



eBook

Your Online Community is a Data Goldmine

Leverage community
data to become more
customer-centric



Online community data empowers your organization to become more human-focused.

Being customer, member, or employee-centric is no longer a nice-to-have.

If you want to compete in today's highly personalized, specialized market, you need to put your people at the center of everything you do, from product development and program offerings to your sales cycle and onboarding journey.

The fuel that powers that human-focus? Data.

One enormous and often overlooked benefit of building an online community is the data it can provide.

When you create an online community for your organization, you're building vital connections between your customers, members, and employees, and with you.

This unlocks collective knowledge, giving your organization an extremely powerful way to know how your community members think and feel. You're adding a qualitative layer to your business metrics that can give you the fuel you need to become more human-focused.

Think about it: Your users are conversing every day, asking each other questions, giving feedback, suggesting improvements – **and you have access to all of that.**

Consider the power this data gives your teams. You can improve your product roadmap, create better educational materials, inform your marketing programs, and more. Your customers, members, or employees come to your community to discuss your industry and your offerings instead of going to other communities you don't know about or can't access.

Want to unleash the power of community data? Let's dive in.

IN THIS EBOOK, YOU'LL LEARN:

How branded online communities create a data goldmine

What kind of data you can get from your online community

How to manage and take action on all your community data

Where to Build Your Online Community

Let's start with where to create your community.

There are two main options for building an online community today: Online community platforms or social media networks, like Facebook, LinkedIn, or Slack.

Communities built on platforms designed for community and communities built on social media serve different purposes, behave differently, and provide a different experience to members, customers, or employees.

The appeal of forming a community on a social media platform is obvious. It's easy and free to get started. But think about it this way - when it comes to **that invaluable data** communities generate, do you really want to build your community on a platform you don't own?

Creating your own online community on a proprietary platform gives you access to all your own data, helping you build a secure and personalized experience for users (not to mention all the community management tools that come with a branded platform), rather than letting someone else take control.



Learn how Delphix listens to customers at scale with their online community



ASAE brings all their members together in the community, creating a virtual town hall



With a branded online community, you can...

- Integrate with your database to update contacts and add engagement data
- Own the user experience from start to finish
- Target and personalize content
- Drive inbound leads through community engagement
- Increase your revenue with advertising space
- Listen in on what your community members care about, understand the topics that interest them, and receive direct feedback
- Keep your community member data private and secure

If you're an organization where engagement is high priority, retention is a major goal, and your users need the support of the organization and one another to succeed in their jobs, you'd get much more value out of a platform meant for online community.



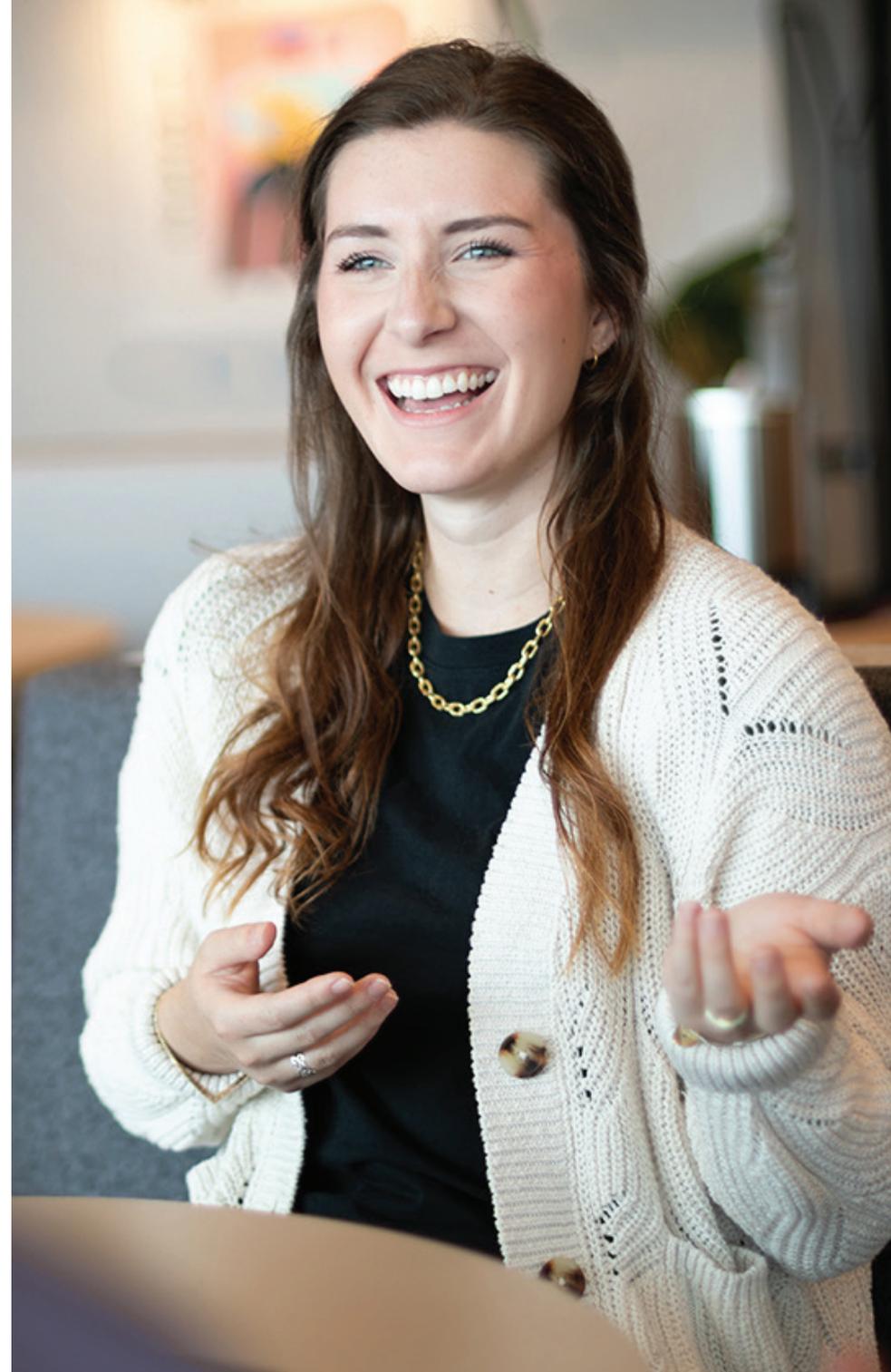
Higher Logic's Community platform dashboards make it easy to track key metrics and spot trends over time. You'll even have a personalized engagement score with recommendations on how and where you can improve.

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The 2 Types of Data You Can Find in Your Online Community

In general, there are two types of online community data you can learn from:

1. **Active insights:** Derived from asking someone about their preferences, through surveys, exit polls, and feedback-specific threads within your community
2. **Passive insights:** Derived from behavioral, demographic, and transactional data within the community, such as search history, most popular threads, common questions, and community usage



ACTIVE INSIGHTS

VS

PASSIVE INSIGHTS

If you're thinking about implementing new offers, programs, events, or making large changes, begin with active insights so your community members can tell you exactly what they think about the idea.

Active insights primarily gauge reactions to ideas and can be a faster way to get insights — enough so you know if it's worth investing in more research on a specific offer or prototyping a product.

The downside of active insights is that they only go so far. Just because your members don't ask for something directly doesn't mean they don't need or want it.

Passive insights are the real magic of an online community. There are three types of passive insights:

- Demographic data, such as ages, location, jobs, and more
- Behavioral data that encompasses everything that your community members interact with in the community, such as blog views, search history, forum posts, and peer networking
- Transactional data, from past purchases to subscription tier to returns and coupons used

It's one way to listen to your members without asking them directly.



Higher Logic uses more data to provide relevant, personalized content based on user roles, interests, and even the actions they take. Unlike other community solutions, Higher Logic's integrations with your member or customer database gives you a 360-degree view of your members.

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6 Ways to Use Your Community Data to Help Your Organization

There's so much you can do with your online community data. From planning marketing campaigns to sentiment analysis, your community provides a wealth of information. Here's how to use it to improve both your community and your business.



When we started aggregating data, GDPR was strongly searched and frequently discussed in the community. So, we created a group and started pushing more GDPR content and resources based on the data we had collected. This was well before the regulation went into effect - we knew we had to be proactive. We put together a GDPR program much faster because we saw it growing early."

— REGGIE HENRY, CIO at ASAE

Learn how ASAE gained valuable insights from their online community →





Build a better user experience

An online community gives you direct access to what your customers, members, or employees want and need.

With an engaged online community, you don't have to wonder what they're thinking – they're talking about it.

Communicating with users and **actively seeking their feedback** on processes, programs, and product roadmaps is key to transparency. While a strategy like this may require you to break down walls and address concerns in your organization, the positive results are real.

“Someone can now alert me when conversation X reaches a certain threshold, so myself or others can get in front of it, whether it's answering a question or assessing a certain product or service based on member feedback.”

— Reggie Henry, CIO at ASAE

By listening to your customers, members, and employees, you can foster a better experience across your products, communication channels, or your programming. Your community can help you:

- Improve your product or program offerings. **Your users are telling you** what they want. Realistically, you may not always be able to make every item happen, but you have a deep understanding of their real needs, which can guide your strategic roadmap.
- Improve how users feel about you. Openness to feedback and transparent communication is going to create genuine relationships between you and your members, customers, or employees.
- Improve market placement. As you improve your product and programs with real customer feedback, you're **fortifying yourself against the competition.**



Find advocates and volunteers

Your best salespeople already exist in your pipeline: your loyal members or customers.

Advocates build loyalty, help crowdsource new ideas and products, increase renewals and upsells, and get more clients through referrals. They're incredible resources for your organization.

Identifying the right candidates for advocacy opportunities, like inviting a community member to speak at an event on your behalf, or finding volunteers for your new mentoring program, is just a matter of using the community data in front of you:

- **Profile information.** Demographic and professional information from user profiles provides insight into skillsets within your community, so you can see if they're a good fit for volunteer needs.
- **Community contributions.** The material your community members post is another way to identify people with the skills you need. Look for file uploads, published blogs, and experts who answer forum questions with knowledgeable information. The more often they're helping other people, the better candidates for advocacy they'll be.
- **Interest.** See who has already visited your volunteer information pages and downloaded your volunteer guidelines and other documents. These folks are already interested enough in volunteering to seek out more information on their own, so they're great candidates if you need more help.

By analyzing their demographics and behavior, you'll be able to determine candidates for these programs, who can help with creating content, doing interviews, and lending their expertise to event planning or business management tasks.

THE BEST PART?

Higher Logic's automation rules cut out so much manual work – categorize and act on data, easily. For example, let's say you're looking for enthusiastic community members to help moderate your community. Use automation rules to identify a group of community members who have posted over 30 times this year and automate an email to these members inviting them to become volunteers.

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Personalize your marketing and sales efforts

To keep up with your users' expectations, you need to tailor and personalize the customer experience. Customize their experiences in your online community to help members, customers, or employees feel appreciated and understood – and even grow your revenue.

Before you can even think about personalizing your communication, however, you have to know what your users need and want – and what each one of them is interested in. Leverage activity data from your online community to gain insight into their pain points, interests, and intents, and use those insights to personalize the experience.

For example, some of your users may enjoy weekly emails, while others will hit delete without opening them. Some love posting in the community, while others prefer just to respond to posts others create.

Megan Kuhman, Senior Manager of Online Communities at ASAE, put it this way: “This new data analysis helps me get a general idea of conversations occurring across the larger member community, so I can better navigate those members to

their cohorts. We can use this demographic data from the AMS and community to steer a member to the right place, where they find valuable, relevant conversations.”

Use activity data to personalize communication and content. For the group that loves events, send an email with information on upcoming registration periods or links to event speaker blogs. For those that prefer online interaction, give them information about ways that they can get involved and share their ideas in your online community.

You can also employ data to give users more of the content and programs they like. If passive insights show that event wrap-up blogs perform well, write more of them. If active insights contain requests for more professional development options, institute more training opportunities or mentoring programs.

Act on the insights your community's activity data provides and build custom content and programs that are hyper-relevant. This builds trust in your brand and keeps your members coming back to your community again and again.

Want to learn more about revenue opportunities within your online community? Check out our guide to monetizing your online community →



Increase community participation

Your own online community generates a wealth of data you can use to actually **improve community engagement**. For example, you might use community to:

- Update your community engagement strategy – is community engagement increasing or dropping? Why?
- Create content in community around hot topics

You can easily identify individual activity problems by running engagement reports or viewing dashboards. Look at the number of members who have performed important activities. If the numbers are low, you have a specific activity problem.

Knowing if you have an individual activity problem or a general, big-picture participation problem will help you develop the right strategies to combat the issue. It will also help you target your strategies toward only members who have not been engaging in your community.

Use your data to improve participation by encouraging members to:

- Log in if they haven't for a while
- Upload, download, and view library resources
- Fill out their profile
- Mark responses as “best answer”
- Make their first post
- Participate in surveys and polls
- Add other members as connections



Identify ideal customers, members, and employees (and minimize churn risk)

With community data, you can identify your ideal users — the people who not only purchase from you, but purchase from you again and again. One way to do this is to understand the commonalities between your renewing users.

- How often do they log in to the community?
- Do they participate in community engagement activities?
- Are they at a certain subscription level, or a specific price point?

The ability to identify these ideal members, such as those who renew and engage, also means you can isolate disengaged users before they choose not to renew. Not all customers, members, or employees are going to tell you directly that they're dissatisfied, so look next to your online community, if you have one. Look for:

Inactive customers: Keep in mind that the interaction that you don't have is just as important as the interaction you do have. If your users are nowhere to be seen, that's a clear warning sign.

Disgruntled and angry comments: When someone constantly posts upset or angry messages in your community, it's a warning sign. Of course, if it's a one-off post or once every three months or so, paired with positive posts, you don't have to worry as much, but watch for trends by certain customers.

Elementary questions: If you notice people asking basic product or subscription questions long after they should be, it's a sign that they won't or haven't fully adopted your offerings.



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD LOYALTY AND DEEPEN TRUST

Perhaps every company's worst fear is having customer criticism front and center in a public place. Odds are, you will get negative feedback in your community. And that's okay! It's better to have occasional cranky comments on your own platform rather than posting on Twitter or complaining in a place you don't even know exists. When it's a complaint in your community, you have direct access to the individual and the problem, so you can address it immediately.

Critical comments and venting can provide great insight into sticking points with your offerings or services, so use it as an opportunity to educate. Your team can leverage these posts as a starting point for a conversation offline.

Making a community member feel heard does wonders for the relationship and with continued support, will hopefully turn them into an advocate over time.

ENGAGED MEMBERS ARE HIGHER-SPENDING MEMBERS

ASAE knew their community was a strong member benefit, but insights gleaned the community extends beyond just a place for members to interact:

They found that community users with at least one activity per month generate 5 times more revenue than users with one activity or fewer per month.

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Drive additional revenue

Using the data sources at your disposal can help you spot key sales opportunities in your existing user base. Combine new business development techniques with analysis from your customer, member, or employee digital footprint to gain a clearer picture of their future needs or wants.

Look for indicators like these:

- Have there been any major shifts in communication or technology in their industry?
- Has their company been acquired or obtained investment capital?
- Have there been any changes to their stock, if the company is publicly held?
- Has your point of contact changed positions within the organization?
- Has a new problem arisen from a recent event?

And finally, the most important question...Do you have a product or service offering that could make things easier or help them bridge a gap?

This type of opening is particularly easy to spot if your users are discussing current events or recent changes in your **online community's** discussion forum. Take notice of what issues affect them and find ways to help. The more likely your product is to solve their new problem or make the transition easier, the more likely it is you've found a new sales opportunity.

Gathering data points from external sources can help create a more complete profile with many behavior indicators. The more engagement points your customer compiles, the more interested they are in your product, and the higher you should rank them when prioritizing your accounts or opportunities.



TIP: Keep in mind that you should never sacrifice your community's authenticity and goal of driving member value to revenue. Your community is for your members – don't make the mistake of putting lead generation first, or you'll lose the value the community can provide.

Rich Community Data Empowers Your Organization

Communities give you a direct channel to listen to your members, customers, or employees, learning more about them in real-time than any other channel.

Becoming user-centric requires an ongoing investment in data. By building an engaged online community, you can gain powerful insights into your members, customers, or employees to build a better experience — one that drives more value for your organization.



Don't solve just one data problem – let's get as much data as we can into this warehouse, so we can continuously solve problems. And let's bring the community along for that ride."

— REGGIE HENRY, CIO at ASAE

Get a 360-Degree View of Your Community with Higher Logic

Higher Logic can help you build an online community that will thrive. Learn more about our solutions and services today.

LET'S CONNECT

