

THE 2020

# Community Industry Trends Report



# Executive Summary

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In 2017, we published our inaugural research report to help community professionals understand how organizations were developing and measuring the value of their communities.

This year's report continues in that vein, but it also explores a new dynamic in greater detail: the value and differences between in-person and online communities.

## **There is a lot of good news to report.**

As communities continue to evolve and mature, they are becoming indispensable within the organization. In this study, 88% of community professionals said that community is critical to their company's mission and 85% said that their community has had a positive impact on their business.

The reported numbers back this up, too. Fewer than 1 in 5 report they struggle with budget, and 65% say their organization will be increasing their budget for community over the next 12 months.

While optimism abounds, so does opportunity for improvement. Even though organizations are investing in community, at least a third of respondents struggle to quantify the value of the communities.

The type of metrics community professionals track are often vanity measures instead of something that ties directly to business value — and the core objectives of their communities. The most common objective of branded communities is customer retention and loyalty. Yet, fewer than half of those who cite this as the primary goal for their communities, are tracking retention as a metric.

So there's still a disconnect between what teams say the value of their community is, and what they're able to measure. This makes sense, as fewer than one-third of community professionals are using a CRM that connects community data back to customer data. That means, for more than two thirds of the industry, it's impossible to connect community data back to retention-driven revenue.

Our goal in this report is to give you a clear understanding of the major trends impacting community teams, and help you develop a successful community strategy leading into the next year.

2020 is going to be a pivotal year for the community industry.  
I hope this report helps you take full advantage of the opportunities ahead.

Best,



**David Spinks**

Founder of CMX and VP of Community at Bevy



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01.

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# Key Trends

# Key Trends

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Community programs are increasingly mature and focused on scaling.



The majority of programs include both online and in-person communities, and there are unique advantages to both.



Increasing engagement is the top frustration for both online and in-person communities.



Customer retention is the primary goal for most communities, both in-person and online. This is a shift from our last report in which customer support was the top goal.



Community professionals continue to struggle with measuring their value in a quantitative way.



Organizations intrinsically see the value of community and are continuing to increase investment.

**02.**

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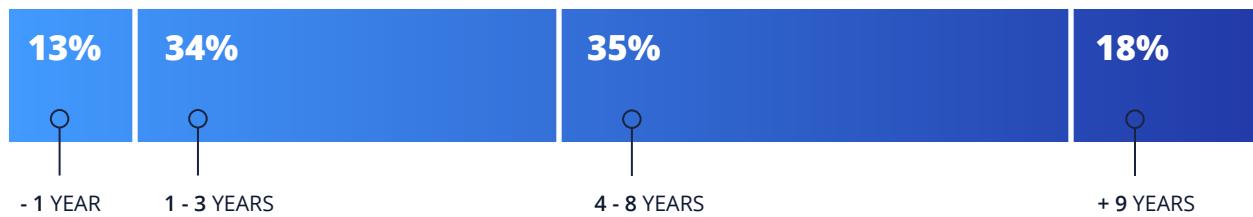
# Methodology

The second annual Community Value and Metrics Report includes responses from **533 community professionals** who completed our online survey from June through August 2019.

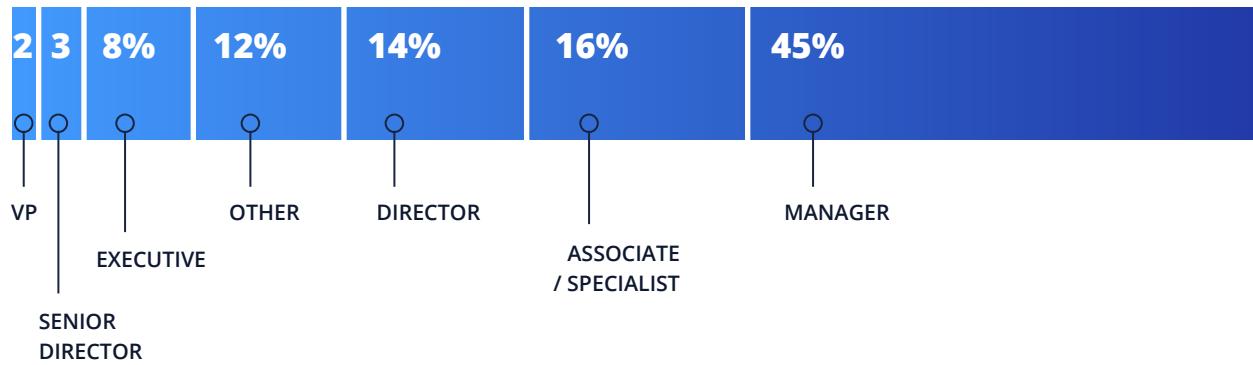
Respondents were asked to participate via email and social media outreach from CMX, Bevy and several distribution partners: Hivebrite, Forumbee, and Uservoice.

You can see the demographics of the respondents below.

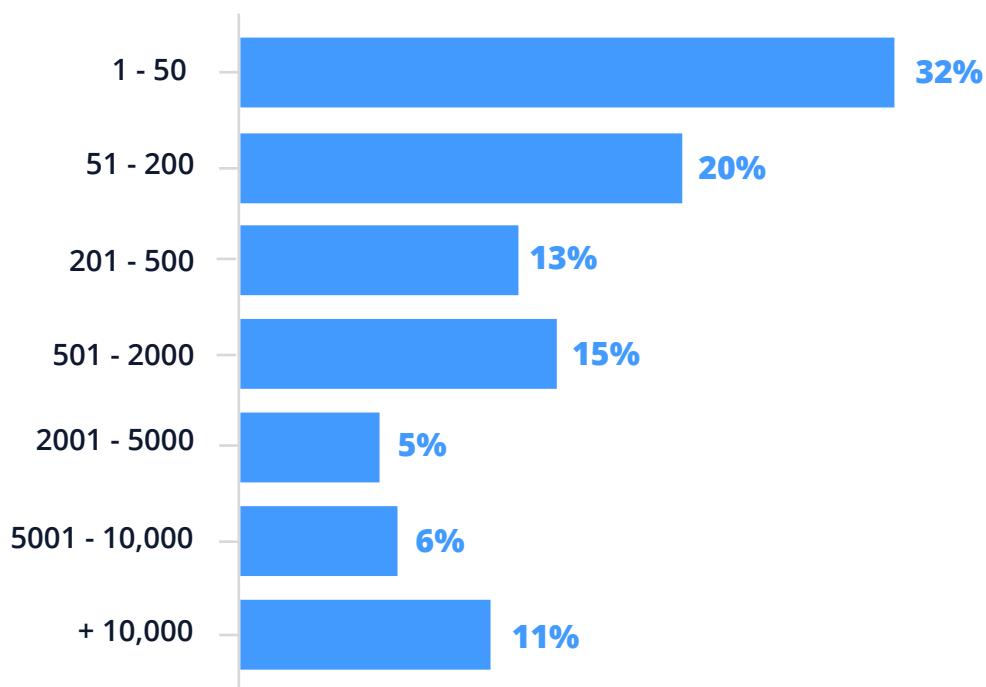
#### How long have you been working in community?



#### What job title best describes your role?

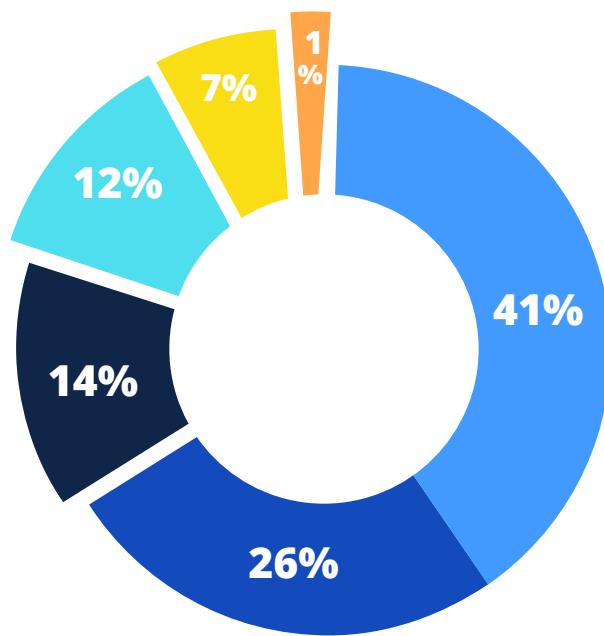


Approximately how many employees does your organization have worldwide?



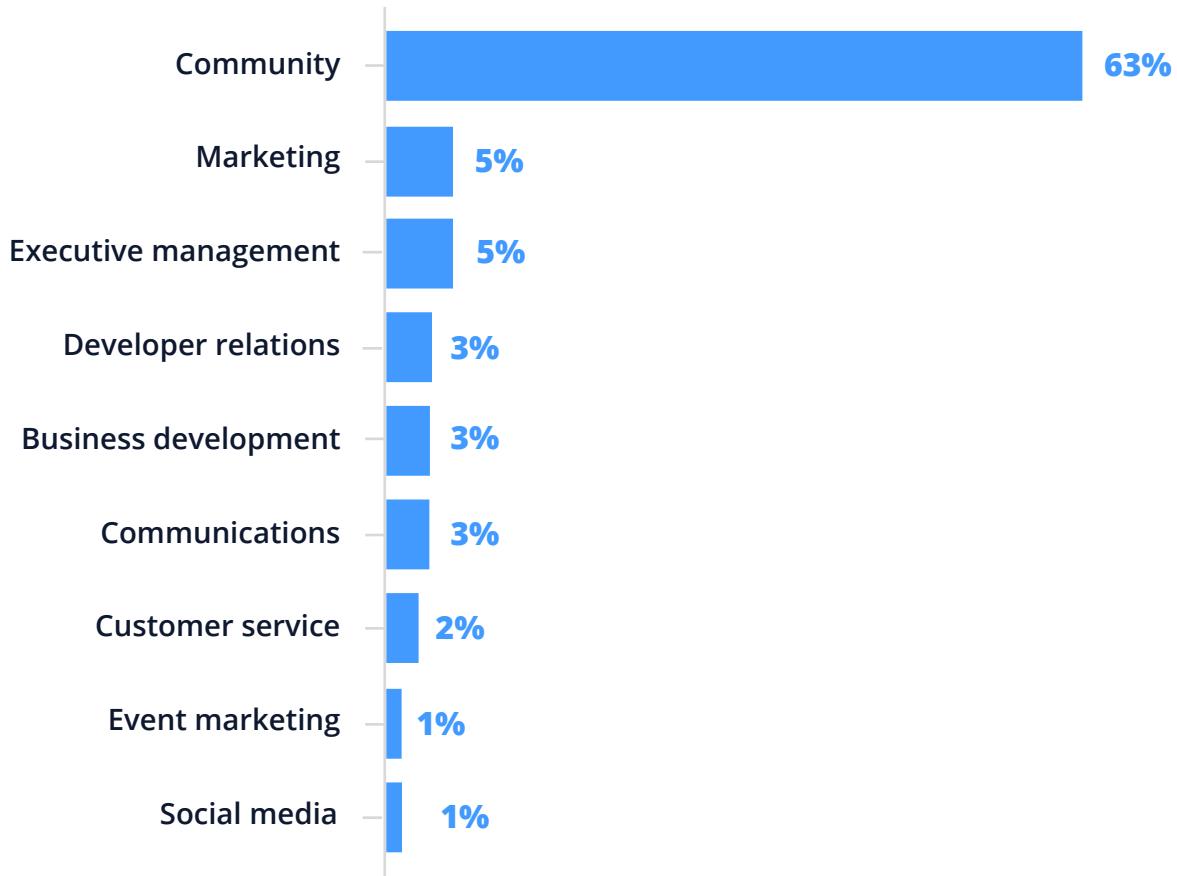
What best describes the primary focus of your organization?

- █ B2B
- █ B2C
- █ Non-Profit
- █ Education
- █ Other
- █ Government



What is your primary functional role in your organization?

TOP 10



Watch David Spinks' keynote,  
presenting the key findings  
from this research

03.

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# Community Industry Overview

# Community Programs Are Maturing

## Almost half of communities have existed at least 5 years

It's reassuring that organizations see the long-term value of communities. In 2017, 28% of communities had existed for more than 5 years, and this number has since **grown to 42%**.

As the community profession matures, so do the skills and capabilities of the teams leading them.

How long has your community existed?

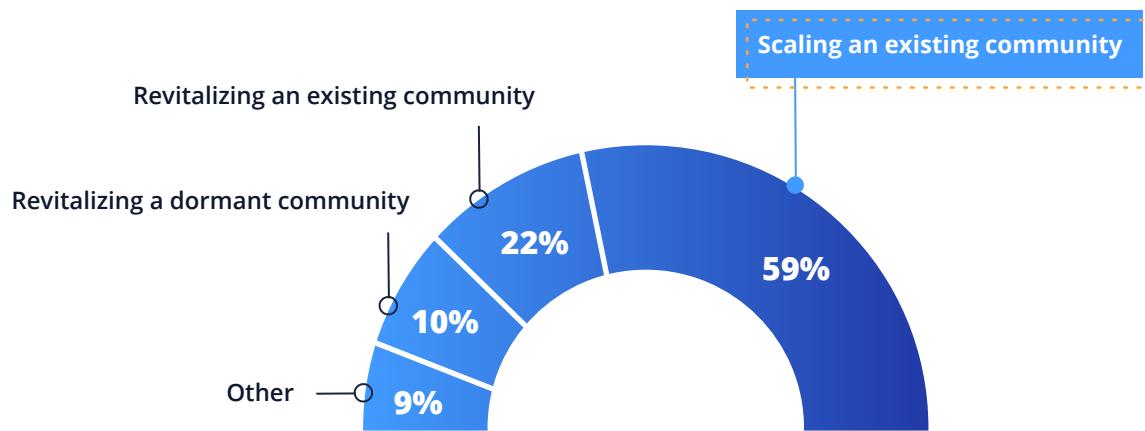


Organizations are demonstrating a **long-term commitment** to their community initiatives

## Most community professional are focused on scaling

Another sign that communities are maturing: Nearly **3 in 5** community professionals say their main goal is to **scale their existing community**.

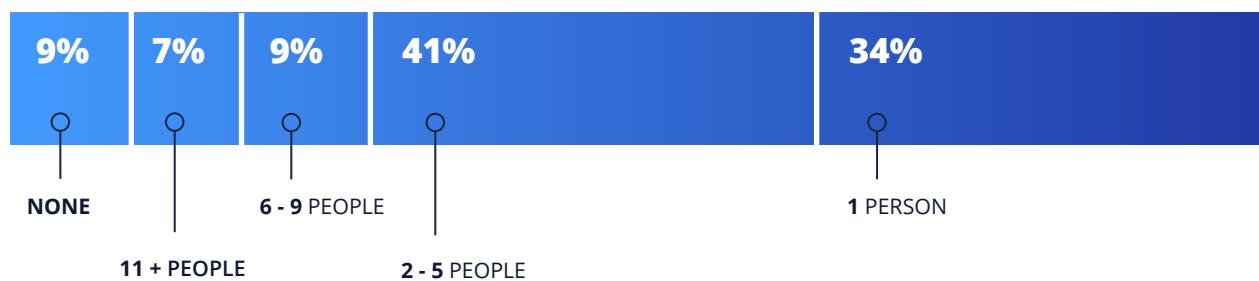
Which option best describes the strategy for your community program?



## More than half of community teams have at least 2 full-time employees

We are happy to see that **41%** of communities have 2-5 full-time people on their teams, which is a signal that **communities are growing in importance**.

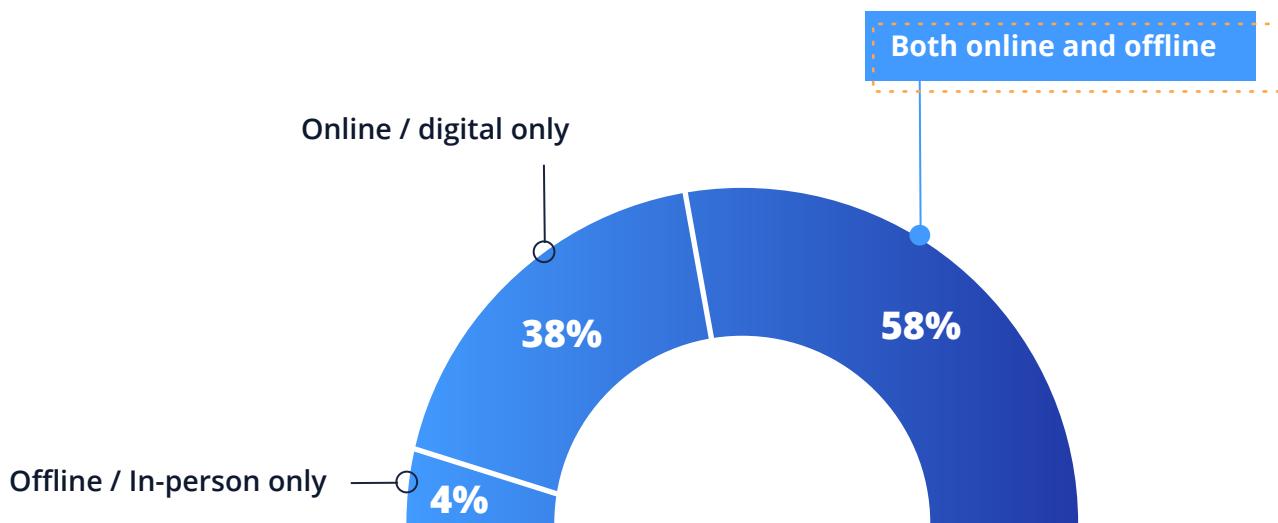
Approximately how many full-time people work on your community team?



## The majority of respondents have both in-person and online communities

New this year, the report investigated the type of communities brands have. To our surprise, the majority have **both online and in-person communities**.

What type of community program does your organization have?



*"The blending of offline programs with online programs can supercharge engagement and customer success."*

Erica Kuhl,  
VP of Community at Salesforce

## Respondents believe that community has a positive impact on the business, and most organizations will continue to invest.

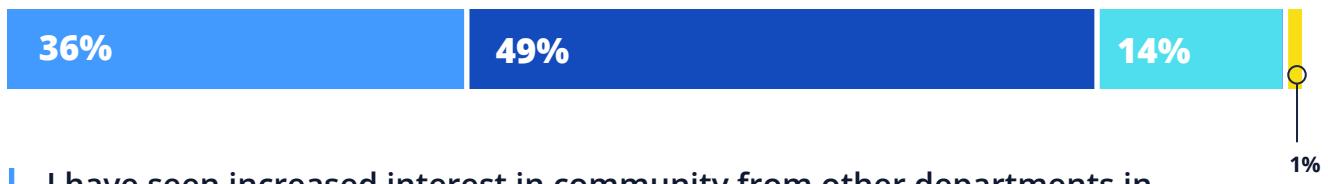
Communities are maturing not only in terms of years of existence but also in how people perceive them. For many, they are no longer a nice-to-have but rather are **an integral part of the organization**.

STRONGLY AGREE    AGREE    NEUTRAL    DISAGREE    STRONGLY DISAGREE

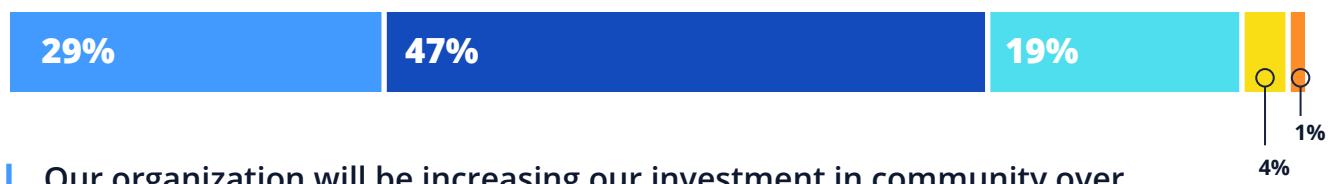
Community is critical to our company's mission.



Community has had a positive impact on our organization's objectives over the past 12 months.



I have seen increased interest in community from other departments in my organization in the last 12 months.



Our organization will be increasing our investment in community over the next year.



Managing my community has become more difficult over the past 12 months because members are turned off by social media.



**04.**

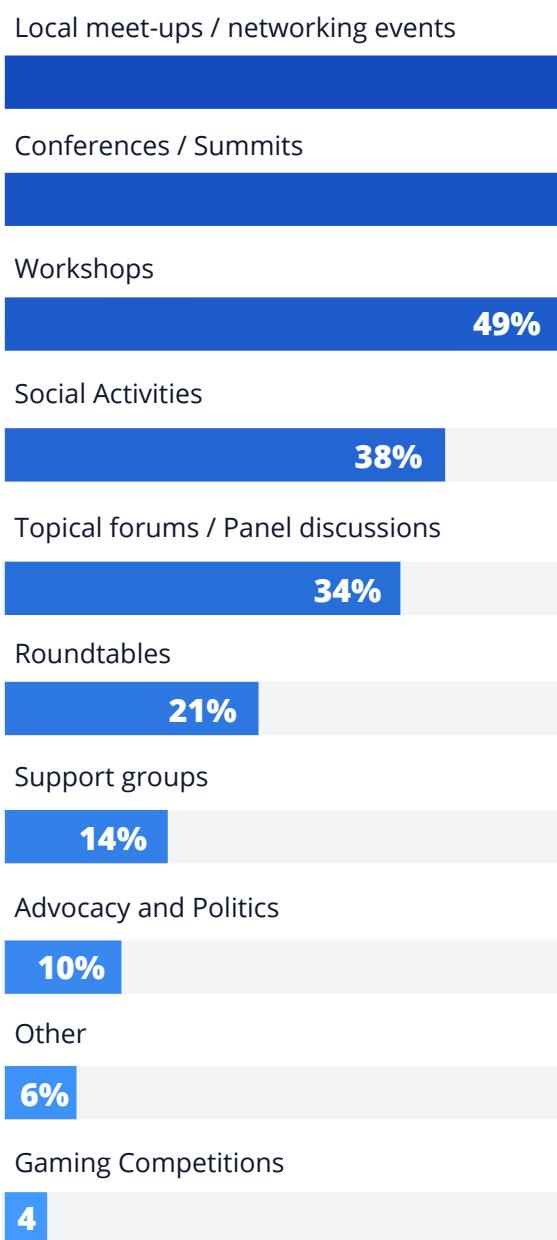
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# The Size and Scope of Community Programs

# Communities are going hyper-local

Local meet-ups are the most common type of in-person community events. Conferences are also popular, especially for B2B organizations.

## What type of in-person community do you have?

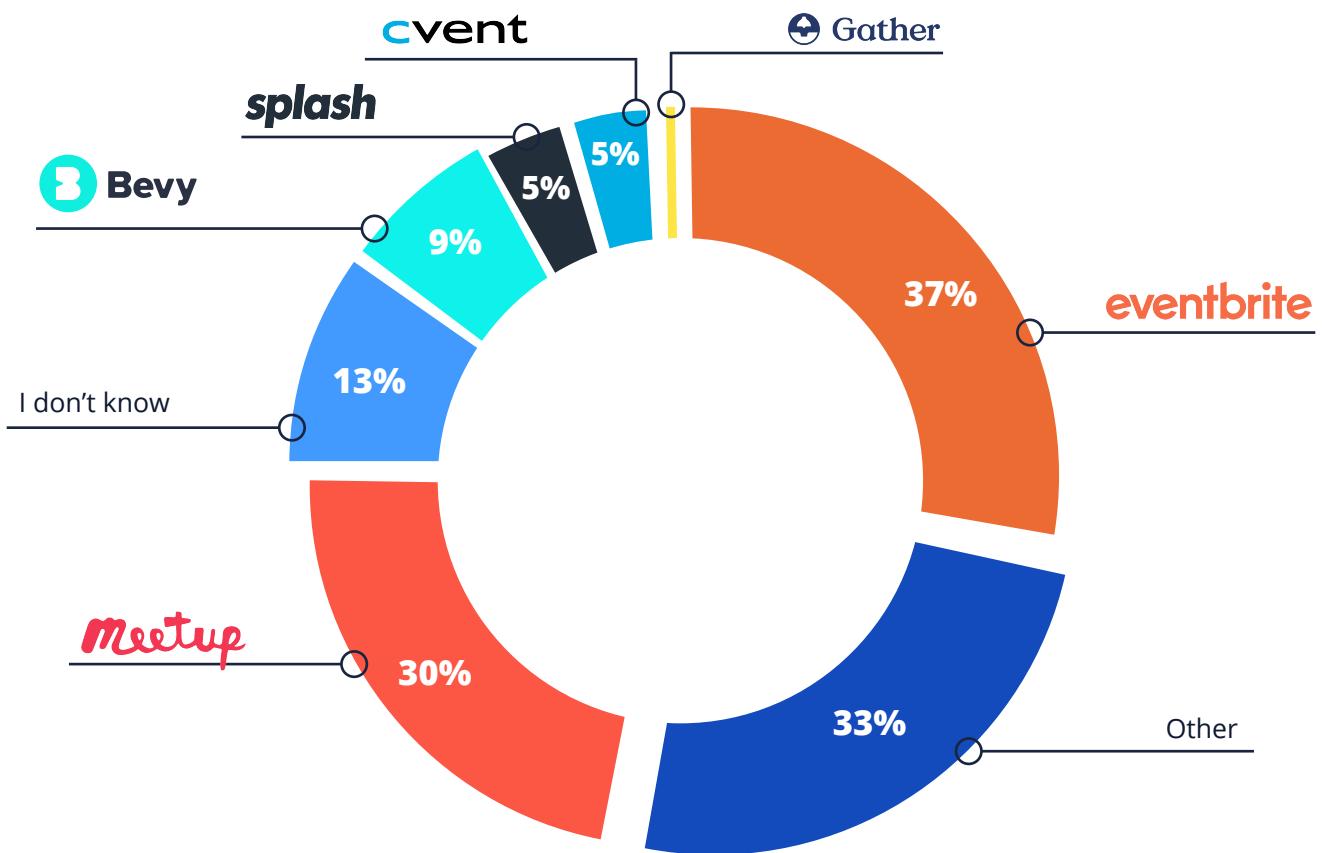


## Eventbrite and Meetup are the most common platforms used to manage offline communities.

There isn't a lot of standardization across offline platforms as many filled in "other" options for hosting their programs.

Many of the platforms used are **event platforms** great for hosting individual events, but don't thread data together for global event programs.

What platform(s) do you use to host your in-person community?

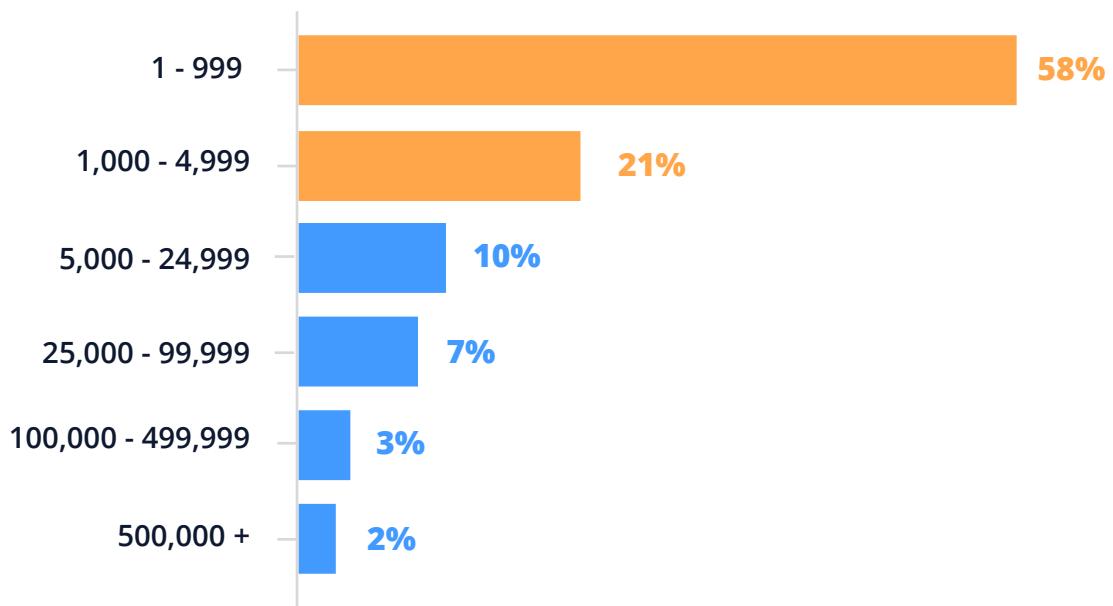


NOTE: Respondents could select multiple options

## Companies are in the early stages of in-person community building

Overall, in-person communities have touchpoints with fewer members than online communities. However, some programs have been able to scale their programs to a substantial size (500,000+), by empowering their community members to self-organize.

Approximately how many total members are in your in-person community (i.e., people who attend your live events) each year?



**300**  
monthly  
events

**duolingo**

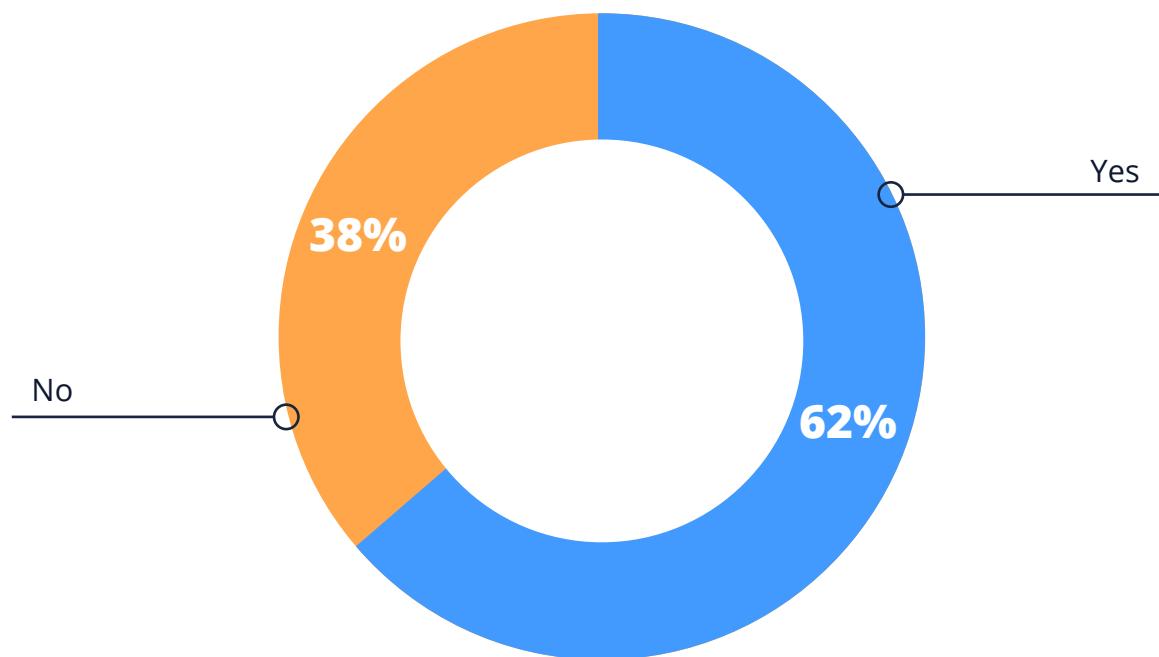
**+2000**  
monthly  
events

**79% have in-person communities with fewer than 5000 members**

## The majority of in-person community programs are volunteer-led.

The majority of companies who run offline community programs are empowering volunteers to self-organize gatherings.

Do you allow volunteers to run community events on your behalf?



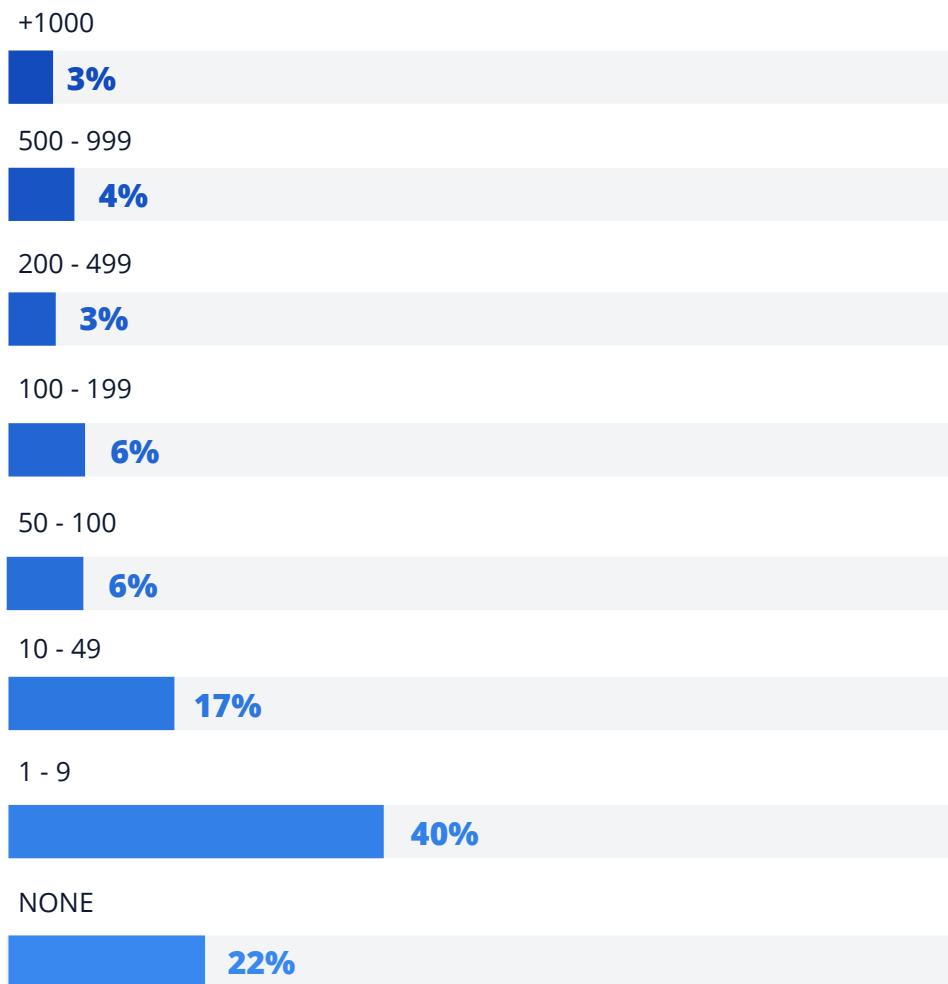
*“Community can be such a huge driver for customer acquisition and lead generation.”*

Kobie Fuller,  
General Partner at Upfront Ventures

## 78% of in-person communities have active chapters that help them run events.

Nonprofit organizations are more likely to have a higher number of active chapters, with 1 in 4 reporting they have **100-499 active chapters**.

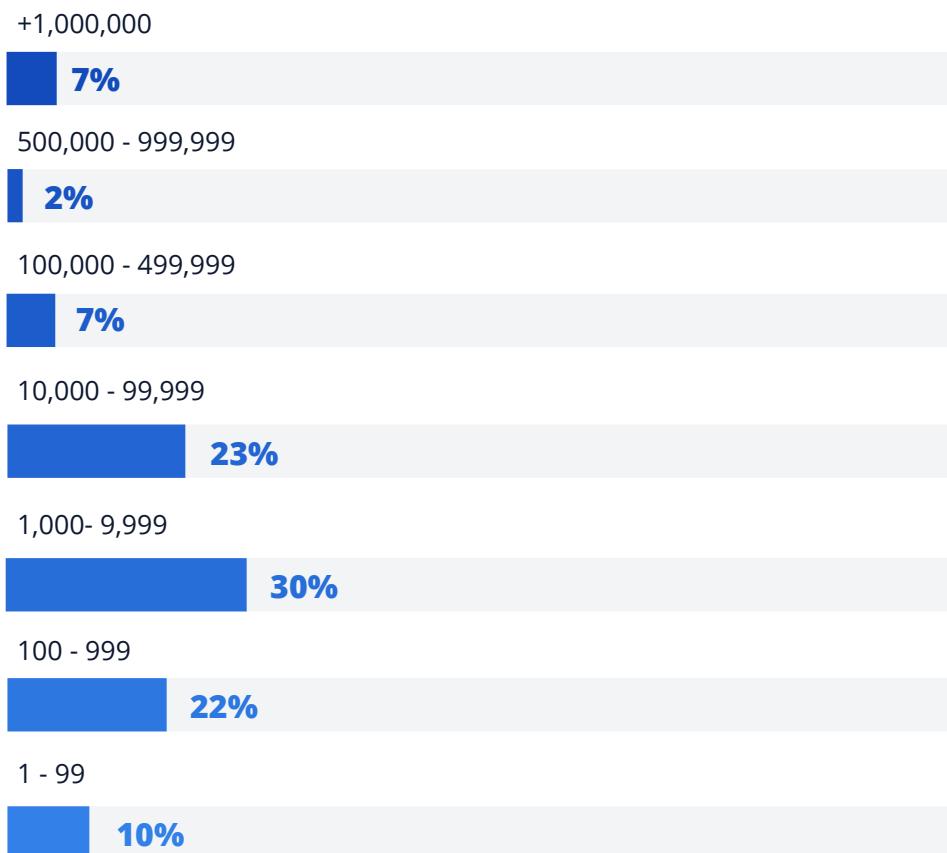
### How many active chapters/groups do you have?



## One-third of organizations have 10,000 people or more in their online communities.

Online communities are generally much larger than offline communities, though a large percentage of these groups may not be active.

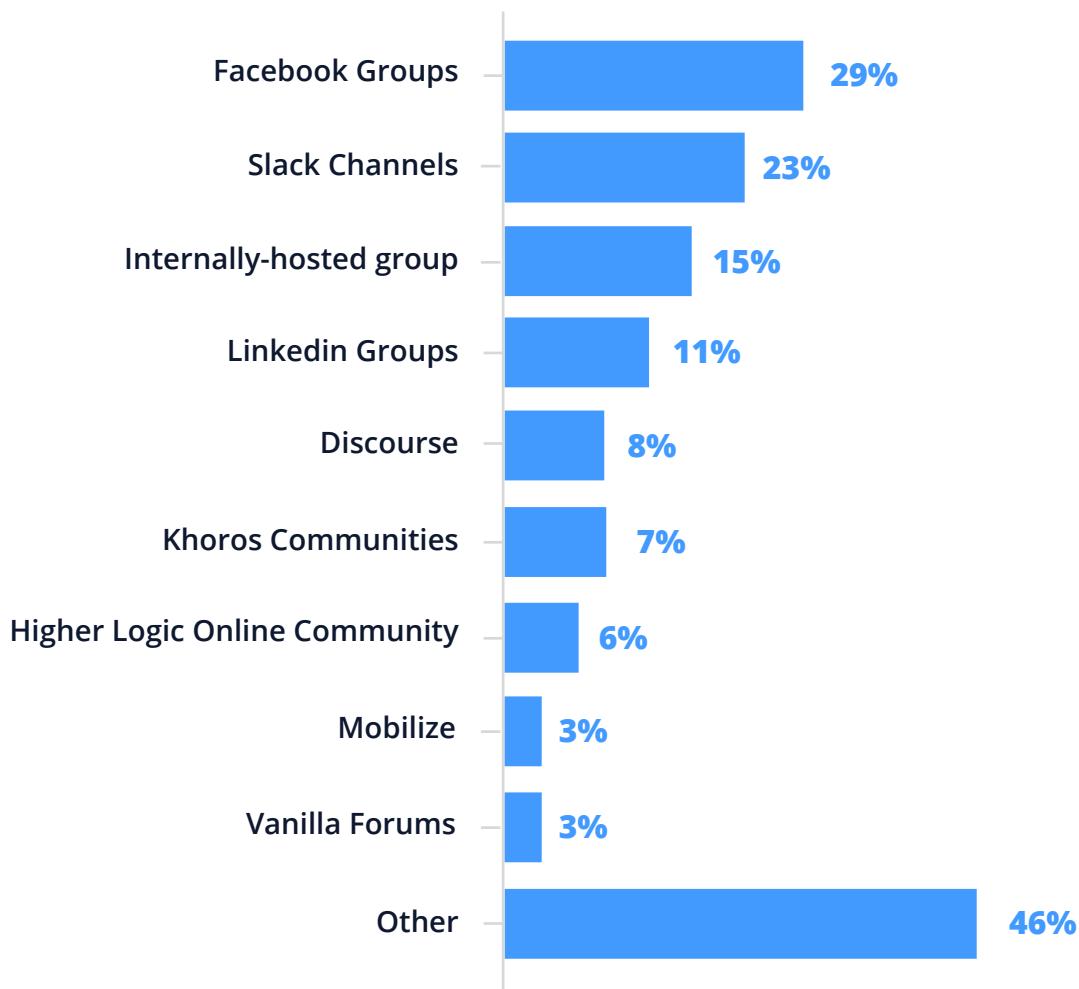
Approximately how many total members are in your online community (forums, online groups)?



## Facebook and Slack are the most common platforms people use to host online communities

As with in-person communities, there are many platforms community professionals use to manage the online communities.

What platform(s) do you use to host your online community? TOP 10



Don't forget to check out our video library where you can find more insights about the report and the latest trends in the community industry.

[BROWSE VIDEOS](#)

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# Top Frustrations Amongst Community Professionals

## The top challenges for *in-person* communities include attendance, lack of automation and difficulty quantifying the value.

Lack of budget and staff are, surprisingly, not the most pressing issues for those who manage in-person community events.

These were top frustrations for community professionals in our 2017 research.

### What are your top frustrations about your *in-person* community?

It's difficult to get our members to attend events

37%

Our efforts are largely manual and not automated

36%

It's hard to quantify the value of the community

36%

Planning events takes too much time

31%

It's difficult to maintain a consistent brand experience across our program

23%

We lack sufficient budget

21%

We don't have enough staff

14%

Other

11%

We don't have the right tools and technology

9%

## Consistently engaging members is the top challenge of online communities

Just as we see with in-person communities, lack of budget and staff are not key issues for this group.

### What are your top frustrations about your **online** community?

It's difficult to consistently engage members

**55%**

It's hard to quantify the value of the community

**44%**

Our efforts are largely manual and not automated

**40%**

We don't have enough staff

**25%**

It's difficult to access the right data

**21%**

We don't have the right tools and technology

**18%**

We lack sufficient budget

**17%**

It's difficult to acquire new members

**15%**

Other

**9%**



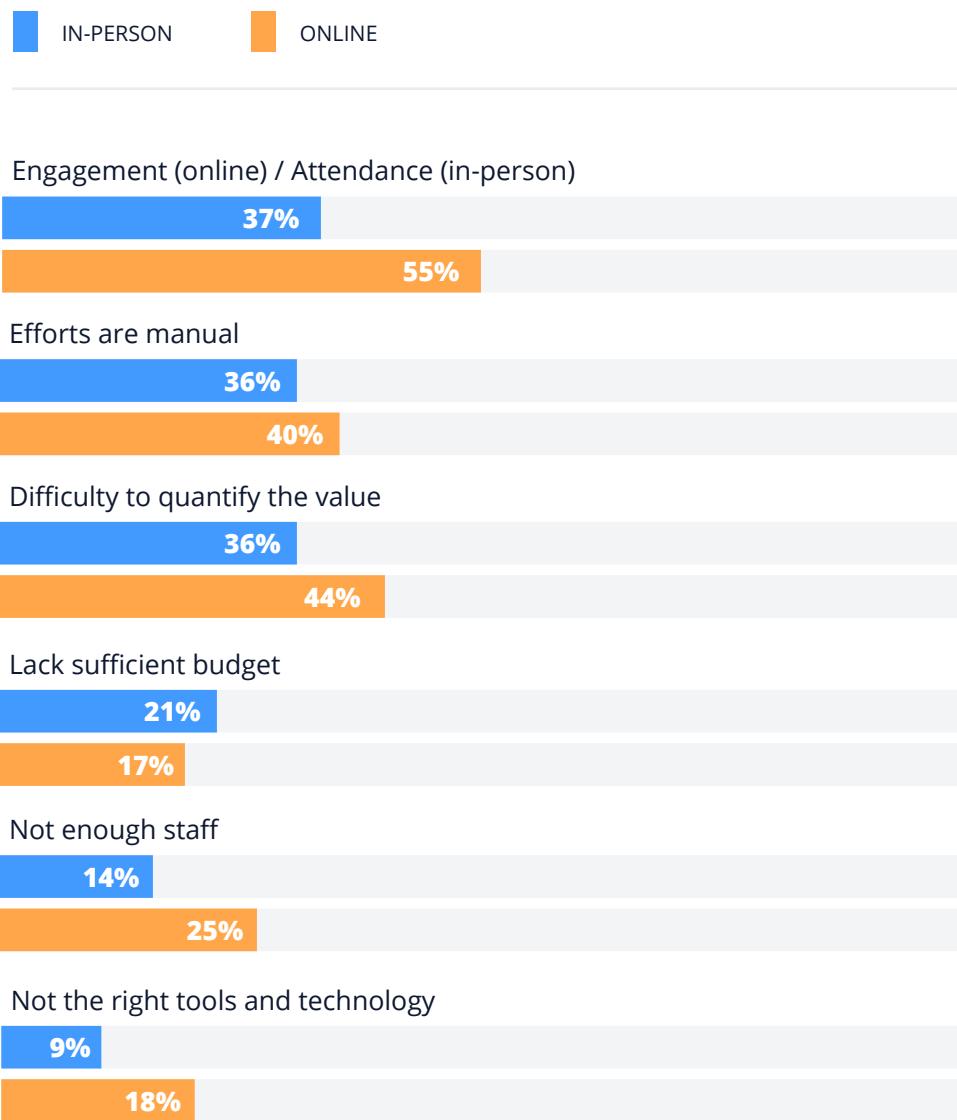
*"One of our challenges is to create a tent that's big enough where more voices can be heard."*

Chris Bruzzo,  
CMO at Electronic Arts

## Many frustrations are more pronounced with online communities

While *in-person* and *online* communities have a different set of challenges, those who have *online* communities are more likely to experience challenges — except lack of budget which was slightly more common for *in-person* communities.

### Frustrations: Online vs In-person communities



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# Measuring the Value of Community

## Communities are heavily focused on serving the needs of customers

While communities serve many different personas, the most common participant is customers.

Who is the primary participant in your community?



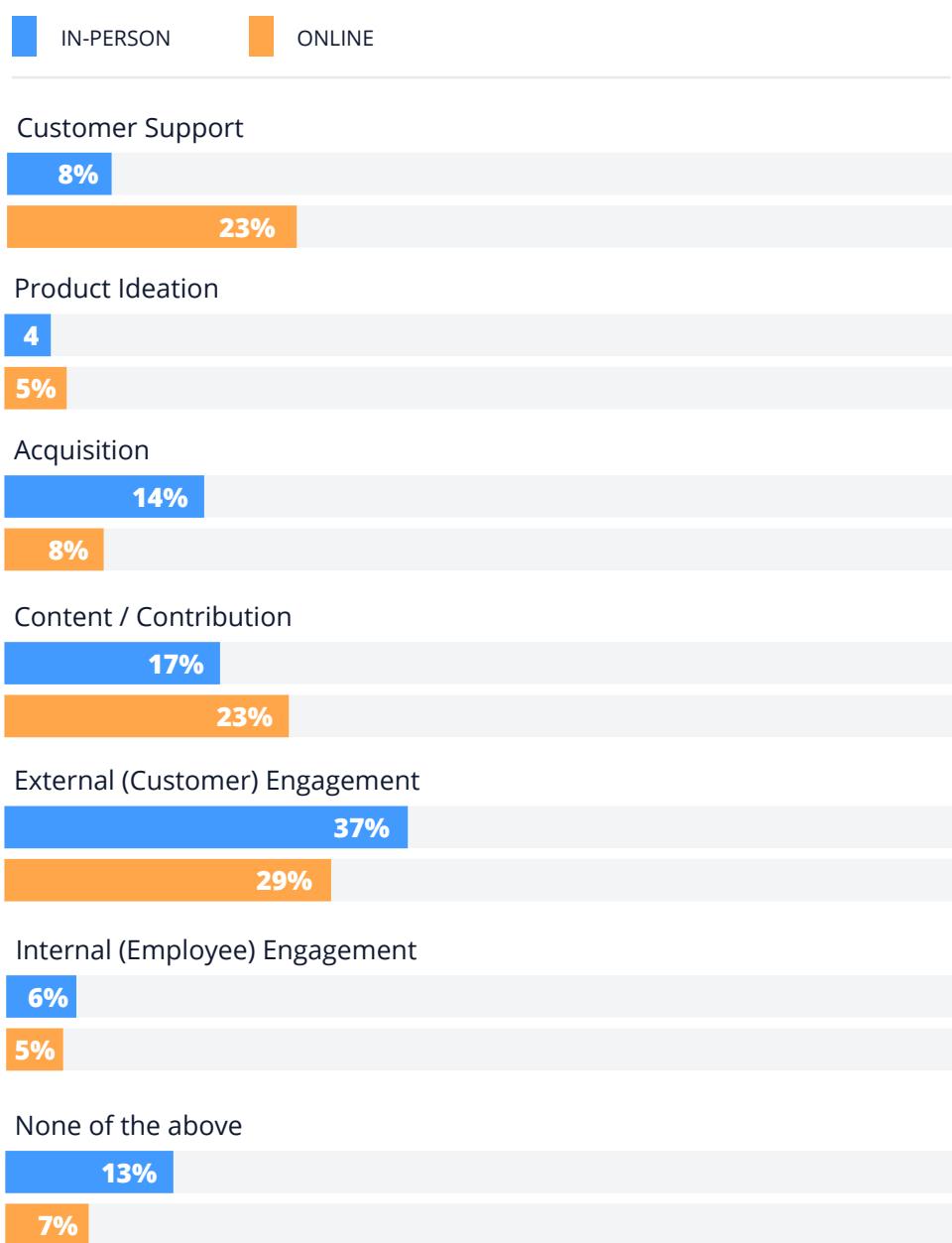
*"Start talking about the importance of your community's trust. Just having that conversation inside of your business can start to create leverage."*

Jascha Kaykas-Wolff,  
CMO at Mozilla

## Both online and in-person communities report their main objective is to drive customer loyalty and retention.

In 2017, the top objective for communities was customer support, followed by advocacy. As predicted in that report, the objective of the community is likely to shift over time, which it has. Perhaps impacted by the growth of Customer Success across tech companies, retention is becoming a growing focus for community teams as well.

### Primary objective: In-person vs online communities



## Community professionals are most likely to use the number of attendees and events to measure the impact of their in-person communities.

While the number of event attendees and number of events are easy metrics to track, these likely are not the metrics leadership cares about the most.

What metric(s) do you use to measure the impact of your in-person community?

TOP 10

Number of events attendees

67%

Number of events

41%

Customer satisfaction

32%

New customers

30%

Retention

29%

Net Promoter Score

24%

Customer loyalty

21%

Change in revenue

11%

Product ideas

8%

Feature adoption

8%



*"Just this year, we've had \$8M dollars in pipeline that's been created after someone attends a community event."*

Jason Boehmig,  
CEO at Ironclad

## The most popular metric for measuring online communities is Monthly Active Users (MAUs)

MAU's show how many community members have returned to the community in the last 30 days. Similar to in-person communities, the measurements online community professionals say they use to measure impact are more focused on engagement, and less on actual business value.

What metric(s) do you use to measure the impact of your online community?

TOP 10

Monthly active users

57%

New user / member sign up

43%

Daily active users

39%

New user-generated content

37%

Retention

31%

Customer satisfaction

29%

Shared content

28%

Number or percentage of answered questions

26%

Net Promoter Score

24%

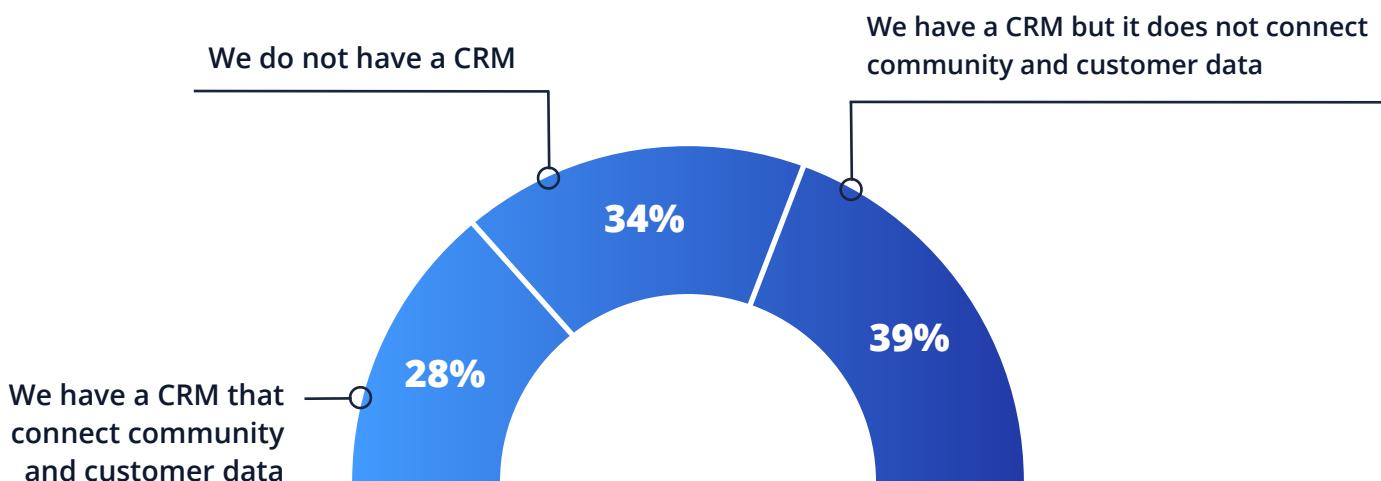
Logins

23%

## Only 1 in 4 are using CRMs (Customer Relationship Management Software) to connect customer and community data.

Considering that customer retention and loyalty is a main focus for many communities, many have an opportunity to become more sophisticated by integrating the data they collect from their communities into their CRM.

Do you use a CRM to connect community data back to customer data?



*"The reason you're hearing the word community every day is because Executives at the highest level understand how it's impacting their bottom line."*

— Laura Nestler,  
Global Head of Community at Duolingo

## Community professionals believe online to be easier to scale and more cost effective, but in-person more valuable to their business and better at driving retention

Consider your experiences with both online and in-person communities. Select the option that best describes your experience.

ONLINE COMMUNITY

IN-PERSON COMMUNITY

BOTH ARE EQUAL

Provides greater value to our business

23%      31%      45%

Helps us retain customers more easily

25%      33%      42%

Is easier to manage

47%      19%      34%

Is easier to measure

51%      24%      25%

Is a better way to provide customer support

59%      12%      28%

Requires less budget

75%      10%      14%

Scales more easily

79%      12%      9%



*"Over the past 12 months, meetups on their own have sourced or influenced over \$5M in ARR."*

Mada Seghete,  
Founder of Branch Metrics

07.

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# Planning for 2020

# Planning for 2020

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The community industry has truly come a long way over the past ten years. We believe it's going to mature much more rapidly in the next ten years.

We see it in the data, as more community teams are able to get buy-in and justify their budget by connecting their community data back to their business objectives.

For years we've talked about how community is the future of business and the companies who have made the investment in community are starting to see the results.

Take Branch Metrics for example, who has been able to attribute \$5 million in ARR to their community. And Ironclad whose CEO confirmed that community is driving over \$8mil in annual revenue through customer acquisition and retention.

Community teams are growing as a result, and we're seeing more community pros reach VP status every year.

You now have the case studies, the tools, and the industry knowledge to make a real impact building community at your organizations.

Below are our recommendations to set yourself, and your community, for success in 2020...

# Recommendations for your 2020 Community Strategy

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## 1. Start with data in mind.

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It's a big problem that so many communities don't integrate with CRMs.

This should be a foundational element of every community program.

If you can't get the data, and tie it back to your customers, you shouldn't invest more into the program. It will just be impossible to prove the value of your work.

## 2. Use this research to get buy in.

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Don't go into any budget meeting without doing your research.

Too often community teams struggle to get buy-in because their pitch doesn't have industry data to back it up. Now you do. Need more case studies? Explore all the talks from successful community pros at CMX Summit.

## 3. Invest in both online and in-person community.

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58% of companies are investing in both online AND in-person communities, and we expect this number to grow. If you're just focusing on online, think about how you can start bringing your community together, especially through scalable, volunteer-run community events.

## 4. Get creative with your engagement strategy.

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It's clear from the data that engagement is the top challenge for community professionals, both online and in-person. The internet is a noisy place, and attention is hard to keep.

You'll need to get creative in 2020, giving people a unique experience they can't find anywhere else, especially if you're not hosting your community on a big social media platform. But the appetite for new community spaces has never been greater. So take your swings.

### **2020 is going to be a pivotal year for the community industry.**

More companies are going to launch successful communities that drive measurable revenue, more community builders will be invited to speak at conferences, and more CEO's will use community as a talking point. There's never been a greater time to be a professional community builder. Strike while the iron is hot, and make community a mainstay in your organizations!

# Join the CMX Community

Now that you've been equipped with this data, don't let it sit there on your desktop. **It's time to take action!** And the CMX community is here to help.

**There are a few ways to get involved:**



Join us at CMX Summit 2020, the industry's largest gathering of community professionals and leaders.  
SEPTEMBER 9 - 10 • REDWOOD CITY, CA

[www.cmxhub.com/summit](http://www.cmxhub.com/summit)



Find your local CMX Connect chapter to meet with other community professionals in your neighborhood, or start your own!

[events.cmxhub.com](http://events.cmxhub.com)



Join CMX Pro, the premier membership community for community professionals.

[www.cmxhub.com/pro](http://www.cmxhub.com/pro)



# Bevy

Bevy is built to scale in-person communities with one integrated platform that empowers organizers, connects otherwise disparate data sources, and unifies community groups from different social networks.

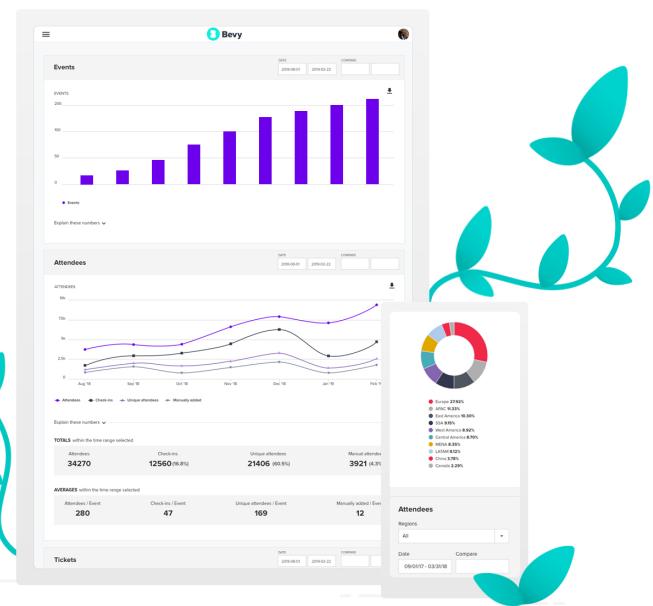
Bevy is the first company entirely dedicated to building in-person Customer-to-Customer (C2C) communities. Bevy acquired CMX, the largest organization for community professionals in February 2019 in order to help CMX accelerate innovation for companies, institutions and advocacy groups focused on building communities.

Bevy continues to innovate with a feature-rich platform used by some of the most forward-thinking & disruptive companies in the world.

Partnered with companies like [Salesforce](#), [Slack](#), [Atlassian](#), [Asana](#), [Qualtrics](#), [Duolingo](#) and more.

Bevy is leading a movement to build C2C communities on a global scale.

[WANT TO LEARN MORE? BOOK A DEMO](#)





Did you find this report valuable?

Did you use it to guide your community strategy?

Have an idea for how we can improve it next year?

**We'd love to hear from you!**

Send us your stories and feedback to [team@cmxhub.com](mailto:team@cmxhub.com)