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The Ultimate Guide Online Communities



Introduction

Communities are on the rise as brands and associations prefer to create their own, mostly online, communities to keep engagement rates high with effective connections. Communities come with different needs from the very first stage of building them to their continuation and engagement. These bring the importance of community management and the various types associated with this concept. Often, community platforms or community apps are preferred to have a designated portal to bring the members of the community together. Moreover, different tools are included to provide the members with a wide range of options and help strengthen their bonds. Let's explore all about communities together: what they are, how to build, manage and engage them effectively, and finally, community apps to help you out during the process



The concept of "*community*" has become more popular as more brands prefer to create their own.

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2 What is an Online Community?

What is an Online Community?

To define **online communities** properly, drawing the line between community and audience is important. There are also different types of communities depending on their niche, purpose, and management style. Lastly, defining the components of a community, namely the members and their roles, is also necessary to have a complete understanding. Let's start with the definitions of community and audience!

Community vs Audience

A community is a social group that emerges when people with common characteristics come together. There are endless possibilities as to what these characteristics may be. For example, your neighborhood community emerges because of your place of residence, while your religious community results from your common beliefs with people. Simply put, communities give us a way to meet under the same roof and interact with each other comfortably.

However, an audience is focused on one central person or brand but the common sense of belonging is not created like in the communities. Audiences are more passive in the sense that they are only in the "listening" position and not contributing themselves.

Audiences are related to more of an individual experience whereas communities allow for shared experiences and inclusiveness. Moreover, communities put engagement at the core and build the rest on top of the relationships.



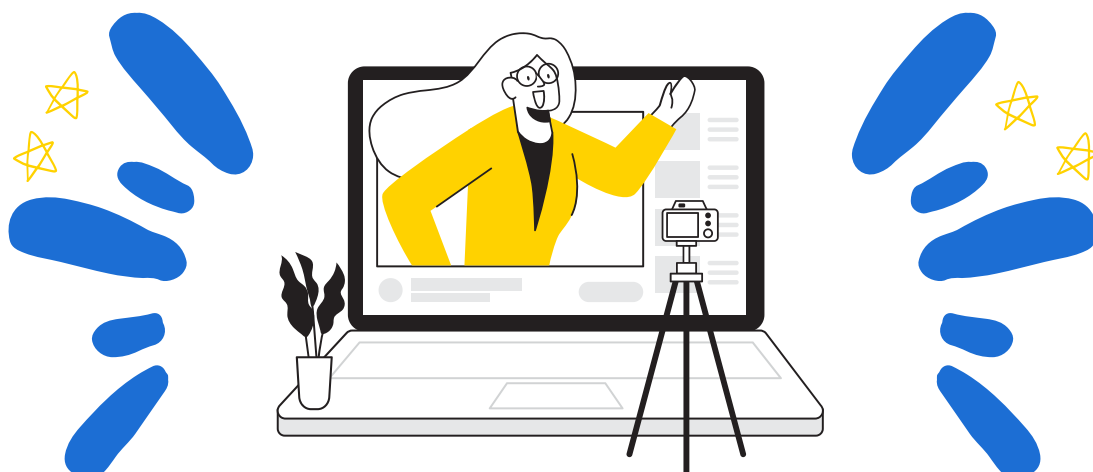
Communities focus on engagement and shared experiences, unlike audiences.

3 Types of Online Communities

There are many different types of online communities and the variety grows as the concept becomes more popular, spreading to different areas. We have chosen 3 of the most common types of online communities to explore in detail:

1. Creator Community

A **creator community** is a type of online community that involves a creator and their audience. The creator may vary from a podcaster to a video producer, and generates content for their community while monetizing the output most of the time. Creating an exclusive community for creators lets them connect and network with others who possess similar interests and get inspired altogether. You can learn more about the best creator community platforms and features to look for when choosing a platform for your own community.

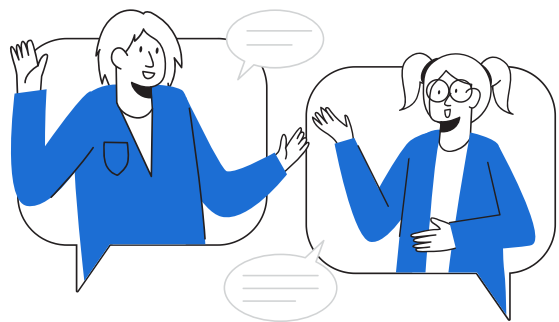


2. Brand Community

A **brand community** is another type of online community that consists of a group of customers with a strong connection that is beyond purchasing the products/services of a brand. Loyalty is a key factor in their relationship with the brand and they are emotionally invested. The members of this community not only purchase the products/services but also tell about their experiences to their family and friends. You can read more about the importance of brand communities and how to build your own.

3. Discussion Community

A **discussion community** is a popular type of online community that lets the members engage on a common topic of interest. The central topic may differ from a popular TV show to politics. This type can also be integrated into the brand community type such as an educational brand creating a discussion online community.



Online Community Members and Roles

Depending on the type of community, the members gain different roles and responsibilities. Let's explore the three main examples of what roles the community members may adopt:

- * A content creator's community usually only consists of their **audience** and themselves. For example, if you're a YouTuber who shares daily vlogs, the majority of your community will adopt a **follower** role while you have the role of a **community leader**.



- • • • •
- * Some gaming communities like Twitch channels or groups on Discord and Reddit are usually flexible and not hierarchical. A group of people with a vital role in these communities is **moderators**. They work to avoid unwanted content or negative interactions according to the community's own rules.



- • • • •
- * Nonprofit communities constitute a great portion of online groups. The appropriate distribution of roles is crucial for such communities to function properly. Fundraising is central to nonprofits, and efficient fundraising can only be ensured with good organization. The collection of donations brings along the need for **accounting** and **marketing positions** while sharing your cause with people requires a good **human resources** team. And of course, these roles can only be distributed efficiently under an **executive**.

You can explore more about [online community member roles and their management](#).



3 Building an Online Community

Building an Online Community

Now that you have a general idea of online communities, it is time to explore the first step: building your own online community! Let's see the benefits first, and then, go over the step-by-step guide.

4 Benefits of Starting an Online Community



Building a community from the ground up is not easy, however, learning more about the benefits will help you to gain the necessary motivation to start! Let's start with them right away:

1. Easy and fast communication is a big advantage of online communities. Members can easily reach each other, or the brand if it is a brand community, in case of any questions, issues, or discussions.

2. Genuine adaptability is provided with an online community, allowing you to be quickly and flexibly altered to the demands of your members. You are continually connected to the worlds of your consumers with the right online community management.

3. Loyalty is a key factor in communities, especially brand communities, and a deeper understanding of your consumers' decision-making processes is possible when you engage with your online community. Continuous communication between you and your online community will be very beneficial, which will both increase the profit from your customers and keep your customers connected to you longer.



4. Data collection and analysis are greatly improved in the case of online communities with surveys and continuous conversation. Community members can be sent a survey, and rather than relying just on open-ended inquiries, further inquiries can be made. The researcher is then given the chance to explain the reason behind the quantitative findings.

How to Build an Online Community in 5 Steps

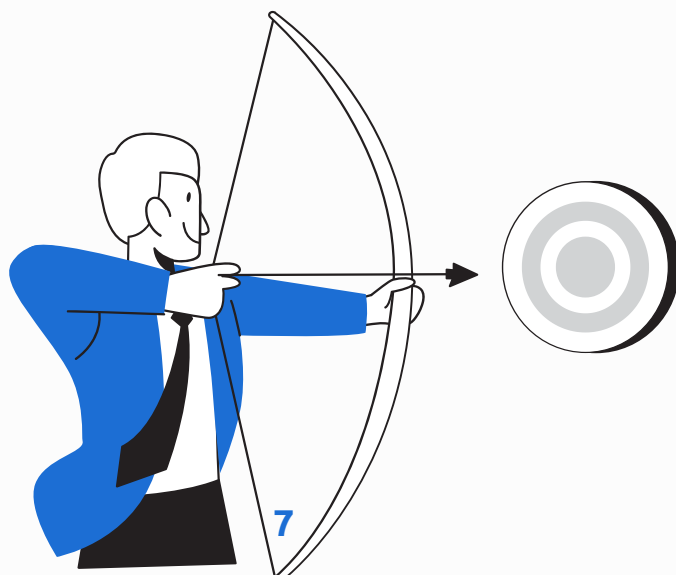
Now, it is time for you to create your own online community!



1. Define your purpose

The very first step to building an online community is knowing exactly what you are aiming for. Even though a community might have many goals in mind, it's more beneficial to focus on selecting a few that reflect your vision and the value provided.

At this stage, it is important to identify the key factors that create a completely online producing and sharing community. Understanding what genuinely fosters a feeling of community and how its members derive value is crucial.



2. Identify the member profile

As a second step, collecting data (such as what your online community members are interested in and their personal information) makes it easier for you to build and manage the community.

With [Raklet's free CRM](#), on each member's profile, you may save all acquired data. Additionally, this data is available for your members to view and edit as needed so you can keep this information updated.



3. Decide on the guidelines

To prevent trolls, spam, and abuse in your community, it's critical to have rules and a moderating plan in place. What sort of conduct is acceptable for the community is made apparent by community rules and standards.

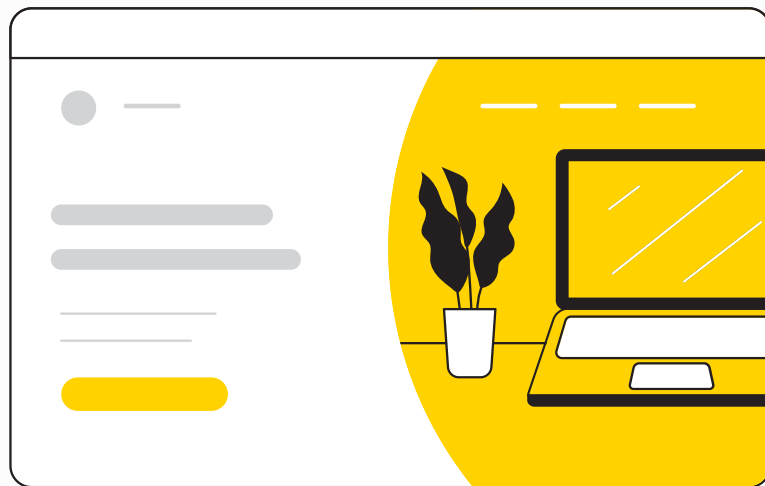
At this stage, establishing rules for both the behavior of the online community members and the behavior of those who manage this community increases the security within the team. Especially since your community is online, it will be much easier for people to show disturbing behavior toward each other.



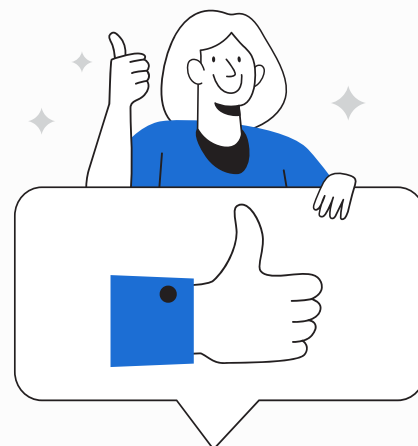
You should decide on the community guidelines to set the rules and protect your members.

4. Set up your community

It's time to launch your community on the **platform** of your choice and get it going. At this stage, you should pick up a platform, do some customizations, and establish the tasks and roles for your online community. Keep reading to learn more about the essential features of community apps and platforms in the upcoming chapters.



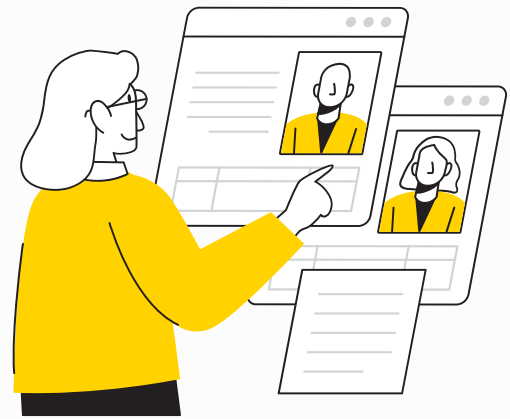
Then, you should make warm **welcoming announcements** and materials: An introduction content for newly joined members will not only allow them to get to know you better, but it will also help them not feel like strangers in the community.



Next, you can build and send application forms to access basic and indeed the most important information about your members. You can learn not only information such as name and age but also their interests and what they are engaged in, you will provide great comfort for the future.

5. Promote and grow

Now, you should grow your community with many ways of promotion! You can make a **paid promotion on social media** to announce your community to more people, or you can reach more people without paying any money with “**invite your friend**” messages that you can send to already included members.



You may also utilize **referral programs**, which reward members for introducing newcomers to your group. Your incentives may be anything for nothing, a coupon code, a prize (such as a new laptop), etc.





4 Community Management

Community Management

Community management has gained importance with the increasing use of social media and the rate of forming online communities. Having a strong brand presence and awareness involves high engagement and loyalty rates from your community, which are direct results of effective community management. Let's learn more about community management and some best practices that you can adapt to your own community! You can also keep reading about the role of a community manager and some examples from popular brands.

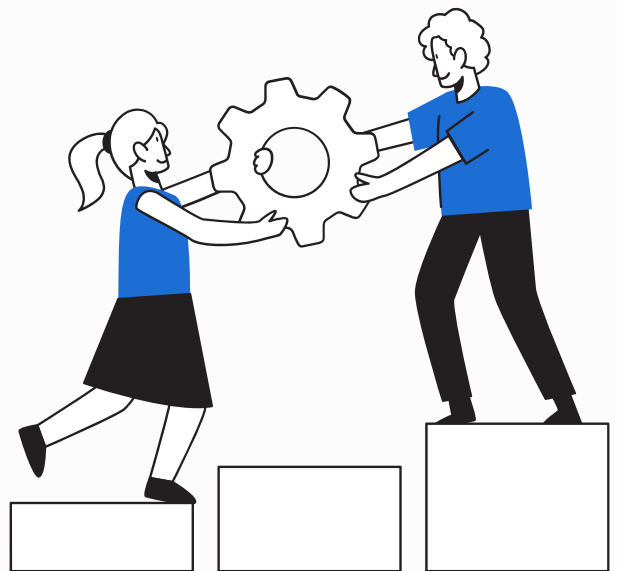


What is Community Management?

Community management is the whole process of building a community of customers or members for your brand or organization and keeping them engaged with different interactions in the long run. A community management strategy includes all the steps leading up to a perfectly engaged community. There are several ways to interact and engage with your audience to keep the connection, growth, and loyalty increasing. However, one of the most important interaction types is social media nowadays.

Community management brings a lot of benefits to your organization or business. Some of these benefits include:

1. Getting real direct feedback from customers/members,
2. Increasing conversion rates,
3. Increasing brand and product awareness,
4. Learning about customer needs in-depth,
5. Providing more value to your customers beyond the product or service,
6. And many more!



3 Best Practices for Effective Community Management

There are several ways to manage your community effectively, and the right strategies differ depending on the type, size, budget, and other factors of a community. However, we have chosen 3 common best practices that can inspire you to improve your community management, let's dive in!

1. Connect regularly with your community

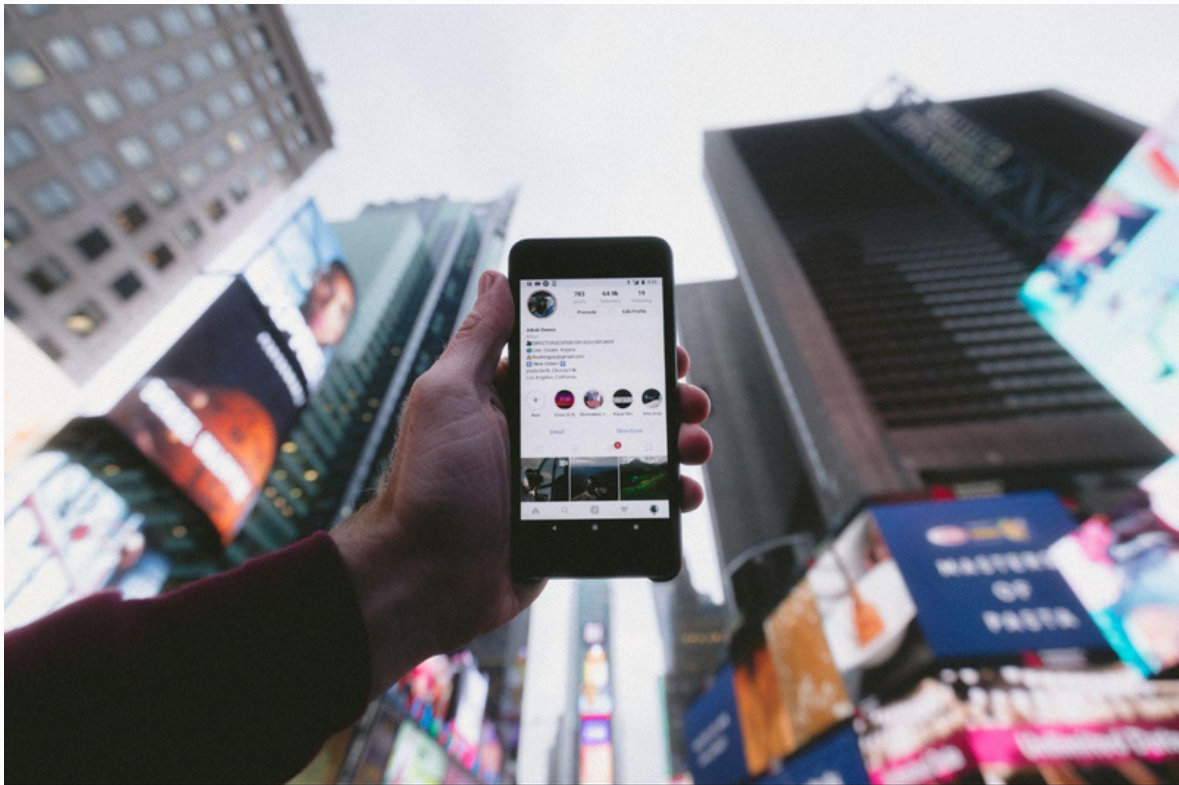


While curating your community management strategy, make sure you include regular connections with your community. This can come in the form of scheduling regular social media posts, planning monthly events, checking feedback frequently, or sending weekly personalized newsletters. You should keep them engaged and remind your brand's presence on a non-disturbing regular basis.

2. Explore new ways to engage

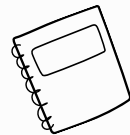
With the ever-changing digital era we are in, you should keep up with the face pace and latest trends! Exploring new social media platforms, popular digital trends, and memes just like Netflix does are all crucial. Who knows maybe the new mobile app will be the right platform to engage with your community event further!





You should explore new ways to engage with your community and effectively execute community management.

3. Use metrics and analytics



With the ever-changing digital era we are in, you should keep up with the face pace and latest trends! Exploring new social media platforms, popular digital trends, and memes just like Netflix does are all crucial. Who knows maybe the new mobile app will be the right platform to engage with your community event further!





5 Community Engagement Strategies



Community Engagement Strategies

Now that you have successfully built your own community, the next step is to make sure your members are engaged, which directly impacts the dynamics of your community. Community engagement, or member engagement, is a strategic approach to promoting all the interactions, communications, and relationships among community members. An effective community engagement, therefore, is all the activities that promote member interaction and strengthen community bonds.

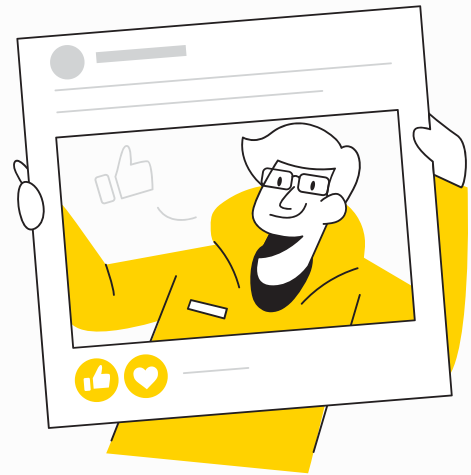
Let's see 5 different strategies to engage your community members effectively:



Community engagement is essential to promote member interaction and strengthen bonds.

1. Create social media content.

With the ever-changing digital era we are in, you should keep up with the face pace and latest trends! Exploring new social media platforms, popular digital trends, and memes just like Netflix does are all crucial. Who knows maybe the new mobile app will be the right platform to engage with your community event further!



Alternatively, you can also use an all-in-one community management platform that offers complete tools for community engagement –like [Raklet](#)! You can engage with your community through discussion boards, emails, and ticketed or free-to-attend events. Your members can also share their ideas, get to know each other, and socialize through the platform.

2. Organize events.

Organize online or face-to-face events for a better engagement experience. Your community bonds will be stronger with “get-together” events. This is a great way to remind your members why they chose to join your community. You can organize interactive events like:

- Webinars,
- Quizzes and surveys,
- Workshops,
- Trivia nights,
- Discussions and opinion sessions,
- And many more!

Each event can be both online and offline, private or public, free or ticketed. It is all up to you and your community!

3. Start a Monday jokes thread.

Who likes Mondays? Open a discussion board to start the week with laughter!

Encourage your members to share a funny joke, GIF, video, or article on the forum every Monday, or a day you prefer. This will keep your community in touch and make them interact with the community.

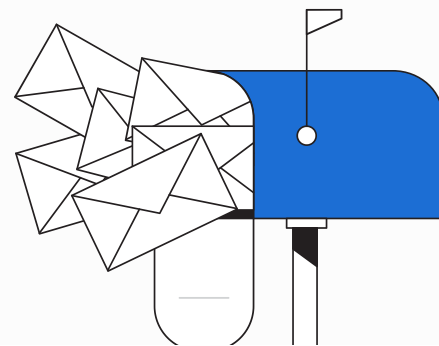


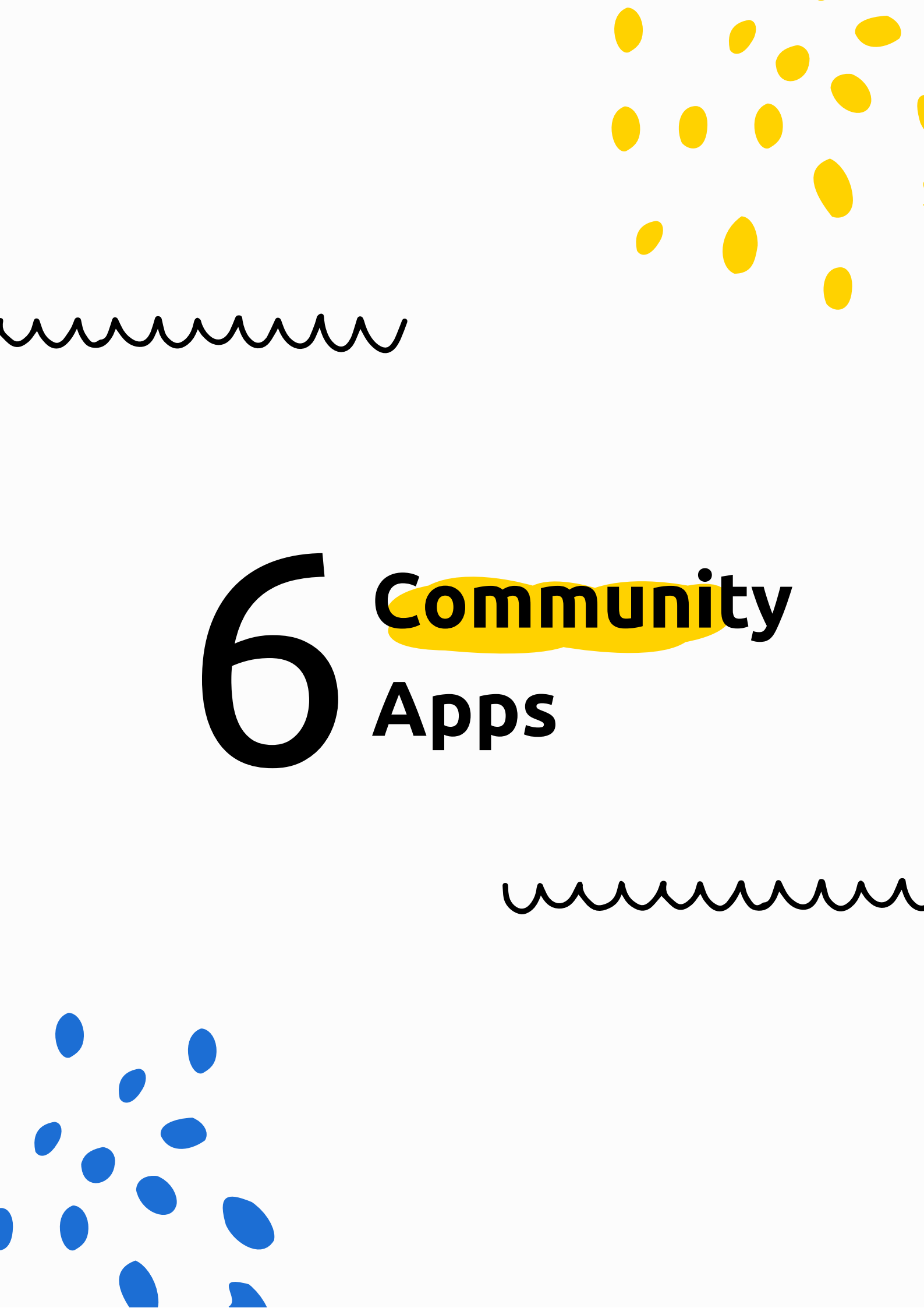
4. Re-engage inactive members.

Sometimes members can dissociate themselves from the community. Let them know that you have not forgotten them through emails or SMS. Sending them “We missed you” messages will likely encourage them to be more active within the community. But remember, your community members might need some time off, as well. Do not persistently send out emails and rather give them space to relax.

5. Send weekly newsletters.

Your community members will love to hear from you every week. You can send an automated newsletter to your members to catch up weekly. You can pick a different topic for each week, or you can just make announcements for future events, plans, and updates. You can also send out **members-only** and **premium newsletters** to enrich the engagement experience. This will attract more members and grow your community.





6 **Community** Apps

Community Apps

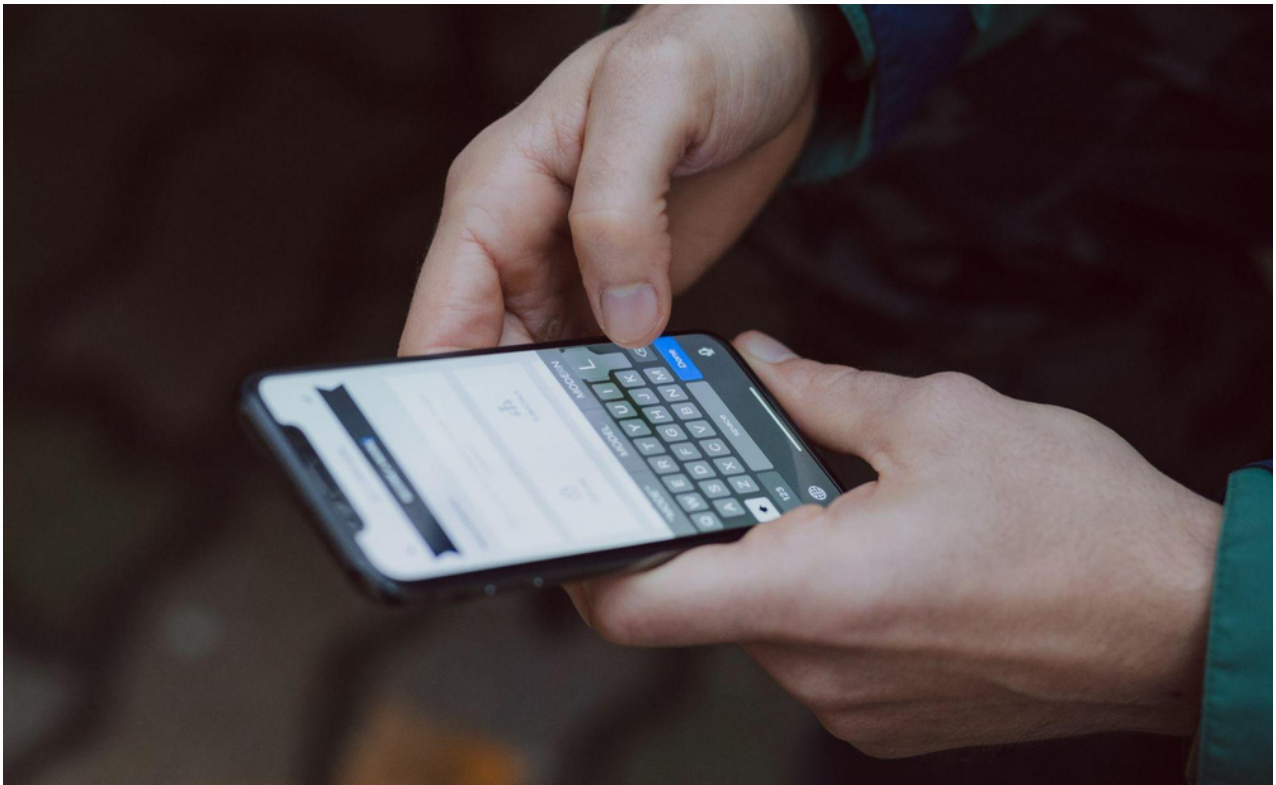
In order to get professional help to cover all your needs regarding community management, you can consider working with community management software. Alternatively, you can also create social media groups on popular websites and applications. However, most of the time, it's almost impossible to give tiers or share exclusive content with your members through those groups. Similarly, gathering data is another difficulty in conventional social media websites.



You'd love to see your member profile so that defining a target group is more effortless. With the help of community apps and platforms, you can easily create charts, go over reports and develop a better strategy for your business. You can compare [the best community apps of 2022](#) in detail. But first, let's see the **5 essential features** that you should look for before choosing the right community app:

1. Social network

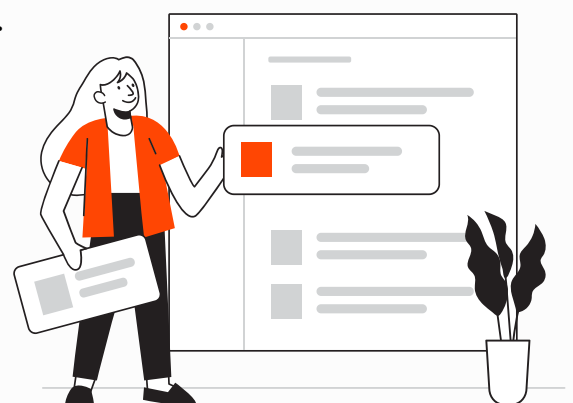
The right community app should provide the feature of creating a private social network within your community and providing **member profiles** with customizable fields. You should provide a private platform for your members to network, and create their own member profiles with customizable fields such as their experience, interests, and many more. Moreover, they can include contact information, and message each other privately.



A private social network is one of the most important features that a community app should offer.

2. Discussion boards

Another important feature is allowing members to have open discussions about their common areas of interest. You can let your members choose their areas of interest, create different discussion boards and their own posts, and like and comment on each other's posts. Furthermore, they can choose to subscribe to specific discussion boards and get regular notifications or have a specific feed with related posts. You can also set up a special discussion board for announcements to your community to effectively inform them about events, and other crucial happenings.



3. Membership plans

You can have a premium community that offers members-only content with different tiered membership plans. Some content such as discussion boards and the private social network mentioned above can become exclusive content to the members by including access in membership plans. Having such private content and premium access also encourages signing up as members, joining the community, and increasing your monetization.



4. Online payments



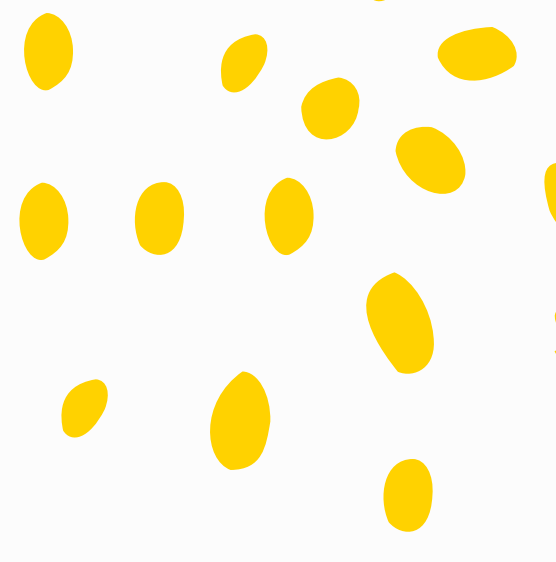
Monetizing your community with membership plans or exclusive content is great, however, the need for secure online payments arises. You should provide easy and safe payment channels for your community with the right app. Having safe payment integrations with different bank options and international transfers are important to run the payments smoothly. Additionally, you should also be able to send automated debt reminders to your members.

5. Personalization



Members want to be identified as individuals, and most would see you favorably if your community app remembers who they are and their past behavior. **Profile personalization** will assist you in delivering that experience. Choosing your community app as simple for members to find groups they might be interested in and receive alerts on discussion boards they've engaged in significantly increases the chance of engagement.





7

Raklet



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All-in-one platform to grow your audience

Build, grow and monetize your audience through **memberships, newsletters** and **other digital tools**. No coding required.

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[Schedule Demo](#)

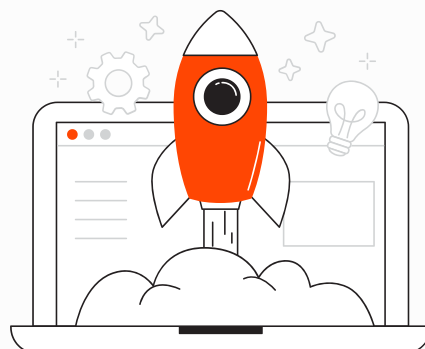
Easy setup · Start for free · Cancel any time



As the right choice for your community app, we recommend [Raklet](#), an all-in-one community management software with over 4000 integrations and various tools to support your community strategies.

You can customize all the features according to your needs, and add monetization opportunities with different integrations such as Stripe. Your community can have its own social network and customers can engage with member profiles and private messages. Raklet offers [various features](#), from sending customized notifications to generating reports and analytics tools!

You can check out our [transparent pricing page](#) for details, or [schedule a demo](#) with us to learn more!





Raklet