

A large orange rectangular area occupies the middle of the page. On the right side of this area is a photograph of a Black man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a white button-down shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the left, with his hands gesturing as if in conversation. On the left side of the orange area, there is a large, light orange L-shaped graphic element.

The 2020 Engagement Trends *Report*

Discover 3 Online
Community Engagement Trends
and How to Apply Them



A large, light orange L-shaped graphic element is located in the bottom right corner of the page.

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Engagement *has become more than just a buzzword. Our customers, members, and employees demand more connection, more transparency, and a greater sense of community from us every day.*

We know that creating ongoing, meaningful interactions with your audience is the foundation for your shared success. By providing the infrastructure that encourages an active dialogue, you enable your users to create those vital connections with you and with each other – and that keeps them coming back.

When you create a thriving community, a powerful transformation takes place: The collective knowledge of the group is unlocked, and everyone grows as a result. They grow closer, grow faster, and grow smarter. And people who were once everyday users grow into your brand heroes.

Since Higher Logic's founding, it's been our goal to not just be a software platform, but to lead this space with innovation and expertise.

Thus, we're releasing the first edition of the **Engagement Trends Report**, a study that provides insights into the state of engagement. Using our proprietary Engagement Benchmark Score, we identified three trends from across 1,000+ of our customers' community sites.

For those who are familiar with our benchmarking reports of years past, our report this year will look a little different. We're leaving the actual benchmarking to our product – where our customers can find a unique Engagement Benchmark Score for their community, along with recommendations for how to increase their score.

Filled with data, insights, and tactical tips, this report will help you see where you can improve your engagement strategy to bring you and your people all together, adapting your organization to meet their need for digital engagement. We'd like to issue special thanks to Higher Logic data analyst Michael Oliver, who was a vital part of this project.

As always, please don't hesitate to reach out if you need advice on moving your engagement initiatives forward.

Warm regards,

Heather McNair *Chief Community Officer*

Heather McNair

Mikhail Opletayev *VP of Software Engineering and Data Services*

Mikhail Opletayev

How We Created the Report

Although community engagement can be hard to measure, we need to understand how our communities are doing in order to improve them. That's why we created the Engagement Benchmark Score.

The Engagement Benchmark Score is made up of three core measures that help gauge success for communities. By combining measurements for activity, value, and reach, the score gives customers data-driven insights around community performance.



1000+ Community Sites Reviewed



170 Metrics Analyzed



3 Community Engagement Trends Identified

THE THREE FACTORS INCLUDE:

activity

The ratio of the number of items created for each active user in the community.

Simply put, out of the users coming to your site, how many create content? Activity is a core metric not only because content is the key driver of value for your audience, but it also motivates others to interact.

$$\text{Activity} = \frac{\text{Items Created}}{\text{Active Users}}$$

value

A measure of the engagement that is generated by the content in the community.

This is an important gauge of the quality and relevance of the content being created.

$$\text{Value} = \frac{\text{Consumption \& Contribution Actions}}{\text{Items Created}}$$

reach

The ratio of users that are active in the community as compared to the available audience.

To have a successful community, you need an audience for the great content being created. We found in our research users who spent more time on the site were more likely to create content, so getting them to the site is a critical first step of the engagement journey.

$$\text{Reach} = \frac{\text{Active Users}}{\text{Available Audience}}$$

We applied the Engagement Benchmark Score to 1,000+ customer community sites. Through this process, we identified the three trends in community engagement that you're about to read.

3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TRENDS + HOW YOU CAN APPLY THEM

Trend 1: The 90-9-1 Rule Has Given Way to More Community Member Participation

It's a common belief that in online communities, 90% of users are Consumers, 9% are Contributors, and 1% are Creators. This is often called the 90-9-1 rule. **Our study found that this is not accurate today in branded communities.**

As part of our study, we examined how different-sized communities vary in engagement levels. We found that the larger a community becomes, a smaller percentage of members create content for that community.

This is to be expected, but unlike the traditional 90-9-1 rule, where just 1% are **creators**, we found that a much larger group of community members, up to 23%, are actively creating new content.

The 9% part of the 90-9-1 rule was fairly consistent with our research when we looked at the **contributors** (members who *only* respond), because that was around 10%. But when you combine it with the **creators** (who respond *and* create), we saw engagement levels up to 33%.



myth

Most community members — 90% — are lurkers, while 9% edit or respond to content. Only 1% of community members create new content.

fact

A large portion of community members participate in the online communities they're part of, especially in small, branded communities.

All communities have a combination of different types of members. There are:

CREATORS

Users who create posts, blogs, and other new content.

CONTRIBUTORS

Users who reply to or comment on the created content.

CONSUMERS

Users who exclusively view or log in to consume the created content and its contributions.

INACTIVE

Users who have not made any actions in the community in the last year.

This holds true in branded communities big and small. According to our research:

- In **small communities** (under 5000), 33% of community members are Creators and Contributors, which is 3x the community standard.
- In **medium and large communities**, 20% of members participate with equal amounts creating content (~10%) and reacting to it (~10%).
- Even in the **largest communities**, over 5% of users are actively creating content with another 5% responding. While the total amount is consistent with the conventional 10% participation, the equal split shows more users are comfortable creating new content.

What does this data tell us? **Community engagement is clearly much higher than commonly thought.**

Additionally, it's clear branded communities are considered safer spaces than public social networks. In branded communities, people feel more comfortable showing vulnerability by asking questions. There can also be greater rewards for sharing and showcasing their expertise.

When users are encouraged to create content, they build value for other community members. More content begets more interaction, such as replies, comments, and post recommendations. These interactions create value for community members at all levels.

PERCENTAGE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS CREATING AND RESPONDING TO CONTENT

SMALL COMMUNITY <i>under 5000 members</i>	33%
MEDIUM TO LARGE COMMUNITY <i>10,000 - 50,000 members</i>	20%
LARGEST COMMUNITY <i>50,000+ members</i>	10%

Explore
Higher Logic's
Community
Solution



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 A large group of community members create new content.** The 90-9-1 rule suggests that only 1% of members create content. This is not the case. Even in large communities, 10% of members are creating and responding to content.
- 2 Branded communities are safe spaces.** As opposed to public social networks, branded, professional communities are considered safe spaces where people feel more comfortable showing vulnerability by asking questions and are rewarded for showcasing their expertise.
- 3 Members continue to create content as communities grow.** As a community grows larger, a lower percentage create new content. However, even in the largest communities (50,000+ members), 5% are actively creating content, substantially more than the 1% standard.

Strategies for **COMMUNITY LEADERS**

If you want to see more content creation, promote content that will encourage that behavior. While a balance of content appeals to the different segments of your audience (blogs for consumers, “prompts” for contributors to reply to, etc.), our data shows communities get more activity when they promote content designed for interaction (e.g. a discussion post encouraging replies). Sites with higher numbers of blog posts saw increased consumer activity, but decreased contributor activity – presumably because people got the information they needed from the blogs.



3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TRENDS + HOW YOU CAN APPLY THEM

Trend 2: Communities Don't Have to be Large to Sustain High Engagement

Some say that you need a community to be a certain size in order to create a successful community that sustains itself organically. However, our data directly contradicts this. Small communities tend to have higher percentages of creators and contributors (vs consumers) and are thriving.

According to our research:

- The most engaged communities– those that have the greatest percentage of creators and contributors (vs consumers) – are those that have 5,000 or fewer members.
- In smaller communities, almost 18% of their audience are creating content, as opposed to 2% in extra large communities (those with 50,000+ members).
- Inversely, the percentage of consumers increased from 72% to 97% as the size of the communities grew.



myth

There is a certain size threshold required to create the critical mass necessary to have a successful, organically self-sustaining community.

fact

Small communities see a lot of engagement due to a greater percentage of creators and contributors than large communities.



SMALL COMMUNITIES SEE A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF CREATORS

Perhaps most interestingly, the percentage of creators is highest in smaller communities.

Why is this? In smaller communities, there is a stronger sense of familiarity. Members are more comfortable creating content, starting threads, and asking questions. There is also a strong sense of accountability. In larger communities, there is more diffusion of responsibility (aka “the bystander effect”), where users assume someone else will step in to help.

In the largest communities, a relatively small group of influencers is creating the content being consumed by active members. These influencers are key to sustaining larger communities. In a community of 50,000-100,000, there may be 1,000-2,000 influencers, which is large enough to sustain a vibrant community if properly tended to.

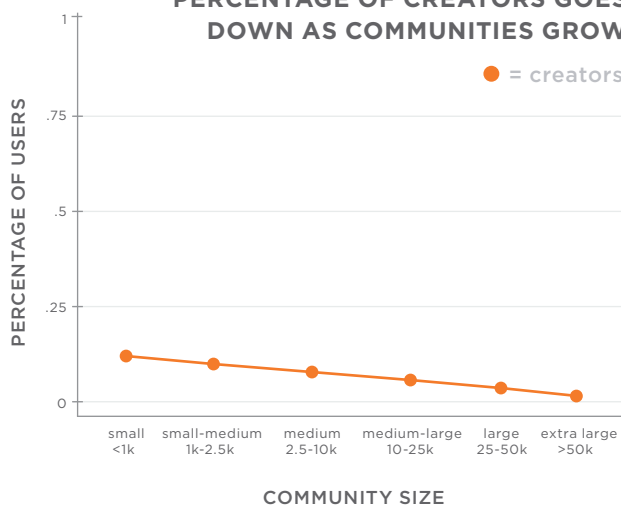
eBOOK

Maximize Association Membership Value *with Engagement*

In this eBook, take a look at how your organization can use engagement tools to solve four of the biggest challenges to associations today.

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PERCENTAGE OF CREATORS GOES DOWN AS COMMUNITIES GROW



As communities grow, it becomes naturally harder to retain the same percentage of contributors and creators, with extra-large communities decreasing by 4 and 9 times, respectively, as compared to the small communities.

This results in a plateau when a community reaches approximately 20,000 users, with the ratio of items created per user dropping off from 1 item for every 5 active users in small communities to 1 item for every 100 active users in extra-large communities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1** | **Small communities are overwhelmingly successful.** Online communities with a small number of members are self-sustaining and successful, in part due to the higher percentage of creators (18%) than larger communities (2%).
- 2** | **Engagement is high in these small communities with a higher percentage of creators and contributors vs consumers.** The most engaged communities – i.e. those that have the greatest percentage of creators and contributors (vs consumers) are those that have 5,000 or fewer members, with 1/3 of users in these top categories.
- 3** | **A small group of influencers are key to sustaining large communities.** In large communities, it's a relatively small group of influencers and thought leaders who create new content for the community.



Strategies for **COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Don't worry if your community is **small**, as you're likely to see high levels of engagement as you establish a strong foundation for your community to expand.

If you have a **large** community, focus community strategy around creating trust. Welcome new members and encourage smaller participation acts to build members' confidence.

3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TRENDS + HOW YOU CAN APPLY THEM

Trend 3: People Stick Around Once They're Engaged with Community

There's a common misconception that if a community member appears to disengage for more than a couple of months, neglecting to create content or comment, they're gone forever. However, our data shows that branded communities are incredibly sticky. Members may leave for months but then re-engage at a later date when a need arises.



myth

If people disengage from your community for a couple months, you've lost them.

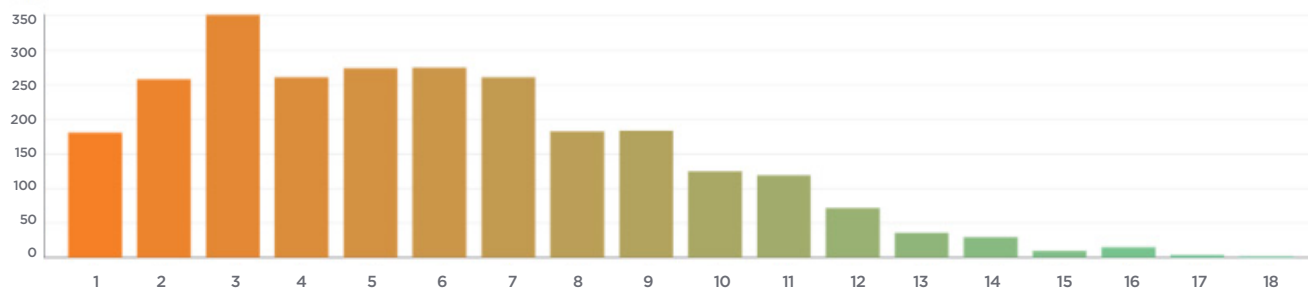
fact

People are loyal to their branded online communities. Once they're engaged, they keep coming back.



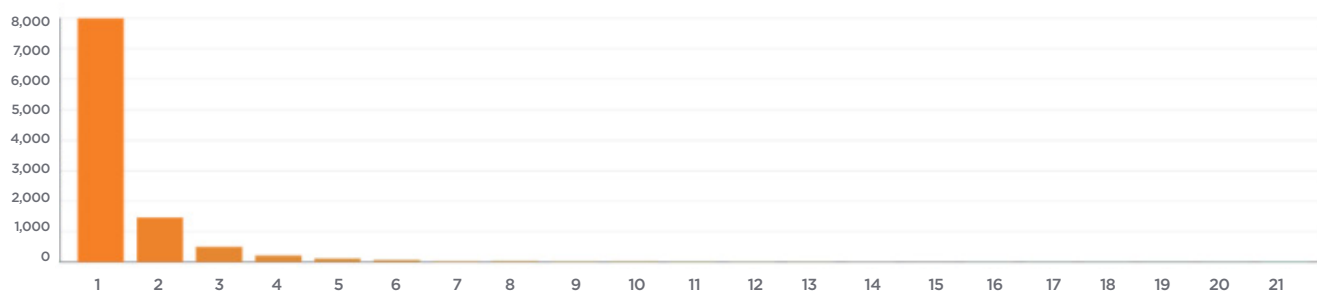
Common **community re-engagement patterns** emerged in our research; one such pattern is shown below. The data shows people disappearing for several months, but then, they come back. In this sample community, many people are re-engaging with the site every 3 months, with a steady number re-engaging within 4 to 7 months. It is around the 8-month mark where we see fewer people return after disengaging, with an even larger drop-off at 12 months, likely due to the expiration of annual memberships and contract structures.

MAX NUMBER OF MONTHS DISENGAGED BEFORE RE-ENGAGING



We often picture the ideal community member engaging with our sites weekly, if not daily. Indeed, that is the “ideal” community member; but our data shows the reality is quite different. Across all communities, we see the average user rarely engages in consecutive months.

MAX NUMBER OF MONTHS CONTINUOUSLY ENGAGED



But while people don’t continuously engage, they do remain part of the community. If a member hasn’t logged into the community for a few months, it doesn’t mean they’ve left forever. The data shows they’re sticking around. Members will come back to the community to ask questions. They may be reading digests via email. They might see something interesting and reply. They might sign up for an event or volunteer. They’ll come back to consume blogs.

Across all community sites, we saw that it can take 19 months (or more!) for users to return to the site. But 50% come back within 5 months, and the majority who return, do so within 12 months. Again, we see a drop-off at that year mark, likely due to the annual membership structures associations follow and annual contracts many software companies use. If a community member has been disengaged with an organization for a

year, it significantly increases the likelihood they will not renew.

These findings show that community members will tap into the community when they have a need for it. Even if they are not actively using the site, they are likely still getting value from passive consumption activities like reading email digests. This underscores **the importance of sending targeted, relevant content to your community members**. If you're waiting for them to discover it on your site, you're missing a valuable opportunity.

eBOOK

Develop an Effective Customer Community Strategy

To truly have an effective online community, you need a strategy. This eBook offers advice on creating a community strategy that sets you up to improve the customer experience (CX) and reach your business goals.

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“Community engagement supports every member’s success by giving them access to the knowledge and value of the entire community. By supporting them in their work, it inspires their loyalty. It exposes people to new ideas, prompts product and service use, and rapidly surfaces shifting needs.”

- THE STATE OF COMMUNITY
MANAGEMENT REPORT 2020

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1** | **Communities are incredibly sticky.** Members of communities may appear to disengage for many months, but they'll come back if they have a need or see an interesting piece of content. There may be ways they are still engaging that aren't accounted for in this round of research (reading emails, for example).
- 2** | **A low frequency of online engagement does not translate into low loyalty.** Even when most users don't continuously engage, they do stay loyal members of the community, evident from the fact that most come back.
- 3** | **Monthly engagement has more variance than quarterly.** A community member's engagement may vary a lot month-to-month, but much less if you look at their engagement on a quarterly basis.



Strategies for **COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Community members are sticking around, even if they appear inactive. If there is a reason for them to log in, they will. As a community leader, you can work to provide opportunities for these inactive members to re-engage, knowing they're waiting in the wings. Additionally, when you're analyzing engagement, look at quarterly data rather than monthly to get a more accurate picture.

If you haven't seen a community member on the site in a while, contact them using automation rules or re-engagement campaigns. We've seen success rates upwards of 30% – and these users stay re-engaged more often than not. If you hit that 12 month mark before reaching out, it may be too late.

Create an Engaging Community with Higher Logic

We hope this report has given you insight into where you can improve your engagement strategy, bringing you and your customers, members, or employees closer together.

Keep in mind is that the data in this report is based on Higher Logic customer data. All online community software providers are not created equal, and engagement differs depending on the strength of the software's engagement capabilities.

As pioneers in the engagement industry, we have the expertise, resources, and solutions you need to be successful in your community initiative.



To hear more about Higher Logic's Engagement Platform or learn more about engagement benchmarking, contact us.

LET'S CONNECT

APPENDIX

The Engagement Benchmarking Score (EBS) was derived through the use of legacy equations, user research, data analysis, and expert opinion that all attempted to answer the question: How do communities create and sustain engagement?

In order to create the EBS, we used the ideas of Activity, Value, & Reach as a starting point for our user research and data analysis which looked at how much a community was active (Activity), how that content was used by the community (Value), and how many active users there were (Reach).

Following the creation of these basic questions, we used common user research tools such as Contextual Inquiries and Subject-Matter-Expert Interviews in an attempt to gather a set of specific metrics that help answer these questions.

During this user research phase we found that the list of metrics that could be used followed similar patterns of thought (called Mental Schemas) that fit pre-existing ideas of Contributions, Creations, and Consumptions. From there, we worked on fitting as many actions in our data into one of these categories.

For example, making a blog fit into the 'Creation' group, while each comment made on that blog was a 'Contribution' and each view on that page was a 'consumption'.

With this goal clearly stated, we worked on the data analysis of creating each component so that all of the ranges would be roughly similar and the time frame could be scaled down such that analysis could be done on a community over the length of an entire year, or each individual month.