

Community Marketing Guide

Everything you need to know about community marketing,
including tactics, examples and more

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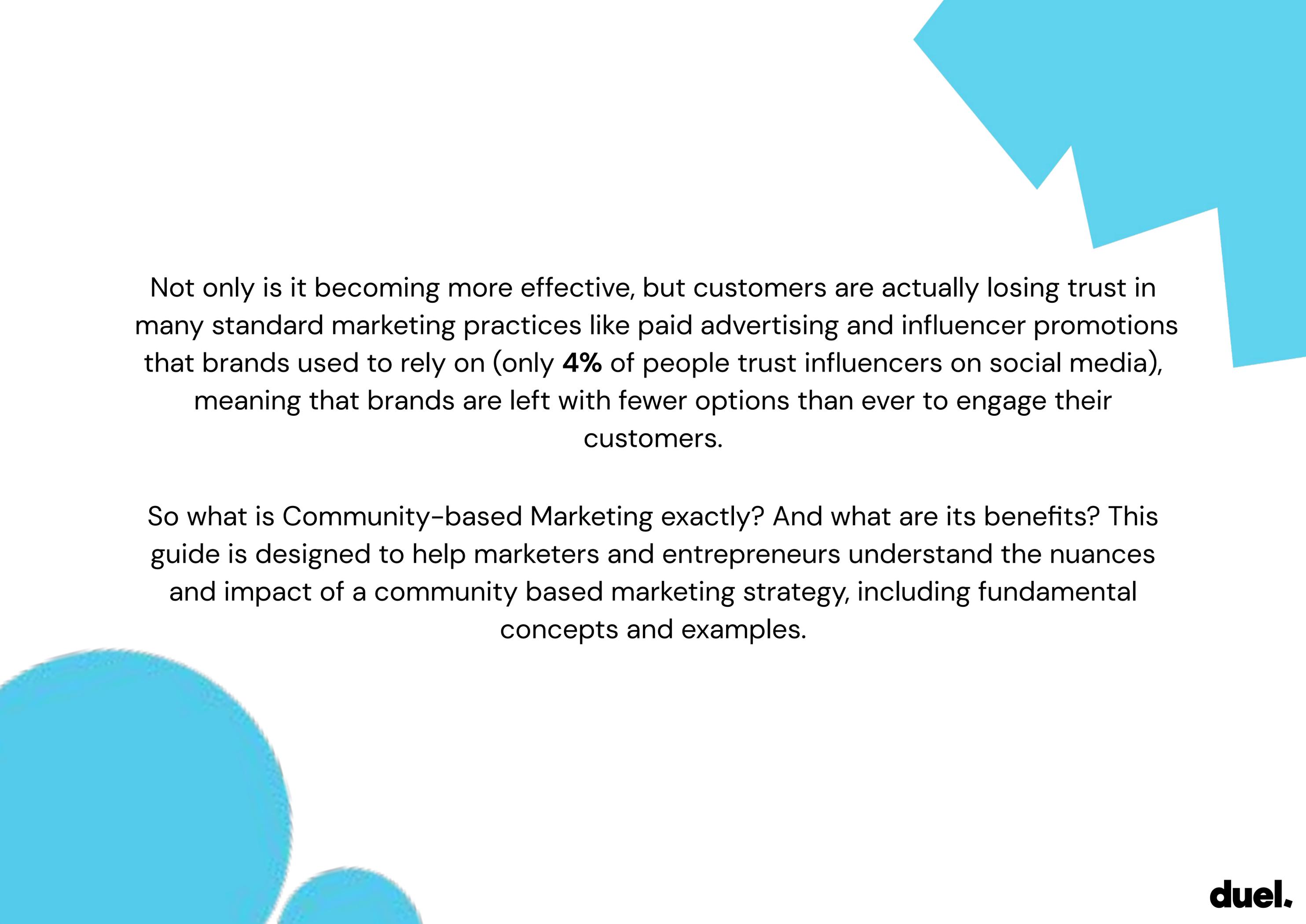
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The Rise of Community Marketing

One of the most significant trends in business is the rapid change of customer expectations when it comes to interactions with brands. According to Salesforce's State of the Connected Customer report, "84% of customers say being treated like a person, not a number, is very important to winning their business." Therefore, customers are not only seeking a great product, but an authentic human connection with both the brand and their community of customers.

They are increasingly seeing their buying decisions as reflections of their identities as well as the communities they belong to. The intensification of relationships between customers and brands is making community based marketing a crucial component of modern marketing strategies.





Not only is it becoming more effective, but customers are actually losing trust in many standard marketing practices like paid advertising and influencer promotions that brands used to rely on (only **4%** of people trust influencers on social media), meaning that brands are left with fewer options than ever to engage their customers.

So what is Community-based Marketing exactly? And what are its benefits? This guide is designed to help marketers and entrepreneurs understand the nuances and impact of a community based marketing strategy, including fundamental concepts and examples.

What Defines a Community?

A community is a space, digital or physical, where people share a connection or belonging to something. Space, importantly for marketers, refers to an abstract idea of a shared environment, it can be online (like a newsletter or forum), or offline (like an office or apartment block).

Beyond this definition, there are 3 markers that researchers say indicate a brand community →

1. **Consciousness of kind:**

an intrinsic understanding that people in a community are connected together, and different from outsiders

2. **Rituals & traditions:**

specific acts and behaviours that solidify culture and meaning in a community

3. **Sense of obligation to community:**

a sense of moral obligation that drives community members to serve each other



While communities have existed for as long as human beings have, brand communities are a relatively new concept. Customers are now creating deep connections with fellow supporters of a specific brand, and even the brands themselves. The rise of brand communities marks a new opportunity for marketers to connect deeply with their customers.

Why Are Brand Communities so powerful?

Brand communities are powerful because they tap into the social and emotional needs of human beings. They create tight-knit associations between a person's identity and the brands they choose to support.

One [study](#) on multiple “love” and “hate” brand communities shows that members of “love” communities are more motivated by emotions, passion, and validation.” People use brand communities to express passion and have that passion reflected back through relationships with other community members. Brand communities are also powerful because of their self supporting nature. Community members maintain active relationships with each other, often without the need for a brand to interject.

Marketers have known that communities are a powerful source of brand advocacy, but creating them or connecting with them has been a difficult process.

Community based marketing has risen from the need to have systems and principles that can help guide marketers to better connect with groups of dedicated customers.



What Does Community Marketing Entail?

Community Marketing is the connection of a brand to a specific community, using a platform to communicate, exchange values and create mutual meaning. The platform does not have to be digital, and communities do not have to be started from scratch.

Brands can choose to work with established groups or create their own. Either way, community-building requires marketers to start conversations, establish opportunities for connection (like events or groups) and create meaningful traditions.

Community-building is a long-term process that requires care and consistency. At its core, it is about relationship building, and strong relationships require trust and time to flourish. It also requires marketers to relinquish control to their advocates, who won't always agree with a brand's ideas or point-of-view.

The Role of a Brand Within a Community

Social Reach
Tools

Task-
Reward
Systems

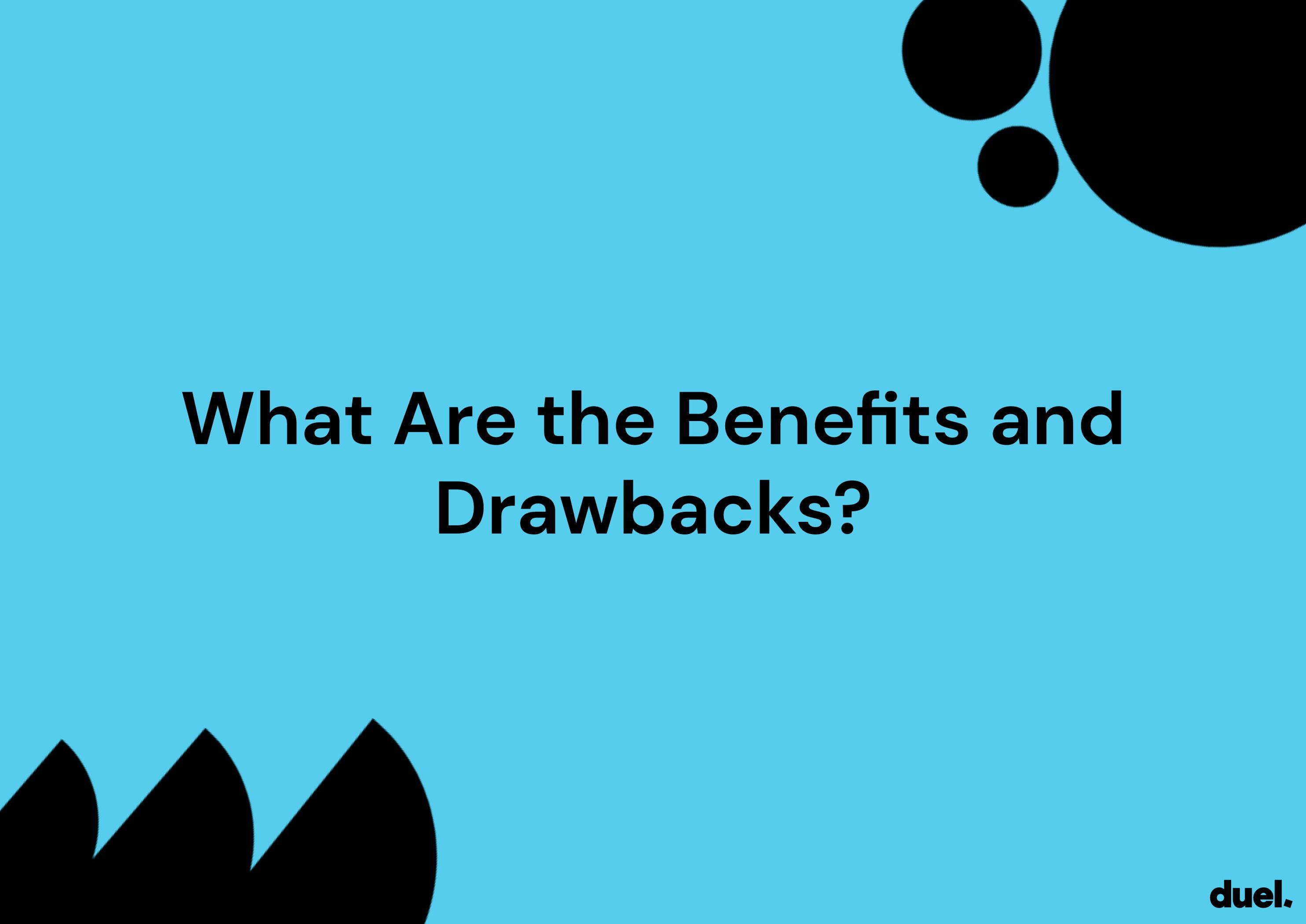
Managed
Service

Branded
Portals

Forums

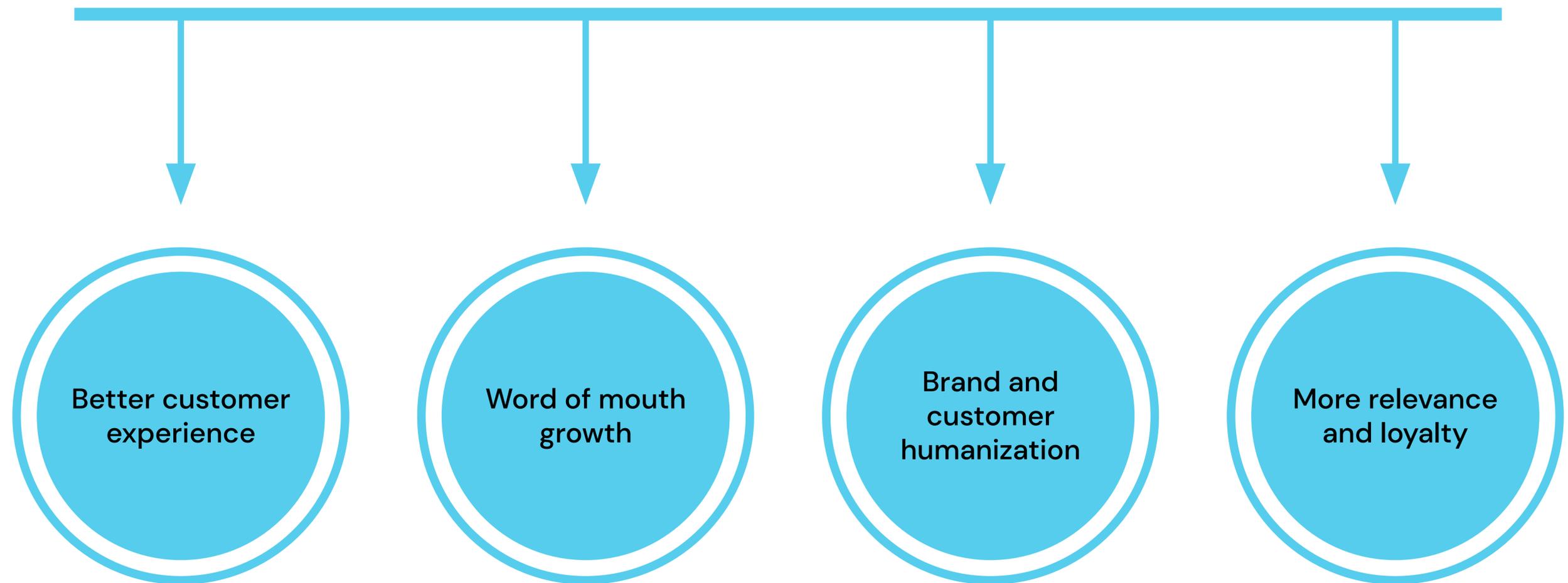
User
Generated
Content

So, with much more straightforward, data-driven options like social media marketing and advertising, why should community marketing be part of the strategy?



What Are the Benefits and Drawbacks?

Benefits of Community Marketing



1. Better Customer Experience

Put simply, brands that provide incredible customer experience see [major boosts](#) to their revenue.



Community marketing, when done correctly, gives marketers a better understanding of their customers and provides an extremely authentic touch point for a number of initiatives like handling customer complaints, gathering product feedback, nurturing advocates and much more.

The insight of active community members can provide a treasure trove of information that helps brands figure out how to deliver the most well thought out experience.

2. Word of Mouth Growth

72%

of customers say they share good experiences with others



Strong communities are filled with willing advocates that recommend products and vouch for a brand. Depending on the way a community is set up, they can also grow organically as members invite their networks to join.

Building great brand communities creates a channel that can lead to great market insight and organic growth through word of mouth.

3. Brand and Customer Humanization

A common theme mentioned throughout this guide is the importance of [brand authenticity](#). Marketing often feels hollow or inauthentic when trying to make customers feel like their human needs are considered.



Good community marketing gets around this issue by putting the power in the hands of community members themselves. Members will share their honest opinions on products (for better and worse), post authentic user generated content and create their own unique relationships that cannot be replicated by a brand. The end result is a more human, authentic experience for brand fans.

4. More Relevance and Loyalty

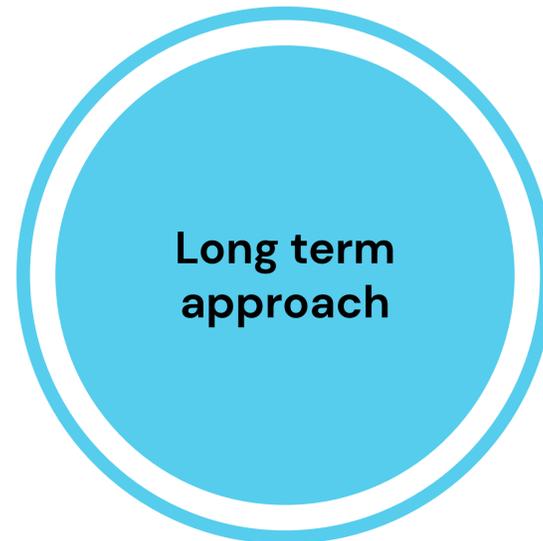
According to consulting firm Kantar, 71 percent of consumers now claim that loyalty incentive–programs don't make them loyal at all. Incentivising customers to repurchase is no longer enough, loyalty programs need to be more relevant and varied, allowing customers other ways to build a relationship with brand.

Effective loyalty programs inspire customers to repurchase and build a consistent relationship with brands.

For marketers, it's an incredible system that keeps acquisition costs down and builds brand equity. Unfortunately, building loyalty programs is not easy.

For brands, that means maintaining a constant and timely symbiotic relationship. A strong community helps build this consistency as community members are interacting with each other and relying on each other for purchasing decisions. In the case of communities with online platforms, brands can also be quick to respond to questions or complaints, adding another layer of responsiveness that pushes potential customers in the right direction at the right time.

Drawbacks of Community Marketing



1. Unique Skill Set Required

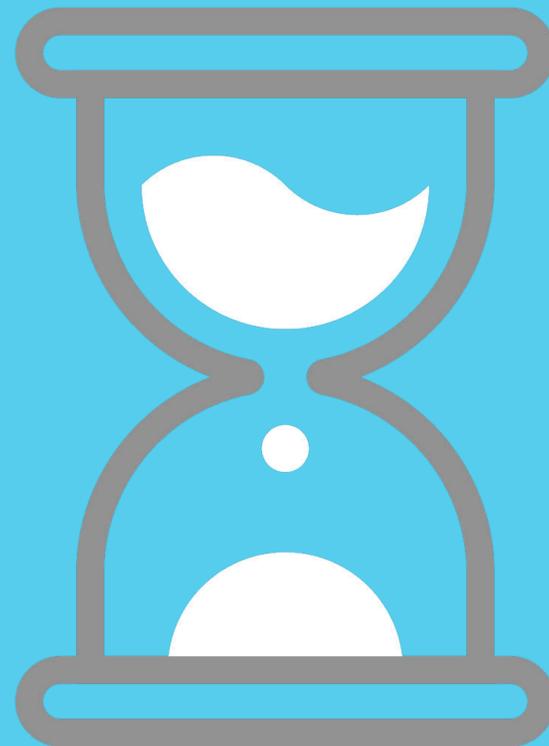


Community based marketing looks intuitive at surface level, but is incredibly difficult to do. Many of the principles of community-building are in direct opposition to traditional performance marketing.

It is difficult to track the impact of communities, and it is difficult to create highly targeted messaging. Brands also must be willing to face negative reviews with honesty, speak frankly and work closely with members to understand their needs. With all that being said, these skills are learnable, and the knowledge base around community marketing is constantly growing.

2. Long Term Approach

While not exactly a negative, marketers need to understand that a community strategy is long-term. Attempting to work with a community to boost sales immediately or launch an ad campaign can backfire quickly.



Community marketers will need to be prepared to focus on long-term brand building and customer experience, which can often mean foregoing shortterm campaigns or targets.

3. High Commitment

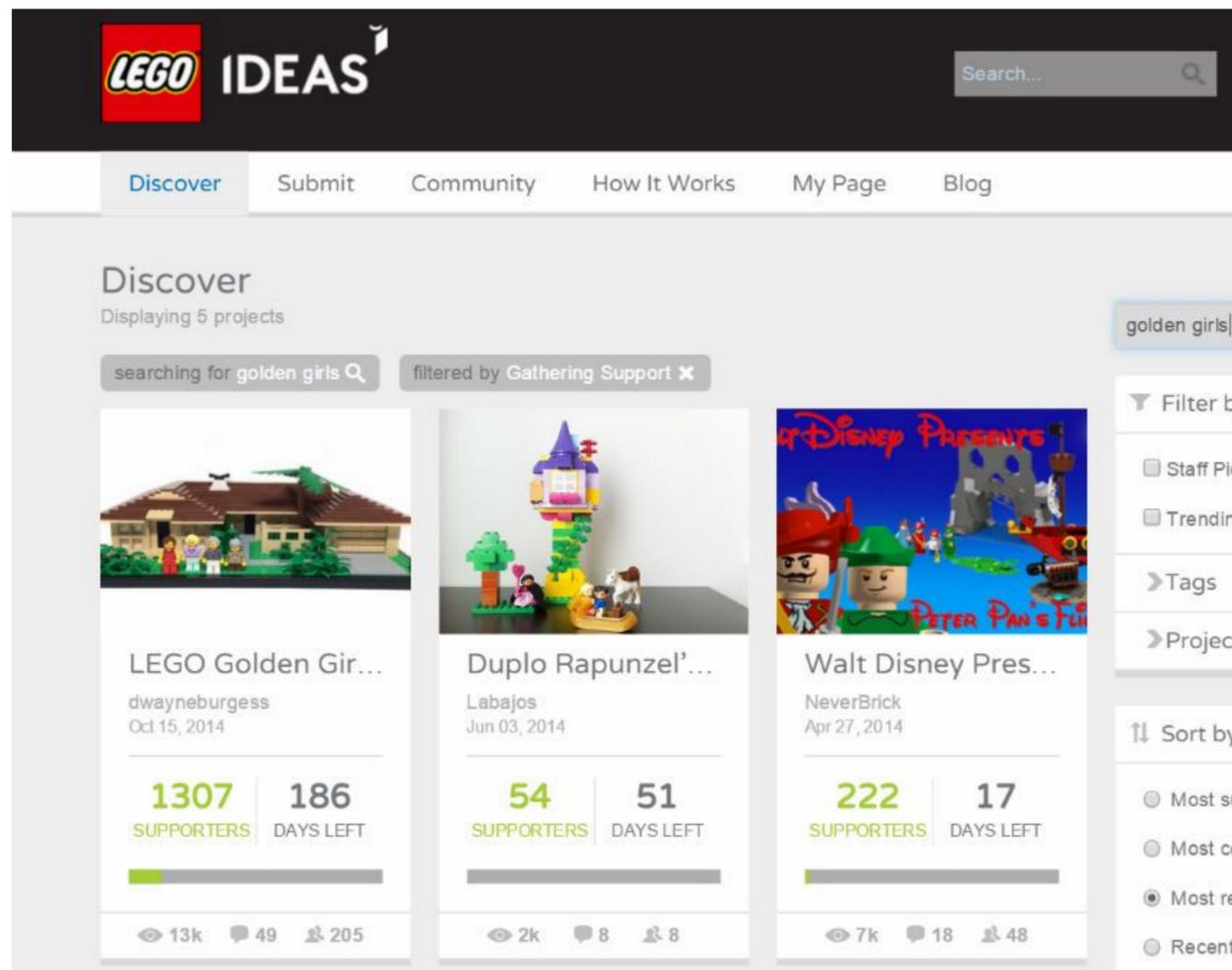


Similar to the need for long-termism, community marketing requires marketers to invest time into building or supporting community infrastructure, listening to members, taking in information and communicating consistently. This is where trust and relationships are built, but brands need to be ready to put in the work.

Speed, personalisation and authenticity are major benefits in community-marketing, but they require a team's constant attention.



Great Examples of Community Marketing



Lego has been nurturing this community since 2014 and is able to approach it with nuance—Lego moderates the ideas lightly but otherwise allows their members' creativity to flourish, and Lego provides incentives and positive interactions by showcasing specific ideas from members and even selecting a few to launch as branded products.

Lego's community is an excellent example of community based marketing, which manifests in the form of a web platform called [Lego Ideas](#). The platform allows community members to share visual ideas for new products and proudly present creations they've made using Lego. Members can then vote and comment on specific ideas.

Build around the uniting thread

Lego found the uniting thread that connects their community is creativity and built their platform entirely around the concept.



lululemon

Lululemon's unique community building strategy has led to their incredible growth and success as a fashion retailer. Instead of relying on digital platforms, their strategy focuses on localised communities that operate in the physical world.



Community / Ambassadors

Meet our store ambassadors

We believe in the power of authentic relationships. Our stores are hubs for people to connect and sweat together, and our store ambassadors make that happen. They inspire their local communities through their passion for sweat.



Through sweat I learned how to work with others, how to win, how to lose, and how to cope with "oh sh*t" moments.

Harold Dale
Store ambassador in New Orleans, LA



Amen Iseghohi
Entrepreneur



Barry Clark
Run Crew Lead



CeCe Marizu
HIIT



Chretienne Yalung
TRX



Ciarize Aurellado
Yoga Teacher



Ericka Jones
Philanthropist/Thought Leader



Harold Dale
Run Crew Lead



Aaron Moore
Public Speaker

Relationships with local leaders like yoga instructors and fitness studio owners are nurtured through product sponsorship and other forms of collaboration. These are not necessarily high-profile influencers, but simply well trusted people and authority figures that fit the Lululemon brand.

The control of these relationships are also local—Lululemon trusts stores to build these connections instead of controlling them from a centralised headquarters. It is much easier for locals to connect with each other in a mutually understood culture, and meeting face-to-face only makes the connections more powerful.



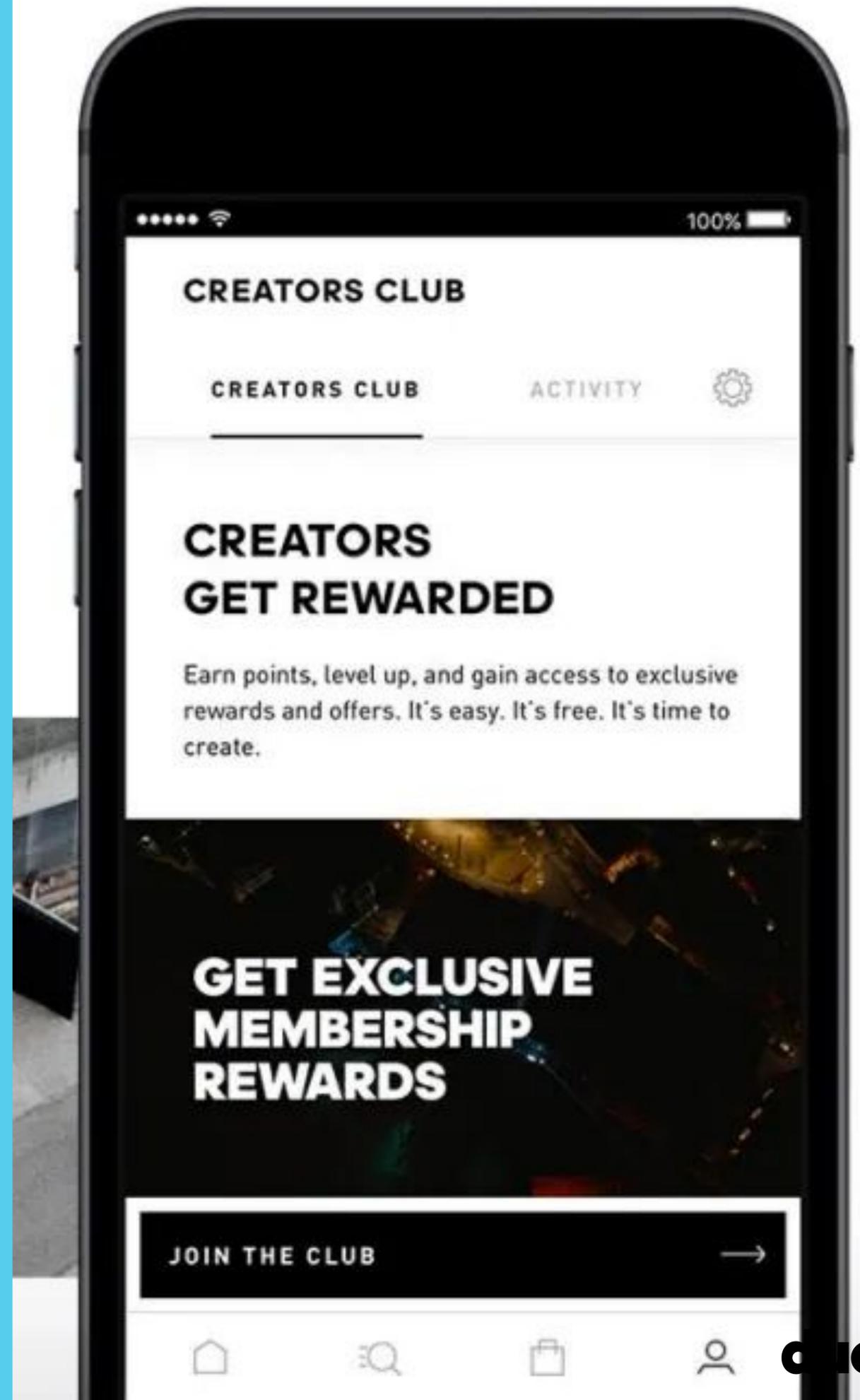
The Adidas Creator's Club is a very robust program that builds community through a rewards program. Community members can complete activities like uploading images or participating in a workout to receive rewards like early access to sales, curated experiences, product discounts or exclusive invites to events.

The club is well-designed to convey the type of community they want to build. The name "Creators" directly shows the type of members they are looking for, while the tasks and rewards are designed to attract members that will show off the exciting nature of the brand through their own personalities.

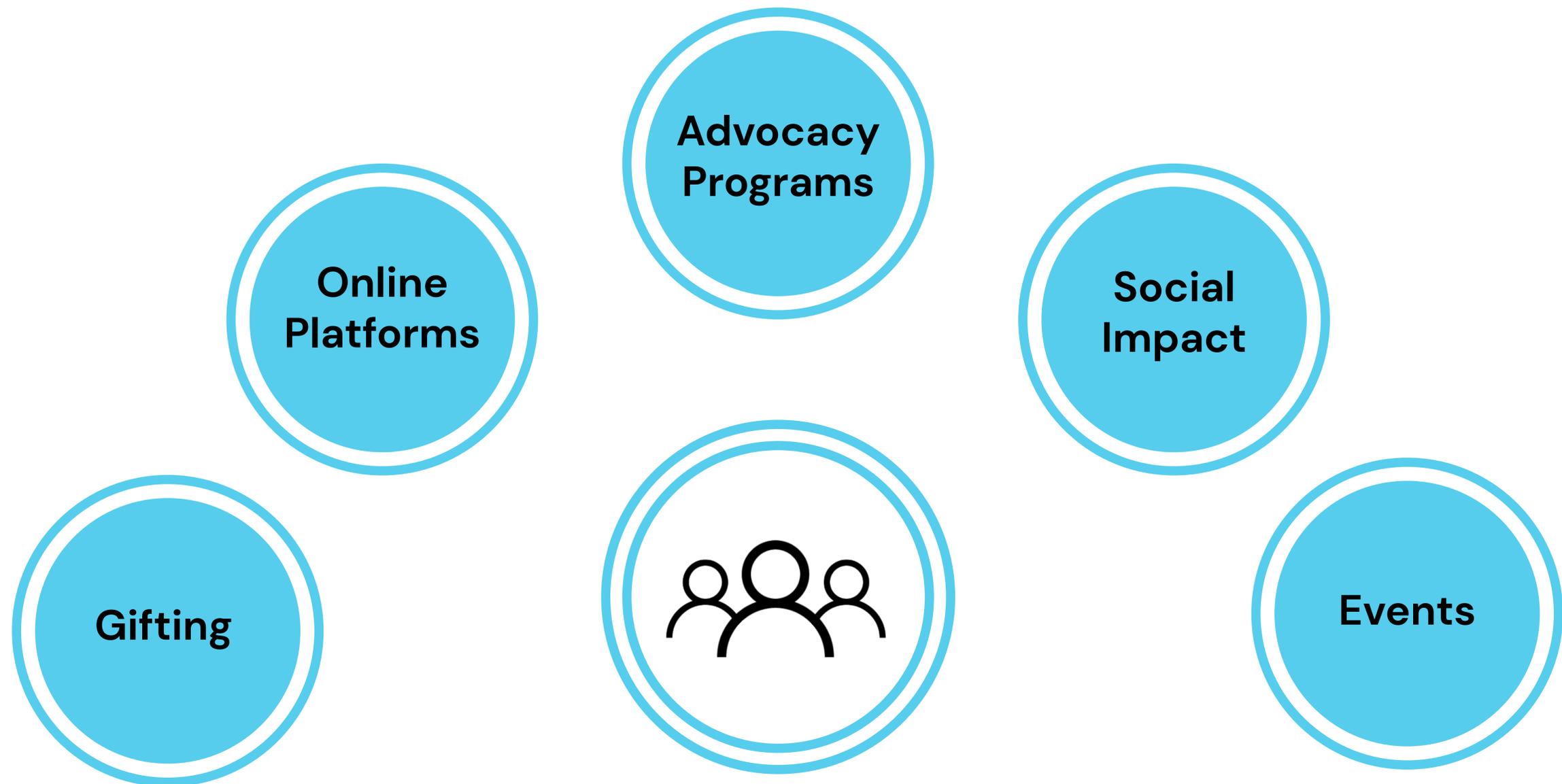
Adidas' approach to community building is much more directly involved than a program like Lego's. They establish the activities, rewards and exclusivity themselves, which takes skill and a deep level of customer understanding to set up properly.

Focusing on Community Experience

Adidas built quality relationships by including many experiential rewards for their community that evokes strong emotions and a sense of identity.



What Are the Tactics Involved in Community Marketing?



1. Create Advocacy and Ambassador Programs

Advocates and ambassadors are anchors of a community, driving conversations, setting up events and making newcomers feel welcome when they join. When tapping into brand communities, advocates are extremely important.

Brands need to be able to connect with these advocates and motivate them to contribute to communities, and this can be done in the form of an advocacy program or ambassador program.



An advocacy program is a system that rewards and encourages customers to advocate on behalf of a brand. These programs are often set up as rewards programs, VIP clubs, or even paid ambassador positions.

2. Online Platforms



Online platforms like Lego Ideas or even Facebook groups are an effective way to connect to communities that need a digital place to coalesce. Multiple platforms and channels can be used, but there should still be a central meeting ground to avoid the community being fragmented across many outlets.

Marketers can create this space and moderate it to start conversations, communicate offers and gather feedback but once again, it's important to understand the balance of control that customers expect. If brand activity overshadows community relationships, customers may turn against the brand or abandon the group if they feel it is becoming a one-to-many advertising channel instead of a space for people to connect and share.

3. Support a Social Cause (and mean it)

One of the most powerful tools that marketers have when it comes to building communities is the support of social causes. People naturally form strong emotional bonds when it comes to supporting causes they are passionate about, something made evident by the global wave of climate protests that bloomed from [a single activist in Sweden](#). Bonds like this aren't just limited to other people—76 percent of consumers expect brands to have a positive [social impact](#) on the communities in which they do business.



Marketers can get behind causes in a number of ways, including sponsoring social organisations, hosting events or making charitable donations. The most crucial component of this method is for brands to prove themselves to customers.

3. Support a Social Cause (and mean it)



pepsi

[Pepsi](#), for example, was accused of being tone-deaf for producing a human rights themed advertisement featuring Kendall Jenner. Consumers quickly pointed out the advertisement's lack of authenticity and spread the word throughout their networks.

4. Host Events

Events are a straightforward tool for creating shared meaning and traditions within a community. Physical events are especially effective since they provide space for people to interact face-to-face and potentially meet the human beings behind a brand, however, online events are currently a necessity for brands facing social-distancing restrictions.

In these situations, events must be creative and extremely well-designed for community experience. Simply converting a planned physical event into a conference call may dilute the experience. Events should be crafted with that in mind.

Great events are typically neither easy nor cheap to plan, so it is important to first understand what would compel people to show up, and how to keep them engaged thereafter.



5. Gifting

Gifting is one of the tools that Lululemon used to quickly grow out local communities. Local ambassadors would get gifts like yoga mats that could then be passed on to a fitness studio or instructor's clients. Giving customers a considerate gift creates tangible value and boosts their sense of good faith. However it's no silver bullet, gifts are not samples—they should not be given with the expectation of a future purchase.

Gifts should always be relevant to both the brand and the community (do not give away pens if you are an athletics brand for example). And, even though they are transactional in nature, they should still invoke a sense of emotion within the recipient.

An emotional tie can be created in a number of ways, such as including a personalised letter, or customising the gift to their desires. This not only gives gifts more staying power in the minds of customers and community members, but also provides a stronger push for recipients to share their experience and story throughout their networks.



How is Community Marketing Measured?

The greatest barrier for marketers to implement a community based marketing strategy is the difficulty in measuring success. There are no industry established community marketing metrics that can quantify an initiative, and much of the value in community marketing is tracked through qualitative study and observation.

With that being said, the impact of community marketing can still be measured through standard goal setting techniques. Marketers can use the straightforward order of setting an objective, measurable goal, tactic and cost.

Objective	Measurable Goal	Tactic	Cost
Increase sales of running shoes this summer	Generate \$3.4M in sales from running shoes by end of August 2020	Gift 5,000 pairs of running shoes to running clubs	\$500,000

To get the most value out of community marketing measurements, the process should be iterative—marketers should be determining whether their tactics failed or succeeded, and then continue refining their approaches. Iterating like this gives community marketers more consistent data to work with.

The ambiguity of measuring communities makes it more difficult to track, but even trackable initiatives like influencer marketing are getting more ineffective. Many brands are taking a leap of faith by investing in community, and it is paying off because it leads to experiences that match the incredibly high expectations of customers.

Key Learnings & Next Steps

Community Marketing is a powerful force of brand building that represents a change in what customers expect from their brands. It isn't easy, but brands who get it right stand to have more loyal customers, long-term growth and brand resilience.

If you would like to learn how to start implementing your community marketing strategy, download our free community marketing template by clicking the link below:

[Get Community Marketing Startup Template](#)

Key Learnings

Community marketing is a long-term approach based on authenticity and creating value

Brands must strike a balance when considering how active to be within their communities

All communities require a defined connection, traditions and a shared sense of obligation

Communities drive loyalty, growth and powerful customer experiences if done well

Scale your brand through Community Marketing today

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