Notes, Product & Eng, Marketing, Customer Experience, Sales & Success, and People. Below these are Shared and Private pages, and a New page button.

The main area features a large header image of a traditional Japanese woodblock print of a wave, with a black billiard ball containing the number "8" overlaid on it. To the right of the image are buttons for Share, Updates, Favorite, and more options.

The workspace title "OS" is displayed prominently below the header. A brief description follows: "The operating system of our company." Below this are two sections: "History" and "All-Notion".

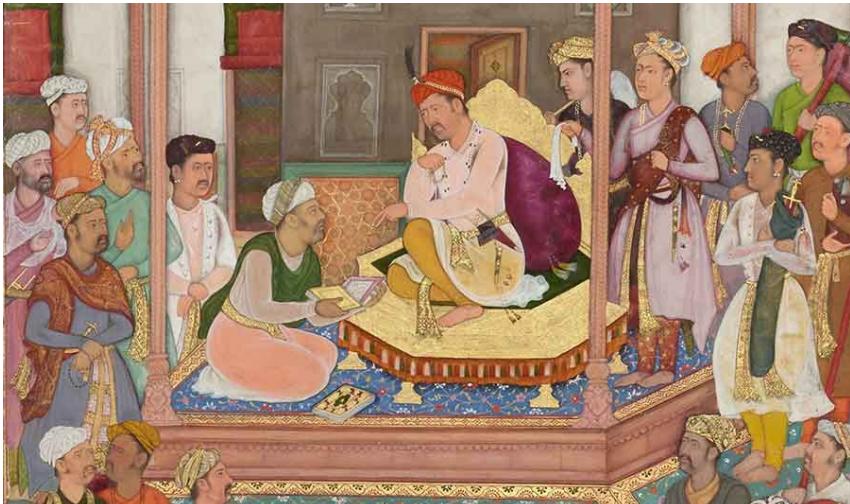
History

- 1H 2021 Planning Repo...
- Company Objectives - 2...
- Mission & Strategy - 2020
- Mission & Strategy - Jun...
- Mission & Strategy - Aug...

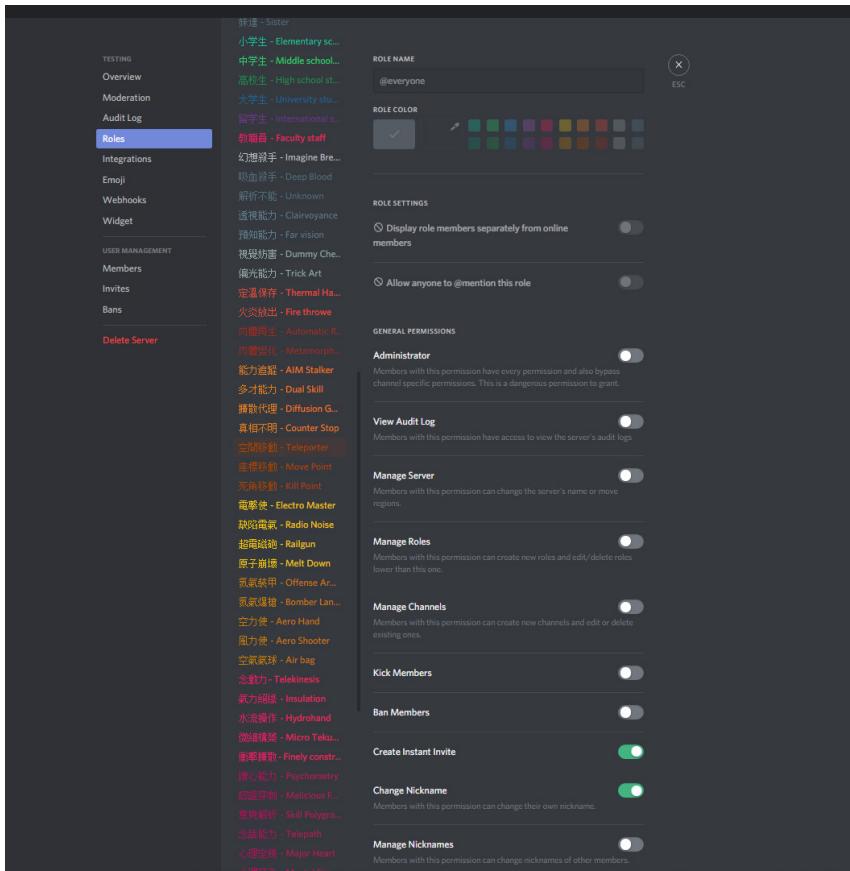
All-Notion

- Company Values 1.0 (Beta)
- Communication Playbook
- Company Q&A

Humans always create roles and hierarchy



RANK INSIGNIA OF THE U.S. ARMED FORCES									
ENLISTED									
E-1	E-2	E-3	E-4	E-5	E-6	E-7	E-8	E-9	SENIOR ENLISTED
ARMY									
no insignia Private E-1 (PV1)									Command Sergeant Major (CSM)
MARINES									
no insignia Private (Pvt)									Sergeant Major (SgtMaj) Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SgtMajMC)
OFFICERS									
O-1	O-2	O-3	O-4	O-5	O-6	O-7	O-8	O-9	O-10 SPECIAL
ARMY - AIR FORCE - MARINES									
									General of the Army (GA)



Many of these things will seem fairly obvious to you. But community managers in 2021 try very hard to justify their own roles, forgetting that running a community is just application of first principles. You may use different tools, but the core concept is the exact same — you are shepherding human biology into a common vision and mission.

If something works on a community of humans at around the time of emergence of the *Homo Sapiens*, it'll probably work on the internet today. You just need to find the right tool to execute it.

2

WHY IS COMMUNITY NEEDED FOR BUSINESS?

One thing I conveniently skipped from the last two chapters is how much money we made off our community. This is a tell-all book, so here it is:

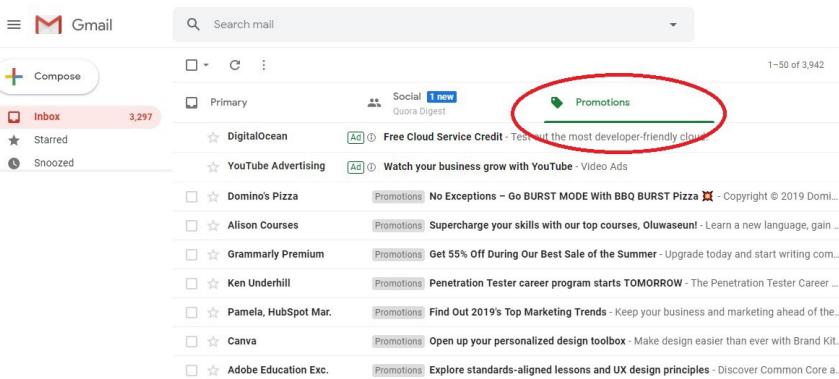
We made \$450,000+ in 4 months.

A famous VC once told me a truthism about engagement: “*All engagement, once created, can be monetized*”. Successful communities are the epicenter of engagement. Engagement leads to retention, it leads to repeat purchases of your product, and eyeballs can also be sold to those who seek them. In fact, most successful apps like Stackoverflow or FITTR are just your run of the mill communities with a wrapper around them; creating enough engagement inside of them to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars. The technology itself is trivial. It’s the people and engagement that are worth so much.

D2C

Direct to consumer (D2C) businesses are starting to see the value too. In fact, many D2C businesses don’t realize that a single product manager somewhere in a Google HQ destroyed 30-50% of their topline with this one change:

Yes, the “Promotions” tab. This one change has proba-



bly shuttered many a D2C company. There isn't a single D2C founder that hasn't complained about the promos tab and its impact on retention since Google first launched it. Most D2C companies make their first sale at a loss, hoping to make money on the second or the third one. They hope that a timely email will make that second or third sale for them. Well, tough luck



This is a black hole meme. Your promo email probably resides somewhere here.

Creators

Large creators understand why a community is necessary too. Almost all creators are slaves to some social media platform. For the first time, a community lets them become a platform (as long as the tool used is white-labeled). This is immense power for creators to have, allowing to pivot into scalable businesses with solid engagement epicenters that doesn't require them to personally be present in the long run.

SaaS

SaaS business owners have been using forum platforms for ages too. A forum isn't a new concept, they have existed since the 90s.

People using a SaaS tool want support, so they need to congregate somewhere to ask for help. phpBB, Simple Machines, and other forum packages were meant to be deployed on your domain. Many of these forums are successful even today.

The screenshot shows a forum thread with the following posts:

- Post 1:** Posted by [User Icon] on 12/01/2012 12:48. The post content is: "Do you have Cost Savings Ideas? We are looking forward to all your ideas to save costs within the company. Thank you for your suggestions!"
- Post 2:** Posted by [User Icon] on 12/01/2012 12:57. The post content is: "When travelling to our office in X, I usually fly to airport Y instead of Airport Z and rent a car. This saves \$50 one way. When travelling with colleagues savings are much higher since we only need 1 car."
- Post 3:** Posted by [User Icon] on 12/01/2012 12:59. The post content is: "In the location A we have installed motion-controlled lighting in offices. Last year's electricity bill was 20% lower than the year before, and we have not received any complaints from users. Payback time of the one-time investment is 1.5 years."
- Post 4:** Posted by [User Icon] on 12/01/2012 13:00. The post content is: "I do not think that outsourcing my role will save costs.
*****"

SaaS owners also know that webinar software (and Zoom in particular) have been useful in getting people together. In fact, webinars are bread and butter of how SaaS companies sell, even today.

Does it matter who you are?

I personally think these lines are blurring. D2C customers may use community to ask questions. SaaS companies may use communities to improve retention. Creators may use communities to become businesses themselves. Finally, I think it helps all categories of businesses kick the VC bucket by sharply reducing customer acquisition and retention costs. The question here is – what type of interaction suffices as a “community”?

Forums? Live Events? Chat? Email? or a 2D/3D world with characters?

The answer, surprisingly, is all of them.

3

ADVERTISING VS COMMUNITY

“I can just run ads, it’s far less effort”, said the Performance Ads guy to me before the pandemic.

Well, this was probably true two years ago. Today, ad costs are out of control. Why? Because everyone thinks like Mr. Performance Ads guy above. Together, they’re saturating the advert bidding war beyond belief.

My opinion is that it’s going to be nearly unsustainable to run ads directly to your product in two years. Trust is in short supply – even if you get a click, you probably aren’t going to make a sale; a community is not just your moat, the fundamental value is that it improves conversion by increasing trust.

If you ask me, the old model was better while it worked. You spend a dollar and make two dollars instantly. The new model, of growing your community first, and THEN monetizing it, is cheaper but very slow. There’s a months long latency between spend and results. But boy does it pay off!

The real advantage of building a community is that it’s going to become the **only** way to grow your product once advertising platforms fully saturate. One of the VPs of billion dollar business Zoho recently told me that the company is planning to scale back SEM on Google because the link clicks are becoming way too expensive, even for them!

The real, measurable value of community isn’t increasing trust, it’s significantly reducing CAC over the long term, and

significantly increasing LTV.

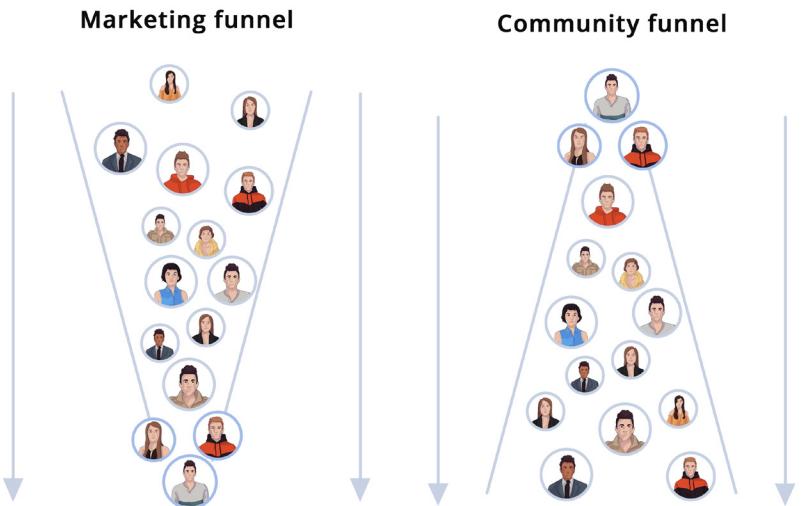
As CEO/CMO/Community Head, your job is to allocate capital into what's going to be best for the company in the long term. Community is a great bet.

Turning the funnel around

If you ask me, the single biggest difference between community and marketing is the way information is spread.

In the case of marketing, you've probably come across the term "Marketing Funnel". You launch an ad campaign that reaches 100,000 people. 10,000 click on the ad. And 2,000 convert.

In the case of community, you want to invert the funnel. You create a community for 2,000 people. These are your active early members. Each one of them spreads the word to 5 other people - you have 10,000 new community members. Now each of them spreads the word to 10 other people and voilà: you have 100,000 community members.



Community is harder to kickstart. But once you reach a critical mass, word spreads like wildfire. Your CAC therefore reduces with time.

Also, even as a function within an organization, I believe that community has a role to play beyond the marketing team—traditionally, community was seen as just another form of getting traction to your brand or business. Today, businesses are recognizing the need of community in product, customer support and so much more. More on that later when we discuss the SCENES model.

PART TWO

THE COMMUNITY ENGINE



4

AUDIENCE VS COMMUNITY

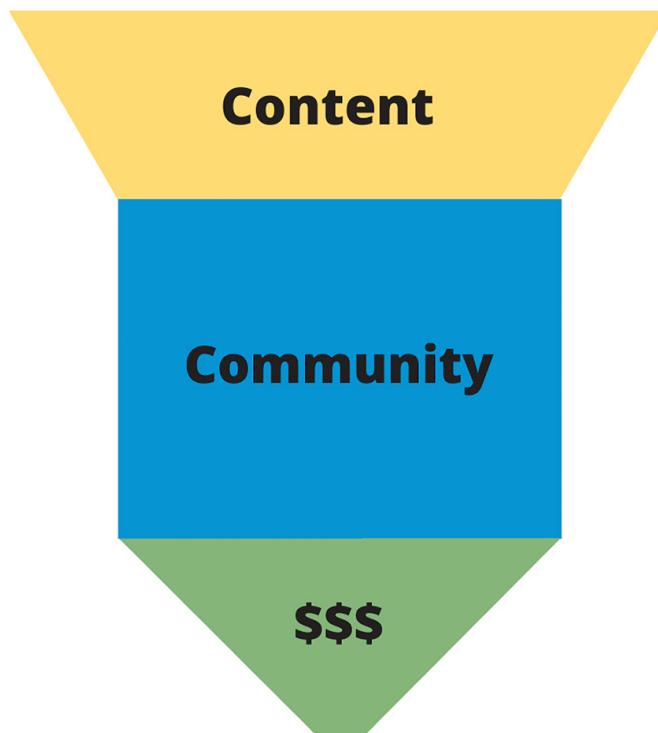
Before we run you through the exact engine we've used, we'd like to clarify something: The difference between a audience and a community, primarily because people often confuse the two.

Any eyeballs on a social platform is an audience. **An audience is characterized by one-way interaction.** This also means you should stop calling your newsletter audience a "community". There's no P2P (peer to peer) interaction. The problem with having an audience is that you are plagued by a constantly eroding influence that can be topped up by producing content.

A community, on the other hand, is characterized by P2P interaction. Your audience interacts with themselves, and they don't require you to constantly churn out content.

	AUDIENCE	COMMUNITY
Communication	One-way communication	P2P communication
Content	Requires constant content production	Minimal content production
Acquisition	Requires static/live content for acquisition/induction	Requires live events for acquisition/induction
People	Can be created solo	Requires 2-3 (minimum) people to run
Examples	Newsletters, YouTube Channel, Instagram, etc	Scenes, Discord, Slack communities

I also want you to understand that there is no line in the sand here. Doing community also means you'll be doing some content, especially in the initial days. In fact, there's a very close relationship between content and community.



Content is top of funnel, and community is middle of funnel, the retention layer. People with large audiences find it easier to transition to community in the beginning, but fail unless they **organize** and go beyond themselves. Running a community is very similar to running a business; very hard to do because there are multiple moving parts. You can't do it by yourself.

An audience, however, can be created alone. In fact, the YouTube algorithm rewards personalities.

Because the founders of Scenes are content creators with a combined audience of 500k+ over platforms, we have a handy breakdown of what types of content to put out to gain traction. Therefore before we dive into communities, we first want to dive into the top of the funnel, content.

In the next chapter, we'll teach you how to master the YouTube algorithm no matter whether you're a person or a brand. This is an important step in your journey of running and scaling a community.

5

BUILDING AN AUDIENCE: THE YOUTUBE ALGORITHM

This book is a guide for communities. But it's also important to teach you how to build an audience. It makes top of the funnel for communities magnitudes easier.

While you can build an audience on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, etc., our suggestion is to use YouTube. YouTube is the one platform where it's still possible to grow in 2021 (without breaking out into dance moves) if you play your cards right, and we're here to break it down. If you follow the next few pages, you'll learn how to create really good content that grows your user base. We've succeeded multiple times on YouTube ourselves, so this isn't commentary — we've lived this.

That this is a slightly technical article, but we've added an "insights" bit on every section with what you should take away from that section. Even if you skip the algorithm parts, make sure you read the insights.

The research

Every article you'll find on Google on the YouTube algorithm is mostly hubris and not rooted in any reality. We wanted to be comprehensive, so we dove into multiple Google research papers on the YT algorithm as well as spoke to creators in India (we know a lot of large creators in India) to figure out how

to beat the algorithm. It's a mixture of math, science, and insights that will help us figure out what works best on YouTube in 2022.

Through all this research, we're actually reasonably sure of how the core YouTube algorithm works. This is because Google published two papers in 2016 and 2019 on the YouTube algorithm — both papers had the exact same core engine in action. However, there have been tweaks over the years to reduce bias and improve time on site (resulting in tens of millions of dollars of additional revenue for them). We'll cover the tweaks and what they mean for creators too in this article. We're going to try to make it as layman friendly as possible and avoid going deeper into the neural network models. Without further ado, let's begin.

The north star metric

All companies have a north star metric. Some would call this the one specific metric that the entire company is trying to improve. It's quite obvious that for most companies this would be revenue, and this is true in YouTube's case too. But the proxy metric that is most tied in to revenue for YouTube is **watch time**. To make money, YouTube serves ads.

Let's assume that YouTube serves you one ad per minute of watch time. Then it's obvious that if you spend sixty minutes watching videos, it has the opportunity to serve you sixty ads. *More ads, more revenue.*

This is why the primary north star metric for YouTube that they can improve in the product itself is watch time. The more you watch videos on the platform, the better it is for them as

a company. YouTube is constantly optimizing and tweaking its algorithm so that you can stay on the platform for as long as you can.

In terms of recommending a user videos, YouTube has to keep only one goal in mind – to maximize that particular user’s watch time. The main way to do that is to keep the user from getting bored and to make sure that just as boredom starts setting in with any video, to have the right set of new videos ready for you to watch on the sidebar.

Let’s start with the 2016 paper titled **Deep Neural Networks for YouTube Recommendations**. It admits that recommending videos have three different problems:

1. **Scale:** Algorithms that work at a small scale don’t work at a large scale. Clubhouse is the most recent company that has struggled with this.
2. **Freshness:** The challenge is with balancing recommendations of new uploaded videos with old established videos that work well.
3. **Noise:** A user’s watch history can sometimes send wrong signals. You can’t tell when a user has really enjoyed a video, because a large majority of users who really like a video don’t hit the Like button.

The Core Algorithm

The core algorithm of YouTube has a 2-layer process. The video corpus in the image is all the videos on YouTube that have ever been uploaded. This is probably millions of videos ever produced.

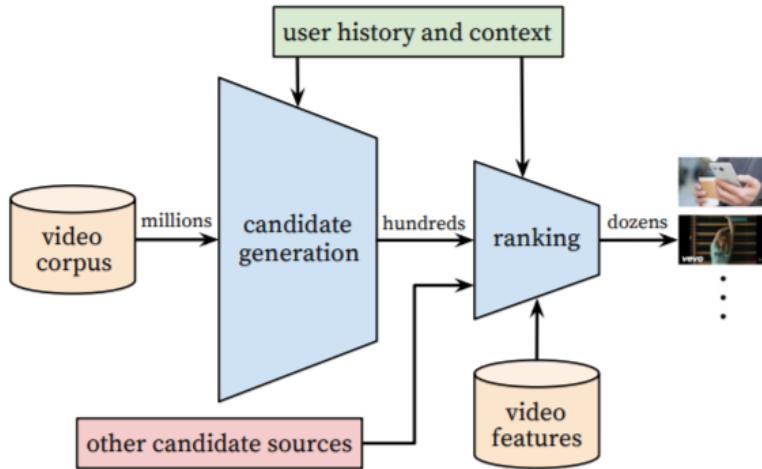
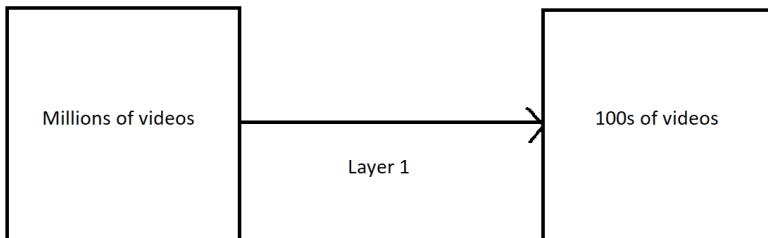


Figure 2: Recommendation system architecture demonstrating the “funnel” where candidate videos are retrieved and ranked before presenting only a few to the user.

Layer 1: Candidate Generation

The paper says that the candidate generation network takes events from the user’s YouTube activity history as input and retrieves a small subset (hundreds) of videos from a large corpus.



This means that the first layer maps out what the user has already watched and subscribed to, and will generally try to show users videos from their own network.

Insight for creators:

- For the creator this means that the main way to get recommended to a user is to get them to **subscribe to you**.
- That's right. For all the talk about going viral, it isn't that useful if your goal is to be a creator. If a user watches a video of yours that has 5 million views and does not subscribe, there is absolutely no guarantee that your next few videos will be shown to them. Because they have watched one of your videos, the recommender might occasionally show them another one, but if they don't subscribe to that one either (or have a bad watch time on that one), you are done. You will not be shown to that user again.
- This means that you should absolutely be trying to get a sub on every video you put out. Also, you should probably delete or private all of the videos in which you have poor watch time. This is to improve the chances of your videos being shown to a particular user. Remember, if they watch one video (with high watch time) and don't sub, then the candidate generation system might show them another video of yours. If this second video has low watch time then you will disappear from their recommendations. I've seen good creators put up 2-3 boring videos up in between many very good videos. If they are unlucky and these boring videos are shown to users who have watched a good one, then they risk losing a permanent sub. I've made this mistake too in the past, by shitposting in between really good videos with high watch time.

The paper goes on to say that the candidate generation system goes one step further. It explains that the candidate generation network provides broad personalization via collaborative filtering. Collaborative filtering (CF) is a technique used by recommendation systems that is actually pretty simple to deploy. This is best explained by an example:

Suppose Jim is a user that likes watching Spider-Man videos on YouTube. Let's assume that Jim also watches Messi videos because he likes soccer.

Now let's assume Rick is a user that has created a fresh account and has watched three Spider-Man videos. Now the CF recommender system has created an association between Spider-Man and Messi through Jim's watch history. Based on this, it attempts to send Rick a Messi video to see if he likes it. **Even though we know that Spider-Man and Messi have no relationship, the CF system creates one** based on the user's watch history, and it recommends the most popular of these relationships to new users based on their own watch history. Basically collaborative filtering recommends a video to user Rick based on the interests of a similar user Jim.

Now there can be many nonsensical relationships created by CF, but YouTube is smart enough to only pick the most popular ones. So if Rick has watched Spider-Man videos, it knows from millions of users watch history that people who watch Spider-Man also watch the Avengers. So it will try recommending an Avengers video.

YouTube ranks the results of its CF algorithm and shows multiple such videos based on their relevance rank. The order of videos shown on the sidebar reflect the "rank" of the each

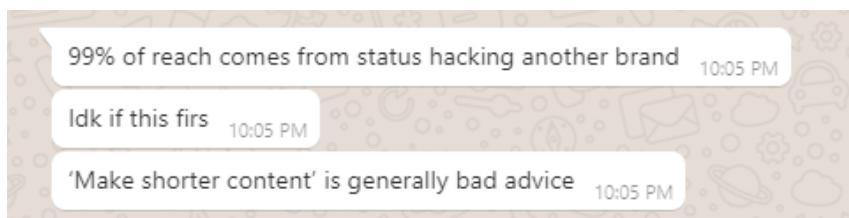
video's relevance to the user.

This also works via search queries. YouTube can create an association between two people who searched for particular keywords in the search bar and the types of videos they watch.

One thing the paper says is that “*although explicit feedback mechanisms exist on YouTube (thumbs up/down, in-product surveys, etc.) we use the implicit feedback of watches to train the model, where a user completing a video is a positive example.*”

Insight for creators:

- Collaborative filtering can be hijacked by, well, doing collaborations. If Varun Mayya collaborates with YouTuber Sid Warrier, then watchers of Sid Warrier's channel will see me and many of them will go watch at least one video from my channel. This tricks the YouTube algorithm into creating a CF recommendation between our channels.
- Most good creators know this instinctively. Here's a 100k+ Indian creator wishing to be anonymous indirectly telling us to collaborate with or diss other creators:



- Even if they search for keywords that displays videos from Sid Warrier's channel, my channel might be recommended.

This means that collaborating with “How-To” type channels might be more valuable than collaborating with personalities, because users who discovered a creator via a certain search query will be recommended your content.

- Dissing another creator also engages the CF algorithm because existing watchers of A will almost always watch a diss/roast of A on another channel. This creates a really good situation for CF algorithms to begin their work creating an association. I would only recommend this if you care about views more than reputation, though. Paddy Galloway grew pretty much doing this (although he wasn’t dissing, he was piggybacking on other big creators).

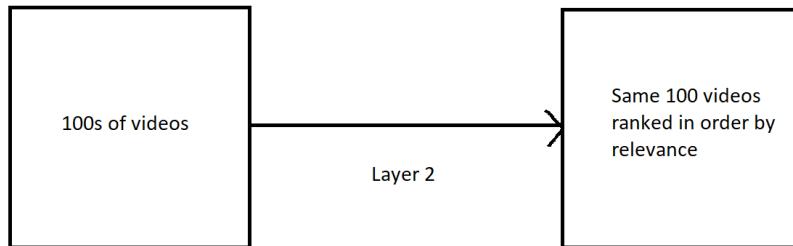


- Likes, downvotes, in-product surveys, and even views don’t matter at all. You can get down voted to hell and still become highly recommended. I see YouTubers asking people to “Like their video”. This is pointless. “Subscribe” is a great CTA though.

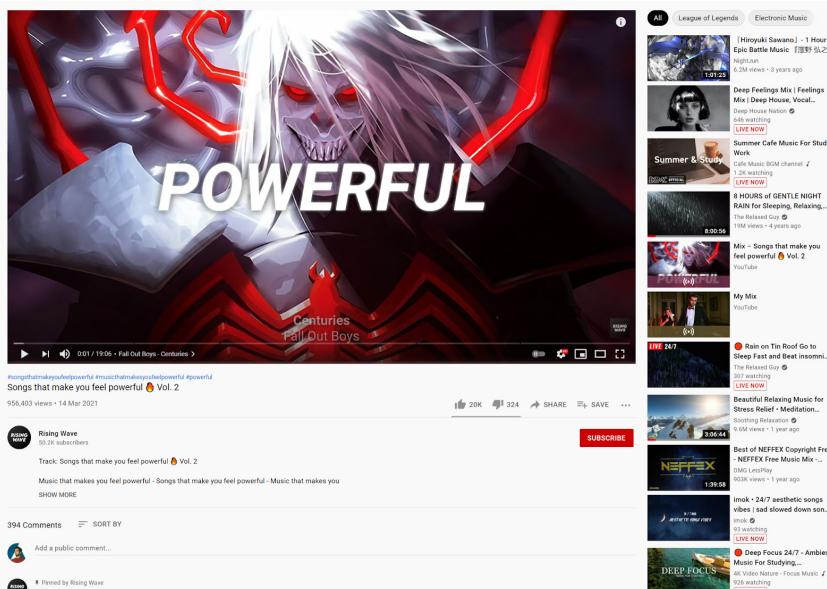
Layer 2: Ranking

This system takes the hundreds of videos returned at candidate generation and serves just a few to the user. It orders the videos in candidate generation by highest likelihood of expected watch time. In very short, ranking is determined by click through rate (CTR) and existing watch time of the video. Watch

time is still more important here as using the CTR alone makes people clickbait too often, which YouTube doesn't like.

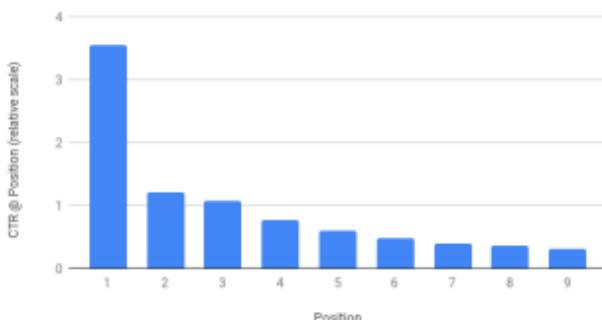


If you look at the 2019 paper instead of the 2016 one, you see that some bias on the CTR has been fixed. To understand this, you need to take a look at the sidebar:

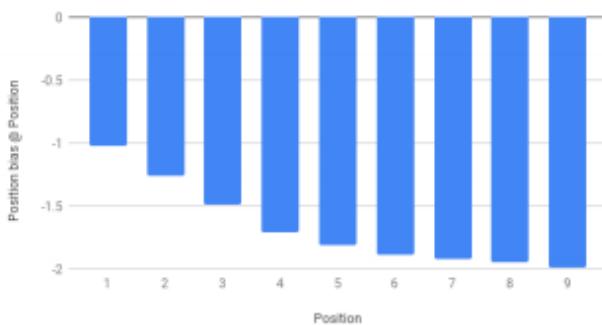


It's kind of obvious that the lower down a recommended video is shown, the lower the likelihood of it being clicked. On mobile this is even worse because you only see one or two recommendations at a time because of the small screen

• CTR @ Position vs. Position

**Figure 6: CTR for position 1 to 9.**

Position bias @ Position vs. Position

**Figure 7: Learned position bias per position.**

The 2019 algorithm accounts for this bias. If you clicked on a recommendation that was very low down the list, then that video will be recommended higher from that point on in other users' recommended lists. The user's past history with the channel that uploaded the video being scored is also useful –

1. How many videos has the user watched from this channel?
2. When was the last time the user watched a video on this topic?

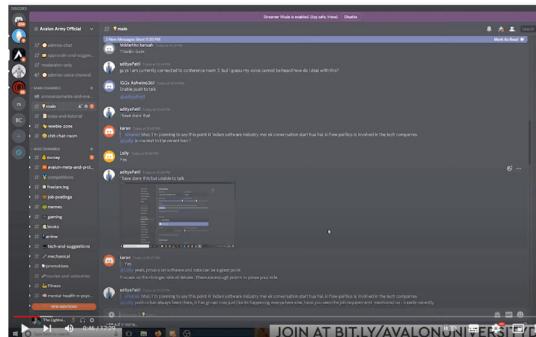
These are probably not as important as the CTR when the video recommended is lower down a list. The only way you can make this happen is with an **insanely eye-catching thumbnail**.

The last thing that I didn't mention was that YouTube is constantly always looking at the freshness of content. The algorithm tries to recommend recent content rather than old stuff. This is because when you look at a 24 hour window, there might not be a lot of good content to recommend, but if you look at YouTube's 10-year history of videos, there might be a lot of good stuff that will just dominate the recommended list — they needed to remove this bias. YouTube always tries to take age into account and the fresher the video, the higher the likelihood of its recommendation.

Through all these signals, YouTube is constantly trying to improve its watch time. It does this by “modeling” its expected watch time. YouTube can sort of guess what the watch time of a particular video will be with very little data! What you have to do to rank high is give YouTube a very high watch time so that they can achieve their revenue goals.

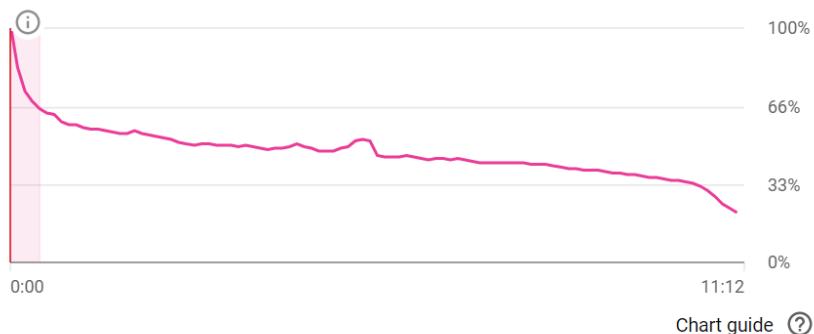
Insights for creators:

- CTR is quite important to earn a click. Which of these thumbnails below do you think has higher CTR? The one on top has 4x the CTR of the bottom one. It's obvious it would win a heated thumbnail battle. The learning? Get a good thumbnail designer.

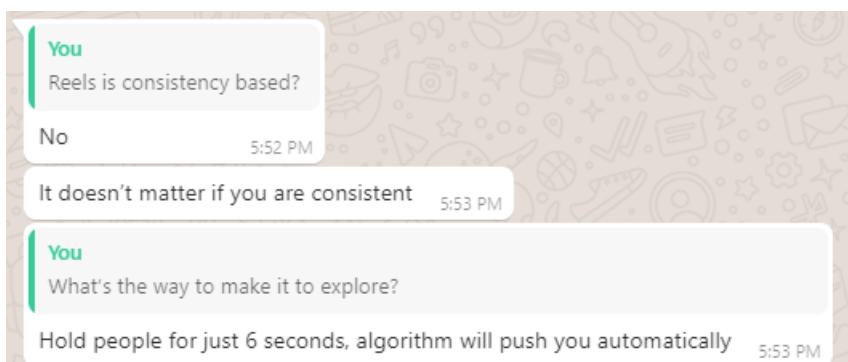


- Clickbait with a great thumbnail and title, but also keep retention (watch time) very high. The best way to think about it is to make your video less boring.
- Again, you should private or delete your non performing videos. I know that sounds ridiculous, but it is what it is. You don't want people seeing your low watch time videos.
- If you look at the engagement tab of any video's analyt-

ics, you'll notice where drop-offs happen. What you'll clearly notice is that maximum drop-off happens in the first 20 seconds. This is true for all YouTubers, small and big. Most drop-offs happen immediately.



- Mr. Beast has gone on record multiple times and said that he spends one entire day shooting the intro for his videos. He knows that the intro is the area with the highest drop-offs and puts immense focus here by capturing attention before a drop-off.
- Raj Shamani (1M+ followers on Instagram) has something similar to say about Instagram Reels:



- YouTuber and investor Garry Tan understands watch time and an exciting intro too:



Garry Tan 陈嘉兴
@garrytan

...

Most YouTube channels that struggle really overestimate the attention span of the viewer. I literally remove even half second pauses because you can lose people from that.

Cut videos until it hurts. Then you are done. (FWIW I don't think I even cut enough most of the time.)

9:47 AM · Dec 25, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

21 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 410 Likes



Tweet your reply

Reply



Garry Tan 陈嘉兴 @garrytan · Dec 25, 2020

...

Replies to @garrytan

I endured many months of very few views too. The first minute matters a lot. Sound too.

I am horribly embarrassed of my early stuff. I am pretty sure I will be embarrassed of my current stuff later

Improvement is possible through a combo of both consistency and iteration

11

4

165

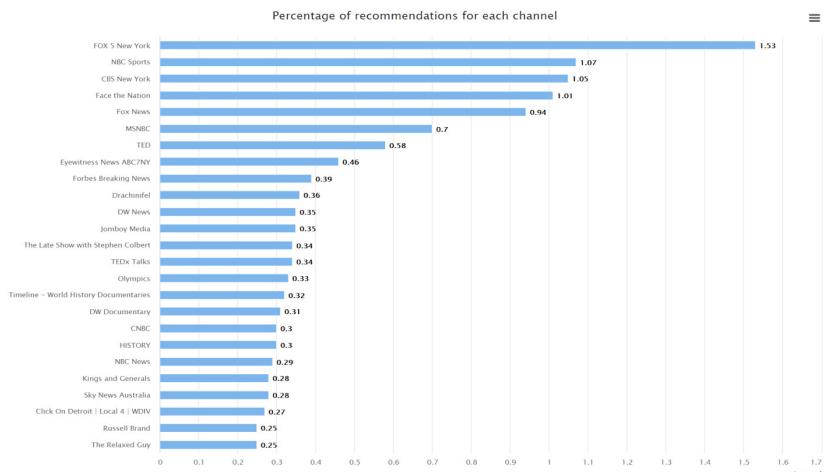
↑

- There's a difference between Watch Time and % of Video Watched. If you are putting up a 4 minute video and have 90% retention, that's probably less important than a 10 minute video with 60% retention. YouTube cares more about the total amount of time watched than the percentage of the video watched.

- This is the main reason live streams aren't the greatest in the beginning if your goal is to be recommended often by YouTube. When live, it works well, but after the video is done, you have to mercilessly cut out the boring parts.
- But there is a flip side to this. Once you become a large creator, there is no better way to do retention than to go live. Live works best when you already have a large following. People come for your personality, so live is a great format to keep your existing followers engaged. You essentially become a late night TV show.
- AlgoTransparency.org notes which YT channels get the largest number of recommendations and you can see the ones with strongest recommendations mimic live TV/news from the days of television. People probably watch this while eating dinner so have insane watch time and don't click away.

We monitor 800+ top information channels, including news channels, vloggers, and shows from across the political spectrum. Details on how we collect this data are available [here](#)

Most Recommended Channels on 07/26/2021:



- The reason I don't recommend livestreams to small creators is that it doesn't work until the audience fully trusts and knows you. If you're small, livestreams are the worst way to grow. If you're large, there's no better way to earn massive watch time and become a dinner-time brand.
- A lot of top creators ask new creators to "stay consistent". Actually, consistency is not what drives recommendations. It's the fact that the YouTube algorithm loves recommending **fresh** content. And you can only be fresh 24/7 if you're putting up content regularly. In fact, posting fresh pieces of content gives you yet another signal that is in your control when it comes to the algorithm — this is the path for the user to discover your old pieces of content. By first watching one of your fresh videos, the recommender starts showing them your older videos.
- This clarification on consistency also applies to creator burnout. Creators are afraid of taking breaks because they think that consistency drives the algorithm and they must create frequently in order to be recommended more to their own audience. This is not true — YouTubers can take breaks. It's just that their channels might not grow as fast during the break and their audience might forget them. The algorithm isn't explicitly penalizing them. Susan Wojcicki, the CEO of YouTube, has gone on record very recently to say that creators aren't penalized for taking breaks.

YouTube CEO to Burned-Out Creators: Data Shows It's OK to Take a Break From Posting

By Todd Spangler ▾



FilmMagic for YouTube

After the pandemic, there was a lot of new content put up on YouTube, most of which was noise and copypastas from other channels. Recently, one change YouTube made with their algorithm is to show more content from authoritative sources. If YouTube “trusts” you (this doesn’t depend on your channel size, it depends on your Google Knowledge Graph), then it is more likely to show your content. News channels benefit most from this. For most of you, this might not be a controllable factor in the beginning.

Our thoughts

I personally believe the YouTube ecosystem is becoming the next Hollywood. Not because of the fame of creators, but because getting in is becoming very difficult. Five years ago, producing good content with a clickbait thumbnail was good enough to get views and subs. To get in today, you have to collaborate with a bigger YouTuber and get the CF algorithm and their audience on your side. Just like Hollywood, if you know

someone, you have a higher chance of getting in.

YouTube was always seen as a platform that democratized fame, where anyone could get popular. But that is slowly fading away — nowadays it's hard to get big without the blessings of the higher ups.

The channel Prakhar Ke Pravachan is a great example of this concept, growing from 0 to 100k subscribers by collaborating with everyone from Shwetabh Gangwar (1.24M subscribers) to MC Stan. Combined with clickbait thumbnails and high retention content, plenty of roasts on popular YouTubers, Prakhar has played to the algorithm's sweet spot.

Eventually the main ways to grow while starting out on social platforms will either be to collaborate with a bigger YouTuber, or make a diss track with their name in the title, just to get the CF system rolling. As Nikita Bier on Twitter summarized it:



Nikita Bier @nikitabier · May 8

...

Twitter is a lot like prison. The best move on your first day is to pick a fight with the biggest account on here.

68

146

2.2K



Even though his tweet was meant for Twitter, it works much the same on YouTube.

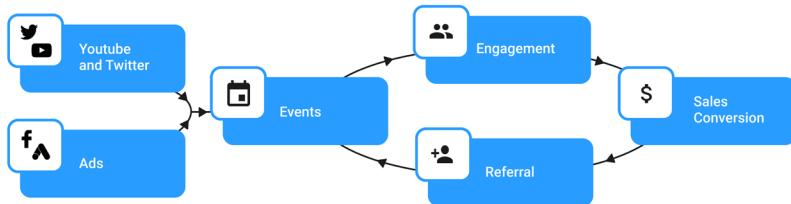
This change in social platforms has already begun. This is why I personally feel that we are in the twilight era of YouTube rather than the beginning. Even though existing creators are about to make 10x more money in the next few years, the small ones are finding it impossible to grow on this platform.

If you want to win, you need to play to the tune of the algorithm.

6

THE SCENES COMMUNITY ENGINE

Let's get back to communities. This chapter is the core thesis behind how the best Scenes communities have grown. It's how we grew our own Discord community as well. We call it the Scenes Community engine.



First, you need a top of the funnel. It could be YouTube, it could be ads, it could be sponsoring other newsletters or creators. We've put down an entire list of methods to generate top of the funnel. There are plenty more, but these are the popular methods most people employ to get people into their community. We'll dive deeper into these later in our chapter on Growth.

- Social media ads
- Targeted ad networks (Carbon, NFTNow)
- Youtube/Tiktok/Twitter content
- Sponsor newsletters
- Sponsor creators
- Pay affiliates

- Websites like Reddit, Product Hunt
- Sponsor podcasts
- Your own podcast/newsletter
- Link on your own product
- Email list
- Physical stuff (posters, events, etc)
- Text messages to a list

Where should I send people?

With products, you always send people to “Download app” or “Visit this website”. With communities, redirecting people to a forum or a chat they aren’t familiar with is a recipe for disaster. Events are a better landing page – this is also why events have been inbuilt into Scenes despite how hard and expensive it is to do so. You want people to be able to set a reminder for the event via Google Calendar.

Here's a pro-tip: If people just get an email before the event, it may just go into promos. A "Set Reminder" on a calendar app won't go into promos. Scenes allows you to set a reminder via Google Calendar by default because we understood how important it was for us while running our community.

Events are both the lifeblood of a community, and their landing page. Stop directing new community members to a chat or a tutorial, please direct them to an event or a webinar where

there's a human showing them around. Since events can't be a daily occurrence (exhausting to do + overwhelming for existing users + hard to plan), you'll have to plan out your ads/inbound channels over the week for a weekend event. We did this on repeat for **eleven** straight months, and have done this for multiple clients – it works like clockwork.

Once a person has been through a 30 min - 1 hour event, they will feel some level of familiarity with what your community and your mission.

When I first joined AIESEC in college (a student community), the speaker at the introductory event bombarded us with strange words that fascinated me. It was interesting enough to me that I wanted to be part of this weird new world. Always make sure you use a lexicon that's unique to your community in your introductory event, even if it seems a bit confusing to new users. This is necessary to create some level of mystique.

We also had a tutorial which we linked people to at the end of an event. Never use this video like this one as a landing page.

Right after the event, people should also be quickly briefed about using the chat and other asynchronous interaction channels. This creates lots of engagement until the next event.

Once engagement has been secured (we've set benchmarks for what "successful" is for community engagement in later chapters), you can proceed to give roles to engaged members and focus on monetization and referrals. We'll dive deeper into

referrals in our chapter on referrals and the next one on CMF.

Although you can run this sequence on any platform, Scenes has inbuilt mechanisms to make this flywheel work. You'll need to stitch Zoom + Discord + a forum tool + Notion/Google Docs at minimum to make this happen. Scenes is a one-and-done, and is optimized for mobile, where 80% of your initial traffic and most of your recurring engagement is going to come from. This isn't a plug as much as it is us saving you plenty of time and migraines.

THE SCENES COMMUNITY ENGINE

When a startup raises their first round of capital, their goal is to find product-market-fit (PMF). Basically, a market need for what they're selling. People define PMF in many ways, but I found this tweet to be the best definition:



I want to rewrite this tweet for communities:

“Community Market Fit (CMF) is gravity. When you’re far, it feels like you’re grasping blindly in the dark. You’re not sure where to go. The closer you get, the stronger the pull. You start feeling acceleration. You’re seeing more people join your events, your conversations, and more conversions to paid users. There’s no feeling quite like it.”

“The center of the gravity well is narrative. Your distance from the center is how well your community appeals to the ideals of the user. As you get closer to the perfect narrative, you should feel the pull of members joining and engaging, accelerating your progress.”

In reality, there are benchmarks that we've set for communities. If you're close to CMF, you can simply look up our benchmarks table.

Remember the engine we spoke about? Let's push some numbers to it.

Let's say you spend \$1, let's call this initial CAC (ICAC). Let's say you have an attendee joining an event at this cost. Let's say 1 in 2 event attendees convert and join your community. That's a cost of \$2 for a new community member. Now let's say 10% of your members are active at least once a month, even if that engagement is simply lurking around the community. Essentially, it costs you \$5 for an active, engaged member. You might want to use the referral math presented here:

$$k = i * c$$

where:

k = viral factor,

i = number of invites sent out by each member to someone outside your community

c = conversion rate of each invite

If you can keep a K factor of >0.5, your cost of acquisition per engaged member is now halved, to \$2.5. Remember, this is the cost for an engaged member, not just a member. Engaged members are almost always going to use your product over a competitor's. Now reverse the math, find out your customer lifetime value (LTV), and work backwards to find your maximum allowable ICAC.

You know you've hit CMF when your ICAC < LTV, allowing for some increase in ICAC over time.

With our own Discord community, we ran hundreds of giveaways, contests, private events, just for folks who were willing to invite other members. Don't underestimate the power of users inviting other users; fast growth startups like Dropbox and Clubhouse grew their user base primarily because of referrals.

This is also why I recommend ALL communities to start invite-only. Cool factor aside, viral factor (k) sharply goes up when the only way to get into a community is by invite. Paradoxically, making a community open makes people less likely to join it and refer others, at least in the initial days.

More on referrals on the next page.

8

REFERRALS

There are plenty of creative, hard working people out there who never do well at life or business, and that is primarily because they underestimate the power and influence of other people. They never set out to utilize it and prefer to do everything by themselves. In this chapter, I want to talk about a hack that uses other people's power in business: whether that be communities, apps, services, or physical products. This hack is invaluable for running communities, because it significantly lowers CACs.

I'm also going to let you in on a secret — very few large companies have achieved massive scale through traditional techniques, especially consumer companies. While they all use advertising, influencer marketing, etc.; all of these techniques have large costs of acquisition and are used to "amplify" a technique that most people don't even realize exists.

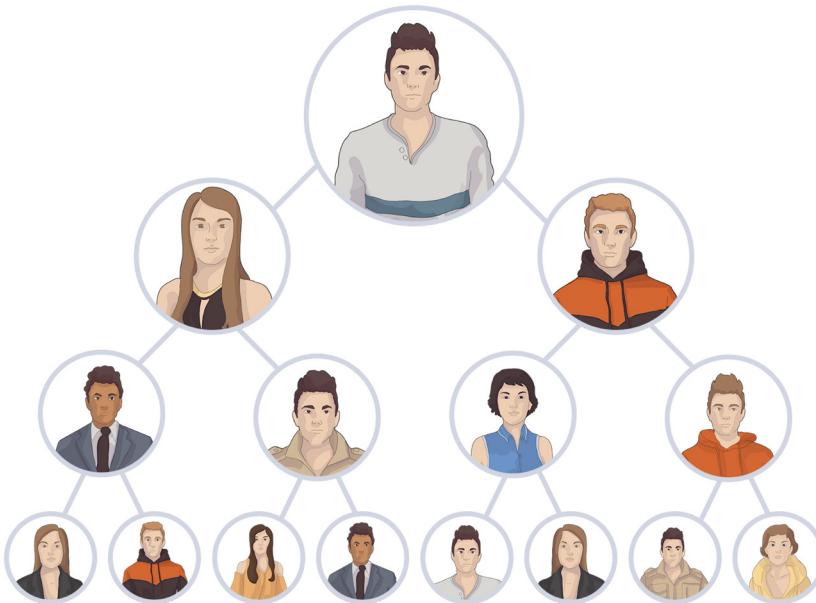
That technique is the darling of Silicon Valley growth experts, and is one I'm going to share with you here.

The story of referrals

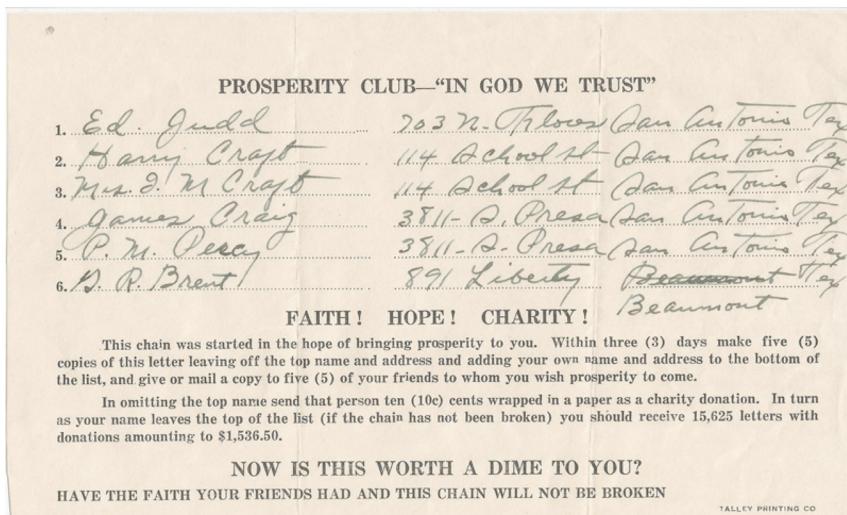
You've probably heard of the nutrition company, Herbalife. It receives a ton of hate for using a technique called MLM, which stands for multilevel marketing. Despite having Ronaldo as a brand sponsor, Herbalife does not grow primarily through

marketing or influencer deals. It grows because per-transaction, financially motivated people are better salespeople than large influencers, when engaged correctly.

Here is how MLM works:



One person sells to two. Each of those two sell to a few more, and so on. Basically, you create an infinite chain of people that keep selling, and each level earns a commission from all levels below it. To understand MLM and referrals, we need to go back to its roots.



In 1935, a strange phenomenon had begun. People would randomly receive a letter, with 5 names on it.

- The letter asked recipients to send ten cents to the person in the first slot
- Then remove that person from the list
- Move the other four remaining entries up one slot
- Put their own name and contact information in the last slot
- Forward the letter to someone they know

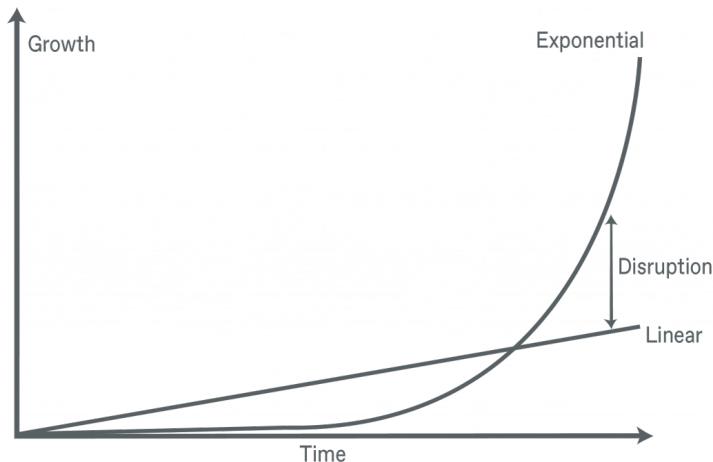
When your name reaches the top of the list, you would receive 15,625 letters with donations amounting to \$1,562.50. (5^6 —the number of names on the list—totals up to 15,625 letters.)

These letters became a big racket in the 20th century and had to eventually be banned by the Post Office system entirely!

We see a version of these letters via Whatsapp forwards that parents send their kids every morning. When you take a simple Good Morning image and forward it to 50 people that

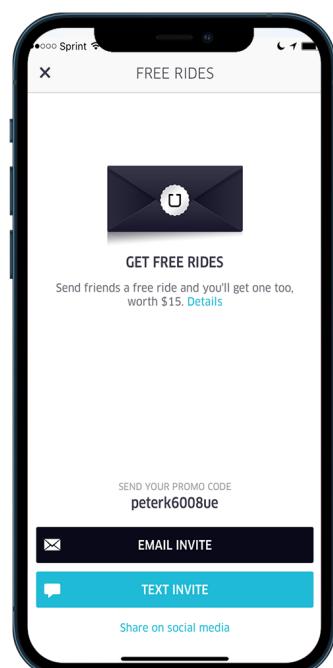
you think might like it, there's a very good chance that the exponential laws of mathematics will kick in.

The message might end up in more than hundreds of thousands of Whatsapp inboxes!



Advertising follows linear curves. Suppose each install costs you one dollar — that is going to remain true even at scale (we're ignoring ad inflation costs here). Unlike linear curves, exponential curves can get massive with zero costs.

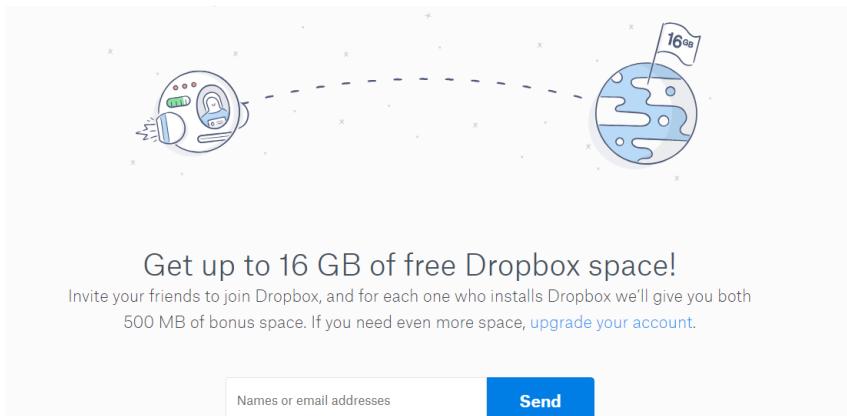
By massive, I mean really really massive! Believe it or not, almost every large company grew like this. Let's go through a few examples with some famous apps that grew via referrals:



Uber

Uber had a 12x ROI from referrals. Their referral scheme shown above is just an app version of the chain letter we discussed before. It would be wise to read its double sided referral case study: <https://viral-loops.com/blog/uber-referral-program-case-study/>

Dropbox



Dropbox reached 700M users after failing at advertising and other common techniques. Referrals made the company reach their current impressive scale!

Mx Takatak

MX Takatak is India's version of TikTok. Unlike the other apps we've spoken about, Takatak just flat out gives you money for referrals. While Uber gives you rides and Dropbox gives you storage space, Takatak has nothing other than money to give. It still works!

In the past, people used to refer 2-3 of their friends, so the

chain didn't have too much steam. These days, even YouTube influencers post about Takatak on their channels, therefore starting off their "chain" at 1000s of users! Even though Takatak gives you just 2 rupees (\$0.025) for a successful referral; because of the law of exponential numbers, you could end up making thousands of dollars, especially if your chain starts off at 1000 users!

It's mind blowing how exponential curves work.



The coronavirus

Your latest exposure to exponential curves has probably been your friendly neighborhood Coronavirus.

Last year (and before the first wave in the US), @balajis on Twitter kept talking about the Coronavirus and how the case rate looked like an exponential curve rather than a linear one. Most people laughed at him, referencing the absolute number: "Oh, it's only 200 cases a day".

People familiar with product startups know that exponential curves are nothing to laugh at.

What can we learn from virologists?

So how do virologists measure the infectiousness of a new virus?

They do this using a value called R₀, pronounced “R naught, known as the reproduction number. For example, if a disease has an R₀ of 10, then a single infectious person gives the disease to 10 other people.

Three possibilities exist depending on the R₀ value:

If $R_0 < 1$, one infection causes less than one other infection. The disease will die out quickly.

If $R_0 = 1$, one existing infection causes one new infection. The disease here follows something like a linear curve.

If $R_0 > 1$, one existing infection causes more than one new infection. This will likely lead to an epidemic.

In startup marketing, we have our own factor, called the K factor. It's basically a ripoff of R₀. We went over this in the last chapter, but we'll go through it again. The formula is simple:

i = invites sent per customer

c = conversion rate in percentage of each invite (i.e, you could be invited but not click the link, so it is not counted)

$k = i * c$

If $k < 1$, one user brings on less than one user. The app or community won't grow.

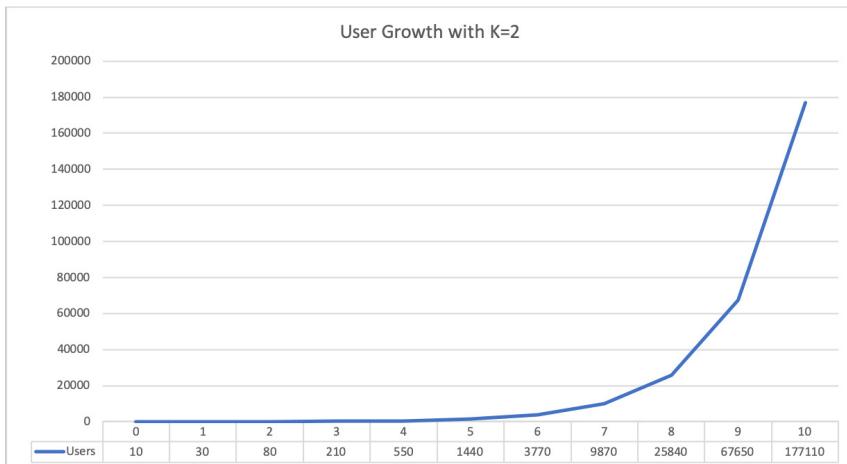
If $k = 1$, one user brings just one other user. The app or community doesn't grow fast.

If $k > 1$, viral app/community.

Most businesses should try to get to a K factor of >1 . Even successful communities will cap out at around 0.5.

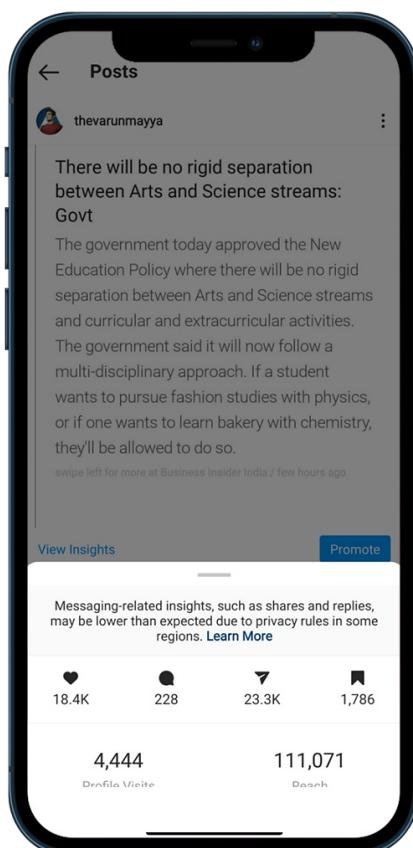
Check this graph out below. Look at what happens after 10 cycles of invites with a K factor of 2. The app starts innocently at a number of 10. From the 1st to 6th cycle the app seems to look extremely linear, despite the fact that it is exponential.

But after 10 cycles of referrals, the number is 1,77,110! Do you now see how crazy referral growth is?



Here's a viral post from long ago on my Instagram showing you the share value. What has happened here is that most people shared this post will end up re-sharing it. That cycle continues in huge numbers!

Like I said in the last chapter, the same thing recently happened with Clubhouse. Even though people thought that its invite system prevented users from using the app, in reality it grew the platform.



So, how do you use referrals in your business?

A long time before we put up YouTube videos, we ran a product agency. We used to employ a little trick whenever it came to billing time – we'd give our clients an option: “Refer another business to hire developers from us, and we'll give you a MacBook as a personal gift if they convert.”

This turned out to be an awesome technique, because we not only employed referrals, we also gave people a **personal incentive**. We could have easily given their business a MacBook, but the decision maker is not going to care about it because he doesn't personally get the MacBook. Even if he gave you referrals, he won't care about conversions. When we flipped things around and gave people rewards, they would usually put in a good word with the other businesses they're friends with because there is a personal incentive to the referral.

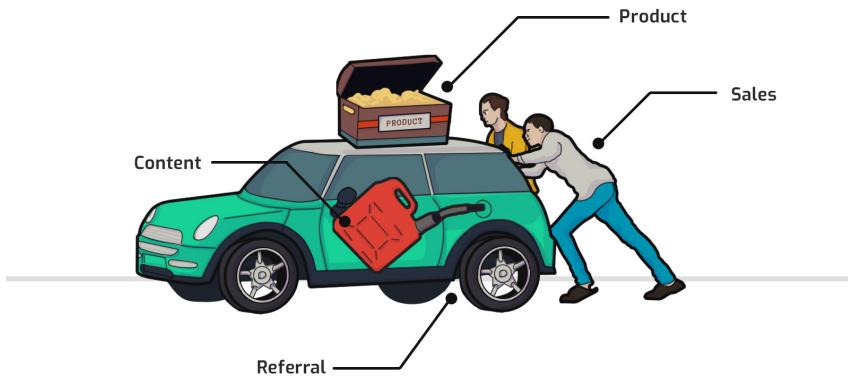
Remember, $k = i * c$

While the value of i was good, you also need to focus on improving c – hence we gave the individual a MacBook rather than give the business a discount. Nobody would care about a 1000\$ discount if they don't personally run the business. But a personal MacBook? That is tempting :)

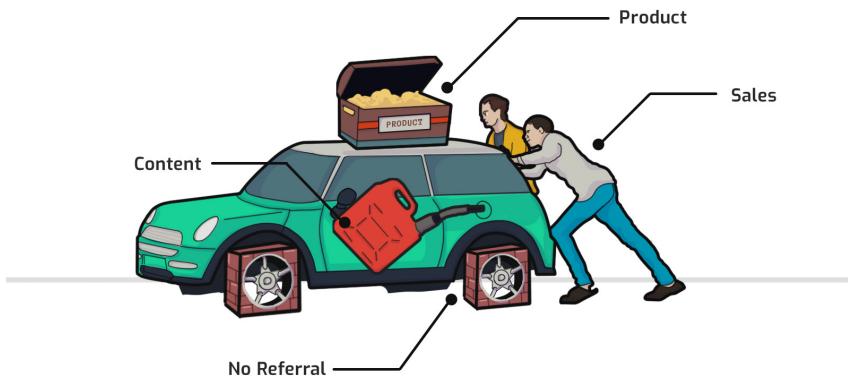
Another suggestion I have is to utilize tools rather than do referrals verbally. It gives people a simple way to make invites rather than email: Tools like <https://viral-loops.com/> and <https://referralrock.com/> made this simple for apps by allowing people to share a link to their friends for referrals. Scenes has inbuilt referrals and a coin system so these aren't required anymore.

How to think about referrals

With communities, referrals are like the wheels of a car you're building. Here's an image of what your community should look like:



A community without referrals is like a car with bricks for wheels.



No matter how much you push this car above using sales or content or advertisements, it simply isn't going to move far, because it cannot continue to generate momentum.

Believe it or not, in Silicon Valley, ads and other techniques are simply a method to amplify referrals. Andrew Chen from A16Z has a great resource on the origin of referrals, and we learned some of the concepts in this chapter from his writing.

PART THREE

GETTING STARTED



9

DOES SIZE MATTER?

“I really really think we should start investing resources into building our online community.”

“How much?”

“Well, we need a dedicated community operations role, budget for goodies, giveaways, and some new tools to host events and boost engagement.”

“How soon can we start seeing results? How big can we get our online community?”

“Well actually, I think we should keep it small. And don’t expect to see any results for a while...”

(Blank stare)

Whether you’re the CEO, CMO or CFO, you’ve probably come across a similar conversation and wondered if your community person has any idea how businesses are run.

You’ve probably even questioned their capabilities and it may sound like they’re just trying to escape the accountability radar.

But the harsh truth is that they’ve actually got a point. And this can be quite a hard pill to swallow.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, I want you to stop looking at community as just another marketing campaign. Like any other important part of your business, you should ideally allocate a separate community team and budget.

For the first few quarters, your community is not going to make any business sense in the traditional way we think of return of investment. Community managers get a lot of flak. Most of their efforts by design will go unnoticed and they typically won't get any credit for building a small community.

As a community builder, **I urge you to resist the temptation to scale too early.**

Now you might think — “*why are these folks telling us to think small when they've just spent the first few chapters telling us how big they got*”

The word “community” is often used as a euphemism for users or audience. The first step to building a community is grounding it in a more appropriate definition. There's a difference between opting into true engagement and passive use.

If you're trying to discern whether you have a community on your hands or merely a user-base, ask yourself: “*Are these people going to buy my product or help me build a better one?*”

And if they're not, then it isn't a community.

In our own experience — we resisted the urge to scale until we found CMF (Community Market Fit). And sometimes we added intentional friction to stall our community from growing out of control.

Off the Ledger (OTL)

Airbase (a spend management platform) launched “Off The Ledger” as a strictly protected no-sales zone for CFOs and controllers, where members ask questions, give advice, network, and keep up to date on what's happening in finance and

accounting. Paradoxically, they introduced friction into their onboarding to ensure quality of community members. They intentionally keep their community small and exclusive.

The screenshot shows a Slack channel named '# general' with 1700 members. The channel has a dark purple background and a sidebar with various categories like Threads, Mentions & reactions, Channels, and Direct messages. A message from a user named 'Finance and Accounting Manager' says 'Such an incredible community!'. Another message from 'VP of Finance' says 'I find OTL incredibly useful. It's allowed me to network and ask questions to a group of people I would never have been able to curate on my own.' A third message from 'CFO' says 'I'm in a local CFO council and there is zero collaboration like we have here.' A fourth message from 'Controller' says 'Love this slack group, it was much needed. Great resource.' At the bottom, there is a text input field with placeholder text 'Join OTL to participate in the conversation' and a set of rich text editing icons.

They have a simple application process to ensure that only finance and accounting professionals are brought into the community. Despite being a market leader in spend management software and having raised around 91 million, Airbase keeps their community small with around 3000 members. It's still considered the #1 community for accounting professionals despite these small numbers.

This isn't a mistake.

As a community builder, you too want to optimize for depth rather than breadth. You want as many members of your community to fit into your template of your ideal customer profile (ICP).

The further you steer away from this ICP, the less likely you're to benefit from their presence. Instead it's more likely to hurt your community building efforts because your active members are going to feel put off by this lack of quality.

If you want your community members to share and engage openly, you want to first feel comfortable around **who** their sharing that information with. This is applicable whether you're running a community like Alcoholics Anonymous, a Cancer Support Community or a professional network of doctors.

Fundamental Attribution Error

In professional communities, you're always apprehensive about other people's impression of you. There's a cognitive bias called fundamental attribution error where human beings tend to jump to conclusions about another person's capability and personality depending on one of their actions.

Cognitive Bias



But if you were to act or react the same way, you would shove it under the carpet or “understand”.

The fundamental attribution error exists because of how people perceive the world. While you have some idea of your character, underlying motivations, and situational factors that affect you, you rarely know everything that's going on with other people. In a community of similar people, members tend to relate to other people and therefore believe they have a strong understanding of the other people's character and motivations.

To summarize, you need to resist the urge to scale prematurely, push-back against stakeholder pressure and maintain the composure to keep your community tight-knit.

10

COMMUNITY NARRATIVE

We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.

When we hear a story that resonates with us, our levels of a hormone called oxytocin increase. Oxytocin is a *feel good* hormone that boosts our feelings of trust, compassion, and empathy. It motivates us to work with others and positively influences our social behavior.

Having a community narrative, a common vision and mission, is a vital ingredient for a successful community.

The Why

Figure out the flavor of your community by zeroing in on your why.

A common misstep is that the motivations for starting a community in the first place are often muddled. “Our competitor is investing a lot in community” or “Our investors think we should start one” or “I want to go viral” aren’t good enough reasons. If you’re starting a community to check off a box, I can guarantee it’s going to fall flat.

Community isn’t one-size-fits-all. You need to figure out what the community would uniquely mean for your organization and what your organization means for your community

members. It doesn't mean that your community narrative has to be loft and perfectly aligned to your business value either.

Ask yourself:

1. What motivates our customers?
2. What motivates our most passionate community members?

The value of community lies within where the incentives align.

Thriving communities demand a shared purpose, an answer to the question "Why are we coming together?". Your purpose needs to be something that your people will want to work on with you, not a selfish or one-sided idea hatched by a single leader.

In order to make sure that your community purpose is grounded in your people's needs, and that it expresses what you can accomplish together, consider:

- What do my people need more of?
- What's the change we desire?
- What's the problem only we can solve together?
 - a. **Make it purposeful.** Tie the activity back to why your community teamed up in the first place. What goal or outcome becomes possible only when this specific group of people gets together?
 - b. **Make it participatory.** Don't just talk at people. You gathered them because they're passionate, just like you! Give them the chance to contribute to the purpose you share.
 - c. **Make it repeatable.** Relationships need time to

flourish, and it'll take a few cycles for some folks to warm up and begin actively contributing. Design the first activity with the intent to repeat it with your people over and over.

The inescapable truth is that you'll have to exceed expectations with your core activity if you want people to show up and keep showing up.

This doesn't mean that you need to invest lots of money in a flashy experience. Instead, do your best to create an undeniably valuable shared experience.

The Enemy

But what's a hero without a villain? A Goliath to your David. A Joker to your Batman. A pineapple to your pizza. When you are drowning, everyone comes together into a small lifeboat and pitches a hand. Having a common enemy or shared adversarial experience unites people.

WallStreetBets or r/wallstreetbets is a subreddit where participants discuss stock and option trading. It has become notable for aggressive trading strategies, unique jargon, and for playing a major role in the GameStop short squeeze that caused losses for several US short sellers in 2021.



For the members of this subreddit, their community was the staging ground for a populist uprising - a historic reshuffling of power in the world of finance, one that gave the middle classes the ability to challenge Big Money interests and allowed common man to amass life-changing wealth.

It took the stock market and media by storm and nearly bankrupted institutional investors who had shorted the stock of GameStop (a struggling video game retailer) in the process.

The community member's disdain of Wall Street elitism and the promise of free money brought a million new members to WallStreetBets in 2020.

Those who joined were people who saw their parents lose their life savings, maybe lost their house. They no longer had interest in generating steady returns of 10 percent each year. They wanted to get rich fast.

We're not here to debate on the correctness of their work, but the strong narrative definitely helped propel a movement

that is literally changing financial regulations. More importantly, it helped the community grow and attract more people to the core mission.

One last tip to add here for brand based communities is that if you're running a health and fitness brand selling protein bars, create and name the community around health and fitness rather than [Protein Bar Company Name] Community.

People associate great value to community identity and they don't want to be simply sold to. Your customers want to be invested in your brand beyond the product purchase; they want a relationship not a transaction. Your community efforts will then as a consequence provide an outlet for bonding over mutual love of a product and narrative.

11

COMMUNITY DESIGN

When designing your community, it's not about the features you choose to opt in or out but rather how those features combine to deliver the ideal experience for your community members. You are *designing the experience not the platform*. Oftentimes, the experience is as much about the members that are active inside the community as the channels or the tools. An anime community on 4chan will always be far more expletive filled than a similar community on reddit, simply because of the kind of people that go to the two places.

As a founder or community builder, you shouldn't try to use a template that worked for others. Like playing with lego blocks, you should design your community with and around your community members – it's not a technology problem, it's a people + technology problem.

Often, your members will just tell you what they need. They will provide you with the perspective you need to create something that feels like it was theirs all along.



The IKEA effect is a cognitive bias in which consumers place a disproportionately high value on products they partially created.

Setup

Visualize this. Imagine your community to be like a house and your planning on hosting a house party. Your channels are like the different rooms in your house. Imagine you see a bidet in the middle of the living room. It's distracting and feels odd. You have to find the right way to categorize different channels into their appropriate categories.

We recommend using a channel based community platform because new users prefer familiarity. The user interface needs to feel intuitive. Slack and Discord made the concept of channels very popular.

You can be innovative and still maintain familiarity and intuitiveness. Surprise but don't overwhelm. When community members say they like surprises and innovation what they mean is they want to see something that they already know well in new light.

Theme and Branding

No two communities are alike (at least they shouldn't be). The mark of a great community design is one which highlights the character of your community. Take your time and research the community. Its character should be the main staple in your design.

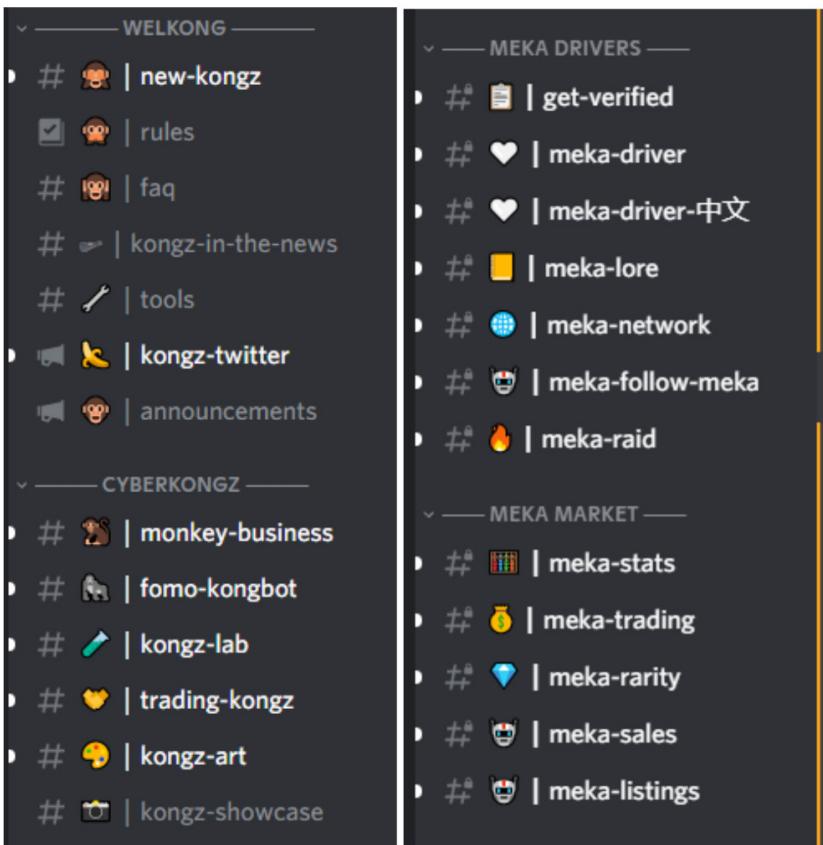
Remember we spoke about that bidet in the middle of the living room? Well how about a giant octopus in the middle of a computer hardware store.

That's exactly what the Fry's Electronics community did at their hardware stores. But in this case - it didn't feel odd, because that's what they're brand stood for.



It would in fact feel odd to walk into a Fry's Electronics shop and not see something wacky and playful every corner.

You should customise your channels and add brand elements whenever possible.



They say a true brand is recognised when you don't have to see a logo.

Walk into an Apple Store and even without the iPhones and logos, you can recognise the black and white sleek design of an Apple store.

Being able to customise your community branding and having brand colours that seamlessly sync with your website or product branding is important.

One of the drawbacks of using Facebook Groups/Discord/Slack etc for your community building is the lack of customisability when it comes to community branding.

Scenes users can edit the colors, fonts, and button styles of their community. Enterprise users of Scenes have complete control of CSS.

New User Experience (NUX)

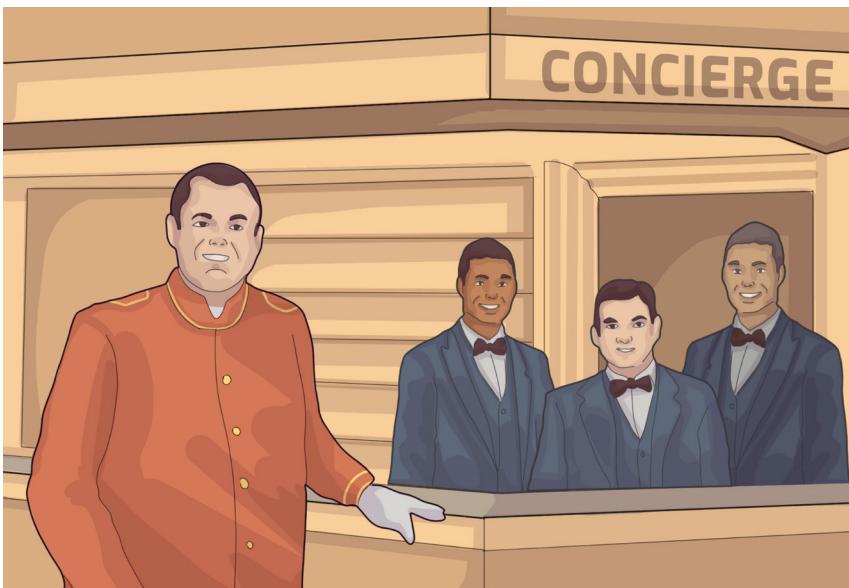
Imagine walking into a hotel and the first thing you see is a used room which ruffled bedsheets and bottles of wine on the floor.

Similarly, opening a community stuffed with a never ending list of channels can overwhelm new users.

Set the stage for your community members to slowly commit to new changes and surprises.



What you want is a warm welcome and Concierge.

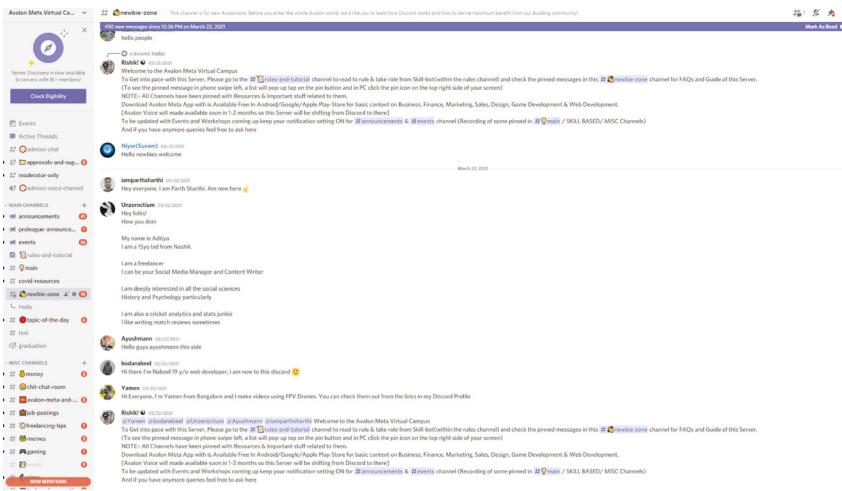


You want to be ushered into your seat.



 **newbie-zone** This channel is for new Avalonians. Before you enter the whole Avalon world, we'd like you to learn how Discord works and how to derive maximum benefit from our budding community!

Our community had a dedicated Newbie-zone to do the same:



Remember that a lot of members are going to give you feedback and suggestions. You absolutely do not have the time to deploy everything, so be judicious. A combination of your intuition and user feedback will guide you.

Channels and Categories

The best way to structure your community is to pick 3-4 high level categories, and structure channels under them. If you are a finance community and have “Trading”, “Crypto”, and “Investing” as subtopics, then by all means, create these as high level categories. Under them, you should try and create at least one synchronous channel and one asynchronous channel.

Below is a simple community structure. It has a global Introductions channel, three categories, and some channels under each. Notice how each category has the same types (and similarly named even) of channels repeating. This improves familiarity. People feel they know the entire structure of your community simply because of the fact that they can predict what

the next category is going to consist of.

TIM'S FINANCE GROUP

Introductions

Trading

Introductions

Trading Resources

Trading Chat

Trading Forum

Crypto

Introductions

Crypto Resources

Crypto Chat

Crypto Forum

Investing

Introductions

Investing Resources

Investing Chat

Investing Forum

Don't go overboard with too many channels or you risk cognitive overload.

Asking for Feedback

As you design your community, ask for feedback regularly. “Creating” a community is not a one-time event, it’s always a work in progress.

Rather than building your community in isolation, you have direct input into what your members care about. The communities that succeed have always been the ones that are closest to their people, often to the point of being driven by their members. Being member-obsessed means deeply understanding their problems and what motivates them, not just how they interact with your community.

Note that your members aren’t always able to articulate what they want when they sit down with you. But when you simply watch conversation happen, you can spot patterns that keep coming up over and over again.

Designing your community experience is a continued process that changes as your community grows and develops. Some of the best communities take years to reach their final form.

12

ONBOARDING

First impressions are critical to the future of the community. Make it easy for members to find insights they need.

Most communities do a terrible job at ‘knowledge management’ of their existing networks. The same questions are asked over and over again, which frustrates and discourages people from contributing because they know their wisdom will be forgotten again in a few days.

Scenes has over invested in building the technical infrastructure to make search, content tagging and indexing incredibly easy. But you also need to hire an editorial, community, and moderation team to manually surface the best content to community members.

When we started using Discord, the platform was still branded as a streaming, chat service for gamers. The interface was difficult to navigate and we needed to have a “Guide to Using Discord”.

Since Discord didn’t have a space for a Get Started Guide on the platform itself, we directed them to a separate landing page. One important thing to note here is that this wouldn’t be the first place a user landed. That would be an event. This resource would be the second.

Scenes allows you to do this natively through static pages and the resources channel.



The image shows a promotional graphic for the Avalon Meta Virtual Campus. At the top, there's a navigation bar with a logo, the word "Meta", and "Pro Leagues". Below the title, there's a subtitle: "The world's first-ever Digital University, now on Discord." The central focus is a laptop screen displaying a grid of various Discord channels, each with a thumbnail image. To the right of the laptop is a smartphone showing the same interface. A purple light effect surrounds the devices, suggesting a virtual or digital environment. At the bottom, there's a callout box with text about the server's variety and a guide to navigating it.

The first time you launch the Discord Server (Avalon Meta Virtual Campus), you'll find a huge variety of elements which can be a bit overwhelming.

This guide will help you navigate through the Discord ecosystem and through that gain maximum benefit from being a member of the Avalon Meta Virtual Campus.

You want to spoon-feed your members till they get their AHA! moment. Once they find that, they'll come back for more. You want to direct them to places they would most likely find their AHA! moment. And get them there quickly.

3. Steps to Get Started



#RULES

Follow the community rules and guidelines.



#NEWBIE-ZONE

Spend time here till you get upto pace.



SKILL-BASED CHANNELS

Be a part of the one that you like or as many as you're into.

If you get stuck or still have any questions, reach out to us at the #newbie-zone
Our community is always there to help!

See you on the other side!

[Explore Now](#)

Visit the Avalon Meta Virtual Campus

One tip here is to constantly look through your community for repeated questions that you can compile into the FAQ resource. You can also consider making an intro video like the one we've shown you before:



A guide to use Avalon Discord University

17K views • 1 year ago

 Varun Mayya

Join at bit.ly/avalonuniversitydiscord.

13

FOUNDING MEMBERS

It takes many months to build a high quality community and get to a level of traction that makes the community self-sustainable. Until then, it's you and a bunch of founding members who drive 100% of discussion. Finding those founding members is key in keeping the community afloat until it hits critical mass. You simply need 5-6 people who will form the layer of connective tissue between members of your community: they're the reason people show up everyday.

The Head of Community

Most founders consider community something to add on as an afterthought, post finding product/market fit.

Hence in most startups, the Head of Community is an over-worked underpaid marketing intern who's been elevated to the role of a community manager.

However, you've got to have founder involvement in the early days of your community efforts. During the early process, as the founder you must serve as the de facto Head of Community before eventually passing along the baton to your head of community. Even from a hiring viewpoint, you're unlikely to find someone with enough skin in the game (and hence patience) to build a community for you. And outsourcing? Prepare to waste a boatload of cash!

Back at our Avalon Army community, we didn't make our first community hire until nearly a year in to creating our Facebook Group and the Discord server. Hand it off once it gets really difficult. Later stage companies are different – you can afford to hire someone who has both the skill set and the drive (well paid for with VC capital or revenues) to build out a community for the company.

The Team

When you're considering building out your community team, think about the jobs-to-be-done.

- Content creation and curation
- Fostering social connectivity between members
- General community operations and analytics
- Moderation

I always recommend hiring from the community itself. A candidate with great cultural fit possesses something that is often times untrainable – the embodiment of your organization's values and the ability to mesh with the team. If they're a part of your community, it already ticks a few cultural check boxes your hiring department might have.

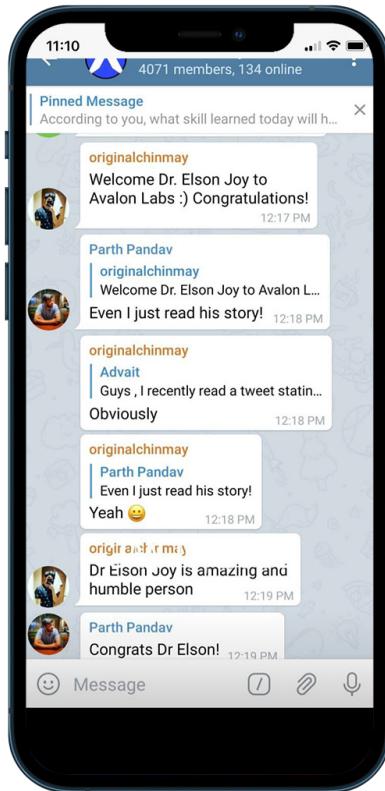
In the great hiring debate of skill-set vs cultural-fit, when it comes to the community team – culture holds the trump card.

It's also wise to bring along a few people from your other teams. Your founding team should be a mix of founding com-

munity members and participation from your product, customer support, marketing, etc.

We've gone in depth into hiring in the future sections of this book with case studies from how platforms like Reddit with over 100,000 communities (subreddits) hired and manage their community team.

Your founding members also make community worth it for you to keep going. When you see a handful of enthusiastic people, you give community a proper shot instead of a half-hearted effort.



Before joining the Avalon team and later transitioning into the Head of Community, I was one of Avalon's most active community members.

14

ROLES & HIERARCHY

If you've got your community design done right and identified your founding members, your community kindle will catch fire in no time.

Roles and hierarchy help direct the flame to ignite your community growth in an organized manner rather than pure chaos. Roles also highlight the who's who of your community. They give people a status worth working toward.

A defined community hierarchy is critical for group functioning. Effective communities require role differentiation along with rank differentiation.

Keep your roles and hierarchy simple because you can expect things to get complex as your community scales. It is better to create roles and hierarchy on a need basis rather than create the role and then find people to fill it.

I would recommend the following roles to start of with:

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Owner	The one who created the community and essentially holds the master credentials. This is usually a namesake role.
Administrators	They have god-mode access but their tasks are generally more technical.
Moderators	They are supposed to supervise and control users' activity, especially the content they publish.

Rank vs Status

Hierarchy refers to the ranking of members in your community based on the power and influence they exhibit. Rank and status are the two elements of hierarchy although they might not always go hand in hand.

Rank is a term often used to objectively refer to where one falls within the hierarchy, and is conceptually similar to the ordinal ranking of numerical values along a number line.

Status, on the other hand, can be measured through social opinion or reputation, and is generally associated with admiration and respect.

The words “status” and “rank” are often used interchangeably or in conjunction, as they both represent positions in a social hierarchy whereby some members are superior or subordinate to others. The closer you can match the relative positions of rank and status, the better for you as a community manager because there’s an implied connection between the structure of the community and the quality of the community.

Platforms like Discord will ask you to order your roles and assign ranks to each one in the order you specified.

Roles as Badges

You can also use roles and permissions as badges to felicitate and facilitate.

BADGE	DEFINTION
Founding Members	They are the backbone of your community. These are the people who give a damn about what you're building and believed in the community vision well before finding community-market fit.
Champions/ Heroes	They are your most active engagers and enablers.
Alumni	Members who were once active in the community but have now turned inactive.

Here are some tips:

a) You can get as creative as you like with how you name your community roles and badges. There can also be individuals who hold multiple roles and badges. Be prudent about who you assign your roles and badges to because once you do, it's usually harder to reverse the action. Reversing a role assignment will usually be met with backlash, even if it is just one person's status you are revoking. Remember, these roles and badges play a huge role in how rest of the community members view them in the status pyramid.

b) Keep in mind that communities are complex and they are not always intuitive. There are a lot of assumptions and intuitions that don't survive when you're actually on the ground building them. At the end of the day, you are dealing with people.

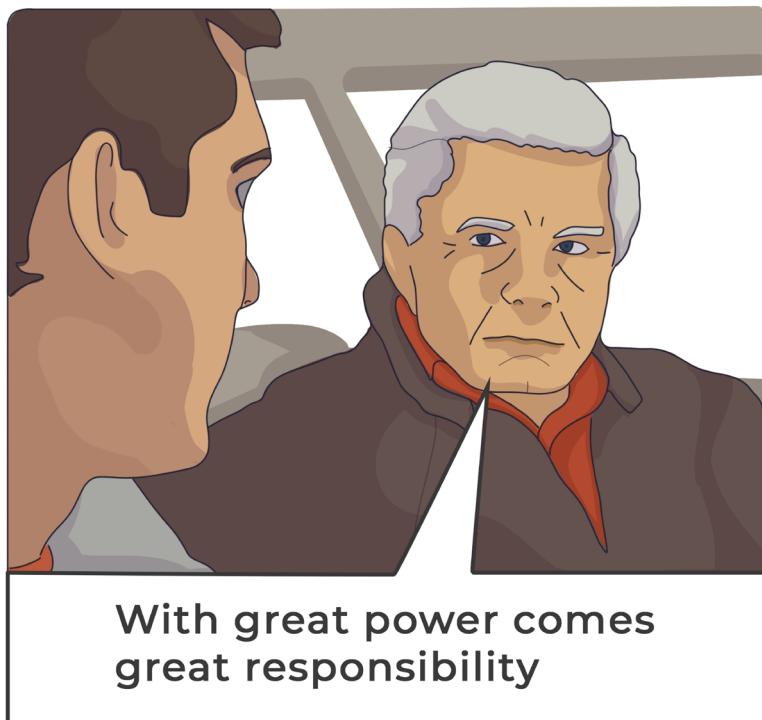
c) Promoting members gives them significant responsibilities. If they aren't prepared for the role or don't take it seriously, it could have adverse effects on your team. Even though the idea of roles is fictional, you must display that you take them very seriously, or you fail at your job.

d) Screen your members carefully and promote only those

you know and trust. For example, Administrators can kick almost anybody in the team. Moderators can kick out members. This leaves a lot of room for dirty politics if handled improperly. Kicking people for no reason might be a mean thing to do, but it's not against the rules. So, preventing it is up to you!

e) We can't retroactively change status dynamics in the event of one bad apple. Having an automated system in place for gamification and community currency is a great way to incentivize without human intervention (and thereby human error).

As Uncle Ben put it, “With great power, comes great responsibility.” Your role here is that of Uncle Ben’s: *to ensure that those with great power use it responsibly.*



**With great power comes
great responsibility**

We have an entire section dedicated to understanding status where we dive deep into gamification, roles and hierarchy in detail.

15

YOUR FIRST 10 MEMBERS

Your first ten members are an extension of your founding team. You however have to always keep in mind that they aren't your founding team. One key difference between your founding team and these super users is that they care much less about the business than the community.

In this chapter, I'll walk you through how to find your earliest members and get your community rolling.

Back to basics

The simplest way to find your earliest community members is to use existing community infrastructure within your business. As a business, you likely are collecting some form of data like email addresses of your customers or potential customers.

Email lists blogs and newsletters were some of the earliest forms of online audiences although they don't exactly fit the bill in terms of P2P communication. It's not hard to convert a few members from your email list into community members.

The image shows a screenshot of the Educative blog's website. At the top, there is a blue header bar with the 'educative' logo on the left, followed by 'ABOUT US' and 'START LEARNING' links. Below the header, a large title reads 'Join our community of readers. Announcing Educative's Blog Newsletter'. Underneath the title, a subtitle states 'The Educative Blog now has its own bi-monthly newsletter with top articles, insider tips, and featured authors.' To the left of the subtitle is a circular profile picture of a person, and to the right are social media sharing icons and a 'Read more' button.

Introducing the Blog Newsletter

Our blog has grown significantly in the past few months. We're so grateful to our readers and want to make sure you get the most out of your time with us. We want to **build a community** with you!

That's why Educative's blog now has a **dedicated, free newsletter** that any user can get in their mailbox twice a month. This newsletter will discuss:

- Top coding tips
- Insider tech trends
- Featured articles
- Author spotlights
- Readers of the month
- Most popular articles
- and more

We'll even tell you about new events, upcoming article series, and trends we're seeing in the tech world. It's an ideal place for readers of all levels to get a **condensed snapshot** of what's hot in the industry and what's good on the blog.

Draft a simple outbound email campaign to your existing subscriber base about the initiation of your online community to check if people are interested in the idea of becoming a part of your community. Create an application process and add members who are interested and fit your ICP into a waitlist.

If enough people engage with your email campaign and join your community, you know you're onto something.

Don't worry about scaling

The onboarding experience needs to be high touch especially with your first ten members. Write personal letters if you have to to find your first ten community members. They eventually need to become part community member and part external evangelist. Problems of scale can come later (we dive much deeper in our chapters on growth).

Build hype

Build hype to the launch of your community by showing testimonials, social proof of influential people joining your community. Constantly build momentum before the launch.

Create an intentional bottleneck to pool together everyone that's interested. People want to see other people. Create artificial scarcity. Onboard members in cohorts rather than individuals. We go over many of these techniques later on in the book.



The Wizard of Oz MVP

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need a product or community to start advertising. Your goal is to validate the demand for a direction. With a plethora of community accessories out there, it can become tempting to want to build your entire community infrastructure at once.

Instead, you want to earn the right to build more.

I want to introduce you to a concept called the Wizard of Oz MVP.

You have to earn the right to build more. Until then fill in the gaps in your MVP manually.



In the Wizard of Oz, it was the man behind a curtain who created the illusion of a giant ghostly head, rather than a real wizard. Similarly, the essence of the Wizard of Oz MVP is to create an “illusion” of an actual product rather than the product itself.

When you’re building a community from scratch, you don’t need all of the pieces at once. You just need to provide enough value to earn the right to get to the next step.

You should stitch together those parts of your community experience that haven’t been validated with manual effort as glue to form a piecemeal solution.

Just like the Wizard of Oz fooled Dorothy and her friends

into believing that there was an actual Wizard, you too should be the man behind the curtain who manually curates a complete experience. Add complexity in increments.

The X factor

To build a community with staying power, you need to dig into what is missing in the market. Once you have gathered a group of people who shared a similar interest, you should be able to distance yourselves from other existing networks.

Your X factor is that element of stickiness that discourages your community members from switching to a similar offering.

One way to improve your X factor is to be specific to who you're building for and set yourself away from the crowd.

Define who your community is for and, even more importantly, who it's not for.

Unfortunately, many communities fail to adhere to this principle - they start with an exclusive community, where members are pouring their hearts out, sharing their personal challenges. Before long, you have a bunch of people who reduce the quality of the discussion. Over time, you end up losing the burning hot ember of what makes your community special, because your original members believe that it's no longer a place for honest conversations.

Be very disciplined about who make it in, and who you kindly have to turn down. This rigorous focus on member standards might put an upper limit on your membership, but the trade-off to get higher quality conversations is worth it.

Posture yourself as the community that is missing in the

market by starting niche.

A Standalone Single Player Experience

Since you only have about a dozen members in your community, it does not provide significant utility or value in terms of networks. To build a scalable community that only grows more valuable as it gets bigger, you need to make sure the $(n+1)$ th member gains more value than the n th member.

But before these network effects kick in, you need to curate a valuable single player experience in your community. LinkedIn for example is a social network with strong network effects. But in the early days (before the Nfx kicked in), the platform was being used for referencing resumes. Users found value in being able to share their own resumes and work profiles.

This is why running early events that don't need other people's involvement or providing exclusive resources is a great way to kick start your early community.

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YOUR FIRST 100 MEMBERS

The sign of a vibrant community is that new members join because they want to without you having to nudge or insist.

You want to start finding those areas in your MVP community that are must-haves, good-to-haves and okay-to-haves and slowly wean off of high-touch manual intervention.

MUST-HAVE (M)	NON-NEGOTIABLE COMMUNITY NEEDS THAT ARE MANDATORY FOR YOUR MEMBERS
Should-Have (S)	Important initiatives that are not vital, but add significant value
Could-Have (C)	Nice to have initiatives that will have a small impact if left out
Wishes/ Will-Not-Have (W)	Initiatives that are not priority for this specific time frame

MoSCoW Prioritization Framework

Once you identify your priorities, you can automate processes and build robustness into the system.

In this chapter, we're going to learn how to scale intimacy while also growing the network.

The 1% rule

In Internet culture, the 90-9-1% is a thumb rule pertaining to participation in an online community. In most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who will never participate, 9% of users participate/contribute a little, and 1% of users account for all contribution.

As you scale to a hundred members, the percentage of superusers in your community will gradually start to decrease till it eventually plateaus at the 90-9-1 rule.

Activate your power users

Once you've identified your super users, you have to activate them. You might also have to fake it till you make it. Reach out to your power users and ask them to post articles, resources. I've gone as far as to draft their posts for them to make their lives easier.

When you finally get to 10 **engaged** members (not 10 total members) who are posting over and over again, it actually ends up organically spurring that behavior from the rest of the community. Then you don't have to nudge people anymore - it just becomes an ingrained habit.

Product-led onboarding

How do you know when to stop doing things that don't scale?

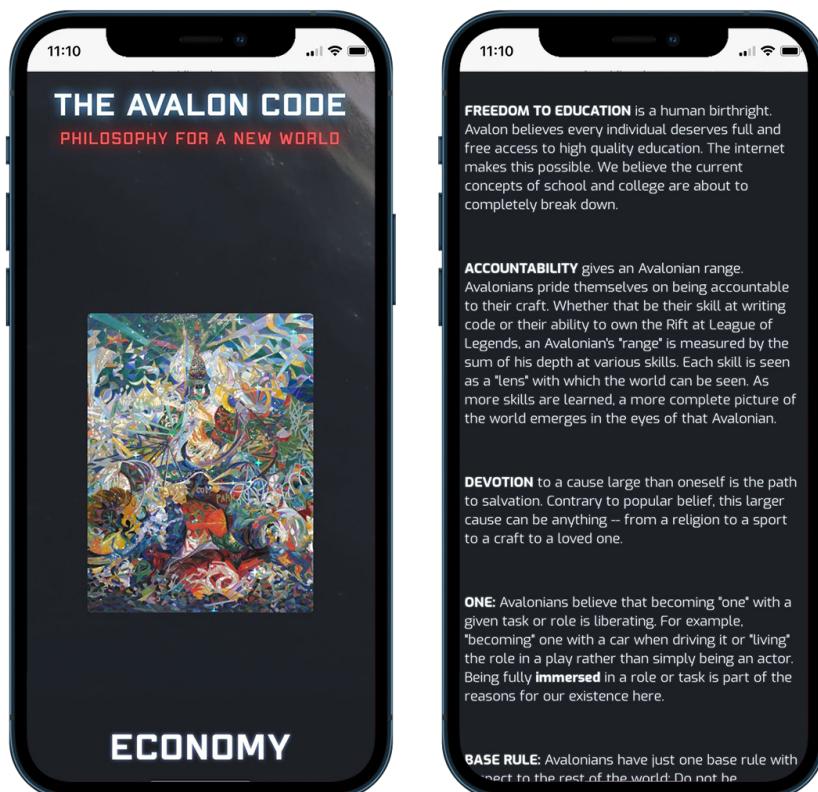
You will eventually exhaust your capacity to onboard every single member. I don't mean tired or bored of doing it, but physically impossible to do it.

You should then build product-led onboarding to automate things that you used to do manually — whether that be showing people around or making sure every question sees a response.

Codify your founding principles

Write down all the principles that you envision you'd live out. They become the DNA of the community.

By including this in your onboarding, you are ensuring that new members are committing to those principles. A lot of people won't read this, but the ones who do end up becoming examples for the rest who follow.



Remember this: If you try and make a community for everyone, you end up making it for no one. Set an incredibly high bar for who makes it into the community and who doesn't. This is critical to long-term success.

Once a community gets to a certain size, things get traction organically. But you still need to occasionally dive into the previous chapter to create new behavior.

We'll dive more into scaling in the chapters on growth.

OWNING VS RENTING

Your online community is an important digital asset for your business. It's the hub for your business online, and if you're just renting your online presence, you may be leaving yourself open for issues that are out of your control.

Some companies rely on third-party platforms like Facebook to engage their customers. But with a website, marketing team, social media team and tech team already in place, shouldn't businesses focus on driving users to their own online community?

You would absolutely not build a long term business on Facebook or Slack, so why the change of heart when building a community, which is arguably harder and more valuable?

A platform that lets you own your community is invaluable, because you control it. It's yours. You become the decision maker and decide what is right for your community.

OWNING	RENTING
You own data and have complete visibility into the analytics	You are limited to the data points and analytics that the platform chooses to show you
Not confined to the functionality of the host platform	Confined to the rules and restrictions set by the platform
You're the decision maker and decide what is right for your community	You're not the decision maker. You're at the mercy of the platform owners.

Community members feel more safe and at home	Platforms tend to be more noisy and have had a history of leaking private data
--	--

Discord for example only gives you data from the last 120 days for non-Partner and non-Verified servers.

Social networks also tend to be more noisy, particularly when it comes to politics, and religion - topics that are incredibly polarizing. These discussions are often fueled with hostility and aggression, which is the antithesis of quality conversation. People fail to see others as even human on some of these platforms.

According to GlobalWebIndex report, members of community sites prefer online communities in comparison to social media sites for the following:

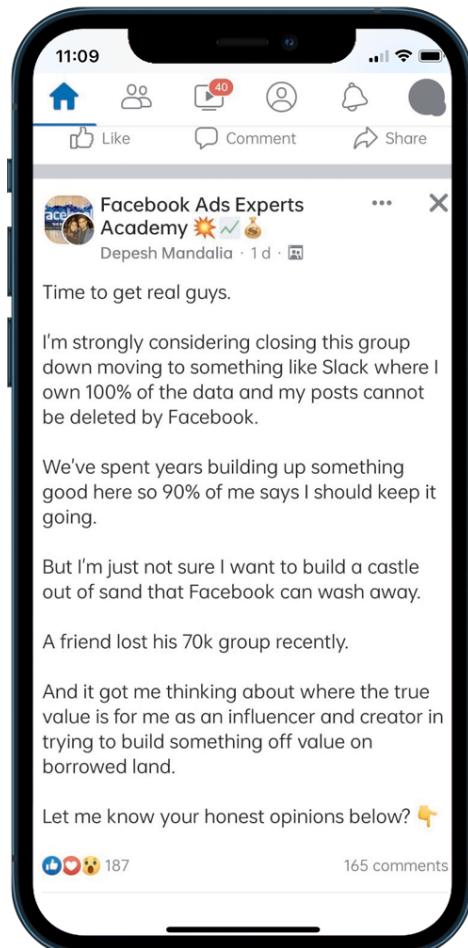
- Meaningful conversation (36% higher)
- Getting respect from others (28% higher)
- Feeling own self (24% higher)
- Being appreciated (21% higher)
- Getting voice heard (19% higher)
- Developing a sense of belonging (18% higher)

Now when was the last time a social platform offered any of the above?

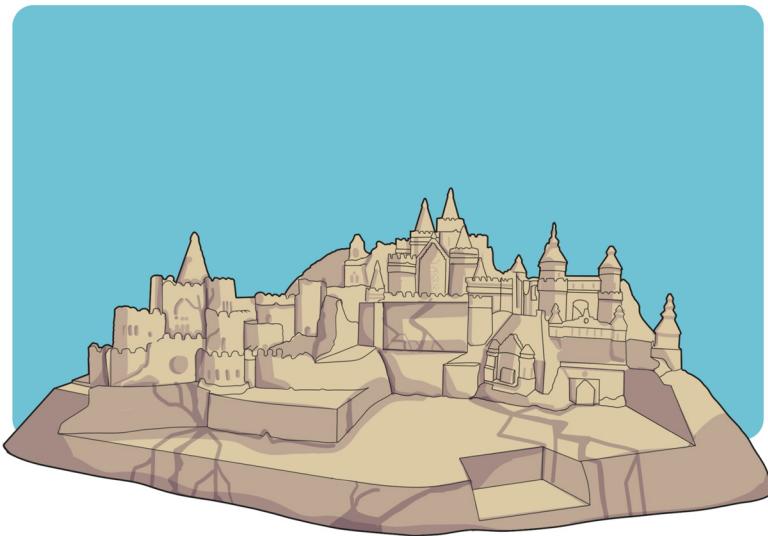
Lastly, community builders run the “platform risk” if their rented platform goes down in usage or decides to make unwarrant-

ed changes that may not align with your strategies. Facebook is dead, for example. All its users have migrated. Instagram has pivoted to TikTok.

Do not put all your focus on a platform you don't own. You don't make the decisions, someone else does.

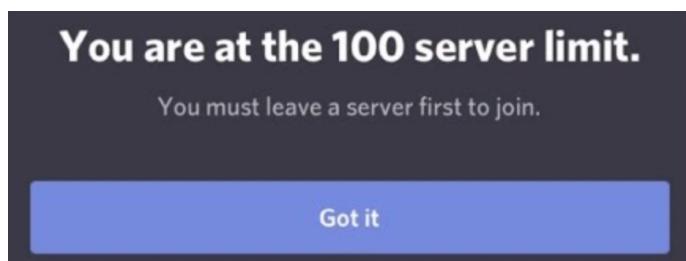


Sandcastles are a symbol of impermanence, and will eventually slip into the sea. Don't build a sandcastle.



Just another button

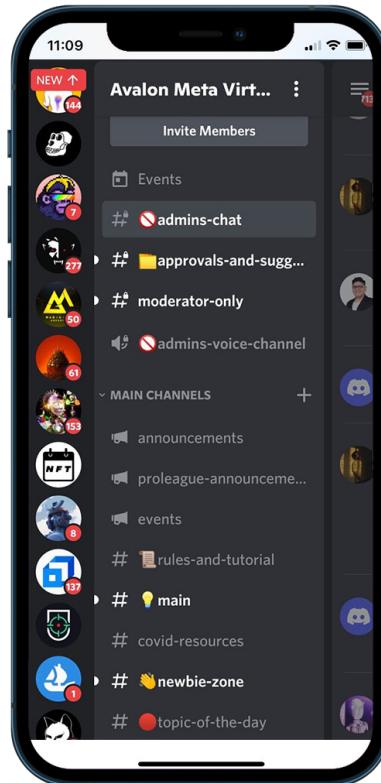
On Discord, I've exhausted my 100 server limit. It's very easy to join a server and you might think that's a good thing. However, just as easy as it is to join these servers, so is it easy to forget them.



I haven't visited any of these years since months on end. Discord's constant notifications pinging doesn't help either. I'm al-

ways squandering through the left switcher trying to identify where I'm being notified.

People will never enter your community manually, just like nobody clicks on every Twitter profile they follow every month. The "ease" of joining a community just because people are on the app isn't a good thing because Slack and Discord don't send content to a single feed like other social media platforms like Instagram or Twitter. It isn't an advantage.



Platform agnostic

An agnostic community would in fact be free from any ties to a specific platform and run equally well across more than one platform.

One way to do this is by posting across different platforms or repurposing content across these platforms. It is no more about how many platforms the brand is on. It has more to do with what is being done on which platform.

Impression by Association

Facebook is notorious for their privacy issues and for selling user profile data. Discord has been associated as a platform for

gamers and Gen-Z. Slack is recognized as an email replacement tool meant for work related communication.

When you choose to build your online community on one of these platforms, you run the risk of being associated with the branding of these platforms.

White-labeled online communities allow the owners to structure and organize different social elements exactly the way they need and provide powerful moderation tools to keep the community a safe place. If you're building a community, you should choose white-labeled. We've had a Telegram community and a Facebook Group die, so we know a thing or two about this.

To summarize, the debate between owning vs renting is almost a no-brainer if you can afford the overhead cost. However, platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, etc., still have advantages in terms of top-of-the-funnel acquisition. No white-labeled community platform will drop traffic or users right on to you, but social platforms can and will if you play your cards right. Utilize the renting platforms to drive traffic to the places you own. It's the best of both worlds.

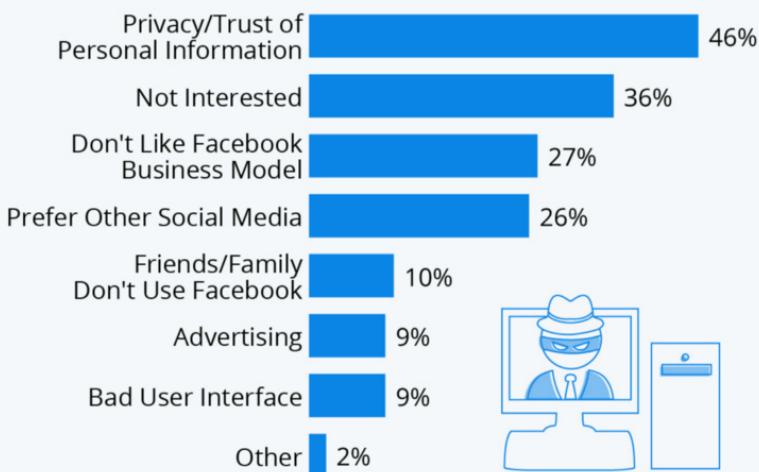
And for the love of God, don't build a community on a platform you don't own. **Neither do you get the organic traffic of a social platform, nor do you get the ownership of a white-label platform. You're in no man's land.**

SWITCHING COSTS

With so many new community platforms and tools out there, picking one that's best for your community can be paralyzing. Moving your community from one platform to another is even more challenging. Should you invest in a custom solution or choose an out of the box solution to start with? How do you transfer all the social capital created on one platform to another as you scale?

Privacy Concerns Fuel Facebook Exodus

Top reasons for why people aren't using Facebook



Survey conducted in December 2019 with a sample size of 1,123 Americans
Source: The Verge



Let's be honest: As much as we all would like to move away from social media platforms to our own real estate, they are now so ingrained in our habits, it's become almost ritualistic to lean on them to start with.

But we can migrate off them for community. We just need a plan.

As long as you nail the value proposition, community members will justify the friction of shifting to a new home.

But if you don't have the budget or immediate need for a standalone app, we have a wide variety of community platforms out there some of which provide custom domain and a white-labeled solution which is the next best thing.

On Scenes, we make migration seamless as you scale from white labelled solution to your own standalone app to our APIs. We understand that your needs will change as you get bigger.

Travel Checklist

- Create a list of things you use frequently
- Identify the most common problems that you face
- Break down the processes that are super manual or have been hacked together
- Where does your community spend most of their time?
- What community programs are you prioritizing?
- Do you need extensive moderation tools?
- How important is branding to your community? Do you need a fully customizable platform?

Involve your community

Changing platforms should not be a surprise for your community. This isn't a project you want to work on in secret and spring on your members when everything is ready.

It won't matter how awesome your new platform looks or how intuitive it is to navigate if your community members won't use it. Remember, community is about the people.

Involve them in the process from Day 1. Share why you're looking into changing platforms and get their opinion by conducting a survey and find out what features, tools, and content they're loving about your current platform and what they'd like to see change.

I highly recommend you reach out to your superusers and get their buy-in early on.

Share mockups with them, get them into the beta, involve them in the entire process. These are the folks who will help you convince other community members that the move is a great idea and that everyone should be excited for the new platform. Even better if you can get your founding members involved in this.

Keep it familiar and fresh

When moving to a new platform, try to keep some things familiar so your community members know that this is still their home. You want them to feel just as comfortable in the new space, as they were in the old space. You can do this by migrating some of the popular content, continuing community norms, and keeping the same branding.

If there were specific features or discussions that members used a lot on the old platform, point those out and let them know how to access a similar tool on the new platform.

But you also want the new platform to feel, well, new. There should be an obvious improvement over the old space.

Saying Goodbye

Make a formal announcement before, during and after the switch.

Plan to close your community space 2-3 weeks after your new one has launched. Let your community know that it'll be closing and that they should save or migrate anything they want to keep.

Unless you are a very large community that has multiple forks, don't keep multiple communities open.

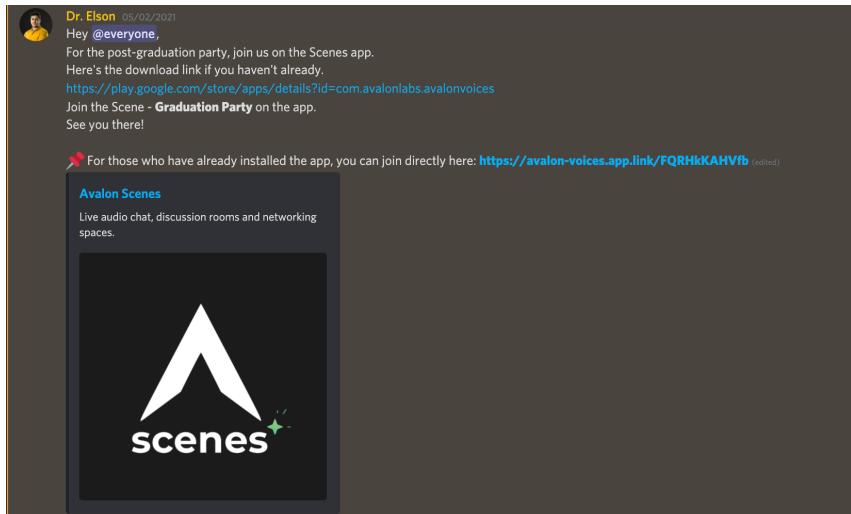
You can change your community settings to only allow posts from admins.

The screenshot shows a user interface for managing community settings. It includes sections for 'Posting permissions' and 'Post Approval', both with radio button options, and a 'Save' button at the bottom.

Posting permissions	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Members, moderators and admins can post to the group. <input type="radio"/> Only admins can post to the group.
Post Approval	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All group posts must be approved by an admin or a moderator.
Save	

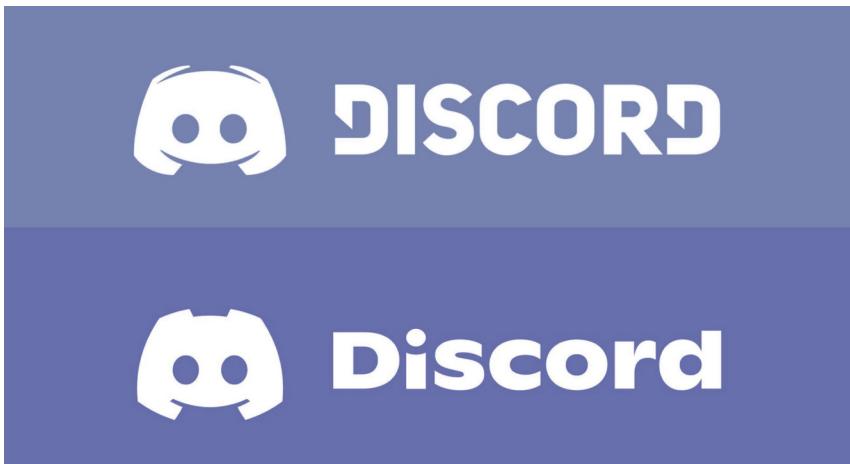
You can even host a virtual goodbye party and reflect on all the wonderful times you've all had there. Then it's time to close up shop and move on.

Be sure to include links to your new space so that anyone who stumbles upon the closed one will know where to go instead.



Set Realistic Expectations

Switching community platforms is a big change, so expect grumbling and nay-sayers. No matter how hard you try to involve your community, there will be people who hate the new platform and won't want to migrate. Be aware of this and set realistic expectations with your boss and stakeholders. People threw a massive fit when Discord changed its logo from A to B — people will complain about everything. Learn to listen to the important stuff and ignore the tantrums.



Manage expectations and help the stakeholders understand any potential roadblocks.

Let them know that you expect to see a dip in registered members. By switching platforms, you're automatically pruning and weeding out people who had signed up a while back but never checked back in. Your community gets smaller, but your retention goes way up. Unless you're in the business of vanity numbers, this shouldn't concern you.

You should also prepare your team for some backlash. Even if they love the new features, people will still find small things to nitpick and complain about. It's okay! Most people will get used to the new platform.

Dealing with Stragglers

Keep all lines of communication open during the migration. And once majority of the community has migrated, leave a pinned message that is easily seen to ensure that stragglers know where to go if they missed the boat.

Continue to monitor the old space for any newcomers that stumbled upon the wrong channel, or even those who may have been radio-silent for some time.

Direct everyone to your new community.

Direct everyone to your new community.

Show the clear value of the new community space.

Just like marketing your products or services, you need to make sure everyone knows where to find you and how to get involved. Tweet, email or send a note with pigeon — whatever it takes across different channels.

Just like you would with the old platform, continue to grow your audience. It's possible you may have lost some devoted old members. If they didn't make the jump, you can always try to replace them, however hard that seems. We lost a good chunk of our founding members who refused to migrate from Telegram to Discord. Although they were missed, this didn't affect us in the slightest.

With the help of everything in this book, you can ensure your community stays healthy no matter where it's based! You see, a community is much more than a group of people gathered in the same (digital) space. It's about the connections that are formed within its boundaries.

In my experience, if the connections formed within your community are strong enough, those will translate no matter what the platform.

In fact, it's a great test to gauge how sticky your community truly is. The rest is just vanity.

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WEB VS MOBILE

Imagine buying a really large plot of land in Alaska.

Over the years, you fill it with junk. A table at one corner, a lamp on the other, pots and plants everywhere. The house, although cramped, starts becoming a home.

Then one day you decide to become a minimalist and move into a van. You decide to live the rest of your life on the road. A van, as you might know, is far smaller than a house, and can only fit a fraction of what you can fit in your house. It wouldn't make sense if you put everything that was in your old house into the van out of sentimentality, would it?

It's the same story on web versus mobile.

On the web, you own a plot of land called a monitor. On a mobile screen, you have just a fraction of that. So why keep all the junk?

On the Mobile World Congress in 2010, Eric Schmidt, the CEO of Google put forward that designers should follow the “mobile first” rule in product design. The goal of this change was simple – to encourage online businesses that have not yet enhanced their mobile experience to upgrade to a responsive or mobile-friendly design.

Most community software, including Slack and Discord, were built web and PC first. Their mobile platforms were an afterthought. Hence, they ended up clunky and cramped on

the small screen, completely ruining the user experience for almost everyone who joins your community from a phone (which is almost everyone, if you're going by statistics).



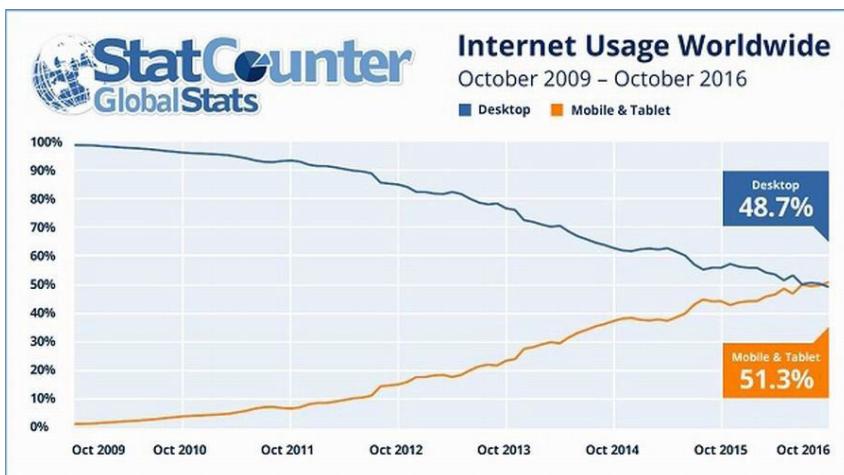
When you try to pack too much into a small space, it feels cramped and overwhelming.

Web-first design (Decremental Disregard)

Designers will make efforts to complete an amazing desktop version and only to find it can hardly be adopted on a mobile end unless they give up a lot of beautiful ideas. If so, the mobile end version will be more like an afterthought, an incomplete product which has been cut down. Most web first platforms that eventually go mobile will either avoid putting in a large chunk of features on the phone, or cram everything in and look terrible.

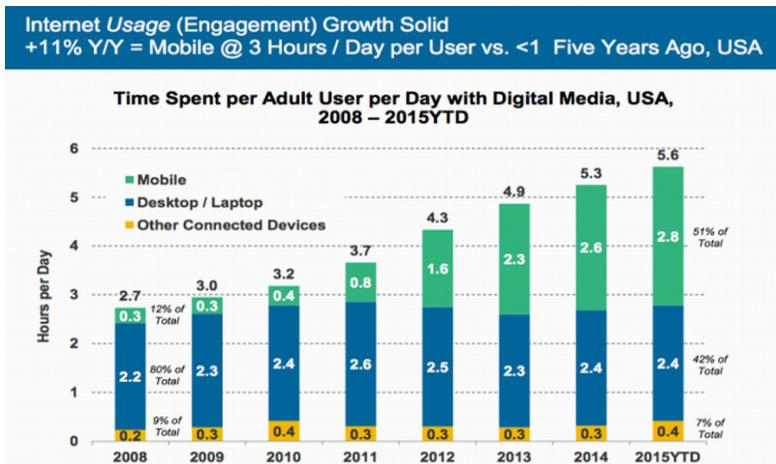
Mobile-first design (Incremental Improvement)

But if we take the mobile product as a starting point, under constraints like bandwidth, screen size, etc.; designers will end up building something that looks beautiful and that also upscales well. When the platform is expanded to a tablet or PC, designers are able to take advantage of the unique features of these advanced ends to strengthen the product step by step. This is the main reason that progressive advancement strategy is widely used.



Mobile usage surpassed desktop usage in 2016.

People spend more and more time on the internet from mobile ends, so this strategy makes sense.



@KPCB Source: eMarketer 9/14 (2008-2010), eMarketer 4/15 (2011-2015). Note: Other connected devices include OTT and game consoles. Mobile includes smartphone and tablet. Usage includes both home and work. Ages 18+. Time spent with each medium includes all time spent with that medium, regardless of multitasking.

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There's a lot more on the Web vs Mobile debate, which include retention and event turnout (by mobile, we mean a mobile app here).

WEB	MOBILE
Average DAU/MAU <2-3%	Average DAU/MAU = 15-20%
Decreased retention	Improved retention
Most people turn off their desktop notifications. You will need email notifications.	In-app notification that show much higher CTR.
Easier to build hence most community platforms are web-based	Complexities involved because of iOS and Android ecosystems
Not as mobile :P	Anytime, anywhere
Event turnout lower because you have to be logged in on PC and may not always have your laptop around	Higher event turnout
No constraints often lead to overwhelming UI	Requires more simpler and intuitive UI because of constrained real estate

At Scenes, we began with mobile-first design and battle tested the platform across different phone specifications and network bandwidths. This might have cost us in terms of time to product launch, but ensured that the platform is much more robust and adaptable. We currently boast of the highest concurrent member scale on audio and video on mobile of any community app on the planet.

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BAIT

Gated content has been a B2B marketing staple. Free eBooks, blogs, resources are often made easily available for prospective buyers to build trust with the product.

It's estimated that as much as 80% of B2B content marketing assets are gated. Marketers use gated content as bait to generate leads by providing prospects with valuable information in exchange for details like their name, email, company, or title.

You can use the same principle to generate quality leads and membership for your online community. By hiding content within your community, you nudge users who are on the fence when it comes to joining your community. Once they come to your community, it's on you to retain them.

But what sort of content should you hide behind the gates of your community?

A simple thumb-rule to follow is: *Can they Google it?*

Can they Google it is proxy for whether it is valuable and scarce. If they can't find it on Google, use this gated content as bait to lure prospective community members into your space. This isn't a bad thing – every B2B business does this.

Tiered Access

Tiered access is another form of planting gates in front of your content. There's also a big business model here. Cracking tiered access is arguably the secret sauce behind OnlyFans' \$2B+ in sales in 2020 with \$400 million in annual net sales.

Like OnlyFans, you can reward your loyal followers with **access**. If members reach a certain milestone engagement, reward them with access to your “behind the scenes” content.

Research suggests that people are twice as affected by losses as they are by gains. By inducing the fear of missing out into your acquisition funnel, you essentially double down on your member acquisition.

Building tiered systems and gating your content either using a paywall or activity threshold is a great way to see spikes in your community membership channelizing the human nature of the fear of missing out.

SCENES MODEL

One important thing before we go any further is to try and understand what type of community you are. This won't just help the community, it'll also help you with your business.

To summarize how communities can add value to your business, we've come up with the SCENES model. (Note: This is a fun spinoff of the SPACES model by the CMX community.)

What are the different types of communities that you can build for your brand?

Support (S)	Organizes members to answer for others to improve customer satisfaction and save costs
Contribution (C)	Increases successful contributions of content, actions, or resources to a collaborative platform, project or initiative
Establish (E)	Gathers feedback and insight from members to improve products and offerings. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community-led development• Community-led launch• Community-led growth
New Users (N)	Drives new customers, leads, and/or users through community experiences or brand advocates
Engagement (E)	Improves loyalty and retention through a community of common interest. May be external (customers) or internal (employees, vendors, alumni)

Success (S)	Connects customers to share best practices to drive product adoption and customer expansion.
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You can of course create a community of be more than one type.

Take for example DevRel communities.

The term DevRel is short for Developer Relations. A DevRel is an umbrella term that intersects with the marketing, developer, and product team. At its core, DevRel is community management for a technical audience. DevRel initiatives encourage developers to adopt products, improve word of mouth, conduct training, etc..

DevRel tactics revolve around high-quality touches and deeper education, led by more direct and interactive events, like workshops, training sessions and even hackathons. The primary goal of DevRel activities is to get developers to interact directly with the company that is offering the product or solution to provide feedback and engage in more inclusive conversations about future development.

Regularly surveying developer audiences provides insights into what developers actually want and this feedback is invaluable to the company as a whole. Many of the developers in the community will also become future buyers.

DevRel communities belong to almost all parts of the SCENES model, but has a heavy learning toward “E”.

It's hard to define communities as one type or the other. I frequently go back to the parable of the blind men and the ele-

phant.

As the story goes, there was a group of blind men who came upon an elephant, each one encountering a different (but singular) part of the elephant's body, such as the tail, a leg, or a tusk. As they begin to describe the beast they have encountered, their answers are so drastically different from each other that they nearly come to blows, accusing each other of lying.



Your community will most likely be an intersection of different types. When we were running our community, we used it to:

- provide support and assistance to those who had enrolled or wanted to enrol for our paid courses
- create and engage with our content
- build products that our community members wanted
- acquire new users to try out our app or courses

- engage with our social media audience and customers
- help connect members with our extended network so that both parties could mutually benefit

A thriving, connected community of passionate users is on nearly every early-stage founder's wishlist. It can serve as a shorthand that their startup has signs of product-market fit, generate word-of-mouth viral growth loop, and help carve out a brand that's known for deep ties and high quality P2P support.

PART FOUR

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



22

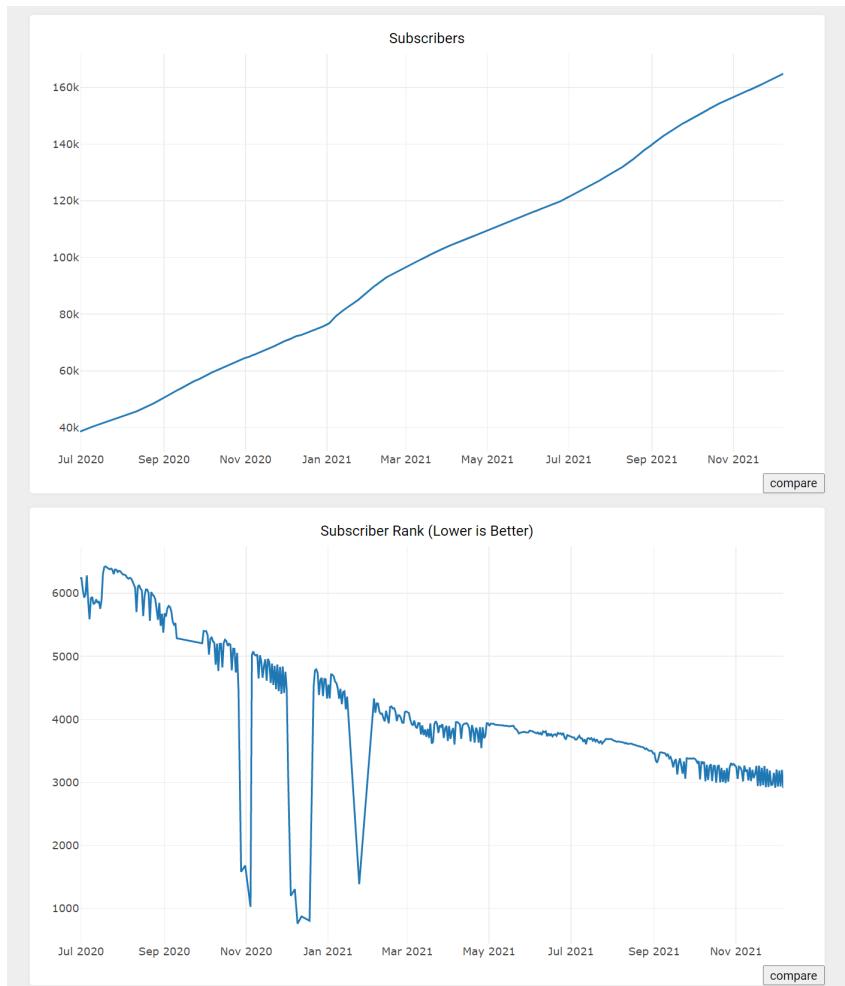
THE NOTION STORY

When Notion first went mainstream (circa 2018), they had stiff competition for their state of product at the time. Google Docs was the big daddy of the documentation space, and fighting a billion dollar company is no mean feat — unless you tap into the power of community.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the [r/Notion](#) subreddit. At the top, there's a search bar with the placeholder "Search Reddit". Below it is a large, colorful cartoon illustration of a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned dress, standing in front of a closet filled with clothes. She is holding a small cube and looking at it. To her right, another person is visible, and further right, a person is sitting on a chair. The main title of the subreddit is "Notion – The all-in-one workspace for your notes, tasks, wikis, and databases". Below the title, there's a "Join" button. The navigation bar includes links for "Posts", "Self-promo Rules", "FAQ", "Discord", and "Official Help Pages". The "Hot" tab is selected. A pinned post by "MOD & Notion Ambassador" from a day ago is highlighted, titled "Self-promo Thread — Promote your Notion content here!". It has 19 comments and 8 upvotes. Another post by "carlpadonosk" from 19 hours ago is shown, titled "I created myself a new best friend, when it comes to decluttering my wardrobe. This everyone, is the beauty of Notion.", which has 256 upvotes and is a "Showcase" post. On the right side, there are two boxes: "About Community" (with statistics: 164k Notioners, 318 Online) and "Powerups" (with a "Become a Hero" button). The "Powerups" box features a cartoon illustration of several characters with superhero-like abilities.

Notion chose Reddit (they didn't have popular white-labeled community tools back then) to begin with.

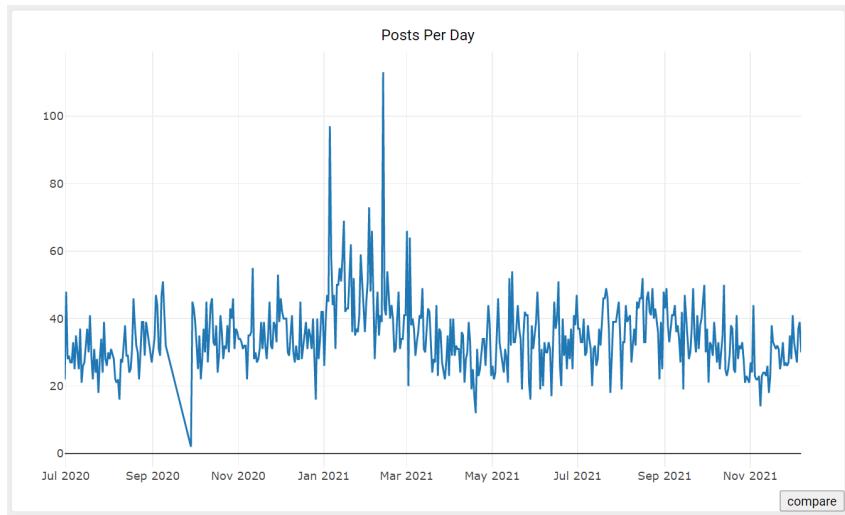


Eventually, the 164,000 strong behemoth of a community became their moat. But let's start with the top of the funnel.

The Ambassador program

Notion realized that in order to seed the community, they'd have to build a top of the funnel of the engine. In their case, they utilized creators, in the guise of "Notion Ambassadors". Notion Ambassadors, including creators like Ali Abdaal; created enough downstream demand for Notion and their community, seeding the community to decent scale. Notion pays their creators between \$3k - \$10k per video (I know this because I once partnered with Notion for a video and simply asked what the 1M+ YouTubers asked for; they were kind enough to tell me).

Once seeded, the community had enough "context" to spark their own conversation. Notion found that the concept of templates were a great context-setter, and that seems to be true until today. With our own community on Discord , we used the concept of "education and skill" as a context-setter. People would talk to each other primarily about code, design, sales, marketing, and more.



Note how you don't need a crazy number of posts per day or high level of engagement per post to run a successful community. The top three posts everyday on the Notion community average just 100 likes, which is **less than 0.061%** of the community engaged everyday (this isn't perfect math, just a decent heuristic). This is perfectly normal for a community their size!

Here are some benchmarks for community size to engagement from our own experience:

$$\text{Engagement Score} = (\text{Unique Engaged per day}/\text{Total Size of community}) * 100$$

Size of Community	<1k	1k-50k	>50k	>100k
Low Engagement Score	<0.5%	<0.2%	<0.05%	<0.01%
Average Engagement Score	0.5-1%	0.2-0.7%	0.05%-0.2%	0.01%-0.07%
High Engagement score	>1%	>0.7%	>0.2%	>0.07%

The Community as a guidepost

One interesting thing to note is that the community shapes product decisions too (a faster way to get to PMF for new startups) – take a look at the top posts on the community this year. The community is vocal about wanting an “offline mode”. This is a very easy way for the developers to make feature decisions:

Top Submissions (year ▾)		
3.4k	💬	Notion, we need to talk: without an offline mode, no one will take the platform s... /u/JoJokerer
2.1k	💬	So true /u/Cam223
2.1k	💬	What do you mean this is not work /u/jerrygoyal
1.8k	💬	But really, come on now /u/thomashrn
1.8k	💬	Priority #1 must be Offline mode. I'm not interested in any new features until th... /u/kickit

[show more](#)

Notion doesn’t have a great deal of internal community managers either – leaving the team small enough to focus on building a good product.

Templates are also an awesome referral strategy in general for Notion, creating an extremely efficient community flywheel.

Notion's community strategy has been replicated by several communities in 2021, to the point of being essential in everyone's arsenal.

In the next chapter, we’re going to talk about the tactical parts of running your community and building engagement. We’re also going to take a deep dive into the exact features you’ll need to have to make this engagement happen, and how Scenes solves pretty much every method of community interaction in one go.

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DESIGNING COMMUNITY KPIs

KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) with communities are hard to set up. Most community platforms give you very shallow metrics. The first thing to understand about beginning to run a community is to understand what metric you're trying to maximize. If engagement, then what kind of engagement?

Well, here are some decent metrics to track:

Base Metrics

- Posts
- Post upvotes (similar to Reddit Karma)
- Chat Messages sent
- Chat messages viewed
- Live Event attendances
- Time Spent on Live Events
- Time Spent speaking
- Media interactions (views)
- etc.

From our experience, community ratios are even more important.

Ratio Metrics

- Ratio of Post comments/Post views (shows % of post lurkers)
- Ratio of Chat messages/Chat views (shows % of post lurkers)
- Ratio of Event speakers/Event watchers and listeners (shows % of event lurkers)
- Ratio of community size to event attendees
- Ratio of community size to post upvotes, chat messages/day, media interactions, etc
- Daily usage of any kind/Monthly usage of any kind, including just opening the community (DAU/MAU)
- Viral factor ($k = i * c$)
- Community LTV/CAC
- etc.

Remember that a lurker in a community is still an active user. Also, at any given point in time, try to optimize just one metric. The last metric (DAU/MAU) is superb for a product, but poor for a community. You can just create a gamified streak or run coupon codes to make sure people open the community everyday, but it's not real engagement. Real engagement is the only thing that will eventually make you money.

Which brings me to my next set of metrics:

Business metrics

- % paying members/Total number of community members
- % paying members/non-lurker active members
- Subscription renewal rate vs total subscribed base
- % members unsubscribing from a paid plan
- etc.

The last type of metrics are very context based, and depend on your business.

Context Based Metrics

- Live event retention (Attended cohort-based course)
- Paid E-Book downloads
- etc.

In own experience, the ratio metrics are the most important metrics for a community. They're a dipstick measure of a community's health and simply optimizing these will lead to a happy, healthy community. Some benchmarks below, based on our experience with over 2,200 communities; some reddit community benchmarking; as well as our own community.

	Ideal value
Ratio of Post comments/Post views (shows % of post lurkers)	10%
Ratio of Chat messages/Chat message views (shows % of post lurkers)	20%
Ratio of Event speakers/Event watchers and listeners (shows % of event lurkers)	No standard
Ratio of event attendees to community size	1%
Ratio of post upvotes, chat messages/day, media interactions to community size	> 0.1% (expanded benchmarks in "The Notion Story")
Daily usage of any kind/Monthly usage of any kind, including just opening the community (DAU/MAU)	>5% (with social apps, you're supposed to see >20%, Whatsapp has >50%; communities are much lower engagement)
Viral factor ($k = i * c$, k is viral factor, i is number of invites sent, c is conversion rate)	>0.5
Community LTV/CAC	>2

Note how I haven't spoken about "churn", or the number of people who leave a community. This is on purpose. If you've ever had a large Instagram account with >100k followers, you're probably losing 100-300 followers a day for random reasons (some people are pruning their social apps, some aren't interested or finding value in your content, some just hate you). It's normal to turn over something like 10% of your entire community base in a year. This is completely normal, so don't worry about who's leaving your community.

Focus on growth – we'll teach you how to keep your best members from leaving later by granting them status.

THE FIRST GOAL: SPARK ENOUGH OF A NETWORK EFFECT

When building a community, remember that you're not building for a certain member, you're building for the network. This is a hard concept to understand for those that aren't familiar with social products.

Let me explain this with an example. If you were building, say, a single player tool, let's say a SaaS tool, you'd build every feature that makes it easy for your users who use the platform do better what the platform helps them do. The goal of a social app is different, there need not be any quality of life fixes as long as the network is strong.

People don't go to an Instagram or a Clubhouse for their features. Plenty of apps have those same features. Instead, people go to those apps for other people. The apps become wildly more appealing as the number of people on them increases, especially if those people are famous, friends, or exclusive. This is the main reason people don't buy houses in the middle of nowhere, even though you'd get twice the real estate at half the price – we're social creatures and will move to the coolest spot in town (wherever the career and mating opportunities are). The minute we find people on an app uncool or not worth the effort, we'll move to another one. Clubhouse saw

their Daily Active Users drop by 4x after they opened up the Android version — people went there in the first place because it seemed cool, and left when it got boring.

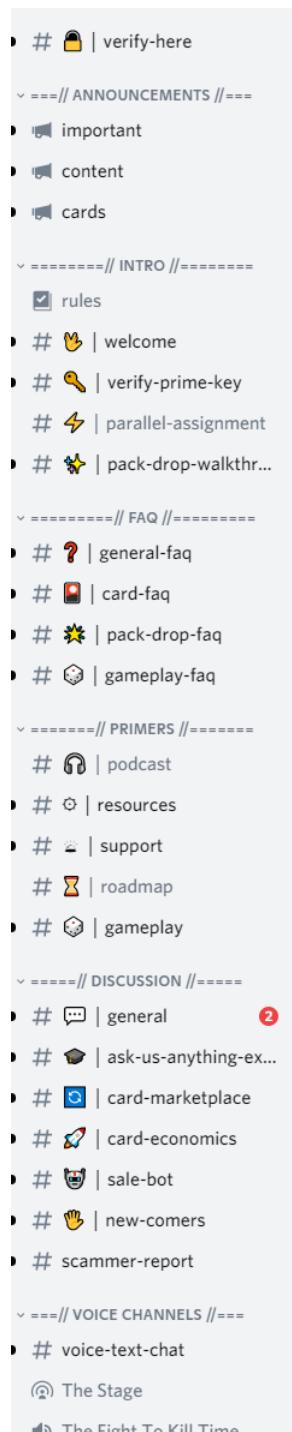
There's a lesson here — to get your community off the ground, you've got to do four things.

- Build for the network (whatever helps people interact and find each other the most)
- Begin by keeping it exclusive
- Spark a network effect via events and topics
- Try to bring on existing network effects

1) Build for the network

Let me give you an example of what building for the network is like by first showing you the opposite. This is the Discord channel infrastructure of a server I visited today:

Even though this is a very well known project, the server setup has issues. As a new user, where do I go? How do I foster a new connection with another



member? This sort of channel structure reduces complexity in the server owner's mind (the owner knows where everything is), but sharply drops interaction among users, especially new users. Topics aren't static either, they're fluid. If I have a support question about the roadmap, does it go in the "Roadmap" channel or the "Support" one?

What tends to happen (because we made this exact same mistake) is that people will just dump all their questions, feedback, and basically any topic into the "General" channel or worse yet, whatever channel they find.

In order to build for the network, you've got to remove the clutter for the end user, even if that's slightly difficult for you as the admin to manage.

2) Start by keeping it exclusive

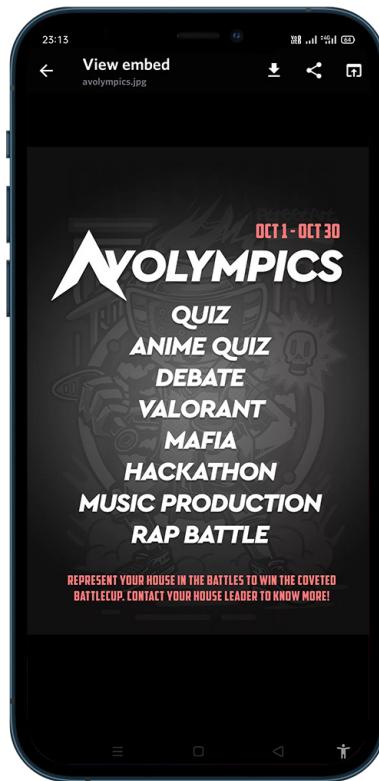
The allure and mystique of an exclusive community not just drives joins, it also drives referrals. If you have a cool, cult-like community of just 30-50 people, you can get them to refer others. People like referring their friends to exclusive communities, but dislike "advertising" for open communities. Technically, referring someone to an exclusive community is advertising for the community, but the referrer doesn't realize this.

People are also more likely to join an exclusive, behind the scenes community rather than an open one. You need to create a secret that just enough people are in on, and this paradoxically creates more demand and joins.

The NFT world is very used to this. The more secretive and elusive the community is, the more the number of Discord members by the date of their launch.

3) Spark network effects

There's absolutely no point of a community if the managers or moderators don't spark discussion. You need to find a way to constantly keep something or the other happening. In our own Discord, we hosted a fortnightly "admin debate" and a "weekend quiz" that made people compete for roles and prizes. Thanks to the competition, the roles actually derived meaning — people fought each other over Zoom calls for a title, thus the title became valuable.



This is also why Communities around education, skilling, finance, and cohort-based courses (CBCs) do so well — they have plenty to talk about (engagement peaks), whereas communities around beauty and fashion fare poorly (not much to talk about).

Lighting a spark around such conversation happens best via a voice/video call. Slack and Discord simply can't do video calls with more than 15 and 25 watchers respectively, so you'll need to tack on Zoom (or use Scenes, it has both solutions).

4) Utilize existing network effects

Did you know that almost all social networks started with

college kids as the first userbase? The reason for this is that college kids already know other college kids, and are more likely to bring their friends on and interact with their friends on the app. After all, all social apps are exactly like college parties. Facebook was smart about this — they first dominated a single college (so that network effects would be maximal, and engagement would be highest among people who knew each in real life when they used the Facebook web app) before moving to the next college.

This is why our positioning for our Discord server was a “Virtual Campus”. Hell, our ads said India’s first “Virtual Campus” too. Having a college-style positioning online sparked network effects that seeded the initial set of users, who then referred the next set of users from colleges too!

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EVENTS: COMMUNITY GLUE

We've been vocal about this — events induct people into communities and set narrative. They also keep the engagement up. Eventually, you'll realize you need to run three types of events:

1. For newbies
2. For existing members to keep deriving value
3. To sell your products (SaaS “webinar” style)

1) For newbies

For new joinees, the introductory events sets narrative and tone. We did an introductory event 2x a month and even made a “Newbie Zone” channel for new members on our community for 24x7 support. When new members feel a sense of warmth from old members and moderators, they're more inclined to refer their friends. Remember that one very important need your community is fulfilling for your members is alleviating their loneliness.

A lot of people join communities not just for the mission (that they may or may not believe in), but to battle isolation, loneliness, and for identity (this is why granting people public roles works so well, and why young children become activists for causes they don't know anything about). When these needs

are fulfilled, your new members become long term evangelists and referrers. If you're more mathematically inclined, a good introductory event increases viral factor (k).

Pre-recorded events or videos don't work. Neither do text or image onboarding pages. These are impersonal. Until that first event happens, these new members are casually strolling through your community rather than true members. They also have poor attention spans and are only mildly interested. If not inducted properly, they'll just leave or worsen your ratio metrics by becoming inactive.

2) For existing members to keep deriving value

Only a fraction of your existing members will use chat and forums. The rest will make their appearance only at events that make sense to them — they typically become dormant members if an interesting event hasn't happened in a while. If you aren't sure what kind of event to run every weekend for this section of your community, bring an interesting guest in your community domain on. Allow one or two of your members to get on stage and talk to the guest (builds loyalty).

You can conduct video and audio events and let people up on stage (like Clubhouse) without leaving your community or using Zoom if you build your community on Scenes.



Like creators on YouTube, you shuld also be collaborating with other communities and cross-pollinating community members.

As an aside not related to events, NFT drops do collaborations very well!

Undead | #01 ch!ffie 7/20/2021

Mad Crocodile Crew & SolCelebs!

In collaboration with Mad Crocodile Crew, we are announcing a cross-discord NFT giveaway! 🎉

- Over 500,000\$ raffle pool for holders!
 - Mad Card GAME!
 - Lowest Gas-Fees!!!
 - Mad Community!
 - Poker Nights!

We Are All Mad Here!

Prizes

1x Mad Crocodile Crew NFT **AIRDROP!** (winner will be chosen in Mad CrocodileCrew server)

1x SolCelebs NFT (Winner chose in SolCelebs Server)

To Enter:

- Join their Discord: <https://discord.gg/eqphfQ9WCw>
- Winner must be a member of both discords in order to win!
- React to this message below w/ 🎉
- Say hi & let them know that you're from -----

<https://tenor.com/view/rainbow-line-line-colorful-gif-15187472>
https://cdn.discordapp.com/attachments/817284343495393292/908075501921386546/Webp.net-gifmaker_1.gif

@everyone
 Giveaway ends in 48 hours🎉

YOU'VE BEEN INVITED TO JOIN A SERVER

Mad Crocodile Crew 2,052 Online • 15,098 Members

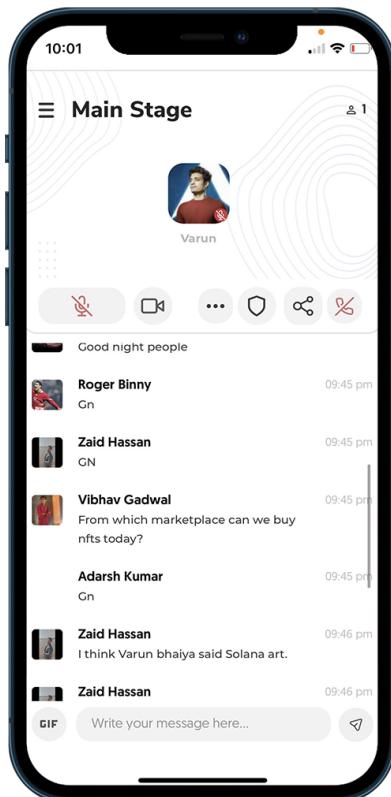
Join

3) To sell your products

If you're building engagement to sell something, it's best done over an event rather than chat or forums. If done over text, you give a small section of your community that's toxic a chance to publicly attack you (it happens all the time). This is much harder over an event because only people who are interested jump on.

You can also sell by being very clear that the event is a sales webinar. In fact, this sets better expectations and does some lead qualification too. A sales event should be run by a different team than the general community events, preferably someone with product expertise of whatever is being sold.

From our experience, conversions after a community sales event are always very high. Our product was a \$300-500 course, and we'd sell pretty much right after the event was done. Discord didn't have a shop so we'd have to redirect people outside (this can sometimes lead to scams, please beware). To solve for this Scenes has an inbuilt shop channel so people need not travel elsewhere and risk losing their money. You also improve conversion



because people aren't clicking out and away.

Scenes allows an unlimited number of listeners and watchers concurrently on stage, even on mobile! Please check your plan to see what limits you are eligible for.

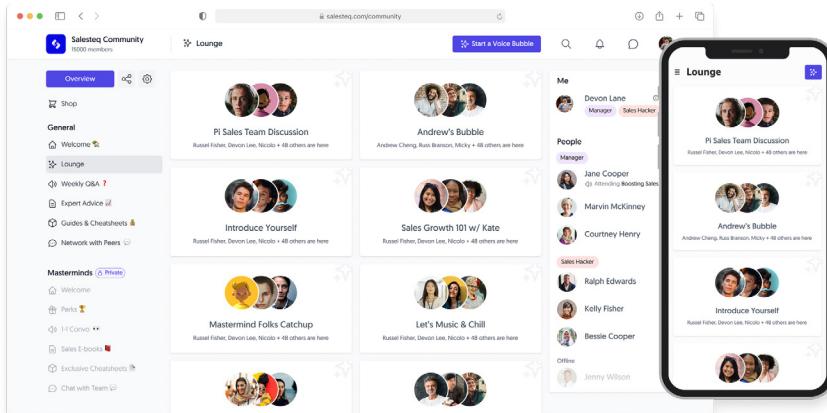
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VOICE ROOMS

The big problem with events is that they are performative and very exhausting to community owners and mods. You need a way for the community to be able to interact with each other over voice channels; they will rarely use video anyway, it's a tad bit intrusive with strangers.

The annoying part about Discord's voice rooms (something we got fed up with after a while) is the fact that anyone can unmute themselves in a conversation. Some people join with their mics on, and there's nothing like someone constantly coughing or playing the television in the background.

Without a moderator manning the channel 24x7, there's absolutely nothing you can do except watch a conversation get ruined in real time. With a 100+ voice room, I can almost guarantee you there will be 5 people with static microphone noise and 5 people with weird background sounds. I once heard someone shatter a vase of some sorts on a voice channels. My ears have been through hell and back on public Discord voice rooms.



You can't do without them though — voice rooms drive incredible engagement and community loyalty without you being there. They make people feel like they belong and give the community a culture of its own. You can't do without it.

We solved this problem with Scenes by allowing people to spawn temporary voice rooms, and also have temporary moderator permissions over that room. This totally solves the problem, and gives you so much quality engagement in return without worrying about your moderators burning out.

A word of caution — do not use a community platform that doesn't have the voice rooms feature, the onus of long term real-time engagement will fall upon you, and you don't want that.

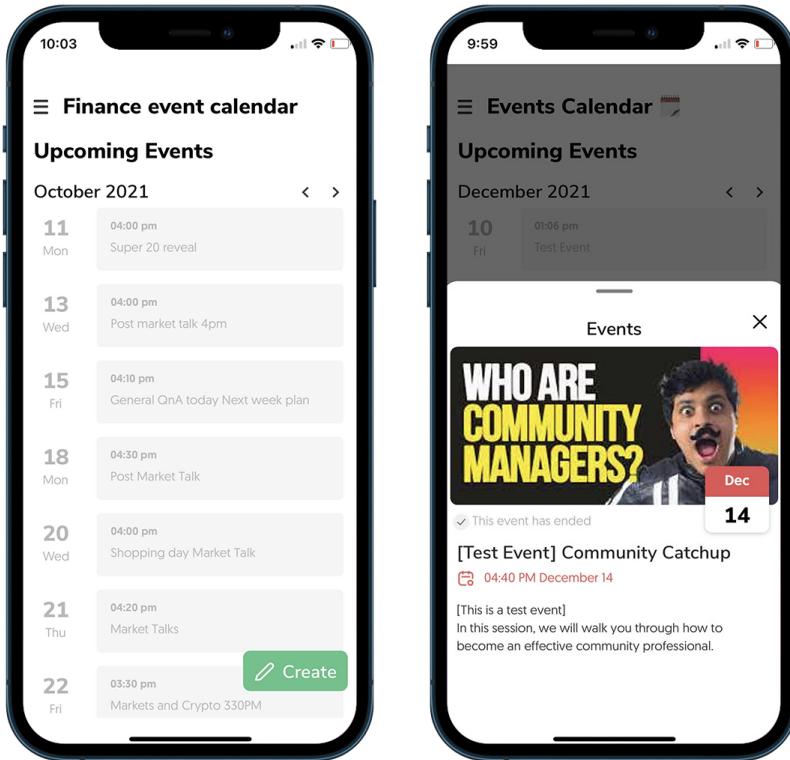
27

CALENDARS & SCHEDULING

The biggest challenge we found on Discord was scheduling events and getting users to attend them. If you've seen our chapter on events, you'll know that a typical community requires 3-12 events a month to stay hot. The big problem is getting members to attend them and pushing the right class of members to the events meant for them.

In the past, we used a hacky Discord + Add to Google Calendar solution. The problem is that the calendar invite would only send them to main server and not the channel where the event was currently taking place. As our community scaled and we moved events to Zoom, we were now chaining three tools (Discord, Zoom, Add To Calendar) and this flow ended up confusing a lot of our members. The reason we did this was because Discord won't let more than 25 people in a channel once video was turned on.

There are now third party platforms that connect Zoom to Google Calendar, and spawn a landing page for the same. However, spawning a new landing page for every single event manually is very tedious.



Scenes perfectly solves this entire workflow, with an inbuilt Zoom (Stage channel) and a connected Calendar channel. It also allows you to segment the right kind of people for the right event, by limiting the Roles that can attend the event (creating a newbie-only event is now a breeze). With the mobile app, event notifications reach more people by taking up real estate on the phone notification tray itself.

We've optimized to getting as many people attending an event as possible. You can do ticketed events, private events, role-based events too.

Recently, we held "All About Money", a fintech event with more than 13,000 people on Stage. We expected many people attending via mobile and low end phones and internet connections, so we pre-optimized for these situations with our team of mobile and real time communications engineers. With Scenes, you can also create unlimited events and schedule for the entire year in one shot if the need arises. Again, you could always stitch together tools, so don't let Scenes be the only option on the table.

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TO FORUM OR NOT TO FORUM

A h, the forum.

Forums have been the oldest form of group internet communication. The format has been done, redone, and done again. I first used a phpBB forum for game development back in 2004. I visited the forum every single day, learning more about making my own game from users from across the world who I knew nothing about except a username.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the phpBB forum software. At the top, there's a dark header with the "phpBB" logo and "forum software" below it. To the right of the logo is a button labeled "Try our Demo". Below the header is a navigation bar with links: About, Downloads, Customise, Support, Development, Blog, Community, and Hosting. Underneath the navigation bar are three promotional banners: "What is phpBB?", "Get started with phpBB", and "Create and Share". At the bottom of the page, there's a section titled "THE #1 FREE, OPEN SOURCE BULLETIN BOARD SOFTWARE" with a paragraph of text and a link to "Learn more about phpBB".

The #1 FREE, OPEN SOURCE BULLETIN BOARD SOFTWARE

phpBB is a free flat-forum bulletin board software solution that can be used to stay in touch with a group of people or can power your entire website. With an [extensive database of user-created extensions](#) and [styles database](#) containing hundreds of style and image packages to customise your board, you can create a very unique forum in minutes.

No other bulletin board software offers a greater complement of features, while maintaining efficiency and ease of use. Best of all, phpBB is completely free. We welcome you to [test it](#) for yourself today. If you have any questions please visit our [Community Forum](#) where our staff and members of the community will be happy to assist you with anything from configuring the software to modifying the code for individual needs. [Learn more about phpBB](#).

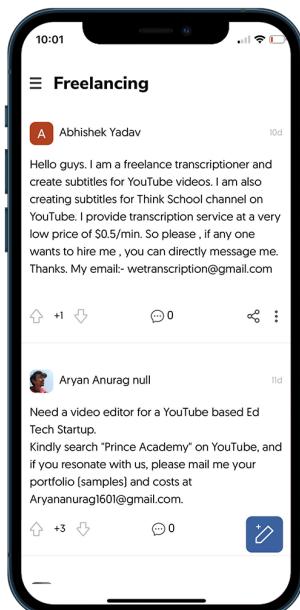
The idea of pseudonymity isn't new; it didn't pop up after Satoshi or Twitter. It started in the early days of the internet, where you could generate and maintain clout through a consistently used username, without having to ever reveal your real name or location. Growing up in India, I was insecure about where I

was from for a long time. Thanks to this and the veil that pseudonymity gave me, I was able to build a reputation without having to reveal who I was. It's not just me that found this freeing – it's also most people who will use your community. The crypto world has really adopted this concept; very few crypto projects use real names!

If your community has young folks in it, they probably haven't had enough time to build out a real personality (it takes a lot of time for people to get comfortable in their own skin in an alien community).

Scenes has slots for real names but doesn't enforce that people use them while signing up. We do however require mobile number verification via a code to prevent bot and spam accounts.

A forum will be where your users can generate the most amount of clout for themselves, pseudonymous or not. A forum is also your best bet at breaking down communication into threads or topics – in my personal opinion, reddit is the best example of a forum and the reddit format (posts, upvotes, downvotes, comments) is the gold standard for anyone looking to create a community.



The Scenes forum channel is a lot like Reddit's. They've cracked the model and we decided not to reinvent the wheel here.

Personally, I believe that forums aren't the best fit for small communities, especially when starting a new community. Because conversations are siloed into threads, you might fail to spark enough of a network effect by failing to get enough people talking in the same place at the same time. Utilizing just a single chat channel is a better option for smaller (<200 person) communities.

And one final tip — don't make a million different forums for individual topics. Topics are fluid, not static. A conversation that starts at "support" could end at "general" or "chit-chat", or vice-versa. It's like the ice cream vendor argument— if you go to an ice cream vendor and see a thousand options, the cognitive overload might prevent you from choosing a single one. Whereas a vendor with just three options is an easier one to pick from.

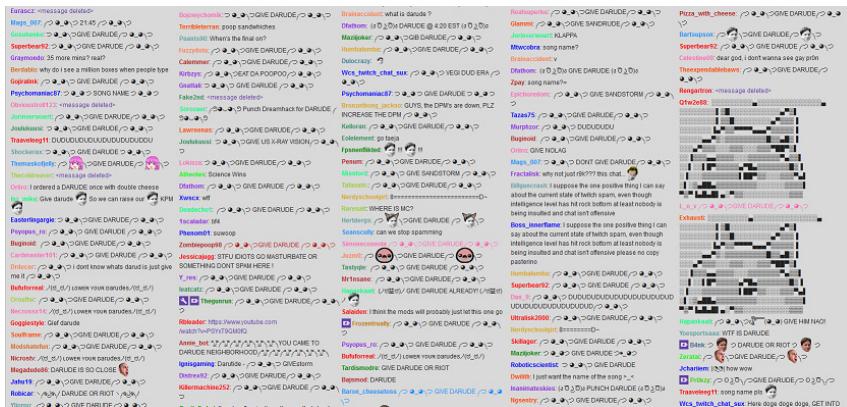
Considering that it is easier to concentrate network effects if you focus on a lesser number of channels, fewer forums will serve you better. Build for the network, not to reduce cognitive overload in your own brain.

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MANAGING A CHAT

A chat channel is the best way to bootstrap your community past a hundred people. A chat is instantaneous; people receive both support and entertainment in a heartbeat. There are several Series A+ business across the world right now managing a hundred WhatsApp groups each, the managers losing more hair than they should for their age. The big problem is that there hasn't been a great chat tool for a communities so far. WhatsApp caps out at 250 users (and is too personal for community), Telegram users are constantly spammed by other people, and Discord is painful to use on mobile. Since chat activity in 2021 is primarily going to come from mobile, you need something that can behave like Discord on the web but like WhatsApp or iMessage on the phone.

More importantly, you'll need to either break down your chat into enough subtopics or risk incredible volume on a single chat at scale. If you've ever seen a Twitch stream in action, you know what I mean.

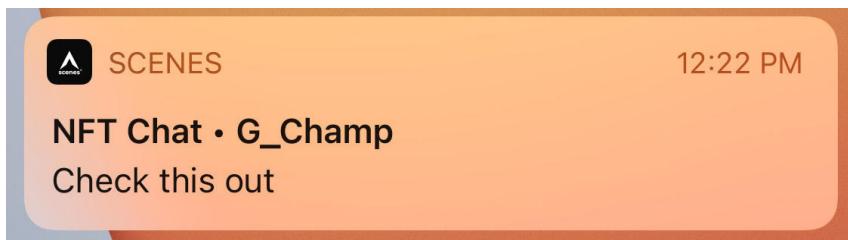


Chats can get so incredibly noisy at scale that I personally believe a 10k+ community should be moved to a forum immediately. I'd even start at 1k.

The challenge in migrating a chat community tool to a forum tool is a pain. You can do this seamlessly on Scenes because both channels are on the same tool -- you don't erode social capital on the switch.

With more than 100,000 users on Scenes and 50,000 users on Discord, we've noted three interesting insights about chat:

1) Chats need mobile notifications: There's absolutely no way you can receive chat notifications if you are on the web (sending email notifications will lead to spam; and very few people enable desktop notifications). Without your community on mobile, you're going to lose a ton of engagement. You also needed threaded chat notifications and not individual messages for every user (Discord sends individual messages).



1. **Competing community chats cannibalize each other:** If a person uses a single app to be a part of, say, 20 communities, they will eventually turn off all notifications on the app itself. Unlike WhatsApp where almost all messages have unique relevance to you, a Discord, Scenes, or Slack community will always have other irrelevant conversations in communities you are a part of that have nothing to do with you. While choosing a community tool, choose the one with the least number of competing communities or get a custom app made.
1. **50% of people mute chats:** Fed up with impersonalized notifications, 1 in 2 people on Scenes mutes a chat. This number is much worse on Discord and Slack, with almost everyone muting an entire irrelevant server/workspace. Discord's notification pattern is to send you many notifications when you join a server, then sending you none at all if you don't interact with the server. Once your chat hits scale, you should move to the forum channel or add more chat channels (balance is the keyword here, too many channels and you confuse new users).

With Scenes, users can mute chats but still receive notifications from events and forums.

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FIREFIGHTING

As a community scales, you're going to be spending a lot of time firefighting. Managing people is not a trivial skill — there are four year degrees that claim to teach you how to do so, but still woefully inadequate.

The big problem with large groups of people, is, well, people. Conflict is wired into our brains (Nassim Nicholas Taleb would call it “Lindy”). With our own Discord, we encountered many of these issues, and the same set of issues continued onward onto communities on Scenes.

If you distil it down to first principles, all humans in a community want three things:

1. Attention
2. Validation
3. A group to belong to

Take any of the three away, and there's disaster brewing. If you're selling soap, a bad customer can at best leave a bad review on a website. That may only marginally affect business unless you have a lot of customers leaving bad reviews. With a community, a single bad apple can ruin your entire community. Do not underestimate the extent a broken person will go to gain 1), 2) or 3).

One of the reasons we removed user to user direct messages from Scenes was harassment. The other was because pissed off people who are muted in a community or kicked off of stage can DM every single other member, throwing shade at the community itself. This happens very often on Discord.

Kicking a noisy member off of stage can be a trivial action for a moderator. However, if not handled properly, you could find an essay on your main chat about all the problems that plague your community. Dissenters can attract groups of other dissenters who haven't received 1), 2) or 3) in a while, and the problem could snowball into a lot of people spewing hate; with many innocent bystanders leaving the community as a result (some will stay to watch the drama, armed with popcorn). The question is one of how intolerant you should be of intolerance itself.

Ban the dissenter after a toxic post? Ban the dissenter before they become explosive? Ban the dissenter the minute they show signs of being a dissenter?

As you can see, we're entering a Minority Report situation here. Dealing with dissenters is like dealing with a bomb situation where you could have evidence of a bombing far before it happens, based on member behavior. It has to be handled carefully, or it'll hurt everything around it.

In my experience, you should delete and ban the dissenter right after a toxic post. A lot of idealists will disagree with me, and talk about the value of free speech. Young community managers are of this mindset: that members must be allowed to

complain. While this is true, it's almost insane to let someone ruin years of your hard work because they didn't get some attention or validation or got kicked off a stage for a noisy microphone. Like I've mentioned before, one pissed off person can bring down an entire 100,000 man community with ease by creating a snowball effect. Trying to reason with the person while they're angry won't work either.

This is the main reason to have a channel or a post where rules are written up explicitly, so you can point at it and explain to everyone else why you banned someone from the community (otherwise the banned individual can become a martyr for the cause).

Here's an example from the Parallel Alpha community:

PARALLEL DISCORD RULES //

- 1. Have fun and don't be toxic.**
- 2. If you have a question, please read #deleted-channel first and view our pinned messages.**
- 3. Unsolicited DM's to other members will result in an immediate and permanent ban.**
- 4. No spamming, text walls, or flooding channels with "copypasta" messages.**
- 5. Don't @ everyone or @ here unless you have written permission from an admin.**
- 6. Please be mindful of the channel descriptions and post appropriately.**
- 7. Listen to all Mods and follow the general rules and etiquette of a Discord server.**

8. No lewd, explicit, excessive cursing, or hate messages will be tolerated.
9. No advertising or self-promotion will be accepted without permission first.
10. Bashing, heated arguments, or any form of doxing will NOT be tolerated.

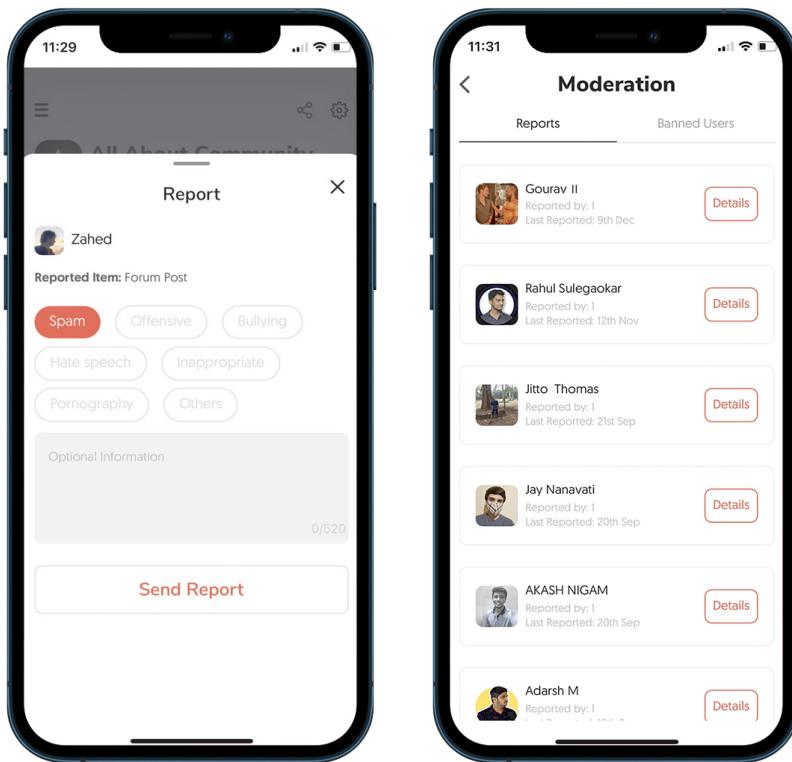
ZERO-TOLERANCE RULES //

1. Zero tolerance for racism or racial slurs of any kind.
2. Zero tolerance for posting someone else's personal information.
3. Zero tolerance for forgery, fake identities, or multiaccounting.
4. Zero tolerance for any type of online bullying or harming of others.**

You do not have permission to send messages in this channel.

Note: Doxing means putting out someone's personal info online.

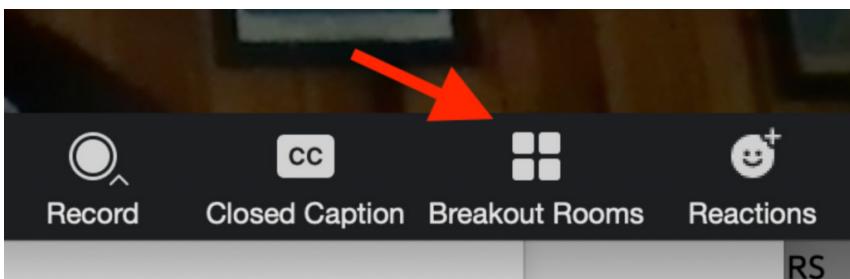
Scenes allows users to report problematic posts and messages, which allows moderators to go fix those issues. Discord and Slack severely lack this feature -- with the mods having to go find the troublesome posts themselves on those platforms (nearly impossible in a large community).



We speak more about firefighting in the chapter on Moderation.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

I once attended a private Zoom session by a large VC. At the end of the session, founders were split up into groups and asked to work on a problem statement together. Zoom has a great feature for this: the breakout room.

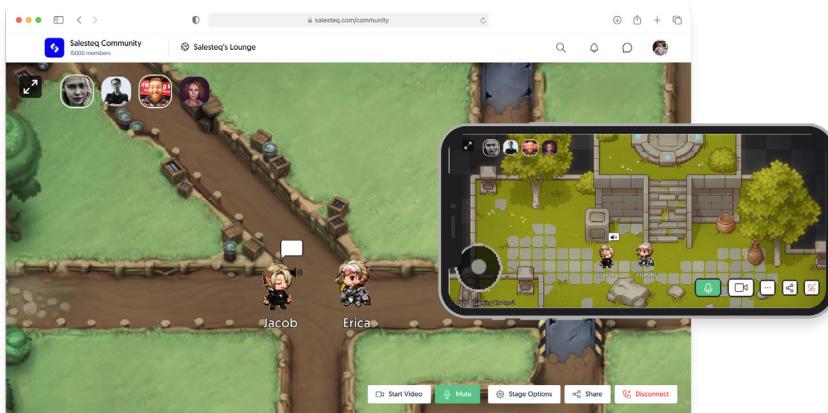


Breakout rooms simply allow you to spawn mini-rooms where small groups of people can talk in private to each other while still being part of a larger event. For example, if an event has a hundred people, each breakout room can have five people each (that makes 20 breakout rooms in total).

When running a community, you need to understand the difference between an interactive and a non-interactive event. Non-interactive events are simply live sessions run by a moderator or a speaker (bringing a few people on stage to answer their problems doesn't count). Interactive events (some call these "workshops") require your members to do stuff with each other (or alone) during the event. Sparking new connections between members who have never spoken to each other cre-

ates amazing rapport and comradeship, and breakout rooms are the right way to give clusters of people privacy from others while they bond with each other.

There's an even better way to do breakout rooms on Scenes -- via our Metaverse channel.



The Metaverse channel is essentially a breakout room that allows people to bubble up into smaller groups. One-on-ones or small group sessions can be conducted in a 2D environment that helps alleviate video camera fatigue. We've seen people use this channel to host conferences, events, and even cohort-based courses!

The right way to use breakout rooms (whether on Scenes or not) is to first host a full event. Once context has been set at the event, move on to the breakout rooms by giving people express instructions on what to do. If people are not told **exactly** what to do when creating a mini-group, they're just going to do nothing.

Also, here's a pro-tip: cap the size of the group to 4 people. Any more and you're risking some people not participating.

Without much further ado, here are the three levels of breakout activities:

1. Start with giving out a simple group task: This gets everyone in the mood and also lets your members feel like they've won in a group setting (this makes members feel really good). An example is a sports community asking a breakout group to make a collage of all their best sporting events in one image. If the task is too difficult, you'll see non-participants.

2. The next level is to try and introduce some competition between each breakout room: We used to host a quiz between different groups once in a while; this worked really well to foster engagement. Almost everyone in a competitive breakout room competition feels involved in the community, even if they lose.

3. Try to move the groups beyond just a breakout session: On our Discord, we created the concept of houses (Odin, Izanagi, Osiris, Zeus) and created a permanent level of intra-community competition. This is great for engagement if you pull it off, but hard to pull off if you can't get enough member involvement. This is why it's important to have a small, involved community instead of a large, dead one.



32

COMMUNITY NOTIFICATIONS

On Scenes, if you use just the white-labeled web platform, you can expect to see <3-5% monthly retention. If you host the community on the mobile platform, that number can go up to 15-20%.

When choosing a community platform, mobile support is absolutely necessary. Without mobile support, you might as well not do community. Even though the first interaction of a lot of new members might be through web (and that's fine), you should aim to get them to mobile quickly. The main reason for this is that web notifications are routed to the user in two ways: **by enabling desktop notifications and via email**.

1. By enabling desktop notifications



Desktop notifications have very poor opt-in rates. Here are the industry averages for desktop notification opt-in rates for 3 popular industries — look how terrible the numbers are:

- E-commerce: 0.5-5%
- Media: 0.5 – 6%
- Financial services: 0.5 – 10.5 %

Delivery rate is also lower if the computer is off (deciding to spam when they turn on the device isn't smart). If people have opted-in, then click through rate (CTR) is best between 11am-6pm. More importantly, you simply cannot send a high volume of chat messages via desktop push notifications.



2. Via email

Email is an even worse format. For starters, you can't send chat notifications over email. Even just sending posts, you will eventually hit the spam folder (people will mark you as spam if you're sending a high volume). As a community scales, volume

of notifications obviously increases. Playing with email notifications is like playing with fire — if enough people mark you as spam, you're in potentially irreversible trouble. It is hard to fix a domain that gets on the bad side of Gmail's spam filters.

Scenes has automatic thresholds based on community size to prevent your members from getting flooded with emails as you grow.

Mobile notifications

This is the main reason I suggest mobile notifications. By downloading an app, people give the app permanent real estate on their phones. Even though it is a little friction, your chat channels send out the highest volume of notifications.

Unlike Discord, Scenes threads together chats (like WhatsApp) after 1-2 messages, saving a ton of real estate and pissed off users.

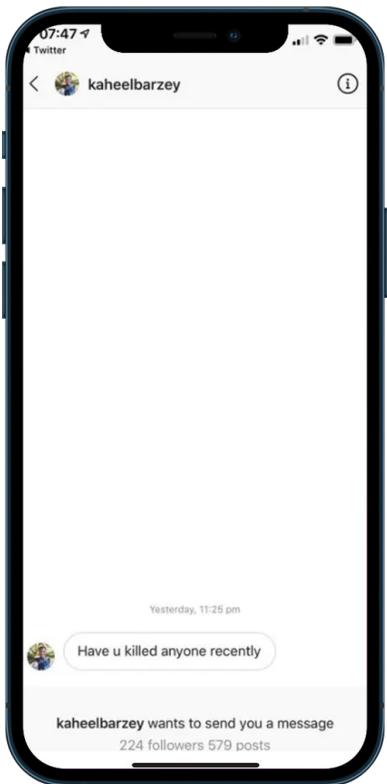


Web is a great place to start, but switch to mobile with urgency if you plan to own a large, healthy community in the long term.

33

1:1 ENGAGEMENT

Direct messages (DMs) in communities aren't a great idea. Even though 1:1 engagement can be a value add that your community provides its members, there are kinks in human wiring that prevent all members from being effective users of DMs. Kinks like these:



Slack did a U-turn after launching their public DMs feature because of the same reason. Because communities are very different from private workplaces (where you generally know everybody, and have an employer to sort out harassment issues), 1 to 1 DMs are a big risk factor for abuse.

In fact, I'd argue that 1 on 1 interactions aren't even your job as a community manager, even if they are connecting two different members. You should be more focused on the flow of traffic, and trying

to make more group interactions happen. Most members are smart and keen enough to connect over DMs or offline if they

meet someone they like.

Scenes has a follower-following system, and DMs can only be sent post that association. They are disabled by default, you will have to enable them as an admin.

Do not focus, as a community manager, on trying to make 1:1 connections happen. Build for the network. Again —individuals will take care of themselves and DM others if they find value and have interacted with them in the group.

34

SETTING INCENTIVES

Incentives drive growth and engagement. Sam Altman thinks so too:



Sam Altman @sama

...

Setting incentives is a superpower.

5 words that changed how I think about almost everything.

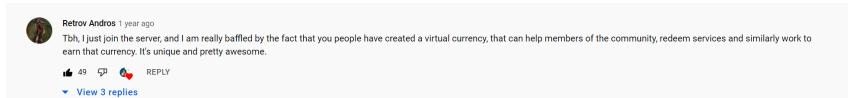
1:27 AM · Jan 29, 2021 · Twitter Web App

284 Retweets 35 Quote Tweets 2,579 Likes

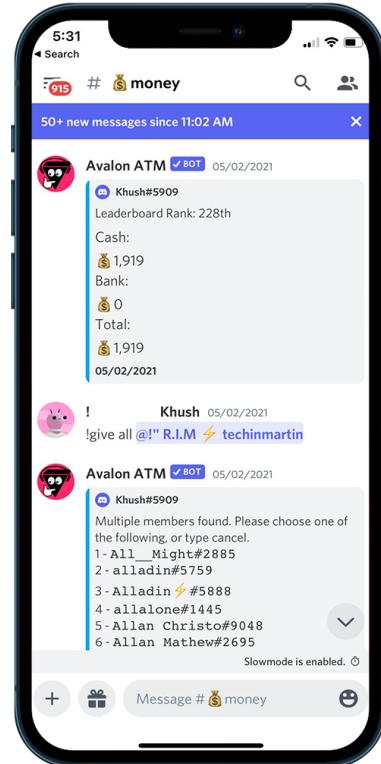
With communities, setting incentives requires carefully planning around your metrics. Here are the five most important things to incentivize on:

1. Invited a friend (growth)
2. Attended an event (engagement)
3. 5 upvotes on a forum post (engagement, any lesser than 5 can be easily manipulated)
4. 5 upvotes on content (engagement, any lesser than 5 can be easily manipulated)
5. Visiting streaks (engagement, converts monthly or weekly users into daily active user)

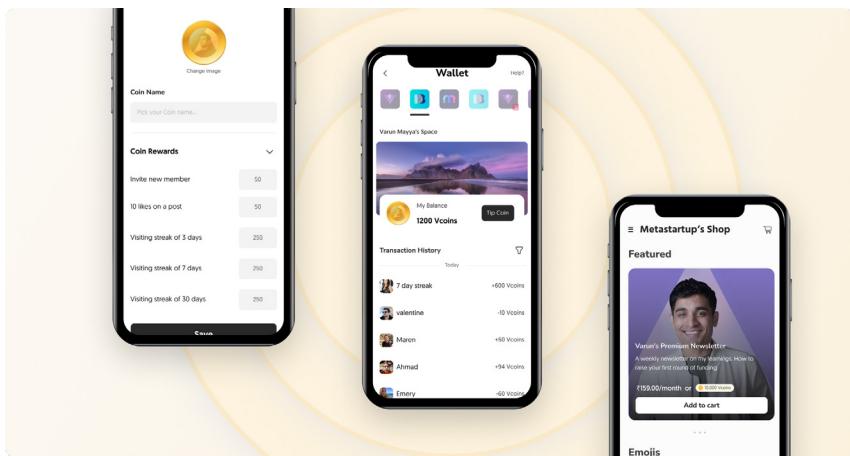
We actually started our incentivization experiments on Discord itself. Here's a comment on our YouTube Discord tutorial:



We used on a bot on Discord called UnbelievaBoat, and setup every new user with 1,000 coins. People could send each other coins and check their balance, but that was about it. You didn't have a shop channel where you could redeem the coins, coins couldn't be given out based on any actions (coins had to be given manually to every user, which is painful). There is so much more you can do with a smartly designed coins system.



Scenes solves the incentivization problem with a full fledged coins system. Not only can coins be automatically given based on certain actions (inviting new members, or likes on a post, or attending events), you can also let your users spend their coins in your shop channel!



Incentives are powerful when it comes to improving your viral factor (k), and all your ratio metrics.

As we'll learn in the chapters on monetization, engagement and revenue increases proportionally. Most importantly, it improves shop conversions because you can give your members a discount if they hold some coins on products that cost money.

One drawback with Scenes' shop system is that it only supports Stripe and Razorpay as payment gateways for now.

PART FIVE

MODERATION



35

THE STORY OF OUR FIRs

Communities can get really taxing. The last thing we expected to be involved in as tech entrepreneurs and community owners were legal issues from community members. A couple of months into our community, we were receiving weekly FIRs. For those unfamiliar with South Asian laws, an FIR is a first information report — where someone informs the cops in writing of a criminal offense that has been committed. FIRs as a practice are often abused in India. The reason we received our FIRs were so stupid you're probably going to have a little laugh reading the reason why.

Remember I told you about how people can get really pissed off being kicked off stage and try to ruin your community as a result? Well, it can happen.

It all began one weekend when a regular member of our community was kicked off of stage by one of our volunteer moderators. When a well known community member is publicly humiliated like this, the community pays. The same member came back and threatened to launch an FIR against the company behind the community, unless we “fired” the moderator. This continued week on week and made all our moderators a tad bit worried. Because all our community moderators were sourced from the community itself, it would be quite sad and technically improper for us to “fire” someone who never officially worked for us in the first place.

The threats continued week on week until we finally just asked the moderator (who was a genuinely well meaning person) to change his account and username, and we gave this new account “moderator” status again. The FIR threats stopped and everyone continued happy.

N.C.R.B (एन.सी.आर.बी)
I.I.F.-I (एन्डीएफ आई.एफ.आई.)

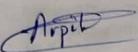
or (को कारण हुकार किया गया)
 (4) Transferred to P.S.(वाना): District (ज़िला):
 on point of jurisdiction (को सैत्राधिकार के कारण हस्तातिरित).

F.I.R. read over to the complainant / informant, admitted to be correctly recorded and a copy given to the complainant / informant free of cost. (विकायतकर्ता / सूचनाकर्ता को प्राप्तिशीली पढ़ कर सुनाइ गयी, सही दर्ज हुई माना और एक कार्पी निश्चल विकायतकर्ता को दी गयी।)

R.O.A.C.(आर.ओ.ए.सी.) याना प्रमाणी के निर्देश पर प्राप्तिशीली दर्ज की गई


 FIR Writer (विकायतकर्ता के हस्ताक्षर)
 Name (नाम): MANOJ KAVAT
 Rank (पद): उपसिरिकारा/अधिकारी निरीक्षक

Signature of Officer in charge, Police Station
 (याना प्रमाणी के हस्ताक्षर)
 Name (नाम): SUDHIR ARJARIA
 Rank(पद): I (Inspector)
 No.(सं.): INSPECTOR


 14. Signature/Thumb impression of the complainant / informant.
 (शिकायतकर्ता / सूचनाकर्ता के हस्ताक्षर / अंगूठे का निशान):

15. Date and time of dispatch to the court
 (अदालत में प्रेषण की दिनांक और समय):

Attachment to item 7 of First Information Report (प्रथम दस्तावेज रिपोर्ट के मद्द 7 संलग्न):
 Physical features, deformities and other details of the suspect/accused: (If known / seen)
 (संटीक्ष / अभियुक्त की शारीरिक विशेषताएं, विकृतियाँ और अन्य विवरण : (यदि जात / देखा गया))

4

As tech entrepreneurs or community managers, you probably have no time to deal with some of this nonsense. However, such is the territory that running a community comes with. You better be prepared.

36

PICKING MODERATORS

People believe that you should hire moderators for your community externally rather than pick them from your community. This is wrong.

Admins or moderators for your community should come from your community itself, and incentive should be status within the community rather than moderation being a job.

Reddit spearheaded this idea of community moderators, with every forum adopting the idea of having community moderators that volunteer for the role.

Here's what moderators do inside a community:

- Put up announcements.
- Remove posts and comments from the community that violate rules.
- Ban spammers, trolls and members who disrupt the peace.
- (In a webinar) Kick people off of stage who violate stage rules.
- Wield some degree of influence when it comes to changing community rules and goals.

While picking moderators:

1. Be really thoughtful of who you select and how you position what you're asking them to fit into. At a certain level of scale, you'll need hierarchy even among moder-

ators; make sure you're picking natural leaders.

2. Pick people who are not afraid to give feedback. But also ensure that the feedback is constructive and not just complaining. Do not pick chronic complainers, they are a time and energy drain.
3. Pick people who have a history of speaking up about things that they feel are wrong or broken or didn't work. You need to find people who are willing to have that dialogue and have the agency to go fix things themselves.
4. Tell them that's why you picked them. It's important for these folks to know that they are valued and special in the community. A moderator is a type of freelancing gig where you're almost always paid in status and not capital. There are much better jobs if folks are looking for money.
5. When building trust, you don't want to overpromise and underdeliver. If you commit to some really big things that will happen in your community (or big growth numbers) and if they don't happen even if it was out of your control, the trust between you and the moderators are affected. Therefore underpromise and overdeliver.
6. Initially, you want to identify moderators and privately reach out to them. You should know all your moderators personally.
7. Moderators talk, between each other and in public. It is generally a good idea to avoid revealing sensitive business information unless mandatory.
8. The best way to hire moderators is to ask for recommendations from your existing moderators.

9. Eventually you can make the process public with applications open to everyone who's interested and filter them. Filtering becomes easy once you have a culture established because existing moderators will act like an internal police that will weed out anyone who doesn't fit the bill.

You want to have a limited term on the moderator role. The reasons are two-fold:

1. It brings in new perspective and culture over time
2. It prunes moderators that are underperforming to their committed role

We used to cycle out one moderator every month, typically the most inactive/ underperforming one.

Another path that you can have for people who have finished their tenure is to hire (full-time) these moderators for brand and customer development roles because they have hands-on experience and insights that are invaluable to your product and marketing teams.

You do not want to enforce hard requirements as long as people are participating. Remember these people have volunteered to help you grow. If someone wants to step back for a while, that should be totally fine. And if there's a moderator you really like that's about to leave, you should hire them into your business to keep them on board.

MODERATOR STANDUPS

Communication Transparency

Despite the fact that moderators don't belong to the business behind the community, they need to feel like they can actually talk to the organization. They're part of your team — they need to feel like they have access. On our Discord, we did weekly stand-up sessions with our moderators, running them through what our plans for the community were over the next week.

We addressed concrete issues like feature requests, community requests, support requests, but also addressed emotional issues. Remember that we've all had those incidents with our friends, colleagues, or bosses where the communication or trust has evaporated, and it's hard to move on from there. Since mods will be the most neglected part of your company's ecosystem, make sure they're heard.

Default to open communication (one manager to many moderators) as much as possible. Make sure you have a private channel on your own community that mods have access to but is invisible to others.

Having a private channel for moderators is very easy to do on Scenes.

 **Dr. Elson** 12/06/2020
@admin

Let's meet tonight?

Agenda:

- Book club
- Secret Santa
- Bots & Moderation - Recording (Craig), YouTube lives (Mee6 announcement plug in), Vortex, ServerStats
- Clean up newbie zone
- Skill days
- Other matters if any (edited)

10pm works?

 **Dr. Elson** 12/05/2020
@admin

Boys and girl - Are you guys into football?
Do you know them?
They were the Galacticos. All the best players in the world in one team. In fact this pic is just half the team.
I want us all to take their example.
Each of them were all-stars in their own right but together - they were invincible!



7 6 5

I don't want admins to be limited to just kicking and banning people.
I think each of us should start taking sessions and being 'content creators' on our own.
If y'all are nervous or need a kickstart, I'll make myself available and we can collaborate, else if you're confident enough to do it yourself, feel free to do that.

6

And we stick together. Help promote each of the new content creators on the platform. Talk about it in the main-channel. Ignite conversations around the topic.
I love it how some of the admins always react to the event messages. things like that

6 7

 **Deleted User** 12/05/2020
I will surely make the conversation in the main channel interesting

3

 @Dr. Elson I love it how some of the admins always react to the event messages. things like that

1 R.I.M ⚡ ODIN ⚡ Chaitanya 12/05/2020
Always there doc ⚡

4 1

The right strategy is to have calls at least once a month talking about issues they are concerned with, previewing updates and anything that moderators want to have their input on. Get them involved early.

Even if only 1-2 people show up, that's fine because those who attended will spread the word that the brand is working on so and so things and that they are hearing their moderators. Make your moderators club so exclusive that folks want to join.

Success is 75% the actual program and 25% the perception of the program.

Most moderators on Discord are unpaid, they do it for the status. However, we do recommend that they be paid eventually by absorbing moderators into your company. Status doesn't pay bills.

Your moderators want access to the business (if you have one) and founders. Make sure that can happen once a quarter. But as community manager, you want to make it clear that they are not going to get any higher up the chain on a daily basis. You have to make it clear that you are their point of contact.

As a community manager, you are the representative of your moderators, and you want to make it clear that you are there to fight for their needs and their voices will be heard with upper management.

38

DEALING WITH CRISIS & THE ESCALATION MATRIX

Like we've shown you in the "story of FIRs" chapter, dealing with crisis in a community is a challenge. One explosive individual can ruin your entire community. You might think this is a rare event, but it isn't.

The best way to deal with crisis is to have an escalation matrix in place. We unfortunately didn't have enough time to spend on one of these during our time on Discord, but it should theoretically work. While it might be possible to take on crisis events one at a time as they come, your moderators will be ill equipped to do so without an escalation matrix; and you're not going to be available all the time either. You need to give them a way to tackle situations by themselves when appropriate and escalate to you when things get hot.

Level 1: Warn the person: This is something that moderators can do themselves. Certain bots on Discord can do this with a log of people who are warned.

A screenshot of a Discord message log. The first message is from a user named 'Teufel' at 1:16 AM, containing the command '/warn @DaNeubi Verwarnungen ins neue System übertragen.' The second message is from a bot named 'you-have-been-warned BOT' at 1:16 AM, containing the response 'DaNeubi" has been warned by "Terror" (Reason: Verwarnungen ins neue System übertragen.). This is warning #1'. Both messages include small profile icons.

Level 2: Mute or Kick the abusive person: muting a noisy member on stage, or kicking them is still a moderator activity.

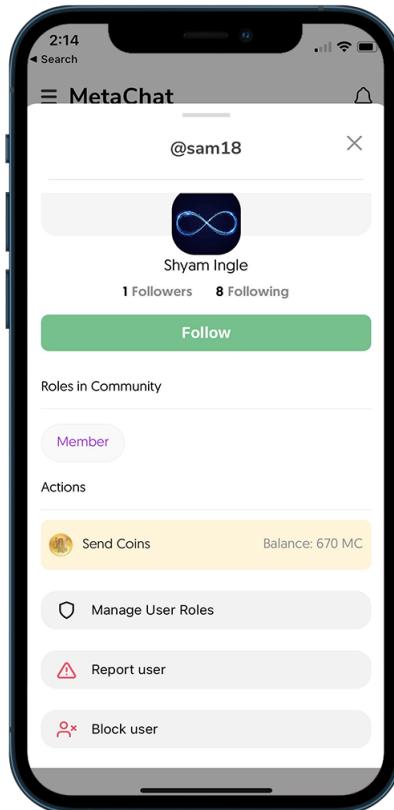
Level 3: Ban the person:
Still a moderator level activity, banning someone prevents them from ever visiting the community again. While this can be abused by certain moderators, having a log of ban events and “reasons” for such events really help go a long way.

Levels beyond 3 assume the person has created a new account and is continuing their rampage from the new account.

Level 4: Talk to the person and make them understand why they shouldn't cause chaos — Be nice; maybe they will understand. They're probably just looking for attention. This is the main reason you should hire moderators who are natural leaders and good with communication. In the case that you have no mods with decent intrapersonal skills, you will find yourself doing most Level 4 work by yourself.

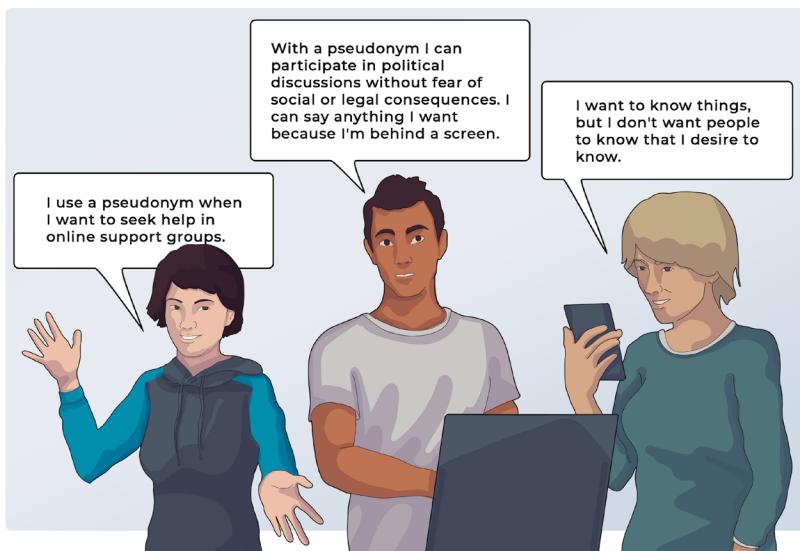
Level 5: Bring a CXO in (Marketing, perhaps) and have them talk to the person. Again, you're trying to defuse the situation rather than have it snowball.

Level 6: Use OTP (Mobile Verification Code) systems to prevent new account spam (more on this in the next chapter).



ANONYMITY & OTPS/ VERIFICATION CODE

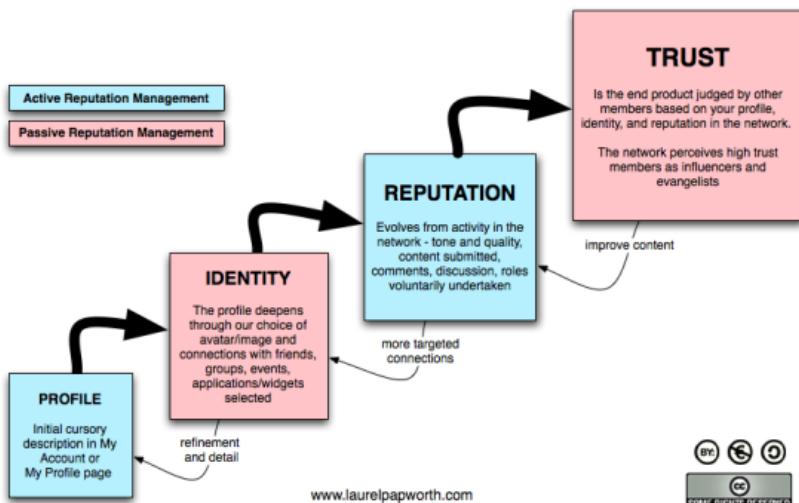
There is a blue ocean of opportunities in exploring how anonymity and pseudonymity can allow people to contribute to communities without having their contribution tied to their professional identity. We're bigger proponents of pseudonymity (accounts without a real life identity specified, but consistent digital identity), but you need some mobile number verification (or OTP verification system) to prevent fake accounts.



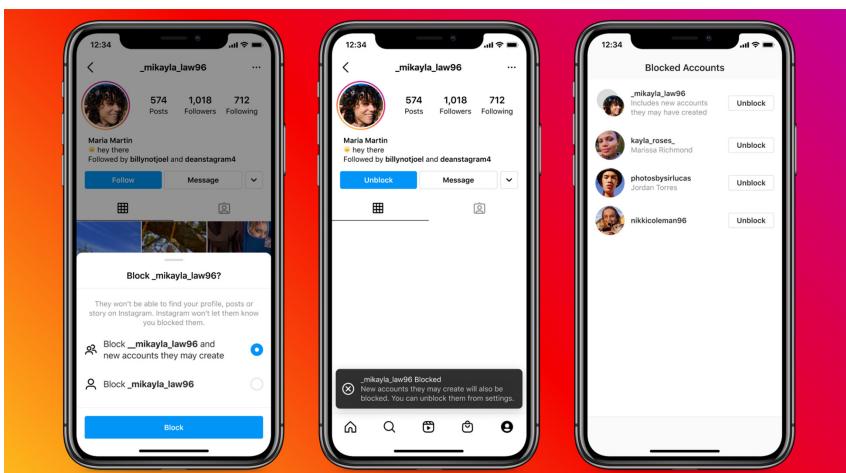
Pseudonymity

SOCIAL WEB - REPUTATION MANAGEMENT CYCLES

© Laurel Papworth 2008



As you've learned in the previous chapter, trolls and toxic people can enter your community multiple times despite being banned; by making multiple new accounts. Instagram came up with a new feature to block users and any new account they might create — this most probably works by blocking all accounts associated with the mobile number of the user.



Both Discord and Scenes use OTP verification to prevent mass account creation (although this needs to be manually enabled on Discord). Email verification is completely useless when it comes to protecting against fake accounts.

PART SIX

STATUS GAMES



40

DJ ROLE STORY

In this chapter I'm turning the pages to a lesser known incident from the Avalon Meta days. While most people are aware of the Discord server, they don't know how things started.

It all began with another Discord server, this one not so public. In early June, we decided to experiment with cohort-based courses. Our content on the Avalon Meta app was gathering a lot of eyeballs, but until then we weren't generating any revenue.

We decided to launch a beta mentorship program in marketing.

I would teach people using my expertise in media buying and marketing automation. The whole experience was community-led product building in action because we were literally learning on the go.

We charged a registration fee of about \$50 for hands-on mentoring.

Although I came in for my expertise and experience in marketing lessons, this was also the start of my online community management journey.

Fortunately for us, our cohort was extremely understanding and forgiving. It was this way because they felt involved in the process of building (Remember the IKEA effect?).

Some of our early cohort members still work with us in key

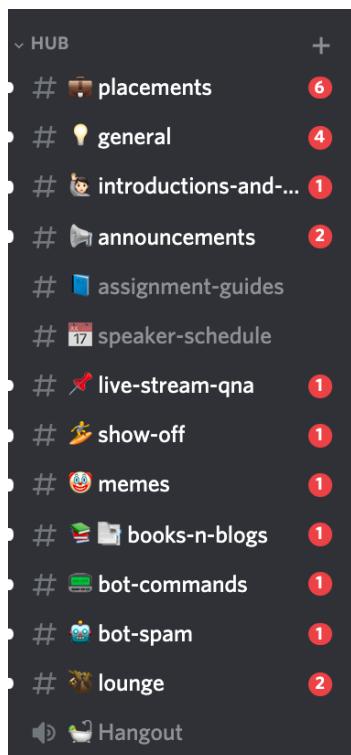
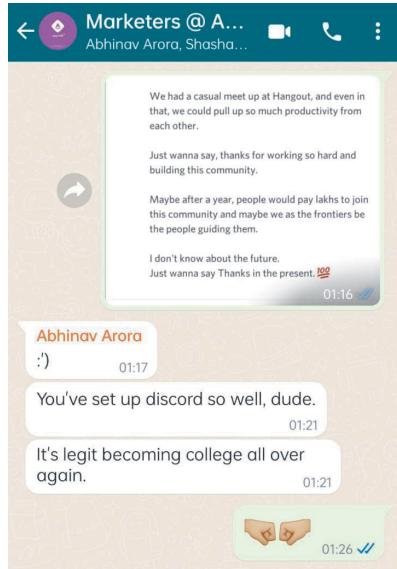
roles within the company today.

In addition to countless text and voice channels where community members could share and engage through their assignments, I decided to incorporate two chill-zones called #lounge and #hangout. I had no idea what these spaces were for but in my head I was sure these were things I was missing in terms of building a virtual university.

What sprouted out of this channel was an event and role like no other.

One of the mentees, while discussing their assignment, started playing some music in the background. A few minutes in, the mentees stopped discussing their course material and instead started providing song recommendations.

The channel started to gain so much traction that several mentors joined the channel to check



in and see what was so interesting about assignment #3.

A little later, we started sharing song recommendations and started raving with our makeshift DJ.

Fun fact: We later learned that he actually did paid gigs as a DJ. No wonder it was so good!

The stream went on for hours and hours. Even our lectures didn't bring in so much engagement.

Mentees from across the country were sharing how they revamped their bedrooms to look like a nightclub while raving to someone playing music on his phone. (Remember, this was when the pandemic hit and all of us were locked in our rooms.) On the accompanying text channels, we were sharing fun stories and spamming emojis.

The whole experience was surreal.

When we launched the main Discord server, DJ nights became a regular thing on that server as well. Music Nights, Techno Thursdays, Fusion Fridays - we had it all!

The image consists of two side-by-side screenshots from a messaging application. The left screenshot shows a channel named '# events' with a message from 'Dr. Elson' dated 01/17/2021. Dr. Elson invites everyone to a 'Trance Night on Avalon Meta Virtual Campus.' at 11:30 pm. Below this, there's a decorative graphic for a 'TRANCE PARTY' featuring various DJ-related icons like turntables and headphones. A message from 'I! R.I.M' (@technimartin) on 01/09/2021 asks if anyone is planning an EDM 'dj night'. The right screenshot shows a search results page for 'dj night' with 319 results. The top result is from 'Akshit Gupta' on 03/06/2021, responding to Dr. Elson's invite. Another message from 'viren_suthar' on 03/06/2021 includes a link to a GIF of a man in a white shirt with the text 'Aur ye Ma ha mein poore'. Below these, there are other messages related to the '# bot-play-music' and '# main' channels.

We also started noticing another behavior sprout among the members.

Community management is in essence observing and shepherding human behavior. Facilitate the behaviours that appeal to you, and disincentivize or punish the ones that don't.

Since the scale of the main server was 50x that of the marketing cohort, it also saw a rise in the number of DJs. Some of them would reach out to us with their soundtracks and records of their past gigs to become a DJ.

But why? What was the allure of a DJ role on an internet server?

The answer is power, or the illusion of it. Being a DJ on our server came with a lot of implicit power they could exercise. As a DJ, they were given priority speaker access on the voice channels. They could also mute, ban or deafen people because we didn't want listeners to have their audio on and "kill the vibe" with someone's mom yelling at them in the background for being late to dinner.

By default, everyone was muted on the channel where the party was going on, and having the DJ role elevated their status by giving them permission that even other founding members or senior roles didn't possess.

ROLES - 29	MEMBERS
Avalon Founders	4
Avalon Team	3
Skill-bot	1
admin	28
DJ	6
Early Avalonian	3594

No wonder we started seeing simultaneous parties going on in different voice channels and even conference rooms.

The DJ Role story teaches us a fundamental lesson in how simple features like roles and permissions in a community play a role in status. It also shows us that it's your job as a community builder to grant tiny, gift wrapped blocks of power and status that your most loyal members can use.

ALLEVIATING LONELINESS

Before we move on to status, there's a quote that sums up the idea of an online community.

"We can be loners together."

I find this to be the simplest way to define what a community is.

In spite of being in a hyper-connected world, we are all extremely lonely. Not alone, but lonely. The rising popularity of the internet has coincided with a rising crisis of loneliness. Family sizes have also shrunk from the larger extended families to nuclear families or people living alone. You live alone, eat alone, and probably spend most of your day in a cubicle or a work from home setup hunched over a desk.

Social interactions form the basis of human society. You've probably heard Aristotle's famous adage – "Man is a social animal by nature...". We, humans, prefer clans and tribes over staying alone. Through online communities, you can still be isolated physically but connected digitally. That's the real value of communities – the vision or mission statement is secondary.

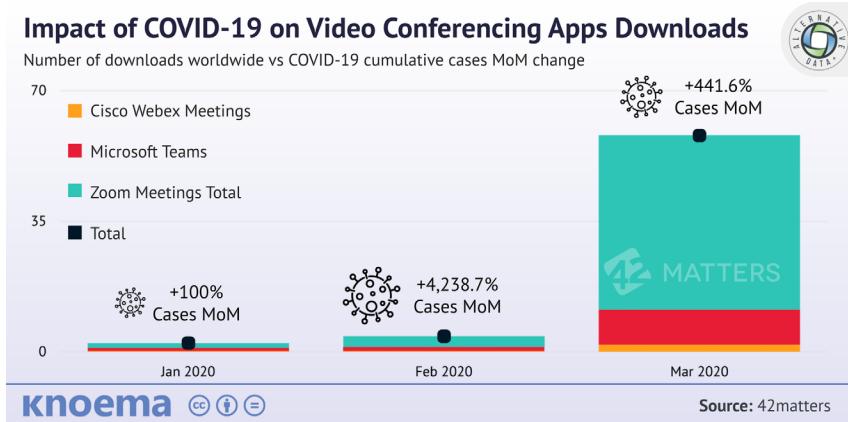
I'm putting this across once again (this time in bold text) because it is so important to what we do as community builders: **online communities help alleviate loneliness.** Online communities are the clans and tribes of the 21st century.

In communities, humans find themselves. Communities al-

low people to feel seen. They feel like they can express a part of themselves more freely, perhaps more than they ever knew they could.

One of the reasons we have a huge advantage when it comes to community building was that we were building for ourselves.

2020 was a horrific year for all of us. But it's also a part of our history and hence, gets a mention. As news of the pandemic came into public notice, we were forced to isolate ourselves. Most of our team members packed their bags and shifted to their hometowns. Being alone was the mandate.



In March 2020, Zoom's daily users spiked to 200 million, up from 10 million in December.

Offline social distancing gave rise to online social connections.

When we were choosing online tools for remote work and learning about ways to improve online engagement, little did we know that we were doing R&D to build the future of communities and now the internet.

And that's how the best products are built. Not from sur-

veys or market research, but product instinct that stems from making a product for ourselves. We were scratching our own itch!

If you build for yourself, you'll always have product-market fit.

4:59 AM · Jul 27, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

1,112 Retweets 123 Quote Tweets 8,426 Likes

I once knew a brand that created a community for their organic, farm-produced products. They were big believers in the idea that organic food was the way to go, and that there were enough people who believed in the idea of organic food. Every forum discussion, every event was about the benefits of organic food and why it was important.

The community failed simply because it didn't alleviate loneliness. It had a strong vision and mission but failed to understand that the only way to get communities off the ground is by connecting people. The vision and mission of the community is simply an excuse to put people together. This behavior can also be seen with teenage activists. Many of them fight for a cause they know nothing about. If asked to specify exactly what they're fighting for, they fail to formulate a coherent (nor convincing) argument. **Many become activists to belong.** Stop building communities at or for people. Community building is with and for people, including yourself. As a community builder, I can tell you that the feeling is almost therapeutic.

There is one exception to this rule of alleviating loneliness: knowledge communities. You can run a forum for product support and discussions that can purely be Q&A without any need to build a support group (although it is still preferred to build one).

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GAMIFICATION

Badges! Achievements! Levels – In this chapter, we'll explore how rewarding your community rewards you.

More than just fun

There's a science underlying gamification. It's wired in to our brains.

The challenges of a game and the achievement of a goal causes a spike in our dopamine levels ("feel-good hormone"). This is the reason why playing is so attractive (and often addictive).

As we continue to repeat a behavior that causes a pleasant feeling, our desire to obtain that feeling again is increased. Simply put, if something generates pleasure, we repeat it. If it doesn't, we avoid it or don't bother.

Gamification is tying what motivates your members with what will bring value to you, your members, and the community as a whole. It is the application of techniques found in gaming to something which is not generally a "game".

For example, you can encourage gentle competition around engagement and retention like awarding points for event attendance and returning streaks which lead to increased loyalty

and lifetime value for you as a business.

Common gamification techniques:

- Custom Permissions: Reward special access and privileges. If you have an existing shopping-based loyalty program, you can integrate the community activities as well where users get rewarded for their contribution.
- Popularity indices: Community members should be able to see the number of friends, followers, or connections they have.
- Leaderboards: A standalone leaderboard is also a great addition. You can assign scores to community activities like in-community engagement or outside community social sharing.
- Badges and Reputation Scores: Badges give a visual cue about the specialty of a community member which others can aspire and work towards. One great way to activate new users is to assign them a badge called “newbie” or “rookie” and clearly outline the steps to upgrade. Since it’s a badge they’ll likely not want to keep for long, they’ll quickly work towards achieving the reputation score to upgrade. It works both ways.

In most cases, you’ll want to assign titles with names that fit your brand personality (Avacoin for example was the virtual currency for our community). Customize them to meet the needs of your community.

The trick here is to create a sense of healthy competition in the community by using a combination of different gamifica-

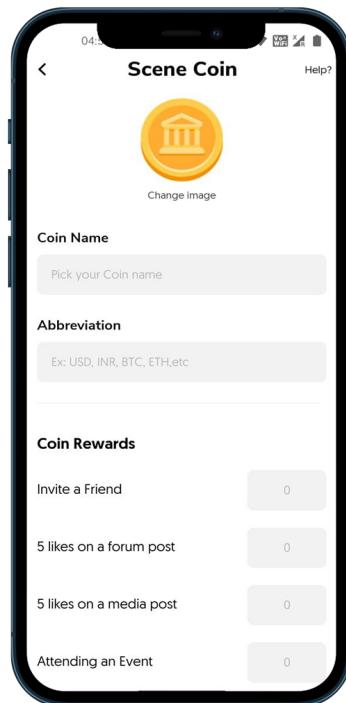
tion techniques.



Community Coins

Since community building is like building your digital empire, you need a currency that community members can use to barter. A community currency allows you to embed gamification and also serves as a medium for value standardization. You're bringing economic dynamics to your community.

You should also customize your community coin and gamification elements to fit your brand personality.



*Community coins are inbuilt
on Scenes*

Our own community coin was called "Avacoin". Although the coin was not real, it had value. The value of the coin increases with the number of members who own it.

You can add a conversion rate to your community coins and provide real-world utility like official merchandise, ticketing to events, and course registrations. Your imagination is the limit!

Scenes allows you to spend community coins in the shop channel. Yep, we've thought it through.

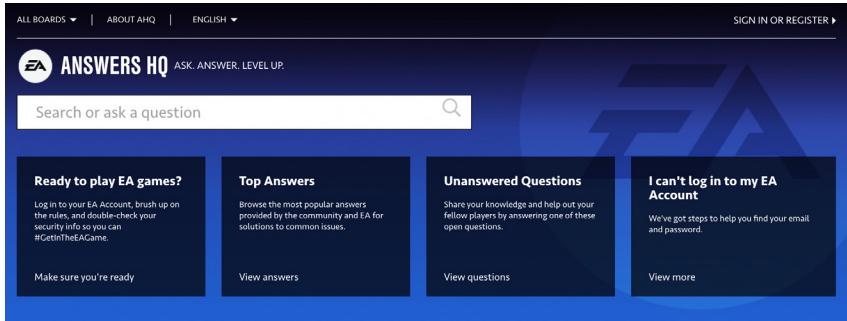
Challenging but achievable

If the rungs of the “leaderboard ladder” that you set are too complex and look far-fetched, it can have a counter-effect and demotivate members. I would recommend gradually ascending the system difficulty so that it’s easier to get started. Once a member gets their first reward, it becomes a habit.

If you’ve played video games, you know what I’m talking about. The first few levels are simple and almost too easy like getting rewarded for understanding the controller settings.

The larger plan is to incentivize the users to attain the goals that will help your community members reach their AHA! moment and stick.

Learning from the best game developers



It won't come as a surprise that Electronic Arts (EA), one of the largest gaming companies in the world has nailed their community gamification. AnswersHQ is a centralized location where users can connect to discuss, problem-solve game challenges and help each other. Here, players that help other players get rewarded. On one hand, it incentivizes community members to contribute and on the other, the community helps reduce support costs.

They have virtual tokens, badges, collectibles as well as a super-user program where outstanding individuals are given roles as "Champions" and "Heroes". You can literally give other people "XP" by upvoting them.

A lot of the gamification features on the Scenes platform are inspired by how EA and games in general do it.

#4



***** NOVICE

System: PS4
username: big_ShvwNMarch - last edited March by  EA_Cade •••

acc has two heirlooms been playing since season 0

CM Edit: Removed Spoiler tag.

+ XP 26

Overall, the gamification and super-user program are huge successes for EA as they help increase traffic to the self-handling support community and deflect contacts from Live Support channels.

Gamification is one of the most powerful tools in your arsenal as architects of community success. Rather than implement it as a standalone give-and-take experience, gamification should be immersive and deeply integrated into the customer journey. It needs to feel natural and have utility rather than being a tacked-on gimmick.

WHY HIERARCHY IS IMPORTANT

You'll agree that not all of your community members are the same. Members vary in the traits and skills they possess. Hierarchies are a way of ensuring that the buck stops at those who have the skills and leadership traits; and are better at making decisions for the community as a whole. It is also important for accountability as it delineates who is responsible for what. Most of the time though, you'll be using it to create a rank order than can replace you on the day to day. Here are a few key points to understand heirarchy:

The Ringelmann Effect

Hierarchies are a great way to maximize individual motivation.

Imagine you put out a plan for a community initiative but do not outline who is responsible for what. Every individual member is likely to take a step back and have a laid back approach because they think the rest of the community will do the work and their contribution won't matter anyway.

The Ringelmann effect or social loafing is the tendency of a person to exert less effort to achieve a vision when contributing in a group than when contributing alone. The larger the group, the less the individual contribution.

One thing to also remember here is that we need ladders to climb and goals to achieve to motivate us. Hierarchies provide clear markers that let us know how far and fast we are climbing the ladder of success.

A Flag to Fly

While titles and badges may come across as trivial measures of our worth, they also give us identity.

If asked, “Who are you?”, I can guarantee that your answer will have something to do with your role in a hierarchy whether at work or in a social setting.

While it might feel that labels restrict us or even enslave us, on a fundamental level it provides psychic nourishment by giving us order and structure.

This is why many people post retirement face a sense of feeling lost because their professional identities that provided that psychic nourishment are taken away.

A word on flat hierarchy

Personal motivations can work against the overall motivation of the community. We need checks and balances to ensure that power and responsibility don’t fall in the wrong hands. An overly powerful dictator can make community members feel like they have a lack of control and power which will in turn affect their community experience.

It is also recommended to regularly rotate the leadership where leaders serve terms. It makes sure that leaders who have completed their terms or are inactive get replaced by new

blood that wants to take up open leadership positions.

Since most of your community moderators will be volunteers, having a flat hierarchy is a much better management style than the more traditional command and control approach. Whether or not it's completely possible in a practical setting is still debatable but it's an ideal to aim for.

Companies like Automattic, the firm behind Wordpress which powers nearly 20% of the world's websites, and GitHub, with more than 50 million users - are some of the world's most important internet companies and communities, that follow a flat structure.

Valve, the gaming company has an entire handbook that explains how they run the company with "no bosses at all".

Flat hierarchy does not mean there are no leaders or managers, but rather the expectation that members lead themselves - DIY management.



HANDBOOK FOR NEW EMPLOYEES

A fearless adventure
in knowing what to do
when no one's there
telling you what to do

FIRST EDITION
2012



The big problem with flat hierarchies are that they almost always fail. Apart from a few exceptions like Valve, almost every major company that has tried flat hierarchies have failed. Buffer is the best example of this.

Publications > Open

What We Got Wrong About Self-Management: Embracing Natural Hierarchy at Work

Aug 5, 2015 · 6 min read



Leo Widrich
Team Buffer



Even though communities aren't really companies, people will still look to leadership to answer their questions and make big decisions for the community in your absence. And leadership will want the glory and publicly visible titles to keep contributing. Not everyone is altruistic nor will they contribute in silence.

As your community scales, you can try a modular design by dividing into smaller community modules. This allows communities to maintain the stability and durability that hierarchies offer and yet maintain some of the flexibility and culture of flat hierarchies. You can have plenty of people at "similar" levels yet have wildly different titles. Just make sure this hierarchy is visually represented somewhere.

One of the other key things to keep in mind is the importance of crystal clear communication.

According to Conway's Law, your community will design its structure as a copy of its communication structure. So keep in mind, before designing complex and rigid hierarchy systems, because this can affect the way initiatives are carried out and their end results.

Crystal clear communication isn't just key to community organization but also simplifies a bunch of other hurdles that growing communities face. If every community initiative is clearly documented, new members can start adding value right away. It also becomes a natural by-product of marketing collateral that's easy to repurpose for external communication. Open and transparent communication also ensures that messages don't get distorted as they travel up and down the ladder of command.

In my opinion, the best communities are benevolent dictatorships founded upon strong pillars of open communication, transparency and putting the needs of the community above personal motivations. You need a broad base of leaders who have these principles and feel personal ownership for the overall success of the community.

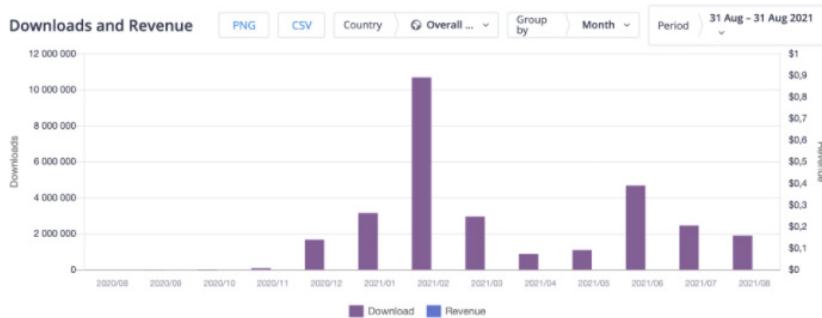
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COOL CLUBS

In this chapter, we'll walk into two clubs that gained a lot of popularity recently. One is an app, and the other is a bunch of apes.

Clubhouse

Clubhouse was an invite-only audio social network that grew to popularity during the pandemic. I intentionally say “was” because the popularity of the app looks like a rollercoaster ride. Clubhouse’s daily active users are down 4x since their peak in February 2021.



Clubhouse app downloads and revenue statistics according to Apptica.com

Within a year of being founded, the app had 10.6 million installs as of February 2021. In March there were 2.9 million installs, and by April the “downloads” statistic showed a 69% dip: the

app had only about 873,000 downloads globally then.

Invite Only, iOS Only

While most users may attribute the reason for Clubhouse's popularity as the audio-only element, the biggest reason for its popularity was yet another status game. Clubhouse started off as invite-only and iOS only. While the creators of the app focused on the nakedness of speech, what they failed to realize was that being exclusive was a useful feature and not a bug.

Globally, iOS devices only represent 28% of the mobile phone devices with Android at 72%. Creating an exclusive iOS club contributed to the scarcity and spread of the FOMO - so much so that Clubhouse invites were selling on eBay for hundreds of dollars.

This Item is out of stock.

An Invitation to ClubHouse (The app) Clubhouse App Invite

Condition: --

Quantity: 1 0 available / 15 sold

Price: **US \$125.00**
No Interest if paid in full in
6 mo on \$99+*

Add to Watchlist

Shipping: May not ship to France - Read item description or contact seller for shipping options. | See details

Item location: Austin, Texas, United States

Ships to: United States See exclusions

Invitations to Clubhouse were being sold for hundreds of dollars on ebay.

What also mattered was who was on stage. The launch saw an early influx of celebrities and influential people who want-

ed a place to connect. Celebrities such as Oprah, Elon Musk, and Joe Rogan appeared in rooms. Every celebrity imaginable wanted to be on a Clubhouse stage, and everyone else wanted to be in the room where it happened. Even the app's sign-up process was clear about their value prop: **Welcome to the app; here's who's popular.**

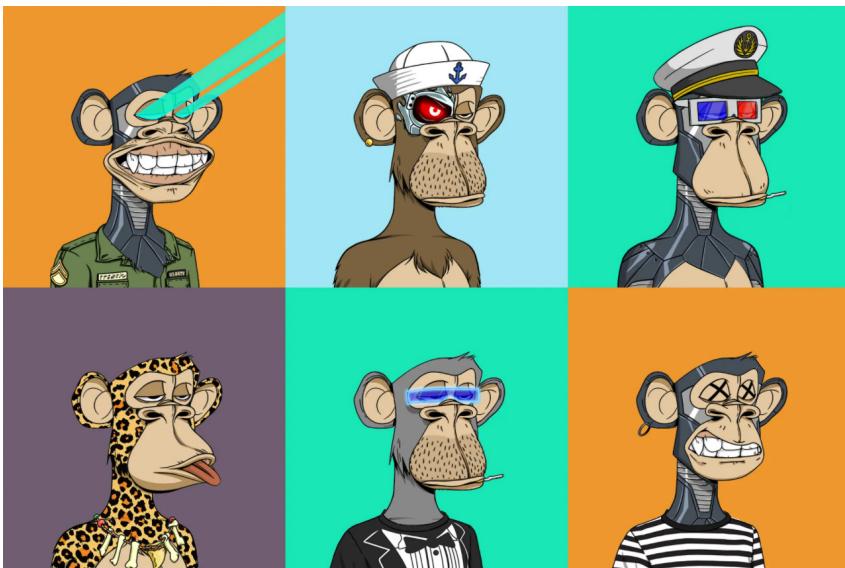
But after the public launch and the rest of the world hopped on stage, Clubhouse started to see a decline in popularity. Followers lists were being gamed. I remember opening the app one day and seeing rooms titled "Follow for following" where users were artificially inflating their numbers. Nobody talked; you just scrolled through to find new people to follow and hope they follow back. This made things worse because who you followed determined your experience. The biggies that really pulled crowds were gone.

The rush to open the floodgates could partly have come from worries about competition and pressure from VCs, but it did more damage than good. Clubhouse became a victim of its own growth.

From Apps to Apes

Let's study another club's rise to popularity - specifically the Bored Ape Yacht Club . BAYC has become the poster boy for NFT projects. I remember reading that at one time the tokens were being sold for less than their mint price. Not the best start!

The collection held its public mint on May 2021 at 0.08 ETH per NFT and has skyrocketed to a floor of 67 ETH as of January 2022. That's a minimum return of 837x in 8 months.



The reason for its insane popularity is status leakage. The apes knuckle-walked from NFT marketplaces to social networks like Twitter. Jimmy Fallon, Steph Curry, Post Malone, and dozens of celebrities aped in and made the news public on Twitter by changing their display pictures.

Many other projects have tried to replicate the success by giving away free NFTs to celebrities in the hope that their projects explode as well. But with a little bit of research, you can easily uncover that the celebrities never “chose” to join.

Remember, there’s no such thing as cheap status. Someone eventually has to pay the price.

As a community builder, use FOMO to your advantage and make your community the cool place to be. But remember that fame can be fleeting and status is not stationary. You are renting fame and have to pay your dues daily by providing value to your community members. We’ll dive deeper into how to replicate a cool club in our chapters on growth.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS & HOUSES OF POWER

Community members come in all shapes and sizes. Below is a list of the different types of community members I've come across and key points about them.

It isn't a hard and fast rule that all community members should fit into one of these categories. We're intentionally stereotyping with broad strokes so you get a starting point with community members' management.

The Newbie (still trying to figure out what's it all about)	Optimize the welcome experience for them. It's going to take some time for them to get used to things and then you can push them to another bucket. Make all the valuable content and community resources available to them easily. But do not overwhelm. You can have regular AMA-style "Newbie Orientation" sessions. If they like the experience, highly likely to invite friends to join the ride.
The Common Man (participates in community discussions often)	Low-maintenance and great for your community. Encourage model behavior and give them something to aspire and work towards. Incentivize through gamification.
The Lurkers (does not participate in community, though they might browse)	Understand why they lurk and if they want to change. If they do, help them contribute. If they don't, show acceptance. The majority of your members are going to be lurkers (1% rule). Direct them to open community discussions and seed questions. Continue giving them regular updates and announcements, maybe through newsletters. Don't assume they are not finding value.

The Veteran (long-timer who holds authoritative status)	Honor their past contributions with badges and senior roles within the community. If not, they can become salty especially if they see new members given the same status. Respect their time and establish their authoritative status.
The Advocate (defends you no matter what)	Equip them with all the resources so they can spread the word correctly. They are great for acquiring new members. Passionate individuals but can sometimes be overzealous. Usually great at communication and make for great brand ambassadors. They usually have agency and a feeling of ownership as well.
The Giver (loves to give more than they receive)	These are members who look at the greater good that the community is doing. May have benefited from being a part of the community and now wants to give back. Don't ask too much from them. Don't bribe either because that can put them off. Acknowledge their contributions and ask for feedback.
The Trouble-maker (lives off the strong emotional reactions of others)	Try and remove them from your community immediately and remove their contributions as well. At best, you can give them 2-3 strikes and with every warning, ask clarifying questions. Might create fake accounts or try and garner support from other members. Move the conversation to private. Make sure your part is clean, and you have solid reason for removal. Ensure your communication is clear. Assume every conversation will be a screenshot on a public forum.
The Argumentative (aggressive communicator who loves to stir the waters)	Communicate to them that their behavior is not the norm. Tell them politely how they could frame their comments better if it becomes offending. Be diplomatic and strategize communication.
The Know-It-All (has an opinion about everything)	Try not to hurt their ego. Make them feel heard. They usually just need an ego-massage. Connect them with Newbies who are eager to hear. Makes for a great combination.
The Cult-Leader (values attention)	These are powerful, charismatic members who command attention. Other community members gravitate towards them. Treat them with respect and attention, and they are gems for your community-building but let them spiral out of control and they are like walking, talking, typing time-bombs waiting to explode. Handle with care.

Houses of Power

You've probably noticed that the nations that perform best on an international stage are those that compete internally as well. The same is true for community building as it is for sports and games.

In our community, we created four houses where members could apply and become a part of. Think of it like the four houses in Hogwarts from the Harry Potter series.

Avolympics!

An inter-house online festival where Avalonians debate, quiz, play Valorant, Mafia, Among Us and so much more against each other for the ultimate prize: the [Avalon Battlecup!](#)



Choose your house!



Creating competition encourages community members to outperform the other houses. We had a full-fledged inter-house online festival where members could battle against each other in quizzes, debates and so much more. And even after the competitions, the houses persisted as a testament to their success. Victory was cemented with permanent status (a role).

Our system was modeled around the weekly Battlecup format from the game Dota. Every week, there would be a competition that teams could get into and try winning. If you win a tournament, you and your team were awarded a Battlecup badge that lasted for a week. The craze around the competitions was something that we wanted to replicate with our own community, which we pulled off quite successfully.



The best bit about being the community host is that irrespective of who wins the competition, you as the organizer will always win no matter what. A healthy competition between

community members brings in greater value for the community as a whole.

One important thing to note is that these "intra-house" events were still just events. Events are community glue.

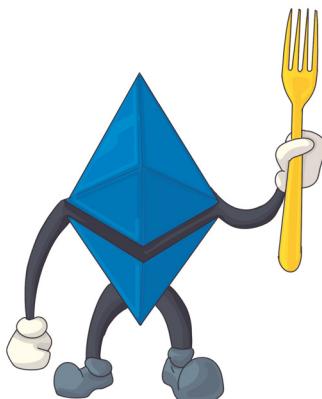
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FORKING

If you've used GitHub, you've probably come across the term "forking" where you make a copy of an existing repository and make changes to it. But the idea of forking has existed since the beginning of civilization.

Did you know that Christianity has more than 45,000 denominations globally? And yet most people think of Christians as one large group in comparison to other religions. Most of the world's religions have different denominations or "forks" that stem from ideological differences. Some are copies of the original with minor changes, and some are radically different.

The reason we're bringing up forking is because as your community scales, it is inevitably going to break into these pockets. Your role then as a community manager is to ensure that these pockets don't swell up with power that you cannot control, else these islands will turn into their own nations.



The Ethereum Classic Story

Another industry where you've likely heard of the concept of forking is crypto.

Did you know that the Ethereum and Ethereum Classic fork was the result of an ideological rift within the ethereum community?

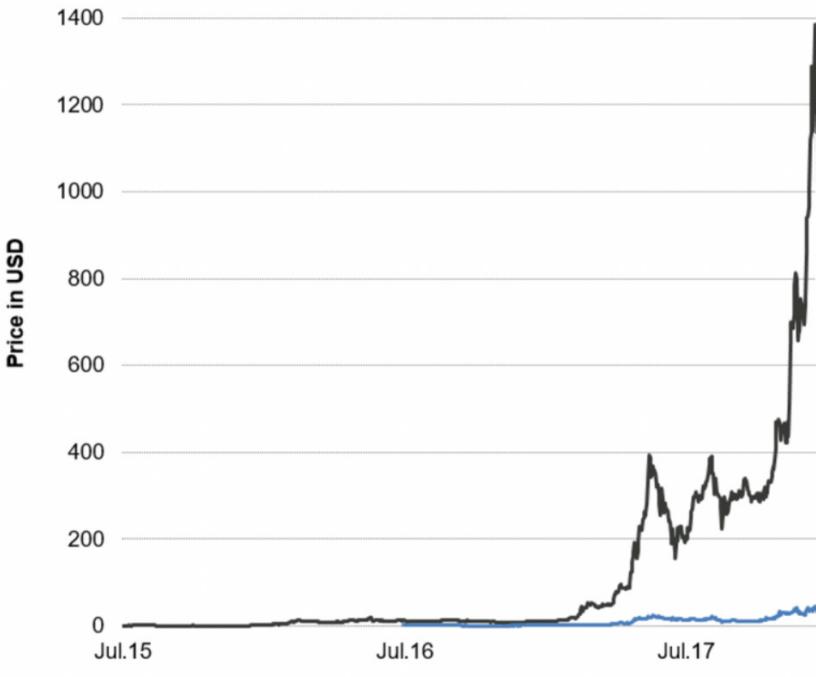
In 2016, hackers stole approximately 3.6 million ETH (worth roughly \$60 million at the time). Two opinions emerged on how to respond.

One group championed by Vitalik Buterin, the project's founder, insisted that the next step should in fact be a rollback, where they would wind the clock back and "reverse" the hack. Effectively, a lot of people who lost money in the hack would be returned their capital.

This was not palpable for the rest of the community, who felt that such human intervention went against the fundamental tenets of blockchain in itself — winding back the clock would be akin to what a centralized institution would do!

Because of Vitalik's strong influence, the ETH community eventually disobeyed their own rules and ran a rollback. Everyone who disagreed was offered a fork — the original Ethereum ledger with the hack still preserved, known as Ethereum Classic.

Ether (ETH) vs. Ethereum Classsic (ETC) in USD



But we haven't gotten to the best part yet.

Other cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin (BTC), have experienced similar forks and debates. However, unlike Ethereum's founder, Bitcoin's founder ceased any public involvement, and his/her/their identity is still unknown. So in 2019, when hackers stole Bitcoin from the Binance crypto exchange and insisted on rolling back the exploit, the change didn't materialize simply because there wasn't any centralized driving force.

This goes to show the meaning of true status and influence. It also teaches us the implications of what happens when power swells up in concentrated pockets (driven by charismatic

community members).

It's important to note that power can reside in members irrespective of their rank or role in a community. As a community builder, try and match the two much as possible.

PART SEVEN

MONETIZATION



SELLING PRIVATE ACCESS

One of the most common ways of monetizing your community is by selling private access to it. Think Soho House, but online.

First, bring community members onto your community with quality content for free. Then provide even better content at a price. Add exclusivity to a part, and not the entirety of your community because you want members to first develop trust in your brand. If members love your free stuff, they will often be willing to pay extra to receive exclusive perks.

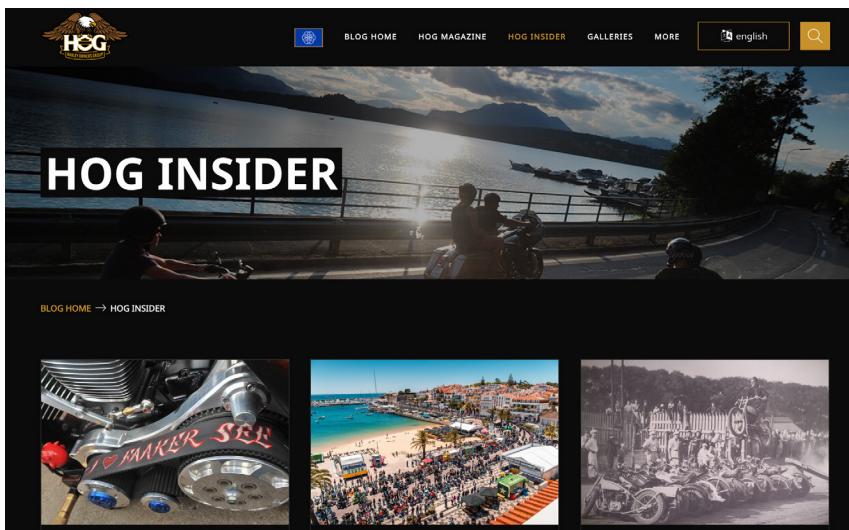
You can charge a monthly or annual fee for exclusive access to private channels, special privileges, or premium content.

In essence, you're creating a funnel: the free content captures eyeballs and gets them hooked. Add the paywall into the mix to quantify the value of the attention you've received.

Social media like YouTube, Instagram is great for the first part of the funnel. For the second part, you need a community.

Make sure the content that you offer in your community is something that they can't find elsewhere. If you can add exclusive opportunities (whether it be to meet someone famous or access to jobs, etc.), you can generate solid revenue.

The Harley Owners Group is a great example of this - exclusive content, roadside help, handbooks, and more! (For you to become a member of the HOG you or your family member must own a Harley Davidson)



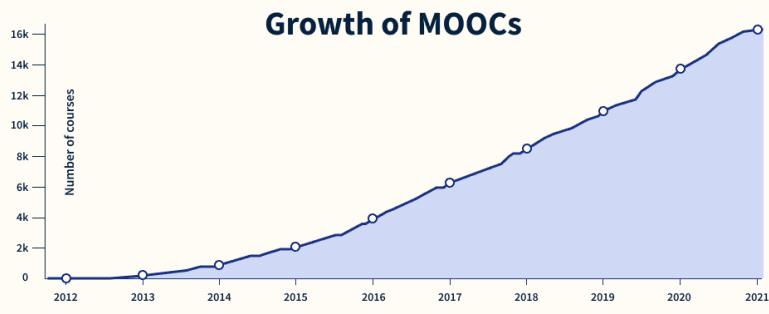
Options for members of your online community may include access to:

- Special discounts for your products, services
- Invite-only events
- Access to bonus information or content
- Behind the scenes of your content creation process
- Community profile customizability
- On-demand calls and other exclusive privileges
- Extensive archive access
- Private channels and community spaces

Selling private access allows you to leverage the interest your people already have in your community. However, you have to make sure that the paid offering packs enough value to be worth the price tag to your members.

COHORT-BASED COURSES (CBCs)

There has been a staggering increase in the growth of online education and Ed-tech startups. Yet despite the massive demand and flow of capital, very few have cracked how to do it right.



class central

By the Numbers: MOOCs in 2020
Statistics do not include China

Image from Class Central



The value proposition of most courses has always been pretty straightforward — you offer top-quality education at a fraction of the price of typical educational institutes. Despite this, traditional MOOCs have abysmal course completion rates. What is lacking is accountability. Learning happens in a social setting where your peers keep you accountable, not watching videos in isolation.

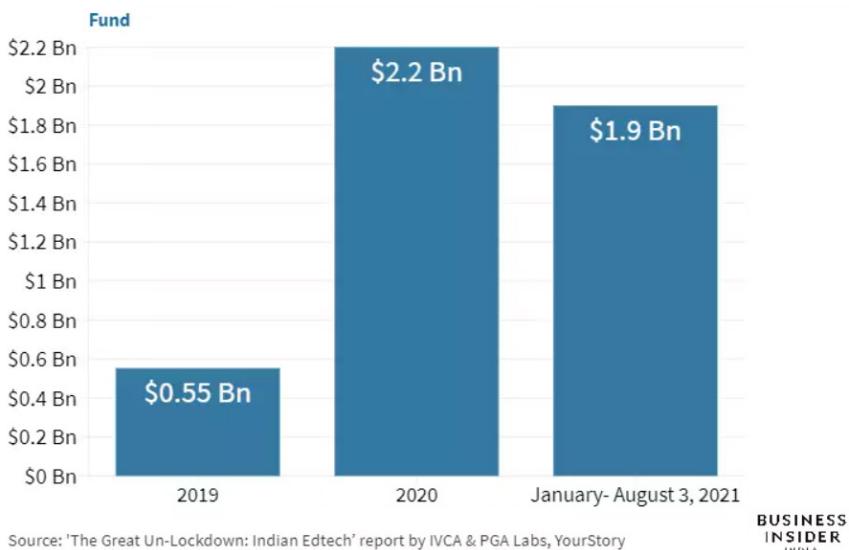
With cohort-based courses (a course + community built for the course), the value provided is not in the course material but in the P2P learning environment that provides a disciplined learning experience. In the internet age, with a little bit of Googling (and sometimes help from someone who's already enrolled in the course), anybody can easily pirate the best of course content. Your unique selling point should not be paid access to the course content but paid access to the community.

Those who apply to CBCs also want mentors who can hand-hold them, give them a ramp to take off, and classmates with whom they can collaborate and compete with.

There is a tremendous business opportunity because education, like healthcare and childcare, is not something people skimp on. Our days during the Avalon Discord are a testament to the business model.

We generated over \$450,000+ in 4 months selling CBCs at a pricepoint for \$3-400 a seat. When CBCs work, they work very well — you can make significant revenue with just 100 students at a decent price point. We eventually stopped doing them because it ended up becoming a live teaching business, which is exhausting beyond a point. Doing the 5th or 10th cohort didn't really bring the same satisfaction the first one brought us.

Edtech startups have raised about \$4 billion since 2020



In 2026, the online learning market is projected to reach \$167 billion.

Avalon Meta, Our CBC business

With cohort-based courses, you have two key elements: Content and Community.

- Content - Before we launched the Scenes app, we put out lots of content on YouTube. It was a library where you could consume free content anytime, anywhere, and post questions via YouTube comments (not exactly the best experience). CBCs were our paid offering where mentors were hands-on involved in live lectures, assignment corrections, and coaching.
- Community - Every module also had its accompanying community (cohort) where students could learn, compete and collaborate with their peers. That's like your classrooms. We also had the Avalon Discord, which as

you may have guessed was like akin to the idea of a college campus. Here we hosted fests, inter-house competitions, concerts, etc. A holistic college experience at a fraction of the cost.

How Community Helped Us

- Our community members would suggest the courses and topics that they wanted us to teach. Oftentimes, students will tell you where gaps in their knowledge exist, which is great feedback when it comes to tailoring your course material.
- We would promote and involve members from the community themselves to work as teaching assistants. This was a win-win because they could now teach what they learned. As Feynman put it, the person that learns the most in the classroom is the teacher.
- The teachers were also put to the test in front of the community. Before being offered to host a CBC, we made sure that the teachers could perform by dishing out free masterclasses within the free community. If the mentor could captivate the attention of the attendees, it gave us a green signal. This became like a funnel for us.
- Regular feedback. The thing we quickly realized with CBCs is that there is a huge services element involved. Quality assurance, hiring course creators, placements, and ensuring that all the students would get a 7-star experience. One bad apple could drastically damage your brand irrespective of the rest of the batch. Since our

community was part of the journey, they were thoughtful (and forgiving) when giving suggestions and feedback.

CBCs by SaaS companies and Enterprises

Owing to the increasing popularity of CBCs, we've also started to see a lot of businesses (including SaaS companies) use this as an opportunity to provide software education and real-world experience in the form of CBCs.

The screenshot shows the Trailhead website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with a search bar, 'Sign Up' and 'Log In' buttons, and links for 'Home', 'Learn', 'Credentials', 'Community' (which is highlighted in blue), 'For Companies', and 'COVID-19'. Below the navigation is a colorful illustration of a bear holding a map, with a small character in the foreground. The main heading 'SKILL UP FOR THE FUTURE' is displayed, followed by the subtext 'Learn new skills from anywhere' and a 'Get Started for Free' button.

TRAILHEAD IS THE FUN WAY TO LEARN

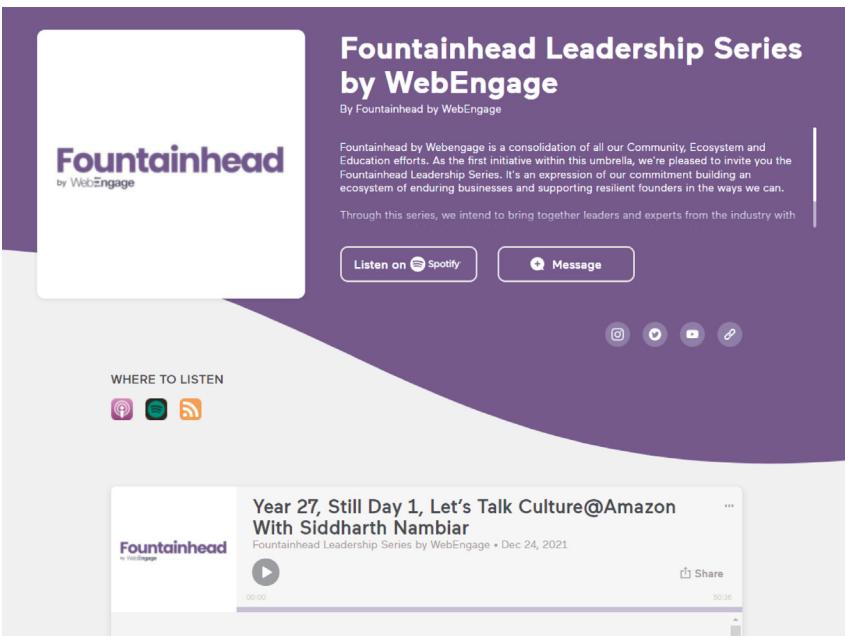
The screenshot shows the Trailhead Community page. The navigation bar is identical to the homepage. On the left, there's a sidebar titled 'Trailblazer Community' with sections for 'Feed' (Connect with fellow Trailblazers), 'Groups' (Join groups to meet and collaborate with Trailblazers), 'Topics' (Discover and follow featured and trending topics), and 'Events' (Attend local and virtual events). To the right, there's a 'Quick Links' sidebar with links like 'Trailblazer Community Overview', 'Trailblazer Stories', 'Trailblazer Connect', 'Be a Multiplier', 'Salesforce MVPs', 'Quests', 'Salesforce Resources', 'IdeaExchange', 'Known Issues', and 'Salesforce Help'. A central callout box says 'Say Hello to the Reimagined Trailblazer Community' with a 'Learn More' button. The background features the same bear and landscape illustration as the homepage.

Trailhead by Salesforce



The screenshot shows the MoEngage #GROWTH Academy landing page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Product, Channels, Industries, Customers, Resources, #GROWTH, Company, Pricing, and Login. A "Request Demo" button is also present. Below the navigation, the heading "#GROWTH Academy" is displayed. A sub-headline reads: "Learn from experts and leaders who do the work that you aspire for. Get access to a community of 10,000+ passionate product and growth professionals." Two buttons, "Apply Now" and "Sign In", are visible. The main visual features a woman with pink hair looking at her phone, with the text "What is #GROWTH ACADEMY" overlaid.

#Growth by MoEngage



The screenshot shows the Fountainhead Leadership Series by WebEngage landing page. The header features the "Fountainhead" logo with "by WebEngage". The main title is "Fountainhead Leadership Series by WebEngage", followed by a subtitle: "By Fountainhead by WebEngage". A descriptive paragraph explains that Fountainhead by WebEngage is a consolidation of their Community, Ecosystem, and Education efforts, and invites users to the series. It states: "Through this series, we intend to bring together leaders and experts from the industry with". Below this, there are buttons for "Listen on Spotify" and "Message". Social media icons for Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn are located at the bottom right. A "WHERE TO LISTEN" section includes icons for Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and RSS. A video player at the bottom shows a thumbnail for "Year 27, Still Day 1, Let's Talk Culture@Amazon With Siddharth Nambiar" from the "Fountainhead Leadership Series by WebEngage" on December 24, 2021. The video player includes a play button, a progress bar showing 00:00 to 50:38, and a "Share" button.

Fountainhead by WebEngage

These are great examples of how community and learning build around a SaaS business.

Even if you don't directly choose to monetize your members, you're building solid pipeline creating these live courses. Imagine — high intent qualified leads who trust you at your fingertips. It's a marketer's dream. More importantly, it serves as an expression of your commitment to building a holistic business.

PROMOTED POSTS

One of the easiest ways to start monetizing your online community is by running ads on it. You can go straight to relevant brands that are willing to pay you to sell their products to members of your online community.

But why do brands pay to run their ads on your small community instead of sticking to Google or Facebook ads where they get access to billions of people?

High Intent

You might have heard the phrase “Any traffic is good traffic!”, but this couldn’t be further from the truth.

People purchase only when they’re genuinely interested in something. In fact, “number of impressions” is a bullshit metric, often used by marketers to save face. What matters is the intent level and quality of these leads.

Almost all brands today invest in digital marketing efforts. Not only is this leading to a bidding war that drives cost of acquisition up, the repeated interruptions ad nauseam are annoying to potential customers. Getting people’s attention online has become an uphill battle.

Even after capturing eyeballs, the average e-commerce conversion rate through outbound ads is roughly 2%. That means if 100 people see your ad, only 2 are likely to convert.

In contrast to this, communities are a cohort of users who have strong intent. Even if you drive only 30 people to your website but 15 people convert, your overall conversion rate is 50%.

Online communities are a fantastic source for businesses to find relevant, targeted traffic. It's what Reddit, Google Search, or Quora does, but better. Running an ad for a no-code tool on a no-code community will have way more ROI than the same ads on Google search or Facebook adverts.

Win-win

As long as adverts are distinguished clearly and useful to your audience, sponsored content is a win-win. You get paid to post it, and you get more valuable content to share with your community.

But make sure your sales posts are as natural and consistent with your other posts as possible. You want them to be a fit with everything else you do without coming across as inauthentic.



You can even add an advertisement in your display banner at the top of your community feed without having to actively promote the product. Just by association, the business will be etched in their mind.

Compared to YouTube where it has to be you (the owner) promoting the brand, communities allow you to avoid using your own face.

Engagement for Content Marketers

You've probably seen thousands of brands that post regularly on social media. Double-clicking on most of their posts will reveal that the brand receives little or almost no engagement.





60% of B2B content marketers say producing engaging content is their biggest challenge

Communities are a life-saver for brands. It helps boost engagement rates because a targeted community brings both conversions and conversations to the table. It's what you need to get ahead of your competition.

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AFFILIATE MARKETING

Once you grow your community, you can drive affiliate sales by collaborating with other businesses.

Instead of getting paid simply to run an ad within your community, you get a share of revenue every time one of your members makes a purchase.

If you're confident that your members will be interested in the product, this makes sense because you're matching your audience with a type of product they need. You provide value to both the community and the business you partner with while making a profit at the same time.

There are plenty of affiliate networks and programs like Amazon Associates, Flipkart Affiliate Program, etc. You can also directly reach out to the advertiser and shake-hands a partnership.

Amazon Associates - Amazon's affiliate marketing program

Welcome to one of the largest affiliate marketing programs in the world. The Amazon Associates Program helps content creators, publishers and bloggers monetize their traffic. With millions of products and programs available on Amazon, associates use easy link-building tools to direct their audience to their recommendations, and earn from qualifying purchases and programs.



1
Sign up

Join tens of thousands of creators, publishers and bloggers who are earning with the Amazon Associates Program.



2
Recommend

Share millions of products with your audience. We have customized linking tools for large publishers, individual bloggers and social media influencers.



3
Earn

Earn up to 10% in affiliate fees from qualifying purchases and programs. Our competitive conversion rates help maximize earnings.

The screenshot shows the Flipkart Affiliate Program homepage. At the top, there's a blue header bar with the Flipkart logo and the text "Affiliate Program". On the right side of the header are fields for "Email" and "Password" with a "Login" button, and a link "Forgot your password?". Below the header is a navigation menu on the left with options like "HOME", "COMMISSIONS", "AFFILIATE TOOLS", "FAQs", "API", "UPDATES", "CONTACT US", and "REGISTER". The main content area features a large yellow circle with the text "Make Money by becoming a Flipkart Affiliate!". To the right of this is a yellow button labeled "JOIN NOW FOR FREE". Below this, a sub-section titled "Drive traffic from your website / mobile site / mobile apps to Flipkart and earn commission on every purchase" is shown. It includes four yellow circular icons with arrows between them, each containing a small illustration and text: 1. "Promote links on your website/app" (illustration of a smartphone and laptop). 2. "Drive traffic to flipkart.com" (illustration of a laptop and smartphone). 3. "You earn commissions if..." (illustration of a pie chart). 4. "When products are purchased" (illustration of a shopping cart).

Most firms typically pay affiliates per sale and less frequently by clicks or impressions. In some cases, the target action may not be making a purchase but installing an app or sharing contact information through lead gen. Whatever the case, orient your affiliate marketing towards a product or service that is relevant to your community members; else you still end up looking like you're selling without generating any income.

Yet the product or service yourself before recommending it to others. Since you're providing recommendations, your reputation may be compromised if there are problems arising from the offering.

The best thing to do is be a user of the product or service yourself. Thereby, you're essentially just sharing your consumer experience and honest feedback with a link at the end.

SELLING MERCHANDISE

If you already have a product or service or have ideas for relevant products, you don't need to be the middleman. You can directly sell your own products to your community.

This is by far the most exhausting (and low reward) monetization method.

For selling products to your community to make sense, you still have to make sure the products you're selling match the audience you've developed. This won't be much of a problem as in the case of promoted posts and affiliate marketing, but it still needs a mention. Always make sure that what you are selling to your community is in some way relevant.

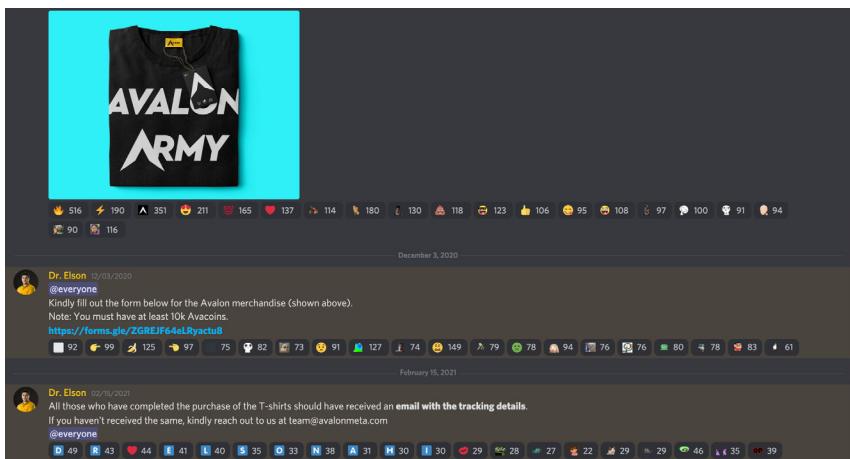
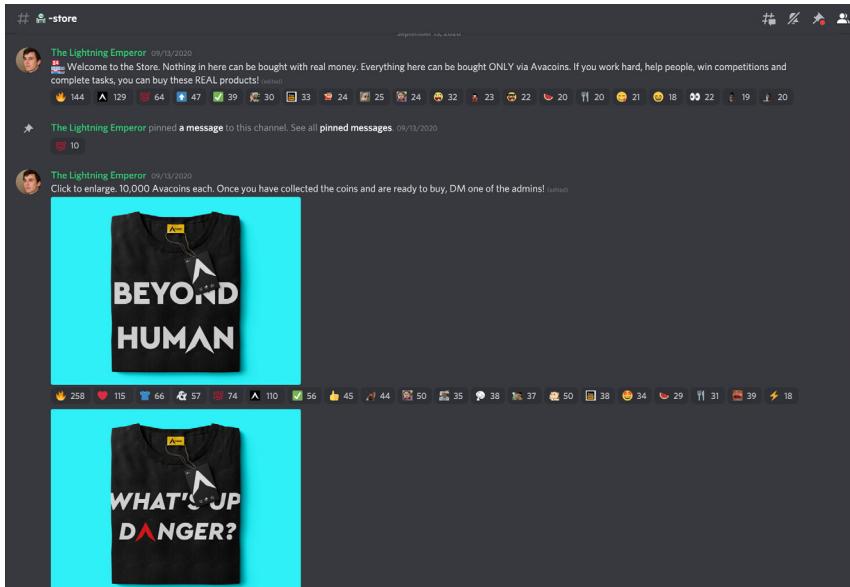
Official Merchandise

Selling merchandise allows you to expand your community into an e-commerce business. You can sell tees, mugs, hoodies, hats, bags, and other commonly used goods designed with your logo, catchphrase, hashtags, art, or inside jokes that community members will understand and relate to. A devoted community will often be glad to wear their membership on their sleeve (literally, in some cases).

The cons are that you'll have to order and store inventory which means you'll have a significantly higher upfront investment and more work for fulfillment on your part. The inventory

problem can be solved with print-on-demand and once you set up a relationship with the supplier, the process becomes easier.

However, you'll still need to ship out orders promptly and deal with returns and other customer service issues.



Honestly, I don't recommend you sell your merchandise because the return on investment in terms of time and effort is never worth it unless you have economics of scale. A bad shipment can erode your profit margins. You'll also need to have full-time customer service — because a lot of issues like sizes not matching, colors fading, and “expectations not being met” are bound to happen. Instead, focus on building a strong community and solve for distribution rather than ‘product’.

The better way to do things is to use your official merchandise as swag instead.

With our own community, none of our official merchandise could be bought in exchange for money. Instead, they were given to members who achieved a certain threshold of Avacoins (our community currency). This made the merchandise even more valuable and incentivized users to participate, engage and become top contributors. We made money in other ways.

Scenes has a Shop channel that allows you to sell merchandise for cash or community coins!

ORGANIZE EVENTS

Events are not just a way to glue your community closer, they're also a way to make money. Running a paid event is simple — choose a topic that matters to your community and add a price tag on top. Paid online events are among some of the easiest ways to make money if marketed right.

If smaller events take off, you can consider upgrading over time to something larger, like a digital conference. Directly sell tickets to your events or use the events to market products and merchandise by reaching out to third-party brands and retailers that are interested in selling their products to your community.

In the pre-pandemic era, Avalon (the company behind Scenes) had made considerable investments in offline meetups, mixers, and conferences.





As the pandemic put things to a halt, we stopped organizing offline events and instead shifted online.

We recently conducted one of India's largest virtual get-togethers of finance enthusiasts and experts on the Scenes app. The event saw a staggering 13,000+ attendees over 2 days. Attendees spent over 7,00,000 minutes on the Scenes app with each of the workshops having over 2000 listeners on average.

[HOME](#) > [BUSINESS](#) > Scenes by Avalon to host India's largest two-day Finance get-together All About Money 2021

Scenes by Avalon to host India's largest two-day Finance get-together All About Money 2021

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Scenes by Avalon concludes online finance get-together 'All About Money 2021'



By CNBC-TV18 | Sep 06, 2021, 03:32 PM IST (Updated)

Online events are much easier to organize. They cost much lesser to host and since you're not geography bound, have higher show-up rates. However, the increased footfall also means you have to allocate considerable resources to moderation.

Scenes has the Stage and Spatial channels (see below) where you can achieve the same goals of an offline event whether it's a 50-person mixer or a 10,000-person annual conference. Attendees can move in and out of rooms just like an in-person event and enjoy the content and connections you've curated for them.

FUTURE OF THE INTERNET



Organizing events (especially online) are one of the best ways to monetize your community because they have higher profit margins, help bring your community together and attract new members as well.

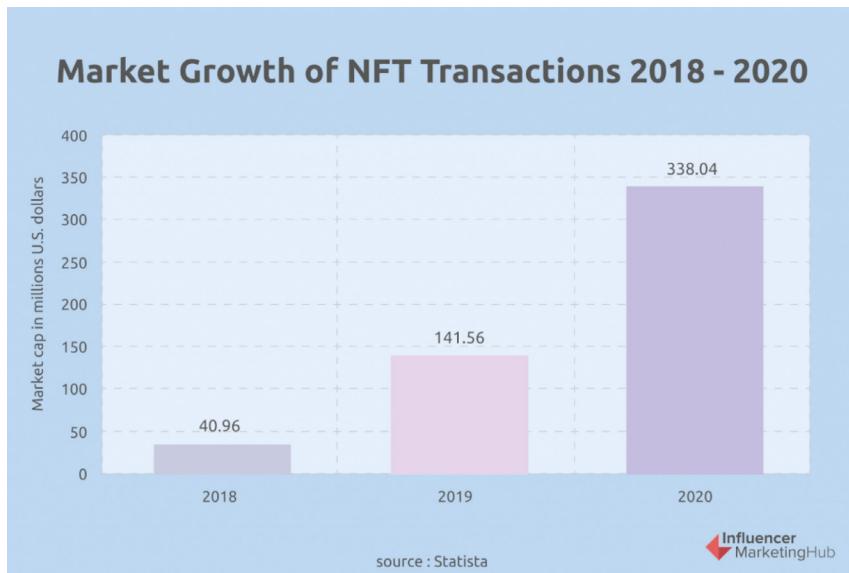
Higher turnout, lower drop-off rates, and overall happier attendees. Check, check and check!

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NFTs

Whenever I decide to buy a Non Fungible Token (NFT), the first thing I do is go through their community.

The community is one of the key reasons that people buy NFTs. That's what separates it from being just another JPEG that they can right-click and save.



There's been an explosion in NFT trading volumes and the trend doesn't look like it's stopping anytime soon.

In this chapter, I want to start the other way around and see how your community, irrespective of being an “NFT project”, can still use NFTs. Below are some of the ways you can integrate NFTs in your community.

Access

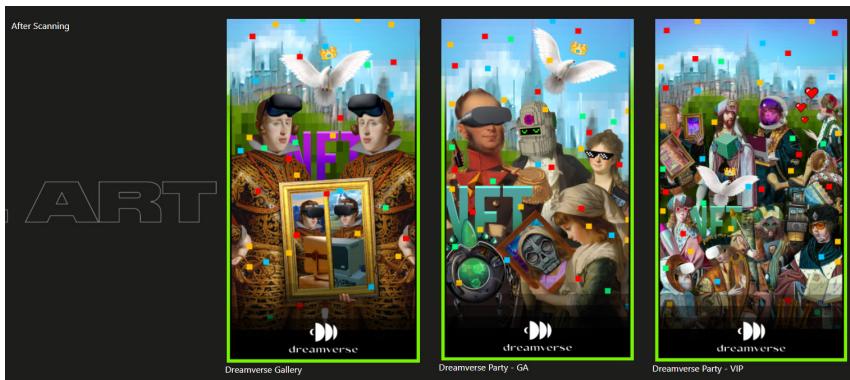
NFTs can be used as a membership card to your community. Your community members can mint these NFTs to claim membership in your community. No matter how hard an outsider tries to forge entry, it's impossible because there's proof recorded in the blockchain. It functions similar to DID (Decentralised Identifiers).

Existing members, early adopters, and investors can be given whitelist spots before opening the floodgates to mint your community NFT.

You can also use NFTs as tickets for events. If you were to sell tickets to a conference, then every attendee would automatically get a virtual ticket stub on their profile commemorating the event. This works in your favor because others could get to see and this, in turn, will drive extra promotion.

Below is a collectible ticket stub NFT from an event called Dreamverse. Notice how the NFT changes after scanning.





For the Dreamverse event, prices started at \$150 for a regular ticket. If you wanted an NFT ticket, you would have had to pay at least \$475 to get into the party.

Gamification

There's a lot you can play around with the rarity of NFTs. As mentioned each NFT can have its own characteristics and personality. Whether randomly generated or not, there will be certain characteristics that are rarer than others. You can reward reputation by giving top contributors rarer NFTs which essentially serve as a badge on their profiles.

Collectibles

Collectibles are currently the most popular in terms of NFT sales.

Number of non-fungible token sales in popular categories in the first six months of 2021



Note: Data only shows sales on the Ethereum blockchain, which is used for the majority of NFT sales. Data does not include sales which took place "off-chain".

Source: NonFungible.com

You can create a collection of your most cherished moments and immortalize the same on the chain so your members can own a piece of history. You can also create your own project and model your NFT around your community's style and characteristics.

People collect to relive memories, give identity, and for emotional value. All of the things that a community provides. Like I've mentioned, the thesis behind community and NFTs overlap and offers you as the facilitator an opportunity to add a monetary value to the same.

Counterfeit-proof

Take a quick stroll about any busy commercial street and you'll find an array of brands like "Abibas" sneakers, "Ralex" watches, or "Luis Vitton" bags.

Almost every major brand has a problem with counterfeits. Running an e-commerce store is already hard. Competing against cheap knock-offs eating some of your revenues - even worse!

Now, imagine a solution based on NFTs whereby a brand offers an NFT associated with every single sale of their products. A digital signature that makes it easy to differentiate the original from the knock-off. In addition to being able to tell them apart, you also get to show off the NFT. A certificate of authenticity stamped on your profile that shows "Official Community Merchandise Holder".

NFT Royalties

NFT royalties give you a percentage of the sale price each time your NFT is sold or re-sold. By setting a “creator share”, you get a percentage for all future sales. Let’s say you set the creator share as 10%. If you sold your NFT for 0.5 ETH which was later resold for 10 ETH, you don’t miss out on the profit spike because you would receive an additional 1 ETH for the secondary sale. Even better, you don’t need to manually track these because your share gets automatically paid out. Everything is publicly visible on the distributed ledger. Through smart contracts, you as the creator (the original address that minted the NFT) get paid in perpetuity. Opensea.io is one of the largest NFT marketplaces in the world, and also the best place to get started with minting your first NFT.

We’ve seen an explosion of innovation around NFTs and this will likely continue for many years — it’s still extremely early in the evolution of this space. I’m also certain that this chapter will age quickly!

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DONATION/TIPPING

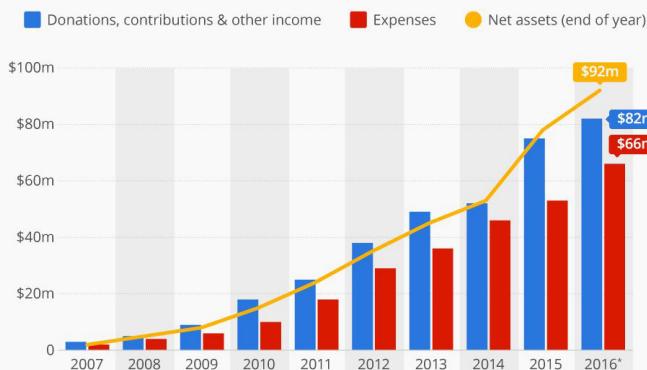
Donations (or tipping) is a form of social crowdfunding where you don't explicitly charge your members or put a paywall to block your content. Rather, you provide (and promote) a place where your members can show their gratitude and bankroll your community initiatives. Sometimes you can even allow members to tip each other and take your cut.

It's akin to putting money into a street-side musician's hat or guitar case, an expression of support and a great way to practice mutual aid.

Wikipedia

Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation are entirely powered by community volunteers, fundraising, and endowments.

The Numbers Behind Wikipedia's Fundraising



You might have seen fundraising banners displayed at various times across the website.



Unlike other platforms that provide free content, Wikipedia does not carry any advertisements.

The Wikimedia Foundation had established the Wikimedia Endowment with a goal to raise US\$100 million in ten years.

It took about half the time to reach and surpass that goal.

That is the power of community crowdfunding!

Tip Jars

Fun fact: I started my career seven years ago as a waiter at Pizza Hut. I would make \$0.5 an hour on the average day; but on days when I was lucky, I would make \$10 just by waiting at one table. The trick was to wait tables where there were parents and children. Parents are charitable around kids, and also have the capital.

Content creators will share a similar anecdote where they often get more in tips, super chats, and applause than from the platform where they're hosting their content. The more capital and charitable the audience, the better the returns.

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APPLAUD

SHARE

Unlike other streams of monetization like promoted posts that rely on the reach and quantity of community members, tips and donations allow those even with a small but dedicated high-quality community earn a decent income.

To receive donations, you need to have a deep emotional connection with your community. Since they are showing you support or gratitude, do the same by thanking your members for what they give you or by giving a shout-out (or some extra attention) to encourage this model behavior.

You could also give your members a bonus sticker or badge to show that they have donated.

Almost every social platform out there is exploring tip jars of different shapes and sizes. Some might even take a cut of the payout in addition to processing fees. Below is a list of platforms, their tipping feature, and platform fees.

Platform	Platform Cut
YouTube (Super Chat, Super Stickers, Applause)	30%
Facebook (Stars)	5-30%
Twitch (Cheer with Bits)	~28% (Variable)
OnlyFans	20%
Patreon	5-12%
BitClout (Diamonds)	Unknown
TikTok (Creator Next)	0%

Clubhouse	0%
Instagram (Badges)	0%
Linktree (Support Me)	0%
Twitter (Tip Jar)	0%

Note the prices may vary with time - so do your own research.

JOB BOARDS/CONNECTING PEOPLE

Hiring is extremely painful for both employers and job seekers. With our experience running an Ed-tech community, we saw the struggle from both sides.

Employers have a hard time finding the right talent that will help their organization thrive. And wonderfully talented candidates have trouble finding their place in the world of work.

A traditional online job search means browsing job boards like Indeed (or even LinkedIn). Most of these are increasingly spammy or cluttered – both for the candidates as well as the employer.

Having a job board within your community can help bridge the gap. You can generate income in the process by offering a more personal way for candidates and companies to connect.

If you're running a community around fitness and health, you can connect trainers with those seeking fitness advice. If you're running a community around Javascript, you can create a job-board channel and help developers find projects or vice versa.

The screenshot shows the [r/scala](#) subreddit on Reddit. A specific post titled "Who is hiring? Monthly /r/Scala Job Postings Thread!" has been made by u/AutoModerator 27 days ago. The post contains instructions for posting job ads, including a template and guidelines for posters and readers. The post has 26 upvotes and 8 comments. To the right, the "About Community" sidebar displays statistics: 43.6k members, 49 online, and it was created on Jan 25, 2008. A red "Joined" button is visible.

The screenshot shows the Gitter Explore page. It features a search bar with "jobs" typed in, along with filters for "ROOMS & PEOPLE". Below the search, there are several job-related rooms listed: "Colt/WDB-Jobs", "dev-ua/jobs", "android-job", "jobs-lgy", "extensible-jobs", and "Jobs". On the right side, there are two examples of rooms: "mobile-devs/android-job" and "spark-jobserver/spark-jobserver". Each room has a brief description, a "Subscribe" button, and a member count (e.g., 895, 426).

The screenshot shows the Hacker News jobs section. It lists several job openings from YC startups:

- YC is hiring a product engineer for our admissions software team** ([ycombinator.com/jobs](#))
- Mezli (YC W21) – hiring a full-stack SWE to build robot restaurant software** ([mezli.com](#))
- Compose.ai (YC W21) Is Hiring Engineers and Designers** ([composeai.notion.site](#))
- OneSignal (YC S11) is hiring engineers to work on messaging: Push, SMS, & Email** ([onesignal.com](#))
- Mux (YC W16) is hiring across the board to build the future of online video** ([mux.com](#))
- Bitmovin (YC S15) Is Hiring a Technical Delivery Manager (US Based)** ([bitmovin.com](#))
- Streak (YC) is hiring remote (North America) Infrastructure engineers** ([streak.com](#))
- EasyPost (YC S13) Is Hiring Remote** ([easypost.com](#))

You can make money by charging a fee from both the candidate and the company. You can have recruiters buy access to a job board channel that you give members for free (or after they've displayed some engagement).

Charging Employers

Companies looking to hire are learning that to find the right people, you have to engage them where they are. Quality talent always hangs around in relevant, high quality, communities.

You can charge a business for having their job listed for a certain period or take a recruiter fee for when a position is closed. However, the latter is trickier to do manually at scale.

Another common source of job board revenue is paid access to candidate profiles. You can become a database of quality resumes and candidate contact information (you can segregate quality talent by a role). However, you'll need to have several hundred resumes available before you're offering sufficient value to charge for this.

If you have a newsletter or a resources section, you can have a section with featured employer profiles and charge businesses for that real estate. You can also charge employers for additional features that can help their company stand out from others, such as allowing them to add a video or their company logo on your posts.

Charging Job Seekers

In recruitment, candidates can be categorized as passive and active job seekers. Passive candidates are already employed or

aren't totally focused on finding a job. Active job seekers on the other hand are actively on the job hunt.

Employers tend to view the passive type as more favorable, but they are also more difficult to funnel toward open jobs.

That's where community-building can come in. Your community should be more than just a place for job postings. You should give your members a reason to scroll even if they are not looking for a job. Provide free career development resources, support, and networking opportunities. While members are busy being an active part of your community, they may come across a job opportunity that interests them and decide to apply.

One way to charge job seekers is by selling private access to the paid channel where job opportunities are posted. This also has the benefit of filtering your candidates and will give your job board a reputation for having quality applicants who are serious about their applications.

Another way to charge job seekers is to help them with their resumes and job applications. You can provide additional services like helping them with resume writing, profile reviews, and mock interviews.

The screenshot shows a Slack channel interface with several messages from different users:

- Gouri** (12/11/2020): Hi! Can you review my GitHub <https://github.com/gouri-panda>. Thanks! I really appreciate your feedback.
GitHub
gouri-panda - Overview
gouri-panda has 62 repositories available. Follow their code on GitHub.
- nikhil** (12/11/2020): Hi everyone! 😊 I'd like to get my GitHub reviewed! Thank You!
<https://github.com/Nikhil-Varun>
GitHub
Nikhil-Varun - Overview
one who is always eager to learn. Nikhil-Varun has 5 repositories available. Follow their code on GitHub.
- Puneet | Mentor** (12/14/2020): @Gouri and @nikhil will do

A red button at the bottom left says "NEW MENTIONS". A timestamp at the bottom right indicates the screenshot was taken on December 14, 2020.

Serious job seekers are always looking for ways to stand out from the crowd. Just like you can offer a featured employer profile, you can allot some real estate for having a candidate's resume highlighted at the top of the stack.

If you're running a cohort-based course, you can also provide digital certificates members can display on their profiles after successfully completing your course.

I've seen countless examples of people who have kick-started their careers from the Avalon community. Members would start by posting free content that illustrated their expertise. This helps them stand out from other applicants and secure the career opportunity of a lifetime. I've also personally referred countless members for job opportunities as well, simply because I could vouch for their expertise because of their community contribution.

As a job board owner, you are the facilitator, the venue through which job seekers and providers can find each other.

Creating an additional revenue stream with a job board is a great way to further generate traffic, develop a relationship with employers, and foster community on your web property.

WHAT % WILL PAY?

For anyone putting in the work to build and nurture a community that offers value, you need to figure out how to translate that value into actual dollars.

The key to success will be thinking about how you can successfully generate profit from your followers, without damaging the relationship you've built. Brand reputation and sales unfortunately have an inversely proportional relationship. You need to balance your brand reputation with your need to make an income.

Convincing your community members to swipe their cards is often an uphill battle. People join communities to make connections and are not in the purchasing mindset, especially if it's an open community. If you start pushing products or sales hard, you can turn members of the community away quite quickly.

If members feel like your community went from being all about fostering connections and providing valuable information for free to suddenly being all about sales, you could lose all the goodwill you took years to nurture. Whatever monetization strategy you choose, make sure it's a natural fit for the community you've built and that what you're selling is something they'll want.

While there isn't a hard number of people in a community that will pay for your offerings, the general rule is that of 1%.

1% of the total membership of your community will pay for something (this was true for our community). Now, this number can vary wildly — this isn't nearly as scientific as our community metrics benchmarks, but 1% is a great thumb rule to have. Once you're monetizing at the 1% mark, instead of adding new services and paid offerings, it's probably wiser to just grow your community. If you push too hard and add several monetization methods, you might end up losing your members or adding clutter!

PART EIGHT

GROWTH



SNEAKY VAMPIRE SYNDICATE STORY—HOW DO NFT PROJECTS GROW SO RAPIDLY?

The NFT economy has seen a massive boom in 2021. And online communities have been at the epicenter of this story.

Sneaky Vampire Syndicate, a token and launch that I was personally a part of, launched to a post-market volume of \$40M+. The hype kicked off because artist Migwashere announced the Sneaky Vampire Syndicate — a series of 8,888 vampire NFTs, each one a unique (yet generated) Migwashere piece of art.

In its first weekend, 4,600+ people bought at least one NFT at a price of 0.08Ξ (approx. \$313 at the time). Sneaky Vampire Syndicate's accomplishments build on top of Migwashere's previous project and reputation — the infamous Bored Ape Yacht Club, which is perhaps one of the best-known NFT projects in the space.

The SVS team had a great community plan straight off the bat. Interest in the project skyrocketed when the identities of the folks behind Sneaky Vampire Syndicate were revealed. The community shot from 0 to 40,000 people in a matter of weeks. The chat rooms were essentially flooded, with most people try to cop out a limited edition NFT before everyone else.

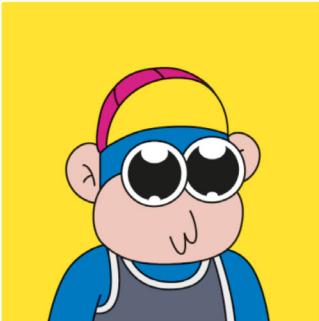
Holders of Sneaky Vampire Syndicate NFTs also got a ton of perks as part of the community, but as an NFT enthusiast myself, most buyers weren't really interested in the art. They were interested in whether they'd be able to make a 2-3x post their purchase. Many ended up making 20-30x.

SVS had four main channels of acquisition:

- **NFT listings websites** (Many potential community members camp on these websites in hopes of finding a good project before other people).

Today's Drops

today upcoming ongoing newest



Chimp Club
Dec 10, 2021 – Dec 11, 2021
Promoted
Chimp Club is a collection of 10,000 handcrafted and randomly assembled Chimps living on the Ethereum blockchain. Chimp Club is home to a wide variety of personalities, from artists, hackers...
[Read More](#)



Ghetto SharkHood - (\$300,000) BIGGEST NFT GIVEAWAY of the YEAR!
Dec 12, 2021 – Dec 12, 2021
Promoted
Welcome to Ghetto SharkHood! Join our discord for the BIGGEST NFT GIVEAWAY of the YEAR! (\$300,000)Ghetto SharkHood is the first utility-driven NFT collectible with utilities that span both...
[Read More](#)



Baby Ghosts
Dec 01, 2021 – Dec 31, 2021

- A ton of press and Twitter RTs from famous people (including famous Silicon Valley investor Garry Tan)



garrytan.eth 陈嘉兴
@garrytan

...

I just vamped in #SVS @SVSNFT

See the resemblance?



- Collaborating with other projects to cross-pollinate audiences



Sneaky Vampire Syndicate
@SVSNFT

...

Sneaky Vampire Syndicate X #888innercircle

Dropping on Halloween ❤️ 🧟 ✨



👤 ✨ 888 ✨

11:41 PM · Oct 25, 2021 · Twitter Web App

595 Retweets 61 Quote Tweets 1,265 Likes

- **Word of mouth and a bounty program** (to enhance said worth of mouth by giving people whitelist spots if they invited the maximum number of people to the community).

They also kept engagement up by promising to put certain people on the **whitelist**. This exclusive list of people would get access to the sale before others — basically the ability to secure their NFT before the wars began. Events were conducted almost every day to get new members into the loop on what SVS was. Almost all NFT projects follow the same general rules, but SVS is an example of a project that carried it off well. They didn't shy away from marketing and PR either.

There are three reasons why the SVS community grew so fast, and why NFT projects have cracked this model:

1. **Visibility:** Because potential community members discovered the community in the first place (listings websites, collaborations, influencers, etc.)
2. **Scarcity:** Because there's implied scarcity (8888 tokens, 40,000 people. Some people aren't going to get tokens)
3. **Opportunity:** Because people can make easy money or earn something out of joining the community.
4. **Validation:** Because big names were involved.
5. **Internationalization:** NFT projects like SVS made separate chat channels for Korean, Chinese, Russian, and other languages for local language support.
6. **Referrals:** Because there was a whitelist program that increased engagement and created a loop of members inviting other people just to get a spot (k-factor with some NFT projects is >1).

As you can see, paradoxically, scarcity drives growth in the early days (the Clubhouse invite program can vouch for this). If potential members can find a way to make money or earn gifts or

rewards out of their community experience, that's even better.

One mistake people make with scarcity is that they assume just because something should be made invite only or scarce, it shouldn't be advertised. This is not correct – you must thoroughly advertise the scarce object, or how would people know that they wanted it in the first place?

With that, I welcome you to the section on community growth. Let's get you to the big leagues.

VISIBILITY

For the purpose of this chapter, I'm going to assume that you're a community manager rather than a CXO. Community managers spearheading community have an additional challenge over a CXO doing the same — budget.

There's a word for a marketer without a budget: *unemployed*.

Similarly, as a community manager, you'll have to often fight for a reasonable budget. How can you expect any sort of performance without a budget to gain visibility for your community? People are not going to fall from the sky and join your community, they've got to hear about it somewhere first. In a world where every single person is fighting for your potential member's attention, you've got to play the bidding game to create a top of the funnel, or go down in the history books as a non performing community manager.

P.S: CEO and CFOs, how do you feel firing a community manager for non performance after allocating them zero advertising budget? Please know that it is absurd to expect anything from them without spend, just like the marketers (especially advertising folk) you've hired.

Here are the steps I'd take if I was community manager in order to build top of the funnel:

Step 1: Fight for a budget. \$1k at least.

The more the better. Start with small experiments and increase budgets where you see traction. If some channel is working well, focus almost exclusively on it until it runs out.

Step 2: Map out every watering hole your potential members are on, even if your community is exclusive.

For example, if you think your potential members watch Mr. Beast's YouTube content, run ads on said content via YouTube ads. If your potential members constantly visit NFT news websites, run ads on said websites. This book isn't an advertising guide, but a simple, common sense based tip is to talk to as many people who might use your community and find out where they spend their time (not just social platforms, but which specific YouTube channels, websites, etc.)

A smart hack – if you have friends who trust you, ask them to open <https://adssettings.google.com/> in front of you. This is an extremely powerful page that will tell you what that person is interested in apart from potential interest in your community. There is some level of invasion of privacy associated with this, so only folks who really trust you will show this to you, and likewise, you should only ask people to show you this page after you've told them the consequences. Once you know someone's interests, you can guess the channels and platforms they'll use.

How your ads are personalised

Ads are based on personal info that you've added to your Google Account, data from advertisers that partner with Google and Google's estimation of your interests. Choose any factor to learn more or update your preferences. [Find out how to control the ads that you see](#)

 45–54 years old	 Male
 Language: English	 Lumen HQ
 Epidemic Sound	 Ferns N Petals
 DAZ 3D	 Superdry
 B & H Photo Video	 Accounting & Auditing
 Action & Adventure Films	 Action & Platform Games
 Action Figures	 Adventure Games
 Advertising & Marketing	 American Football
 Android OS	 Anime & Manga
 Apparel	 Apple iOS
 Architecture	 Audio Equipment
 Augmented & Virtual Reality	 Autos & Vehicles
 Babies & Toddlers	 Baby Care & Hygiene
 Beauty & Fitness	 Blues
 Boating	 Bollywood & South Asian Film
 Books & Literature	 Browser Games
 Building Toys	 Business & Industrial
 Business & Productivity Software	 Business Finance

Step 3: Find relevant pools and add bait

An extension of the previous step is to find highly relevant pools where your users might hang out. You can add some bait in your community and people might join in to check that piece of bait out. An example of this process is to find popular newsletters, pay them a price to advertise an exclusive piece of well-written content, and ask readers to join your community to access said piece of content. We use <https://www.letterhunt.co/>.

The value in going after niche, relevant, pools instead of YouTube or Instagram ads is that they are much cheaper and more targeted. YouTube and Google ads in particular have gotten extraordinarily expensive over the last few months. You get more bang for your buck and a more relevant audience by going after niche sources.

Step 4: Allow people to easily cross the gate with a little effort

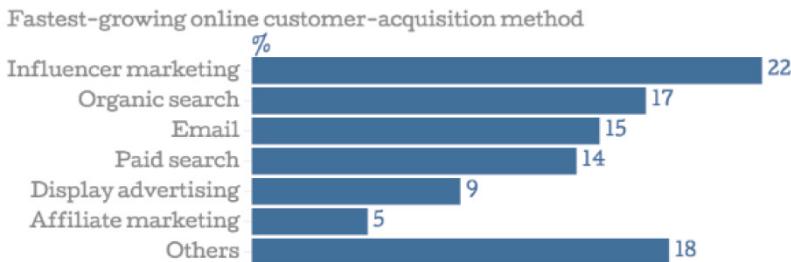
Like we've said before, lock your community up in the beginning and make it invite-only. We've never seen a community that wasn't invite-only in the early days get big (there may be exceptions, but viral factor, k, is low with open access communities). You can turn off invite-only after a few months. The gating, however, should be easy to get through. If people want to get in and are willing to spend 2-3 mins, they should be able to get in. It makes them feel smart, too.

Clubhouse was actually fairly easy to get into, even when they were invite-only. If you ever did a Twitter search for "Clubhouse invite", you'd find someone willing to give out in-

vites (the reason these people do so is because it makes them look altruistic).

Step 3: Get influencers

Influencers in 2021 is making an incredible amount of money selling their distribution. And dollar for dollar, they're cheaper than running social media ads. Influencers also tend to have a much higher advert click through rate because their audience trusts them (audiences trust influencers way more than clicking on a random ad in their feed). According to Mediakix, 71% of marketers said the quality of customers, leads, and traffic from influencer marketing are better than those from other sources. You're creating word-of-mouth marketing at scale (there's inherent warmth with your audience using an influencer) rather than just running cold ads to a cold audience.

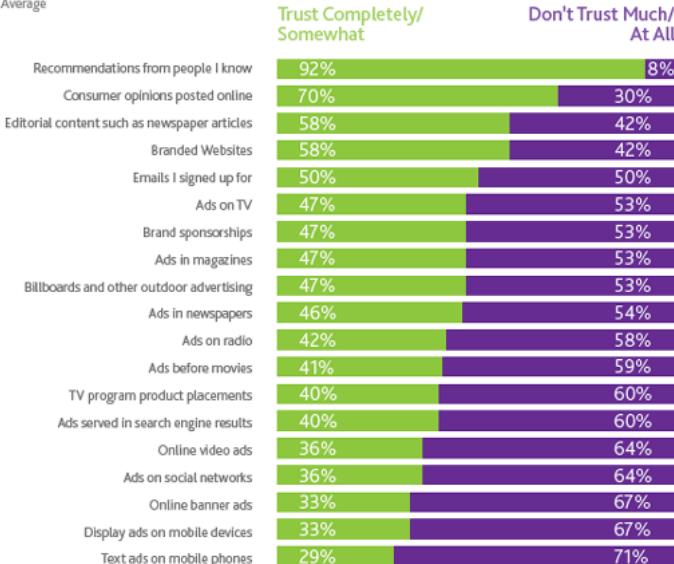


Data: Tomoson

Influencer marketing is the middle ground between “Recommendations from people I know” and “Ads on social networks”:

To what extent do you trust the following forms of advertising?

Global Average



Source: Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey, Q3 2011

Step 4: Run all ads to events

With a traditional product, you'd send your top of the funnel to your Playstore or Appstore download link. With communities, you should not send them to your community homepage or some random chat (they haven't been through an event induction and hence are most likely to be dead community members). **The top of the funnel has to direct to an event.** When you advertise an event, people are:

- a) More likely to click
- b) More likely to attend the event
- c) More likely to listen to you for 30 mins
- d) Hence more likely to convert into an active member

Events are the trojan horse into a potential member's mind.

To give you an idea of the costs, we ran adverts to a community event and had 13,000 people turn up (the event happened on Scenes, we were able to manage all those concurrent members on stage at the same time on mobile). The cost per conversion into community member was roughly \$0.7. This event was run to an Indian audience, hence costs were unbelievably low, but when we ran ads directly to the community as an experiment later, we saw a cost per conversion of \$3. That's a **4.2x cheaper cost running ads to events** rather than to your community homepage/chat/forum.

Step 5: Verbal CTA to join community

When people attend your event, remember to ask them to join your community every 5 minutes or so while the event is going on. On YouTube, you should always ask your watchers to subscribe and repeat it indefinitely. It's the same with events – people will forget to join your community and hence will be lost forever. Don't make this mistake; people need to be told, sometimes multiple times, for them to join.

Scenes makes this easy by allowing people to join a community in one click while an event is going on.

One last tip

I have one last tip for you, and this is yet another reason we built Scenes for mobile platforms first rather than web.

Most people will see your ads on a mobile phone, especially when running them through influencers or newsletters or other advertising platforms where you can't control the operating system.

If you do not have a fully working mobile community platform, you have wasted your money. Most of the new age community platforms like Circle and Tribe don't have fully functional or scalable mobile apps at the time of writing this, so you're wasting dollars.

Web community platforms look and feel nice, but they not only waste your money, you barely see any engagement there.

Be smarter.

HOW TO CREATE SCARCITY

We've mentioned before why scarcity is great for the early days of a community. Invite only communities by design feel "exclusive".

However, you might ask: "Isn't tech supposed to be a great leveler and communities supposed to be inclusive?"

We feel that very large invite-only communities are possible because software companies have democratized access in the first place. With tools like GMail, anyone can get an email address. But some people are still willing to go through a ring of fire to get access to invite-only tools like Superhuman. Similarly, communities that adopt the invite-only model turn themselves into *fashion* at the very beginning; they look cool (or horrendous) to people on the outside. However, exclusive communities still differ from pure fashion, as communities still offer the utility of connecting with others.

Another advantage of these *exclusive* social networks is that there exists strong network effects. If you create an invite only community of just 100 well known content creators, you're bound to have many of them inside who already know each other. The advantage of this is that conversation happens organically, and quality of said conversation is high. This makes the community all the more valuable for people on the outside who want to get in.

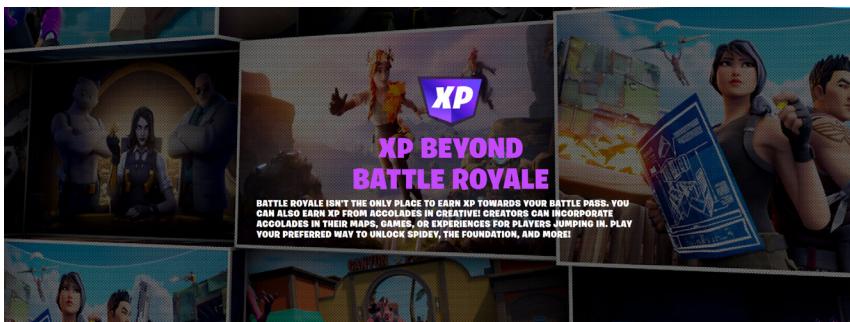
Scarcity need not be created with just invites. In a tradi-

tional NFT community, scarcity doesn't exist at the invite level, it exists at the token level. Even though 100,000 people can be a part of the community, only some people can gain access to the tokens. This implied scarcity can grow the community, which is a necessary group to join in order to eventually gain access to the tokens.

In some communities this scarcity could be at a different level — scarcity of certain roles that people really want, scarcity of rewards in the shop, scarcity of channel access, etc.

Regardless of what form of scarcity you choose, creating it is very simple:

- **Pick a layer at which you want scarcity:** Community Level, Role Level, Channel Level, Category Level, Reward Level, Token Level (if you have tokens).
- **Find a way to gate access to this level, with instructions on how people can achieve the scarce object in question:** a full fledged instruction page on what exists and why people should work toward or buy it. Great design always helps here (probably the reason why NFTs seem attractive from the outside). Here's a snippet from Fortnite's Battle Pass page:



- **Create competition for this access:** It could be as simple as an entrance exam that schools use for access to their community and campus, or as complex as staking NFTs in order to access private channels in a Scene or a Discord server.

Because I've been doing this for a decade and am tired of thinking of new competitive formats, I use a simple hack - I find the latest Netflix game show and copy the format for my community. It works all the time because people are familiar.

[Discover](#) [Apply](#) [Afford](#) [Visit](#) [Help](#) [Blogs](#) [≡Q](#)[Home](#) / [Apply](#)

Applying to MIT

We oversee the application process for students applying for first-year and transfer undergraduate admissions. We try to explain our process, help you understand what we're looking for, and think about how to prepare for MIT. Most importantly, we try to encourage young people to be students and community members first, and applicants second.

Admissions announcements

The Regular Action deadline for first-year applications is January 5. If you're applying RA, make sure to complete the requirements in time!

The transfer application deadline for spring entry has passed. The [fall entry deadline](#) is March 15.



Understanding the process

Learn how (and why) we recruit, select, and enroll the students we do.

Preparing for MIT

Learn how to enrich your education and get ready to study at MIT (or wherever is right for you).

First-year applicants

Learn how to apply as a prospective undergraduate student who will be entering immediately after secondary school.

Transfer applicants

Learn how to apply as a prospective undergraduate transfer student who has previously enrolled at another degree-granting institution.

Parents and educators

Get advice on how to counsel and support your students through the process.

MIT Requirements for Admission

What are MIT's admission requirements? While there are a lot of pieces that go into a college application, **you should focus on only a few critical things:**

- **GPA requirements**
- Testing requirements, including **SAT and ACT requirements**
- **Application requirements**

In this guide we'll cover what you need to get into MIT and build a strong application.

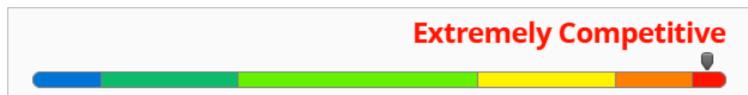
School location: Cambridge, MA

This school is also known as: Massachusetts Institute of Technology



If you want to get in, the first thing to look at is the acceptance rate. This tells you how competitive the school is and how serious their requirements are.

The acceptance rate at MIT is 6.7%. For every 100 applicants, only 7 are admitted.



This means the school is **extremely selective**. Meeting their GPA requirements and SAT/ACT requirements is very important to getting past their first round of filters and proving your academic preparation. If you don't meet their expectations, your chance of getting in is nearly zero.

After crossing this hurdle, you'll need to impress MIT application readers through their other application requirements, including extracurriculars, essays, and letters of recommendation. We'll cover more below.

- **Celebrate and advertise the scarce object:** Swinging the prize in front of everyone's face while creating an artificial bottleneck has tended to work since forever. My monkey brain will always want what I cannot have, but I need to know it exists and is desired in the first place. A cohort-based course I know shows people how many people have taken the entrance exam. A real estate platform shows you how many units are left and how many people have "seen" the unit in the last 24 hours. Everybody does it.

The screenshot shows a Zillow listing for a single-story house with a light blue exterior and a white porch. The house is set in a snowy landscape. At the top right, there are buttons for 'Travel times' and 'Add work destination'. Below that is the 'Overview' section, which includes the time on Zillow (4 days), views (4,235, circled in red), saves (232), and the listing agent (INMO Realty Company, LLC 518-892-3926, Brian S McQueen). The detailed description below the overview highlights the home's recent renovation and affordable nature. On the left side of the main listing, there are four smaller thumbnail images of the house from different angles.

My only tip here is to spend some money on it so people know the community also cares enough about the scarce object/invite.

60

OPPORTUNITY

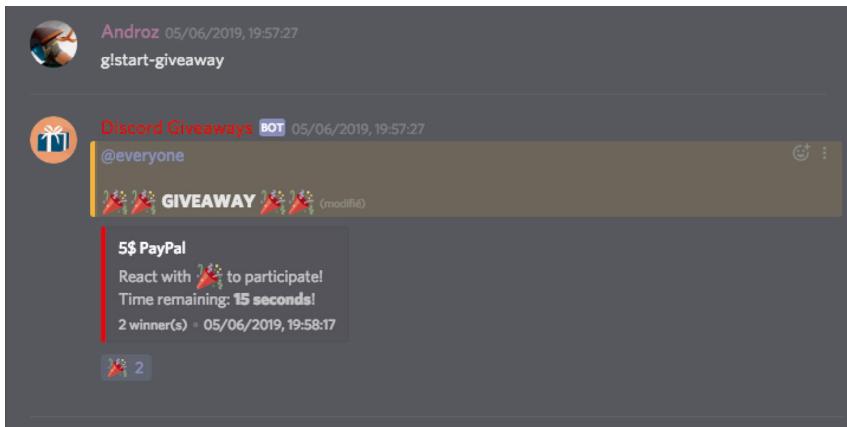
Every community that people can make money in will always be successful as long as new members who join have a chance to make money. America is not known as the land of money, it is known as the land of opportunity. There's an important distinction between the words opportunity and money - opportunity means you have a chance to make money. Money means you are gifted cash.

America is the land of opportunity because you have a chance to come here and make money (hence become successful). Not every person who goes to the country ends up successful, but they all have a shot at doing so. Successful communities are often the same.

In our old Avalon community, we used a job board channel and a coin system to reward people. We didn't give out jobs, but we gave people opportunities to post them and apply to them. At least a hundred people (this is a very conservative estimate) found jobs in our community. These stories traveling social media are enough to get other people to join with the same hope. For some, these hopes end up in a real job, and thus the cycle continues.

Here are the opportunities to make money that every community can provide its members:

1. Job boards
2. Exclusive Coupons
3. NFTs (implied opportunity to sell them and make money)
4. Airdropped cryptocurrencies
5. Freelance gigs
6. Venture investments (finding investors)
7. Cash won via competitions
8. Gifts and giveaways
9. Fantasy sports and betting
10. Finance/crypto “tips” that allow people to pick the right stock before others (in the finance world this is called “alpha”), r/WallStreetBets is a great example of this
11. Free cash



There are plenty more. It's up to your creativity as a community manager to come up with ways people can find opportunities to make money in your community. You won't survive in the long term if your members don't get the opportunity to

make money. If your community won't give them opportunity, members will eventually gravitate to one where they can make some dough.

Many young community members are naïve enough to think that members will stay forever just for the vision and mission of the community. Sorry to burst your bubble, but we're all human. We can use our intelligence and stay connected to a larger mission for a while, but over time we will always fall to fear and greed.

Be there for your community members across the emotional spectrum.

VALIDATION

People in advertising know this well. Get a famous actor or sporting personality to promote your product and you'll find a rapid increase in trust index and product usage.

It's the same with communities. I once joined an NFT community (Sneaky Vampire Syndicates) because Garry Tan (famous VC) and Alexis Ohanian (the reddit co-founder) signaled authenticity on Twitter. In my head, it was a safe bet to take considering other smart people had thought this through.

People want to join communities, they just don't know which ones. When a community is backed or publicly supported by someone who has reputation to lose, more people are likely to join it. Cognitively, legwork and due diligence have already been done by this "famous person", and hence the community must be legitimate. Sometimes (and we've seen this in the NFT space), even the famous personality has been scammed by the owners of the community, and this leads to an awkward situation for everyone.



Steve Aoki ✅
@steveaoki

...

had to join the fancy frenchies fam once I saw these
#NFTs 🔥🔥 check out their discord!!
@fancyfrenchnft

discord.gg/R8GyHrGt ✓



5:44 AM · Sep 17, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

470 Retweets 49 Quote Tweets 1,330 Likes

Getting someone famous to tweet or post about your community (even if this is a sponsored tweet or post) is a very good way to gain validation, and users are more likely to convert if there's some validation behind what you're doing. This is somewhat like influencer marketing, except you're using a different

class of influencers (ones that still don't recognize they are influencers).

It also works the same in the startup world – when Scenes was an unknown yet technologically sound app, we had very few people willing to take the plunge and buy a subscription. Now that we're backed by 40+ institutional and top angel investors, client adoption is much easier.

Humans behave the same way everywhere, after all. As Taleb would say, it's Lindy.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Facebook's primary growth spurt happened because its product had high product-market-fit with teenagers. Its second growth spurt happened much later, thanks to internationalization. Internationalization is simply the process of adding more languages to your product or community.

Here are some Facebook internationalization metrics from YourStory:

- 40 percent of Facebook users are not using English.
- More than 70 percent of Facebook users are outside the United States.
- It reaches more than 10 percent of the [total national population in 26 countries](#).
- Facebook is available in 43 languages and is in the process of being translated into another 60 languages.
- Since offering an Italian-language version of the service about a year ago, the number of users has grown from 350,000 to about 8 million.
- 25,000 volunteers helped translate Facebook into Turkish last year, and there are now 9 million Turkish-language users signed up for Facebook.
- Facebook is working on five Indian languages, including Tamil, Punjabi and Hindi.

Watch this video on Facebook's path to 1B users.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>

[how we put Facebook on the path to 1 billion users - YouTube](#)

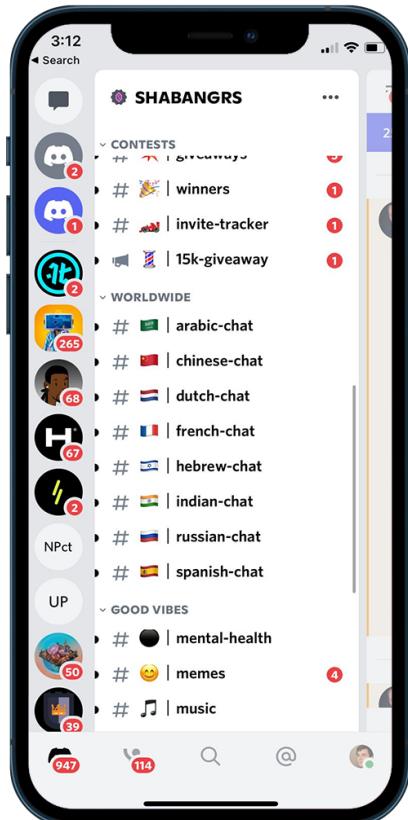


Check out the full course for 50% off at
[http://www.udemy.com/growth-hackers-conference/?
couponCode ...](http://www.udemy.com/growth-hackers-conference/?couponCode...)

YouTube · Gagan Biyani · Jan 9, 2013

The Avalon community started off on Telegram. Once we hit a certain cap, we started expanding by adding multiple sub-communities in regional languages. Not only did this increase the size of the total community, it also created regional language moderators and regional language engagement. Here's an example of a Discord community with internationalization:

Anytime beyond 10,000 members is the perfect time to venture outside of your primary language and add international voice, text, and forum channels. If you're starting a project that you expect to grow fast, you should begin with international channels and also acquire international moderators.



PIVOTING YOUR COMMUNITY

I've seen a particular type of community fail time and time again on Discord — sports communities. Now don't get me wrong, there are plenty of successful sports communities on reddit, Scenes, and Discord. But it's just plain hard to scale a new sports community, simply because most hardcore sports enthusiasts are a) already part of a big sports community b) not keen on being part of a sports community online c) would rather discuss sporting events over text message with friends they know in real life. Fitness is sort of the opposite — you can build the 5000th fitness community and still find a niche to fit and scale in.

In this chapter, I want to tell you how to pivot a community anytime after you've reached 100 users. How do you tell your members that you're pivoting? How do you manage expectations?

The truth is that most communities find themselves doing pivots (of different scales) at some point in their existence. Some pivots are tiny, with a name change or a platform change. Some pivots are massive, with a sports community pivoting into a startup community.

While pivoting (or even starting a community), here are four golden rules:

a) Your first 10-100 members define your community's engagement and culture: In some cases, you might want to talk to them 1 on 1; in some you'd want to do an event just for them. If members want to leave, let them, but ask them not to disturb the peace for other people. When spoken to in a 1-1 fashion, they are less likely to cause chaos on their way out.

b) Clearly state what the new community will be about and what it will do: What its rules, rewards, and goals are. Try making no references to the previous community; it will just confuse new members.

c) Pick a niche that isn't a winner-takes-all: Sports communities are winner take all. It's hard to find a viable niche in this domain. Finance, Gaming, etc., allow for multiple communities with enough differentiation. There's no one community that will win it all – people will be members of all popular communities in the niche if they seem interesting. One pro tip here – don't try to pitch yourself as the "best" community. Instead, try to be "different" from the communities that exist. In short, find an existing popular niche and create a "twist". For example, NeoG was a coding community, which actually gave assignments to all its members to level up, no other coding community did the same.

What the twist in your community idea is versus incumbents, I leave it up to you.

d) If you're a brand, make the community brand adjacent rather than "all about the brand": No offense to brands, but

nobody wants to join brand communities. They seem too corporate and there exists an implicit financial agenda. The better way to position the community is tangential to your brand. If you're a health protein bar brand called "StrengthBars", the community should absolutely not be called "StrengthBars". It should be a fitness community called "Daily Strength" or similar. Remember that Airbase's community is called "Off the Ledger", not "Airbase community".

You can sell your brand's stuff in your community to your heart's content, but adjacent naming is important.

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PIVOTING YOUR COMMUNITY

Content creators figured out something very smart about the content space. You can grow by collaborating with others rather than constantly battling them — even with other creators in your exact same niche.

Community is exactly the same, yet how often have you seen Community A x Community B events outside of the NFT space?

The problem with brand communities is that many of them are venture-backed tech companies, and venture-backed tech CEOs often have competitiveness seeping out of every pore. For them, it's as much about denying others a win as it is about racking up their own wins. This attitude absolutely does not work with content and community.

Our community once played Valorant (an online multi-player videogame) match with people who originally were from another community. The match had thousands of viewers, and there was a lot of cross-pollination between two communities that were in the same space and same niche. Since people can join multiple communities and want to be a part of all the best ones, events like these are great ways to collaborate without explicitly putting up an announcement like “Go join this other community kkthxbye”.

Even though neither of the communities were gaming communities, using a game as a bonding tool between two

communities was something stolen from the way some content creators collaborate and cross-pollinate audiences.



The plan is simple:

1. Find a list of communities you'd like to collaborate with.
2. Reach out to them and propose to collaborate. Not all will reply, find other channels in. We've found Twitter DMs to be the best way in.
3. Find an innovative way to collaborate (multiplayer games that are livestreamed, podcasts, a joint collection launch, etc.). Get creative.
4. Make sure there's a clear CTA for the members of both communities to join the other one. Probably a reward too.

Scenes is working on a native way for two communities to collaborate, allowing both communities to create a temporary fused stage where an event can be live-streamed. Both community "join" buttons will be available on stage.

SELLING YOUR COMMUNITY

Like we've said multiple times before, any place that gathers engagement is monetizable. But not every place that has monetizable engagement will be desirable for an acquisition. The best example of this is YouTube channels. Even though there is some merger and acquisition (M&A) activity with YouTube channels, it is not the norm, and there is a reason for this.

When buying a YouTube channel, there is the risk that you're *buying* a person, no matter the engagement and audience that person has. Once the person grows old, irrelevant, or uninterested, then the acquisition becomes a failure. A person as a product is a weird concept, and therefore M&A teams are allergic to buying people. Historically, a YouTube channel with 3-4 people that get screen time is much more likely to get bought than a 1 person channel.

Communities, however, are seen as full-fledged products where the admins and moderators are seen as fungible (mods are easily replaceable with another person without destruction of the community). That's why we're seeing more and more community M&A value — because M&A teams see communities as products.

Some communities have their own product, and they see great exits too. Prosus recently acquired Stackoverflow (a community for engineers for 1.8 billion USD). In terms of features, Stackoverflow is basically a forum with gamification features.

Stack Overflow acquired by Prosus for \$1.8 billion

Greg Kumparak @grg / 10:32 PM GMT+5:30 • June 2, 2021

 Comment



 Image Credits: TechCrunch

I'll argue that a lot of consumer startups today are just communities, and many need not hire engineers to build their own product. They could do just fine using a white-labeled platform like Scenes (it'd be hard to sell your community if you've built it on Discord or Slack; both require third party logins and a third party download).



Naval
@naval

...

Building an audience on a proprietary network is building an elaborate castle on sand.

1:42 AM · Nov 9, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

442 Retweets 140 Quote Tweets 5,132 Likes

Dev.to and Hashnode (for engineers), 9gag and Buzzfeed (content) and even Pinterest, are just examples of communities that have their own app.

If you are able to spawn out your own app, have a Single-Sign-On based sign-in system, and have a white-labeled web experience, you will interest M&A teams in companies across the world.

Here's the process to sell your community:

Pre-build relationships: You can't meet an acquirer and sell the next day (unless the value of your community is small). Find a potential list of acquirers and get an initial meeting. Make sure they're in the same space as you otherwise the acquisition won't ever make sense for them.

Continually send growth updates to all potential acquirers:

Most of these people are really busy and won't hang around your community every day. Send them updates as interesting events and growth will happen.

Most communities will be bought, not sold: Outbound sales process will rarely work when it comes to selling a community to an acquirer — there will need to be inbound interest from a champion inside a company. Hence the constant growth updates!

Third-party validation from respected people in the industry can make entire deals happen: Zapier bought Makerpad based on a single tweet!

Most conversations will fizzle out, with people canceling

deals last minute: This is the same with startup acquisitions and shouldn't be any different here. Focus on the community and don't fully mentally invest yourself in the potential exit. As someone who has sold a company before, building castles in the air before a deal is done will lead to emotional ruin, I promise you.

Value your company properly and ask for what you're worth: This is especially hard to do when there aren't enough examples to anchor to. There are not enough communities that have been sold for us to figure out exact valuations or revenue multiples, unlike the startup world where there are a plethora of examples.

If all goes well, you should be a part of a bigger company now. Enjoy the payout!

PART NINE

HIRING



HOW TO HIRE COMMUNITY MANAGERS & WHERE TO FIND THEM?

The hiring process is the most important because the people you invite to be part of your community and company will determine its outcome. With business and communities, inputs lead to outputs. The inputs are people.

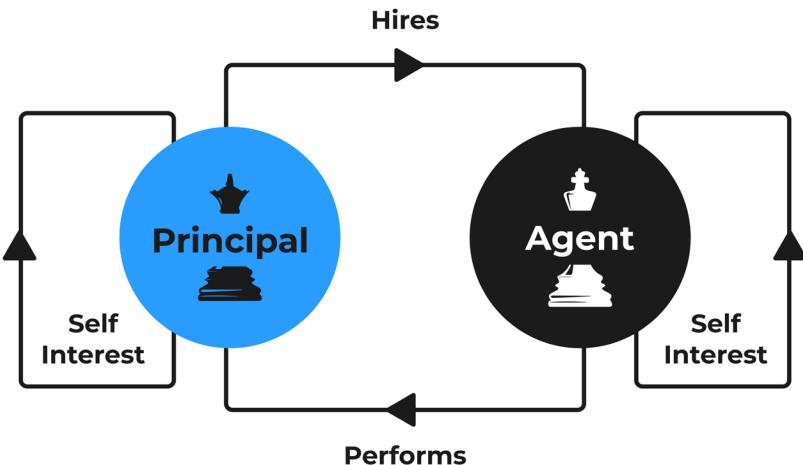
Job Description

The role of the community manager is not to manage people but to manage the environment. Focus on enabling the members and the community will thrive.

As mentioned earlier, in the early days of building your community you need to have founder involvement.

A lot of the first jobs-to-be-done are not clearly defined and it's also difficult to demarcate which task belongs to which department and who is accountable. Founding members have skin in the game for this generalist role where you have to do all sorts of things like - support, moderation, events, etc.

Even if you choose to hire early on, ensure that you communicate that the job description is that of a leader and not someone who checks boxes.



The Principal-Agent Problem

One successful company which hired a community manager early on in their business is Instagram.

Against every business textbook of hiring engineers or designers or PMs, Instagram first hired Josh Riedel, a community manager to help the founders work through the early user concerns of the company and do customer development.

Customer Development

A community manager is a communications hub between the company and the community. When you're starting off your business, you have a lot of untested hypotheses about your business model. Who are your ideal customers? What features/products do they want? How should you deliver the product, how to price it, and so on...

These facts and insights don't reside inside your building. You have to do the leg work and dive deep into the trenches of your community to uncover them.

Community managers have their finger on the pulse on what makes their members (potential customers) happy and what makes them tick. These insights are also extremely valuable to the product team (but make sure to parse the information you receive; community managers aren't PMs and can be misled).

Beware not to over-index on the voices of the loud 1% of your community. You are building a product for the masses and any product decision you make will affect the remaining 99% as well.

Here are the tasks a community manager will do on a daily basis (you can use some of these in the job description):

- Come up with event titles for events
- Conduct events – bring relevant people on stage
- Conduct breakout rooms and workshops
- Reach out to speakers for events
- Pin important chats and announcements
- Control the flow of conversation and steer away from touchy topics
- Answer questions on company policy (this is a lot like a PR role)
- Scaling channels in the community as community scales
- Adding to community FAQ
- Maintaining the community blog/newsletter. Ideally recruiting a member of the community to do this.
- Conduct giveaways
- Conduct competitions and award coins and rewards

- Manage the community swag store
- Create roles and permissions and award them to deserving people (matching power and role of a member)
- Assign moderators
- Do a weekly call with moderators
- Prune moderators if inactive
- Kicking and banning trolls and toxic members if moderators aren't available
- A little social media management (or co-coordinating with the SM team)
- Handle all sorts of crisis events

Skills Required

Community is a great department to start one's career in a company. Because it gives you insights into all the departments which will exponentially increase the depth and breadth of your early experience. And your experience in the community team will in turn be helpful if you choose to transition into another department as well.

Exceptional community managers have a balance of creativity, empathy, and systems thinking. Especially when you're scaling quickly, you need someone who can set up the processes, resources, and tools that can grow alongside you and aren't just responsive to what you can pull together at the moment.

As mentioned earlier, the best place to find and hire community managers is from within the community itself!

They already know the company history, the products, the team.

Even during the interview process, find out if the candi-

date has done their research about your community because it shows proactiveness and allows you to move deeper into the conversations as opposed to the usual, more generic questions.

Social Media Footprints

A candidate's social media profile gives a wealth of information. Not only is it useful in terms of the actual job they have to do which was traditionally social media management, but it also can be used to assess the potential hire's level of sociability and creativity.

A recent study by the Society For Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that 84% of employers recruit via social media and 43% of employers screen job candidates through social networks and search engines. Why should it be any different here?

Community jobs also require creativity, at least some of that ought to be evident in their online presence. Nowadays, if someone has an unusually small social media presence, you start to wonder why.

Finally, don't forget people are interviewing your company too, and having a community is great brand signaling. Hiring for us has become so much easier across all departments because of our strong online presence and community. Another reason to get your community up and running for success, if you're still on the fence.

HOW MUCH DO COMMUNITY MANAGERS MAKE?

As someone who is hiring for a community role, you'll be surprised to know that compensation carries less weight than you might expect.

In a 2019 report by First Round Capital, only 1 in 10 job seekers said cash or equity compensation was a primary reason they joined the company. Much higher on the wish list? The ability to make an impact (55%), the problems they'd be solving (42%), the mission (40%), the team (39%), and the culture (30%).

I can't tell you how much this is true especially for community roles.

There was once a time when I was looking to promote and "hire" an existing community member who was contributing well. He found it insulting that I was assigning a monetary value to his contribution!

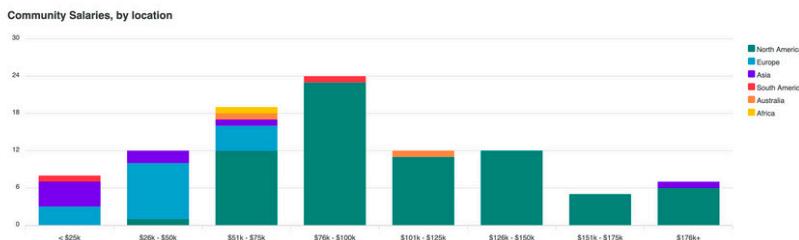
On a tangential note, for those looking for community roles, it's traditionally been a struggle to find anything remotely in the range of what could be considered fair compensation.

There are plenty of reasons why this may be the case, but the most likely culprits are:

- The role is vaguely defined or understood even within the company
- It is typically seen as a “soft skill” position.
- The range of work and responsibilities are spread across departments.
- You can’t quantify the value of community and the effort that goes into building and maintaining one

Thankfully there is an upward trend in salaries over the past 12-24 months, but there is still plenty of room for improvement.

How much money can I make?



There's no specific path for community managers because community-building doesn't have a specific established place in every business yet.

At the end of the day, you have the power to trailblaze your path to the executive level. If you have proven that you can build, scale, and manage a community, you will always be well paid – it is a critical role.

Your pay scale depends on several factors like:

- How significant is the community to your business
- If community is a separate function or a part of another department like marketing or product

- Size of the community team and your role in the same
- The size and bank balance of the company you're planning to work for

While almost every company I know wants to build a community or have some community element in their business, they don't always recognize the time and effort it takes to build one.

I've seen so many companies make the mistake of putting community as an added task on an underpaid marketing intern's to-do list.

This has consequences because the intern is working in a team of one and will end up having to wear many hats. It can be hard to scale a community successfully with this smorgasbord of responsibility. Eventually, the community suffers.

The average salary for a full-time community professional in the US is as follows:

Community Manager	\$31,000 to \$220,000
Senior Community Manager	\$34,000 to \$180,000
Head of Community	\$44,000 to \$375,000

Although there's no escaping the unfortunate ground reality, the future of community professionals is exciting as the overall industry receives more exposure. We will see a lot more roles emerge and your responsibilities within it as we explore new frontiers.

If you're in the community space, let's connect (you can email me at elson@buildonscenes.com). I'd be happy to put you in touch with companies that are on the lookout.

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS VS COMMUNITY MANAGERS

A LinkedIn search for “community manager” today will churn out millions of profiles.

However, zooming into their roles and responsibilities, you’ll learn that most of them are better fit for the title of Social Media Manager rather than Community Manager.

What is the difference?

Before we narrow down on the specifics, let’s first understand the similarities.

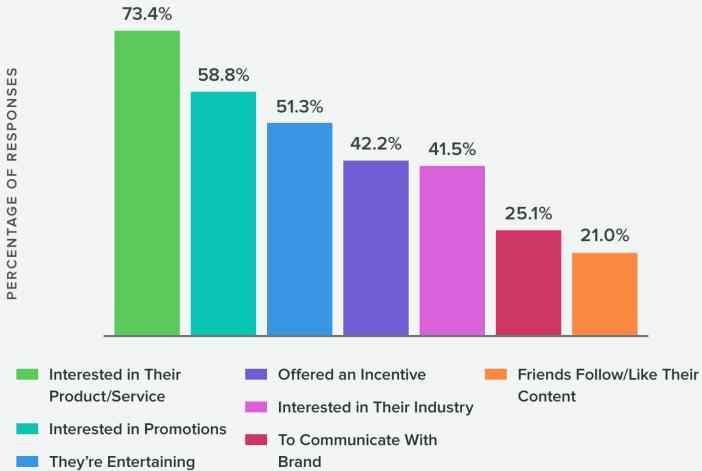
Both roles are responsible for managing a brand’s presence online. However, social media managers are limited to existing social media. As DIY social media or community platforms started to emerge, it made sense for businesses to put the added responsibility on their SMMs and simply change their titles.

Unfortunately, as we get better with our definitions, we are learning that these roles are quite contrasting. Here are some of the key differences:

Social Media Manager	Community Manager
Acts as the brand to promote the brand's products, post content and reply to comments.	Acts as an average user/ brand ambassador to encourage audience engagement and provide support.
Will post from the brand's account.	Will post under their own account.
The goals are often sales related. Delivering news, including the release of products, services, and features.	The goals are engagement and retention related which in turn help increase life time value and thereby revenue.
Goals are more specific and generally short term and focus on sales.	Goals are broad and long term.
Wants followers and conversions.	Wants community members and conversations.
Efforts are online.	Can be both online and offline.
Always public.	Usually exclusive.
Function of the marketing department.	Functions across departments including product, marketing, business development and support.
Must be able to write effectively and in the tone of the brand.	Communication skills are a must though they have a little bit more freedom in this case.
Creates content.	Curates experiences.
Success measured through social media post engagement, ad click through and conversion rates.	Success measured more in the long term in terms of relationships cultivated with users and brand advocacy.
Jobs are easier to find.	Jobs are a bit harder to hunt down.

Actions That Make People Follow a Brand on Social Media

Q2 2016



sproutsocial

sproutsocial.com/index

"They're entertaining" is a prerequisite for social media managers. Not so much for community managers. You can leave your sense of humor at home.

OFFLINE VS ONLINE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

A key differentiator between social media and communities is that communities are not just limited to the online world. Most successful online communities will have frequent offline meetups, mixers, and in-person activities.

Today communities are turning phygital (physical plus digital) which blends digital experiences with physical ones to provide unique interactive experiences for their members.

58% of brands have both online and in-person communities and 38% have only digital communities.

Harley Owners Group

The HOG is a great example of a community that started offline and is now online too.

The HOG started as an initiative in 1983 as a way for Harley Davidson owners to take their fraternity beyond the road. The initiative has helped build longer-lasting and stronger relationships between Harley-Davidson's customers and the company, not to mention help boost sales.



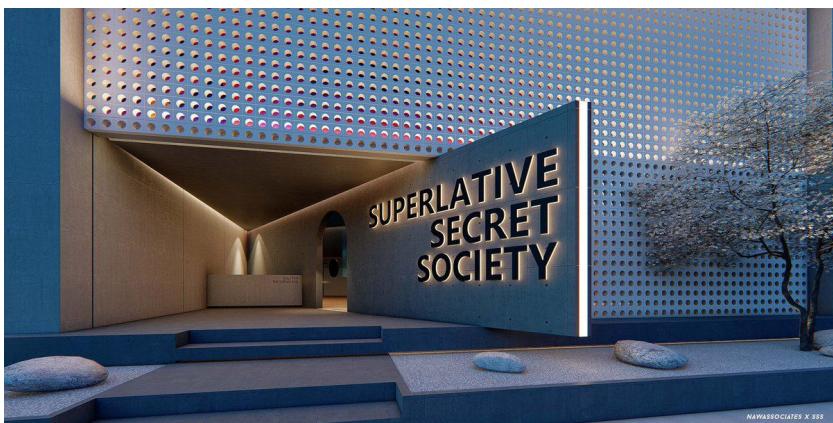
HOG is often considered “the granddaddy of all community-building efforts”

In addition to the offline camaraderie, biker events, and garage parties; the online community gets access to discounts, courses, and boot camps for all skill levels.

From riding motorcycles to surfing the internet, the HOG is a textbook example of how you can take your business from offline to online through community.

NFTs going “off-chain”

A more recent example of communities in the physical and digital world is in the NFT space.



NAWA ASSOCIATES X 233



Superlative Secret Society is an NFT project which gives members exclusive access to a VIP lounge and art gallery. Members also get profit-sharing from the offline initiatives.

Almost all NFT projects have some offline elements in the project roadmap.

The Bored Ape Yacht Club took their project off-chain with an actual yacht party and concert as seen below. They've organized meetups across the world in countries like the US, Hong Kong, and the UK too.





The proliferation of the internet first gave rise to digital communities; taking away the need for physical proximity for communities to form. Ironically, now it also appears that offline experiences are now being fostered through connections first formed online.

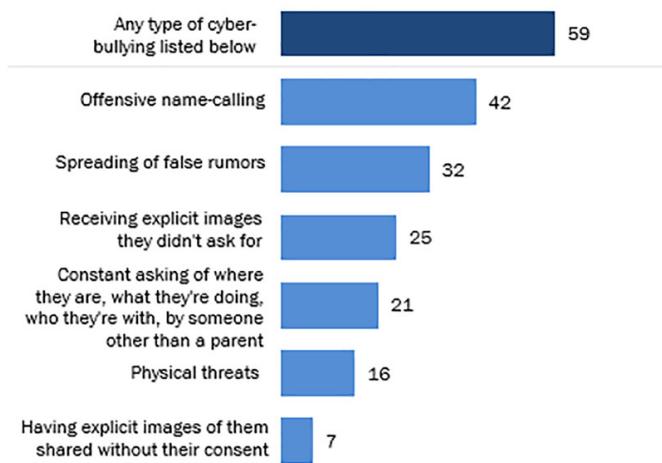
70

TALENT BURNOUT

Being a community manager is not all fun and games.

While the removal of the boundaries of geography, space, and time does have its benefits, unwarranted encroachment can hurt your mental health. The constant battle against trolls can take a toll on you.

% of U.S. teens who say they have experienced __ online or on their cellphone



I often feel stressed out whenever I open my phone and see so many people that I needed to reply to immediately. Pings, pop-ups, and glowing red dots everywhere - it can become overwhelming!

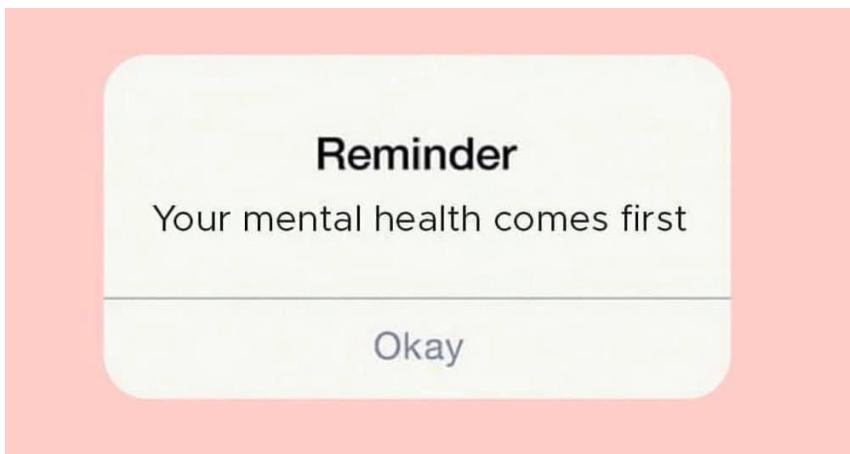
As a community manager, the constant pressure of having so many eyeballs watching your every move can also burn you

out.

But turning off all your notifications is not a foolproof solution because you might miss important alerts.

The trick is to set the expectations upfront with your community members and team. Let them know that if you're not in your best mood, you are not at the best for your community as well.

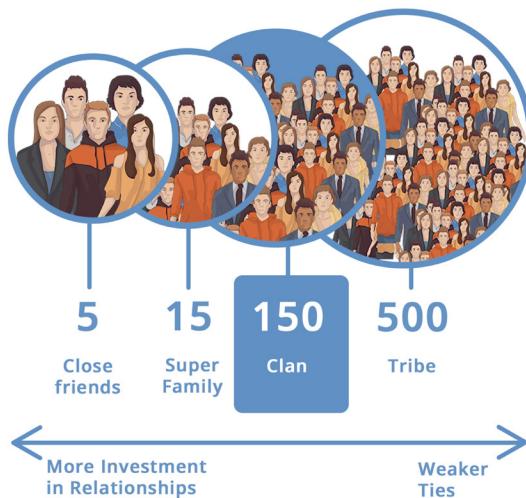
It's not the notifications that we need to manage, but people's expectations.



There's also a growing trend of people withdrawing from social interaction in the 'real world' (desocialization) because they already have too much of it online (oversocialization).

Dunbar's number

Dunbar's Number: 150



People have limited bandwidth to build relationships. That limit is called *Dunbar's number*. It is the supposed cognitive limit of the number of stable relationships one can have or in practical terms, the size of the community an individual can interact and form relationships with.

Dunbar's number is important because that constraint allowed offline communities to grow sustainably. If a community grew out of proportion, you could easily sense the noise and overcapacity. That is not the case with online communities which can grow rapidly not being bounded by geography or space.

If you do not take into account Dunbar's number, the member experience gets hurt.

The ratio of signal to noise decreases and the quality of information deteriorates.

Not only does the sensory overload lead to a poor member experience it also causes a loss of that close-knit “sense of community”.

As you scale, you have to be aware of the side-effects of achievement and make conscious efforts to nurture the sense of community. A community manager has to constantly break their community down into manageable units every time there’s a new milestone. All of this takes its toll.

REDDIT HIRING STORY - BUILDING TRUST AT SCALE

Backstory

In 2015, Reddit users and moderators started to voice their unhappiness at how the business was starting to behave like a business behemoth and had lost its human touch. At scale, the brand and community felt like a faceless corporate behemoth.

Things had started to reach a breaking point where moderators were not feeling supported. They had a single point of contact within the organization and that single point of contact abruptly left one day. To get the attention of the organization, they protested. They took a number of their communities offline as a protest and have their voice be heard.

In the wake of that, Reddit brought their founder Steve Huffman back. Steve took on the mantle of rebuilding the organization from scratch.

This was a scenario where a lot of trust was needed to be rebuilt with the moderators who essentially powered the entire community.

“We don’t believe Reddit!” was the phrase that echoed across their platform. There was a deep distrust in the organization after years of being underfunded, neglected, and not handled very well.

Annual Moderator Roadshows

The Reddit team started to organize Annual Mod Roadshows where they traveled across the country meeting moderators. These events were intended to promote goodwill and have a good time. No karma, upvotes, or downvotes. Just dinner, drinks, and conversation.

The biggest positive from the roadshows was that the moderators started to recognize that Reddit was still *a bunch of people who cared and had the same goals*.



Now it probably wouldn't be possible for you to go meet all your mods, especially post the pandemic. If you can't afford to go to every house and personally meet and greet, ship gift swag and write personal thank you notes. Your moderators and active community members will appreciate and it doesn't take much effort either. Remember, it's the thought that counts.

In addition to the roadshows, the Reddit team hired a Community Council which includes 50 or so moderators across the spectrum of subreddits. They are all under NDA and the team shares all information with them.

Community Team Structure

Reddit has three distinct teams and within them specialties:

- **Community Support Team** - Focuses on traditional customer support and can expand into thinking about how to create a positive new experience.
- **Community Relations Team** - More traditional community managers who know how to mediate conflicts. These are often the pipeline and communication flow between the company and the community.
- **Community Initiatives Team** - These are program managers. Their specialty is building out programs, thinking through the operations, measuring success, and running A/B tests, pulling statistically significant results.

Adopt an Admin

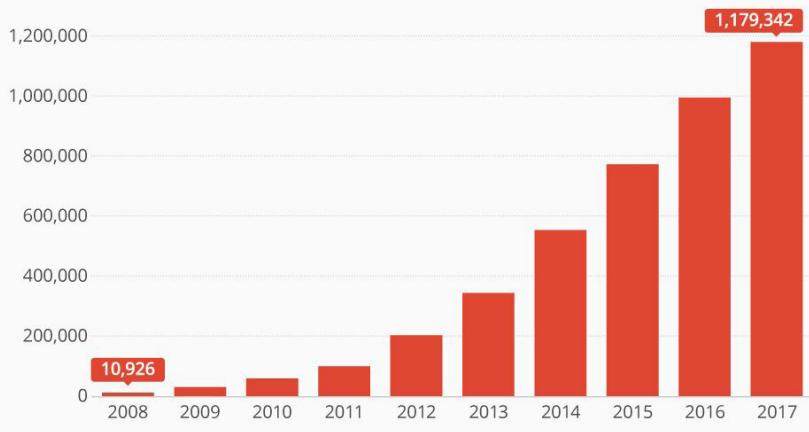
Reddit also launched an initiative where staff members (admins) were brought into the moderation teams for 1-2 weeks and would participate in moderating alongside the volunteers.

It gave moderators context of what they were doing and a sense of what the team at Reddit did - product managers, salespeople, etc.

This was incredibly powerful on both sides.

The Explosive Growth of Reddit's Community

Number of subreddits, i.e. forums dedicated to a particular topic, available on Reddit*



@StatistaCharts

* all figures as of the end of the respective year; 2017 figure as of November 12

Source: Reddit Metrics

statista

There's a lot you can learn from the Reddit story especially as a community that is in the rapid scaling phase.

As the “front page of the internet”, Reddit continues to be one of the most successful social platforms and an excellent case study on how to rebuild trust at scale.

PART TEN

TIPS



KING AS A PEASANT

One of the things I began noticing in our community was that it was influencer-led. Whenever an influencer or person with social status within the community would join a voice room or engage in a channel, everyone else would go silent and just keep listening. Even when we encouraged them to speak up, they wouldn't do so because they didn't want to feel "stupid" in front of their role models or felt like their opinions were not smart enough.

I would often try and enter the voice room in stealth and eavesdrop on conversations, but seconds later, either the speaker or listener would point out that I joined the stage. Initially, I enjoyed the attention I was getting but later on, I was frustrated because this meant I couldn't really get a lock on the true beat of the community.

As the community leader, I wanted to do a lot of social listening to understand and feel the pulse of my community members. If all they did was keep quiet or say things just to please me, I was being disillusioned into thinking that everything was perfect just as is.

This particular hack is straight from a fairytale. You've probably read the stories of kings and queens who would hide their identity by dressing in disguise while roaming around their people.



Princess Jasmine from Aladdin would walk around the city dressed as a commoner and listen in on what the people had to say about the king and kingdom.

In your online community, this is much easier to do. To listen to your community members in stealth, all you have to do is change your profile picture and name (or make a throwaway account).

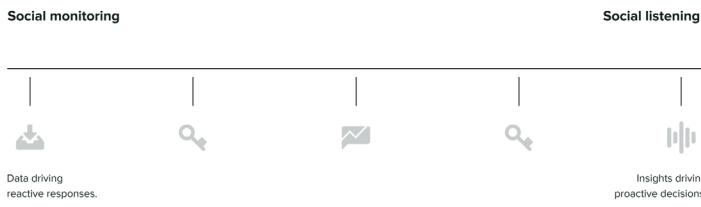
Doing this allows you to ask, tell, and listen to things that you couldn't do in your “role” as community head.

I'm not sure if this is ethical or legal, but if you have the right moral compass and are doing it with the right intentions, this hack might open you to ways you can improve your community efforts in ways no one would tell you otherwise. 9 times out of 10, your community members know exactly how to fix or grow the community. When running ads on Facebook or Google, your ideal customer profile won't speak up and help you out. Here, they will – but you've got to remove yourself from the situation.

Social Listening

Social monitoring vs. social listening

Monitoring tells you **what**, listening tells you **why**.



Social listening is actively seeking information from your customers/community members about what they think, how they feel, and what they expect from your business. On Twitter or other social platforms, social listening is passive. With communities, this can be an active process.

The difficulty arises as members are often reluctant to tell you things that they don't like straight to your face. To a lot of well-meaning members, asking for improvements or pointing out problems can come across as being ungrateful. Many won't bother to put in the effort publicly unless prodded. The big downside of not receiving real intel is that if the problem persists and you are not aware, it will eventually surface in public. Others may start to experience the same leading to a bad community experience.

If you have a community culture that is vocal about their problems, great! If not you can try using an anonymous confession box (which often doesn't work well because of noise) or

do real-time social listening where you quietly sit in on those easy-going, free-flowing, no holds barred conversations.

Remember the goal is not to trick or swindle people but to find or make ways to better your community management.

CREATING MORE KINGS

As you scale, your job as a community leader is to create more community leaders. You hold the spotlight - and you need to become an expert at wielding it. It seems counterintuitive to give your special microphone away to others, but that's exactly what you have to do.

Empowering others to shape your community's direction and giving up control is scary, but it's also what will make your community live beyond you. Encourage community members who voluntarily raise their hands for opportunities to lead in ways big or small. Support them with your expertise and cheerlead their accomplishments. Awarding status helps.

Devote resources and time to finding and elevating new stories. By doing this, you're highlighting what it means to be a top-notch contributor. This will motivate existing members to picture how they can deepen their involvement with your community.

From Community Leader to Community Builder

A community becomes a community when it can organize itself without your active involvement.

Take for example the Duolingo community which organizes more than 500 language meetups every month. Language learners of all levels get together and these community events have become a natural extension of the product.



Duolingo Language Meetup

Meet other people interested in languages for a night of games and snacks. Duolingo's community team will be in town and is excited to meet you for our very first NYC meetup!

Language learners of all levels encouraged to show up.
New to Duolingo? Join us too!



WHEN

Thursday, February 6, 2014
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

WHERE

AlleyNYC
500 7th Ave. 17th Flr.
New York, NY

Follow Duolingo on [fb.com/duolingo](https://www.facebook.com/duolingo) and twitter.com/duolingo

If Duolingo tried running these meetups on their own, you can imagine how much staff and resources they'd need. The only way that Duolingo has been able to achieve its exponential reach and growth is by letting community members run the meetups themselves. Even if it's not always "on-brand".

You have to give up some control and embrace uncertainty to get rewarded in community goodness. You have to buy

into the belief that “two heads are better than one” and groups can do so much more. It’s what we preach when we encourage members to join our community.

What you’re building is a sandbox. Give people just enough freedom to create something that’s their own, on their own. But also set fundamental constraints — I said sandbox, not a beach.

Growing a community isn’t about management. It’s about developing leaders. Shift your mindset from stoking your fire to passing the torch.

BRIBING

If you're someone who is feeling queasy and uneasy at the thought of bribing your community members or someone with influence, then for the rest of this chapter I recommend you replace the word bribing with "rewarding in advance".

If someone is doing something (or might agree to help you do something) that can benefit your community and they have no intrinsic motivation or need to do so, give them an incentive to do so.

There's nothing wrong in doing so.

You create an even more compelling ask - by giving before asking.

In the Avalon community, we were organizing daily events and engagement activities. Community members wanted speakers and experts from outside of their close network. But asking a busy person for their time can in itself feel like you're committing a crime. What's worse? Doing it frequently. If the ask is made too frequently, givers can become fatigued. Offering monetary compensation isn't always the best idea because it feels transactional and might create a habit you can't afford. So it needs to feel like they're doing you a favor.

People sitting in positions of power are more likely to respond to bribes than your rewards post-action fulfillment

(gamification). The key difference between bribery and positive reinforcement (operant conditioning) is that when bribing, the reward is given before the desirable behavior occurs.

Bribing is only bad if you're offering an incentive to someone in exchange for bad behavior or turning a blind eye towards your bad behavior.

Doing people favors without asking for anything in return (immediately) or giving people gifts even before they helped you are great ways to start a relationship with someone on the good foot. The receiver naturally feels indebted to return the favor.

In fact, you can be upfront about the bribe.

When I was running the community, I would tell those I needed favors from that I have an exchange proposition in mind and then go on to the details of my bribe. As long as what you're doing comes from a place of good intention, the other party will happily "oblige" your requests. We created a role in our community called "Priority Members", and plugged them right at the top of the member stack. Whenever we'd call a speaker over, we'd offer this role to the person (almost always in advance) and also give them some Avacoins. Even though most of these people didn't have any idea what the role or the coins meant, they still liked the fact that they were given something.

Roles, permissions, coins, and hierarchy also work on people outside your community as long as you sell it as such.

PART ELEVEN

CHOOSING A PLATFORM



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SLACK?

“Slack is specifically designed for some group of people who are aligned around the accomplishment of some goal...it's a lousy social network...a lousy replacement for a bulletin board or discussion.” ~Stewart Butterfield, CEO, Slack

The screenshot shows the official Slack website. At the top, there's a dark header with the Slack logo, a navigation menu with links for Product, Enterprise, Resources, and Pricing, and a search icon. Below the header is a prominent blue banner with white text that reads: "Slack is your digital HQ. Meet the new features keeping teams connected in a work-from-anywhere world. [Let's go →](#)". To the right of the banner is a small 'X' icon. At the bottom of the page, there's a dark footer section.

Slack does not advocate itself as a community tool. It describes itself in various ways...“*the email killer*”, “A *digital HQ*” and the “*place where work happens*”. But never as a community tool.

Slack is a great email replacement, and a great workflow communication tool. But communities are different.

The Punishing Pricing Model

The screenshot shows the Slack pricing page. At the top, it says “Choose the plan that's right for your team” and “Pay by month or the year, and cancel at any time.” Below this, there are three plan options: “Pro”, “Business+”, and “Enterprise Grid”. Each option has a brief description and a price table. The “Pro” plan costs \$6.67 USD per person per month when billed yearly or \$2.67 USD per person per month when billed monthly. The “Business+” plan costs \$12.50 USD per person per month when billed yearly or \$5 USD per person per month when billed monthly. The “Enterprise Grid” plan is described as “Slack for the most demanding enterprises - all the flexibility to meet your regulatory requirements, and all the power to match your growth”. At the bottom, it says “To get a price estimate for Enterprise Grid, please contact our Sales team”.

Plan	Price	Billing Period
Pro	\$6.67 USD / \$2.67 USD	per person, per month, when billed yearly / \$3.20 USD/person, per month, when billed monthly
Business+	\$12.50 USD / \$5 USD	per person, per month, when billed yearly / \$5 USD / \$6 USD/person, per month, when billed monthly
Enterprise Grid		To get a price estimate for Enterprise Grid, please contact our Sales team

Slack's pricing model punishes growing communities.

Slack costs about \$6.67-12.5/user/mo (some discounts are available depending on where in the world you are).

Even if you get to 1000 community members (still small), you're spending ~\$80-95k a year.

The free trial which permits unlimited users is limited to 10k of the most recent messages (you will exhaust this in a few days with a decent-sized community) and 5GB of file storage, which means a vibrant community will quickly hit the free tier limits. At this point, you will either have to pay or accept limitations like not being able to post any more files, or not being able to search valuable archive content from the community.

You also can't migrate at this point, so you're stuck. This is why Slack offers a free trial.

Limited Events Functionality

PRO	BUSINESS+	ENTERPRISE GRID
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group video calls up to 15 people• Screen sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group video calls up to 15 people• Screen sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group video calls up to 15 people• Screen sharing

Slack also limits group video calls to up to 15 people irrespective of the plan chosen. This means you will not be able to host your events or webinars on Slack and thereby risk losing social capital as your members churn. Events are community glue, you can't do without them.

As a consequence, you will also have no data regarding how many were interested in your events, how many attended, and how many dropped off. There's a reason why Slack limits this

to 15 members. Video is expensive, and having too many people on video at the same time can easily break the bank!

Admins can see your DMs

Email has traditionally provided employers with the ability to view (if necessary) your work emails. Similarly, on the paid versions of Slack, admins with relevant permissions can export not just group conversation data but also private channel conversations and 1-1 direct messages.

The adage “Don’t write anything in an email that you wouldn’t want to see on the front page of the newspaper” applies to Slack as well.

It is worth considering whether your community members will feel comfortable that others can see their private messages.

Limited User Profile

If you’re in a group with team members you already know, your user profile information on an online tool doesn’t matter. But it is a problem when you are trying to build a community with people who don’t already know each other.

Limited Moderation Features

Slack doesn’t allow admins to mute or block other users which can become a big problem when you may be looked upon/held responsible for community platform sanctity.

There’s also no way to block someone on Slack. If you want

to avoid someone, the admin would have to remove the user from a channel or you would have to create your own channel and exclude them. This is generally not the way most community platforms work – you will always have trolls that you want to block.

Roles, Permissions, Badges and Gamification

It is not clear who is in charge. Communities need to have a leader, manager, or host who community members can turn to with questions, etc. Slack can feel quite impersonal and there is no “face” of the community. Slack has preset roles so you can’t do funky stuff like sell roles (and thus exclusive access). You also can’t have moderators with channel/category-specific permissions. This is very limiting in a community setting.

Limited Branding

Communities rely on custom branding like banners and covers to foster a strong sense of identity. Slack is a business productivity tool and is less concerned with providing customizable branding beyond color schemes. You can’t embed a public Slack on yourwebsite.com/community (or community.yourwebsite.com) and make it look like the rest of your website.

Finally, Slack is now owned by Salesforce and it doesn’t seem likely that Salesforce is committed to creating a community platform with Slack. Once you’re a public company, change is hard, especially with pricing models.

Even if you’re running a community for working profession-

als, your community members would likely prefer a solution that escapes the environment they spend their working day in or doesn't distract them from their work. People will leave your workspace during a busy workday if a random member decides to say "hi" and obstructs their screen!

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DISCORD?

Even though we had our start with Discord, we don't think it's a great community platform. The audio/video channel was a game-changer back in the day, but these channels have suffered since the 25 member limit.

The word "discord" means a disagreement between people. Not the best start for a platform where you want to host your community and foster healthy connections between members.

A screenshot of a dictionary application interface. At the top, it says "Dictionary" and "English". Below that is a search bar with the placeholder "Search for a word" and a magnifying glass icon. The main entry is "discord". It is defined as a noun, with the phonetic transcription "/diskə:d/". There are two numbered definitions: 1. "disagreement between people." followed by the example "a prosperous family who showed no signs of discord" and a list of similar words: strife, conflict, friction, hostility, disagreement, lack of agreement. 2. "MUSIC" followed by "lack of harmony between notes sounding together." and the example "the music faded in discord". Below this, there is another list of similar words: dissonance, discordance, lack of harmony, disharmony, cacophony. A note indicates that "verb ARCHAIC /dis'kɔ:d/" means "(of people) disagree." with the example "we discorded commonly on two points". At the bottom, it says "Definitions from Oxford Languages" and "Feedback".

Discord started as a platform to host gaming communities and a communications tool for gamers. Recently the positioning has changed to showcase that it can be used to host any kind

of discussion for a group of people with a shared interest. In March 2020, Discord changed its motto from “Chat for Gamers” to “Chat for Communities and Friends”, and introduced server templates. This was part of their response to an increase in users as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This was around the same time Avalon was looking for an online platform for building our community. As the story goes, we grew that community to 50k members to eventually shut it down.

Here are some of the reasons we decided to move off despite having a massive community with possibly the highest retention rates across the world:

Overwhelming User Interface and Experience (UI/UX)

I still remember the first time I tried creating our community on Discord. It reminded me of one of the old-school code editors that developers use for programming.

If you remember the chapter on Web-first vs Mobile-first design, Discord’s interface is an example of what can go wrong when you start web-first. Since it was a platform for gamers, it made sense to start with the web or desktop.

When Discord was started, they assumed that most servers would be a small handful of mutual friends who already knew each other and wanted to play games together. This is not the case for communities and especially communities at scale.

Discord notifications can also become spammy and noisy. The constant pinging may be useful if you’re running a small

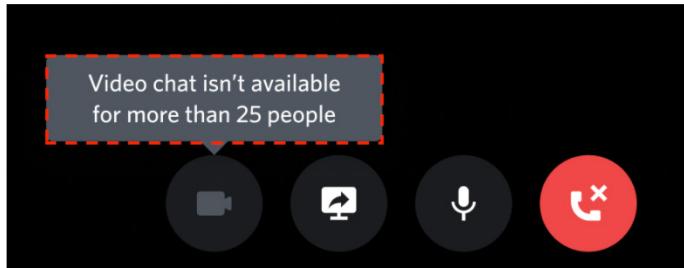
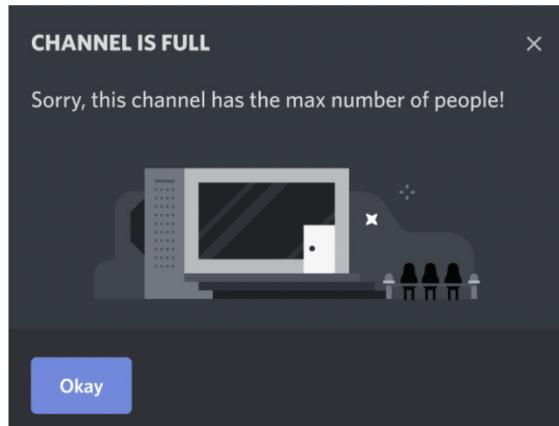
server but becomes annoying when running a community. You instead want an organized notification tray with relevant notifications.

Limited Audio Video Functionality

Currently, only a total of 25 people on the server can join the channel to video chat together! When you activate even a single video within the channel, that channel will automatically put a cap on the number of people who can join until all camera streams stop!

Once the channel is filled with 25 people, everyone else on the server will see an error letting them know that there are too many people in the channel! You will almost always have to chain Discord with Zoom (and spawn event landing pages manually). This is an absolute pain and defeats the purpose of the platform.

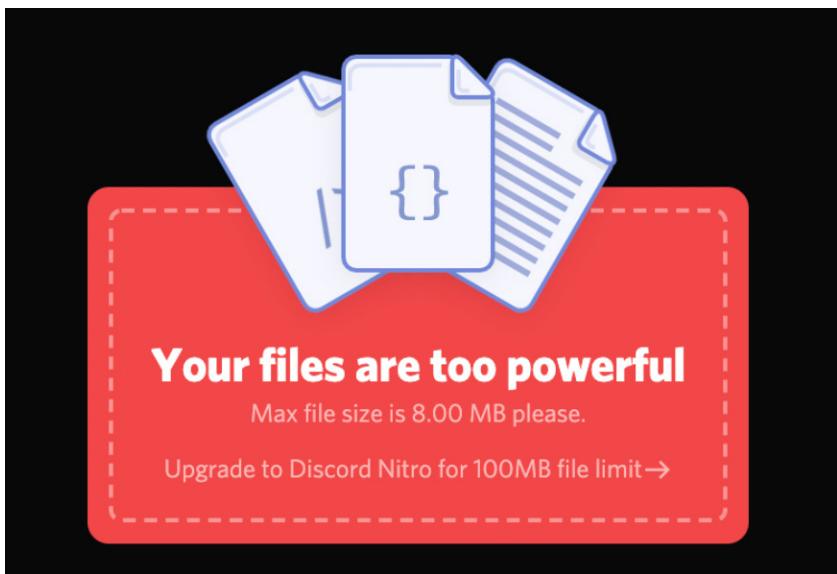
Audio-only channels still have large limits, but you will need a mod online 24/7 to man the channels in case of someone accidentally unmuting their mic (which happens all the time) or intentional trolling.



Limited Text Functionality

Discord doesn't have a forum functionality. If you wanted to have a support forum or a job board within your community, you would need a forum format to keep conversations organized. The big problem with chats to do such a thing is that some random person might type "hi" in between an intense conversation. This sort of thing happens all the time in a community!

There is also no dedicated space for posting rich media like blogs, documentation, and resources. You're still stuck using the chat format (which has the same exact same problem as above unless you disable users from contributing).



Discord also doesn't let you share or save posts for future reference.

Spam and Scams

Discord is notorious for hacks, spam, and raids. It is so common (and part of the platform culture) that terms like "Discord Nuking" have come about.

Discord Nuking means when you destroy and delete everything in a server, all the admins and members hard work.

Every day hundreds and thousands of users fall prey to spam and scams on Discord.

 Input Mag

Twitch cofounder Justin Kan's Discord for NFTs has been hacked

Kan's massive Discord server for his NFT-focused community, Fractal, was hacked yesterday. Specifically, one of Fractal's Discord bots was...

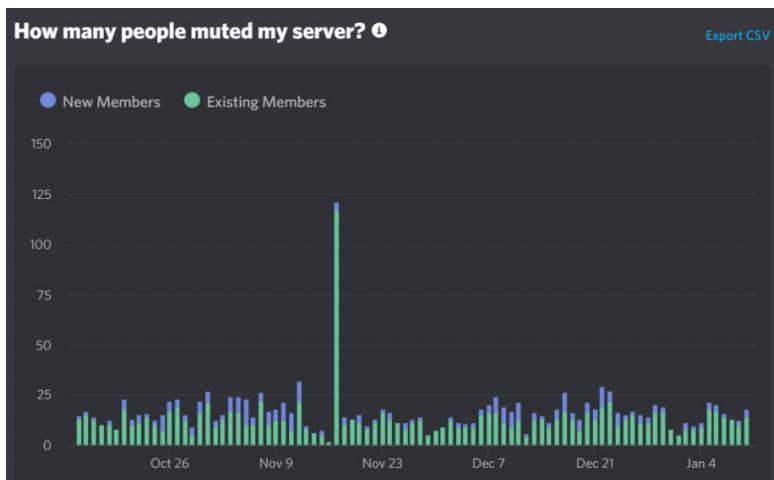
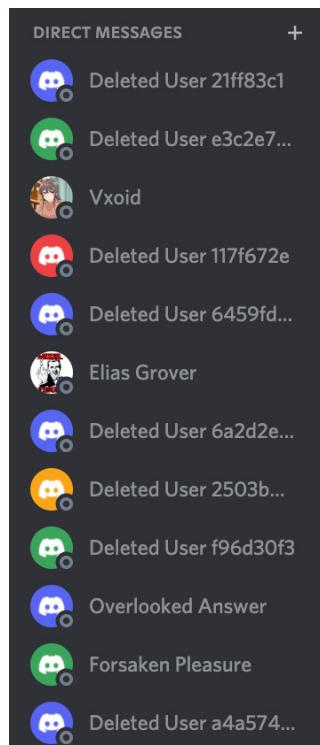
1 week ago



Most Discord users use their fake names, similar to what you'd do in a game. Also, the task of ensuring that people follow its community standards is largely left up to the organizers of individual Discord servers.

Our own Avalon community fell prey to an attack by a teenage hacker who exploited a webhook loophole in the platform to post NSFW content.

I remember the entire team squandering having no idea or control of the situation. A bot assumed the admin role and was spamming links faster than we could delete.

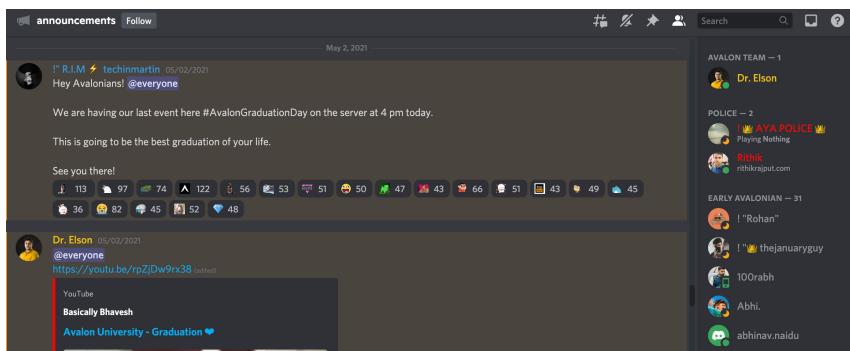


We had a total of 120+ people mute the server that day which still leaves a blotch on our community's statistics. A lot of peo-

ple straight up left too.

Misleads you into thinking you're “happening”

Discord can mislead you into thinking that you have more active and online members than you actually do. If you look at the screenshot below, you'll notice that we had closed the server in May 2021 after our last event. Yet, if you check the right panel of members, it shows so many members as online.



This is because you cannot differentiate between a member being active on your server or casually streaming a game on another server. You don't own Discord, it is yet another social platform.

Also, only data from the last 120 days are available for non-Partner and non-Verified servers. This is something that you should consider especially if you're looking to make data-driven and informed decisions for your community.

The above pointers prompted us to look for a better community solution despite running one of India's largest Ed-Tech communities on Discord. We took our expertise in community building and opened the curtains for Scenes.

WHATSAPP AND TELEGRAM

WhatsApp and Telegram are two of the worst places to run your community if your goal is to scale beyond a few hundred members. WhatsApp is also very intrusive especially if you're running a professional community.

These platforms have such limited functionality that according to me, they do not even qualify as community platforms – they're simply basic communication platforms.

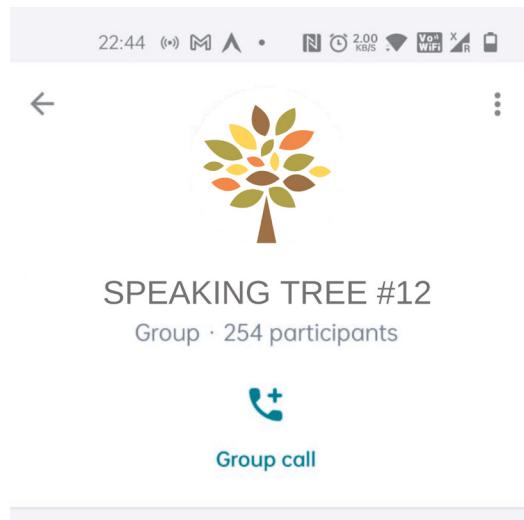
In this chapter, we'll elucidate what features limit your community-building capabilities and also double-click on those features that create a negative experience for your community members.

Limited features

- No events functionality
- Lack of branding and customizability
- No forum functionality - threads, upvotes, down votes
- Extremely noisy and spammy notifications
- Chat-only is often context-less
- No roles and permissions
- No gamification

Limited scalability

WhatsApp limits its group size to 256 members. This means if your community crosses those numbers (which it will), you are forced to create and manage multiple groups and broadcast the same message across groups every time you want to make an announcement or share something. Also, the single interface is not suitable for a community beyond a couple hundred even if they did allow you.



The WhatsApp Social Network for Book Lovers Running Since September 2020 With 25 WhatsApp Group Network 7500+.
*Bringing Everyone Together The Best And Friendly Book Club In Denver and All Over World

While you can scale your community on Telegram in terms of membership, you still have to create multiple groups for every discussion which is not scalable. When we were running the Avalon community on Telegram we had so many groups that it was hard to keep track both as a user and community manager

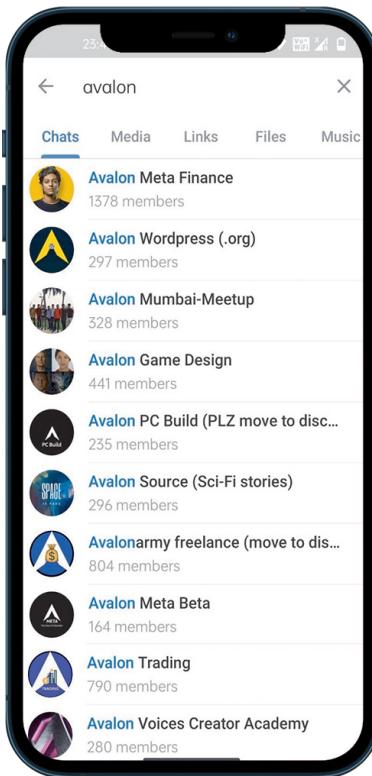
(see image below). If you put too many people on a single chat, it becomes pure noise. Forums thread sense into chats.

Access to phone number

When you join or get added to a large group on WhatsApp, everyone there has access to your phone number. If you're running an open community on WhatsApp and promote the invite link public, you're violating your members' privacy by exposing their phone numbers to spam and scam.

Unless you want your members to get calls from the Nigerian prince, you have to find a safer alternative.

The funny thing is while WhatsApp exposes data that you don't want exposed, it has limited or no functionality for data that you want to put on display – like your bio, social links, and mutual connections.



Stores everything on your phone

WhatsApp consumes your device's storage with text messages, images, audio and video files. Many of your communications members may not have sufficient storage on their mobile

phones and may regularly have to delete their old messages (including those of your community).

WhatsApp Stories

My laundryman once posted a photo of his wife's birthday as his WhatsApp Story. When he came home the next week to collect my dirty linen, I gave him my belated wishes. He asked me how I found out and I mentioned that I saw it on WhatsApp.

Little did he know that his WhatsApp stories were being seen by everyone who had saved his number.



Now I get that this was a specific incident but the point I'm trying to make is that WhatsApp shows you Stories of people that you may not "know" you're opting into.

Not everyone remembers all the people with whom they may have shared phone numbers, especially those one-time acquaintances.

What's left?

Drama and appearing rude is the last thing you want when leaving a community. Unfortunately, WhatsApp notifies everyone in the chat when a member leaves.

It's also the bad kind of social proof where other members who may have not yet found their AHA! moment or value in the community might get influenced or wonder why others are leaving the group.



The point of this chapter is to drive home the point that communities are beyond just grouping people into a single chat. It works fine under 250 people but fails as you scale.

You'll have to move off at some point, so why not begin on a better platform?

Whichever tool you use must give you the ability to scale as you scale your community efforts. The worst thing is to have your community efforts stifled by a personal communications platform.

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SCENES

For a second, I want to run you through what we're building. When we ran our own Discord server, we found a broken workflow — we'd use Discord + Zoom (as mentioned, Discord has a 25-man limit if you turn on video on a channel) + Reddit + Google Calendar + Notion + Gather.town.

We were so tired of this workflow that we decided to build the entire set in one tool. 14 engineers and a year later, we've built a web + mobile app that's been battle-tested with tens of thousands of people on a live stage.

Scenes is designed to be the ultimate community tool.

If you've stuck with us this far, it's a wise idea to hang around a little longer. We've built the ultimate community solution for you.

Interaction via Channels

The screenshot displays the WayneCorp community overview. On the left, there's a sidebar with navigation links like Overview, Calendar, WayneTower, and Batman, Incorporated. The main area features a large banner for 'WayneCorp' with a cityscape background. Below it, a section titled 'Trending Events' shows an 'Annual General Meeting of Wayne Corp.' with a date of 26 Jan 2022, time of 7:30 PM, and a thumbnail of Bruce Wayne speaking at a podium. To the right, there are sections for 'Community Leaderboard' and 'People' (listing Ronald Richards, Darlene Robertson, Christina Mellisa, Chris Rogers, Kathryn Murphy, and Marvin McKinley). A sidebar on the far left also lists 'Daily Standup', 'Community Overview', and 'Add a new channel'.

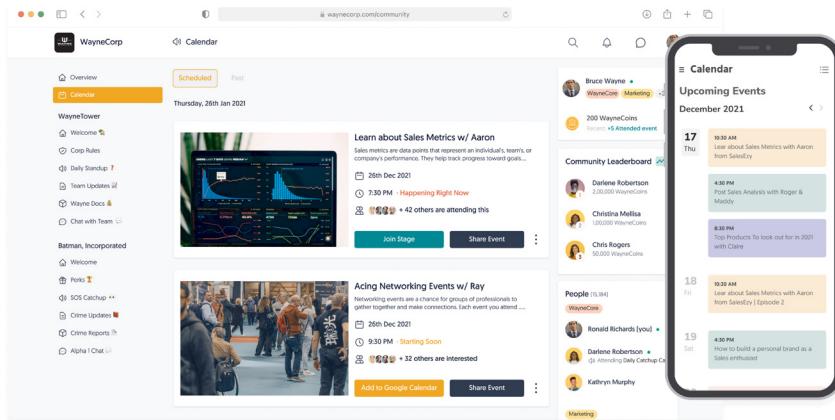
We have the most comprehensive channel library out there. Voice, video, text, forums, resources, shop, metaverse; you name it, we've got it!

Live events (with up to 10,000 people on video/audio stage)

The screenshot shows a live video event titled 'Daily Standup'. Two hosts are visible: Alyssa Martinez and Emma Guo. The interface includes a sidebar with navigation links for Overview, Calendar, WayneTower, and Batman, Incorporated. A central video feed shows the hosts, and a sidebar on the right displays a list of participants with their messages. Buttons for 'Start Video', 'Mute', 'Stage Options', 'Share', and 'Disconnect' are at the bottom. A mobile phone icon on the right shows a smaller view of the same video call.

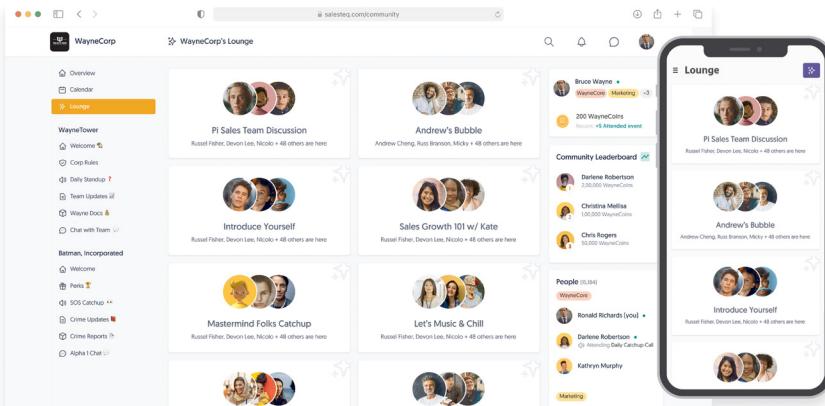
Host events, webinars, or even internal office meetings of any size with flawless video and audio, instant screen sharing, and live chat messaging.

Calendar Channel



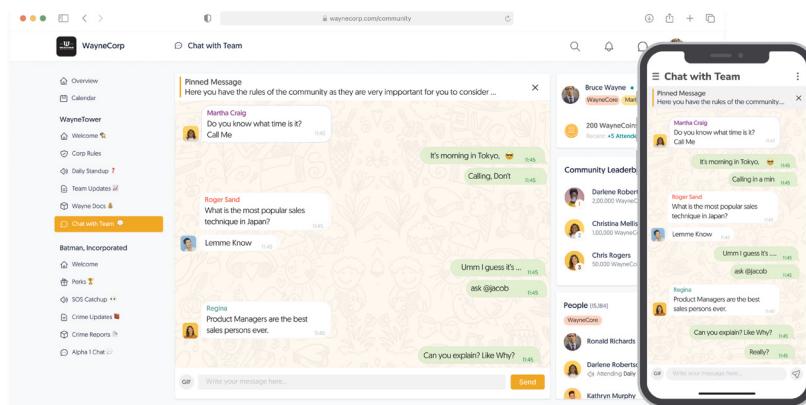
Quickly create and schedule meetings immediately or for any time in the future. Instead of worrying about people getting notified or showing up, you can focus on programming your event to success.

Voice Bubbles



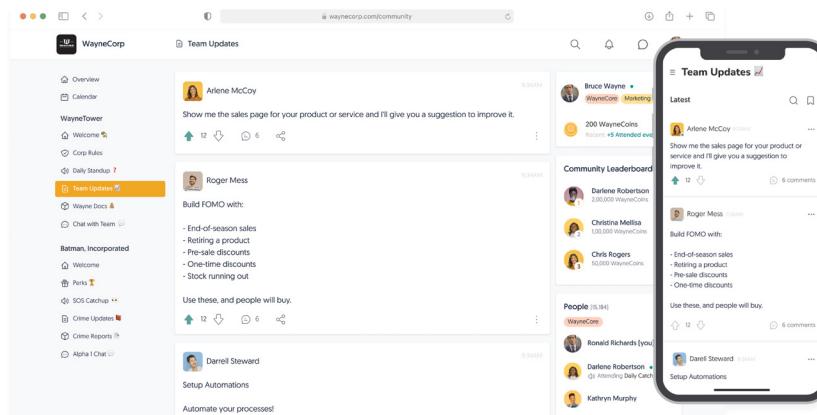
Create a breakout room from an existing event or spawn a quick call using temporary voice bubbles. These are excellent for quick, compact one-on-one calls, networking mixers, or team huddles.

Chat



Engage with your community members in real-time through fast and simple text messages, GIFs, and more!

Forums



Keep your communication organized with threaded conversations that community members can upvote or downvote. These are perfect for announcements, customer support, and general discussions.

Resources channel

The screenshot shows the WayneCorp community interface. The left sidebar includes sections for Overview, Calendar, WayneTower (Welcome, Core Rules, Daily Standup, Team Updates), Wayne Docs (selected), Chat with Team, Batman, Incorporated (Welcome, Perks, SOI Catchup, Crime Updates, Crime Reports, Alpha Chat), and a search bar. The main content area shows the 'Wayne Docs' channel with posts like 'How to Cold Email [Successfully]', 'The Psychology of Selling', and 'Sales for Dummies - Playlist'. A mobile phone on the right shows the same content in a mobile-friendly layout.

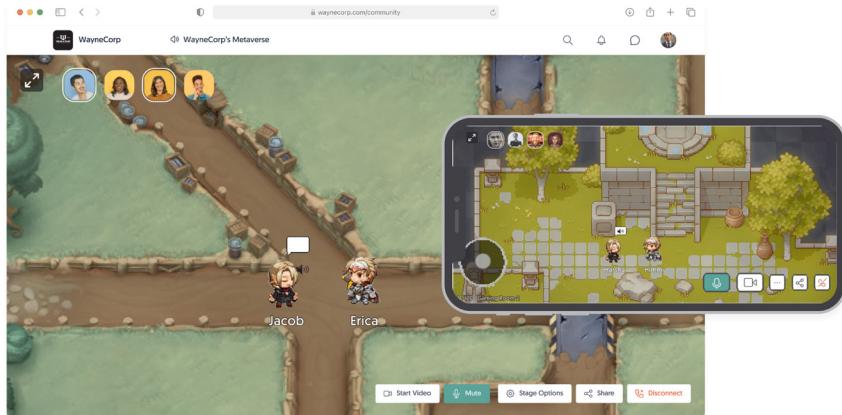
Use our rich text editor for your blogs, newsletters, documentation etc. You can embed or upload images, videos, and documents using the versatile media channel.

Shop

The screenshot shows the WayneCorp community interface with the 'Shop' section selected in the sidebar. The main content area displays three product offerings: 'Mastermind' (\$49/month), 'Pro' (\$79/month), and 'Batman' (\$99/month). Each product has a brief description and a 'Purchase Role' button. A mobile phone on the right shows the shop content in a mobile-friendly layout.

Monetize your community by selling roles, event tickets or community merchandize using our in-built shop channel.

Metaverse channel



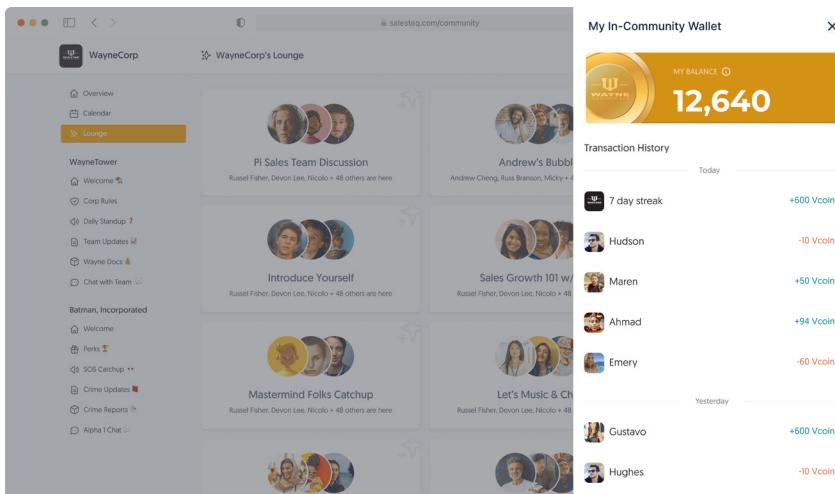
Explore a new world in itself through immersive 2D experiences. Community members can walk in and out of rooms and enjoy the experiences and connections you've curated for them.

A screenshot of a "People" list interface. It shows a count of 15,164 people. Below this, there are two sections: "Manager" and "Pro". The "Manager" section lists Ronald Richards (you), Darlene Robertson (Attending Sales Growth 101), and Kathryn Murphy. The "Pro" section lists Marvin McKinney, Esther Howard, and Courtney Henry. Each entry includes a small profile picture and a green dot indicating they are online.

Roles and Hierarchy

Provide role-based access control to your community administrators, moderators and members. Generate custom roles with tiered permissions and your roles can double-down as badges to reward top contributors.

Custom Coin system



Incentivize community members for engaging and contributing to your community. Coins also serve as a standard medium of value exchange across the community. The coins may not be real, but they have value. Link them to your shop or roles and you have everything to power the economy of your digital empire.

Web + Mobile

Engage with your community members where they are. Scenes works seamlessly across all devices. All features are battle-test-

ed and engineered for scale across any device!

Custom mobile app

Host your community on your own app customized and personalized to your unique needs. Build your home on the internet on your own property.

APIs

Use our robust APIs to plug and play our features into your own solution. We've built Scenes using a modular approach so you can build your community infrastructure the same way you played LEGO as a kid.

Every system and learning in the book can be implemented on **any** community platform. You need not use Scenes if you are happy with some other solution. In most cases, you'll have to use multiple platforms that will confuse you and your members — Scenes solved that for us, so do give it a spin if you're on the hunt for a community platform.

EXPANSION INTO AN EMPIRE

The Flutter community is an excellent example of a large online community that has moved beyond the idea of using a single platform. It exists anywhere and everywhere.

This might sound like we're shooting ourselves on the foot but as you scale your empire, you want to be omnipresent and omnichannel. Your community will have enough "forks" and leaders to go beyond your first community platform.

The screenshot shows the Flutter website's homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Multi-Platform, Development, Ecosystem, Showcase, Docs, and a search icon. A prominent blue button on the right says "Get started". Below the navigation, the text "A community open to everyone" is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font. A large yellow call-to-action button contains the text "Join developers around the world making Flutter even better". To the left of this button, there are three stats: "127k Stars on GitHub", "151.4k Followers on Twitter", and "106k Members on Meetup". Below these stats, a quote reads: "Flutter is the most popular cross-platform framework in the world*". A small note at the bottom of the button states: "*According to the JetBrains 2021 State of Developer Ecosystem survey".

Not only is Flutter the most popular cross-platform framework in the world, it's also one of the most popular cross-platform communities in the world.

Find Community Online

Get involved and ask questions

 Flutter Discord → Talk to other Flutter developers about Flutter and share useful resources.	 Community Slack → Chat with GDEs and other Flutter community members	 Flutteristas → Learn more about this group of Flutter developers who identify as women or non-binary
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 Google Group → Get the latest Flutter announcements, ask questions, and troubleshoot	 Stack Overflow → Find answers to pressing questions on Stack Overflow	 Reddit → Join the subreddit for discussions around every aspect of Flutter
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 Hashnode → Read and write Flutter-related posts and participate in Flutter discussions	 Breaking changes → Get news of breaking changes directly in your inbox <small>Subscribe to the newsletter →</small>	 UXR Research → Sign up to participate in UX research to continually improve Flutter <small>Sign up →</small>
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In the next few years, we'll see more and more brands embrace community and expand their digital presence beyond a website and traditional social media marketing. We'll see more large communities outgrow existing social platforms and set up their independent properties. That was the reasoning behind us starting Scenes where we power your community quite literally "behind the Scenes". With Scenes, you actually own

your community, so there's no worry of the rug being pulled from underneath you.

Beyond the first thousand members, it is often your community that will fork and decide. Remember we told you about a few of our old members that refused to move from Telegram to Discord? Well, those outliers are still running an Avalon group on Telegram as of today!

Communities are beyond you as a brand. Even if they're not that way today, they w+ill at some point. Embrace it, as Flutter has.

* * *

Well, that ends our journey. Writing this book has been a long and exhausting process, but a fun one. We hope that we get to partner with you (or at least write a sequel that you get to read) as we learn more!

On a parting note, I wish you all the best with your community-building journey. If you want to learn more and stay connected, follow us on social media and stay connected.

I sincerely hope you learned something from this and if you're looking for a place to practice what you've learned, try buildonscenes.com and build your own digital empire the way you want to.

