

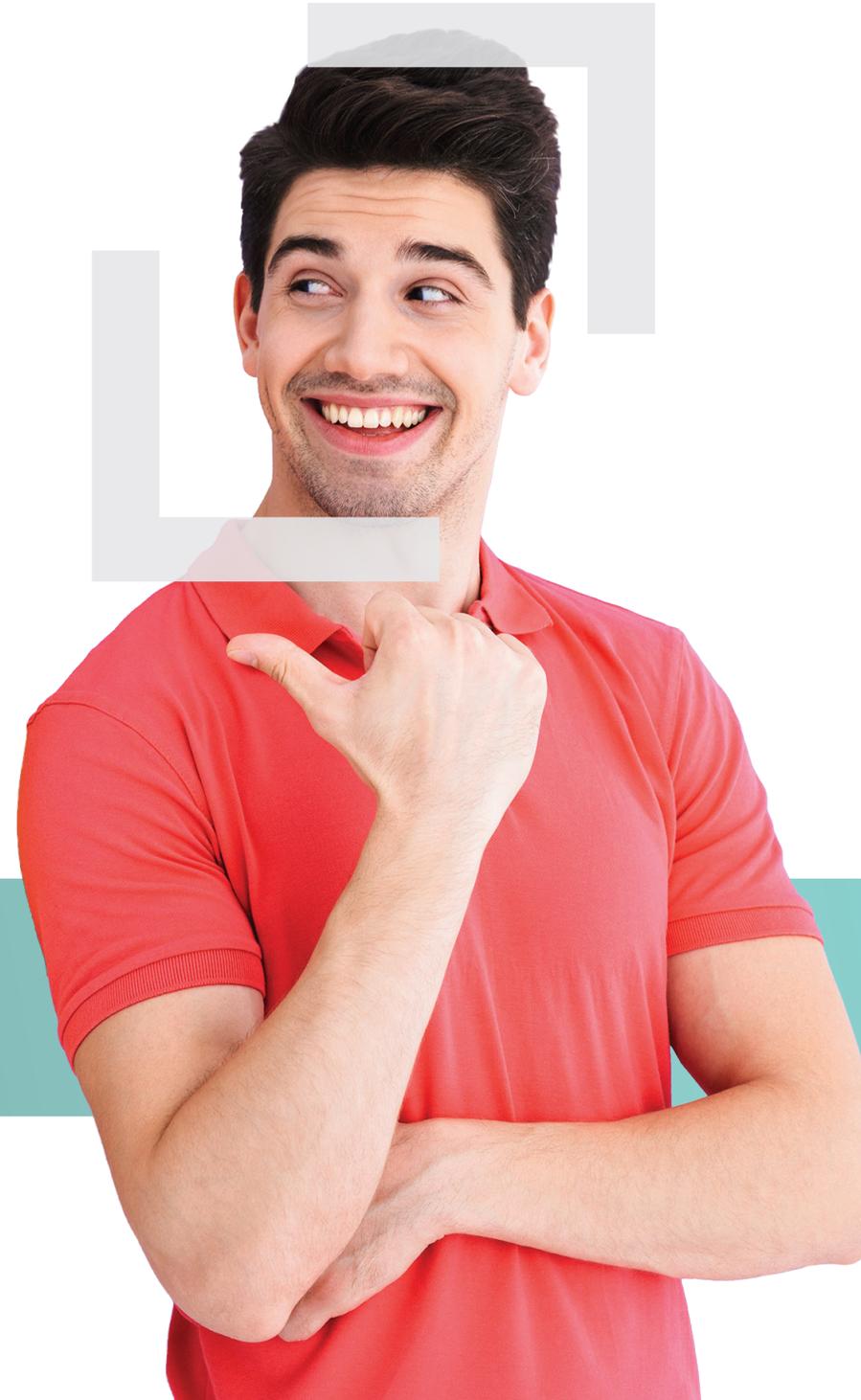


eBook

# How to Get More Engagement in Your Online Community

Tips to help you engage your users and keep them coming back

The Comprehensive Guide to  
Online Community Engagement



# If you want a highly engaged online community, build the right foundation.

We all want more engagement in our online communities. We all want our communities to be essential parts of our users' lives. There's nothing more disappointing than launching a new community and seeing it sit there, inactive. And it makes sense, because without people coming, engaging, and returning, how can we reap the benefits that we know our communities can offer our organizations, like loyalty, satisfaction, and advocacy? An engaged community can transform how an organization connects and communicates with customers, members, and employees across every stage of their journey.

But, how to engage community members? Whether it's a lack of insight about the proper approach to community engagement, or whether your community was built on a platform that doesn't have what you need to foster engagement, we'll walk through engagement from the ground up: How to build the right community foundation and move into the tactical, practical things you can do to encourage users to come, engage, and return.

To help you achieve the benefits we know an engaged community of members, customers, or employees can provide, we're sharing the experience we've gained from our 11 years in this industry.

**In the next section, we'll examine the foundation: best practices for Strategy, People, and Technology.**

## WHAT'S INSIDE

### THE FOUNDATION

- Online Community Engagement: Start with Strategy, People, and Technology

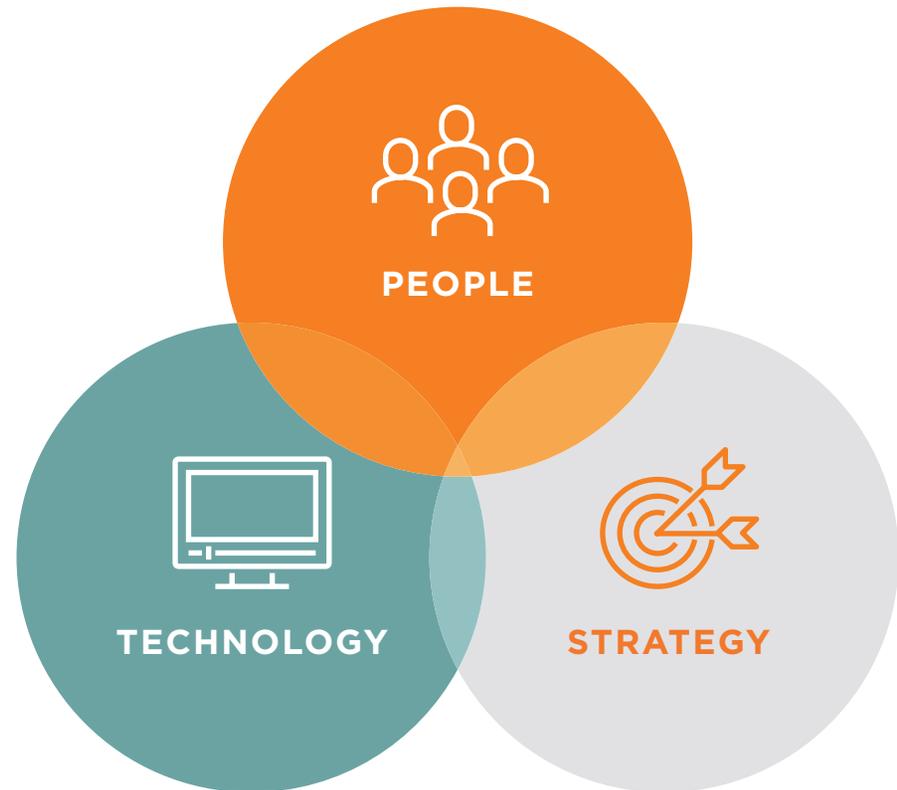
### THE TACTICS

- How to Manage an Online Community: Creating and Encouraging the Right Content
- Use Automation to Encourage Engagement and Make Your Life Easier
- Use Gamification to Encourage Wanted Behaviors
- Enlist Community Support
- Knowing How to Measure Engagement

## THE FOUNDATION

# Online Community Engagement: Start with Strategy, People, and Technology

Whether you're planning to create a brand new community or you'd like to get your current community more engaged, you should start with evaluation of your foundation: **Do you have the strategy, people, and technology to make sure your community is engaged?**



## The Strategy: Developing the Right Mindset Around Community Engagement

Great communities create generative value because of sustained engagement – users coming, going and returning. But when you're starting out, or you're working your way up from good to great, it's tough to know if you have a community engagement strategy that will create this habit in your users. Will it stand up to uncertainty in markets, new business goals, or the changing priorities of your members, customers, and employees?

**The Community Roundtable's research** has shown shared characteristics of advanced communities, which require community leaders to take certain actions behind the scenes:

- Share the community strategy early and often, so it's fully discussed, vetted, and approved
- Identify clear, actionable metrics
- Secure resources across multiple dimensions: technical, strategy, and user needs
- Charge the identified resources with accountability and authority needed to realize strategic goals
- Get commitment to a dedicated community budget

Once you've set the stage, **it's vital to put the community users front-and-center of your strategy.**

Online community platforms can increasingly help provide a curated experience. We'll get into the necessary technological pieces for that later, but we first have to understand some of the drivers at play with our members, customers, or employees.

That knowledge will inform our strategy on how to increase community engagement. In the next few pages, we'll dig into how we can deliver a community engagement strategy that fits them, fits us, and builds shared success.

- What motivates them to join the community?
- Why return or why stay longer?

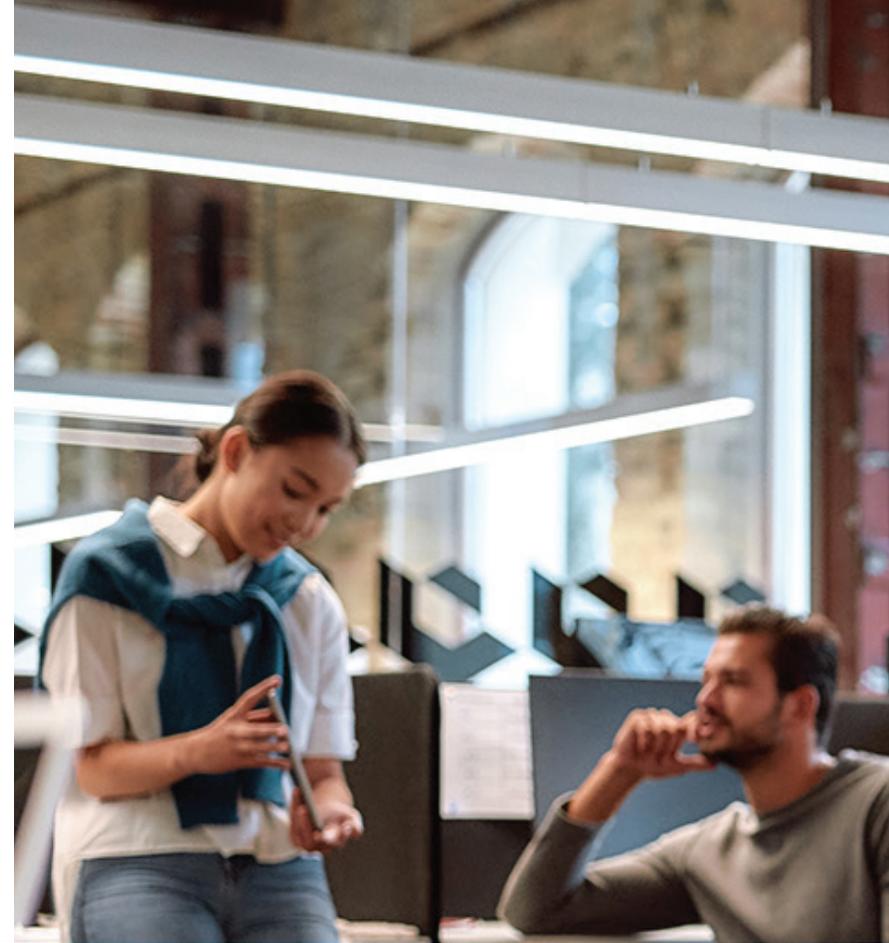
## What motivates my users to join the community?

This question should be top of mind when you connect with new users. We know in general that communities create access – a gateway to a destination that’s shaped to their needs. We know that newcomers commonly cite a need to network with their peers, connect with experts or to receive specialized content.

As you form your approach, keep these three pillars in mind: Find, connect, collaborate. Once your user finds the community, is it easy for them to get involved and collaborate? Once they’re there, they should have many touchpoints for getting involved and contributing. So it’s all about building a destination that’s designed for them to engage.

### Think through these questions as you build your community engagement approach:

- How will you make it human-focused so it’s about the users’ needs on any given day?
- What is in place to make them feel like they have a voice?
- Have you created centralized, topic-based areas for users to get what they need?
- How will you convey value via calls-to-action (CTA) in an easy to understand way?



### **DON'T DO IT ALONE**

Higher Logic has over 10 years of expertise in online communities and engagement, and powers 2.4 billion community interactions annually. We're here to help you from launch to maintenance with extra guidance, manpower, or Strategic Services.

## Why should I return or stay longer?

A lot of energy goes into acquiring each new user. And you need them, but our experience has shown the benefits of taking a balanced strategy that includes a focus on sustained community engagement tactics.

A user may come to a community for any number of reasons, and they may return or stay for different reasons. This, we recognize is a puzzle, but you want to create a wide enough set of opportunities for them to continuously engage. Their return and longevity signals value for your users which translates to growth for your organization.

Think about self-sustaining approaches that increase the 'stickiness' of your community, like these:

- **Identify and encourage Champions.** They build their reputation by sharing their expertise, which will benefit other members and the community as a whole. (See more in Enlisting Community Support)
- **Create listening posts.** Build in opportunities for feedback that don't just come via email or surveys. Crowdsourced insights are often more valuable.
- **Consider their journey and how they would interact with your community.** You don't want them to have to jump through hoops to get to a single topic or action. That can make for quick attrition.
- **Organizing your community around topics,** built for users' roles, interests, and even the actions they wish to take create more relevant engagement opportunities and personalize the experience to a much greater effect. If done well, this can lead to higher satisfaction, and ultimately, more renewals and retention.
- **Connect other programs to your online community,** like events, webinars, or product research. Users don't view their vendors as segmented departments, so the community should reflect that central point of truth and engagement, even as each department benefits from the full breadth of engagement.
- **Whenever possible, personalize with the intention of reducing "noise."** Users obviously like to have elements of the community speak to them in a way that's relevant, but they also don't want to be overwhelmed. Avoid community churn by curating content for different types of users.

## The People: Ensuring You Have Great Community Management

Every organization needs at least some dedicated management for their community. This is one common reason a community will flounder – lack of active management. Communities need somebody to take care of them.

That being said, most small organizations don't need a full-time community manager. But a large organization with a lot of customers, members, or users most likely will. Community management can also be a part-time position that could be taken on by someone at your organization.

The bottom line is this: It's less about the number of hours, as it is about the experience level of the person who's managing the community. For example, a person with more experience will need fewer hours to be highly effective, while someone with less experience will have to spend more time learning and executing effectively. Ultimately, what you need is someone with a specific skillset, and to do it well, additional capabilities.



### **NEED STRATEGIC COACHING OR HELP WITH DAILY MANAGEMENT?**

Higher Logic has an industry leading team of community managers and strategists. Take a look at what we can do for you.

**Learn more about Higher Logic's Strategic Services →**



We've seen that in our own customer base, as those who use our paid community management service see much higher engagement.

**Customers who rely on Higher Logic's Strategic Services during their first 12 months have:**

- 68% more active users than those that don't utilize our team
- 64% more content consumed than those that don't utilize our team
- 102% more content created than those that don't utilize our team

This is a good indicator that dedicated community management is an essential.

**If you opt to hire a community manager, these tips will help:**

- Finding the right community manager
- Qualifications for a good community manager

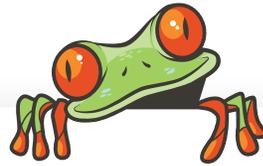
# Finding the Right Community Manager

Community management is a profession that's evolved rapidly into one that requires a sophisticated combination of analytical skills, project management, strategy, and business acumen. And that's on top of needing to be engaging, write well, understand the technology, and stay calm in a crisis.

What it comes down to, no matter the situation, is accountability. You'll need someone to keep your community going, tend to it, create engagement (more about that in "creating a content calendar.") What you put into your online community engagement tactics is what you will get out.

## FOR MORE INSIGHT,

check out The Community Roundtable's research on their eBook, **Community Management: Understanding Roles and Responsibilities in 2020** →



## QUALIFICATIONS FOR A GOOD COMMUNITY MANAGER

### 1. CALM, COOL, AND COLLECTED

Communities will have their share of needs, often enjoyable, but often stressful. Your manager should not only set and moderate the policies of your community, but they should also gracefully navigate group dynamics.

### 2. CHANGE AGENT

Find someone who can navigate internal constraints, goals, and organizational structures so they can tap into vast areas of organic growth and user-led advocacy.

### 3. CONNECTOR NOT JUST NETWORKER

Your manager should easily engage with your users, not just at a chatty level, but with the mission of the community and goals of your organization in mind.

### 4. PROFESSIONAL ENGAGER

Look for someone who knows how to be open online but understands the legal and ethical constraints of the profession (and how your community users might feel too).

### 5. ANALYTICAL STORYTELLER

You need someone who can crunch the numbers, but what's harder to find, is someone who knows how to tell a story with the data. A thinker, not just a doer.



## The Technology: Finding a Community Platform That's Built for Engagement

The modernization of community engagement software space is skyrocketing. Community management as a profession is powered by technology, so we have to look at the implementation of your tech as a change project initiative. Think about your tech stack as the foundation upon which you'll build the destination that supports all your users' "must-haves."

It's worth repeating: **The technology needs to serve your member, customer or employee selection criteria – first. Yes, your needs count too, but making them happy will go a long way toward your success.**

You've probably googled best practices, read case studies, and heard many sales presentations. We have too, and we've also been hands-on working with a lot of different kinds and sizes of organizations to onboard engagement software. To us, it comes down to three things: Alignment, Capability, and Support.

- Alignment: Why can't I just use ...?
- Capability: What functionality do I really need?
- Support: What else do I need?

### HOW TO PLAN YOUR ONLINE COMMUNITY

You want to start a branded online community for your customers, members, or employees? Here's where to begin.

Identify shared goals using the Jobs-to-be-Done Framework, explained in this eBook: **How to Build a Thriving Online Community: 4 Planning Steps to Ensure Your Success.**

**DOWNLOAD IT NOW FOR MORE ON BUILDING YOUR PLAN AND STRATEGY FOR YOUR COMMUNITY →**

## Alignment: Why can't I just use ... ?

There are lots of ways to interact with your members, customers, and employees: industry events, advisory councils, webinars, social media platforms, visiting them at holidays. Ok, probably not the last one. But, not social media either.

For real, community engagement to happen, users need to feel a high degree of comfort about their privacy, asking questions, and belonging to the space. Sharing and showcasing their expertise often gets diffused on social media platforms or open source solutions.

### **TO ACCOMPLISH YOUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS, GO BIG**

Think bigger than a support portal or forum or a listserv. Find a solution that can work with your vision of creating an engagement destination that people want to come to and return. We recommend using a proprietary community platform, for several reasons:

#### **MORE CONTROL**

If you create your community on social media or open source solution, you're subject to any and all of their changes, with no say, effectively building your house on rented land.

#### **MORE SECURITY**

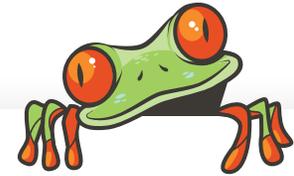
Community vendors place privacy as top priority – it's their job. With a Facebook or LinkedIn Group, you have a limited ability to protect your members' privacy and your own information.

#### **MORE DATA**

On a social media platform, they gain invaluable data that your community will inevitably generate about your members and customers – you do not. If you create your own online community, you'll have access to all that data, helping you understand your users and creating a curated experience for your users.

#### **MORE COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT TOOLS**

With a community platform like Higher Logic's, engagement tools are built in, specifically designed to help you create an engaging experience.



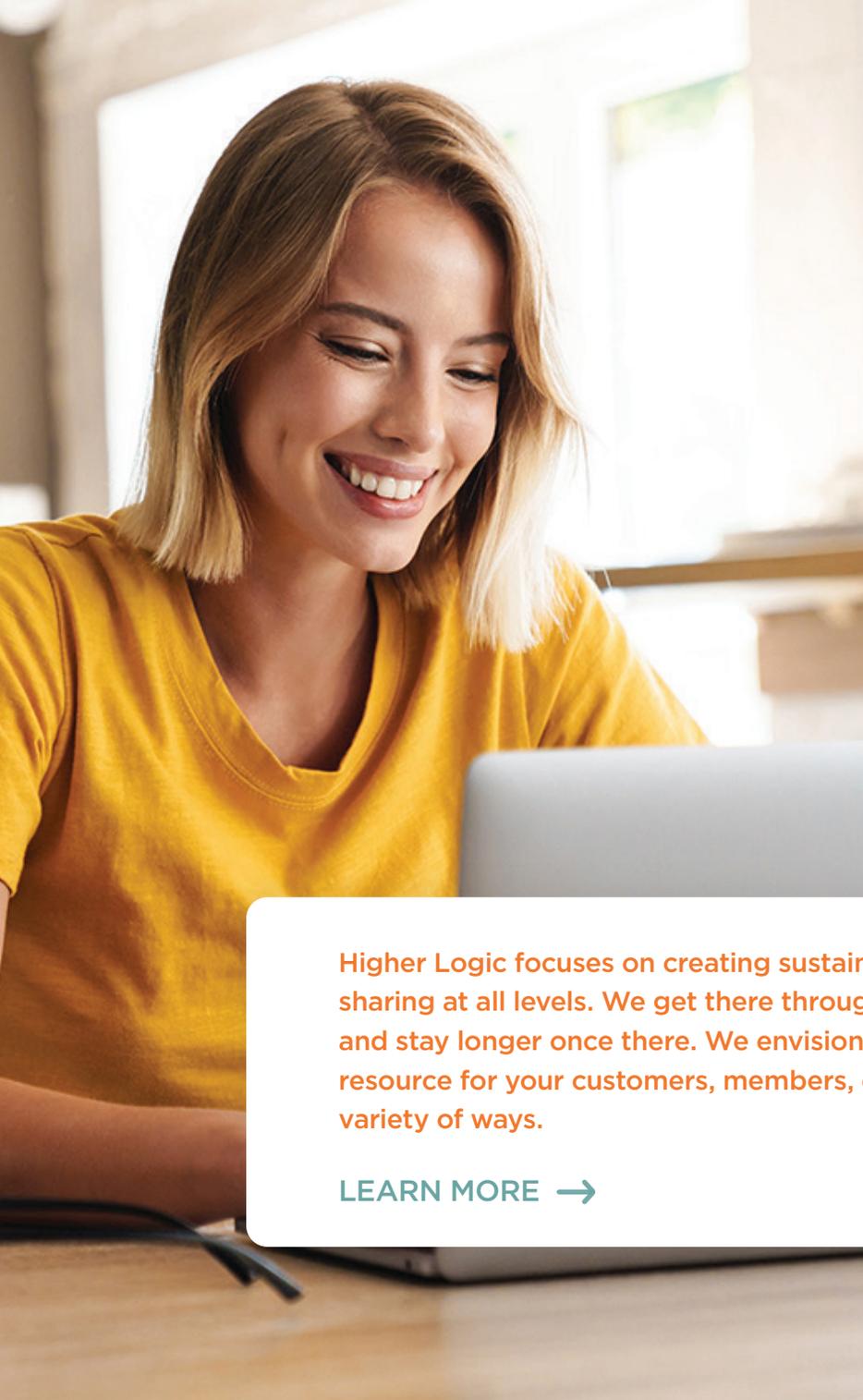
## Capability: What functionality do I really need?

If you want an engaged community, you need to build your community in the right place. When you can motivate members, customers, and employees to consistently engage in the community, you impact key experience metrics. The technological infrastructure of your community can help your organization achieve higher productivity, deliver more innovative products and services, and improve loyalty in your userbase.

**DOWNLOAD OUR TIP SHEET:**  
**The 10 Most Important Questions to Ask Any Customer Community Vendor →**

### CHOOSE THE BEST ONLINE COMMUNITY SOFTWARE

- Can the platform support your goals?
- Can the platform support multiple use cases?
- Does it have the functionality needed to accomplish the use case you need?
- Is it easy to customize the platform and brand it?
- Does engagement come naturally? What built in tools exist to make it engaging?
- Does the platform integrate with your user database? This could be a Customer Relationship Management system like Salesforce or Oracle, or it could be an Association Management System like iMIS or YourMembership.
- Can the platform provide a personalized experience for users?
- Is vendor innovative and forward thinking?
- Do they offer any services to help you launch your community or staff it with a community manager until you can hire one?



## Support: What else do I need?

As you read on in this eBook, you're going to be inundated (in a good way) with advice on how to keep cranking up your engagement levels. You'll see tips, case studies, checklists, and more – but there's no magic wand. Yet.

When you get into segmenting users, building subgroups, creating advocate campaigns, building programs, and all the other best practices that permeate successful communities, you'll have a better idea of what platform you'll need.

Higher Logic focuses on creating sustained, long term engagement centered around expertise sharing at all levels. We get there through built-in tools that encourage customers to come, return, and stay longer once there. We envision our community product becoming a comprehensive resource for your customers, members, or employees, a destination focused on engagement in a variety of ways.

[LEARN MORE →](#)



## THE TACTICS

# How to Manage an Online Community: Creating and Encouraging the Right Content

Your goal should be to **create content relevant to the audience and where they are in their journey so that you reinforce bonds and create shared value.**

People typically join communities, because they want to grow their knowledge, connect with others, and build their own brand. Unfortunately, these same people may get distracted, forgetting why they joined, especially if they don't find something to engage them on the first visit. There are a lot of moving parts to capture their attention, but it boils down to: Is your content of value to them?



**JAMA SOFTWARE** created a public online community where customers and prospects could easily find content around its extremely technical products, as well as network and learn from each other. Jama can now drive top-of-funnel leads to a single place, as well as provide technical content and a peer network for its customers.

Its community makes daily communication easier for both customers and staff, and it's been called, **“the best resource for all things Jama.”**



If you want your users to give you their time and attention, then we need to make it worthwhile for them. How do you create content that matches your organizational goals with their drivers?

In this chapter, you will get to see the inner workings of how we successfully help our customers create engaging communities through the content. It's a roll-up-your-sleeves chapter filled with timelines, examples, and checklists.

#### COMING UP:

1. Planning your content
2. Keeping organized with a calendar
3. Engaging with different types of members
4. Crafting discussion posts

★ **BONUS:** 5 ideas for engaging community content

# Content Calendar: The Best Community Engagement Tactic

Do a search on Amazon for planning calendars and there are thousands of results – some with llamas on them. You can put a llama on your *How to Increase Community Engagement* calendar if you like, but what we want to talk about here is how and why to incorporate a planning calendar. It's a must-have tool to engage your members, customers, and employees.

The main goal of your calendar is for you to understand how your content is distributed throughout the year. The calendar helps show you when to deploy it. It'll help you remember to support your annual user event. You can add seasonality as appropriate to your industry and audience.



## WHY CONSIDER A CONTENT CALENDAR?

- Stay more organized
- Share your plans with team members, colleagues, and management
- Adds discipline to your engagement strategy
- Creates regularity that becomes habit-forming for your users
- Helps see where your content fits with other activities
- Visualizes all the content types to ensure you maximize all the possibilities
- Supports culture-building in your community
- Establishes guidelines and standards for all the content you deliver



## HOW MUCH TIME DOES A CONTENT CALENDAR TAKE?

We all know that planning saves us in the long run. Building your master calendar is worth the investment to set up, as it'll streamline your activities. You can plan out your work in advance, so that on any given Tuesday, you know what you've got on your plate.

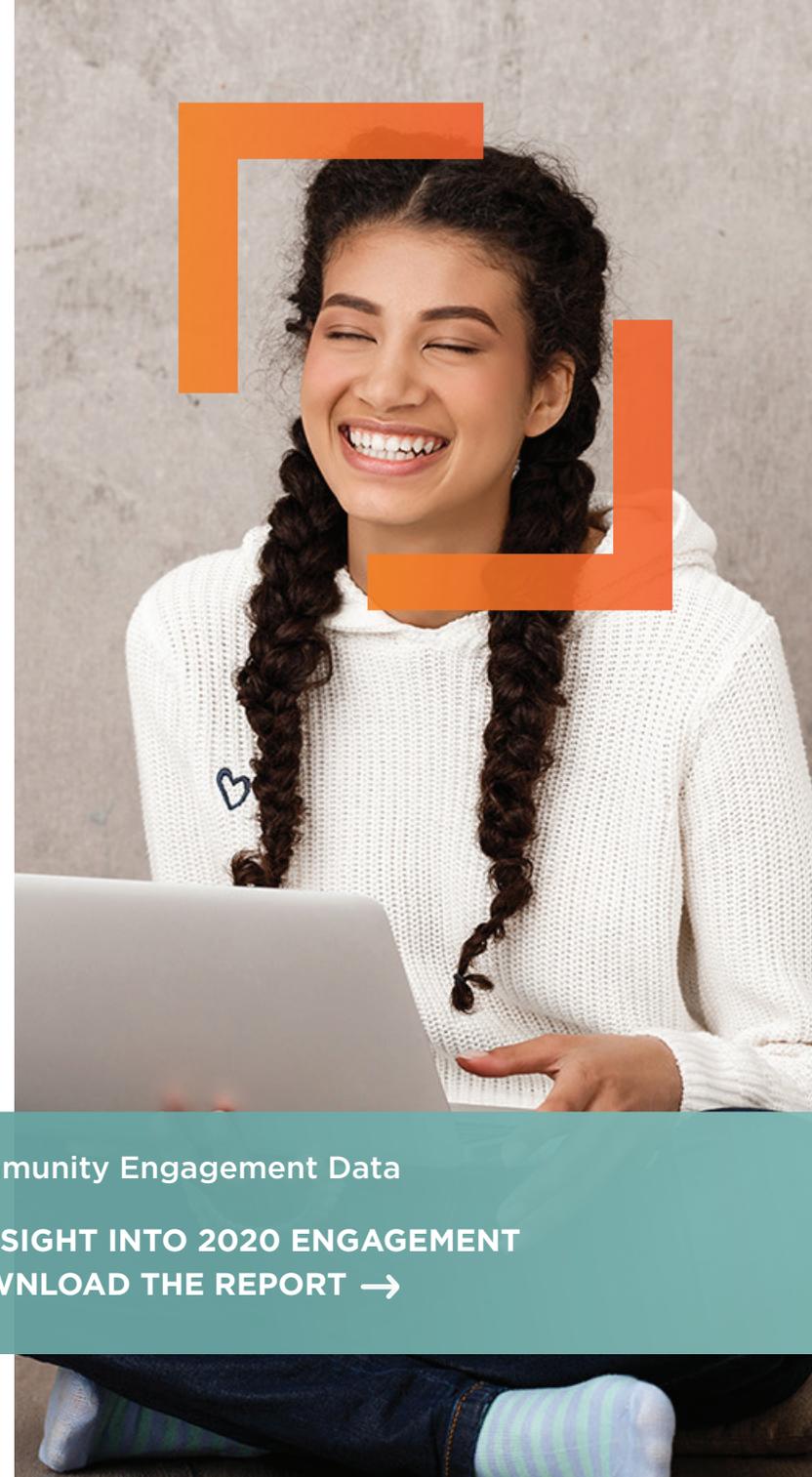
After that, the amount of content you post depends on your community. You may need to have a staff person posting every day in some situations. In other cases, it's ok to slow down your activity level in favor of encouraging your power users to take a leadership role (More on this in Enlisting Community Support). In our software, you can assign admin privileges so that they don't have access to everything but still can help you.

## Engaging different types of members

As you develop your Community Engagement Strategy, you'll want to plan different types of content for different types of community members. Our experience has shown that different types of content generates different types of engagement. It may make sense for your strategy to shift how and when you're using different kinds of content, depending on your goals.

Traditionally, community leaders want to see more contributions than simply consuming, which totally makes sense, since you want to have people engage that's why the community exists. Although we agree, don't worry too much about consumers, or "lurkers" - you need the appreciators just as much as you need the louder people - they play a vital part in viewing, consuming, and benefiting from created content that your creators and contributors are making.

**We like to classify community members into four different types in this sample community audience matrix on the next page.**



Dive into Community Engagement Data

**FOR MORE INSIGHT INTO 2020 ENGAGEMENT  
TRENDS, DOWNLOAD THE REPORT →**

TYPE	DEFINITION	SCENARIO	EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES
CREATORS	Users who create posts, blogs, and other new content	<i>Everyone knows Sally. She likes to write a blog post when she runs into a particularly interesting work situation and see what advice and reactions her peers have.</i>	Consider inviting your top creators to be in your community super user or champion program. These members are obviously committed to the community and you can enlist their help in moderating, writing a weekly post, or even activities outside of the community, like presenting at your annual event.
CONTRIBUTORS	Users who reply to comment on the created content	<i>Stanley checks in when he sees interesting content in his weekly email digest. Very often, when he reads an article or a discussion, he will provide his advice.</i>	Send an automated email to your contributors encouraging them to submit a question for an Ask Me Anything session.
CONSUMERS	Users who exclusively view or log in to consume the created content and its contributions (also known as “lurkers”)	<i>Lakshmi regularly reads the content – we can see it in her profile, but she is highly unlikely to do anything more than view and read.</i>	Try grouping users who tend to consume and create an automated email that invites them to make their first post.
INACTIVE	Users who have not made any actions in the community in the last year	<i>Pieter joined the community a few years ago, but he hasn't taken any action in the last year.</i>	If you haven't seen a community member on the site in a while, contact them using automation rules or re-engagement campaigns. We've seen success rates upwards of 30% – and these users stay re-engaged more often than not.

How much engagement should you expect from each group? Learn more in [Measuring Community Engagement](#) →



## Writing effective discussion posts

Many of your users will be comfortable with accessing content, commenting, or posting something due to the proliferation of technology across all of our lives. But that doesn't guarantee everyone will be a natural at creating a discussion post that's designed to engage.

Here's why you should put in the effort to create engaging discussion posts and provide training to users on this topic:

- If community members find the content of the discussion to be valuable, their satisfaction with the community will increase.
- If community members post a discussion to the group, their satisfaction will increase if they receive a timely, high-quality response.
- If the content is high-quality, clearly presented, and well-organized, community members will spend less time/energy/effort to find the information they need.

Sometimes, especially early on in the life of an online community, the community manager is the one who has to start discussions. Here are some strategies you can use and share with users to teach them how to create engaging discussions.

### HOW TO ENGAGE AN ONLINE COMMUNITY WITH YOUR POSTS

#### MAKE IT PERSONAL

This post genuinely relates to my situation

#### EXPLAIN CONTEXT AND MOTIVATIONS

I've got a new boss and want to help her

#### PROMOTE PEER INTERACTION

Let's create a sub-group and build this!

#### MAKE IT "SKIMMABLE"

50 - 250 words is a good rule of thumb

#### RESPOND WITHIN 2 BUSINESS DAYS

The event is Tuesday, don't wait

#### INVITE PEER COLLABORATION WITH @MENTIONS

@JohnG didn't you have this problem?

#### START WITH THE NEEDED ACTION

I need a quicker way to translate web content

#### PUT A QUESTION IN THE SUBJECT LINE

Know any shortcuts?

# 5 Ideas for Engaging Community Content You Can Add to Your Calendar

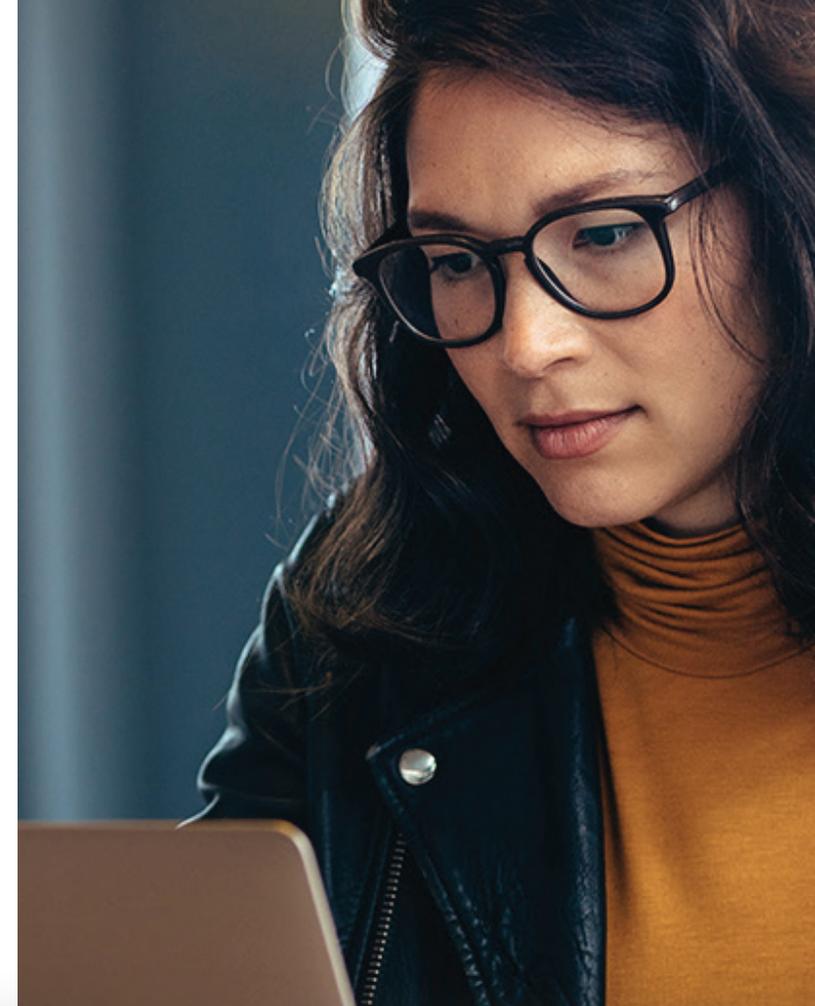
## 1 | Ask Me Anything Sessions with Experts

**WHAT IS IT?** Set up a regular event – on your content calendar – where users get the opportunity to discuss a topic and ask questions with one of their own experts – an Ask Me Anything or AMA.

You can work with the experts ahead of time by going over the topic in a pre-event meeting, creating a test community for practice, and giving them best practices, such as responding as fast as they can. When they're prepared, they get excited and that spreads to the rest of the community.

The first event may not be the best! Its purpose really is to help everyone know what to expect and how they work. Send out a post-event survey and get suggestions for improvements or topics.

**WHY DO I NEED IT?** An AMA is a great way to create community-exclusive content, giving members a chance to ask questions of an expert and understand how other professionals or industry leaders solve problems. Plus, with an AMA, you generate a large amount of content at one time that you can repurpose and share across other channels.



### DOES IT WORK?

Community programming can be used creatively to support users. **Genesys's online community manager developed a Q&A Show where he brings on a staff expert to answer support questions in the community.**



## HOW DO I DO IT?

4 WEEKS BEFORE	2 WEEKS BEFORE	1 WEEK BEFORE	DAY OF AMA	1 WEEK AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select a topic</li> <li>• Select an expert</li> <li>• Coordinate the date with the AMA expert</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train the expert</li> <li>• Promote the event</li> <li>• Collect questions from community members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the event (newsletter, social media)</li> <li>• Promote the event within the community</li> <li>• Collect the expert's answers to the pre-submitted questions</li> <li>• Create, and then close, the discussion thread for the AMA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the event (automation rule email)</li> <li>• Get on a call with the expert</li> <li>• Open the discussion thread</li> <li>• Post the pre-submitted questions and expert's answers</li> <li>• Post a closing message and close the discussion thread</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send a thank you email to the expert</li> <li>• Re-purpose the content generated during the AMA (newsletter, social media)</li> <li>• Promote the event to disengaged community members (automation rule email)</li> </ul>



### ANY SECRETS TO SUCCESS?

Make AMAs a special event; a good rule of thumb is to have one 1x per quarter

How to pick a topic: Review community reports for "Threads with most replies" and "Most liked content" to identify topics that are already engaging community members

Have a community manager post the first seed question to encourage engagement



## 2 | Tip Tuesday

**WHAT IS IT?** Help community members to become familiar with the community engagement software, so that as their comfort level increases, they get more value.

**WHY DO I NEED IT?** You can highlight features/functions that are overlooked or new to your group. These become great reference points to onboard community members, and easily repurpose for welcome campaigns (more on these later!)

**DOES IT WORK?** Yes! Since something as simple as confusion with the platform could be a barrier to participation, Tip Tuesdays are great ways to help community members who might be less tech-savvy get involved.

### HOW DO I DO IT?

2 WEEKS BEFORE	1 WEEK BEFORE	1 DAY BEFORE	POSTING DAY	1 MONTH AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review community health metrics</li><li>• Review the search term reports</li><li>• Review frequent questions received from community members</li><li>• Determine tip topics to highlight</li><li>• Determine #TipTuesday cadence for the month</li></ul>	Create each #TipTuesday template before the scheduled posting date	Create and schedule the post for the following day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post the tip to the Open Forum community as a new discussion post</li><li>• Monitor community members' responses to the post</li></ul>	Monitor community health metrics

### 3 | Seed Content

**WHAT IS IT?** Content such as questions or resources, which a community manager posts on behalf of the community's members. Seed content is your secret weapon: It's user-created content that you can strategically post when your community launches. An empty community – one without questions or ideas – isn't particularly welcoming. Seed content allows you to instantly engage users when your community opens.

Keeping a cache of “easy-to-answer seed questions” is an effective community engagement strategy. Plus if your best-laid plans go awry, you've got seed content to fall back to if necessary. Better yet, why not share your list with active members or MVPs and they can use it, too?

**WHY DO I NEED IT?** The 90-10-1 rule of community engagement says that you'll usually only see 1% of community members post content organically (among Higher Logic customers, this number is more like 23%). Having seed content to rely on helps to create organic member-to-member engagement in the community.

**DOES IT WORK?** Yes! The seed content that works best has ample background context and has to do with a relevant topic that other users are also interested in. These seed questions should come from real users and be tailored to the interest of your users.



## HOW DO I DO IT?

SET UP	1 WEEK BEFORE	POSTING	1 WEEK AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish a reoccurring automation rule that goes out to engaged members asking for seed content</li><li>• Ask users if you can post their questions on their behalf</li><li>• Identify active members of MVPs who can assist</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify author</li><li>• Generate draft</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post the question or topic to the community</li><li>• Track responses</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify any responses of note to repurpose</li><li>• Update calendar or seed content list as needed</li></ul>



### ANY SECRETS TO SUCCESS?

Get questions straight from your community members to ensure seed content is natural and seems organic, rather than something you've just made up. This can make discussion deeper and more authentic.

#### Use these drivers to help you brainstorm:

- What are People Doing? What are you working on now? Do you have any upcoming events?
- What are People Thinking? What books have you read? What have you learned recently?
- What are People Feeling? What do you like/dislike about \_\_\_\_\_? What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_?
- What are People Fearing? What are you struggling with? What is your biggest challenge?



## 4 | Member Spotlight

**WHAT IS IT?** A thread (usually monthly) that features a member of the community based upon determined criteria.

**WHY DO I NEED IT?** Members, customers, and employees continually cite the importance of learning from people like them. If you're facing a work problem, or don't understand how to upgrade a software, it's more satisfying to hear how other people tackled the issue. The people that lend a hand in this situation also gain, since the featured member feels valued as an expert and improves their status.

**DOES IT WORK?** Yes! Your community members, especially those who want to build their brand or professional network, will love being recognized, as well as learning about other members. This is a great way to put faces to names and make that personal connection.

## HOW DO I DO IT?

### TEMPLATE CREATION

- Determine member spotlight criteria
- Generate community thread template
- Generate outreach template

### START OF QUARTER

- Identify 3 members to highlight in next quarter
- Send initial outreach to identified members

### 1 WEEK LATER

- Generate drafted threads for member approval
- If a response is not received: Follow up with member to verify if interest (potentially identify backup spotlight)

### 2 WEEKS LATER

- Add approved threads to content calendar

### POSTING DAY

- Add thread to community when posting date occurs (potentially leverage schedule functionality to pre-schedule threads all at once)



### ANY SECRETS TO SUCCESS?

Try using these criteria to find members to spotlight:

- Most Engaged Members
- Top Discussion Contributors
- Top Library Contributors
- Community Champion or Ambassador
- Industry Expert
- Member Segments

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Repurpose the content from your spotlighted member: Use it in collateral and identify potential advocates.

## 5 | Engage Your Inactives

**WHAT IS IT?** A program to encourage your “lurkers,” or consumers and inactive users to take more overt action but accomplished in a way that’s not too pushy. Understanding the make-up of your audience, and the consumer and inactive sub-segment is critical here, as is the timing and cadence of your outreach.

**DOES IT WORK?** We recommend that our customers who haven’t seen a community member on the site in a while try contacting them using automation rules or re-engagement campaigns. We’ve seen success rates upwards of 30% – and these users stay re-engaged more often than not.

### HOW DO I DO IT?

2 WEEKS BEFORE	1 WEEK BEFORE	1 DAY BEFORE	POSTING DAY	1 MONTH AFTER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review consumer/inactive metrics</li> <li>Identify easy CTAs</li> <li>Determine cadence for the quarter</li> </ul>	Create each before the scheduled posting date	Create and schedule the post for the following day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post the tip to the Open Forum community as a new discussion post</li> <li>Monitor community members’ responses to the post</li> </ul>	Determine consumers’ response metrics



### ANY SECRETS TO SUCCESS?

Don’t expect to convert consumers into always-on advocates. The majority of your time is better served ensuring all members receive the help they need

Try to understand why consumers don’t participate. Is it because they don’t know how or what to do? Identify easy call-to-actions (CTAs) for them to accomplish (this is where Tip Tuesdays may come in handy)

Target specific consumers (automation rules are a great way to do this) get everyone to post a profile picture, or respond to a quick poll

Create smaller discussion groups or identify other ways to make interacting in the larger group less intimidating

# Use Automation to Encourage Engagement and Make Your Life Easier

A community platform with built-in automation helps community managers interact with a broad audience with improved personalization, increase the efficiency of their time and efforts, and deliver an experience that align activities to the goals of the organization.

It's an easy feature to adapt to multiple purposes, but here are some of the most common use cases. We give you some of our favorite automation rules to use again and again in the next section.

**Alleviate daily or repetitive tasks.** Automation tackles the repetitive and time-consuming tasks that repeat on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

**Encourage behavior you want.** Create habits either for you and your team or for your end users.

**Stay organized.** Instead of chasing to do lists or being buried by things to remember, get the system to do it for you.

**Improve communications.** By automating, you can more quickly respond to members, avoid bottlenecks, and anticipate needs.

**Personalize.** The system can support user recognition programs or help you focus on multiple subsets more easily.

## WHAT'S AN AUTOMATION RULE?

Higher Logic's community platform includes built in logic-based triggers that you can set up to encourage engagement. Automation is a streamlined way to stay organized and active with members, while also improving communications, reporting, and user recognition.

[Automation rules work, too!](#) They lead to conversions and responses. See how they worked for the National Association of School Nurses. →

# 8 Examples of Automation Rules That Get Users Engaged

## 1 | Write a great welcome email

Identify the most important immersion activities (e.g. making a first post or completing their bio) for a new member. Then automate an email or group of emails to provide the guidance and any additional information.

Here are some examples of what you could include in the automated welcome email:

- A sincere thank you for becoming part of the community
- Ways to get in touch with important points of contact
- Details about what to expect and how they can customize it
- Something that will pique their interest
- Next steps, such as personalized content suggestions, an action that leads to a valuable incentive, or a fun community activity for them to do

## 2 | Hand out digital recognition

Use automation to track certain thresholds of activity, so that you can digitally recognize the user. Gamification (see the next section) is a great approach to motivate your members, customers, and employees. When they hit certain levels of engagement points, they can display ribbons such as “Expert” and “Senior.”

## 3 | Increase user profile completion rates

Trigger a congratulatory email to send out when a first-time poster doesn't have a complete bio and picture. You can temper your message with a reminder that they're more likely to get responses if they have these items completed.

## 4 | Get passive users engaged

Set up an alert for when a member replies to a post privately. Send them an email suggesting they post the message publicly, which acts as a reminder of how important their contribution could be for a wider audience.

Caution: Don't come across as if you're monitoring their activity. You can adjust the rule to only trigger on multiple instances of private replies. You can also let them know that you didn't read the private message out of respect for privacy – that you only noted it was sent.

## 5 | Tell them they're missed

Automation rules can indicate which active users haven't posted for a while. You can refine the pool by requiring at least a certain total number of posts, but that haven't posted within the last X number of days.

A nice note – even an automated one – makes them realize their contributions are appreciated by making the community more vibrant. You would be surprised at how many community members will respond to these automated emails and thank you for noticing or let you know why they've been inactive!

## 6 | Entice nonmembers into becoming members

You may have different levels of access to the community, and you can program automation rules to encourage movement into a different tier. For example, if you had an open community that allowed prospects to join, you could trigger an automation rule after they've posted a couple times.

Based on the path they take, you can add more automation, such as thanking a customer for purchasing the offer and explaining where to find resources.

## 7 | Send certain segments tailored reminders or updates

If you have a specific program or goal in mind for a subset of your community, you can use a rule to send emails to just them.

## 8 | Generate lists

Heading to a town for a business meeting and wondering if you should set up a meet and greet? You can use automation rules even if you aren't planning on a broader campaign. The generated lists help you learn about the demographics of your community, and that's useful when you're considering how to report data.



## TIPS FOR WRITING A GREAT AUTOMATION RULE EMAIL

- Edit the standard templates to fit your community
- Use a “friendly from” - “from Gracie at XYZ” vs “from XYZ”
- Include a picture of the sender
- Know your email goals
- Consider what time of day works best to drop an email
- Double check your content matches their journey stage
- Add gamification aspects
- Make content trackable
- Write captivating subject lines
- Design and write for scanners

## Use Gamification to Encourage Wanted Behaviors

Gamification is an approach you can use both to motivate and include an element of fun in your community. Gamification done right (intrinsic motivation) helps community managers shift users' behaviors from short-term transactions to long term engagement; it gets at the heart of motivating people's behaviors, as most users like some form of recognition and competition.

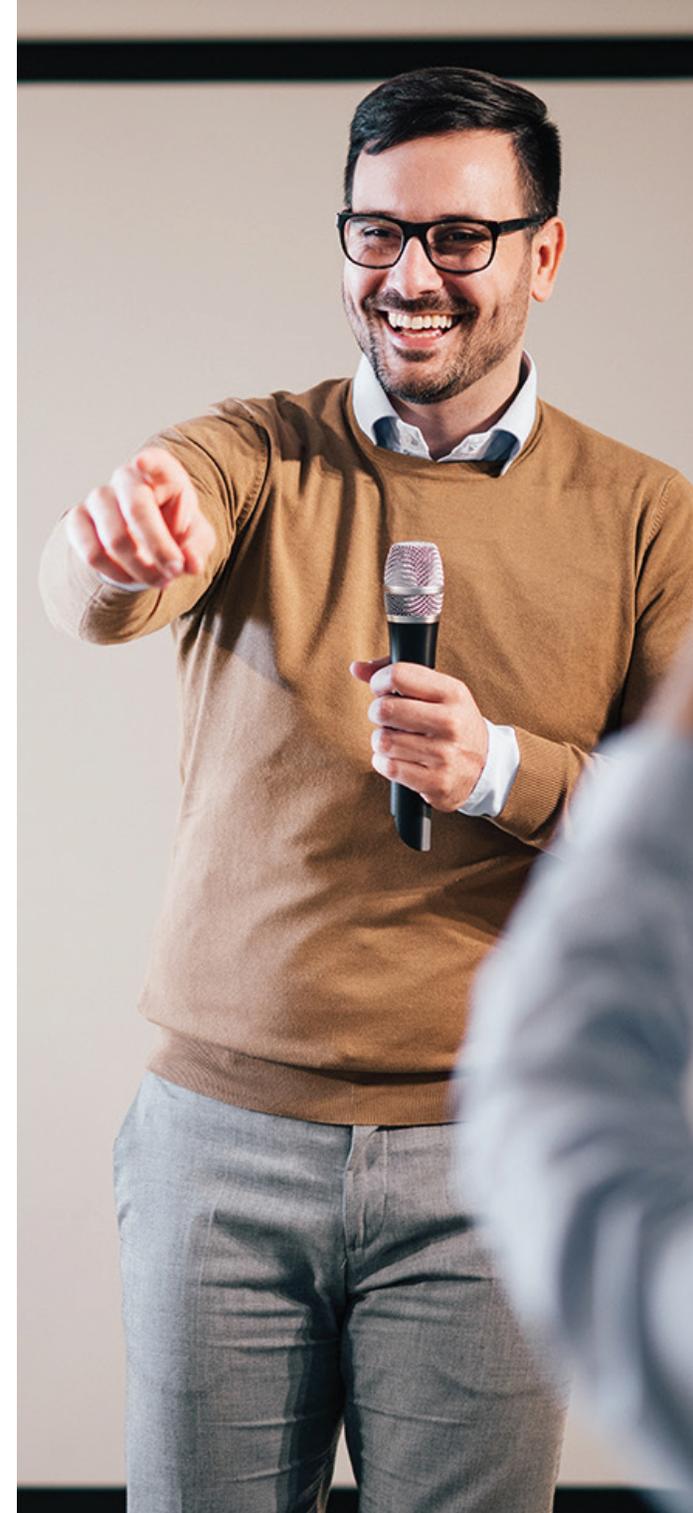
**Backing that up is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which describes two types of motivating rewards:**

- What are Intrinsic Rewards? Motivated from within, not from external factors
- What are Extrinsic Rewards? Motivated by external factors, or things

Extrinsic motivators, like cash prizes, are less likely to motivate for the long-term, so as you design your gamification program, focus on intrinsic rewards.

**One example is including ribbons or badges on users' profiles. These can appeal to the intrinsic motivators that drive long-term community engagement. For example:**

- Exposure/Status: I want to be perceived as a knowledgeable professional in my industry
- Sense of Pride and Belonging: I feel seen, heard, and valued by the organization and by other community members





## WHAT'S GAMIFICATION?

Gamification applies game characteristics like rewards, rules, and experiences to non-game contexts. Higher Logic's community platform includes gamification tools to help you engage, motivate, and reward and recognize users when they complete goals.

.....

“ Intrinsic motivation is driven by an interest or enjoyment in a specific task and doesn't rely on external factors — it exists within the individual. Achievement, responsibility, gaining knowledge, and competence are all examples of intrinsic motivators.

Extrinsic motivation is driven by the desire to attain a desired outcome or reward. Money, competition, positive feedback, and avoiding punishment are all examples of extrinsic motivators.

Which type motivates more will vary for different people. Externally motivated people perform to achieve a specific end goal, and once achieved, that goal no longer motivates. Intrinsically motivated individuals perform for their own satisfaction or achievement, and the motivation is generally self-sustainable and long lasting — that's optimal for online communities.”

**Sarah Hawk, Feverbee**

*Using Automation to Support Motivation*

## When to use gamification?

Gamification can work well to incentivize participation, but a one-size-fits-all approach won't work for every community or for every segment within your community. It may not be appropriate at all for your users. Go back to your understanding of your user's goals and motivations. They might feel like it cheapens the community. Or they might feel patronized if an everyday activity results in a badge; perhaps your user requires more of a challenge or twist.

### Run through these questions to determine when to use gamification in your community:

- What kind of community have you built for/with your users?
- What's the stability or age of your community? Is this the right time?
- Can outcomes and activity loops be measured?
- Are you just rewarding quantity, or have you considered quality?
- Would design elements clash with existing motivational structures?
- Would gamification damage desired behaviors in your engaged community that already has strong intrinsic motivation?
- What value would the community/the organization get from it?
- Is the experience meaningful or customizable for the user?
- If it's not fun, why are you doing it?



## How to use gamification in your community

### DO

- ✓ Think about the system, mechanics, and conditions of what you're designing
- ✓ Think about how your mechanics interact with other areas of your community
- ✓ Focus on the end goal of the program
- ✓ Scale rewards accordingly

### DON'T

- ✗ Try to design a whole experience, since each user will experience it differently
- ✗ Expect a gamification program to be a panacea that works for every user
- ✗ Start with a list of objectives or tasks for users to complete
- ✗ Make things too difficult or too easy

## 3 Ways to Gamify

### POINTS, BADGES, LEADERBOARDS

This is a way to track which individual users have contributed to the community. Everyone can understand who is most involved without reading every word on the banner.

- Points accrue for everything that a user does while logged into the community
- Award Badges for significant contributions, outside activity, or use tiers to encourage advancement
- Leaderboards are a great way to feature your users for their contributions

#### Examples:

- Connect to your events. You can easily look and see someone's attended for 10 years!
- Create thought leadership badges, training certificates, project participation, a badge like "500 approved answers."
- You can also sell products/services with badges - i.e. they participated in a course!



## POLLS

During an in-person conversation, we consciously and subconsciously gather feedback; polls are a quick way to get some feedback in your online community. They help make capturing information intimate and immediate. We like using them in fun and serious ways.

### Examples

- Get them talking: If you were stranded on a desert island with... who would you choose?
- Get some intel: When do you start your season of giving campaign?
- Make them laugh: Which activity do you now secretly do during online meetings?
- Generate ideas: What should our next green initiative be?
- Test knowledge: Given the new policy, is bringing pets to work ok in the office?



## PROFILE PICTURE SWEEPSTAKES

Use gamification to connect fun activities to the elements that'll contribute to your community's overall success. Profile completion, especially adding a photo, make an online community platform more human-focused. It also increases post responses and engagement metrics.

### Examples

- Run a contest where they can win company swag and submit a picture of themselves wearing it. Although this is a giveaway (extrinsic), it's got a long-term twist by encouraging a behavior that will increase participation.
- Show them what their profile could look like.



## Enlist Community Support

Nearly all communities have engagement as their driving goal, but having a community advocacy program to help you achieve that is less common. It's actually one of the best ways to see more community engagement and lighten the community manager's load. An advocate – sometimes referred to as a power user, a community champion, or MVP – works on your behalf inside the community.

You could extend the advocate's work outside of the community, but what we're talking about here is focused on community activity. It's a big return for little effort, and best of all – ***they make your life easier.***

If you don't have one, or need to improve, start now. A powerful transformation occurs where the collective knowledge improves: the whole community gets the benefit of learning from these MVPs and the MVPs feel empowered and valued. You get to meet people who feel as strongly as you do about your association, company or employer.



# Starting a Champion Program

Simon Helton and Lauren Kocher at the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) shared their tips for starting a community advocacy program at our annual conference – here’s what they recommend.

STEP	ACTIVITY	IDEAS
Identify Goals	You can set the goal for the entire program and for each separate project.	Review pain points and communication goals for the community.
Determine Tasks	What would you like your Champions to do on your behalf? You’ll get more response with specific, discrete tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at Seed Content Discussions</li> <li>• Reply to discussions</li> <li>• Welcome new members</li> <li>• Host AMAs</li> <li>• Mentor newer users</li> <li>• Moderate certain communities</li> </ul>
Recruit Champions	The more the merrier! The goal is to automate the process as much as possible – you can scale it up without additional work. It helps you not overload people as well.	<p>Look to existing groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beta testers</li> <li>• Volunteer pool</li> <li>• Most active posters</li> </ul> <p>What if you don’t have a community yet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look to conference volunteers or speakers</li> <li>• Social media influencers/active members</li> <li>• Board members</li> </ul>

CONTINUED →

STEP	ACTIVITY	IDEAS
Communicate	<p>The more personalized your outreach to the advocates-in-training, the more likely they'll respond with the desired action. Personalization makes the benefit clear to them. Adjust your templates; it'll pay off.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Segment: Use segmentation to make what you're asking for relevant to their expertise and areas of interest.</li> <li>• Schedule: Don't bug them every day. Look at your timing - 1x a week is probably the most you'd want to ask.</li> <li>• Ask: Give them specific and relevant action items, so they don't have to think - just do.</li> <li>• Automate: One hour a week max is what you need. Prioritize the top activities with that sanity saving limit in mind.</li> </ul>
Recognize Contributions	<p>Make this a meaningful activity for your group. Empowering and recognizing them contributes positively to the community's culture.</p>	<p>Take a look at our Gamification section for more ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital ribbons or badges for a front and center visual thank you</li> <li>• At events (online or in-person), take time to recognize them</li> <li>• Swag and gifts that appeal</li> </ul>
Maintain and Improve	<p>As with any initiative, take the time to celebrate your successes and to learn how to grow and do better the next cycle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check in on champion activity levels</li> <li>• Add new champions</li> <li>• Thank outgoing champions</li> </ul>



# Knowing How to Measure Engagement

Engagement metrics will tell you how successful your community is by helping you understand how many people create, respond, and interact with content.

## THERE ARE TWO KEYS TO MEASURING ENGAGEMENT:

### KEY #1: MEASURE ON A REGULAR BASIS

You'll need to measure engagement on a regular basis in order to see how your community is doing over time. While you can measure engagement on a monthly basis, we recommend measuring quarterly. This is because a user's engagement may vary a lot month-to-month, but much less if you look at it on a quarterly basis.

### KEY #2: MEASURE THE RIGHT THINGS

You won't be able to gain insights unless you measure the right metrics. What do we mean by the "right" metrics? It's the metrics that map to your goals – if one of your goals is to provide a resource hub, see how often those resources are being downloaded. Either way, these measurements will help you evaluate whether the community's actually being used and relied on.

Here are some engagement metrics you can track (if your community platform provider makes them available):

#### Community retention and use

-  Logins
-  Agreed to terms

#### Consumption

-  Pageviews
-  Contributor, vs. lurker, vs inactive

#### Engagement

-  Discussion posts
-  Library uploads

#### Perception

-  Quotes/comments from members
-  Emails to you

# Setting Expectations for Community Engagement

A rule about online engagement has floated around the internet for a while, called the Rule of Participation Inequality, or the 90-9-1 Rule. The rule goes something like this:

## User participation in any online internet community generally follows the 90-9-1 rule:

- 90% of community members are lurkers who read or observe, but don't contribute
- 9% of community members edit or respond to content but don't create content of their own
- 1% of community members create new content

Is what you should expect?

For anyone new to community management, this is a discouraging benchmark. If active participation is this low, what's the point of creating an online community at all?

For organizations who've already launched an online community and don't see high engagement, this rule might lead them to accept it's the norm.

But we see communities generating impressive results for their organizations every day. To do that, a community needs to have solid engagement. The 90-9-1 rule just doesn't align to that.

We decided it was time to re-look at the data so that we could have accurate expectations for engagement levels today. We wanted to dig into the reality of what engagement or the new 90-9-1 rule looks like for our own customers at Higher Logic. Does the rule hold true?

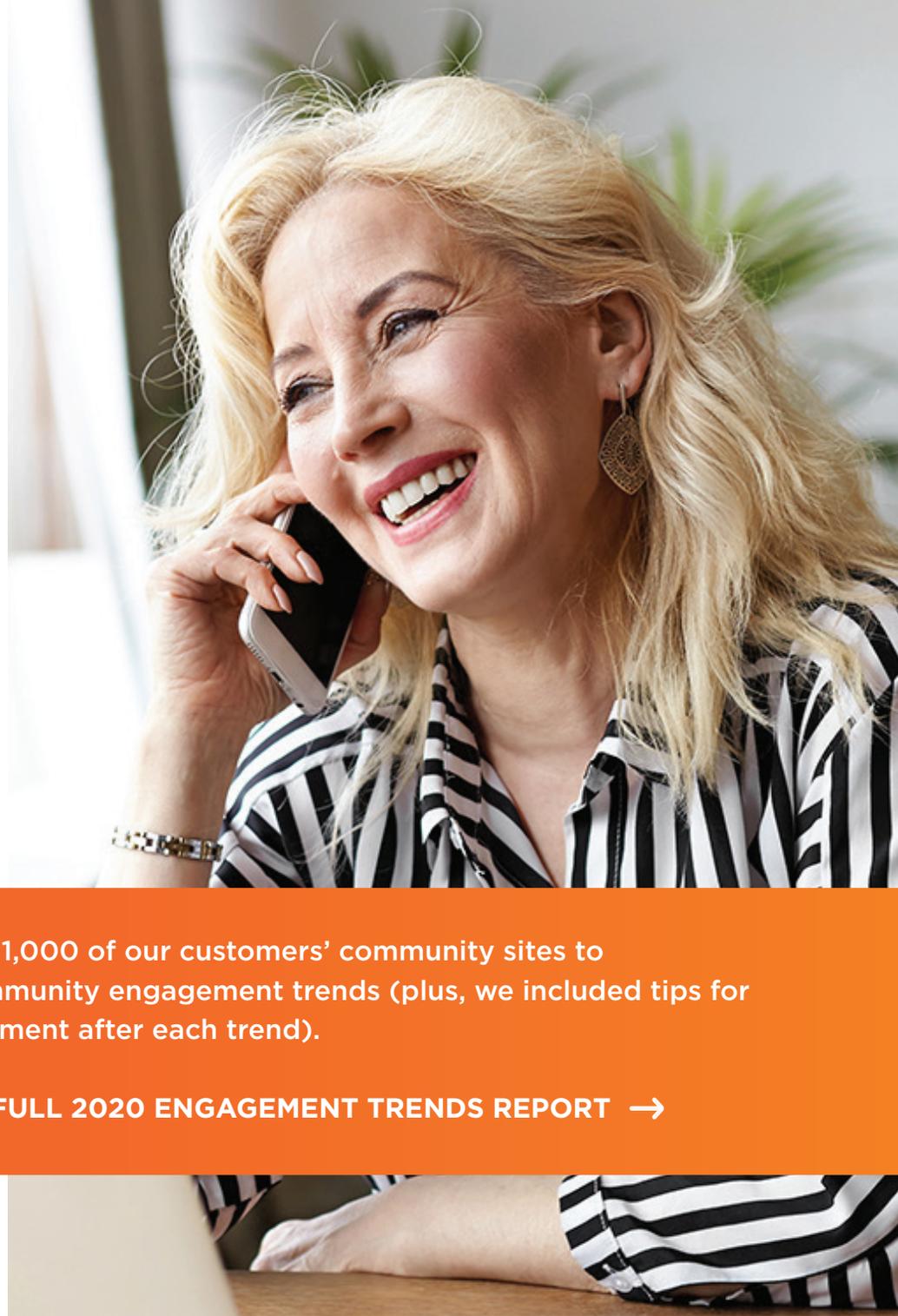
## Turns out, it does not.

In our research, we found that the 90-9-1 rule has given way to more community member participation. In fact, a large portion of community members participate in the online communities they're part of, especially in small communities.

**Unlike the traditional 90-9-1 rule, where just 1% are creators, we found that a much larger group of community members, up to 23%, are actively creating new content.**

The 9% part of the 90-9-1 rule was fairly consistent with our research when we looked at the contributors (members who only respond), because that was around 10%. But when you combine it with the creators (who respond and create), we saw engagement levels up to 33%. This holds true in branded communities both big and small.

So how much engagement should you expect? It depends on a lot, like where you're building your community, what type of content you encourage, and who your members are, but overall, our customers see much higher levels of engagement than the 90-9-1 rule would indicate.



We reviewed over 1,000 of our customers' community sites to uncover three community engagement trends (plus, we included tips for increasing engagement after each trend).

**CHECK OUT THE FULL 2020 ENGAGEMENT TRENDS REPORT →**

# A Thriving, Engaged Community is Within Reach

The best online communities are thriving, engaging destinations that people want to return to again and again. And this can be the reality for your community, too.

## A COMMUNITY THAT ENGAGES USERS AT EVERY TURN REAPS REWARDS:



### Build Connections

Create vital connections with your users, unlocking collecting knowledge and engaging everyone in your community.



### Retain Users

Keep your users coming back with personalized, relevant experiences from onboarding to renewal, growing them from everyday users into brand heroes.



### Grow Your Organization

Whatever stage you're at, a community helps you thrive, accelerating the growth of your organization.

**Questions about anything you've read, or want more engagement advice?** Reach out, and we'll be happy to help. If you're interested in seeing a demo of the Higher Logic platform, contact us.

 **higher logic**

**LET'S CONNECT**