

FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY SUCCESS

*Building scalable community programs for
meaningful organizational results*

Featuring Data from The State of Community Management 2021

Sponsored by:



Vanilla: A one-stop-shop community solution



Vanilla by Higher Logic combines the power of customer community, Q&A, knowledge base, and ideation to help brands improve customer experience and brand loyalty while reducing costs.

vanillaforums.com

- Best-in-class moderation tools
- Comprehensive knowledge-base tools
- Search Engine Optimized for maximum visibility
- Hundreds of integrations with existing tools
- Analytics suite to measure engagement and ROI



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ABOUT THIS EBOOK

Based on the 2021 State of Community Management research, this report was produced by The Community Roundtable and made possible with support from Higher Logic.

The narrative is drawn of unpublished data from the annual State of Community Management survey, focused on Higher Logic communities, average external communities, and an overall online community average.

Inside, we feature several innovative Higher Logic communities:



The complete report can be found at: <https://the.cr/socm2021>



BUILDING VALUABLE COMMUNITIES

Over the last two years, the place of community in organizations shifted, with community programs becoming a commonly required investment at all types of companies. The COVID-19 pandemic tipped communities from a nice-to-have to a must-have. Suddenly, the value of connecting employees and customers via an equitable and widely accessible digital network was obvious.

Since March 2020, 71% of communities saw their visibility increase, 67% of them with an added increase in urgency. More than 74% of community programs report an increased recognition of their value and 62% of communities experienced an increase in engagement, with 17% of those seeing a significant increase. The COVID-19 pandemic propelled online communities into the spotlight when it was no longer possible to connect at events, in retail environments, at meetings, or in the office.

Community ecosystems give organizations the potential to create cohesive digital environments where every customer and employee has access to what they need when they need it – unconstrained by physical limitations. Community professionals excel at designing and cultivating online environments where individuals are comfortable, empowered, connected, engaged, and productive. The biggest differentiator between those organizations that can harness this potential and those that can't is whether they understand the incredible value of community leaders and their teams.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CHECK

Higher Logic Powers Healthy Communities



POWERING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Building and sustaining a healthy community is the goal of all community teams.

Higher Logic client communities stand out from their cohort of external communities, boasting strong executive support, significantly higher client purchase and/or renewal rates, and much lower planned migration rates. These are all indications that Higher Logic communities are healthier than our survey average.

Community programs are under a microscope, garnering attention from both senior executives and their boards of directors. **Showing success can make or break a community program, so seeing that 52% of senior executives' general perception of the community program at Higher Logic-powered communities is very positive, compared to 45% in the external average, suggests those communities are on solid ground.**

A common challenge for community professionals is that executives are philosophically supportive, but they don't know what community teams need at a practical level. To bridge that gap, community teams identify and communicate specifics as well as initiate conversations with stakeholders about how they can help in a more direct and concrete way.



Executives with a positive perception of their online community programs.



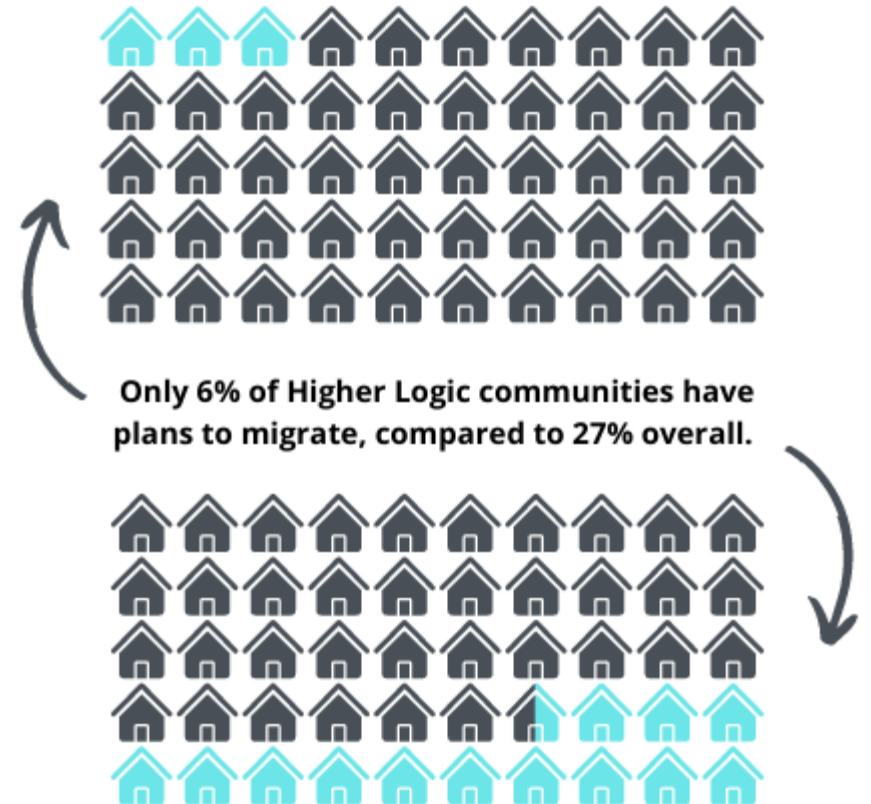
DELIVERING ORGANIZATIONAL VALUE

Two ways customer communities deliver value are by reducing customer churn and/or stimulating additional sales.

In 2021, 34% of Higher Logic client communities report that they can directly attribute higher renewal or purchase rates to their community members, compared to just 23% of their cohort of external communities.

Another marker of community health is whether the community team is looking to migrate to a new community platform. **Only 6% of Higher Logic community programs are currently considering or planning to migrate their communities, compared to 27% of the overall cohort of external communities.**

While these aren't the only measures of a successful community, they do provide evidence that Higher Logic community clients are well on their way.



DRIVEN BY EXPERIENCE



Name: Sarah-Lesway Ball

Position: Senior Director, Global Experience Marketing

Use case: Customer Success, Product, Advocacy

Industry: Networking

Results:

- Increased customer satisfaction
- Customer insight
- More customer touch points

Juniper Networks is a leading, global networking company with a wide range of products, from wi-fi and AI to routers to security. As a result, its customer base is highly varied and ranges from multi-national service providers to small school districts, along with everything in between. **With that comes a challenge: how to build consistent but custom communities that engage all types of customers?**

Some NDA customers need behind-the-scenes, clearance access to product information and strategy. Others want to ask experienced users questions about product usage tips or best practices. Some require small-group interaction while others benefit from a large pool of input from global colleagues. As a company that deeply values the customer experience, Juniper Networks had to innovate to meet all these needs, plus consolidate to facilitate community management.

Using Higher Logic, Juniper’s Customer Experience Team has developed 50+ communities (and the number is still growing) to support highly targeted collaboration and expert enablement. Each community delivers a custom experience to members, from virtual events and Ask the Expert chat sessions to Ambassador-led Lightning Talks to broad group discussions to private advisory councils.

Juniper has successfully used this strategy to deliver on its “Driven by Experience” brand promise to create custom experiences for individuals, with 1:1 interaction, highly curated content/activities, and truly bespoke interactions – pleasing customers and ensuring their success. Plus, Juniper Networks now has infinitely more insight into what its customers want/need to help shape the company’s future direction.



THREE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNITY HEALTH

- 1. Take your community's temperature.** You can't change what you don't measure. Start small by focusing on an initial set of numbers and measure progress on key activities, chosen for their potential for positive influence. You don't need to reinvent the wheel – some of these metrics might be things you already track and report on, like awareness, sentiment, engagement, or contributions.
- 2. Link metrics to opportunities.** Your community will always have room for improvement. By pairing each metric with a corresponding opportunity for growth you set the stage for continued growth, and remove the element of good vs. bad health scores. By viewing every health metric as something that can continuously be considered as a place for improvement you can set achievable long-term goals.
- 3. Community health isn't one size fits all.** While the overall health of your community might be defined by top-level metrics, it's important to consider how the behavior of different user types contributes to different levels of value to the community. Try tracking the engagement of some of your key stakeholder groups. Separate organization senior leadership and moderators from everyone else to understand how they influence others. Who are the people you want to make sure are engaged and can you track their usage and contributions?





BECOMING BUSINESS CRITICAL

Community Contributes to Organizational Success

BECOMING BUSINESS CRITICAL

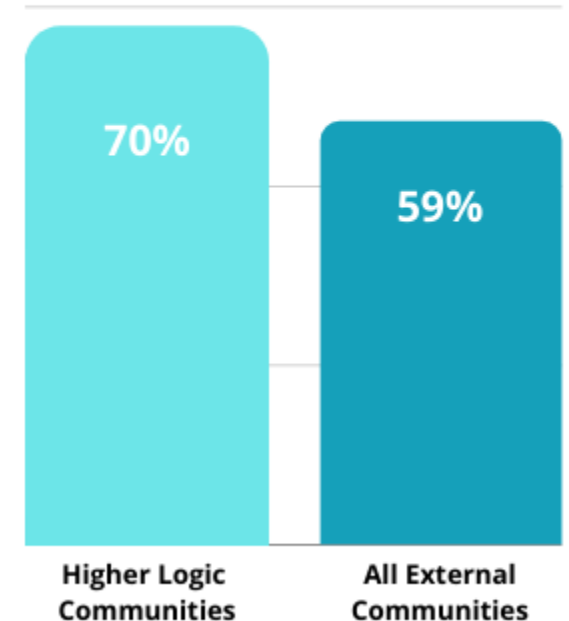
Community is an essential part of a fully-integrated business.

Customer communities no longer stand alone in an enterprise; often they're integrated with critical business systems to provide insights into customer behavior, delivering even more value to the business. **Higher Logic clients are again ahead of the curve in this area with over 70% of their communities reporting that they are integrated with organization-wide business systems vs. 59% of their external community cohort.**

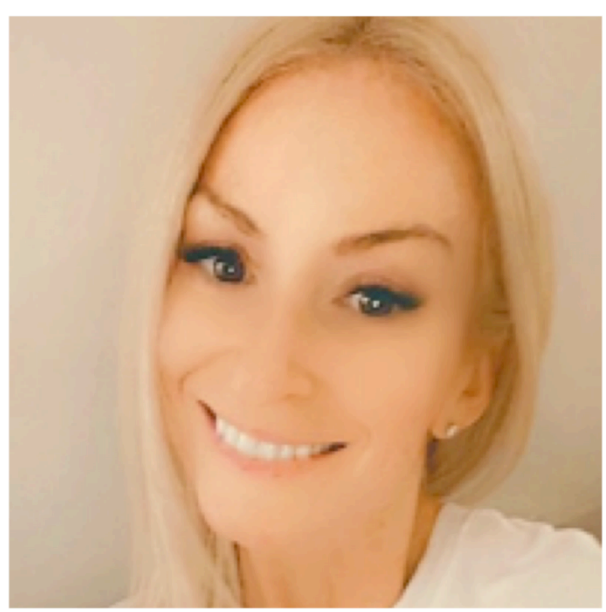
While the vast majority of enterprise community programs are tasked with providing organizational enablement services, Higher Logic clients lead the pack. **Over 82% of their clients are implicitly or explicitly tasked and resourced to provide training, metrics, reporting, and playbooks vs. 77% of their external community cohort.**

As organizations see the value of community in the initial use case, they naturally see additional applications in other areas. **This expansion of scope often leads to an ecosystem supporting a network of communities and this is evident in Higher Logic clients, with over 52% of respondents reporting they support a network of communities vs. only 37% of their external community cohort.**

Communities where the platform is integrated with organization-wide business systems.



A COMMUNITY TO RELY ON



Name: Nichole Devolites

Position: Customer Operations Director

Use case: Customer Support

Industry: Security

Results:

- 75% increase in membership
- 980% customer and employee discussions
- 35% reduction in response time

SecureAuth launched their community on February 26, 2020, right on schedule. They were planning to use the community to replace their ZenDesk knowledge base and help customers self-serve, and planned to incrementally expand from there, starting with a rewards program. A week later, they went fully virtually – and realized they needed to expand the community immediately to be an all-encompassing, central location for product content, networking and crowdsourcing, post-webinar recordings, best practices, latest news and events, etc.

They started by launching the rewards program early with badges and ranks, and have continued to quickly evolved the community. Each quarter, they add another important category, like customer stories, a specialty badge, like 1-year anniversary and advocacy, and celebrate customer contributions.

As the pandemic has continued, the team has noticed that customers rely on the community, more than ever, to access what they need to be successful in maintaining their investment with SecureAuth.

SecureAuth saw amazing increases with their community since last December, including: 75+% increase in membership, 980% increase in discussions from both customers and employees, 700% increase in comments from both customers and employees and 719% increase in page views.

They delivered on their original goal of self-service, too; Since the community launch they saw a 5% reduction in tickets and 35% reduction in overall response time, as the community freed up the support team's time to focus on more pressing tickets.



THREE WAYS TO MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY ESSENTIAL

- 1. Become customer-centric.** Being customer-centric is to understand the experience through the eyes of your customers. Your community is a great way to understand the customer from their unique point of view. Use the community to align the company with your customer's needs. This provides real-time voice of the customer feedback that can improve everything from R&D to support to marketing.
- 2. Empower frontline crisis management.** Many organizations have plans for crisis communications, and using your community as a frontline responder to any crisis-level event is smart and effective. Your community is a natural place for your customers to come for information and/or to vent their frustrations. Design a designated cross-functional escalation plan that ensures your community team can triage questions and provide feedback to the right internal team. This plan can cover everything from upset customers to when product releases or technology upgrades aren't meeting the expectations of your customers.
- 3. Make a great first impression.** For many customers, your community might be the first place they truly interact with your brand. Leverage your community to better understand how customers see your brand ensuring that those interactions exceed expectations, are seamless in nature, and introduce elements of delight at every stage of the customer journey.



SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

*Content And Programs As
Foundational Building Blocks*



CREATE SUSTAINED SUCCESS

Conducting community research for 12+ years gives us a unique view into how mature communities create long-term success. Two easy wins are robust new member onboarding programs and a consistent approach to community content and programs. Not surprisingly, Higher Logic clients excel in both of these areas.

87% of Higher Logic client communities include community information in the customer onboarding process vs. just 71% of their external community cohort. Making sure your community is front and center at the start of the customer journey is a proven way to establish participation and engagement behaviors that are critical to a community's ongoing engagement and overall success.

Despite the documented importance of consistent content and programs, a staggering 60% of all communities in our 2021 report at best they have “an informal schedule” for content and programs in their community. **98% of Higher Logic communities report having a consistent approach to content and programs, contributing to the long-term success of their community programs.**

Organizations that include community information in the customer onboarding process.



98% of Higher Logic communities have a consistent approach to content and programs.



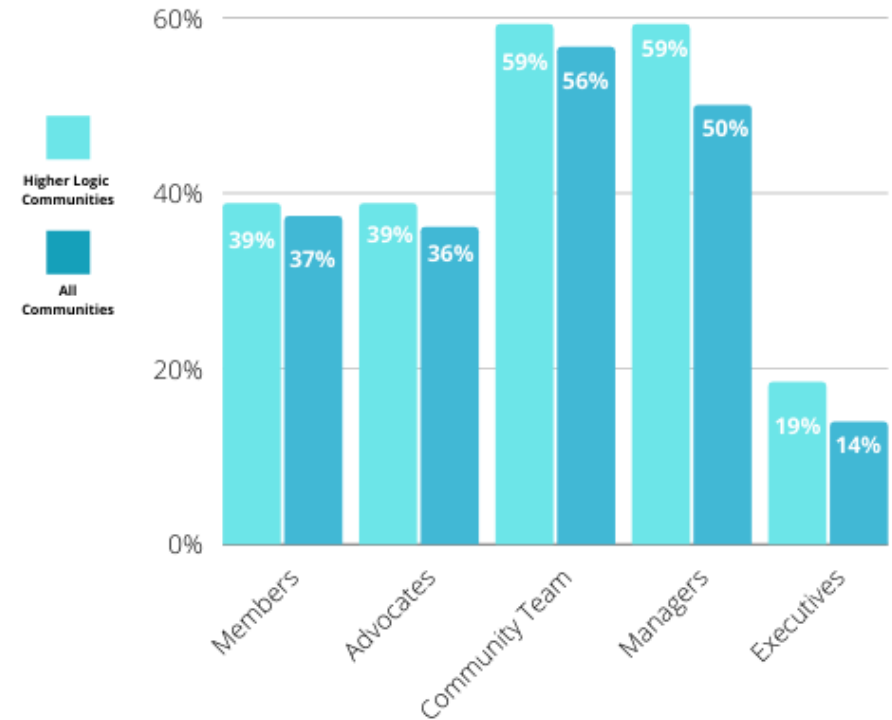
(EM)POWERING COMMUNITY TRAINING

As communities become more integrated into organizations and address more objectives across the employee and customer experience, more and more individuals are involved in their management and leadership.

Our research shows that cross-functional support for community programs, from a diverse group of internal teams, including Support, R&D, Engineering, and more – contribute to higher community success rates. Providing access to community training at all levels of the organization ensures alignment around community behaviors and values in a way that supports engagement and advocacy, but not all organizations offer community training to employees that aren't directly responsible for community.

Higher Logic client communities offer training to more employees in every category, at every level of the organization, ensuring that employees across the enterprise understand how to engage in the community and are empowered to make the community successful.

Employees that are offered community training.



EFFECTIVE CONTENT AND PROGRAMS



Name: Beth Vanderkolk

Position: Director of Community

Use case: Engagement

Industry: Software

Results:

- 152% increase in discussions
- 119% increase in comments

MURAL is a digital workspace designed to support creative visual collaboration. Beth Vanderkolk joined MURAL in January 2021, after a long career creating new content and communities. At MURAL, Beth set out to support, educate, and empower the rapidly expanding community by connecting members with peers, partners, and experts through meaningful content and programs.

In April 2021, they launched early access to <https://community.mural.co>, an inclusive and engaging space for MURAL enthusiasts to connect, share, and inspire one another. **The MURAL community team made it their full-time job to ensure people were heard and connected to the community through responses, private messages, cards, etc.** They awarded their early access crew a badge and a beautiful, special swag kit. The community team also works cross-functionally internally, escalating customer concerns and sentiment, and encouraging her colleagues across product, design, engineering, and marketing to respond personally to members in the community.

The MURAL team used creative programs for both increased member acquisition and engagement. They launched a unique bingo activity that increased new member acquisition by 31% in just one week. **They also saw a 152% increase in discussions and a 119% increase in comments.** To date, MURAL's Community has gone from 480 to about 34,000 page-views per month.



THREE WAYS TO BUILD EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

- 1. Start at the beginning.** How you welcome your new members matters – our research consistently reinforces the positive impact of onboarding programs on long-term engagement. Think about how you want your members to engage in your community and build a multi-touch welcome program to make norms and expectations clear.
- 2. Define engagement for roles.** Not every community members will (or should) engage in the same way. Onboarding for specific roles help ensure that different levels of engagement and participation are expected and encouraged. Consider dedicated onboarding programs for super users, SMEs and other community-critical roles that exist in your community program.
- 3. Define programs to solve for your customers.** Often, what we think members value is actually different than what they actually report as valuable. We have found that things commonly defined as important to a community (like the sense of connection and sense of belonging) often rank far below more tactical outcomes like convenience, speed of response, accuracy, and trustworthiness. When designing programs for long-term engagement make sure you consider content that solves for your unique audiences needs.



ABOUT THE COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE

Since 2009, we've empowered tens of thousands of online community professionals to build and manage innovative, effective, and award-winning communications, collaboration, and community programs at global organizations.

We do **everything online community, and only things online community**. From research and tools to training and education, to our private peer network, we are the world's most trusted source for online community resources.

Innovation global organizations trust The Community Roundtable



Click to learn more about our community, training resources, research, and more:

