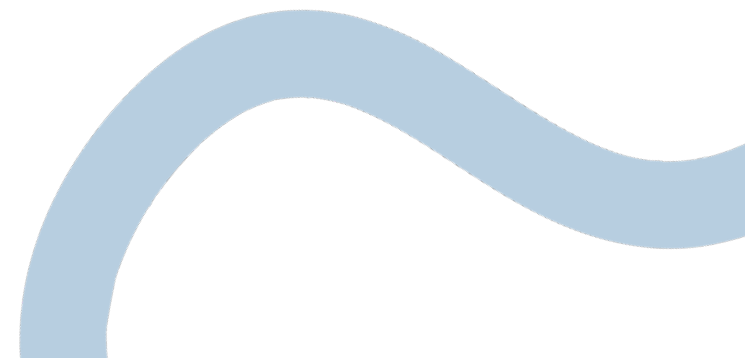


FACEBOOK
VS
OWNED
COMMUNITY
PLATFORM



CONTENTS

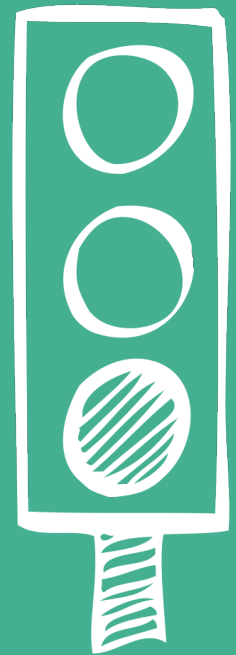
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03.

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INTRODUCTION



A thriving online community is one of the most effective tools for improving customer engagement, satisfaction, retention, and more.

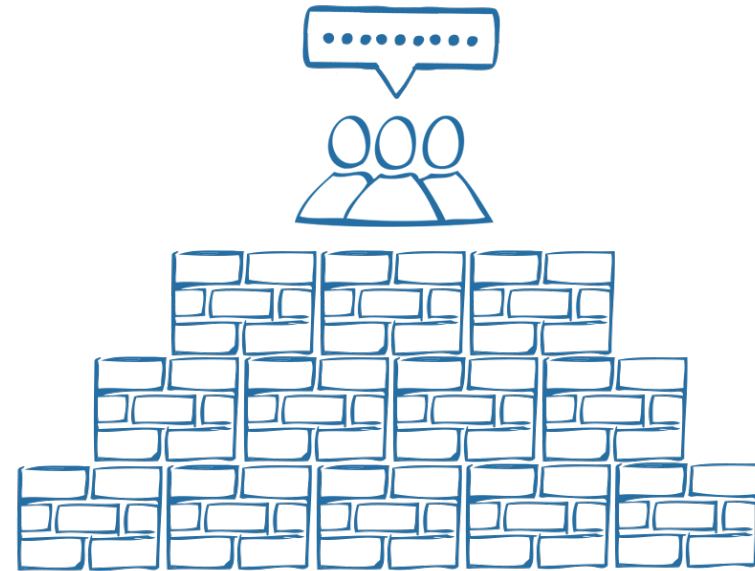
People love to talk to each other about the things that matter to them. And a community makes it easy for members to tell their stories, share their experiences and grow their passions.

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WHERE YOU ESTABLISH YOUR COMMUNITY IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT DECISIONS YOU'LL MAKE

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However, communities built on social media and communities custom-built on platforms designed for a specific community serve different purposes, behave differently, and provide a vastly different experience.



So, when making the decision between a public social network like Facebook or a custom-built online community, your choice should be based on how they compare for some key factors:



ENGAGEMENT



**CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
& SATISFACTION**



CUSTOMER RETENTION



**COMMUNITY FOR
SUPPORT**



SEO



RISK

This guide will cover all this and help you make the best decision for your brand's needs.

05.

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ENGAGEMENT



LESS DISTRACTIONS, MORE ENGAGEMENT

“Everyone is already on Facebook!”

You might think it's a good idea to build your community on Facebook because you have a large following there already. It's familiar for them, easy to use and thus can lead to much greater engagement, right?

YOU NEED TO FACTOR IN THE DISTRACTIONS ON FACEBOOK

On paper it sounds ideal, but you need to factor in the distractions on Facebook and consider how your content is competing for attention with the main newsfeed, friends and any other groups or pages they follow.

When you fully own the channel, everything within your community supports your brand. Discussions are specific to you and your sector.

There's no distracting adverts in the sidebar, no newsfeed stealing attention, just pure focus on your community.





CAN YOU HAVE SUB-GROUPS?

When you fully own the channel, you aren't locked into Facebook's restrictions.

You control the user experience, meaning you can split things into separate categories or sub-groups to make it clear where certain topics should be discussed.

This organisation makes it easy for people to find and dig into the specific sub-topics they are interested in—a great way of communicating with like-minded people and feeling connected in this big wide world.

And the more topics get organised, the more community interactions flourish.

You can't split off and go this deep on Facebook and engagement pays the price.

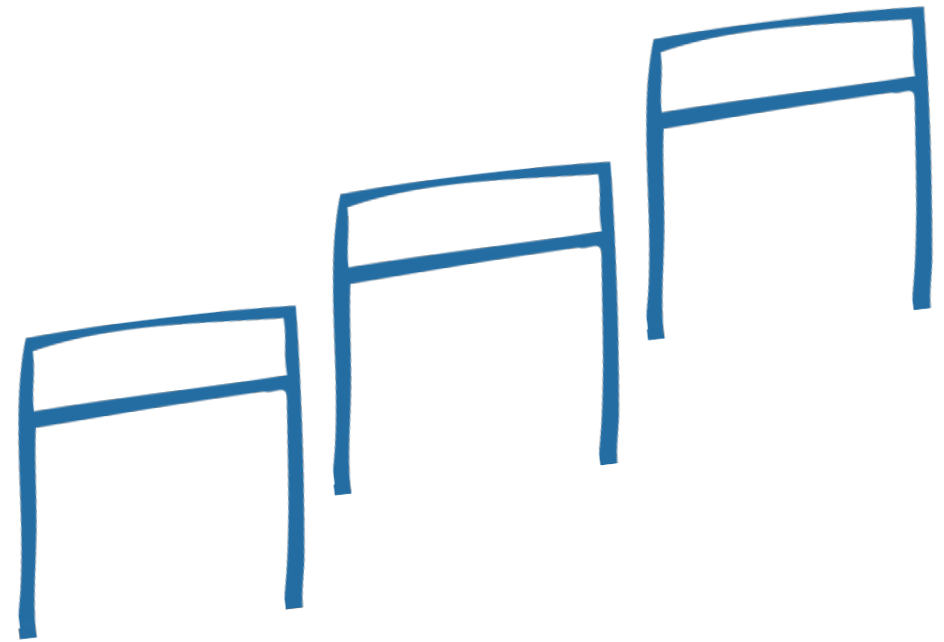
HISTORICAL THREADS ENABLE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Search on Facebook groups only goes back 30 days (and the results aren't always accurate). If community engagement is your goal, this is a problem.

It hinders your ability to let users make deeper, more emotional connections.

YOU SHOULD BE REMOVING HURDLES FOR MEMBERS, NOT ADDING MORE

Facebook has crippled the search functionality because it wants to steer users away from discovering old threads—it makes them more likely to start new ones.



Unfortunately, breaking up interesting discussions is bad for exchanging ideas, having long-running discussions, and including as many users as possible (i.e. community engagement).

An example of Facebook's goals clashing with yours.

Moving to your own community platform can breathe new life to thousands of threads with high-quality content previously buried by Facebook.

FINAL WORD ON ENGAGEMENT

Facebook as a social media channel has many qualities; it's great for promoting your company and products, attracting new customers and growing your brand awareness.

But, just because your customer base is on Facebook, it doesn't mean it's the best tool for building an engaged community.

Fully owning your community channel makes it easier to encourage engagement and repeat usage—exactly what you need to build trust and loyalty in your brand.

For those of you who are in a Facebook group, I have two questions:

1. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW A POST?

2. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU ENGAGED WITH A POST?

10.

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USER EXPERIENCE & SATISFACTION



GIVING MEMBERS THE BEST EXPERIENCE

From a member experience perspective, Facebook has fallen way behind in the community race.

Brands still think Facebook communities make sense because users are already on Facebook and are used to navigating the site. That's true, but it doesn't mean they are getting a better community experience.

Above all, your community managers should be able to organise and showcase the specific elements of the community based on your brands requirements and user needs.

So how can one generic community template accurately represent millions of unique communities?

This is what you get on facebook and, unfortunately, they are seriously strict about maintaining their look, feel, and functionality—even within paid groups.

FACEBOOK OWN THE LAND UNDER YOUR FEET

When YOU own the platform, you can fully customise the user-interface to suit the needs of your members:

- You can add the community into your website's header and footer for seamless navigation between your website and your community.
- You can add search capabilities to maximise conversation discovery.
- You can separate different sub-topics to narrow interests and boost engagement.
- You can match the branding and theme of your website.
- You can integrate your knowledge base into community search results.

In other words, you can optimise usability and give members a slicker, more satisfying community experience.

It's important not to overlook this; member satisfaction is the key to promoting long-term community growth.

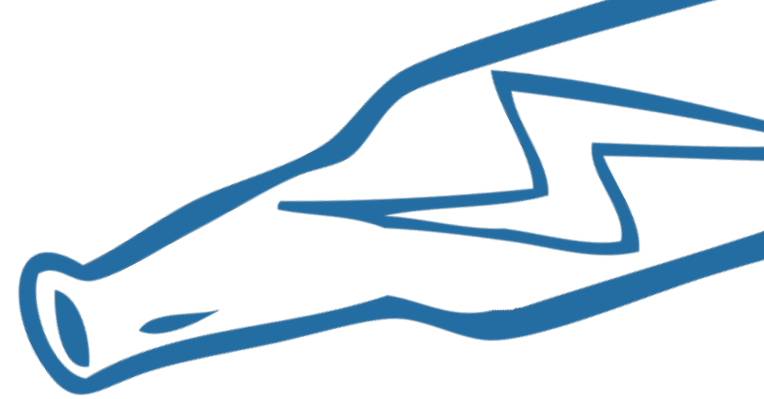
HAPPY CUSTOMERS ARE REPEAT CUSTOMERS

From a support perspective, getting your issue resolved quickly is the most important aspect of satisfying customer service.

Modern consumers have grown to expect a high level of customer service. They aren't happy to be passed around reps or wait on hold. Time to resolution is vital and they quickly get frustrated when they encounter needless friction.

HAPPY CUSTOMERS ARE LIKE LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE

People are also more comfortable with technology than ever before and would now rather self-solve their problem than speak to a customer service rep.



Taking advantage of this is one of the main advantages of building your community outside of Facebook.

Because Facebook restricts the site architecture, you can't add sub-categories or sub-groups to make it easy for people to find answers from topic experts and like-minded people.

You don't even have a way to quickly search the previous posts and conversations—you are left to manually scroll back through the feed.

Talk about a lousy user-experience.

If you want a community where members can find hyper-specific threads where others have already worked through issues, you need to host your community outside of Facebook.

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CUSTOMER & MEMBER RETENTION



CAN MEMBERS HAVE MEANINGFUL DISCUSSIONS?

When members consistently have meaningful conversations, it makes it harder to walk away.

They make a connection. The distance between the customer and your brand decreases and this actually increases a sense of partnership and loyalty.

In fact, this is one of the best ways to turn customers into brand advocates because you're ensuring your community consistently adds value to the lives of your customer base.

However, the Facebook comment culture prioritises short, fleeting comments. This means most of the interactions are throw-away one-liners, rather than deeper discussions that support customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Post turnover is quick, good discussions get lost and the meaningful connections go with them.

Compare this to an organised owned platform that is split into sub-topics. Users can engage in long, meaningful threads—often lasting days, weeks, or even years—related to their exact interests.



GAMIFICATION

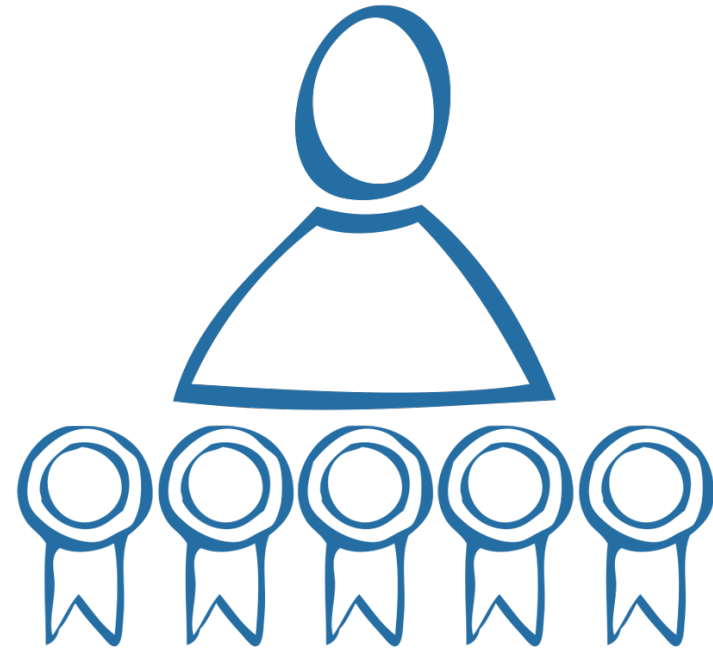
Gamification is one of the best tools in your community toolkit to boost engagement, but it also helps to reduce membership churn.

With gamification, you can encourage people to get into the habit of returning and engaging further through badges, titles, leaderboards—signs that show off a user's expertise are hard to walk away from.

GAMIFICATION IS ONE OF THE BEST TOOLS FOR BUILDING UP COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

However, to get a tangible boost from gamification, you need to be able to customise the experience—something you can't do on Facebook.

Sure, you can give members a 'Top Fan' badge, but that's hardly compelling and doesn't deliver any extras for the 'top fan'.



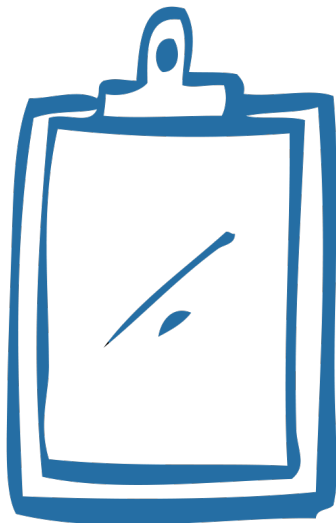
When you have control, you can personalise gamification to resonate with your members. The badges are relevant, titles and leaderboards become meaningful, and often turn into goals for newer members.

Our clients have used badges to great effect. Whether that's rewarding contributors who win photographic challenges or those who generate ideas that other people find useful (rather than those who just happen to talk the most).

YOU OWN THE DATA

Online communities are a gold mine for consumer insights and data that can be analysed to drive further marketing decisions and foster ongoing customer retention.

Online behavioral data will show you what discussions, files, topics, and products your customers are interested in. Feed this data into your CRM of choice and you can automate and personalise the experience of your brand for every customer.



OWNING COMMUNITY DATA MAY BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOYAL CUSTOMERS AND LOST OPPORTUNITIES

When you can see what customers are asking, which content they are consuming, and the discussions they are participating in, you can make much more accurate connections to their wants and needs.

Companies with this kind of 360-degree view can use these insights to ensure their marketing tactics are resonating in a way that keeps customers coming back.

Yet again though, you can't do this on Facebook because you don't own or have access to customer data. It all goes to Facebook for their gain.

17.

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AS A
SUPPORT
CHANNEL



INTELLIGENT SELF-SERVICE

One of the biggest advantages of having an online community is that customers can quickly self-solve their problems without clogging up your more expensive manned support channels.

That's the really cool thing about a community: there's often no larger knowledge base about your product than your customer base.

Customers use products in all sorts of unexpected ways and have experience with all kinds of use cases and scenarios. The ability to tap into that and add it to your support channels can be a huge benefit.

And on a platform that archives discussions, people can search for conversations where others have already worked through their problems. If they can't find an answer, they can ask the community a new question and have experts answer.

This is known as Intelligent Self-Service. It's a better, quicker experience for them, and it saves you support costs.

There is a simple equation you can use to calculate your rough support cost-savings:

$$\frac{(\text{Cost per support call} \times \text{Support calls per month}) \times \text{Deflection rate}}$$

Example: If you get 5000 support calls a month and each one costs you £10, that equals £50,000 per month. Deflect 30% (which is fairly conservative) to your community and you save £15,000 per month.

Deflection rate depends on the quality of your community—some of our clients exceed 65% deflection.

Keep in mind this doesn't factor in equipment, operator training and overhead, so there are additional cost-savings.

CUSTOM-BUILT COMMUNITIES RECOUP THEIR INVESTMENT FAIRLY QUICKLY

The truth is Facebook Groups are NOT designed for this. Not even remotely.

On Facebook, there is no way to see historical and important conversations without manually scrolling back through posts and hopefully finding a relevant one.

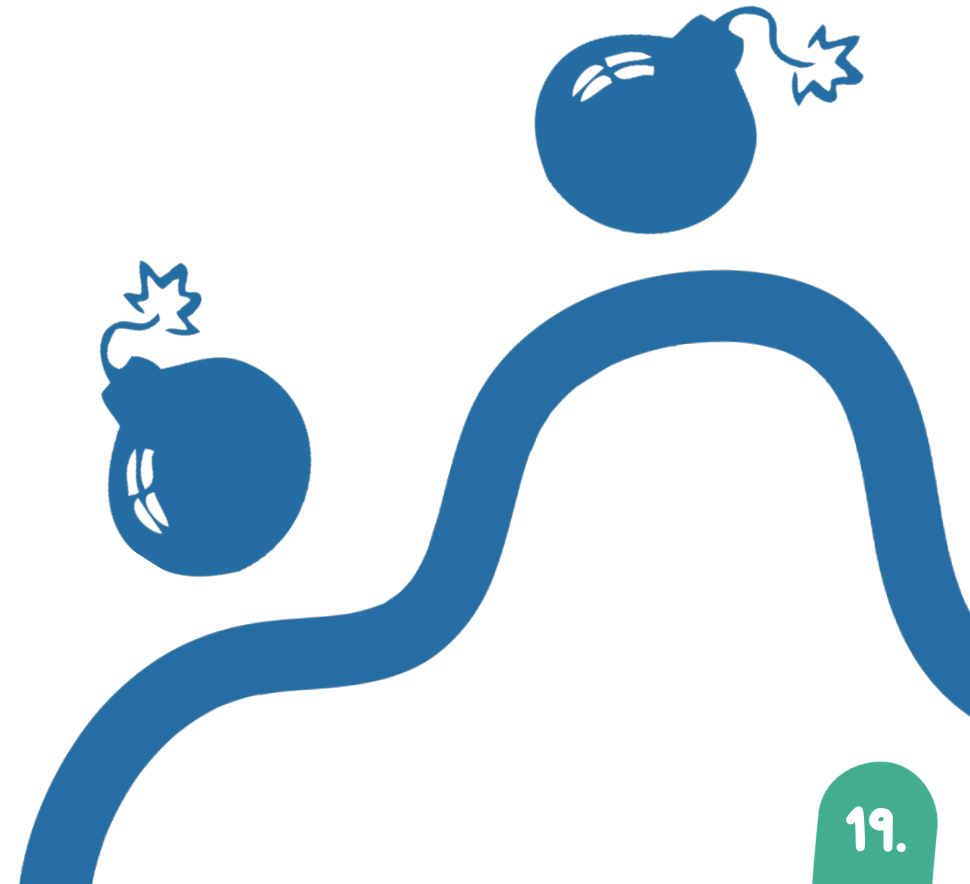
Posts are essentially a disjointed stream of community consciousness, making it hard to extract any community insights related a specific problem—leaving you with frustrated users clogging up more expensive support channels.

Even if you have an industry expert giving out unbelievable knowledge bombs, it's easy for members to miss them.

Inaccessible information is unusable information and you have to consider this before deciding on the home for your community—especially if reducing support costs is a primary motivation.

For brands who are serious about customer service, having a community outside of Facebook is a must. It allows you to take community support to the next level by integrating with your knowledge base.

In other words, you can have your knowledge articles show up in community search results.



THIS IS GREAT FOR:



**CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION**



**REDUCING TIME
TO RESOLUTION**



**TICKET
DEFLECTION**

In an era where 61% have stopped doing business with a company due to poor customer service (Microsoft), this is also extremely important for customer retention.

Unfortunately, taking external elements and having them show up in search results is something Facebook doesn't allow. This is the straw that breaks the camel's back for many brands considering Facebook for their online community.



21.

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SEO: THE FORGOTTEN PUZZLE PIECE



DON'T FORGET ABOUT SEO

A huge benefit that tends to get overlooked when considering the home for an online community is search engine optimisation (SEO).

Have you ever seen a Facebook group show up in any Google search results?

That's because they are NOT indexable. For the non-technical, this means Facebook groups are completely confined. Search engine bots can't crawl the content posted in your community, display it in search results or send organic traffic to it.

Hence why hosting a community on Facebook is an unbelievable SEO lost opportunity.

In a thriving community that is integrated with your site, your members are constantly adding pages, navigating around your site and engaging with content. Google is going to notice that and boost your site in the most important way; in search results.

Community members creating content also means there is an increased likelihood of other users searching for the same queries and landing on your page.

New customers arrive via all manner of questions and your cost of customer acquisition drops significantly.

COMMUNITIES BUILT ON SOCIAL MEDIA WILL NOT PROVIDE YOU WITH AN SEO BOOST

This kind of engagement is not easily replicated. It would take a team of marketers dedicated solely to SEO and content creation to achieve what an online community can organically produce.

Why not let your customers do the work for you?

23.

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COMPARING THE RISKS



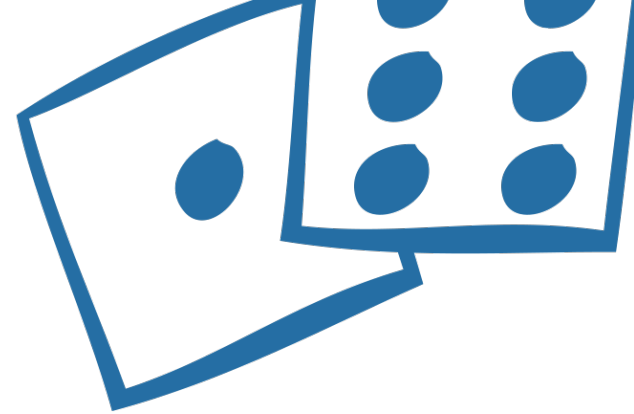
ALGORITHM CHANGES

When you lack control over the tools you use for your community, you inherit a huge degree of risk. You are rolling the dice with your community.

Every now and then, the overlords of the internet decide to change things up and there is nothing you can do about it.

If you—like many other brands—spent thousands of hours building up your Facebook page, you are probably still reeling from the swift culling of your organic reach, which now floats around 1%.

It's now common for pages with well over 1,000,000 page likes to struggle to generate 100 post likes. All that hard work and content put into building an audience was for virtually nothing.



As of now, Facebook isn't restricting group reach, but you have to be crazy not to expect them to go down that route—look at their history of changing the rules. There's been a definite pattern of “help us grow Facebook then we'll charge you for it”.

In fact, smaller changes to how Facebook groups function have already begun.

In 2019, admins began reporting that people were being kicked out of Facebook groups if they were not ‘active’ in them. That's a big problem—many community members are passive. They just want to occasionally read discussions and learn about a topic from peers and experts.

If they don't actively engage, Facebook gives them the boot, demoting them to an “invited” list.

They are (probably) doing this to maximise engagement and show advertisers a hot new property for their adverts, but the bottom line is someone else gets to say who can stay in your community.

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FACEBOOK DECIDES TO CHANGE? GREAT, YOUR USER EXPERIENCE JUST CHANGED, TOO

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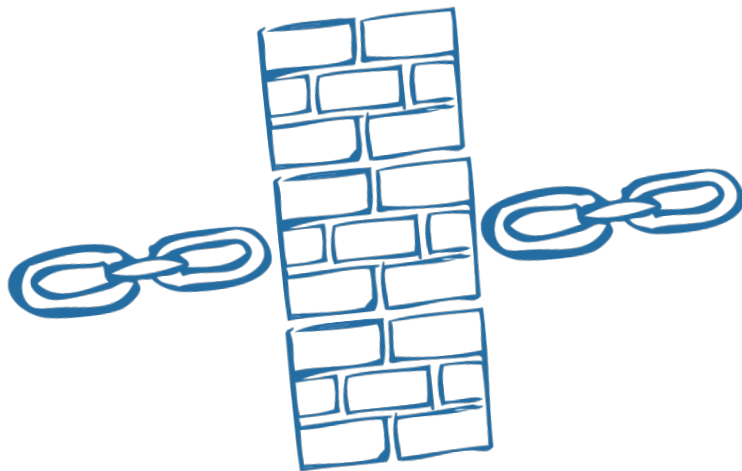
COMMUNITY DATA

Facebook doesn't give you the ownership of your members' data. All you receive after getting more than 250 members is an aggregated report.

This also means that you can't use the data to push members to your other channels. This is a big risk.

What happens if Facebook closes your group without warning? Having members on several channels mitigates the risk of one going down and losing everything you have invested in building up your community.

An additional, more advanced problem is your inability to integrate your Facebook community with your CRM.



When your community IS integrated, marketing teams get a 360 degree overview of member activity, their interests and their levels of engagement.

You can use all that data to target them with highly personalised marketing for more successful cross/up-selling. You also get greater awareness of members who are likely to leave—giving you the chance to act and prevent churn.

TO MAKE A COMMUNITY SUCCESSFUL YOU NEED ACCESS TO COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

When you fully own your online community, you control the functionality, the data, the user-experience, the ad real estate; everything.

There will always be some degree of risk, but on your own platform it doesn't fluctuate at the whim of other businesses.

26.

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FINAL THOUGHTS



QUICKPLATFORM COMPARISONS SUMMARY

	OWNED	FACEBOOK
ENGAGEMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE & SATISFACTION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CUSTOMER RETENTION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMUNITY FOR SUPPORT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SEO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RISK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Attention has diversified and people are choosing to pay attention to content and connect with brands in new and ever more interesting ways.

That's why every social platform – Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram – has a place. They're all important and powerful tools. The trick is finding the right job for each tool.

Facebook can be a terrific tool for building brand awareness and a powerful platform for advertising, but for communities, the best long-term solution will always be your a platform where you have full control.

In general, you should be wary about relying on Facebook for any type of long-term strategy, but be even more careful if you plan to use it as the backbone of your brands community.

Think through what your needs are.

And, if the benefits of an owned community platform are in line with what your organisation needs, start a conversation with 4 Roads about building your community on land that you own.

We'll happily demo a community and showcase the points we've made in this guide.

We've built over 120 communities—this is what we do.

BUILD YOUR COMMUNITY ON LAND YOU OWN



BOOK YOUR COMMUNITY DEMO



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**THANKS FOR
READING!**

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4 ROADS - COMMUNITY SPECIALISTS