Community Benchmark 2024

Report

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Circle

Introduction

A couple months back, one of our customers, Rita, shared something in particular that really caught us off guard.

"I'm just trying to figure out if I'm doing a good job or not."

For context, Rita is a super-experienced community builder and manager who's been in this line of work for over a decade. She's launched her own successful community and grown ones for big household brands.

In other words, her whole life and career is all about being on the cutting edge of all things community management.

If someone like Rita isn't sure that what she's doing is good enough, how must everyone else feel? Like they're constantly taking a shot in the dark and hoping for the best?

Although we were surprised to hear it from Rita, we probably shouldn't have been. That's because these doubts have come up in our conversations—*a lot.*

Creators and community managers want to know how their community's performance stacks up against their peers and other communities like them. But when it comes down to it, what they really want to know lines up with what Rita was asking: *"am I doing a good job?"*

Now, there are a couple of reasons they're looking for that kind of validation. The first is that community management as a function is still in its infancy.

We don't have universal standards, established benchmarks, or even agreed-upon metrics that everybody can refer to (or measure). There are very few resources out there to help community managers know with 100% certainty they're on track: these folks are the ones literally paving the way.

The second reason is that community pros usually have a small (or no) team, and not everyone in the organization understands the value of what they do. This makes fighting for resources an uphill battle. Knowing what "good" looks like would really help them get the things they need—and the recognition they deeply deserve.

Then you have the creator entrepreneurs (let's call them creators) who start their own communities not because they *love* business, but because they have a deep passion and have fearlessly built a business around it.

These creators also often work alone: nobody's giving them performance reviews, and the customer feedback they get tends to focus on areas of improvement, not necessarily areas of strength.

Just like community managers, creators wonder, "Is this what I'm supposed to be doing?" But they have no one to ask.

This can be a *really* isolating experience, to say the least.

Even in Circle's very own customer community, creators are always looking for benchmarks to compare their performance to.

So what does *good* look like, we wondered? At Circle, we already had mountains of anecdotal evidence from years of talking to our customers, but now we needed to get hard, concrete data to back it up.

Stats and figures are just one part of this story. Equally important are *proven* tactics creators can implement in their own communities to achieve the level of success they're measuring themselves against.

And so the 2024 Community Benchmark Report was born.

Cait Curley
Never Board Learning

Is there a benchmark for retention data from various markets?

We are coming up on our 2nd birthday and we are interested in comparing our founding member retention to others in the education sphere. Is there a way to find this information? What's an ideal founder retention rate two years out?

Thanks

Anna Oñate
Intrapreneur & PaperPack coFounder

What's your average Activity Score? For benchmarking!

🙌 Good day everyone! We launched a B2B community connecting professionals in the sustainable packaging industry, and are looking into setting proper success metrics to monitor growth and engagement. Saw the recently launched AI based activity scores from Circle which are a great indicator, but would like to know what is a realistic benchmark for a new (<100 members) vs. a mature B2B community. Could someone share some experience on their B2B community Activity Scores? Would appreciate it! Thanks! 🙏

+215 like this

First, we surveyed hundreds of professional creators, entrepreneurs, and influencers, all of whom built communities around their audiences.

To identify the best community builders, we then layered on Circle product data, resulting in two distinct participant groups: Platinum creators (the top 10% of communities on Circle) and standard creators (everyone else).

Despite facing similar challenges, and having similar-sized communities to their peers, Platinum creators consistently spark and maintain a higher level of engagement.

In this report, we'll lift the lid on exactly what it is they do that makes all the difference.

We're incredibly excited to share these insights with you. Both to bust some extremely common misconceptions about what a successful community looks like (it's not what you think), but also to showcase exactly what top creators are doing so you can emulate their success.

Here's to unpacking what makes a community great. Enjoy!

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Top 10 *findings*

Leveraging Circle's product data and an algorithm, we identified the "best" communities on our platform—those who had the highest membership engagement, retention, and growth.

We call these "Platinum" creators.

We then integrated survey responses and interviews of those communities to pinpoint the unique behaviors and business tactics that distinguish them from standard creators.

Here's what we discovered:

1.

Platinum communities have superior engagement, but on the surface, their businesses look a lot like typical communities.

75% have 500 or fewer members, nearly 60% don't have any full-time help, and half of them use three or fewer tools to manage their community.

2.

Platinum creators don't spend tons of money on new member acquisition.

Half of them don't spend any money on it at all. However, they do use significantly more acquisition channels than standard creators, including social media, email, and YouTube.

Top 10 *findings*

3.

Platinum creators prioritize onboarding and get it done in half the time.

How? They follow onboarding best practices such as implementing comprehensive welcome tours, sharing community guidelines, and using conversation starters, all of which help them onboard new members twice as fast as standard creators.

4.

Platinum creators owe a big part of their success to consistently hosting events.

100% of Platinum creators host events. On top of that, they organize more of every type of event in comparison to standard creators, like group discussions, orientation sessions, and Q&As.

5.

Not only do Platinum creators host more events, they also get more people to attend.

59% of Platinum communities see a 50%+ attendance rate, compared to just 33% of standard communities. They achieve this by throwing events their members ask for, attracting the right attendees, and sending plenty of reminders.

6.

Platinum creators prioritize retention much more than standard creators.

Platinum creators are twice as likely as standard creators to cite retention as their top priority for 2024. In contrast, 41% of standard creators say member retention is their lowest priority.

Top 10 *findings*

7.

Platinum creators experiment more with re-engagement tactics.

A third of creators (Platinum and standard) don't have a consistent process for bringing back disengaged members, but Platinums are more likely to experiment with re-engagement tactics.

8.

What Platinum creators don't tend to do is offer discounts.

This is the one re-engagement tactic that Platinum creators are less likely to try. Rather than lower the perceived value of their community, they lead with the value they provide, and price their offerings accordingly.

9.

Platinum creators monetize their communities more.

Only 7% of Platinum communities are free, compared to 21% of standard ones. The remaining 93% of Platinum communities charge for access or offer the community as an add-on to another purchase.

10.

Finally (and perhaps most importantly) Platinum creators do not have more money, employees, or hours in the day than standard creators.

What they do have is a profound understanding of their members that they pair with creative, smart tactics. This knowledge is free and accessible to everyone, empowering all creators to join their Platinum peers in the top 10%.

Methodology

We adopted a trifold approach to understand what the best communities do differently, including:

- A detailed survey
- In-depth product usage data
- Insightful qualitative interviews

First, we conducted a broad survey reaching 682 diverse community pros, including creators, entrepreneurs, and influencers to get a baseline on their community management strategies. Then, we integrated this analysis with extensive Circle product usage data.

Utilizing an algorithm, we were able to assess and categorize communities based on those who demonstrate the highest level of membership engagement and the lowest level of membership churn. This enabled us to identify the highest achievers in our platform, who we categorize as our "Platinum" communities.

Lastly, we complemented our quantitative data with qualitative interviews. By engaging directly with select Platinum community builders, we gathered in-depth insights and personal anecdotes to better understand the nuanced practices and strategies behind their success.

Who
We surveyed 682 professional creators, entrepreneurs, and influencers who built communities around their audiences.

Why
To understand how professional creators run their communities so we could identify what the best ones do differently.

How
We surveyed creators and layered on Circle product usage data. Circle uses an algorithm to predict a community's success, with the highest achieving communities called Platinum.

We then cross-referenced our Platinum customers with the list of respondents to pinpoint exactly how the most successful creators behave and structure their businesses differently.

Demographics

Creator *type*

Modern-day creators are a diverse bunch. That's why it's so important to start by taking a closer look at how our respondents see themselves and define what they do.

While most respondents identify as coaches, course creators, founders, or entrepreneurs, 25% couldn't (or didn't want to) choose from available options. Similar to artists or performers who prefer not to box themselves into a single category, they tend to see themselves as doing a little bit of everything, a combination of the creator types we mentioned above.

50+%
call themselves "coaches" or "course creators".

Others
identify as "founder" or "entrepreneur".

Some
define themselves by who their audience is.

Some
emphasize *who* they are, rather than *what* they create.

1/4
chose "other" and explained they do a little bit of everything.

What's also interesting are respondents who take a completely different approach to defining what they do. For example, some felt more comfortable describing themselves in terms of their target demographic, i.e., "I'm a passionate dog mum who created a community for dog owners."

Others emphasize *who* they are instead of *what* they're creating. These respondents elaborated with qualifiers along the lines of: "I'm a connector", "I'm a marketer", and "I'm a creative visionary".

Community size & platform

Over the years, we've spoken to many community builders who worry that until they have a community with thousands of members, they haven't "made it". They're often under the impression that other communities are much bigger than theirs and that the "most successful communities" must be *huge.*

But that's not the case, and we'd like to take the opportunity to debunk that belief, because it's probably just holding you back.

Only 7% of respondents have "jumbo" communities with more than 5,000 members, while 4 in 5 respondents have 500 or fewer community members. It's actually much more common to have a smaller community, and most importantly—that doesn't make it any less successful or lucrative.

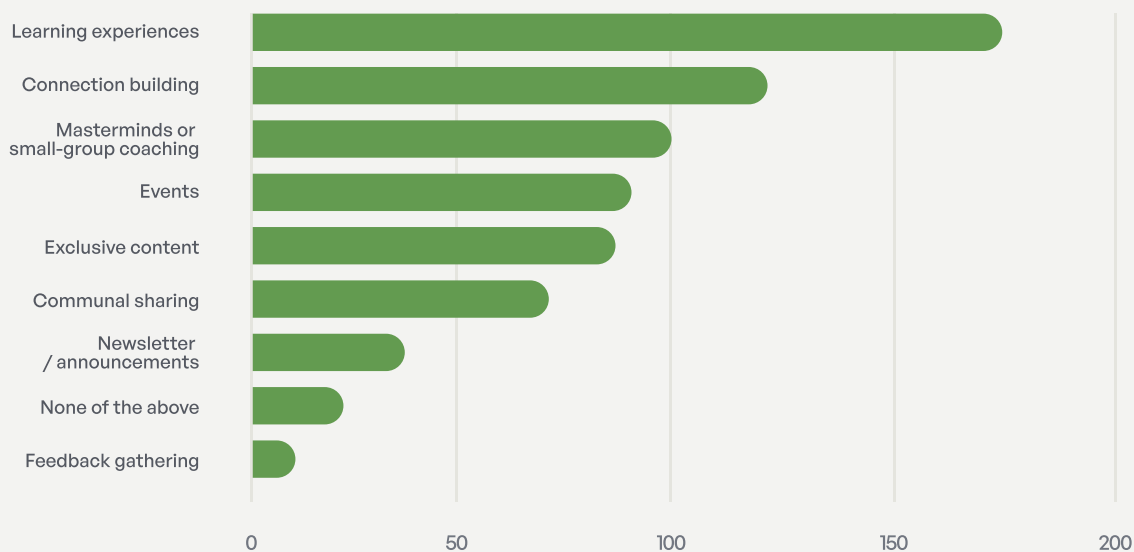## Community size

Number of members

- 1 - 100
- 101 - 500
- 501 - 1000
- 1,001 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 10,000
- 10,000+

53.8%

28.2%

6.5%

5.1%

2.6%

3.8%
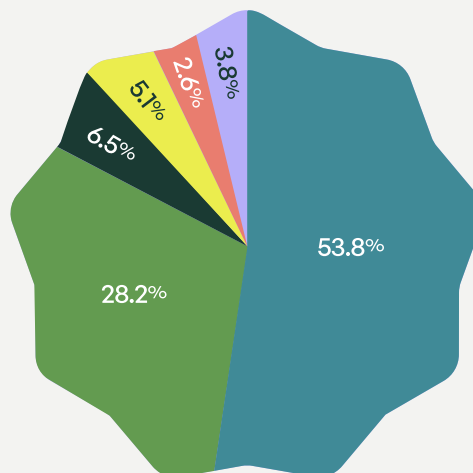
Community
core value

When we talk about the core value of a community, we're referring to its main offering. The one that gets people in the door, provides a really rewarding experience, and keeps them coming back for more. Let's see what respondents consider theirs to be.

What is the core value provided by your community?

Nearly 25% of creators say their members find value in the community through learning experiences such as self-paced courses, bootcamps, and cohorts. Given that over half of respondents identify as coaches or course creators, that lines up.

It was also interesting to see that in second place, we have a near four-way tie between these four popular offerings:

Connection building

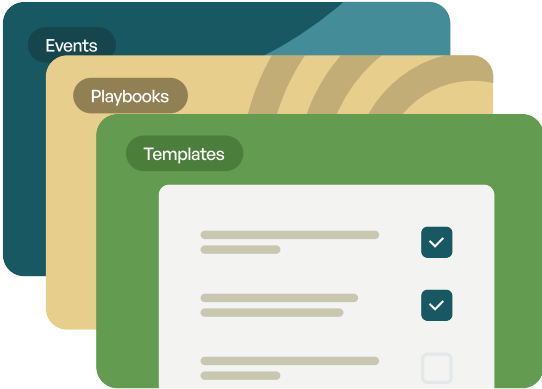Networking, group messages, member matching, real-time chat, DMs

Masterminds or small-group coaching

A blend of brainstorming, education, peer accountability, support

Live events

Webinars, masterclasses, summits

Exclusive content

Playbooks, resources, templates

Creator *tier*

We analyzed Circle product usage data from over 10,000 communities to identify communities that had the highest membership engagement, lowest membership churn, and the most consistent growth.

Based on this algorithm, communities were then categorized as "Platinum" or standard. We pinpointed the Platinum tier as the pinnacle of community performance on our platform. This elite tier comprises the top 10% of Circle communities that have demonstrated unparalleled community excellence.

Within this context, community excellence is defined by a superior onboarding process, a well-structured community framework, proactive administrative involvement, a consistent flow of compelling content and programming, sustained monthly growth, and robust member engagement.

According to our findings:

90%

qualify as **STANDARD** creators

10%

qualify as **PLATINUM** creators

Quick refresh

Platinum creators are the highest-achieving communities on Circle–the top 10%–and we identify them through an algorithm used to predict a community's success. To understand which respondents belong to that category so we can analyze what they're doing differently, we cross-referenced these Platinum creators with our list of survey respondents to analyze and understand what it is that they do differently.
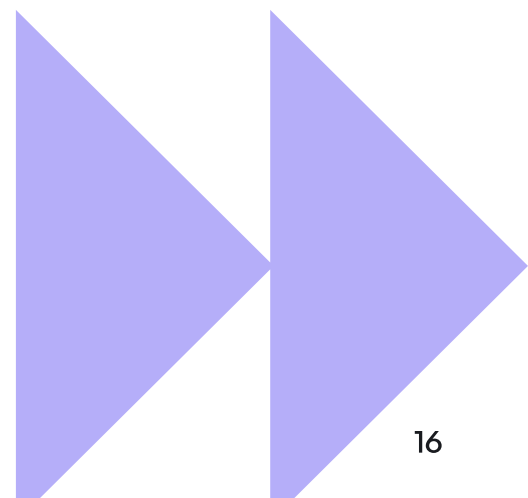
Platinum
communities

Platinum communities *aren't what you'd expect*

"Successful communities are huge, with *thousands* of members. They must be free, too—how else would you get that many people in the door? And surely running a beast of a community like that can't be done without a massive team and an expensive, complicated tech stack."

If you've ever had assumptions like these, you're not alone. Many creators we talk to are under the impression that's what a thriving and lucrative community looks like.

But are any of these ideas true?
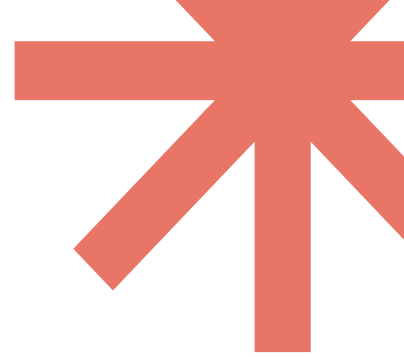
Debunking the myths - *Part I*

Let's break down some of the most common assumptions people have about Platinum communities and see what's really going on behind the scenes.

Platinum myth

Size

>>> You need thousands of members to have a rich, engaging community.

Platinum fact

Your community doesn't need to be big to be successful.

Community size alone doesn't determine success. It's about the quality of the interactions and relationships inside the community, not the quantity of members.

For context, Platinum communities are no more likely to be jumbo-sized than standard ones. 76% of Platinums have 500 members or fewer (similar to 82% of standards) and only 7% of Platinum communities have over 5,000 members, vs. 6% of standard communities.

Platinum myth

Cost

»»»

You need to make your community free, or you won't attract and keep tons of members.

Platinum fact

Successful communities are monetized, either by charging members directly for access or by offering it as an add-on to another purchase.

Charging helps ensure that people who join have a higher level of intent and commitment, which leads to more thoughtful engagement inside the community. They also tend to value content more if they can see that you value it, too.

In fact, the vast majority of Platinum communities require a purchase (93%), while 21% of standard communities are free to join.

Debunking the myths - *Part II*

Platinum myth

Team

>>>

You need a large team to manage a successful community.

Platinum fact

You can run a successful community without a team, or with a small, efficient one.

Nearly 3 in 5 respondents don't have any **full-time** help, and that's true for both Platinum and standard creators. About the same number of respondents employ two or fewer **part-time** or freelance staff members.

By keeping your team small, you're actually in a better position to develop close, meaningful connections with your members, which fosters a deeper understanding of your community. It also means you're forced (in a good way) to maintain a laser focus on high-impact activities that actually move the needle.

And since you've established a member-led culture, you can leverage your members to scale via ambassador programs, referral programs, member-led events, and more. In other words, you can scale your community culture without needing to clone yourself.

Tools ≫

You need a bunch of expensive, complicated tools to manage a successful community—especially if you don't have a large team to support you.

Platinum fact

You don't need loads of tools, you only need the right ones.

Half of all creators (Platinum and standard) use three tools or fewer to manage their community, including their community platform, email marketing, and any automation tools.

A simpler tech stack means you spend less time managing tools and more time on your community, creating an even better member experience.
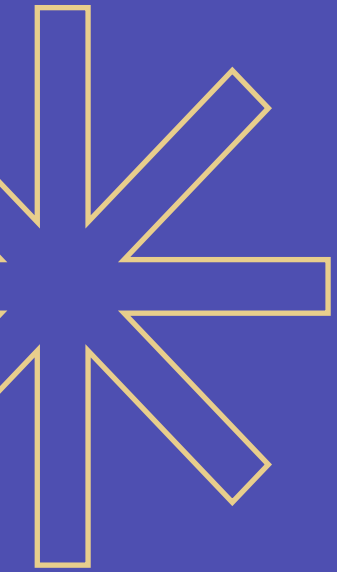
In a nutshell, super successful communities don't have more members, bigger teams, or loads of resources—and they're certainly not free.

So, what are they doing differently? Let's dive deeper into the Platinum member journey to find out.

Member acquisition

Key *takeaways*

1.

Platinum creators use more acquisition channels than standard creators, especially YouTube and email.

2.

They leverage existing members to grow their community through inexpensive or unpaid marketing tactics.

3.

They partner with "amplifiers", i.e., brands and professionals that are already trusted by their audience and cater to their target customer.

4.

They invest in high-quality content that establishes them as an authority in their field, attracts the right people, and filters out those who aren't a good fit.

5.

They focus on consistency, knowing it will pay off in the long run.
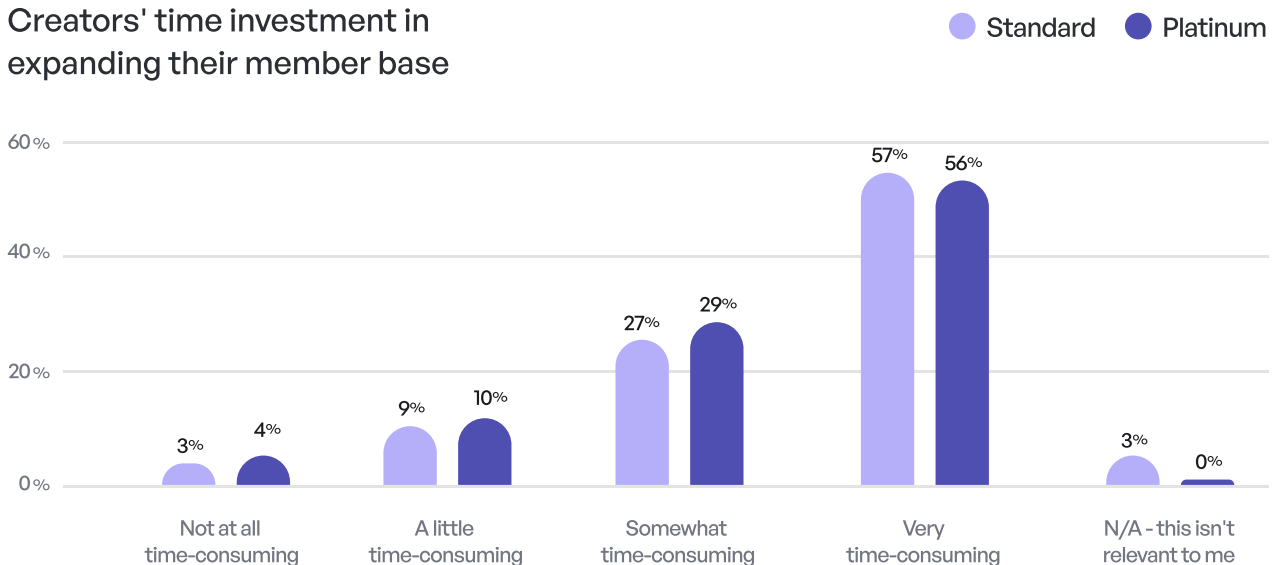
6.

They shamelessly self-promote whenever they can.

The surprising overlap between *standard and Platinum*

When someone's community is growing quickly, it's natural to assume that it comes easily to them or that they have more money to throw at the problem. But when it comes to the effort it takes, there are more similarities between standard and Platinum creators than you might think:

1. Acquiring new members is time-consuming for everyone

Platinum and standard are equally likely to call new member acquisition very time-consuming, with half of all creators choosing that option.

Creators' time investment in expanding their member base

● Standard ● Platinum

	Not at all time-consuming	A little time-consuming	Somewhat time-consuming	Very time-consuming	N/A - this isn't relevant to me
Standard	3%	9%	27%	57%	3%
Platinum	4%	10%	29%	56%	0%

2. Growing a member base is universally challenging

4 in 5 creators say that growing their member base is somewhat or very difficult for them.

Creators' perceived difficulty in growing their member base

● Standard ● Platinum

	Very easy	Somewhat easy	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	N/A - this isn't relevant to me
Standard	3%	13%	44%	38%	2%
Platinum	1%	21%	41%	37%	0%
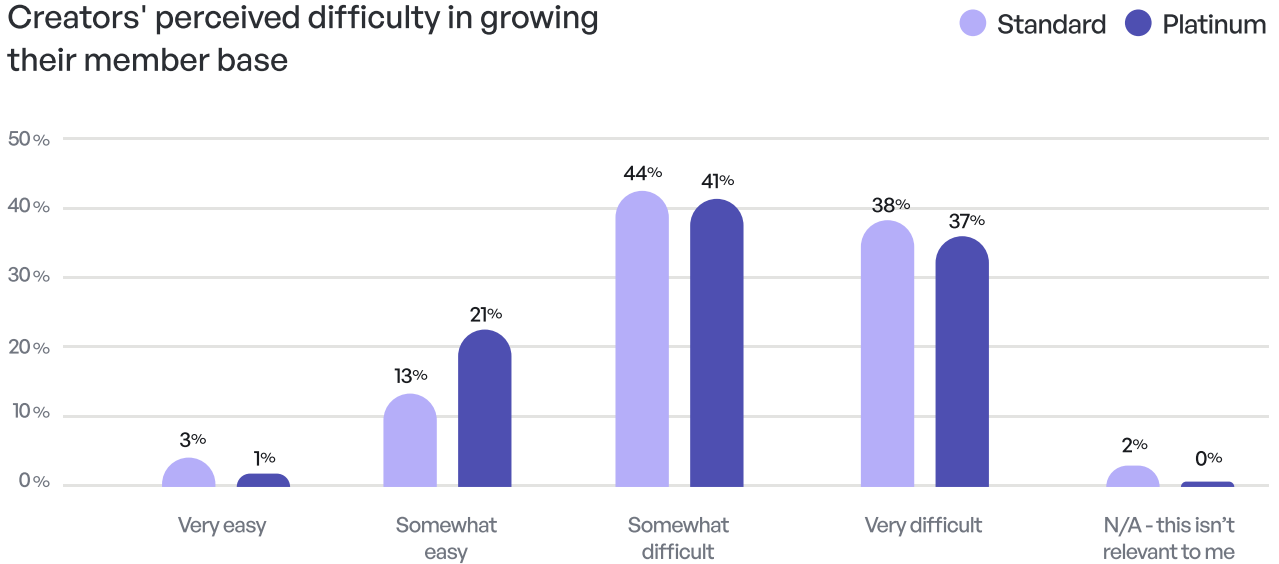
3. Platinum creators do not spend more on member acquisition

Platinum creators are even less likely than standard creators to spend money on new member acquisition, with more than half spending no money on it at all.

% of budget spent on member acquisition	Standard	Platinum
0% - nothing!	51%	57%
1-10%	17%	16%
11-20%	10%	6%
21-30%	7%	9%
31-40%	2%	3%
41-50%	4%	1%
51-60%	2%	6%
61-70%	1%	1%
71-80%	1%	0%
81-90%	1%	0%
91-100%	2%	0%
N/A - I don't control this	2%	0%

So, what's *their secret* to success?

Although acquiring new members is just as challenging and time-consuming for Platinum creators as it is for standard ones, they're three times more likely to say they're doing an "excellent" job at it.

What do Platinum creators do differently that gets them better results—and the confidence that they're on the right track?

Platinum creators use more acquisition channels than standard creators.

This is true across the board, but especially for YouTube and email marketing.

Acquisition channels used	Standard	Platinum
Social media	68%	84%
Email / newsletter	57%	78%
Blog / website	54%	71%
Referrals / WOM	62%	68%
Events / workshops	42%	57%
YouTube	25%	47%
Podcast	23%	31%
Partnerships / collabs	24%	29%
Product purchase	26%	25%
Paid - social	12%	16%
Paid - search	4%	6%
Mobile app	3%	3%
I don't know / I don't track this	2%	0%

But how do they manage to use more channels if they're spending the same or even less on new member acquisition than standard creators?

How Platinum users acquire members *without a lot of money*

1. They leverage existing members

If you're not tapping into the power of your existing members, you're missing out. There are so many ways they can multiply your reach— through word of mouth, asking for referrals, and sharing testimonials or success stories.

You can also set up an ambassador or "superuser" program that incentivizes and rewards existing members to get new ones on board. Some Platinum creators even have alpha and beta groups they use to inform their community strategy.

> "I have a few podcast episodes featuring members of my group coaching programs, and those episodes serve as very detailed, inspiring testimonials for my community and the coaching inside."
>
> **Tammie Bennett, Founder**
> The Show Up Society

"I have a [founding members] alpha group that has helped guide my direction. They are also reaching out to others because they really like our community."

Barbie Wong, Founder
Musical Nest

"The most powerful recruitment path for me is word of mouth. It works because I deliver the best experience I can for my weave students– they recognise that and want to share the experience with their friends."

Cally Booker, Founder
The Weaving Space

"We regularly hold large competitions, challenges, and tournaments where we create graphics and encourage people to share their creations (which look nice on social media). The challenge markets itself, as people enjoy posting their nice graphics on other platforms like X or LinkedIn, which then drives traffic to us."

Greg Lester, Founder
Airwiggles

2. They partner with "amplifiers"

Trust is the ultimate currency, so it doesn't come as a surprise that Platinum creators lean on "amplifiers" (as coined by Darnell Brown below) to recruit new members—AKA brands or individuals whose audience and target customer overlaps with yours.

When you collaborate with them, not only do you get access to their audience, but you benefit from the reputation they've already built.

"I create content for amplifiers, meaning brands and entities that are trusted by and already cater to the audience I'm seeking to attract. I produce workshops, webinars, and short-form videos that would appeal to their customers, and when given the opportunity to link in an upsell, I create a special offer for them to join our community shortly thereafter."

Darnell Brown, Founder
Bulletproof Hustle

"I collaborate with other coaches and offer my expertise to their businesses, including offering free of charge mini-workshops. I also ask them to share my posts, which saves me ad costs and weighs more than paid ads, as it's a personal recommendation by someone with a reputation."

Dr. Katharina Kessel, Founder
Body and Balance

"Partnering with Wix Studio has been a game changer, enabling collaborative marketing on various platforms, which not only fuels our creativity but also attracts a steady flow of new members. Our advice to other creators is to invest in a relevant, high-quality YouTube channel and seek partnerships with brands that are committed to long-term collaborations and deep audience engagement."

Brad Hussey, Founder
Creative Crew

3. They invest in high-quality content

We all know that your content has to be good—it's a cliché at this point. But there are two reasons you should invest in it, which you might not have thought of:

1.

It acts like a filter

Content attracts the right people, but it also deters the wrong ones—something often overlooked but equally important. You want people to join who are truly interested in what you have to offer, leading to much higher engagement and retention rates in the long run.

2.

It serves as a preview

It's like giving people a teaser trailer of all the value they can access by joining your community. When you establish authority and credibility early on with high-quality content, prospective customers will want to invest in your paid offering for an even better, more in-depth version of that expertise.

"Most of my community members come from my podcast. After listening to a few episodes, they become very familiar with my coaching style so they know whether or not they are a good fit for my community."

Tammie Bennett, Founder
The Show Up Society

"I focus on providing great value on social platforms and regularly mention the additional value that can be found inside my community. The majority of my content is shared on YouTube and Instagram, and more recently my podcast. Once viewers and listeners grow accustomed to you and naturally see you as an authority in your niche, you become front of mind when they are considering taking that next step."

Anna Tyrie, Founder
English like a Native
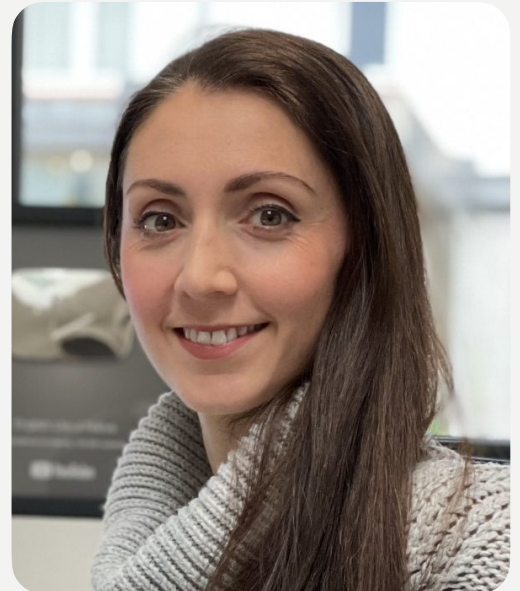
"Don't be stingy! Give your audience value and allow them to experience wins along their free journey with you. Then they will know that the solutions you are offering are legitimate and will trust that paying you to help them will give them even better results."

Dr. Amy Hoyt, Founder
Mending Trauma

> "Our main prospecting happens through workshops that focus on giving lots of value, and doubles as a sort of filter for those who want more buy-in and those who enjoyed the workshop but decide the next level is not for them."

Graham Barton, Founder
Sync Beast

4. They focus on consistency

Smaller, consistent efforts make more of an impact over time than a single "big bang" member recruitment campaign. Although you might not see the fruit of your labor at first, it will eventually pay off.

This is why Platinum creators choose specific activities that they can reliably repeat, whether that's posting on social media or sending out an email newsletter. They're in it for the long haul.

> "I've been building my Instagram following for two years now, but when it comes to organic searches, that's something I've only recently started focusing on. I try to upload one blog per week. Consistency is going to be the best thing to make any business venture successful. Don't think that this is something you're just going to create and then it will instantly support itself."

Bryana Kappadakunnel, Founder
Conscious Mommy

"I post multiple daily reels on specific marriage and relationship topics and encourage people to DM a certain word if they want more help."

Brandon Doerksen, Founder
Grounded Men's Community
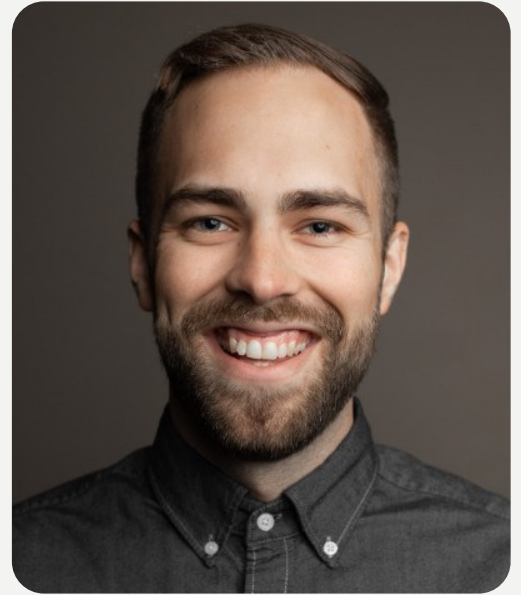
"I send out an email every Saturday morning. In the email, I share a tip about growing orchids, and then in the PS, I invite members to learn more and join my community."

Anna Weston, Founder
Orchid Bliss

Let's review:

Platinum creators are what we call the top-performing communities on Circle (the top 10%, in fact). We identify these high-achievers using an algorithm designed to forecast community success. To unpack the secrets to their success, we cross-referenced survey respondents with our list of Platinum creators.

5. They shamelessly self-promote

You don't get what you don't ask for, and people can't buy a product they don't know about. In the world of Platinum creators, being bold (and consistent) about self-promotion is key.

Whether they're hosting a podcast, whipping up a newsletter, or rocking an in-person event, they always make sure to mention their other offerings. This is yet another helpful way to boost visibility and nudge interested prospects to explore your offerings.

"When I respond to [emails from people on my list], I give them a short answer and tell them that they should join my community for more in-depth and personalized advice."

Anna Weston, Founder
Orchid Bliss

"I print out flyers with a QR code and the selling points to joining and leave them behind at conferences and client meetings."

Avon Collis, Founder
Relevate

"I talk about the community in the outro of my podcast and mention it in passing on most episodes, so they get interested in joining."

Tammie Bennett, Founder
The Show Up Society

"Because I'm a live illustrator, I am often in front of large groups of people and this allows me to mention my book and my community and other free workshops that I might have coming up."

Ashton Rodenhiser, Founder
Mind's Eye Creative

Co-founder

Stephanie Cartin,
The Entreprenista League

The Entreprenista League is a membership community dedicated to supporting women founders and leaders, and providing them with the best community support, tools, and business resources needed to grow and scale.

We offer a Lifetime Access Membership—once you're a member, you're in for life. We transitioned from a yearly recurring membership model to lifetime access in 2023 to ensure our members could grow with us and have access to our resources and community support at all stages of their business journey.

The Entreprenista League is a closed membership model, with quarterly periods of open enrollment. During our open enrollment periods, we host an "Experience Week", to our wider network (email list and social media audience), which includes four days of virtual programming where they can truly see and experience what it is like to be part of our community. The experience week includes info sessions, office hours, and a business learning event.

Our member acquisition success stems from two core strategies. We use paid social for top of funnel awareness and email capture as well as our member-led ambassador program. Each quarter when we host Experience Week, we run paid social media campaigns across Meta platforms (Facebook & Instagram) driving to our Experience Week Virtual Events and membership sign up landing page. We test variations of creative and copy, reaching women business owners worldwide.

Our referral program, known as Entreprenista Entourage, encourages our current members to refer their founder friends to join The Entreprenista League, rewarding them with incentives for every new member that joins. Our existing members love being brand ambassadors for the community as they are able to authentically speak to their own experiences and the value and impact the community has made in their own business.

Ultimately, the reason that our community and acquisition strategies work well is because of the product and community we have created. We are truly the best community for women founders and our members have the most incredible experience being part of the community and organically want to share with other founders.

When building your community, remember to test and learn, and don't be afraid to try new strategies. Results do not happen overnight and these strategies take time, patience, and lots of planning.

Member
onboarding

Key *takeaways*

1.

Standard creators are twice as likely as Platinum creators to say they're doing just an OK or even a bad job with their onboarding experience.

2.

Platinum creators are more likely to follow onboarding best practices, like providing a welcome tour, highlighting community guidelines, and prompting new members to join in.

3.

Despite doing more work to onboard members, Platinum creators get it done in half the time.

4.

Platinum creators do four key things that makes their onboarding process more successful:

◆ They approach the process with a deep level of empathy

◆ They provide new members with immediate value and quick wins

◆ They find ways to make new members feel seen and appreciated

◆ They leverage the power of existing members and automation

Onboarding is an *underrated art*

Onboarding is the moment when members decide if your community lives up to the expectations your marketing promised, how they will engage, and ultimately whether or not they'll stick around. If your onboarding experience is lukewarm, or worse, leaves new members feeling lost and unwelcome, it makes engagement and retention a lot harder than it needs to be.

> **Your onboarding process is the first impression your community makes on a new member. And if you're not careful, it could be your last.**

We've all had an experience like this—buying something we were excited about, only to feel duped (and even a little foolish) when it's not what we thought it would be. Some creators even tap into these disappointing experiences when deciding what not to do in their own communities:

> "I have been through many coaching programs—all of which touted an 'onboarding call', which never actually felt like a true onboarding. At the end, I was still left with questions, unsure about how to dig into the program, and zero clue how to engage inside the program. My team vowed to never replicate that experience."
>
> Graham Barton, Founder
> Sync Beast

How do Platinum creators approach *onboarding differently?*

Here's the scary truth: even though 1 in 3 standard creators think they're just doing an okay (or even a bad) job at onboarding new members, only 13% of them consider it a top priority in 2024.

In comparison, the majority of Platinum creators believe they're doing a good or excellent job at onboarding, and **over a third of them still say that onboarding is one of their highest priorities in 2024.**

So, what differentiates the onboarding experience in a Platinum community vs. a standard community?

Platinum creators are more likely to follow onboarding best practices.

These include providing new members with a comprehensive welcome tour so they know where to go and what to do, highlighting community guidelines, and encouraging new members to join in conversations.

Let's compare the adoption of best practices in standard and Platinum communities:

Adoption of onboarding best practices	Standard	Platinum
Write an introduction	57%	76%
Read a "get started" post	60%	69%
Provide community guidelines	45%	68%
Encourage new members to complete their profile	53%	63%
Send a welcome DM	42%	60%
Offer a community tour	34%	60%
Participate in or join a conversation	36%	56%
Have an onboarding email sequence	45%	53%
Host welcome events or orientations	22%	22%

Platinum creators report onboarding new members in HALF the time as standard creators. You'd think following these onboarding best practices would take a lot of time, but Platinum creators are doing it twice as fast as standard creators.

Here's how Platinum creators set members up for success from the start using an *intentional* onboarding journey.

1. They approach the process with a deep level of empathy

You need to put yourself in the shoes of your new members. Try to understand their perspective, needs, and expectations—and if you don't know the answers to these questions, ask! Getting to know your members is key to building trust, personalizing their experience, and creating a welcoming atmosphere that makes them feel like they belong.

> "Most people are nervous to spend multiple four-figures on a learning experience like we offer. But they're even more scared to feel dumb, screw up, or fail. Our onboarding calls set them up for every success by showing them around the community, letting them know exactly how and where we'd like them to post, group call walkthroughs and replays, and anything else to make them comfortable. In other words, one-on-one onboarding is the best way to eliminate fears or buyer's remorse in our enrollees, which turns them into rockstars on our program down the road."

Graham Barton, Founder
Sync Beast

"We still have quite a high turnover of new subscribers, so it's something we're focused on at the moment. The number one factor has to be upscaling familiarity with the community and what it offers. The difference in understanding and engagement between a new student and an established one is enormous. It's the difference between someone who doesn't understand what to do with the community vs. someone who doesn't know what they'd do without it! We made a lot of progress with providing emails with directions and links to videos to help onboard new subscribers."

Anna Tyrie, Founder
English like a Native

"We created an incredible roadmap system for those coming in. It's a simple Google doc that highlights the most important pieces of content in the membership and resources for them to use to achieve their goals. After 30 days, they get a check-in email and based on if they feel lost or not, they click yes or no and it sends them to a landing page that then re-orients them if they say they are struggling or lost. It reminds them of all of the content and resources they have at their fingertips, the live calls, and how to get 'back at it'."

Kelsey Rowell, Founder
Whole Life Nurse

Founder

Tiago Forte,
Building a Second Brain

We recently onboarded over 2,000 students to our brand new self-paced course, <u>Pillars of Productivity</u>, which we launched inside our Circle community on Black Friday 2023. Here's how we did it.

With an influx of new students, our aim was to create a seamless onboarding experience, ensuring they could effortlessly navigate the course material, engage in meaningful discussions, and share their learning insights. The journey for our new students begins in the "Start Here" space, an integral part of the Pillars of Productivity space group. This initial step is designed to cater to five crucial aspects of an effective onboarding process:

1. Understanding the course structure

We start by explaining the structure of the course within our community. This includes the purpose and functionality of the various spaces, offering students a clear roadmap of their learning journey. We've purposefully limited the number of spaces inside the course to a minimum as we've found that engagement in each space declines if there are too many to choose from.

2. Encouraging mobile app usage

Acknowledging the growing trend of mobile-first users, we encourage students to download the Circle mobile app. This ensures that they can engage with the course material and community from anywhere, at any time.

3. Familiarizing with Circle's functionalities

Recognizing that some students may be new to Circle, we offer detailed guidance on how to navigate the platform effectively. This includes leveraging the powerful search function as the first step in addressing queries, understanding how to use bookmarks for easy access to content, and customizing notification settings. These instructions are delivered through both written explanations and demonstrative GIFs, catering to different learning preferences.

4. Guidance on seeking help

We provide clear directives on how students can seek assistance, whether their queries are related to course curriculum, technical issues, or require one-on-one support. This ensures that students are directed to the right resources without any confusion.

5. Addressing frequently asked questions

The "Start Here" space also includes a section dedicated to FAQs, addressing common queries such as invoice requests, updating their email address on Circle, and understanding community guidelines. We found that a proactive approach to addressing these questions leads to higher student satisfaction and fewer customer service inquiries.

6. Progressing to the course curriculum

After familiarizing themselves with the foundational aspects of the course, students are directed to the "'curriculum'" space. Here, each lesson is structured to not only impart knowledge but also to encourage interaction. We incorporate prompts within the lesson content, urging students to share their thoughts and insights in the comment section. This approach fosters a collaborative learning environment, enabling students to learn from each other and build a supportive community.

2. They provide new members with immediate value and quick wins

The faster your members see the value in being a part of your community, the more delighted they'll be, and the more likely they are to recommend you to others (AKA, free referrals!). If you can set them up with a quick win—whether that's a connection to someone they *need* to know, helping them achieve one of their goals, or access to just the right resource—even better.


"We mixed our onboarding with both artmaking and exploring the site through a series of micro-challenges. They're so small that new members can't not do them. Coupling the member's goal (artmaking) with our goal (using the site) is magic."

Caylee Grey, Founder
Fairy Artmother

"We ask every member in our community of early stage founders to introduce themselves with a strength that they are willing to share and an ask that they need help with. One founder asked for introductions to their ideal customer profile and another founder read it and was able to immediately get her connected with a potential sale. In exchange, she offered to provide some technical assistance with his development shop review."

Charlie Cuddy, Co-Founder & Executive Director
The Nebraska Startup Academy
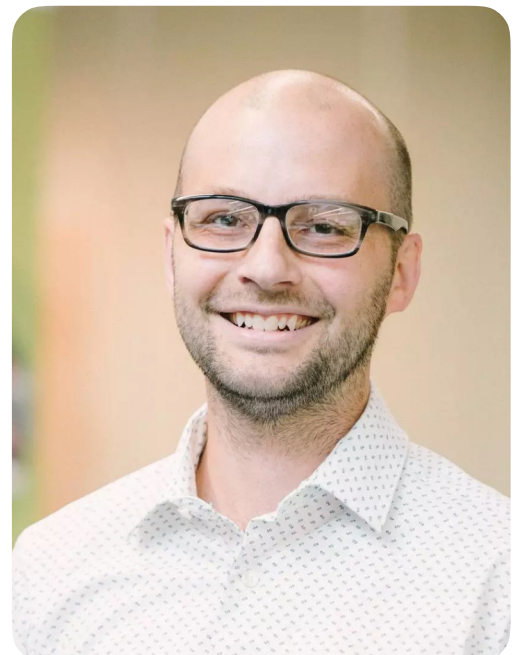
> "As part of the registration process, I have them tell me why they want to join and what they are struggling with most. That way, I can line them up with resources as soon as they join."

Barbie Wong, Founder
Musical Nest

3. They find ways to make new members feel seen and appreciated

When you welcome new members and recognize their contributions, people are much more incentivized to join in conversations or community activities—because they feel like they belong.

Other ways you can make your new members feel seen is by asking them for feedback, tagging them in relevant conversations where they can share their expertise, and celebrating their milestones.

> "I email every new member a video message personally using Bonjoro. I get so many comments from my members about how special they feel when receiving this message. I also send a really fun package in the mail to every new member."

Tammie Bennett, Founder
The Show Up Society

"I have an automation set up that sends each new member a DM and a pop-up. I think people have to feel seen privately before they're comfortable interacting publicly."

Darnell Brown, Founder
Bulletproof Hustle

"I invite every member to do a Hot Seat with me (a 5-10 minute video where I'm asking them some questions about themselves) as part of the onboarding process."

Barbie Wong, Founder
Musical Nest

Founder

Jay Clouse,
The Lab

Hey! My name is Jay Clouse, I'm the founder of Creator Science, and my community on Circle is called The Lab.

When I built this membership, I knew one of the best ways that I could stand out and make an impression and make a place that's truly unique and special, was by putting a lot of thought and intention into my onboarding.

And Circle really facilitates this in a handful of ways.

So, when new members come into The Lab, the first thing they're presented with is a booking link to schedule 30 minutes of one-on-one time directly with me.

Now, that's not something that they're told before they join that they will get.

I think that having this magical surprise and delight moment early on in their experience with the membership sets them up to think, "This place is different, this place is exciting. It's going to be one of my better membership experiences."

Once they schedule that, they are invited into Circle, where I have a pretty robust set of custom fields in each member's profile. So, filling out their profile actually shares a lot of information with me and with the community, so that we can better connect other members to each other.

Next, throughout their onboarding experience into The Lab, they are instructed which steps to take and how to show their progress in video.

Because as much as I wish this whole thing were done in person, the magic of the Internet and the magic of Circle is that we're doing all this online—but I wanted to retain as much of a personal touch as possible.

And creating onboarding touchpoints in video is a really great way to do that.

Lastly, this is kind of a secret. Something that I think is really powerful about Circle is that you can create an onboarding course using the Circle course spaces.

You can basically create a linear step-by-step path to say, once you've joined, the first thing you should do is go through this member guide or this onboarding course to familiarize yourself with the community, learn how to use it, and how to get the most out of it.

So that's how I try to make The Lab stand out from a membership experience standpoint in onboarding. Hopefully, that helps you with your membership community as well.

4. They leverage the power of existing members and automation

It's easy to spread yourself thin when you're trying to create an awesome onboarding experience. But with the right setup, a little automation, and the help of your members, you can scale your personal impact without burning out. For instance, you can automate personalized welcome DMs, send out a sequence of emails with instructions on how to get the most out of your community, and create a welcome committee of superusers that greets and assists new members.

> "Having superusers has really helped. I have a space for members to introduce themselves when they join, and I was feeling the pressure to make sure everyone was personally welcomed (something that has become more challenging as the community has grown). Now each welcome post will get at least two or three comments which I think has a big impact on member happiness."
>
> **Jessie Montague, Founder**
> Honest Hounds

> "Active members are invited to host meetups or teaching sessions, fostering a sense of belonging from the start."
>
> **Brad Hussey, Founder**
> Creative Crew

"I have onboarding totally automated. Members get a personalized survey, followed by personalized DMs from me giving them instructions. Then we follow up a week or so into their membership and seek their feedback with a Typeform."

Bryana Kappadakunnel, Founder
Conscious Mommy

"My onboarding is all pre-set up with workflows. Since I'm the only one running my community, I opted for the Business Plan so I could use the workflows to send out automated welcoming messages."

Anna Weston, Founder
Orchid Bliss

Founder

Dr. Amy Hoyt,
Mending Trauma

How Amy runs a stellar onboarding experience with Circle

Onboarding is SO important. If you can onboard and get clients connected to the community within the first week, they will stay. To help new clients feel connected to us and the community, we do several things.

First, as soon as they join, we have automations and workflows to greet them. Within Circle, we use workflows to DM new members a greeting that also gives them clear instructions on the next steps (to introduce themselves and post).

Our email automations are the second way that we keep them engaged. Each new member is entered into a seven-day campaign that welcomes them, shows them how to access the platform, teaches them to set their notifications, and gives them clear guidance on how to get the most out of their experience with us.

Second, within the first week of a new member joining, we set up a free 15-minute private call to orient them and get to know them. We ask them what they hope to accomplish with us, what they are struggling with, and remind them that the brain has a hard time noticing progress, which means they need to pay special attention to any wins they have.

We also let them know when our weekly, virtual live meetings take place and encourage them to attend. We are bold in letting them know that participation in the community will mean the difference between a good experience and a great experience. Research is clear on the power of community for healing trauma and we let them know this. We continue to meet with them individually throughout their time with us (every three months) for a check-in and progress assessment.

Third, within the Circle community, we use both workflows to reward members for their participation. We have a badge or reward system for members who contribute and comment, post, and like others' content. This starts immediately and gets them somewhat motivated to continue to engage.

Finally, every member that joins is assigned to one of the founders. We message them weekly, keep track of their participation and struggles, and work to develop a closer relationship with them to help them along their healing journey.
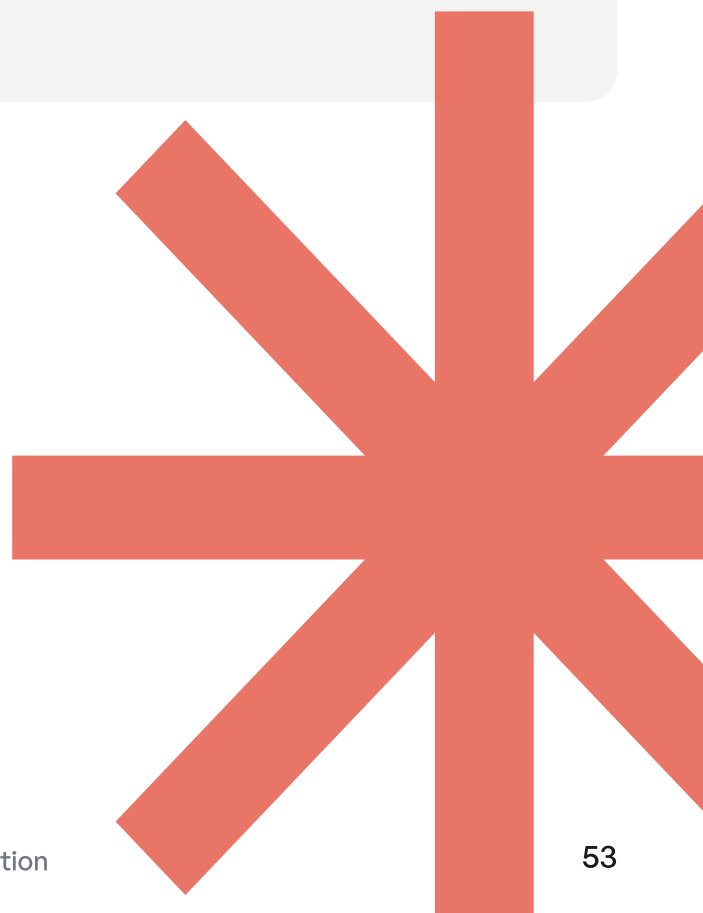
Engagement

Key *takeaways*

1.

Engagement is a big time and money suck for all creators, but Platinum creators are twice as likely to say they're doing an excellent job at it.

2.

Platinum creators owe a big part of their success to events—100% host them. And they don't just host more events, they host more *types* of events.

3.

Platinum creators are twice as likely to have an attendance rate higher than 50%. How? They throw events their members want to attend, make sure to attract the right attendees, and send reminder messages at opportune times.

Programming can *make or break* your community

Picture that iconic moment in old Western movies when the protagonist arrives at their destination…only to find a ghost town with tumbleweeds rolling around. Inevitably, they feel uneasy and unwelcome, wondering if they're in the right place at all.

That's what a community with poor engagement feels like to its members—and why irresistible content and can't-miss events are so important.
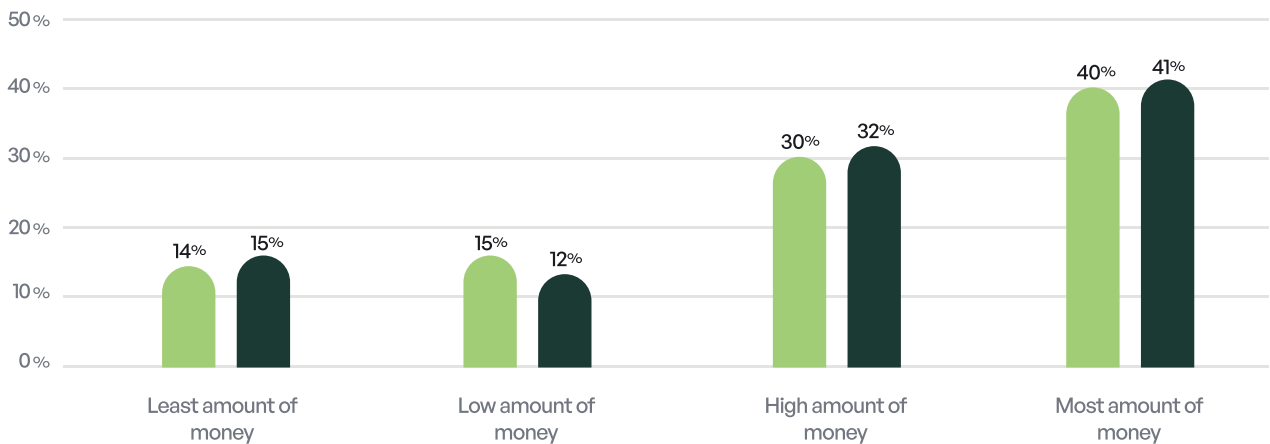
So it won't come as a surprise that both Platinum and standard creators agree that this area is where they spend most of their time—and a whole lot of money, too.

> **Over 70% of creators report spending a high amount or the most amount of their budget on content creation and programming to drive engagement.**

Budget spent on creating community programming & content

Legend: ● Standard ● Platinum

	Standard	Platinum
Least amount of money	14%	15%
Low amount of money	15%	12%
High amount of money	30%	32%
Most amount of money	40%	41%

What's different about *Platinum event programming?*

The time and money spent on content creation and programming isn't the only overlap between the two creator groups. More than 3 in 5 creators find this particular aspect of community building to be time-consuming.

Content creation isn't particularly challenging for these creators—it's just a slog. Three quarters said they find the process somewhat easy or somewhat difficult. That's the survey equivalent of ambivalence. It's not super hard, it's not super easy...it's simply the reality of the job.

That being said, Platinum creators are more likely to say they're doing a good or excellent job at creating programming. Based on our findings, here's why that is:

1. 100% of Platinum creators organize and host events, and they host more of every type of event compared to standard creators.

Type of events organized	Standard	Platinum
Educational	70%	88%
Small group discussions / peer support	56%	63%
Office hours / Q&As	47%	62%
Member showcases / success stories	25%	43%
Onboarding / orientation	25%	34%
Celebrations / milestones	23%	34%
Summits / conferences	14%	25%

2. **Not only are they hosting more events (which isn't groundbreaking in and of itself) but their members are far more likely to show up live, creating a vibrant atmosphere and energy that attendees feed off of.**

59%
VS
33%

of Platinum creators

said their events see more than a 50% attendance rate

of standard creators

said their events see more than a 50% attendance rate

That's a BIG difference. Before we dive into the specific tactics Platinum creators are using to ensure higher attendance rates, let's take a look at some examples of popular events shared by survey respondents.
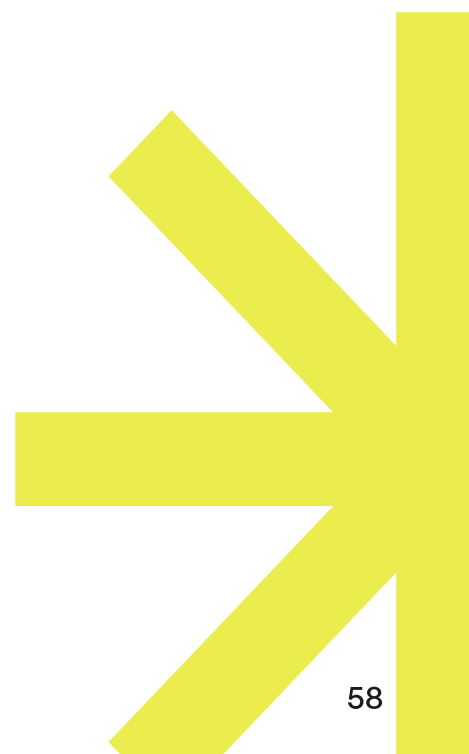
Behind-the-scenes of *popular events*

You're probably thinking "I host events, too!" And you're right—many creators do. So what are Platinum creators doing that's so special? What do these wildly successful events even look like?

Good question. We asked them:

"I run an ESL (English as a Second Language) community and the most popular event in our community is our Conversation Class. This is a group Zoom session that is focused on practice. This regular, organized community session helps my members to actively converse, get to know each other, and become friends.

To help our members prepare for the session, we provide reading materials in advance that familiarize them with the conversation topic and discussion questions that may come up. We have an 'always open' Zoom meeting room too, for members to continue the conversation after the classes, or jump in when they want additional conversations. We've had members of our community meet up offline and even go on holiday together! This is only possible with regular, genuine, open, and fluid interactions, so we do our best to facilitate this as regularly as possible."

Anna Tyrie, Founder
English like a Native

"I run a community for dog owners, and one thing we do is run neutral dog walks each month. Members apply to be leaders for their local areas and then other members attend the walks. We have a map that shows the community where their closest walk is, and they can join in as many as they want as long as they have a membership. It's great as the members share on socials and then others want to join too."

Jessie Montague, Founder
Honest Hounds

"The most successful event I've hosted was a virtual block party (open to the public). It officially welcomed and celebrated our existing members through that point in time, but doubled as a launch party that basically told the world, "Hey, we exist, and you should join us!". During the event, I walked the public through three to five features within our community via a screen share as a signed-in member. Live attendees were also automatically in a drawing to win raffle prizes.

Our existing members felt cherished, the turnout was fantastic, the chat was lit the whole time, and we welcomed several new members as a result of this workshop."

Darnell Brown, Founder
Bulletproof Hustle

The top three tips for
increasing event attendance

It's one thing to collect RSVPs. It's quite another to make sure people actually show up.

Here's how Platinum creators do both:

## Tip 1: Ask your members exactly what kind of events they want more of, then deliver them

"Make the event exactly what your members ask for. It doesn't matter if it's more Live Q&As or more masterclasses or classes on topics they're asking for or instructors they want, if you listen to your members, ask them questions, and make what they want, they energetically show up often."

Mandy Ellis, Founder
Freelance Writer Wealth Lab

"I polled my members to understand what days and times would work best for them and then I landed on our live office hours that time."

Kar Brulhart, Founder
Social Department
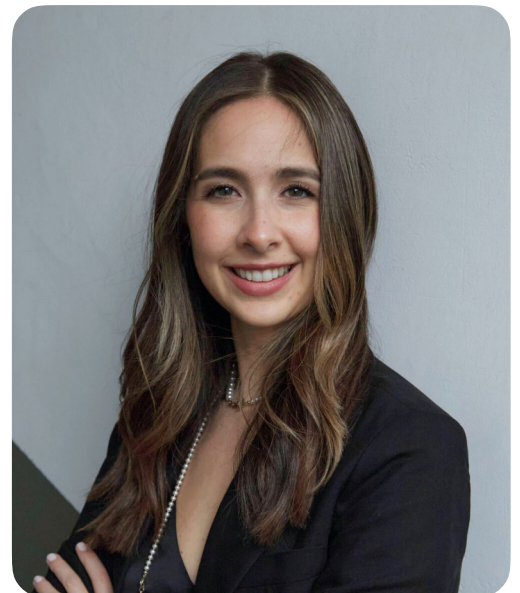
Tip 2: Remind your members (again, and again...and again)

"Even the most dedicated members are busy and forget. That means pre- and day-of communication. The day the event is solidified (meaning you put it in your own calendar or your guest instructor booked the appointment/class), put it up/schedule it in the community with a great description, image, day/time/ scheduling, and a place to put questions. Then, day of the event, send an email early in the morning, put up a post in the community early in the morning, and use Circle's auto-DM feature to send a notification one hour before. I also have notifications in Circle to alert them one hour before in their notifications tab as well, but the DMs are much more of a personal touch."

Mandy Ellis, Founder
Freelance Writer Wealth Lab

"We send an additional 'reminder email' 24 hours before the call then a 'live now' email when the call starts. The 'live now' emails get a ton of clicks as people are busy and forget or often need to be prompted."

Josh Hall, Founder
Web Designer Pro™

Tip 3: Remind your members (again, and again…and again)

"I quadrupled my membership price. This makes it so that only people who are serious about their progress attend."

Kar Brulhart, Founder
Social Department

Founder

Saya Hillman,
Mac & Cheese Productions

Saya's 5 steps to running a can't-miss event on Circle Live

1. **Advertise that applicable events won't be recorded**

I usually include a note about the importance of face-to-face time in a community as well as a nod to safe spaces where you don't have to worry about what you say being shared. When recordings are offered, people tend to prioritize the live event less. If they know it's one and done, they're more likely to do what they can to show up.

Additionally, recordings can often turn into sources of negativity in that they hang over people's heads until watched. And if they're not watched, people feel bad about themselves, that they've failed.

Selfishly, I don't want to add more to my To Do List, e.g. sharing the recording afterwards, dealing with tech issues, etc.

2. Tell people what to expect at the event

What's the goal of the event? Overview of content? Can they passively participate? Are they going to be put in breakout rooms? Will they have to share? Do they have to be on camera? Can they show up with hot mess hair and a sweatshirt? Is it ok to join from the couch? Should they bring anything?

The more detail you can share, the more likely folks will show up confident and excited and leave with met expectations and a desire to return.

3. Lean into FOMO

Make people realize the goodness they missed if they didn't attend so they're more likely to attend in the future. For example, take a screenshot of everyone —you'll get better images if you tell everyone you're doing this and to smile— and share the screenshot along with a few good quotes from the chat.

Share soon after the event to continue any high spirits and momentum garnered. You're more likely to get attendees chiming in in the immediate aftermath.

I share these event roundups both in the community, in Announcements, and in the Weekly Digest.

4. Set the right tone

Have upbeat, nostalgic, singalong songs playing as people arrive. Sounds commonsensical but smile! Welcome people by name! Call people out in a nice way! "I live in Chicago too, Jane!" "I love your background, Sam!"

5. Make attending and participating in events easy

Screenshot and share ahead of time what it looks like when it's time to join a event as it's a bit different than how we're used to joining Zooms, Teams, etc.

If you have attendees do an activity with instructions, especially if there's no slide, write out the instructions ahead of time and pin to the chat. Make sure to mention you're doing this as some people won't know to look at the chat.
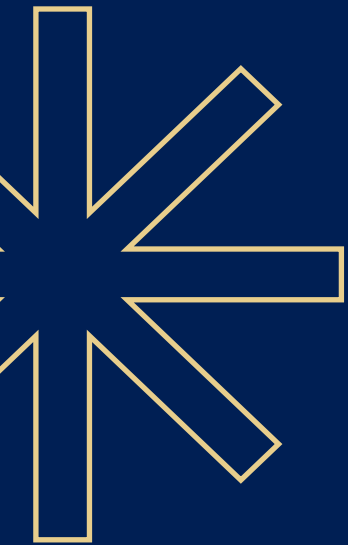
Retention
and churn

Key *takeaways*

1.

Platinum creators prioritize retention much more than standard creators—they're twice as likely to say it's their top priority for 2024.

2.

1 in 3 creators (both Platinum and standard) don't have a structured process for bringing back disengaged members.

3.

However, Platinum creators are more likely than standard creators to experiment with and adopt re-engagement tactics.

4.

What they don't do is offer discounts. Instead, they know their own worth, lean into the value they provide, and give members space to come and go as they please.

Member retention: the *primary area of divergence* between Platinum and standard creators

You might not expect member retention to be a divisive topic—we certainly didn't. But according to our findings, this is where Platinum and standard creators differ the most.

Let's take a quick look at what they have in common first:

1.

They find retaining members and reducing churn equally difficult

2.

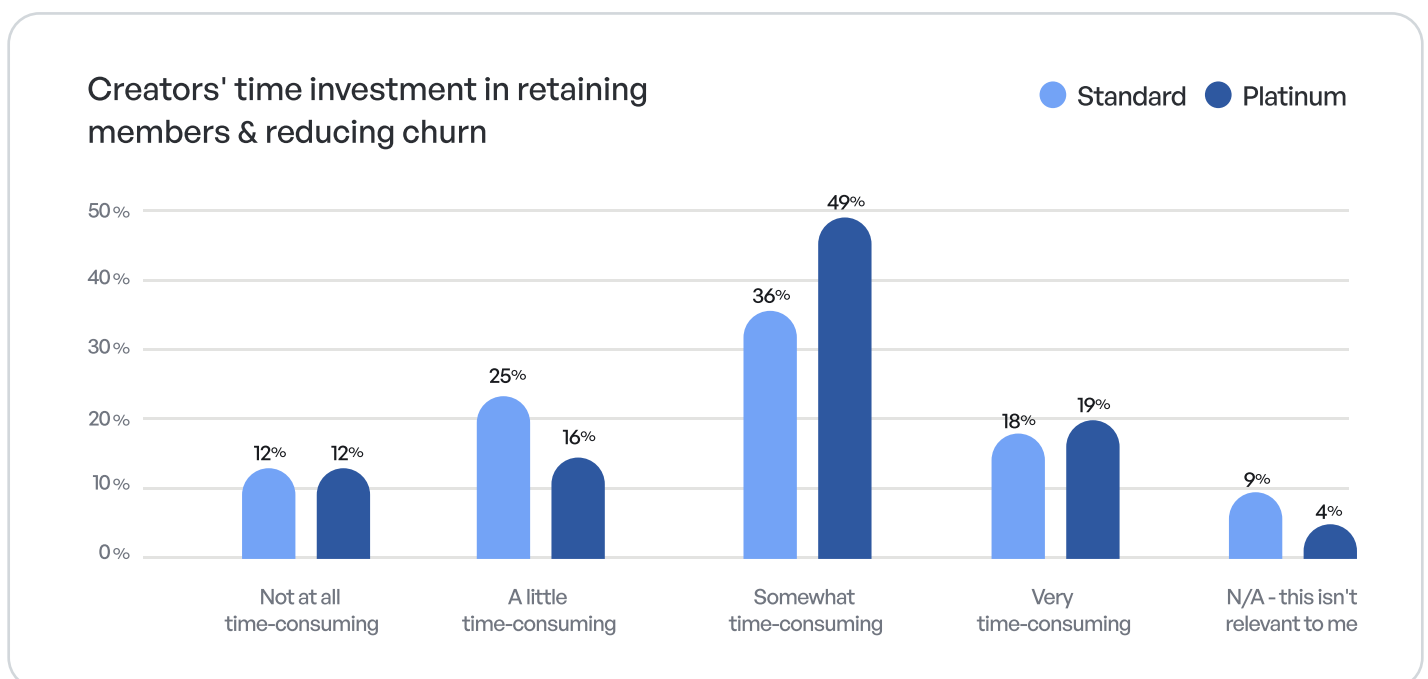They think they're doing an equally good or an equally bad job at it (50/50)

3.

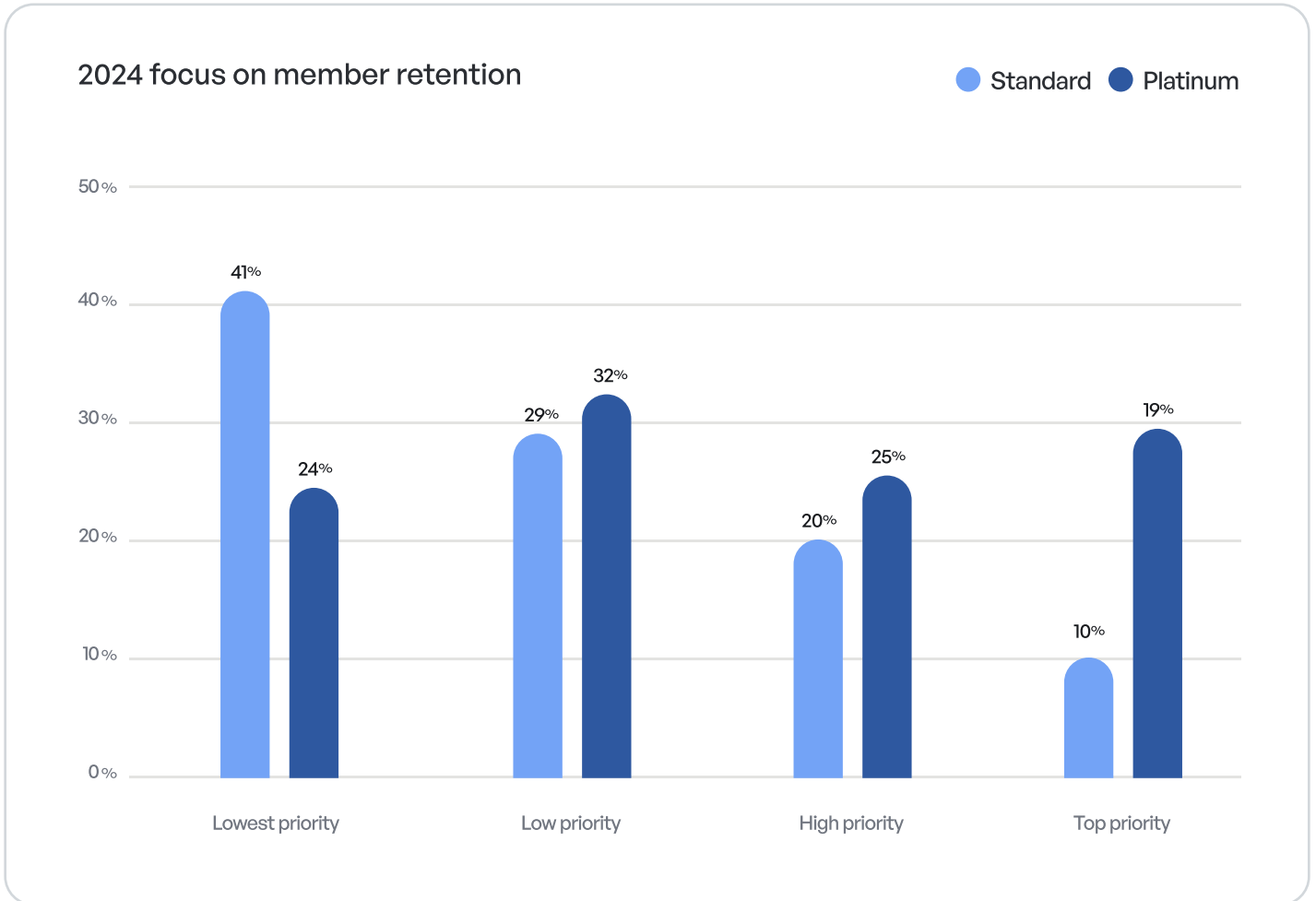They allocate the same portion of budget towards it

But that's not the full story.

Retention is clearly more important to Platinum creators. How do we know?

They spend more time on it. About 70% of Platinum creators (vs. half of standard creators) report that retention is somewhat or very time-consuming. And for creator entrepreneurs, time is money–in fact, it's more valuable. It's the one thing they can't get more of.

Creators' time investment in retaining members & reducing churn

Standard ● Platinum ●

	Not at all time-consuming	A little time-consuming	Somewhat time-consuming	Very time-consuming	N/A - this isn't relevant to me
Standard	12%	25%	36%	18%	9%
Platinum	12%	16%	49%	19%	4%

They're twice as likely to say retention is their top priority. 44% of Platinums say it's a high priority or their top one. Standard creators are the total opposite—41% say retention is their lowest priority.

2024 focus on member retention

● Standard ● Platinum

	Lowest priority	Low priority	High priority	Top priority
Standard	41%	29%	20%	10%
Platinum	24%	32%	25%	19%

Why Platinum creators *put retention first*

Initially, we wondered if the difference stemmed from Platinum creators having more members—but we've already debunked that myth.

So, the question remains: why do Platinum creators prioritize retention more than their standard peers? Is it tied to specific milestones such as earnings, member count, or community tenure?

Here's what our findings tell us: Platinum creators unanimously agree that retention should be prioritized right off the bat. This continuously improves the member experience and makes your business more sustainable to run, because you're not constantly chasing new customers.

"Working on member retention is code for 'making the community/experience better' which will attract more members, make it easier to sell, get better member results, and reduce churn instead of having to constantly try to sell an 'ok' experience."

Josh Hall, Founder
Web Designer Pro™

"Prioritizing member retention should begin at the early stages of developing and managing a community. In essence, member retention is not just a phase in the lifecycle of a community; it's a fundamental aspect that should be woven into its fabric from the start."

Nicholas Whitake, Founder
Changing Work Collective

"If you don't care about keeping your members happy and keeping them as a valuable part of your living/ breathing community from the minute you publish your community, it'd be super easy to see your member retention die fast. Without keeping members, you have an ongoing exhausting rinse-and-repeat cycle of new members with no longevity or help from long-time members who can welcome them and show them the way. And you're not offering enough personal help/ solutions/cool stuff to earn their dollar as a member."

Mandy Ellis, Founder
Freelance Writer Wealth Lab

# Retention isn't something they wake up and decide to do—*it's embedded into the very DNA of their community*

"I don't think creators should ever 'begin to prioritize member retention.' Focus on creating a safe, welcoming, positive space where people know the few and simple rules and the goal of the community. Be ok with people leaving and/or not participating at the level you want. I've never once thought about how to keep members. I just provide a community I'd want to be a part of and it turns out—others are in the same boat!"

Saya Hillman, Founder
Mac & Cheese Productions

In other words, instead of slapping a bandaid on a gaping wound (i.e. implementing last-minute retention tactics when it's the whole member experience that isn't delivering), you want to create a flywheel.

Here's what that looks like: first, you offer an enticing value proposition, and you start getting members in the door. Then you onboard them in a way that ensures engagement and quick wins from the start, meaning that they're more likely to stay and refer others. You continuously ask for feedback to keep offering more and more value while improving processes, content, and programming, which encourages more new people to join, and existing members to stay.
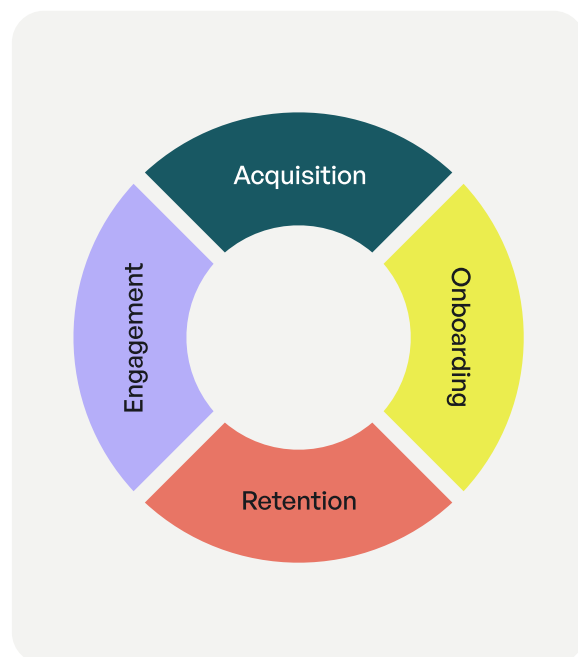
"The points of community, for me at least, are connection, learning, human elements, help/troubleshooting, growth/improvement, and celebration. ALL of those keep members engaged and are critical to building a community in the first place (basically prioritizing these is prioritizing member retention). If you start with the idea/priority of keeping as many members as you can for as long as possible, and build to what they're asking for/telling you about, recognize the things that solve their biggest problems and offer solutions, and be a good human being leader for your members, that puts you in the right place from the first brick of community building, and then you can optimize as you grow."

Mandy Ellis, Founder
Freelance Writer Wealth Lab

If you haven't considered retention much yet, *don't worry*

It's worth noting that it's *incredibly* common to overlook retention at first. 1 in 3 creators don't actually have a process at all for bringing back disengaged members.

By being here, you're already a step ahead. That's why we created this report in the first place: to bring you simple, actionable, and most importantly, proven tactics that the top 10% of our creators use, so you can emulate their success.

Has a process for re-engaging members

No
33.7%

Yes
66.3%
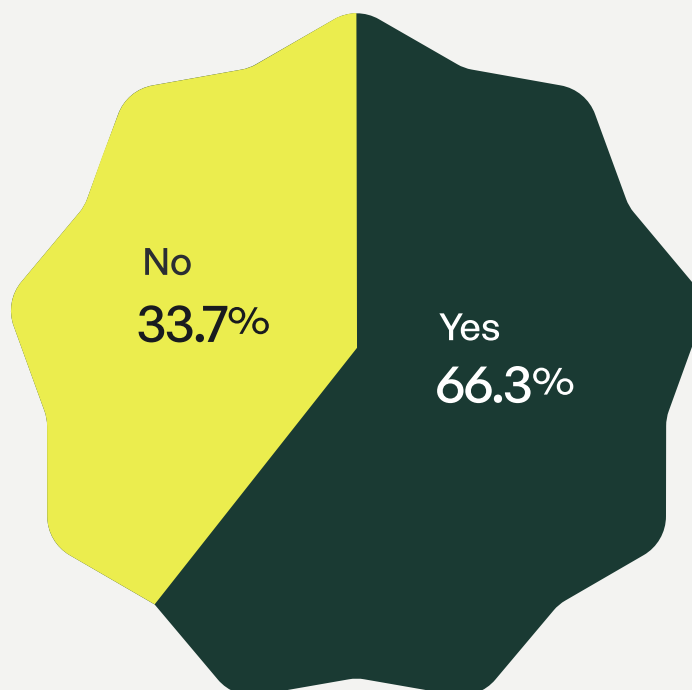
Founder

Callie Willows,
Membership Geeks

As a community that has been operating for over eight years now, we know that engagement can ebb and flow. Many members will start off fully engaged, and then as life and other demands come up, they tail off a little bit. This is completely normal.

So, what can you do about it? What we do to bring people back into the community and encourage shyer members to participate (the kind that reads posts but doesn't post much themselves) is host a fun quarterly community event. This can be anything from a scavenger hunt, to a members week, all the way to a bingo competition.

These events are an awesome way to get members active and engaging again, not just in the community, but also with our content—and with each other! To give you an idea, our most recent scavenger hunt had people not just posting in the community for the first time, but also discovering features and content they weren't previously aware of.

Events like these also get members talking, sharing, and depending on the type of the activity, working together to complete tasks. That's why they're so great for fostering meaningful connections between members and community spirit as a whole. And even when the event is over, we continue to see increased participation levels—what's not to love?

How Platinum creators build retention into *the DNA of their communities*

1. They shine a spotlight all the value that's being created

There's no way around it: we're all busy. Most people suffer from information overload from their phones, inboxes, and the usual social media channels, so it's easy for updates to get lost in all that noise (no matter how awesome they may be).

That's why Platinum creators strive to shine a light on community activities across different channels. This incentivizes members to check out what's happening, sparks engagement, and keeps the community feeling lively and connected.

"I have incentives of doing private calls at the six-month and one-year mark. Members who stay that long get a 20- and 30-minute private call with me along with a status badge added to their membership profile. This also gets them access to a private group chat and private pop-up workshops/coaching."

Kelsey Rowell, Founder
Whole Life Nurse

"New-ness is a really fun part of being in a community so new keeps fresh members on board. Schedule posts with a bunch of useful info to them (I try to be at least two to three months ahead on scheduled posts) and that keeps them coming back for good info."

Mandy Ellis, Founder
Freelance Writer Wealth Lab

"Main reason we hear that people aren't engaged is that they forget about the community within their normal workflow. Anytime we create a new curriculum we share the teaser on our other social platforms as a reminder to log in and check it out."

Charlie Cuddy, Co-Founder & Executive Director
The Nebraska Startup Academy

2. They make sure that members feel comfortable engaging in a way that suits them

As a creator, your role is to offer value, set a positive example, and be attentive to your community members. Their engagement will inevitably vary based on individual preferences and their capacities, and that's completely normal.

The key is creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable and accepted in their unique way of engaging. That keeps them coming back for more—guilt-free.

"Re-engaging people is all about letting them know YOU'RE still showing up. Not everyone will do the work. Not everyone will complete the course. Not everyone will show up to all the group calls. Not everyone will engage in community discussion. The only common denominator is the leaders of the community. When the leaders show up consistently, it creates a trustworthy environment that disengaged members will feel comfortable integrating back into, even if for a brief time."

Graham Barton, Founder
Sync Beast

"It may sound counterintuitive but I keep members' attention by allowing them to not be outwardly active in the group all the time. We have too many places in our lives where we feel like we aren't doing enough and I don't want my community to be another one of those."

Tammie Bennett, Founder
The Show Up Society

"I check in with people periodically, especially those who don't participate as much. I don't mind it if people don't answer back. I simply assume they are busy and I will simply try again later."

Barbie Wong, Founder
Musical Nest

3. They know their worth and price their offerings accordingly

In comparison to standard creators, Platinum creators report using more tactics to re-engage members. But they don't discount their offering. Instead of lowering the perceived value of their community, they firmly stand behind it.

The more you value yourself, the more members and prospective customers will value you, too. Raising prices can actually lead to more members overall, not just more members that are right for you (but it does that too).

> "I decided to increase the cost of my community to $79 per month from $35 per month. Everybody told me that it was too expensive for a membership. Since then, my membership has gone from an average customer lifetime of 3.5 months to 7.4 months. Because I was able to add more of "me", I charged more. Charging more allowed me to make more, which allowed me to invest more, show up strong, and ultimately it increased retention."
>
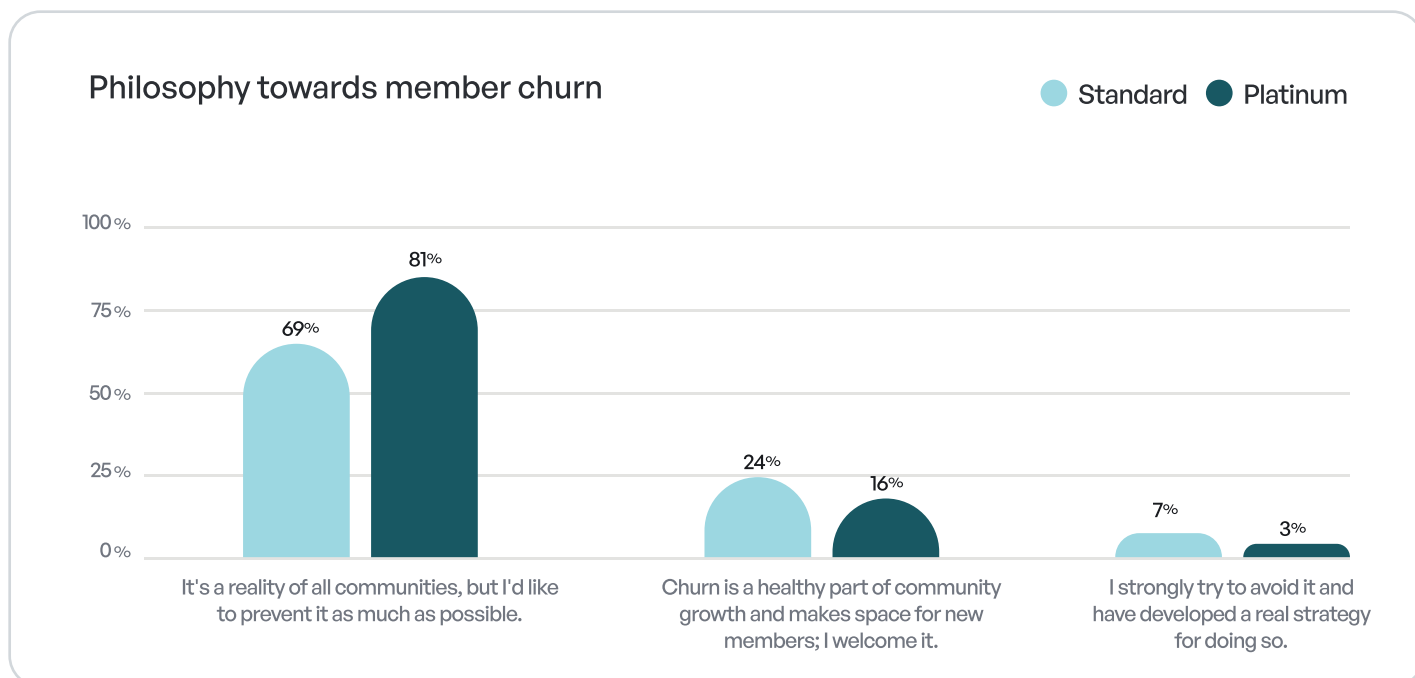> Kelsey Rowell, Founder
> Whole Life Nurse

Shifting your mindset when it comes to churn

Everyone has mixed feelings about members churning. On the one hand, it can feel disappointing when someone leaves—like you've invested time and effort into something that didn't work out.

On the flip side, churn is a natural part of running a community. People come and go, and there are a lot of factors that influence their decision. Agile creators leverage what they learn from churn to improve and evolve their offerings. Others even suggest that churn is sometimes a win, meaning that your members have learned all they need to at that given point.

When it comes to our Platinum creators, 4 in 5 of them recognize that churn is a reality of all communities (even if they'd like to avoid it as much as the next person.) They're confident enough in their value and what they're offering to accept it and learn from it.

Philosophy towards member churn

● Standard   ● Platinum

	Standard	Platinum
It's a reality of all communities, but I'd like to prevent it as much as possible.	69%	81%
Churn is a healthy part of community growth and makes space for new members; I welcome it.	24%	16%
I strongly try to avoid it and have developed a real strategy for doing so.	7%	3%

Zen Garden of Churn

Some expert insights to help you the next time churn is stressing you out

"We support members coming and going—art looks different in all the seasons of life. We trust they'll be back when they need it."

Caylee Grey, Founder
Fairy Artmother

"At the end of the day, I don't sweat the engagement. I'm a bystander in a lot of memberships. I consume and I only engage when I need it."

Kelsey Rowell, Founder
Whole Life Nurse

"Think about their exit as a celebration. [Churned members] acquired a lot of skills in their time with you, and now they don't feel like they want or need the community anymore. I want to make sure that as people are leaving they are doing so because they feel like they received so much support and confidence that they don't need the community anymore, or they are looking for other ways to grow their skills."

Ashton Rodenhise, Founder
Mind's Eye Creative

Founder

Jordan Godbey, *GrowthCommunity*

If you don't pay attention to churn, you'll get a leaky bucket scenario where you keep adding new members at the top and roughly the same amount churns out at the bottom. This means your community stalls out from a growth perspective—and might even start contracting.

Let's dive into the five biggest examples of churn mistakes I see communities making and what you can do about it.

1. Unclear value proposition

Problem

People aren't exactly sure what they're signing up for or what they're going to get out of the community, but they're taking a leap of faith to find out.

Solution

If you have a transformation-based community, like with coaches or courses, get very clear about the problem you're solving and the specific outcome someone will achieve within a certain timeframe.

For example, in my program, I teach people how to build and launch their community-powered course on Circle in 90 days or less. If you have a member-led community, you still need to get specific about who it's for and what problems you solve.

Let's take Exit Five, a community for B2B marketers where they can get answers to 'un-Google-able' problems like how to advance their careers, find open job positions that aren't publicly available, and get feedback on their work from other marketing professionals.

2. Lack of sufficient onboarding

Problem

When someone joins your community, they need to learn two things:

- How your program works, what they need to do first, how to get value out of it, when and where the live calls are happening, how to get help, etc

- How Circle works, what all the spaces are about, how to complete their profile, how to manage their notification settings, download the mobile app, etc

Both of these are key pieces to make sure your member gets the most value from your program.

Solution

Create a detailed onboarding space with individual posts that walk them step by step through everything they need to know to be successful. We recommend doing a list view layout with numbered steps with just one piece of info per step so it's easy to consume.

3. No finger on the pulse of the community

Problem

Members join your community and eventually churn—but you don't know why they joined or why they canceled.

Solution

Add an intake form for members to fill out when they join to capture some key info like what motivated them to join and what would make their experience a success. This will give you key insights into their problems and goals. When someone cancels, follow up with a short cancelation survey to understand why they canceled, and what was missing that you could add for the future.

4. Wrong pricing model

Problem

 A monthly subscription is not the right monetization strategy for every community. A monthly subscription asks someone "Are you getting the value?" every 30 days and gives them lots of opportunities to leave.

Solution

Especially with transformation-based programs, the value might take many months to achieve, so it's better to have a longer-term view like an annual subscription. That way they are committed to being in the program for 12 months and have that amount of time to achieve the goal before asking themselves if it's worth pulling the plug or not.

5. No re-engagement plan

Problem

Members go silent and are at risk of churning.

Solution

Check in with your members regularly. Sort members based on their Activity Score and DM the least active ones to re-engage them. Try and get them on a live call, either a one-on-one or a group call. If they do churn, mark them in your email system and continue to share powerful updates via email to see if they will rejoin in the future.

Churn is inevitable; all members have a lifecycle. But there are things you can do to make it better. No one will stick around forever, but from a business standpoint, there are plenty of tactics you can use to encourage them to stay as long as possible.

Looking forward to *2024*

If there's one thing we want you to take away from this report, it's this: you don't need any more resources than you already have to become a Platinum creator.

You don't need more members or more employees. You don't need a complicated, expensive tech stack. And you certainly don't need to be spending all your money on new member acquisition (or anything else!). The secret to reaching Platinum status is making the most out of what you already have—everything we've learned about Platinum creators is proof of that.

Here's how they do it:

They deeply understand and connect with their members.

Platinum creators are always looking for opportunities to poll their members and ask for their feedback. They're hosting the events their members want to attend, creating the content their members want to consume. They're on the ground with them, and in many ways, identify as one of them.

They use empathy to come up with and implement smart, creative tactics.

Successful community building is all about building and optimizing a flywheel. When you acquire the right members and onboard them well, they engage. They create content for you. They stick around for the long haul, and even refer you to others.

As a result, your community becomes bigger than yourself. *The culture scales*.

That isn't to say it's easy: none of the Platinum creators we surveyed are saying that. It takes time, effort, and consistency. But these tactics are doable—Platinum creators are pulling them off right now with the same resources and hours in the day that you have.

So as we dive into the new year, here's a simple yet powerful plan for you.

Pick one of the powerhouse tactics our Platinum creators unveiled in this report and try it throughout the year. To make the process even more manageable, narrow your focus to retention in Q1, onboarding in Q2, engagement in Q3, and acquisition in Q4.

You don't need to do it all, or do it all at once – every single one of these incremental improvements will get you closer to being in the top 10% of creators. We leave this knowledge in your hands: what you do with it, is now up to you. Happy building!

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- 😊 Introductions
- 📞 Strategy

🚀 The launch process

📚 Course notes   🚀 FAQs   📕 Swipe files   📞 Book a call   +

Welcome to Academia 👋

Unleashing Minds, Igniting Futures

Duante Robinson
Aug 9