GUILD

Community Based Marketing (CBM)

The new play in B2B marketing

https://guild.co

Guild – the messaging app for professional groups, networks and communities.

Table of contents

1. Executive Summary

With almost every B2B marketer following the same playbook, it's time to develop a new play.

Community Based Marketing (CBM) can be that play.

In 2020, against the backdrop of remote working, rapid digital transformation, oversaturated B2B digital marketing channels and a rise in experts looking to monetise their professional knowledge, 'Community' is back in fashion.

In this *'Community Based Marketing – the new play in B2B marketing'* guide, we look closely at community and make recommendations on how to use it effectively and successfully as part of your B2B marketing strategy.

We provide a clear definition of "Community Based Marketing (CBM)" and we also look at why 2020 has created 'Perfect Storm' conditions for B2B communities to flourish.

Our report features recognised expert contributors from vendor, agency and client side, all providing their own unique take on Community Based Marketing and the criteria for success.

'Community Based Marketing – the new play in B2B marketing' helps organisations understand the drivers behind the growth of community and the resulting opportunities and challenges. This report:

- Defines Community Based Marketing (CBM)
- Shows where CBM sits in the marketing funnel
- Makes the business case for CBM
- Gives you the success factors for CBM
- Provides case studies of successful CBM in B2B marketing

About the authors

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Ashley has been working in professional communities and B2B marketing for over 20 years. His first business, Econsultancy, which he founded in 1999, is a community for marketers learning about digital marketing and ecommerce. Econsultancy has over 600,000 members globally.

His second business, Guild, launched in 2018, is a messaging app for professional groups, networks and communities. Guild is used by B2B marketers in professional service businesses, membership and media organisations, to engage prospects and customers in a private, branded, trusted space.

Ashley has authored two books and speaks internationally about digital and marketing trends.

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Michelle has more than 23 years' B2C and B2B experience client, agency side and vendor side, providing digital, marketing, communications, content, community and social media strategy advice and support.

She has worked with a wide range of clients, including the V&A, London 2012, BBC, Direct Line Group, Multiple Sclerosis Society, Barclays, The Coca-Cola Company, Unilever, UPS, US Embassy and many others.

Michelle was a visiting lecturer at MMU and taught Community and Social Media Strategy modules in the MSc in Digital Marketing Communications.

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- Charles Thiede – CEO – **Zapnito**

2. What is community based marketing (CBM) in B2B?

Account Based Marketing or "ABM" is a widely understood discipline in B2B marketing.

But what about Community Based Marketing or "CBM"?

First, we need to define "community" in a B2B context:

> **B2B Community: definition**
>
> *A B2B community is a group of professionals drawn together by a shared interest and held together over time by mutual support or benefit.*

The word 'community' suggests connectedness, togetherness, people joining in and becoming something bigger than the sum of their parts.

In the case of B2B *marketing* these communities are a) professionally-focused and b) serve a marketing purpose.

So, CBM for B2B marketing is defined as follows:

> **Community Based Marketing (CBM): definition for B2B**
>
> *Community-Based Marketing (CBM) brings professionals together around a shared practice or area of expertise to create closer, and more valuable, relationships with prospects and customers.*

3. Why now is the time for community based marketing

There are signs that traditional B2B marketing tactics are getting 'stale' and need a rethink:

"I firmly believe that Community Based Marketing is the only future growth channel for B2B companies in the next few years. Traditional marketing has grown stale and buyers are simply tuning out. The ability to successfully acquire customers is growing more expensive but resulting in diminishing returns.

"A community based approach flips traditional marketing on its head though because instead of pushing out messages, you are drawing in people based on their genuine interests.

"Successful B2B companies going forward will be those where marketers can engage with communities in authentic and value-creating ways aligned with the interests and values of these communities."

Mark Birch, Founder – DEVBIZOPS and author of "Community-In-a-Box: How to Build Event-Driven Professional Communities".

Online communities are nothing new of course. On the Guild blog we published a timeline of digital communities stretching back to the 1970s:

Figure 1: The evolution of online communities – a timeline
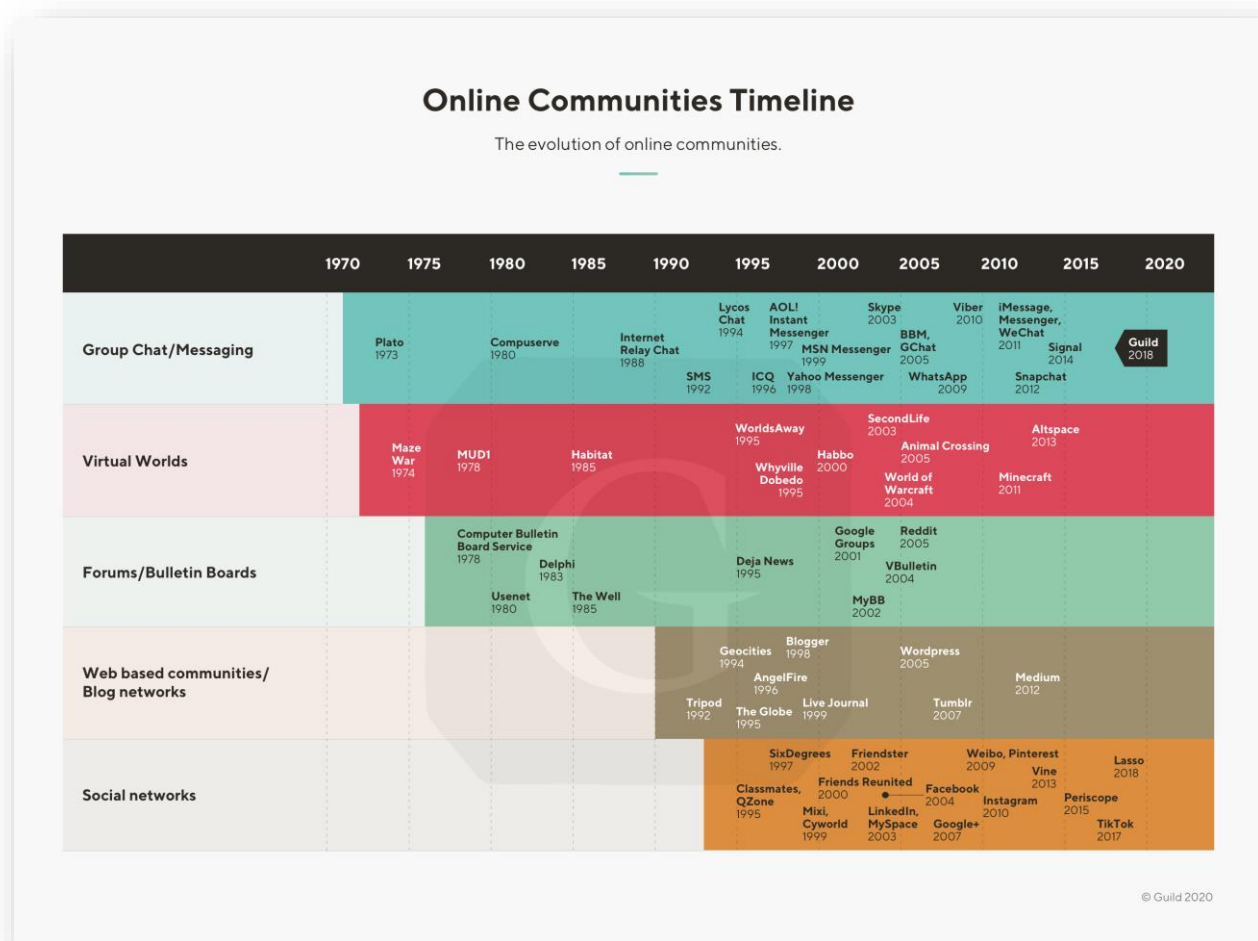
Source: Guild[1]

The name of our own platform, Guild, deliberately refers back to professional communities from the medieval times.

So why have communities made such a comeback?

Why are VCs getting all excited about 'community' as a hot area to invest in?

There are three main reasons:

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[1] https://guild.co/blog/what-is-online-community/

3.1 The rise of the "passion economy" and digital transformation in B2B

The 'gig economy' is well known. But there is a variation on this which applies much more to B2B, professional services and the knowledge economy. This article from Andreessen Horowitz explains The Passion Economy and the Future of Work. [2]

Platforms like Patreon and Substack are allowing professionals to monetise their individual expertise and, as a result, a huge number of micro-businesses are springing up. These are all centred around niche professional, or semi-professional, communities.

Larger organisations, undergoing digital transformation, are getting used to ways of working that are less hierarchical and monolithic and more networked, more part of an ecosystem, more 'hub and spoke', more agile. Traditional command and control approaches are breaking up to be replaced by fluid communities of interest.

Whether it is micro-businesses or large corporations, then, the future of work is going to be more about professional networks and communities that cut across traditional business hierarchies.

3.2 The impact of Coronavirus

COVID-19 has forced us to distance ourselves from one another. We have been alienated and hidden behind masks. We have been shut inside and unable to take part fully in social activities like sport, music, eating out and travel.

The result is a big increase in the desire for a sense of belonging, of connection, of a sense of self as part of a group. Much of this is played out through family bonds, or a rediscovery of local community, and digital ways to stay in touch with friends and loved ones.

[2] https://a16z.com/2019/10/08/passion-economy/

Source: Nathan Dumlao[3]

But it applies professionally too. We have learned new virtual ways to communicate and collaborate with our colleagues and customers but we also want to be connected to our professional peers – to learn and share, to give and receive support and encouragement, to help each other out. On Guild we saw a 120% increase in messaging activity during lockdown.[4]

As we go into a period of great economic uncertainty, with higher levels of redundancy and unemployment, we know that professional networking and tapping into our professional communities is more important than ever.[5]

3.3 Saturation and waning effectiveness in other B2B marketing channels

The final factor in the rise of CBM is that it is just getting much harder to cut through in existing marketing channels. There's so much noise. So many webinars, ebooks, white papers, email newsletters, InMails, events, podcasts, blogs, social media…

Tomasz Tungaz, VC at Redpoint, wrote about the rising costs of customer acquisition as follows:

"The costs of customer acquisition have risen. Whether it's Facebook ads, LinkedIn ads, Google search engine marketing and retargeting, email marketing, or outbound calling, all of these channels bear some hallmarks of saturation.

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[3] Photo by Nathan Dumlao on Unsplash
[4] https://guild.co/blog/professional-messaging-soars-during-lockdown/
[5] https://guild.co/blog/how-to-use-guild-for-professional-networking-and-personal-brand-building/

Community Based Marketing (CBM)

"Response rates are declining, depressing conversion rates, and raising the cost of customer acquisition. The surge of venture capital in the last five years worsens this predicament."

If you can create a more emotional bond and some reciprocity with your prospects and customers through effective CBM, then you have a much better chance of getting their attention, their action, and their loyalty.

> **❝**
>
> **Which countries or sectors are forging ahead with Community Based Marketing?**
>
> *A few companies have been successful in recent years building thriving communities, and that has spurred other companies into exploring how to use community in the context of B2B marketing.*
>
> *Many technology companies in the open source space were early adopters of the community model of marketing. Then bigger companies such as Salesforce got into the arena by building out Trailhead.*
>
> *It is not a country by country growth curve then, but rather the tech industry globally taking the lead, and other industries will begin to dabble into community-based marketing.*
> Mark Birch – Founder – DEVBIZOPS and author of 'Community-In-a-Box: How to Build Event-Driven Professional Communities'
>
> *It is a movement that is breaking beyond the confines of the few industry associations and specialty B2B media and events companies who drove this model in the past.*
>
> *There are a few emerging with a community-centric view of themselves, such as Arizent, Questex, Wellesley Information Services/SAPInsider etc.*
> Anthea Stratigos Co-founder & CEO of Outsell

Now is the time, where almost every B2B marketer is following the *same* playbook, to develop a *new* play. And CBM can be that play.

4. Where CBM fits into the B2B marketing funnel

The diagram below shows a classic marketing and sales funnel moving from awareness through interest and desire to the point of action, or sale, and into customer loyalty and advocacy post-conversion.

Figure 3: Community Based Marketing in the marketing funnel
– where community plays hardest

Communities in B2C marketing can be very successful when they are broad and shallow. They might have tens, even hundreds, of thousands of individuals in a community which is broadly defined and has only light engagement. For example, these Facebook branded communities from Adidas and Red Bull:

Figure 4: Examples of B2C marketing communities on Facebook Groups and Pages
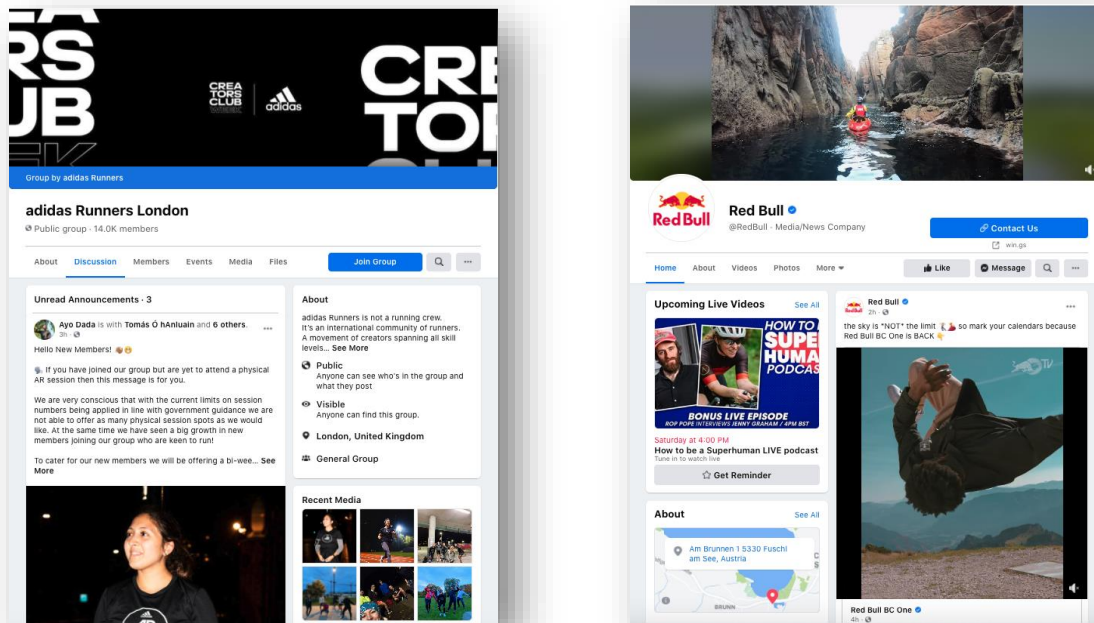
Source: Adidas and Red Bull Facebook Group and Facebook Page B2C communities

In B2B marketing, however, relationships are typically significantly **lower in volume but much higher in value**. This means that most **B2B communities are narrower and deeper**.

At the 'Awareness' top end of the marketing funnel you will typically have publicly accessible content, albeit aimed at a particular B2B audience, supported and augmented with various forms of paid media and marketing. You want this awareness-building to turn into interest from potential customers who you can then qualify (e.g. using lead scoring) into prospects of varying potential value and influence.

Figure 5: B2B marketing communities are typically much narrower and deeper, although this successful B2B community for engineers has >1million members
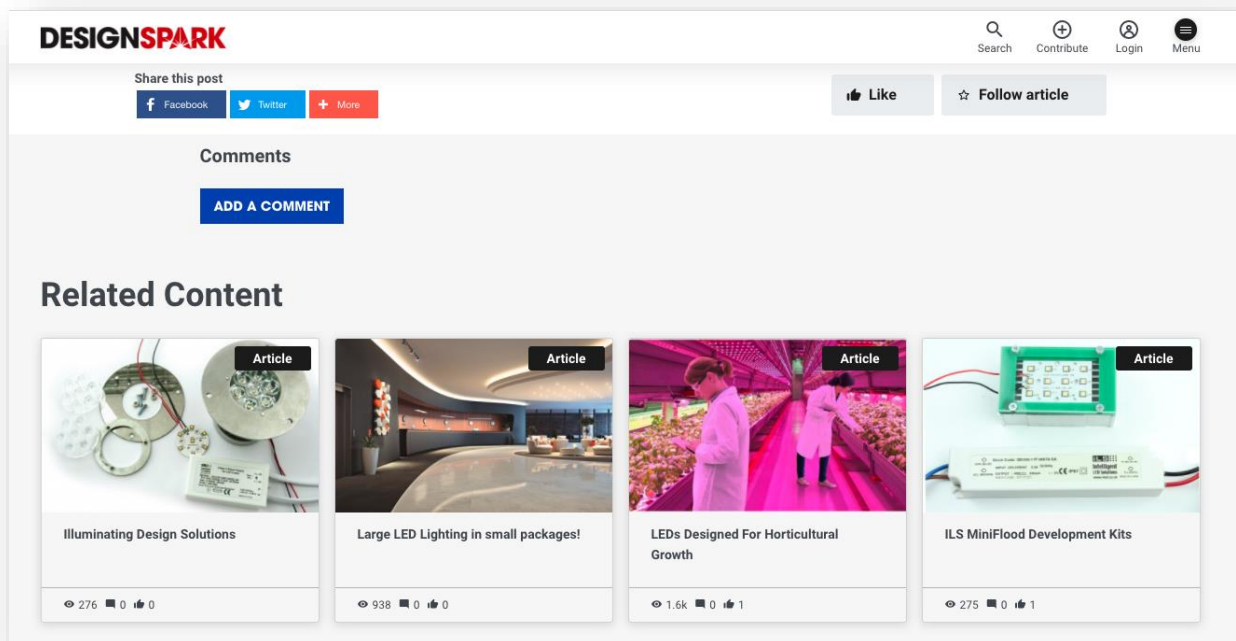
Source: RS Components Design Spark Community

Interest, Consideration and Desire

The Interest/Consideration/Desire stages are perfectly suited to Community Based Marketing.

You might have groups that are 10s, 100s, possibly 1000s, in size at this stage broken up by topic, interest area, geography, job function, seniority etc. It's important that groups are big enough to have natural momentum, but not so big as to become too noisy or anonymous in feel.

You now have the chance to further engage with prospects who have shown an interest in what you offer – enough to join your community – and build their own conviction that you have the expertise, authority, credibility and reputation in the market to be selected as a supplier when the time is right.

Figure 6: B2B marketing communities, like this one on Guild for a professional services business, work well at the consideration stages
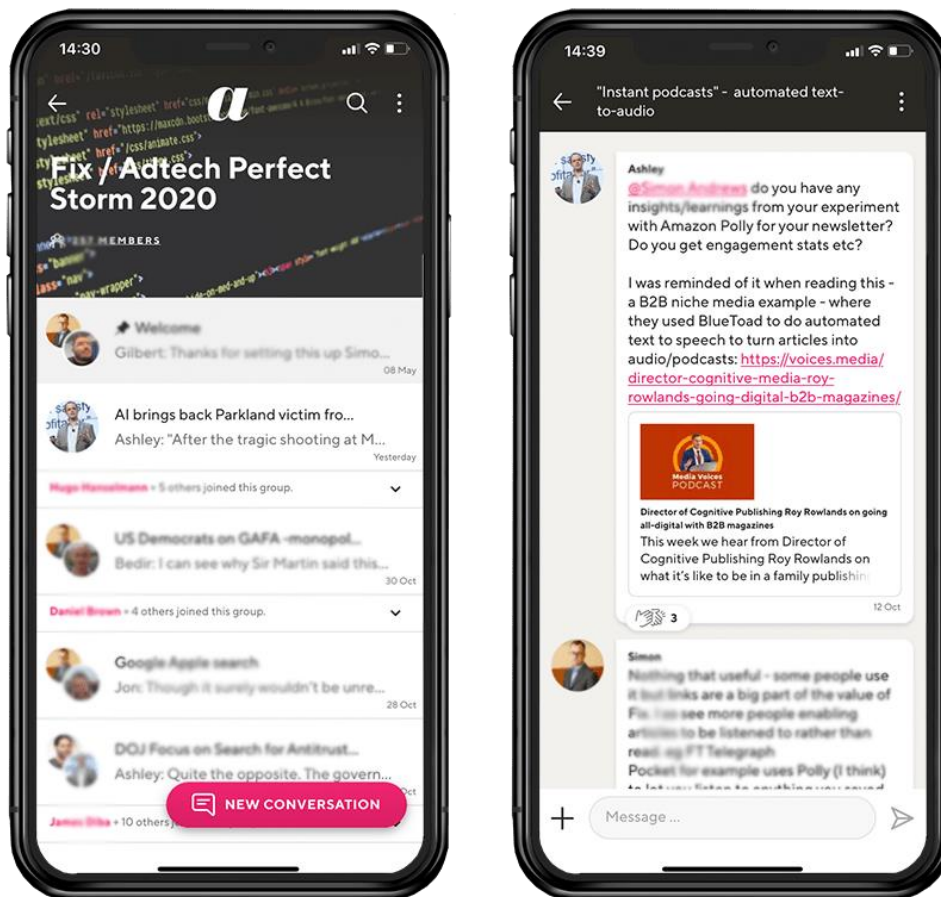
Source: Fix / AdTech Perfect Storm B2B community on Guild[6]

Loyalty and Advocacy

Sales and marketing can be too focused on customer acquisition when much of the value, and profit, particularly in B2B and professional services, comes from loyal customers that stick with you over longer periods of time. **Customer advocacy leads to referrals: a very effective and low-cost form of awareness and new customer acquisition.**

Community based marketing can be used to increase loyalty and customer advocacy by super-serving key accounts. They might exist only within a single

[6] https://guild.co/blog/adtech-perfect-storm-community-case-study/

Community Based Marketing (CBM)

key account that is valuable enough to you to justify providing 'concierge' levels of service and support.

Another option is to create broader customer communities where members get value from each other and you gain insight into their issues and challenges: this is fantastic market insight to improve and prioritise the development of your product, services or customer experience.

5. The business case for community based marketing

Successful community building brings many benefits – see the Case Studies section for examples. Often ROI is assessed in relation to the following:

5.1 Engagement to improve retention / reduce churn

For any B2B business which has subscribers, members, learners, attendees, or regular users, it is clearly important to increase retention and yield and decrease churn or downgrades.

Professional membership organisations, B2B media and events business, SaaS technology companies, professional training and education establishments all have this in common.

If you can create a community which your customers engage in, get value from, and want to stay part of, then you should be able to measure the impact on retention, or churn, rates. Even if that is simply by asking members of your community if/how their belonging to the group has impacted their commercial relationship with you.

5.2 Thought leadership to drive inbound leads

B2B marketers are very accustomed to thought leadership as a marketing approach. Businesses that are rich in expertise, knowledge and intellectual property – where what is ultimately being sold is often an intangible IP asset like advice – are well suited to thought leadership.

By showcasing your expertise, you hope to gain awareness with your target market and use content to further persuade prospects that you know your subject area better than others and are the obvious choice to turn to when the need arises.

A community of expertise, centred around your thought leadership, and hosted by your organisation, puts you at the centre of your sector and

influential players in it. You should be able to track new leads that come from this community, or existing leads that have been successfully nurtured, or accelerated, because of the community.

5.3 Premium customer service for top customers

Some customers, or even prospects, are more valuable than others. Not just financially but perhaps because of their influence or the prestige of their brand and how that helps you sell to other prospects. These customers are worth 'super-serving' – looking after in a concierge, or 'velvet glove', manner that shows them just how much you care and impresses them with your progressive use of community to add value to your relationship with them.

It might be a single large customer, like a key account, or it might be a cluster of customers who have a lot in common and would benefit from access to each other, facilitated by you. These groups are likely to be smaller, and more intimate, than communities of thought leadership as above.

You can measure the ROI of this form of community based marketing through customer satisfaction (e.g. Net Promoter Score), the resulting advocacy or recommendations you get, and growth in the account size e.g. if you get new briefs or projects that you find out about because of the group(s) you are running.

These 'high touch' customer communities also help you defend and justify premium pricing for your product or services and support a prestige brand positioning if you have one.

5.4 Market / customer insight

There are all sorts of ways, both qualitative and quantitative, for B2B marketers to understand their prospects and customers. This is important to refine your marketing and messaging as well as to inform and prioritise the development of your product or service.

Marketers rightly spend a lot of time, and money, on really trying to get under the skin of what their customers want, what they'll want in the future, and how to articulate the ways in which your product/service meets those needs. What better way to get this insight than to hear it direct from your customers' mouths? Particularly when it is natural, unprompted, honest conversations, questions and answers, that reveal the real needs and wants of your customers using the language that they best understand and will therefore most likely resonate in any marketing you do.

Communities based around conversations that focus on a professional area of practice or interest are goldmines for such market and customer insight. The ROI will come from you doing better marketing, making the best decisions about your product/service development, and even just surfacing unmet needs that you can easily convert to business. As one Guild customer noted, "*We just won a £80k consulting deal from a question asked in our Guild group.*"

6. Success factors in community based marketing

What are the criteria for successful CBM in B2B marketing?

6.1 Your community needs a clear purpose

Prospective members of your community need to know exactly why they should join. A professionals' time and attention is precious. They will want to invest in things that are worthwhile to them.

Equally you only want members in your community who are relevant, interested and engaged to ensure focused and valuable discussions. So, you must be very clear about what the community is for and why it exists. Communicate this to members and stick to your purpose.

This is why every Guild group must have a stated purpose.

> ❝
>
> **The importance of a community purpose**
>
> *It's important to have a single clear purpose – too often every objective you can think of is stuffed into the reason for having a community. Sometimes you cannot squash lead gen and loyalty and a need for research in one wee group of people. Also, beware of changing objectives as the new CMO comes in and direction is changed leaving the community itself a bit adrift.*
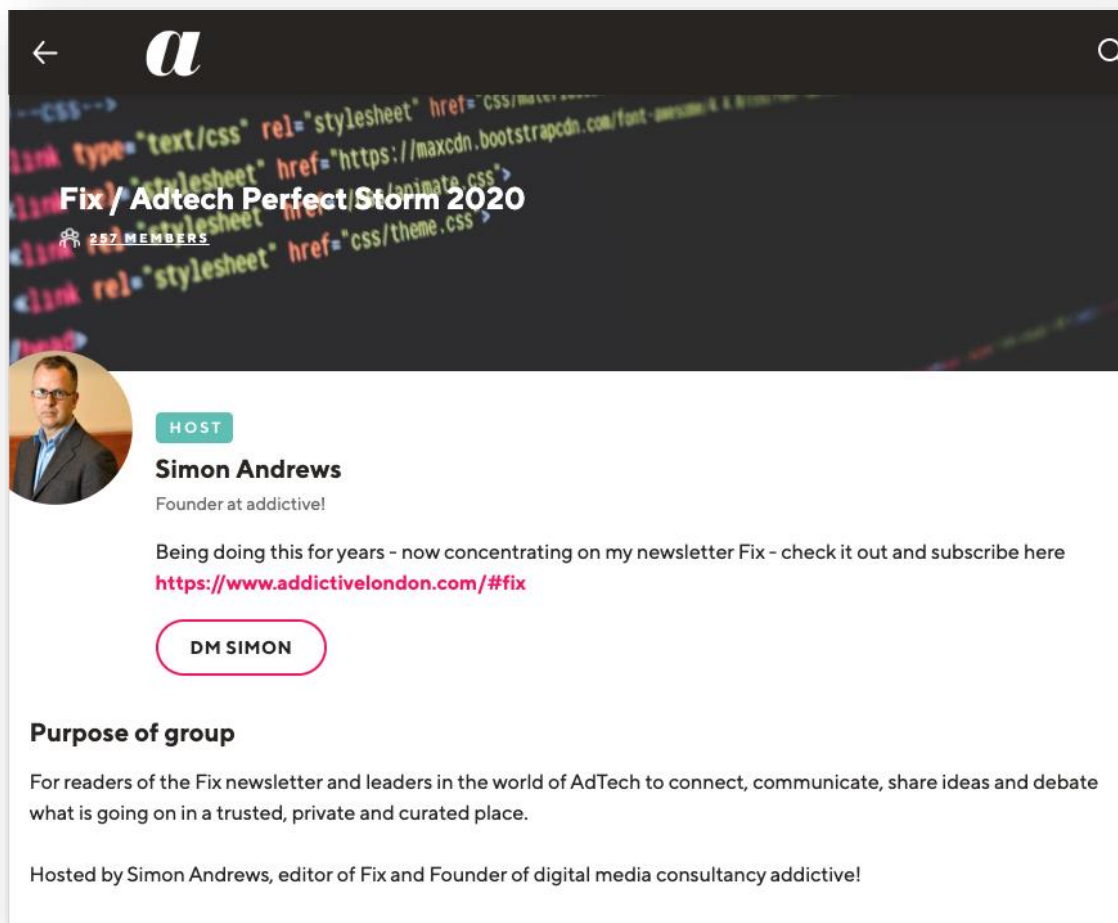> Katy Howell, CEO, Immediate Future
>
> *Against a background of data overload, communities that are just talking shops are going to struggle in the future. Groups need a purpose beyond chat.*
> James Farmer – Co-Founder – B2B Marketing

Figure 7: B2B marketing communities, like this one on Guild, clearly articulate their purpose and provide value for members

Source: Fix / AdTech Perfect Storm B2B community on Guild[7]

6.2 Objective and metric setting

You need to be clear on the business objectives behind your investment in community and the metrics you'll use to measure whether your community is delivering value.

The most common metrics for communities are member growth and engagement. Whilst helpful indicators of community health, they lack any direct connection to business outcomes.

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[7] https://guild.co/blog/adtech-perfect-storm-community-case-study/

Community Based Marketing (CBM)

There are many specific, tactical, metrics around community but broader business objectives often include:

- **Improved conversion rates to sale** – through a closer customer experience and deeper relationship with a brand and business which improves perceptions, credibility, trust, purchase intent, brand favourability etc.
- **Improved product / service development** – through the conversations in a community, businesses can more accurately identify and address customer 'pain and passion points' as well as their needs.
- **Improved marketing effectiveness** – not just higher response and engagement rates from those in your community, but also better insights into marketing messaging and positioning by listening to what your community is saying (and how they are saying it).
- **Reduced churn + higher yield** – customers are more likely to stay as customers, and spend more, if they are engaged in your community and getting value from it.
- **Reduced costs to serve** - reducing customer service costs by moving to a one-to-many and self-service model. Capture knowledge and support information via your community and make it available to others.

> "
>
> **The importance of bridging metrics in community based marketing**
>
> *A better way to measure the value of a community is to work backwards from desired business outcomes and use bridging metrics to tie business metrics to direct usage and engagement in community.*
>
> *For example, a community might be built for the purposes of sharing and amplifying internal technical knowledge. If the business outcome is faster product releases, a bridge metric might be support tickets raised which ties back to number of answered posts on the knowledge forum.*
>
> Mark Birch – Founder – DEVBIZOPS and author of 'Community-In-a-Box: How to Build Event-Driven Professional Communities'

6.3 Small can be good!

Do you really need to chase big community numbers to show success?

It could be a dangerous route, particularly in B2B where it is more about value than volume, where quality usually counts more than quantity.

In fact, communities can weaken, fragment or drift if they get too large. Professor Robin Dunbar, who sits on the Guild Advisory Board, is famous for the 'Dunbar number', of ~150, showing we cannot truly know more people than that.

Communities for B2B marketing are likely to be 10s, 100s, possibly 1,000s, but very few are larger.

Guild's model for professional networking in the digital age[8] suggests group sizes between 15–1,500 are likely to be optimal. Too many LinkedIn Groups or Slack communities are overwhelmingly large, impersonal, or noisy so don't add real value or create meaningful connections.

[8] https://guild.co/blog/a-model-for-professional-networking-in-the-digital-age/

"
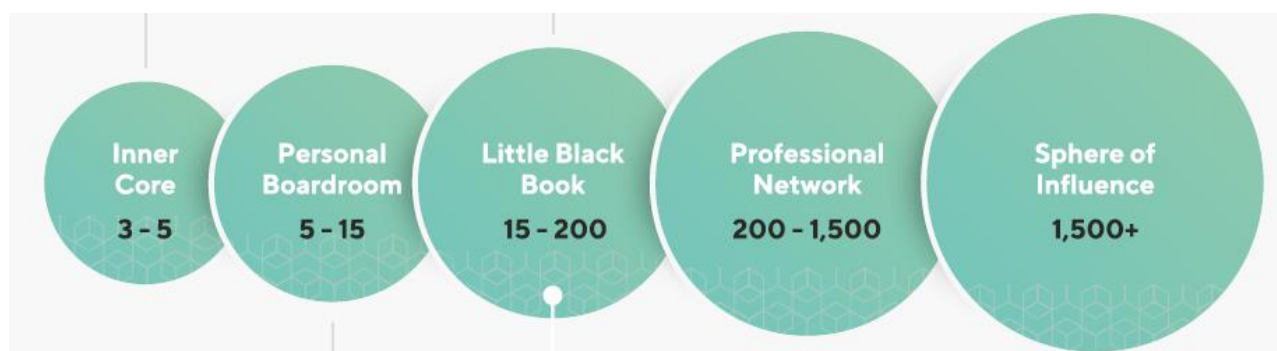
How big is too big in B2B communities?

A community would not be considered too big if mutual benefits and focused norms are occurring. This might be by its active participants or bystanders benefitting from the interactions. However, the larger the mass of people becomes, the more likely frictions between beliefs and set positions occur. This leads naturally to sub-communities as like-minded or otherwise similar people group together.
Blaise Grimes-Viort – Blaise GV Consulting

Size doesn't matter – it depends on the community you want. Large communities like Salesforce: Trailblazer or Atlassian work because it answers a need. It is focused on members being able to dip in and out with core editorial support, elite volunteers and a network of mechanisms to support growth and engagement. However, for more senior or topic led communities you want depth. A place in which to share meaningful content, discuss challenges and build relationships with peers. These are often more successful in small groups of 50 – 100 in my view.
Katy Howell – CEO – Immediate Future

Some communities are quite small and some are larger (Sermo, GlobalSpec, CEB (now Gartner) or Procurement Leaders (now World50) – it's about the relevance and philosophy of the group and whether it's higher end or mainstream.
Anthea Stratigos – Co-founder & CEO – Outsell

Stack Overflow is an example of a community that is many millions of software developers. There are aspects of the Stack Overflow community that are unwieldy and can lead to negative experiences. Most communities from a B2B marketing standpoint will tend to be much smaller and manageable.
Mark Birch – Founder – DEVBIZOPS and author of 'Community-In-a-Box: How to Build Event-Driven Professional Communities'

6.4 The importance of a community leader/manager/builder

Whatever you call the role – community builder, leader, group host, admin, community manager - it is vital to have a 'go to' person for any member of the group. Otherwise it is like having a dinner party with no host, or an event with no-one to lead it.

Research by Commsor[9] in October 2020 found that community managers/leaders submitted over 38 different job titles and reported wildly differing salaries – from $25,000 to $176,000. 'Community Manager' was the most popular job title with 40% of respondents using that role description.

> ❝
>
> **Who is best placed to lead and manage a B2B community?**
>
> *It's rarely a specific job title, more a type of person who makes the best community leader or community manager. Broadly, content/editorial teams rarely have the right blend of skills, people with a comms or PR background often make excellent community managers. Marketers are generally better at the planning, analytics and alignment of community to business goals.*
>
> *Offering community strategy and management or 'Community as a Service' (CaaS) to clients is going to be an interesting battleground for agencies and consultants. I'd like to think that PR and communications agencies and professionals could be quicker off the mark this time. They certainly have the skills, they should be able to do CBM well and can create new income streams for themselves. Hopefully the word 'marketing' doesn't put up the barriers.*
>
> **Michelle Goodall – Head of Marketing – Guild**
>
> *I often compare the work of community builders to that of startup entrepreneurs because in both cases, you need to be scrappy and experimental and innovative.*
> **Mark Birch – Founder – DEVBIZOPS and author of 'Community-In-a-Box: How to Build Event-Driven Professional Communities'**

[9] https://the.community.club/alex/community-job-survey-results-511h

"

Who is best placed to lead and manage a B2B community?

Discussions don't just happen out of thin air, they require a good community chair/manager with the right skillset to facilitate executive level discussion and information sharing, and make everyone feel like that are part of something bigger than what they do back on the job. Ideally, they too are peers.
Anthea Stratigos – Co-founder & CEO – Outsell

Marketing tends to have a lot of the resources & expertise that Community needs, especially in the early stages when you're getting off the ground. Though, I think Community should be cross-functional by nature, as you are in a unique position to build 1:1 relationships with customers, prospects, partners, etc. Community is able to keep a finger on the pulse of the market & your target audience.
Dominique Farrar – Community & Communications Lead – Spendesk & CFO Connect

When starting out, it can be easier for community to report to marketing or support directly, but in the long term it should be a standalone team that reports to the executive level. Community has the ability to drastically augment how businesses operate fundamentally.

From a sales perspective, companies can start educating their target buyers much earlier by being involved with them indirectly early on.

Product teams can get direct insight from their customers about what is working well, and what isn't.

Marketing can participate in authentic conversations with their audience and learn to build relationships with the right people as the right time.
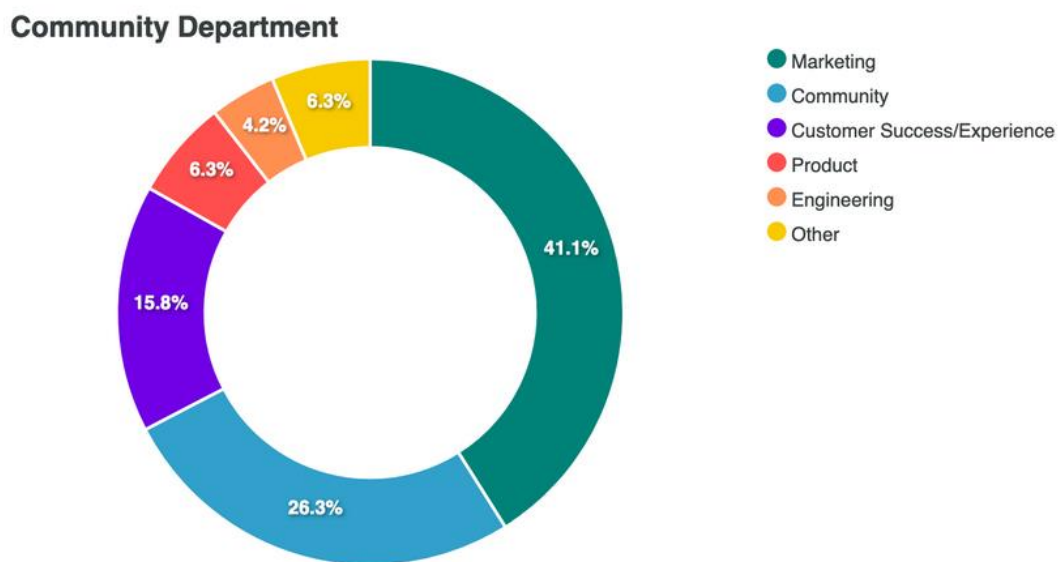Mac Reddin – Co-founder & CEO – Commsor

A community manager needs to have the basics – writing, analytics, organisation, a bit of tech understanding. But they also need softer skills that are critical to this role and often undervalued: empathy, an understanding of behavioural science and psychology, resilience, knowing when to step back and when to step in, and a decent sense of humour.

In a B2B community, hosts can be senior, influential and credible figures, but rarely a junior marketing or sales exec for example. Poor community management skills will never result in a thriving community. Organisational reputation is at stake, so people with good 'reputational antennae' make excellent community managers.

Community leaders should have expertise in the special interest areas of the group, should lead by example in how they engage with the community, and should be supportive, welcoming and encouraging, particularly to new joiners.

The Commsor research highlighted that 41% of community leaders report into the marketing team and 26% report directly into the executive team.

Figure 9: 41% of community managers report in to Marketing but 26% report directly into an executive Community role

Community Department

- Marketing — 41.1%
- Community — 26.3%
- Customer Success/Experience — 15.8%
- Product — 6.3%
- Engineering — 4.2%
- Other — 6.3%

Source: The Community Job Survey 2020 – Commsor[10]

[10] https://the.community.club/alex/community-job-survey-results-511h

Community Based Marketing (CBM)

Community expert and author Mark Birch talks about resilience, the danger of under-resourcing your community and the importance of creating a wider community management team for larger communities:

"It is critical that communities are led and managed by people with the passion for helping others, have an innate interest in the subject matter of the community, are stubbornly resilient, and possess a growth mindset. If you do not have people that have that foundation, the community is not going to succeed.

"I also fundamentally believe communities thrive when managed by a team. Community management is a very draining role, and many people experience burnout within a couple of years. Never cut corners when it comes to staffing a community, bring on a few people not just to support the community, but to support each other."

6.5 Curate, not dictate

The most successful communities feel like they are 'owned' by the community itself. To the point that really strong communities, just like other groups and tribes, will police and defend themselves both internally and to outsiders.

To create this dynamic, community managers should not dictate to the group or dominate the conversation, and it is not an opportunity for broadcast/one-way communications.

It is important to engage and lead by example, but the secret is to create the right environment over time, with the right people, for the community's members to step forwards and volunteer their own ideas, information, questions and advice.

6.6 Choose the right technology platform

In truth, a great community proposition and a brilliant community leader is much more important than the technology you choose. Some successful B2B communities still run off email lists!

But choosing the right platform for your professional community increases your chances of success. Just as choosing the wrong one can make it hard.

Switching platforms is never easy and there is the inevitable discussion about whether community software should be decided by the CMO, CTO or digital team.

Flying Trumpets Founder Susanna Kempe echoes what all the report contributors said – that the community strategy is more important than the technology choice:

"Far too many businesses think that community building is about choosing a good bit of tech and leaving it to the CTO or digital team to plan and manage. This should be part of the CMO's integrated marketing strategy."

As a technology platform ourselves, we have strong opinions about what platforms work hardest to develop communities that can be sustained and deliver value. Controversially for the many Slack aficionados, for example, we think Slack is not designed for communities[11], and believe WhatsApp is a very risky choice for B2B.[12]

As well as the more established enterprise level community platforms that cost tens, or hundreds of thousands of dollars per year to licence, there is open source software and ready-to-go mobile first platforms like Guild providing a risk-free and low entry cost option to get your B2B community off the ground.

There are also interesting community-based models developing for individuals. If you are a writer and want to monetise your newsletter then Substack is popular; if you are an artist or creator then Patreon might be for you.

6.7 Trust

You need trust for a community to thrive. You have to earn trust over time and it can quickly be lost. At Guild we believe that identity, with individuals being present as themselves with professional profiles, is important to create trust. Many messaging apps are moving towards secrecy and anonymity which can encourage disrespectful and unkind behaviours.

[11] https://guild.co/blog/slack-isnt-designed-for-communities-and-heres-why/
[12] https://guild.co/blog/10-dangers-of-using-whatsapp-for-business/

Guidelines are important for communities to set expectations around permitted behaviours and you should be seen to enforce these guidelines. You need to act with integrity and speak with authenticity and do so over time.

6.8 Consistency and persistency

Consistency in a community works well. Such as regular days of the week for specific posts, for example, welcoming new members on a Friday or monthly Q&As/AMAs with expert guests. Creating Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for response times to community questions or issues is another important consistency KPI.

Sudden surges of activity, or prolonged periods of inactivity, suggest to members of your group that perhaps this is something only occasionally on your mind rather than central to what you do. At Guild, as a guideline, we suggest that group hosts with <3,000 members set aside 15 minutes a day for their group(s), which is usually enough for even the larger B2B communities as they don't have the same spam issues that Facebook and LinkedIn groups often have.

All the most powerful aspects of a community – a sense of belonging, trust, reciprocity, stored knowledge and wisdom, valuable and responsive connections – take time to build. It is extremely hard to create a vibrant community overnight if it doesn't already exist.

It can take a while for any group to 'warm up' and 'open up'. This is particularly true in B2B, where individuals represent their employing organisations and have their personal professional reputation to consider and protect.

You need to be prepared to be persistent and invest in community over the medium-long term to build it into something truly valuable for you and its members.

6.9 Community at the core, not peripheral

If you think of 'community' as a project, initiative, or campaign, then it will likely fail. A bit like 'culture' at work, community works best when it is felt, lived and breathed by an organisation, particularly its leaders. It needs to be embedded across the business and infuse all aspects of it.

Community exists in-person and digitally – a combination of the two is best. Ultimately community, in the context of B2B marketing, is about wanting to stay close to your market and your customers. Not only is that central to any marketer's role but is what those leading the business should care most about.

6.10 Community building is an (undervalued) skill

Whilst community building and management is not *that* hard or expensive, it would also be unfair to those who are really good at it not to recognise it as an area of distinct skill and expertise.

Katy Howell, CEO, Immediate Future made this point emphatically when we interviewed her:

"*A good community manager is somewhat of a unicorn. When you find them, hang on to them!*"

There are plenty of great content writers who can't do community management. There are sales and marketing professionals who you'd think would be good but aren't, there are passionate business leaders who think they should be able to do it but just don't 'get it'.

Great community builders are an unusual mixture of social, psychological, editorial, communication, commercial and sales skills. They intuitively know when to dive in and when to sit back. When to create and when to curate. When to gently moderate or when to take swift action.

Despite this it is widely acknowledged that community management is historically not something that businesses have wanted to pay for. It isn't a standard job or line in the budget. It isn't a service that many agencies actively sell to clients.

With the rise of CBM, this will change.

7. Case studies of CBM in B2B marketing

Some sectors are relatively mature in terms of Community Based Marketing. For example, many IT and technology businesses have unlocked value by creating customer service communities.

Some sectors have had very active, private communities of practice and academic forums for decades, such as research, healthcare and life sciences.

In this section we summarise examples of B2B communities of different sizes, maturity and different platforms. For more case studies and communities on Guild, please visit the case studies section on the website.[13]

7.1 Salesforce – Trailblazer

Salesforce's success isn't due purely to its software innovation. For the past 5+ years it has focused on developing an international community of >2 million members[14] who support each other, organise events, produce content, and are a critical part of Salesforce's global growth.

Salesforce's Trailblazer Community[15] is a global movement with groups in ~90 countries. 'Trailblazers' comprise all types of stakeholders including developers, partners, employees and customers. It's a B2B mega-community!
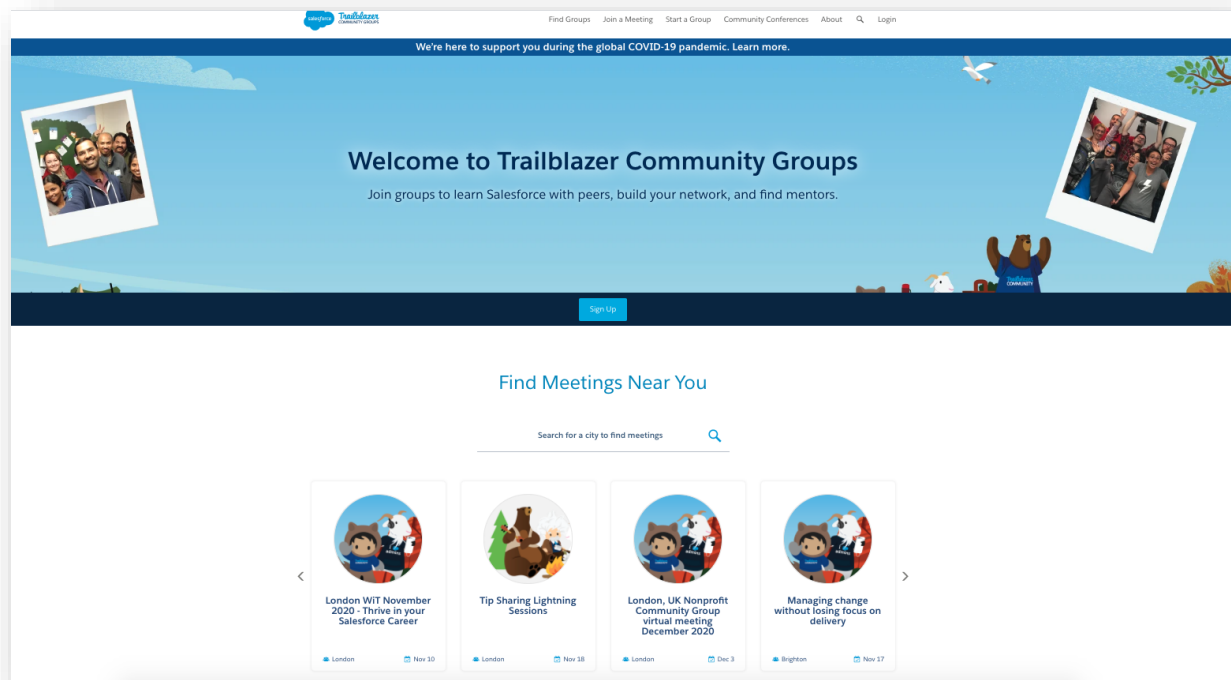
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[13] https://guild.co/blog/tag/case-studies/
[14] https://hbr.org/2020/01/when-community-becomes-your-competitive-advantage
[15] https://trailblazercommunitygroups.com/

Figure 10: Salesforce Trailblazer community members number >2 million members globally

Source: Salesforce Trailblazer Community Groups[16]

The communities and discussion are not solely limited to Salesforce technology. Whilst everything is centralised and Salesforce Community Cloud powers many of the communities, there are also separate communities on Guild, Twitter and Slack.

Salesforce is clear in its program terms that Trailblazer Community Groups are 'unofficial' and are led by people who are passionate about Salesforce[17]. Product support is understandably a key topic in many groups, and the Trailhead Academy delivers in-person and virtual learning experiences around the world. But the community members also discuss a broad scope of topics, such as diversity, career progression, charity and philanthropy.

Their annual "Dreamforce" conference and other regional events convene many community members, building relationships, and advancing

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[16] https://trailblazercommunitygroups.com/
[17] https://trailblazercommunitygroups.com/program-terms/

Community Based Marketing (CBM)

Salesforce's corporate agenda. But, the community ecosystem delivers year-round awareness, loyalty and retention, servicing value, market intelligence and delivers rich insights from its biggest fans and end users.

"Trailblazer works because it answers a need. It is focused on members being able to dip in and out with core editorial support, elite volunteers and a network of mechanisms to support growth and engagement."
Katy Howell – CEO – Immediate Future.

7.2 Arizent - Leaders

Rebranded from Source Media in early 2020, Arizent provides business-to-business digital marketing services and subscription information to senior level professionals in the financial, technology and healthcare sectors.

Arizent is developing a membership-based peer network called 'Arizent Leaders' to give members access to exclusive content and research whilst focusing on peer support in communities and collectively advancing common goals, like ESG and diversity.

In an ADWeek interview[18], Arizent's CEO Gemma Postlethwaite highlighted why B2B media are increasingly focusing on community to drive value and monetize their audiences - by treating them as something more than just 'readers' or 'subscribers':

"Traditional B2B media models are not meeting the evolving needs of companies marketing products and services to our audiences. Traditional advertising has become commoditized and intrusive to the learning experience of audiences. Allowing brands to play a more significant role in educating, supporting, and even honoring professionals, has significantly improved the outcomes for our brand partners.

"Over the long term, we expect that other thematic focus areas will coalesce into tightly-knit communities, where our members will rally around solving for these challenges. This is a very different model than segmenting the B2B marketplace into industry news brands, as it was done in the past."[19]

[18] https://www.adweek.com/media/qa-ceo-gemma-postlethwaite-sourcemedia-arizent-relaunch/
[19] https://www.adweek.com/media/qa-ceo-gemma-postlethwaite-sourcemedia-arizent-relaunch/

How B2B media can drive value from community is also highlighted in the article 'What is the ROI of online community for B2B?' [20]

Figure 11: Arizent announce the launch of 'Leaders' highlighting how B2B media moving towards community to drive value

Source: Arizent on Twitter[21]

[20] https://guild.co/blog/what-is-the-roi-of-online-community-for-B2B-media/
[21] https://twitter.com/arizent_co/status/1290662848549531649?s=20

7.3 Addictive – Fix AdTech / Perfect Storm community

This professional B2B community was launched on the Guild platform in spring 2020 when Covid-19 meant the cancellation of most B2B physical events. It has grown to a community of 250+ AdTech specialists. [22]

Highly respected digital consulting firm Addictive publishes the Fix newsletter each week, which is read by people at Google, Facebook, Snap and TikTok as well as many VCs, Brands & Agencies. Founder Simon Andrews convened the community on Guild from the newsletter and event, with industry experts discussing topics related to AdTech and the changes in the advertising industry, including 'cookie death' and IDFAs.

Communities are a natural and needed evolution of the content > newsletter > event model. One which membership organisations, media and publishing businesses, and increasingly professional service providers, consultants, agencies and vendors are opening up to. Simon explains:

"I am really focused on the 3Cs – Content, Community and Commerce – and building this Guild has been really useful in developing that thinking. I 100% subscribe to the 'Community Based Marketing' (CBM) movement. But to make it a success, you've got to understand that communities are so much more than a marketing tool.

"Convening people who are interested and highly engaged in a subject or industry is one of the most valuable things organisations and businesses can do. If you're clear about what the community is for, why it exists, who it's for and what value it generates… oh and you are willing to put the effort in to develop it and manage it properly, then the return on investment can be massive."

[22] https://guild.co/blog/adtech-perfect-storm-community-case-study/

Figure 12: Addictive's Fix AdTech / Perfect Storm Advertising and Digital community on Guild
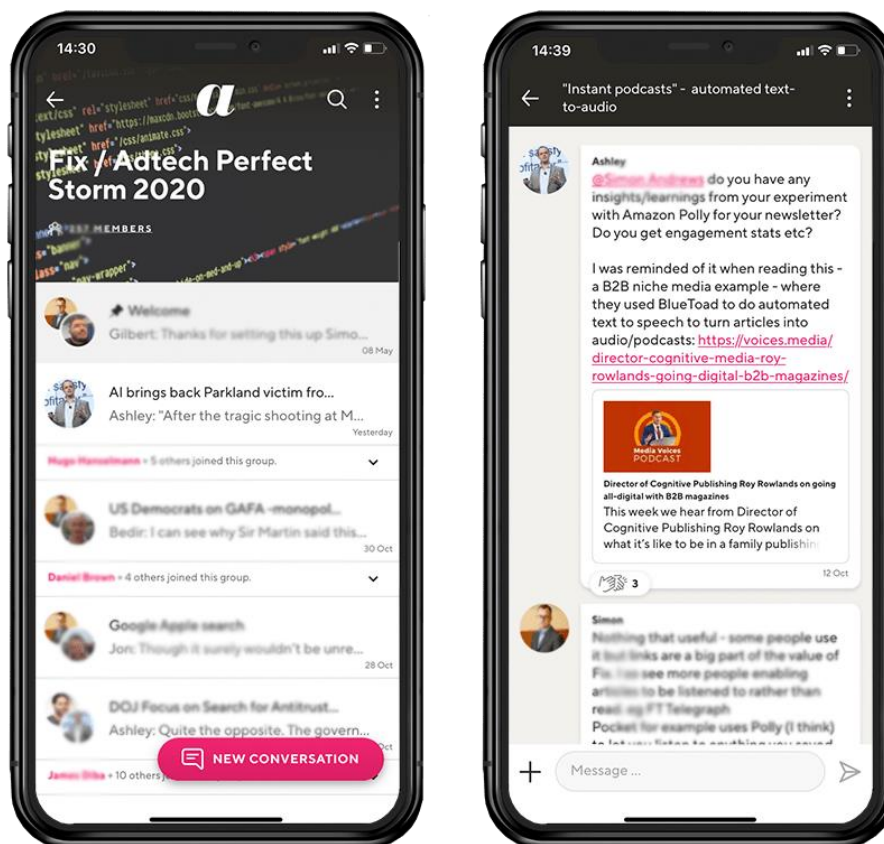
Source: Addictive / Guild [23]

7.4 B2B Marketing – Marketing Leaders

Publisher, media and events business B2B Marketing has set up and hosts a peer-support network of Chief Marketing Officers on Guild, to facilitate peer discussions about the challenges of running a marketing department.

The members are from many different companies across the whole of the UK. It's an active community of > 100 B2B marketing leaders. The community has meetups (in person or virtual) to help develop closer relationships.

[23] https://guild.co/blog/adtech-perfect-storm-community-case-study/

Communities like this provide subscriber and membership value for media businesses and positively impact renewals in a competitive sector.[24]

Figure 13: B2B Marketing's CMO Leaders community on Guild
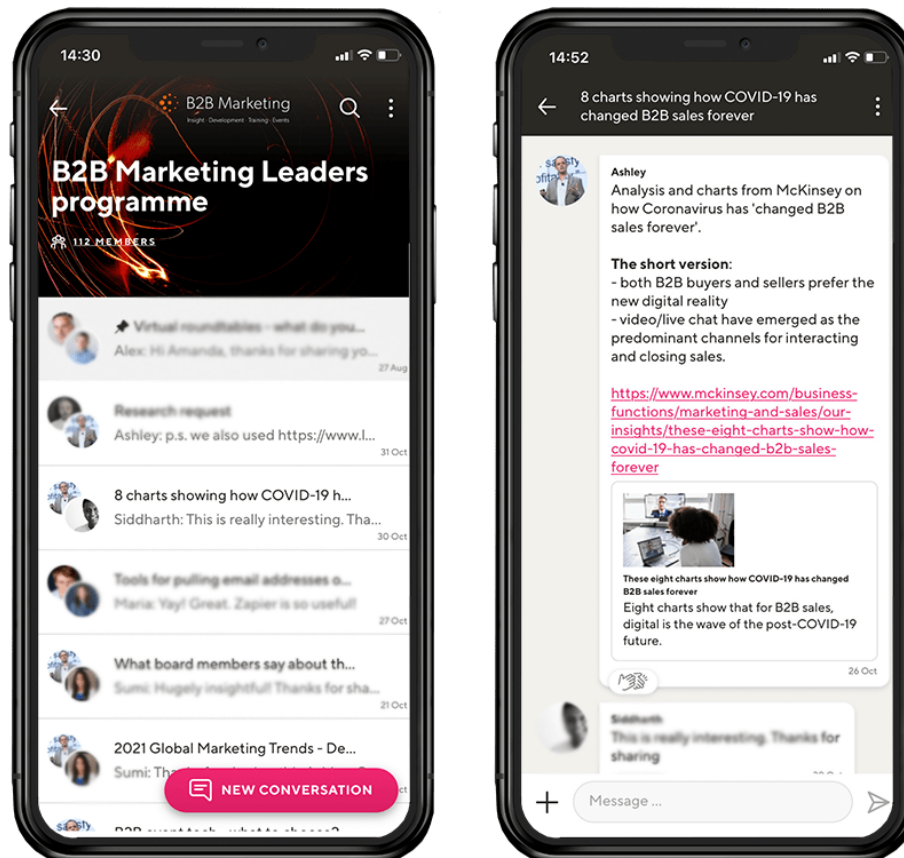
Source: B2B Marketing /Guild[25]

7.5 Sage City

Sage delivers software solutions globally to help organisations manage accounting and financials, operations, people, payroll, and payments. With such a large portfolio, it's important for Sage to meet customer expectations and provide omnichannel support globally.

Sage's online community has consolidated branding, messaging and customer support into an online forum they named 'Sage City'. They used

[24] https://guild.co/blog/cmo-peer-support-group-guild/
[25] https://guild.co/blog/cmo-peer-support-group-guild/

Telligent to create their support forums and have rolled out Sage City to a number of countries.

Whilst Sage City is primarily a servicing community, it does visibly highlight Sage's commitment to high levels of customer service, which is a key brand pillar. Communities like Sage City reduce the cost of customer service through this one-to-many communication model.

Sage City US also contains groups that are more aligned to marketing objectives, such as The Sage Accountants Network, Partner and Student groups.

Figure 14: Sage City – servicing through community
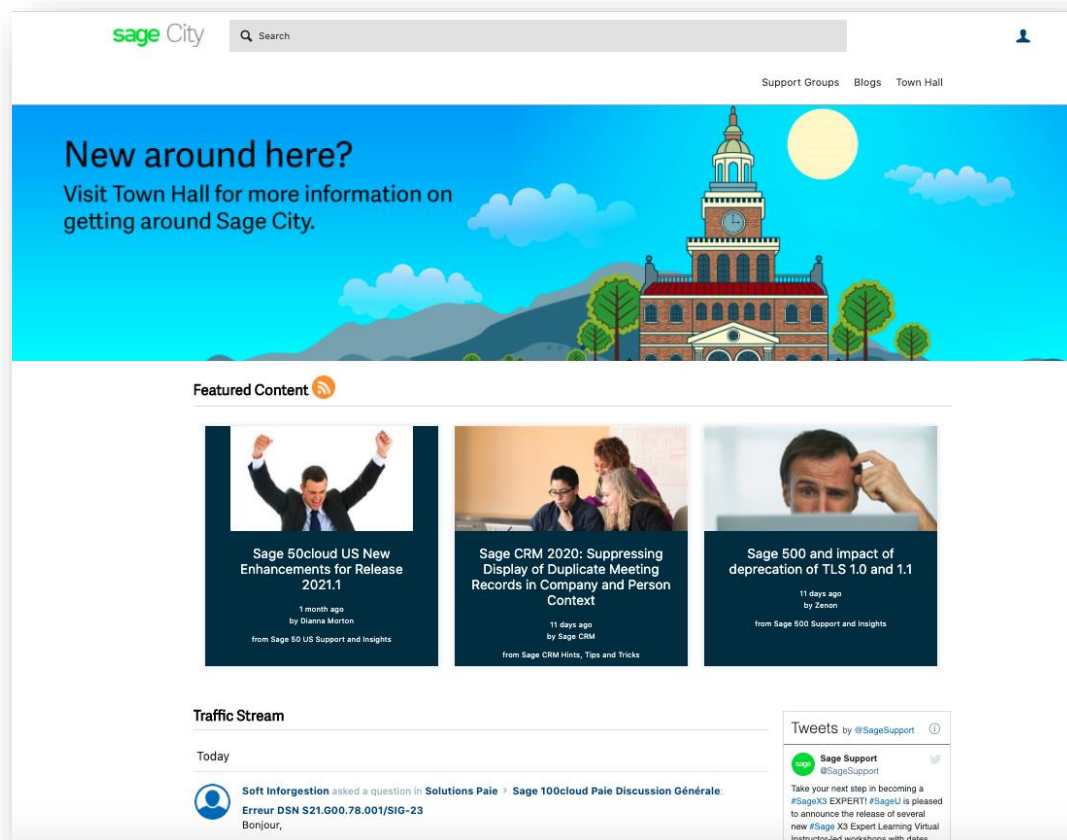
Source: Sage City[26]

[26] https://www.sagecity.com/

7.6 Enterprise Sales Forum

Enterprise Sales Forum was launched in 2014 as a professional community for sales professionals by report contributor and author Mark Birch. It now covers the globe across 12 chapters and over 25,000 B2B sales professionals and startup founders as a community to network, learn, and collaborate and drives its members to events.

It is not an owned or captive community run and managed by a company for marketing purposes, but a self-sustaining community funded by the community itself. This ensures independence in content and keeps the focus squarely on serving the needs of the community members first. It uses a combination of technologies rather than a single community platform.

Metrics are purely geared towards sign up and attendance of events and growth in membership. Regular member surveys gauge the value of the community by members.

Figure 15: Enterprise Sales Forum is a collaborative network of sales communities with chapters in the US, Canada, UK and Singapore
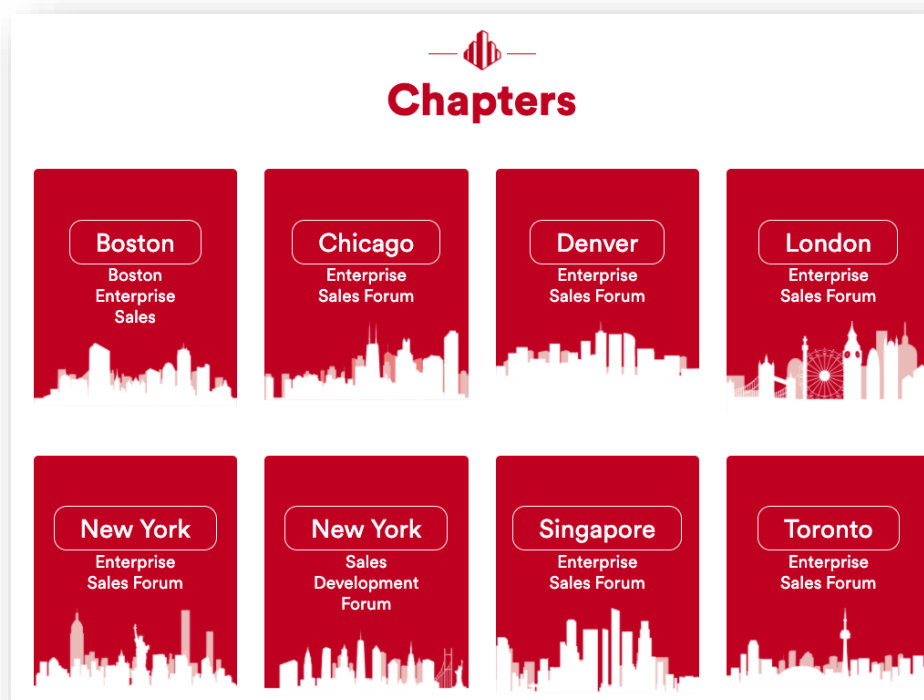
Source: Enterprise Sales Forum[27]

7.7 EFM events – IT Pack

The IT Pack from EFM Events was launched mid 2019 and delivers "the energy and knowledge of an IT Symposium" but there is significant content generated via the community which is hosted on Zapnito.

Currently US only, a team of four are responsible for the community that will eventually expand to Canada and other English-speaking countries. The goal is to provide a service that's of value to IT leaders and to eventually create revenue streams. Bri Bert, Marketing Director at EFM events states:

"The people that we currently have involved are getting value and sharing their successful business strategies and experiences with each other. If people aren't gaining knowledge and perspective while using it, it's going to be fruitless to continue."

As an evolving community, IT Pack, like many marketing-led communities, will ensure that any move towards monetisation doesn't devalue the community for its members.

Figure 13: IT Pack's IT community
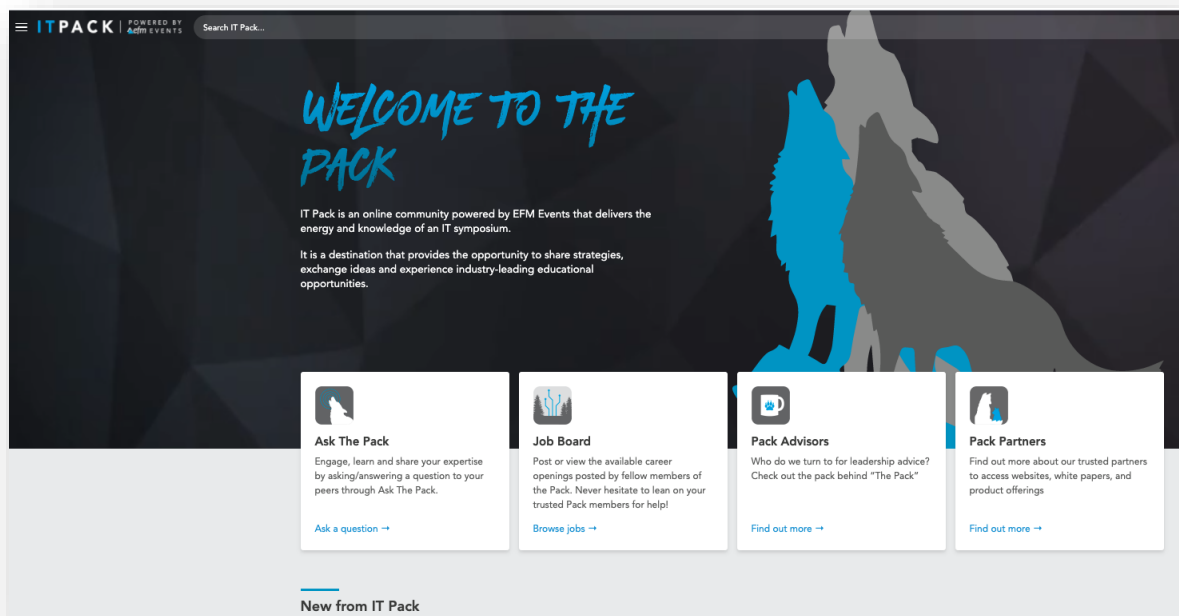
Source: IT Pack

7.8 Spendesk - CFO Connect

CFO Connect is a global community and resource hub for finance leaders at fast-growing companies from Fintech business Spendesk. The community, hosted on Slack, was set up shortly after Spendesk was launched in 2018.

CFO Connect hosts regular meet-ups in Europe & the U.S, discuss hot topics, share expert resources in the group and on a blog. It's run by a team of three members responsible for planning, onboarding, event planning, content creation, social media, community ops etc.

The core marketing objective is awareness and key KPIs are: membership growth, engagement, and reach (website & social). Dominique Farrar, Community & Communications Lead for Spendesk and CFO Connect highlights why they invested significantly in building a community:

"Like many things in the startup world, it started with a hypothesis — that community would be essential to building a great business & product.

"If we wanted to participate in building the future of finance, we would need to learn from, and be relevant to, the finance community. So, the initial criteria for success was really testing the appetite for community among finance leaders. And very quickly, that hypothesis was validated. Word of mouth continues to be a top referral source."

We asked Dominique about Spendesk's 'secret sauce' and what has made CFO Connect such a successful B2B community:

"Instead of our community being focused on a specific business outcome (like leads or revenue), our community is 100% focused on providing value to our members, whether they are prospects, customers, or none of the above.

"We can focus on creating a high-quality experience for our members, which builds trust - an essential element of community building. It's very difficult to gain and very easy to lose."

Figure 14: CFO Connect finance leaders community on Slack
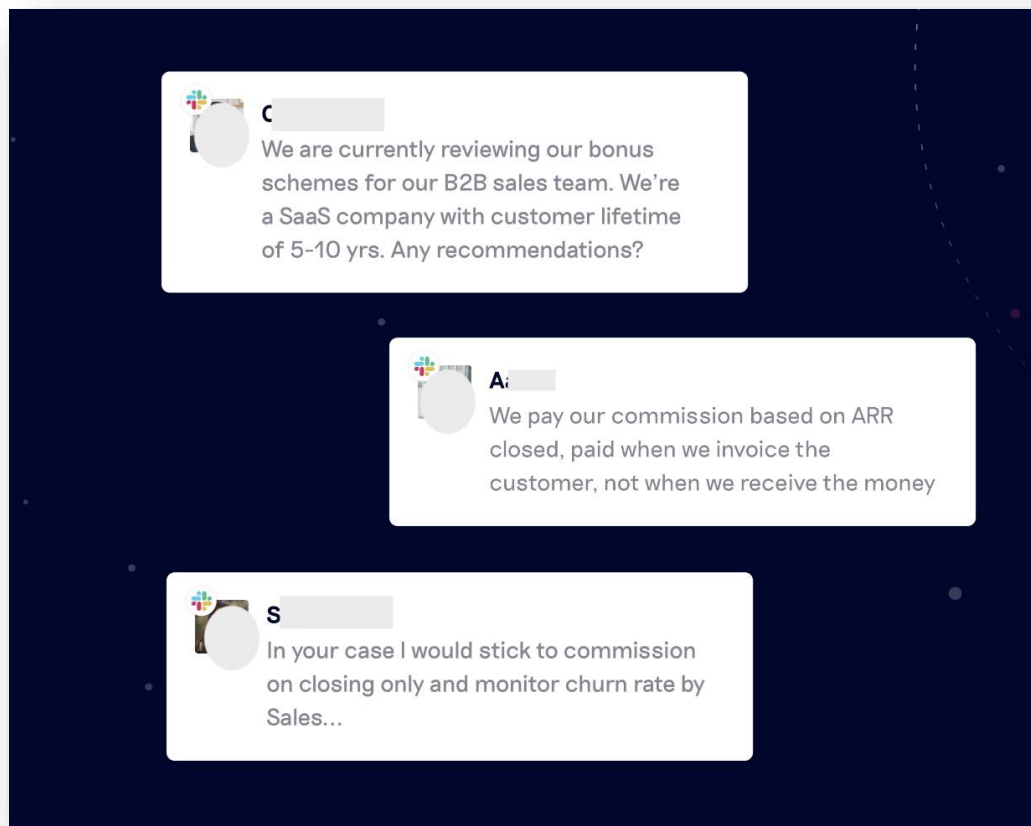
Source: CFO Connect on Slack

7.9 Commsor – Community Club

Commsor, a data business, originally launched The Community Club as 'Community Chat' in November 2019 as a newsletter highlighting the best tweets and posts about community. A Slack community was developed in January 2020 to connect the newsletter subscriber base with each other.

It now has 2,000+ members, is run by three people and can be found on two platforms, Slack and Forem. Slack allowed Commsor to focus on what makes community grow and Forem is a more public space for longer-form content. Commsor Cofounder Mac Reddin explains the foundations of the community:

"Honestly, when we first launched the community there weren't really any quantifiable metrics we were aiming to hit.

"Instead, we focused solely on building a community that we'd want to be a part of as people passionate about the topic of community, letting the structure and goals build over time.

"The original goal behind the community was to create a place to build relationships with our target audience and conduct research as we started building our product. As both the product and community has matured, the goal has shifted to building the best place to grow and advance the community industry. Grow the industry, grow the company."

We asked Mac what Comsor measures, he continues:

"Most of what we track isn't a metric, but rather a sense of 'feeling' the community has by keeping our finger on its pulse. We look at qualitative signs such as, are people happy? Are they engaging and talking about the community outside of our spaces? Are they inviting their friends?"

Mac's secret to building a successful B2B community is:

"A metric ton of TLC, patience, and building the community for the right reasons. If you set out to build a community to pull some transactional value out of it, it simply won't work. You have to build community for the community's sake, and the value will come organically."

Figure 15: Commsor's Community Chat is hosted on Forem
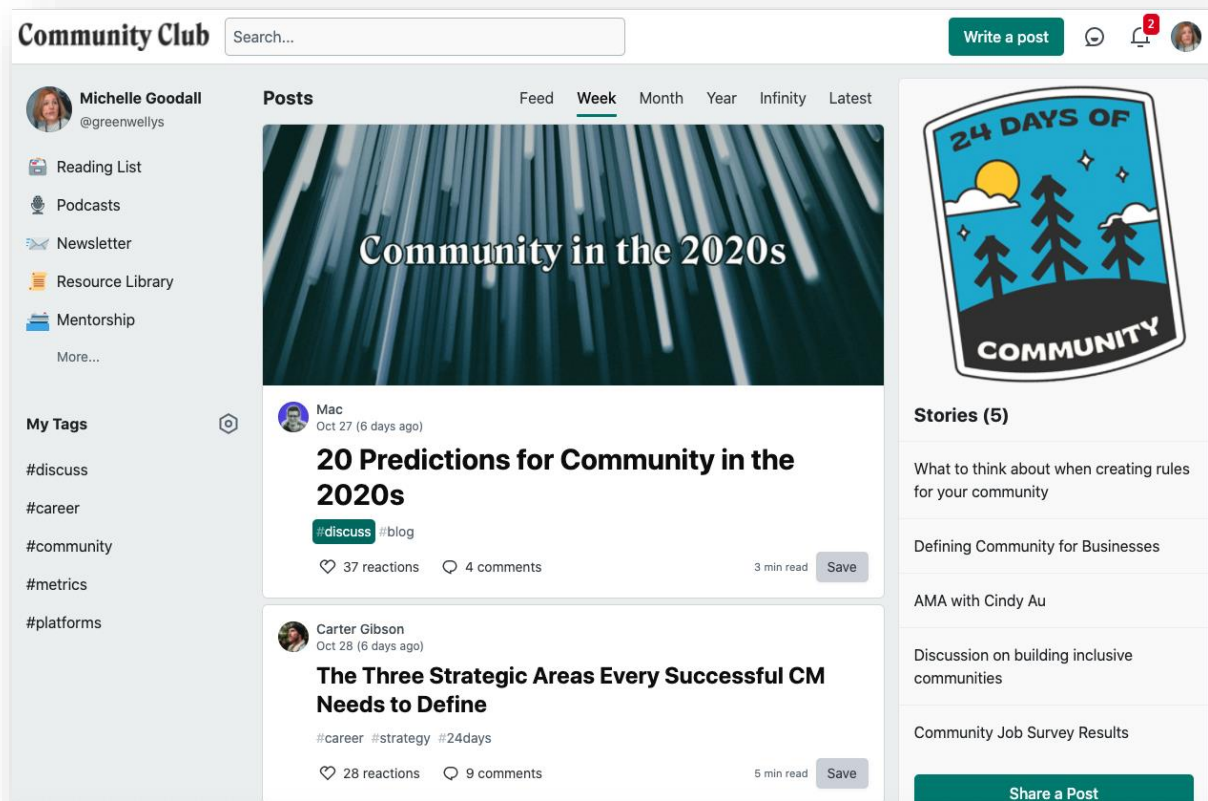
Source: The Community Club

7.10 Guild – CREO

"Coronavirus Response for Event Organisers" or "CREO" is a community set up by Guild on the Guild platform in March 2020 in response to COVID-19 as a peer support group for event organisers having to pivot to virtual and hybrid events.

Ben Fletcher, Co-founder of Utterly Events who run Fast Growth Icons, CIO Icons, Velocity[2] events says this about CREO:
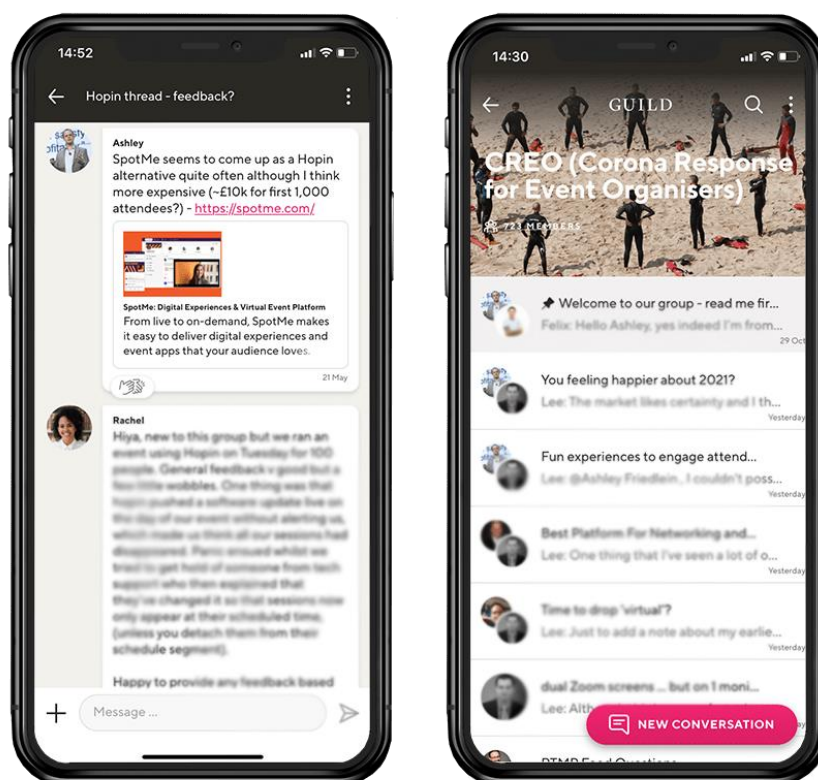
"The events community was left reeling when COVID lockdown measures were put in place and physical events were cancelled around the world. Guild

acted quickly to provide a safe space and a home for us to collaborate and speak in confidence with others experiencing exactly the same challenges.'[28]

CREO was certainly not set up with marketing objectives in mind. It was launched to help friends in the events industry at a time when things were in free-fall.

However, CREO has helped Guild with brand awareness in a number of professional sectors. The CREO community has generated earned coverage in trade media and social media shares from members. It has also created a number of global brand and platform advocates in the events sector, some of whom have gone on to successfully support their events and event communities using Guild[29]. The CREO community today is still growing, active and its 700+ members are highly engaged.

Source: CREO & FORT – helping businesses with 'the great recovery'[30]

[28] https://guild.co/blog/guild-co-blog-guild-providing-support-businesses-charities-individuals-covid-19/
[29] https://guild.co/blog/tag/events/
[30] https://guild.co/blog/guild-co-blog-guild-providing-support-businesses-charities-individuals-covid-19/

8. Conclusion

Community Based Marketing (CBM) is not new but is now set for rapid growth in B2B marketing.

It is not a quick fix approach and needs to be properly supported. But the rewards of getting close to your market and customers are many.

The *'Community Based Marketing (CBM) - the new play in B2B marketing'* report explains why the conditions are perfect to develop successful community strategies and B2B communities right now.

B2B marketers looking at Facebook Pages and LinkedIn Groups are starting to migrate them to platforms where they have control of branding, ownership of their data, better analytics, less noise and ads, compliance with legislation like GDPR, proper customer service and support, integrations with other systems etc.

With the influx of VC investment and more entrepreneurs building offerings to serve the community market, expect more community platforms to enter the market and more agencies and specialists to offer 'Community as a Service' or CaaS.

Platforms like Guild, purpose-built for professional communities, let businesses build their communities without having to make data and ownership compromises, or pay large amounts to licence enterprise community software or custom develop functionality.

We are very grateful for the insights and expertise of the report contributors and thank them for their time and input.

For more case studies, models, research, opinions and data about community and messaging, visit the Guild blog at https://guild.co/blog/ and the case studies section there.

Please contact us via https://guild.co/contact should you wish to reproduce this report or have questions.