2025

Community
Trends Report

Your roadmap for what's next in community — featuring exclusive insights from 14 industry experts

Ali Abdaal

Julie Solomon

Pat Flynn

Glo Atanmo

**Justin Moore**

Bonnie Christine

Circle

Introduction

At Circle, we have a front-row seat to the inner workings of *thousands* of successful communities. And every year, we get to use these insights to plan our product roadmap and better serve our customers.

But here's the thing: most community builders don't get that kind of behind-the-scenes access. In the world of online community building, credible, publicly available research is hard to find.

So, we decided to change that. Instead of keeping all this gold to ourselves, we're going to share it with you.
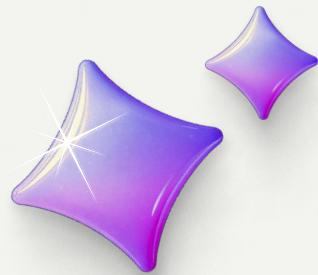
Long story short, we:

1. Surveyed over 1,200 active community

builders to uncover what's working, what's not, and what's shaking up the industry

2. Interviewed 14 industry experts

for insider knowledge on the latest trends and what's really driving success in their niches

3. Dug into real-life case studies

from some of Circle's most successful community businesses, so you can see the trends in action

4. Sat down with Circle's founders

to get the inside scoop on what's coming next for community building —and what you can do to stay ahead
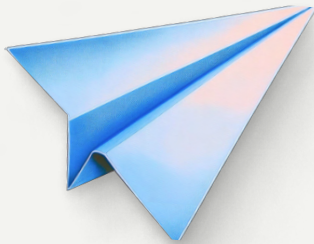
Some trends we were expecting, and some came out of left field.

But one thing's for sure: **2025 is going to be a big year for communities** as people seek authentic connections in smaller groups, away from AI algorithms and social media posturing. This report covers what's working, what's not, and what's changing.

We hope you enjoy reading it, and more importantly, that it helps you plan a truly impactful community strategy for 2025.

Happy building,
The Circle Team

Overview of our 1200+ respondents

Note: We tried to split our sample size as equally as possible between Circle customers and communities hosted on other platforms.

Circle customers are a little over-represented (as they were easier to recruit), which naturally influences some of the platform-related findings. While this data provides valuable insights into trends among engaged community builders, it is not intended as a market share analysis.

Respondents identify as

10.6% Other

21.7% Community business founders

41.8% solopreneurs and creators

26.6% Community managers
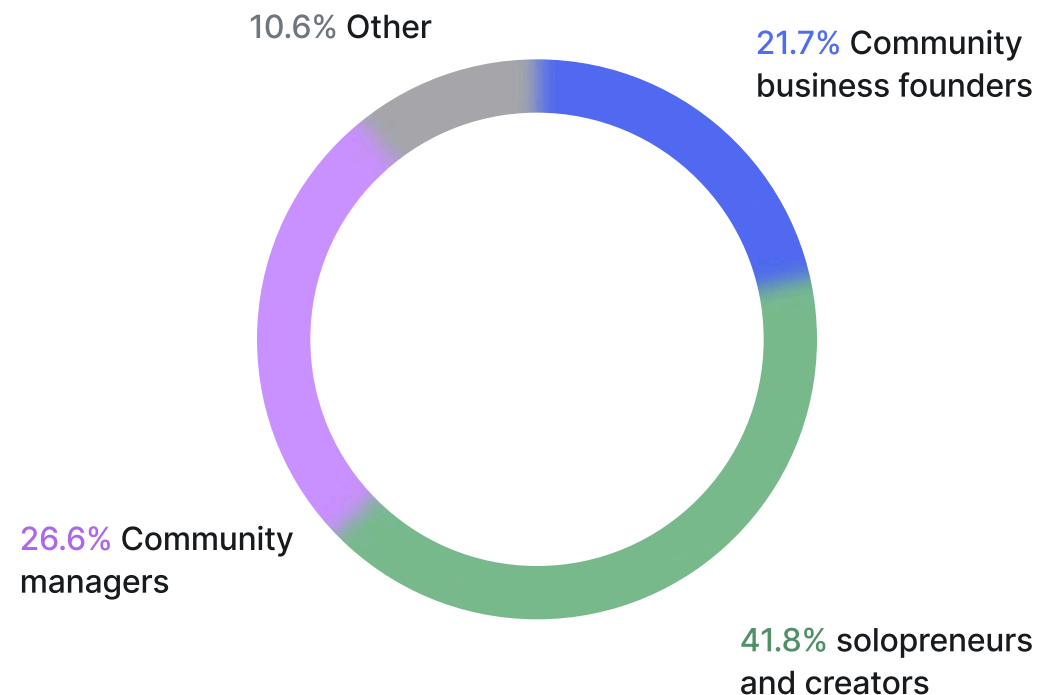
The different types of communities

7.9% Other

9.1% Product support

35.8% Professional networks

23.5% Life clubs

24.1% Upskilling programs
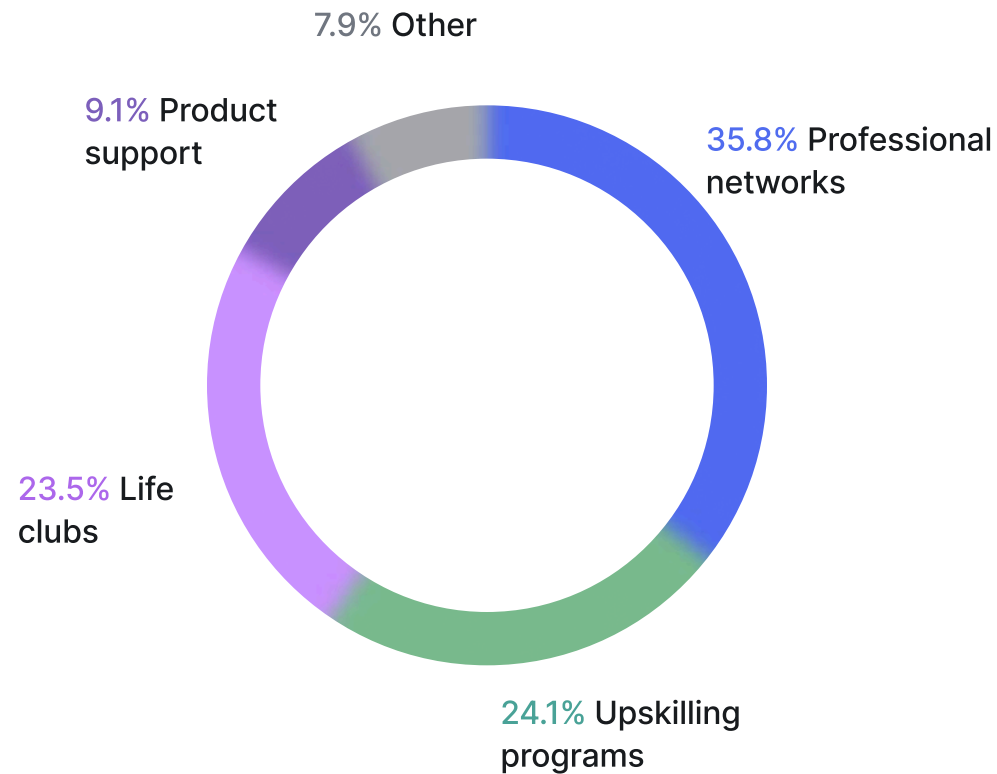
Where respondents host their communities

66% Circle

8.8% WhatsApp

8.7% Facebook Groups

3.5% Slack

3.4% Discord

1.2% Mighty Networks

1.1% Skool

0.5% Hivebright

0.4% Bettermode

0.3% Kajabi

0.2% Thinkific

8% Other
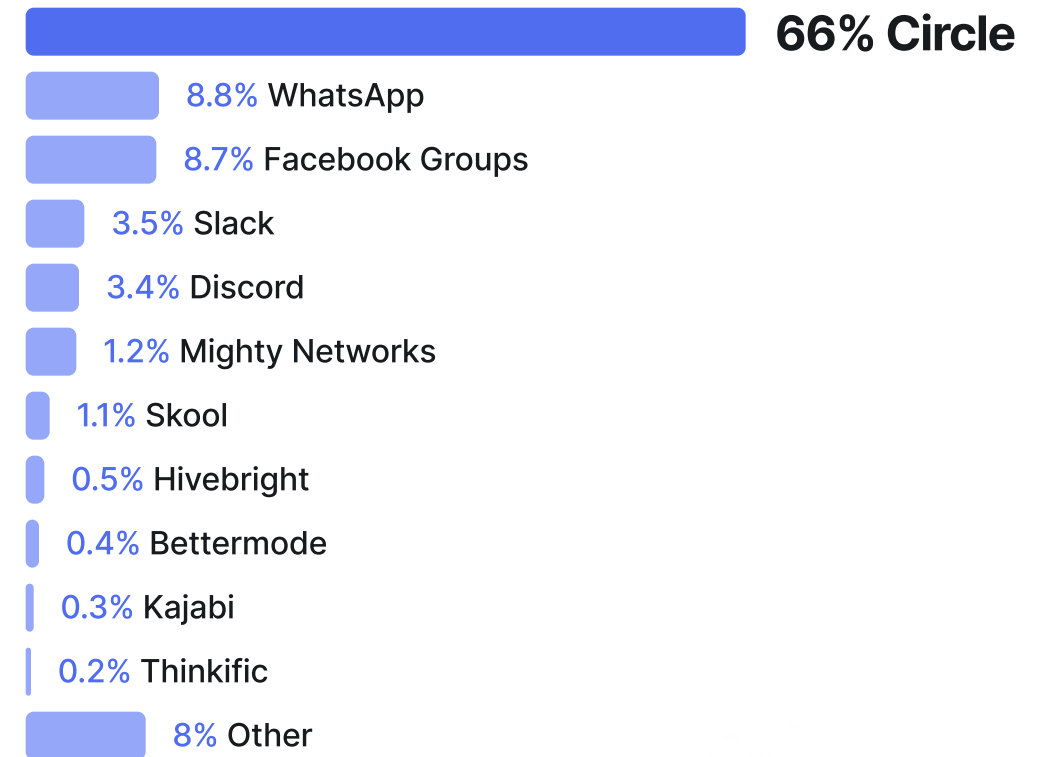
The range of community sizes

5%
10,000+

4.05%
5,001-10,000

12.65%
1,001-5000

10.1%
501-1,000

44.3%
Under 100

25.7%
101-500
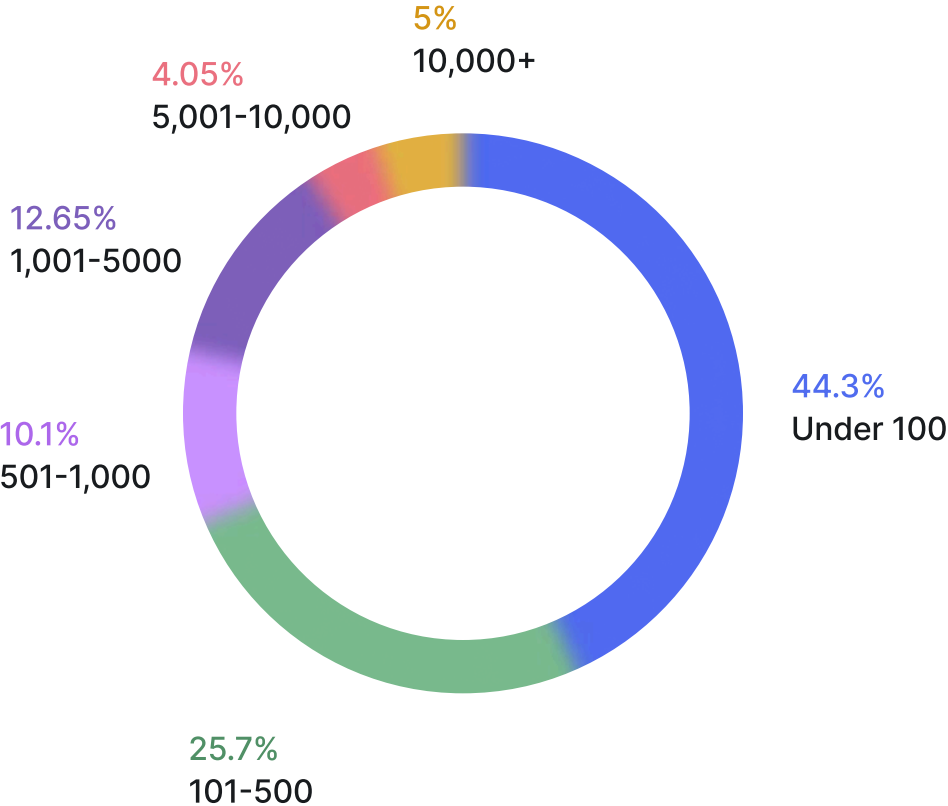
How much revenue they generate

29.2% Less than $10k

28% No revenue

19.3% $10k-$50k

14.6% $51k-$250k

4.9% $251k-$500k

2.47% $501k-$999k

1.8% $1M-$10M

1.25% More than $10M
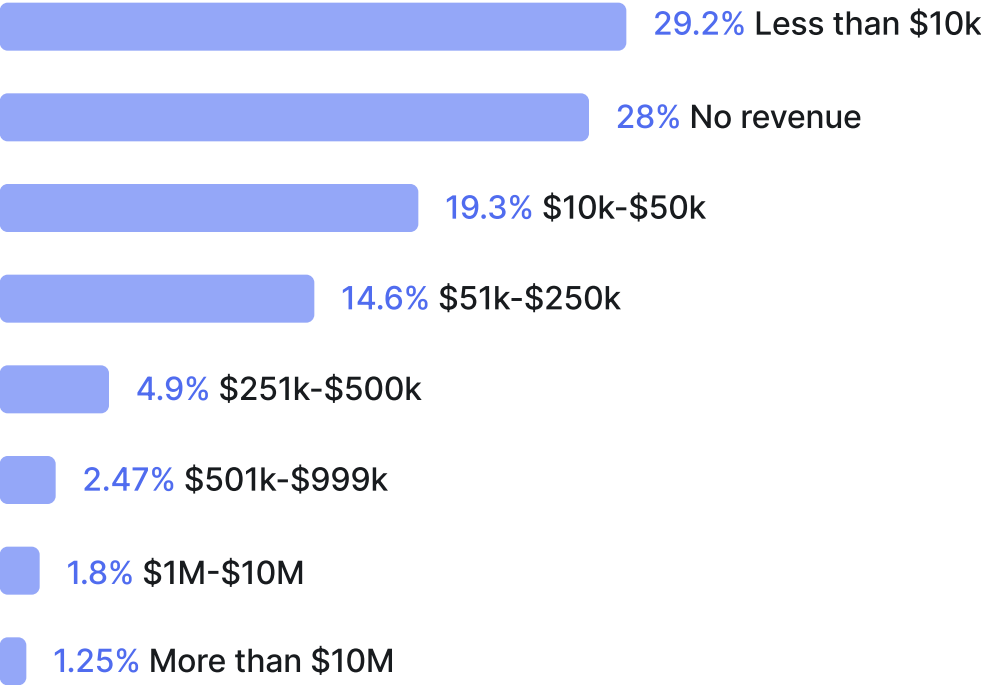
How to use this report

Here are *five simple ways* you can put the findings in this report into action:

1. Share the knowledge

Pass this report along to your team, partners, or stakeholders. Highlight the trends that matter most to your community and explore how they might shape your strategy moving forward.

2. Audit your community tech stack

Take a step back and look at the tools you're using to bring your member experience to life. This is your chance to streamline, cut costs, or explore new tools that better serve your community's needs.

3. Use the stats to pitch your next big idea

Want to kick off a paid membership, new content type, or hybrid event strategy? Use the data in this report to build a case for why now is the time to invest in the initiative you have in mind.

4. Revamp your engagement strategy

Is there a trend in this report that caught your eye? Try it out! Whether it's a new growth channel, live event, or even an AI chat agent, pick an experiment to run and see what resonates with your audience.

5. Spark a conversation

Pick one trend that really stood out to you and start a conversation in your community, or write an Instagram, LinkedIn, or X post about it. What's your take? How does it apply to your community?

Chapter 1: **Social media is where you find your people, community platforms are where you connect with them**
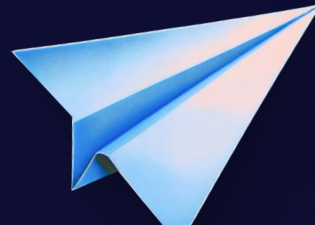
Social media still reigns as the growth channel of choice

Social media isn't going anywhere as a growth channel—and with billions of people scrolling every day, why would it? Our survey findings confirm this, with 76% of respondents still relying on social platforms to bring fresh faces into their communities. Meta's platforms and YouTube, in particular, are driving big results for creators and brands alike.

76%
of respondents still source new members from social media

Social media channels ranked best to worst for driving business for community builders

1st place
Instagram

2nd place
YouTube

3rd place
LinkedIn

4th place
Facebook

5th place
TikTok

6th place
X

Here's the thing though; growing an audience on social media isn't the same as building a community. For years, algorithm-driven social platforms have trained us to chase likes, follows, shares, and reactions. **Metrics of reach, not relationships or trust.** After all, what social media is designed to do is keep us scrolling—not connecting.

And community builders? They're exhausted. Fighting with algorithms just to be seen, watching their content reach only a tiny fraction of the following they worked so hard to build. Or worse, worrying their biggest platform might be shut down at any time (ahem, TikTok). It's frustrating and draining, to say the least.

More community builders are realizing this and shifting their strategies—using social media to bring people into their communities, and then creating deeper relationships there. Now, many are turning to purpose-built platforms— spaces where they can craft personalized, authentic communities, free from the noise.

This is where those lasting connections flourish—where people don't just scroll past, but stop, stay, and become part of something meaningful. The magic happens when you create a space where people feel truly at home.
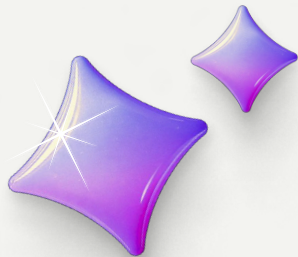
"In 2025, social media will continue to act as the 'front door' for discovery, but its limitations in fostering deep connections will drive more people to community platforms for meaningful interactions. If platforms like TikTok face bans or regulatory hurdles, this shift toward stable, algorithm-free spaces could accelerate."

Sid Yadav
Circle Co-Founder and CEO

Sophie *Miller*

Founder & Director
Pretty Little Marketer

"As someone who lives and breathes community building at Pretty Little Marketer, I'm not at all shocked that social media continues to be our go-to growth engine—it's literally where the magic of discovery happens.

It's so true, while social platforms are the perfect stage for finding your tribe, it's the authentic connections and that special sauce of community culture that transforms casual scrollers into ride-or-die community members. Discovery is just the beginning.
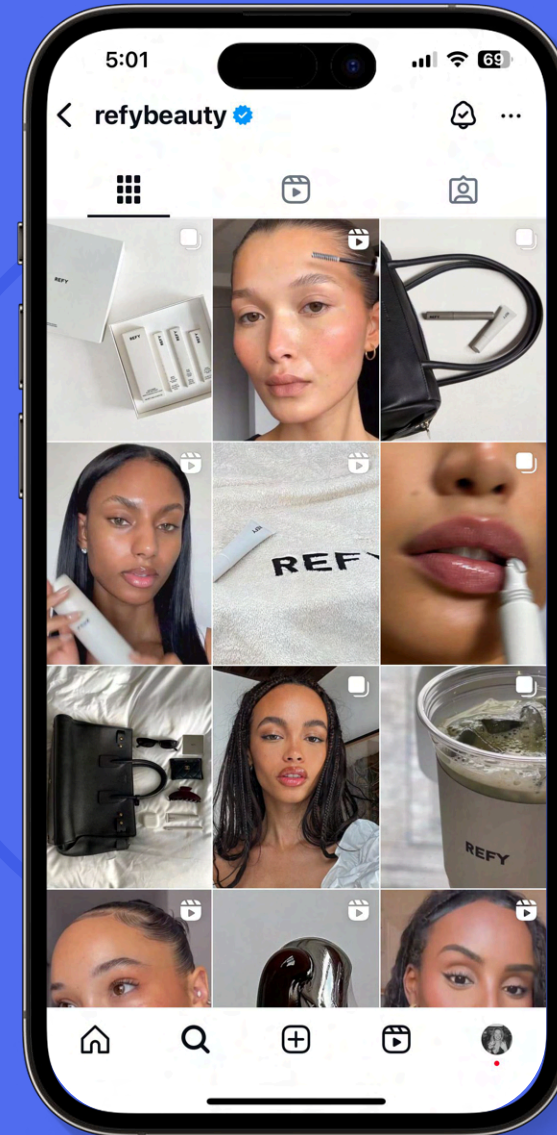
REFY Beauty is a masterclass in how this trend plays out in real time!

The way they leverage Jess Hunt's influence and partner with content and UGC creators for that initial discovery moment is great— but it's how they transition this attention into something deeper that's truly iconic.

Their strategic move to funnel their most engaged fans into broadcast channels and private Instagram profiles is where they really stand out and thrive, especially in a saturated niche like beauty where great products often aren't enough on their own to do the talking.

It says 'you came for the brow transformations, but you'll stay for the community'—and this intimate space is where they're turning passive followers into loyal brand advocates. The strategy is giving exclusive-but-accessible energy.

On that, I predict private spaces will be a big trend this year and beyond. From de-influencing trends to mass unfollow movements, users are streamlining what they're doing, what they're consuming and where.

From accessible options like Broadcast Channels and the OG community favourite, Facebook Groups, to dedicated Slacks and Discords—I think brands need to get creative with how they're connecting and building community outside of content-only tactics."
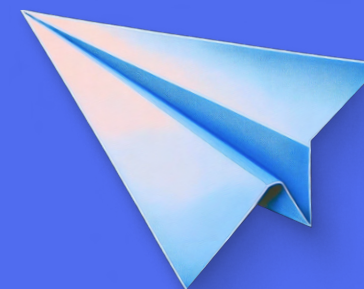
Meta: the most popular choice for entry-level communities

When it comes to starting a new community, Meta's platforms are the go-to for many creators and brands. They're free, familiar, and lots of potential community members and customers already hang out there.

We found that of the communities not hosted on Circle, 46% are hosted on Meta platforms—specifically Facebook and WhatsApp.

Whether it's a private Facebook group or a WhatsApp group chat centered around a niche like vintage watch collectors or local trail-running enthusiasts, Meta makes it easy to bring people together and start building connections without upfront costs. For creators and small businesses, it's a natural first step to test the waters and see what works.
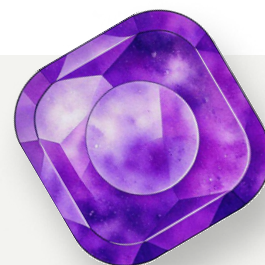
36% Other

24% WhatsApp

46% of entry-level communities are hosted on Meta

9% Discord

22% Facebook Groups

9% Slack

That being said, while Meta, Slack, Reddit, and Discord are great for getting started, they're not designed to support long-term growth or a thriving community business.

As communities on entry-level platforms grow, the limitations start to show:
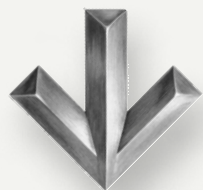
You don't own your audience

Unpredictable algorithms decide who sees your posts, you don't get full access to member data, and platforms can change their terms and conditions whenever they want.

There a ton of distractions

These platforms are typically full of ads, spam, scams, and a ton of unrelated content, making it hard to keep your community's attention on meaningful engagement.

Monetizing is a challenge

There aren't any built-in tools for memberships, courses, or premium offerings—meaning you have to rely on clunky workarounds or unpredictable revenue streams like sponsored posts.

It's not easy to create a branded experience

They don't offer many (if any) customization options, which makes it harder for your community to stand out in the crowd and for your brand to shine through.
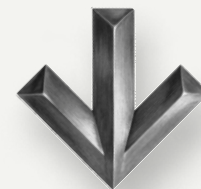
There are limited features

You can't host events, courses, sub-spaces, and more, and end up using multiple tools to stitch everything together, frustrating community members with duct-taped experiences.

Conclusion:

When creators reach a certain level of maturity, they often transition from entry-level community platforms like Meta and Slack to purpose-built community platforms to create the curated, personalized experience they want to offer their members.

Kristen *Bousquet*

Monetization Coach
CEO of Your Soulcialmate

"As someone who started my membership community in a Facebook group and now has almost 200 paying members, I think Facebook Groups and WhatsApp are great for entry-level community spaces.

However, eventually, you may run into the need for more features, organization, and professionalism, which is why I ultimately moved to a Circle community.

And while we may see more AI features for managing paid communities or more competition in the space, one thing won't change:

The communities that thrive will be the ones with real connection, not just flashy tools or big numbers."

How **Dave Gerhardt 10x'd the value of Exit Five overnight** by moving to a private, purpose-built community platform

Dave Gerhardt
Founder, Exit Five

Dave Gerhardt started sharing B2B marketing tips on LinkedIn and gated them behind a Patreon subscription, thinking he'd get *maybe* 30 members. Plot twist—it exploded to 1,000+ members in just a few months. When members started asking to connect with each other, Dave quickly whipped up a Facebook group. But as Exit Five grew from a side project into a serious business, **Dave realized the Facebook group he had impulsively created was now holding him back.**

exit ↗ five

Facebook's limitations were making it **impossible to create the premium experience** his members deserved.

Zero access to member data to market to them

Members couldn't find resources, even when they were right there

The whole setup felt too casual for a serious B2B brand

Valuable content kept getting buried in the endless Facebook feed

Managing memberships manually was eating up too much time

After years of cobbling together different tools and platforms, **Dave turned to Circle Plus.** The platform helped Exit Five level up with:

A slick branded mobile app (launched in just 4 weeks)

A membership site that brings together his content and community

A professional space that matches the brand's value

Full control of his community and member data

Branded push notifications that keep engagement high

Smart membership management that actually saves time

What began as an impromptu, part-time Patreon and Facebook group evolved into a thriving community that members can't get enough of.

Word of mouth growth is on fire and now Dave attracts tons of professionals who wouldn't touch his Facebook group with a ten-foot pole.

The kicker? Dave says if he'd known what Exit Five would become, he would've started with Circle Plus from day one.

$1M
in bootstrapped revenue in 2023

87.5%
increase in revenue year-over-year

1.6x
higher average monthly active users (MAU) for a group his size (40% vs. 15%)

The niche community advantage
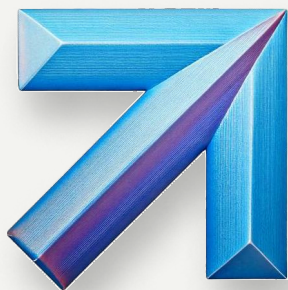
More and more community builders are realizing that bigger isn't always better. Instead of trying to be "everything to everyone" on massive social platforms, they're moving their most-engaged fans into cozy, exclusive spaces with specific content tailored to their needs.

3rd Trend

To give you an idea, on average, survey respondents say **one community member is worth 234 social media followers.**

1
Community member

234
Social media followers
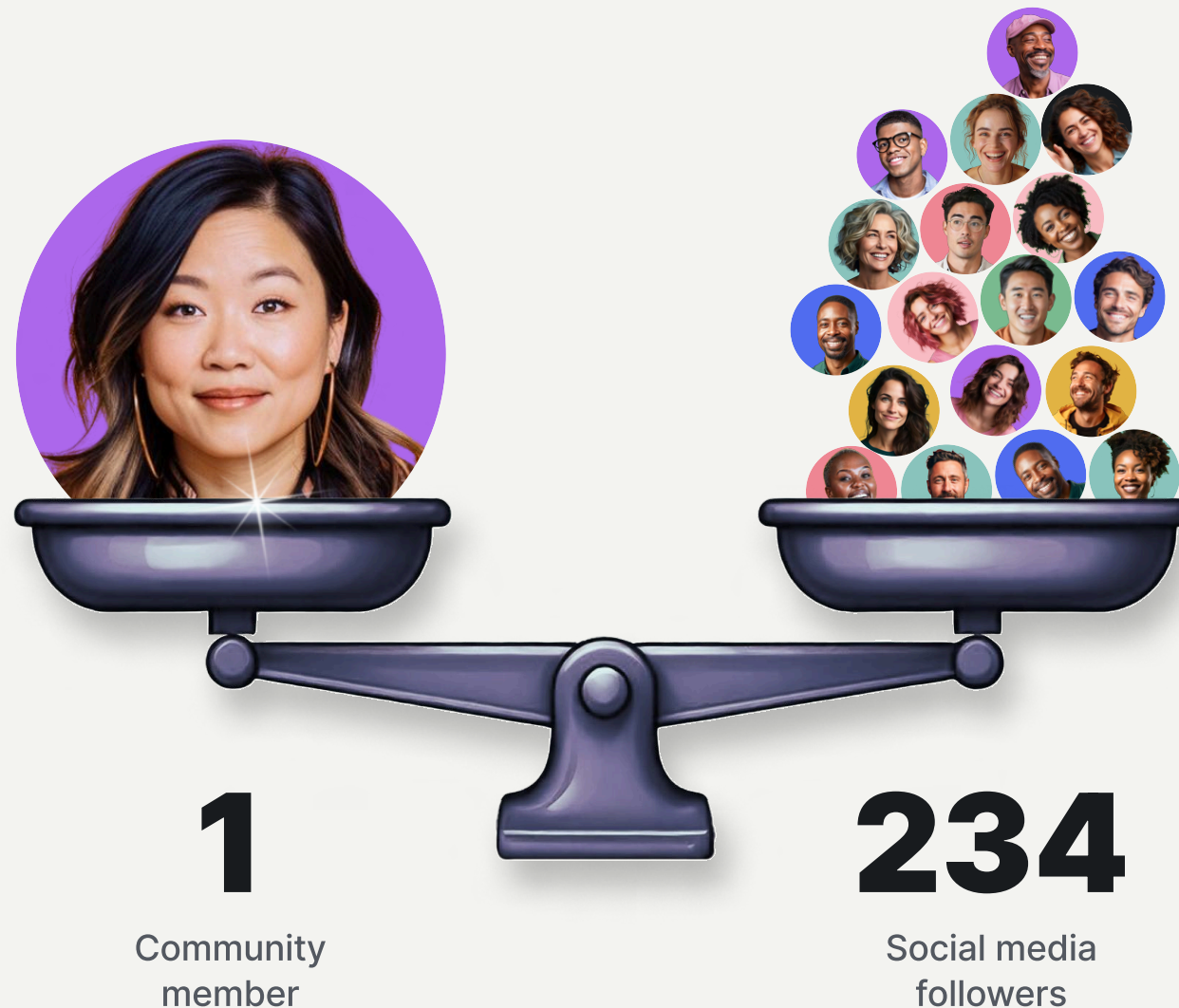
So, what's driving this shift to curated community experiences?

According to our findings, two big factors.

First, these smaller communities are ideal for creating meaningful connections that turn into lasting business.

The second driver? It's gotten significantly easier to bring people into these spaces. And it's not just because the tech has improved (though it has). There's been a mindset shift on the audience side, too, and it's changing the game.

And while they may have been hesitant to try new platforms in the past, they're ready to make the jump now —as long as they can see the value. Smart community builders are picking up on this shift and running with it.

People are actively looking for an **escape from the endless social media scroll.**

They want to see **less negativity and ads** in their online spaces.

They're **craving real connections** with others who share their specific interests, goals, and even values.

Want to hear something else that might surprise you?

Small communities with 100-1,000 members are reporting the same levels of success as their bigger counterparts, with 79% of respondents believing their communities will make a significant impact on their business this year.

How communities rate their overall success in 2024

13%
very successful

58%
moderately successful

29%
not successful

Micro (Under 100)

23%
very successful

67%
moderately successful

10%
not successful

Small (101-500)

22%
very successful

70%
moderately successful

8%
not successful

Medium (501-1000)

30%
very successful

59%
moderately successful

11%
not successful

Large (1,000+)

Just like micro-influencers have shown us for the past few years—engagement matters way more than size.

When it comes to community, quality (and personalization) beats quantity every single time.

"Niche communities are growing because people are seeking deeper, more personal connections—not just with the creators they admire, but also with like-minded folks on similar journeys that they can relate to. These hyper-personalized spaces are intentionally smaller, which means more meaningful interactions, high-touch engagement, and a VIP-like experience."

Andy Guttormsen
Circle Co-Founder and Chief Revenue Officer

Jay Clouse

Founder
Creator Science

"A true community misses you when you're gone. And in smaller communities, it's more likely you will be missed. As communities scale, the experience often does not — intimacy and connection decrease while the demands of support and operations increase.

Community builders are realizing that being small is a competitive advantage, and can be managed with a smaller team, too."

Tom Ross

Founder and CEO
Design Cuts

"I'm increasingly seeing a lot of communities doing $100k-750k with the following model, allowing the community creator to have a wonderful and profitable lifestyle business:

Price: Around $1k+ annually

Size: 100-300 members

**Niche:** Highly focused member persona

Pricing tiers: Annual only

I can see that as we shift towards this model, people are realising that 100-300 members can be a nice level of intimacy, without burning you out in terms of capacity. Plus it's much easier to attract and manage 100 members paying more, versus thousands paying very little."

Matthew Carnevale

Head of Community
Exit Five
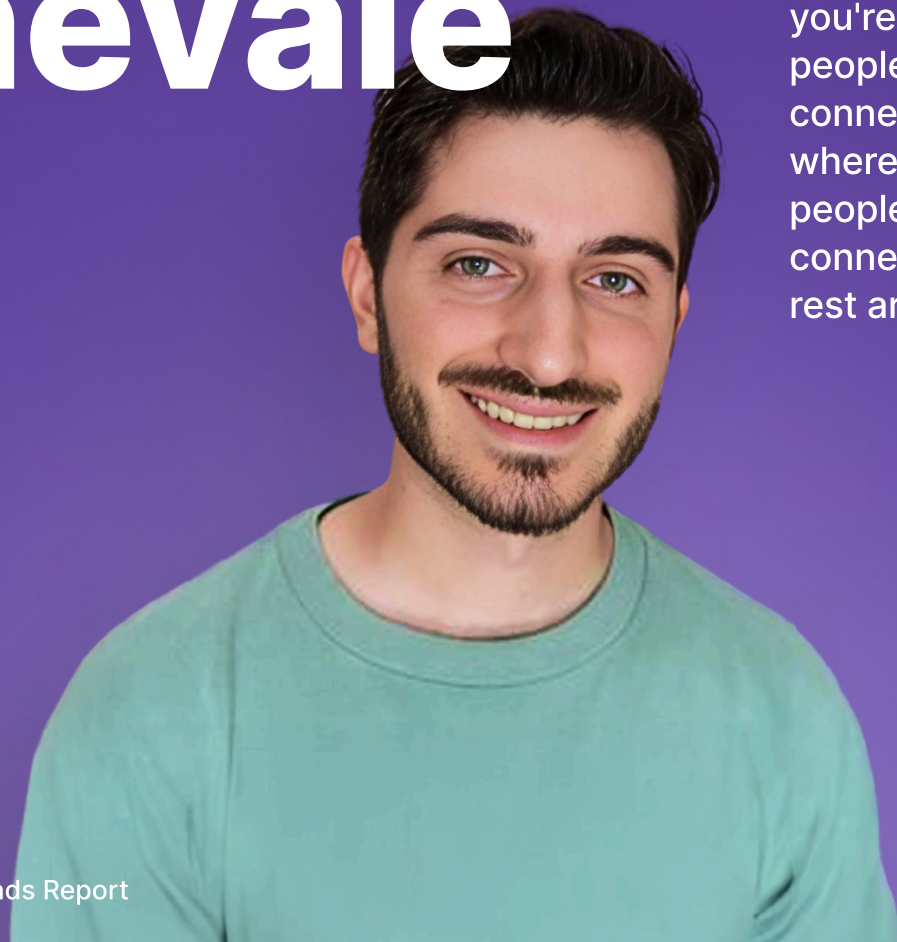
"Every group of people past a certain number starts to be less fruitful for those involved in the group. Think of planning a night out with your friends—the more people you have to coordinate with, the tougher it gets to plan. If you're in a room with 20 people, it's likely you'll connect with everyone, whereas in a room of 500 people, you'll maybe only connect with 15-20 and the rest are strangers.

People want to feel connected to others. Especially those who are like them. It makes them feel like they have a group to lean on and relate to.

And in order for people to feel connected and a sense of belonging, it's better to put them in a small room (virtually or physically) with a group of people like them. A large room (or community in this case) just feels like a big room of strangers. And for most people that's overwhelming and just makes them want to leave the room."

From open-door to invitation-only: exclusivity and privacy as a value prop

47 %

of survey respondents are using application or vetting processes
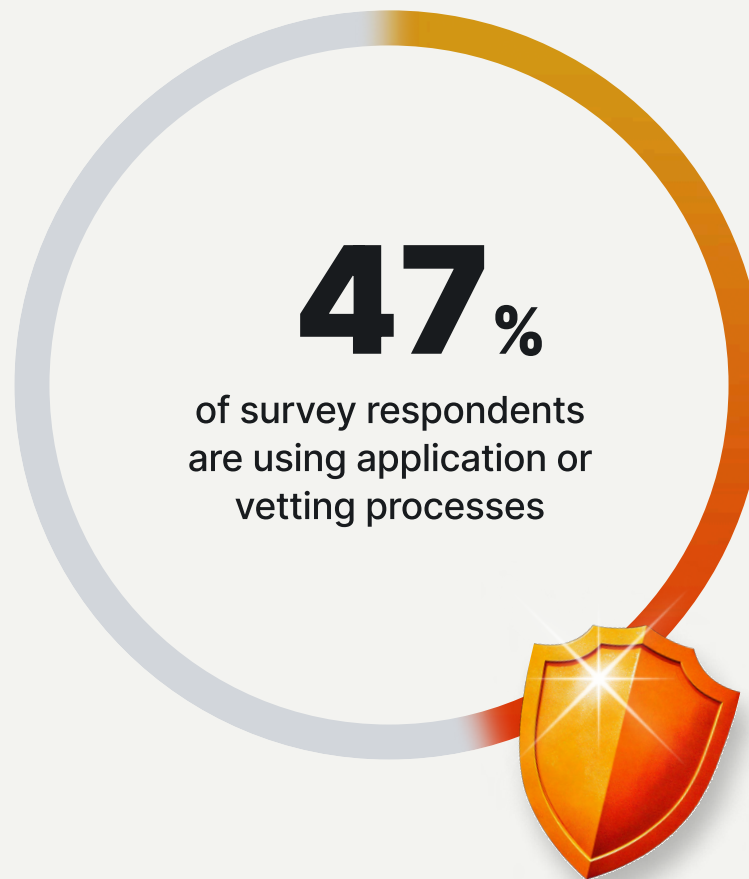
Business accounts on social media are public, so anyone can follow and jump in. More often than not, it ends up feeling like a really crowded trading floor, with everyone shouting over each other to be heard.

That's why more and more private communities are adding application or vetting processes—almost half of our survey respondents, in fact—to create a space that's less chaotic and more intentional.

Not sure how this would apply to your community? Let's take a look at some examples of different vetting processes and why they're used.

Cultural fit

A mindfulness group may require applicants to demonstrate genuine interest in personal growth (rather than just joining for promotions.)

Quality over quantity

A professional network might vet applicants to make sure they're bringing the right level of expertise to the table.

Enhanced safety and trust

Many parent-focused communities use applications to ensure a shared understanding of the group's supportive culture.

But it's not just about keeping membership numbers small and filtering out spam and scams.

It's about creating something truly special and signaling the value of it. Just like that impossible-to-get-a-reservation restaurant—we want in precisely because not everyone can *get* in.

And when people make the cut? They tend to have a higher level of commitment, engage meaningfully, and want to take full advantage of the experience. That buy-in often translates into a willingness to invest more— both emotionally and financially.

Think about high-ticket masterminds, elite networking groups, or private mentorship communities. These spaces position themselves as "invite-only" or "application-required". Their exclusivity not only increases their perceived value, it increases the quality of the experience and justifies higher price tags.

In other words, **exclusivity isn't just about maintaining a certain image; it can also be a highly effective growth lever.** The more exclusive and high-quality the experience is, the more you can charge.

"Communities succeed by creating distinct spaces with clear purposes—whether that's professional development, creative collaboration, or shared interests. This intentional design helps foster trust and encourages members to share more openly than they would on public platforms."

Rudy Santino
Circle Co-Founder and Chief Design Officer

Use case:
Safety & trust

Founded by Certified Grief Educator Brian Smith, the Grief 2 Growth community provides support to those navigating grief and loss. Recognizing the need for a safe space, Brian made it a members-only platform so people would feel comfortable sharing deeply personal experiences.

"The application process ensures privacy and exclusivity, creating a refuge members can trust," says Brian.

Brian Smith
Grief 2 Growth

Use case:
Cultural fit

Gregg and Adam founded Whoggga—the no BS networking community for business owners—to turn conventional, boring networking on its head and focus on humans first, business second.

Whoggga has an unusual approach to vetting new members: instead of Gregg and Adam doing it all themselves (which wasn't scalable as their community grew) existing members assess newcomers to make sure they're legit business owners who would be a good value-add to the community.

Gregg Pajak and Adam Holtzer
Whoggga

Use case: Quality over quantity

Erin Halper founded The Upside in 2018 to help independent consultants, advisors, and coaches build flexible, fulfilling businesses. She hosts quarterly open houses where prospective members can learn more about the community to see if it's right for them.

Then, in order to join The Upside, prospective members fill out a 20-minute application to ensure it's a good fit. This application helps the team get to know the applicant's profile, clients, expertise level, and overall attitude, to ensure they align with the community. Since signing up requires a three-month commitment, this step helps set everyone up for success from the start.

Erin Halper
The Upside

Chapter 2: Successful communities are thriving ecosystems

5th Trend

Live virtual events are your secret weapon for engagement and retention

In 2025, we know that offering a wide variety of member experiences isn't a nice-to-have—it's table stakes to fostering a thriving community. But here's the surprising part: in a world obsessed with on-demand, Netflix-style content, live experiences are stealing the spotlight again.

78% educational workshops or trainings

60% small group discussions and peer support

47% open office hours and Q&A

In other words, people want more than just pre-recorded, one-size-fits-all content. There's something about the energy of real-time interaction that static content just can't beat. It also challenges the "set it and forget it" mindset of evergreen content—it takes effort in the moment, but that's what makes it so engaging.

That's why many community builders are flipping the script.

Instead of constantly creating new content or stressing over one-off launches, they're **generating ongoing value with live programming including events like:**

Exclusive workshops and masterclasses

Paid mastermind groups

Niche industry bootcamps and accelerators

High-value webinars with actionable outcomes

Private networking and AMA sessions

"Live events are thriving because they bring an irreplaceable sense of human connection and energy that more static digital interactions can't match. They create shared experiences and help members feel like they're part of something bigger—something real."

Sid Yadav
Circle Co-Founder and CEO

How Ubuntu Hub's live events strategy helped them grow to 17,500+ members

Ubuntu Education

The Ubuntu Hub started as a vision to connect teachers across Africa.

The founding team—a group of educators with experience teaching in multiple African countries—realized a massive gap: a lack of professional development opportunities and support networks for teachers.

The Ubuntu team set out to create an online space built by teachers, for teachers, to address these challenges. Little did they expect that within a few years, **their community would grow to over 17,000 members spanning 22 countries.**

Teachers across Africa faced significant challenges that held back their professional growth and made it hard to connect with peers.

Isolation

Many teachers worked in remote areas with little to no opportunities for professional development or collaboration.

Lack of resources

Training and development programs were often inaccessible and underfunded.

Disconnected platforms

While WhatsApp and Facebook helped with basic communication, they couldn't create real engagement or structure.

Generic solutions

Trainings often missed the mark, offering one-size-fits-all content that didn't meet specific local needs.

To overcome these barriers, the Ubuntu team launched a Circle community to bring teachers together and **make live events the heart of their community.**

Frequent live events

Ubuntu hosts 30+ live events every month, covering leadership, mental health, AI tools, and more.

Interactive experiences, real connections

They offer webinars, workshops, and Q&As which allow teachers to collaborate in real time.

Feedback-driven programming

Event feedback helps Ubuntu fine-tune and stay laser-focused.

Certificates that count

Attendees earn certificates, giving them something tangible to show for their time and boosting their motivation to keep coming back.

Live events weren't just another feature—they were one of the driving forces behind Ubuntu's explosive growth:

The live, interactive format gave Ubuntu the edge it needed to build trust, spark engagement, and keep members coming back for more.

Now, live events are the backbone of Ubuntu's community engagement strategy.

17.5k+

members across 22 countries

229%

increase in monthly active users over six months

30+

live events every month

Pat Flynn

Serial Entrepreneur and Startup Advisor

Founder of Smart Passive Income

"At Smart Passive Income, we've dramatically increased our live events, workshops, masterclasses, and office hours over the past year – more than ever before.

This shift reflects a crucial understanding: in an era of increasing digital isolation, people crave real-time connection and personalized guidance.

We've even evolved our signature programs from purely DIY to 'Done With You' models, recognizing that sustained transformation happens through active engagement and community support.

What's particularly fascinating is how this trend transcends industries. In the Pokemon space with Deep Pocket Monster, we've seen an explosive growth in the value of live community engagement.

These real-time interactions create what I call 'relatability moments' – opportunities for authentic connection that simply can't be replicated through polished, pre-recorded content.

In fact, this aligns perfectly with what I discuss in my book 'Superfans' – live interaction is one of the most powerful tools for building deep community connections."

"Especially in today's AI-driven world, there's a growing appetite for raw, unfiltered human interaction. The 'imperfect' moments during live sessions often resonate more strongly than perfectly curated content."

# 2025 is the year of platform consolidation and complete community tools

Expanding your programming and creating multiple income streams is an exciting prospect until you find yourself juggling more tools than a handyman.

Don't get us wrong, offering tons of value to your members is fantastic—but stitching all those tools together can quickly become overwhelming.

Our data shows that **58% of respondents are using three or more tools** to run their community business, from CRMs to email marketing to automations.
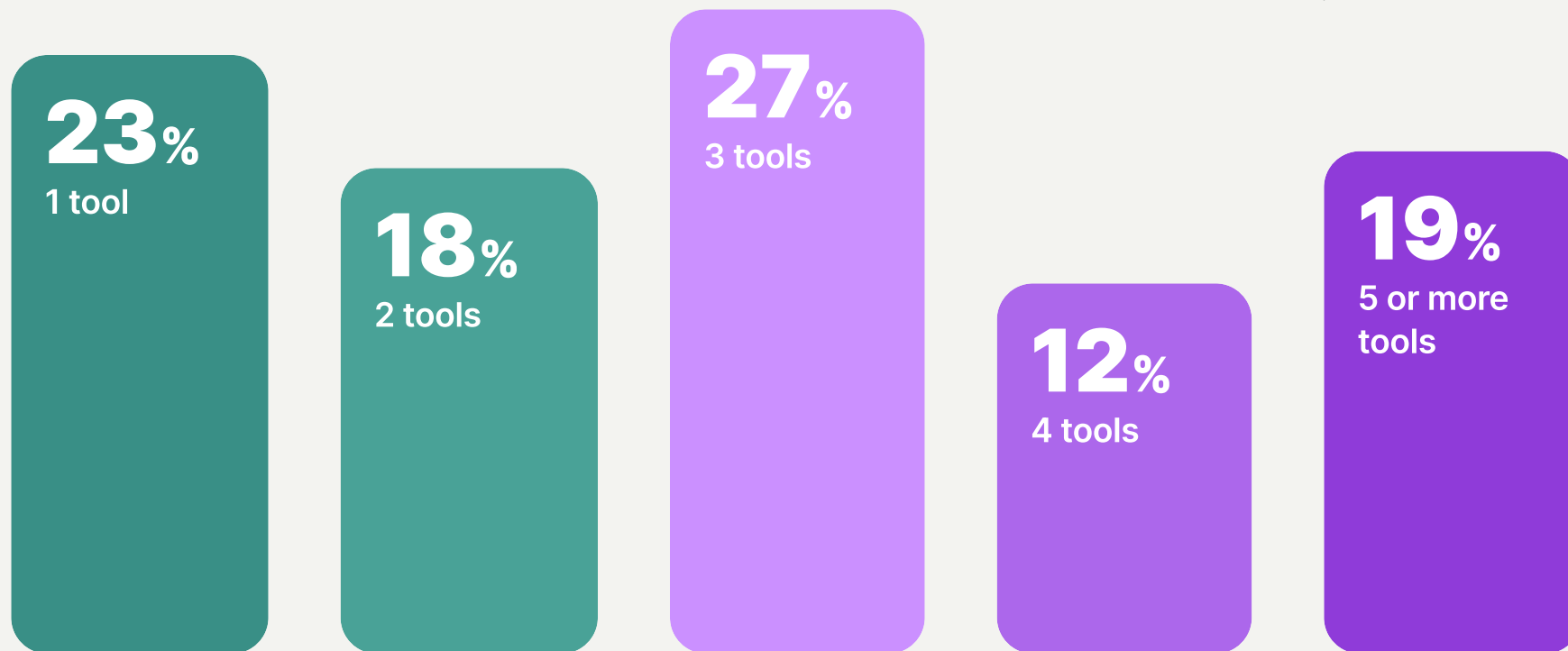
That's a lot of tabs, programs, or platforms to keep open and stay on top of.

But there's good news: the **great consolidation is finally happening.** This year alone, 27% of respondents streamlined their tech stack, bringing functions like email marketing and community management under one roof.

The math is simple: **fewer tools = more time for what matters.** When everything's in one place, you can focus on what really counts: creating value and building connections.

27% consolidated last year

67% plan to consolidate in 2025

Only 6% have no plans to consolidate tools in the near future

The transformative power of recurring revenue

For many community builders, **transitioning from one-off sales to a recurring revenue model is a transformative "aha" moment.**

When you're always focused on landing the next sale, you get stuck on a hamster wheel—juggling creating, marketing, and closing deals—and leaving little room for innovation.

That's where recurring revenue comes in. It gives you the breathing room you need, with predictable income that lets you focus on what really matters: delighting your members.
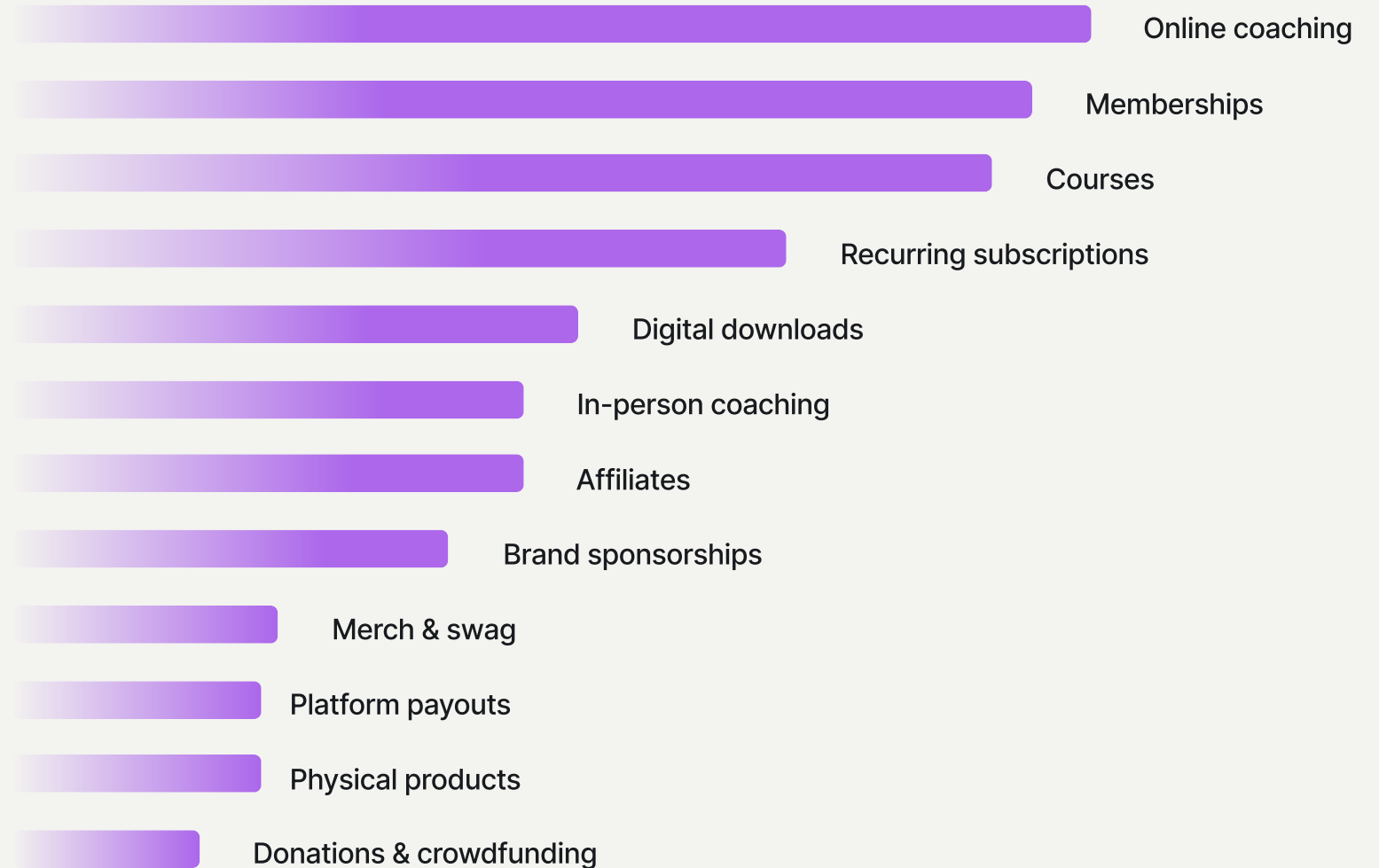
Plus, it's much more cost-effective to keep your current members than constantly hunt for new ones.

54% of respondents are already tapping into paid memberships and **41% are using recurring subscriptions, alongside offerings like coaching and courses.**

It's not just about earning more—it's about creating a sustainable business model that supports your long-term growth (and helps you sleep better at night.)

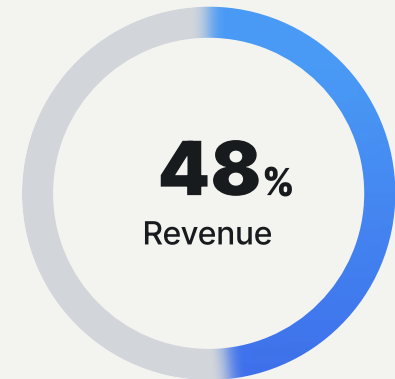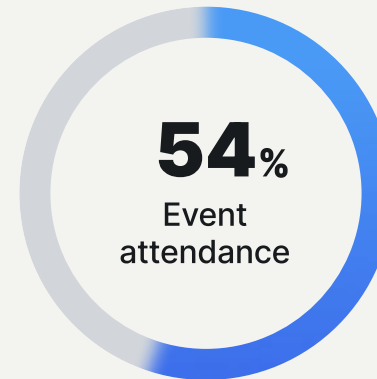# Popular monetization methods for creators & entrepreneurs

Online coaching
Memberships
Courses
Recurring subscriptions
Digital downloads
In-person coaching
Affiliates
Brand sponsorships
Merch & swag
Platform payouts
Physical products
Donations & crowdfunding

Alongside the transition to recurring revenue, we've seen a change in how community success is being measured. **Many respondents are now prioritizing total active members and engagement vs. community size and revenue**—metrics that used to reign supreme.

Again, this is a sign that lasting engagement is now a bigger priority than short-lived transactions, which makes sense as it's often a leading indicator to generating more revenue.

Indicators and metrics our respondents are using to track the success of their communities

75% Total active members

70% Community engagement

64% New joiners

49% Total members

54% Event attendance

48% Revenue
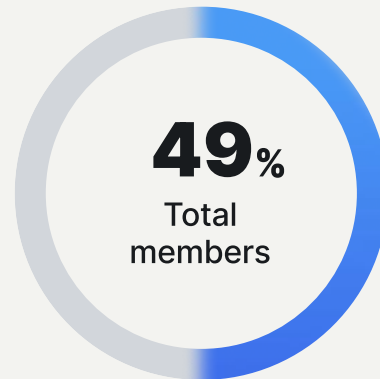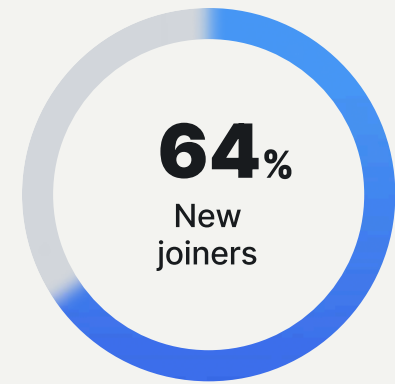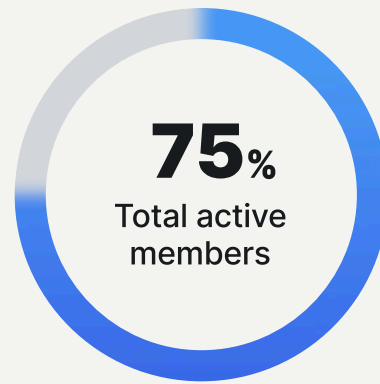
7th Trend

It's the "1,000 True Fans" philosophy in action—a reminder that a smaller, deeply engaged audience can be far more impactful and sustainable than a massive, disconnected following.

So when you think of your community as an ecosystem, the key takeaway is this: **keep engagement centralized on one platform and adopt a business model that gives you the time to create even more value for your members.** This way, they'll keep coming back, and you'll build a sustainable business that can thrive in the long run.

"The most innovative creators are seeing their communities as accelerators for multiple revenue streams, not just subscription platforms. They're using their communities to validate new products, gather instant feedback on ideas, and create exclusivity around premium offerings.

This means building flexible spaces that can showcase different types of value—whether that's early access to new features, collaborative product development, or premium learning experiences. **The key is creating clear pathways that help members discover and engage with these different offerings naturally.**"

Rudy Santino
Circle Co-Founder and Chief Design Officer

Julie *Solomon*

Messaging Strategist & Coach
**Founder of The Brand Accelerator
and The Influencer Podcast**

"In 2024, roughly 60% of our revenue came from recurring offers, including membership programs, low-cost and high-value trainings, and payment plans for signature offers like The Growth Collective and The Brand Accelerator. This recurring model has been a game-changer, creating consistent cash flow and allowing us to build more predictable revenue.

What's interesting is that my highest-converting offers tend to be those that start with a low-ticket recurring product (like a subscription or ongoing membership), then naturally lead into higher-ticket programs. This shift away from traditional one-off launches to a more sustainable, consistent model has not only simplified our operations, but it's also helped my clients feel more supported through continuous, ongoing access to content and community.

Looking ahead to 2025, I see a growing demand for high-value recurring products that don't require constant new content creation.

Community builders are realizing that sustainability and profitability come from building evergreen offers that can be reused, optimized, and scaled, rather than launching something new every few months.

There's also a shift toward memberships and subscriptions being positioned more like boutique experiences—not just paywalls for content, but curated, intimate spaces where clients get exactly what they need without overwhelm.

One of the biggest gaps I'm seeing in my niche is that clients, especially high-level professionals, struggle to bridge the gap between strategy and execution when it comes to creating content from their messaging. They don't need more theory—they need plug-and-play frameworks, done-for-you templates, and real-world examples they can immediately adapt and a personalized human touch. This is what's driving the demand for recurring offers that go beyond theory and provide real-time solutions and support.

This move toward recurring revenue isn't just about cash flow—it's about creating deeper client relationships and retention. People are craving consistency, trust, and simplicity more than ever. That's the foundation I'm building on for 2025, and I predict more creators will be leaning into this too."

Bonnie *Christine*

Artist, Pattern Designer, and Teacher for Creatives

Founder of Flourish with Bonnie Christine

"The first time I truly understood the transformative power of recurring revenue was in 2012. I had been proudly sharing about my blog readership—something I thought was wildly impressive—with a wise business owner who asked me one simple question:

'That's great, but how much revenue is it bringing in?'

The truth? Not much. He encouraged me to dream beyond vanity numbers and imagine what could happen if even a small percentage of those readers became recurring supporters.

That single conversation planted a seed. I spent the next day brainstorming: What could I offer consistently that would be worth someone's investment? Two months later, I launched a membership using nothing more than a blog post and a PayPal subscription link.

It was a $5/month 'membership' that was essentially a paid newsletter. But that weekend, 200 people joined, creating $1,000 per month in predictable income for my tiny surface pattern design business.

It was the most stable income I'd ever experienced, and it gave me the freedom to focus on building my dream career. Today, that same membership has grown into a community that generates over a million dollars annually.

Recurring subscriptions are a win-win, not just for business owners but for consumers too. They simplify life in ways we often underestimate. Personally, I'm thrilled when I can subscribe to something I use regularly—whether it's Adobe Illustrator and Procreate for my design work, memberships that help me grow as a creative, or even art supplies and watercolor paper for my studio.

This trend aligns with what I hear daily in my surface pattern design community. Artists, designers, and hobbyists love the idea of reducing decision fatigue.

Subscriptions mean one less thing to think about and more time to focus on what matters most—creating beauty and bringing their visions to life. The power of these models lies not just in their financial predictability but also in their ability to foster ongoing relationships between creators and their audiences."

Chapter 3: **The comeback kids—newsletters and IRL events**
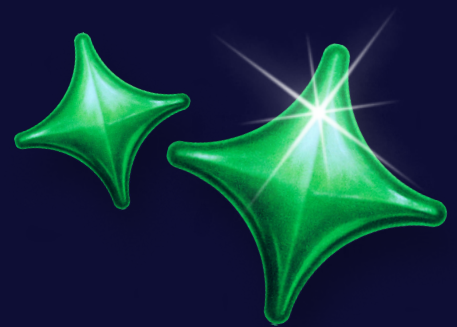
From URL to IRL:
In-person events are back

After spending years focusing on online events and trying to perfect the virtual experience, people are really missing face-to-face connection—and community builders are picking up on that. They're bringing back in-person events, not to replace online ones (because those are still very much thriving), but as a powerful addition.

In fact, 48% of our survey respondents are already hosting IRL events, with many saying they've been a big success.

How respondents rate the success of their live events

30%
extremely successful

58%
moderately successful

12%
not very successful

Before you panic, you don't need to throw a massive festival to make an impact.

We're not talking about giant events like SXSW or Web Summit that draw tens of thousands of people. Instead, it's mostly about micro-events—small, intentional gatherings that give community members a chance to connect in person.

Popular types of **in-person events** that our respondents are running

Casual meetups

Practical workshops

Networking events

Invite-only

Ticketed events

Member-led meetups

Other
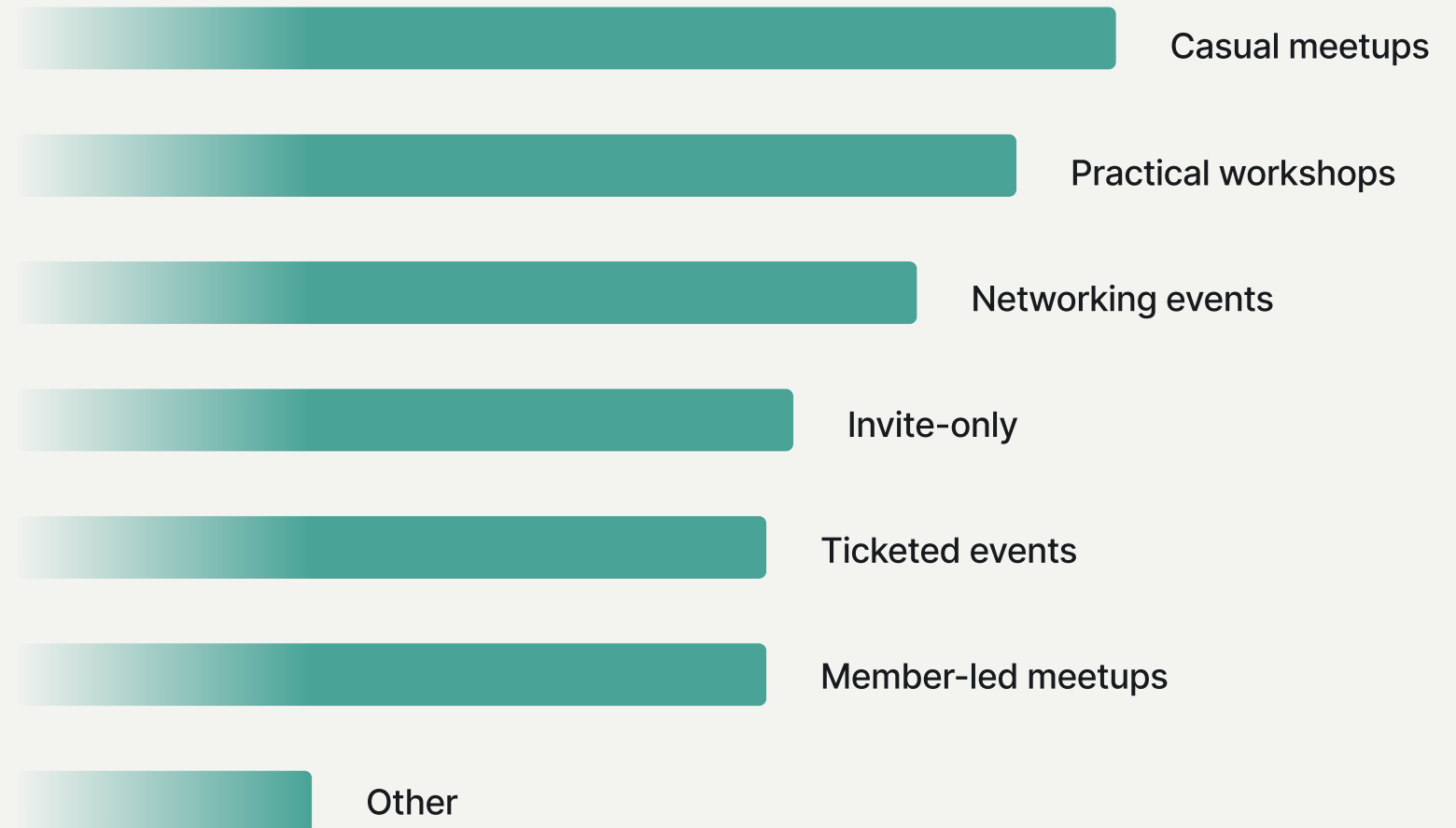
8th Trend

For community builders, micro-events are easier to pull off, with lower costs and less stress, but still a great return. As for attendees, these intimate settings mean real conversations and stronger connections—things that are hard to achieve in a huge crowd.

What's most surprising (and maybe even a blessing for busy, bootstrapped community builders) is that casual meet-ups are currently the most popular type of in-person event.

No elaborate production necessary—just a simple opportunity to hang out and get to know each other.

Workshops, networking events, and ticketed experiences round out the mix, providing even more ways to engage face-to-face.

"After hosting thousands of virtual events in the Circle customer community, expanding into IRL experiences felt like a natural next step (one that our customers have been requesting for some time now). In 2024, we piloted invite-only micro-events in cities like London, NYC, and São Paulo—intimate meetups and dinners designed for our most engaged customers to connect and learn from each other.

The response has been incredible—attendees loved them precisely because they were small and curated—and had no other agenda than helping them build meaningful connections with each other and the Circle team."

Mathilde Leo
Head of Community at Circle

Glo Atanmo

Creative Entrepreneur
and Digital Marketer
Founder of the Life Leap

"Social media absolutely continues to blow me away in how quickly and easily you can find exactly who you're looking for. But finding your people is just the first part. Connecting, building, and growing with them takes intentional time and effort offline.

I've been hosting in-person experiences for the last decade, and I've always felt that social media can only go so far in community-building. The magic happens offline, so we're doubling down on in-person experiences this year to reflect that."

Ali
Abdaal

YouTuber and Best-Selling Author
Founder of Productivity Lab

"This doesn't really surprise me — we've been doing casual in-person meet-ups for the past few years with our PTYA community and we're hoping to do more with our other community, Productivity Lab, at some point in 2025. There's just a much better vibe than anything really formal and I love talking to people in real life.

I think there's still a place for those other live events and I think in-person stuff, in general, will become more and more important over the next couple of years."

Justin *Moore*

Sponsorship Coach
Founder of Creator Wizard
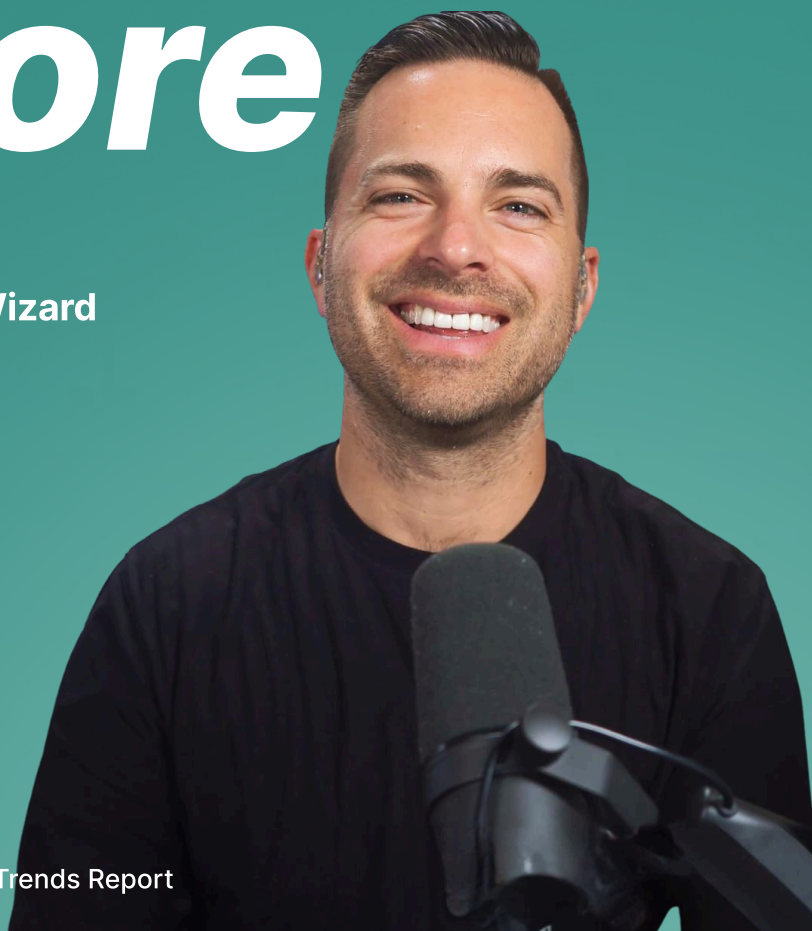
"The purest version of a human experience is meeting up in person—networking, learning, and connecting in real life. That's why I'm so bullish on in-person events. I'm investing a lot of my own money into them, and I believe it's going to be good for my business. I've found that the most profound shifts in my life and business have happened when I've met people in person.

The point is not the size of the event; it's about connection. For my event, I want to avoid the traditional conference format— no keynotes, no panels, no workshops.

Everything's going to be hands-on. It's called Sponsor Games, where creators will play games based on my framework. It's kind of an anti-conference approach.

I think people are craving connection. They don't want to just sit and watch a boring keynote or panel while playing Candy Crush. This is why I'm betting on in-person experiences—they build die-hard advocates for your business. There's something different about meeting someone in person, sharing a meal or a drink, and forging those connections. I do think there's a lot of potential here."

Newsletters are cool again (and we have proof)

Despite everybody saying "email is dead" for the past decade, newsletters never actually went away—they were just waiting for their moment to shine. And in 2025, they're making a major comeback.

We've already seen how social media platforms are becoming increasingly noisy, and algorithms more restrictive. We've also seen how more and more creators are looking to connect better with their audience using curated, hyper-personalized content they can monetize.

With all that in mind, it makes total sense that newsletters are in again. Writers, in particular, are embracing the direct-to-consumer model with long-form content, following in the footsteps of creators who've done the same with video.

Platforms like Substack are leading this shift, transforming newsletters from simple email blasts into a powerful form of monetizable subscription media.

Some even see Substack as a social network in its own right, helping creators build dedicated communities around their content.

Our survey shows 67% of respondents are actively using newsletters to grow their business.

(And out of those who don't have one yet, 41% plan to launch one in 2025).

26%
high impact

56%
moderate impact

18%
low impact

82%

of survey respondents report that their newsletter drives moderate to high impact on their community business

9th Trend

Size does matter, but here's the thing; you don't need a huge email list to start seeing results. Community builders with just a few hundred subscribers are already seeing revenue gains.

That said, 500 subscribers marks a key tipping point for noticeable growth. Once you hit 2,000 subscribers, many respondents report a higher impact on the business.

Respondents who reported high business impact from their newsletter, based on total subscriber count

40%

30%

20%

10%

0

500 or fewer   501-2k   2k-5k   5k-10k   10k-25k   25k-50k   50k+

Newsletter subscribers
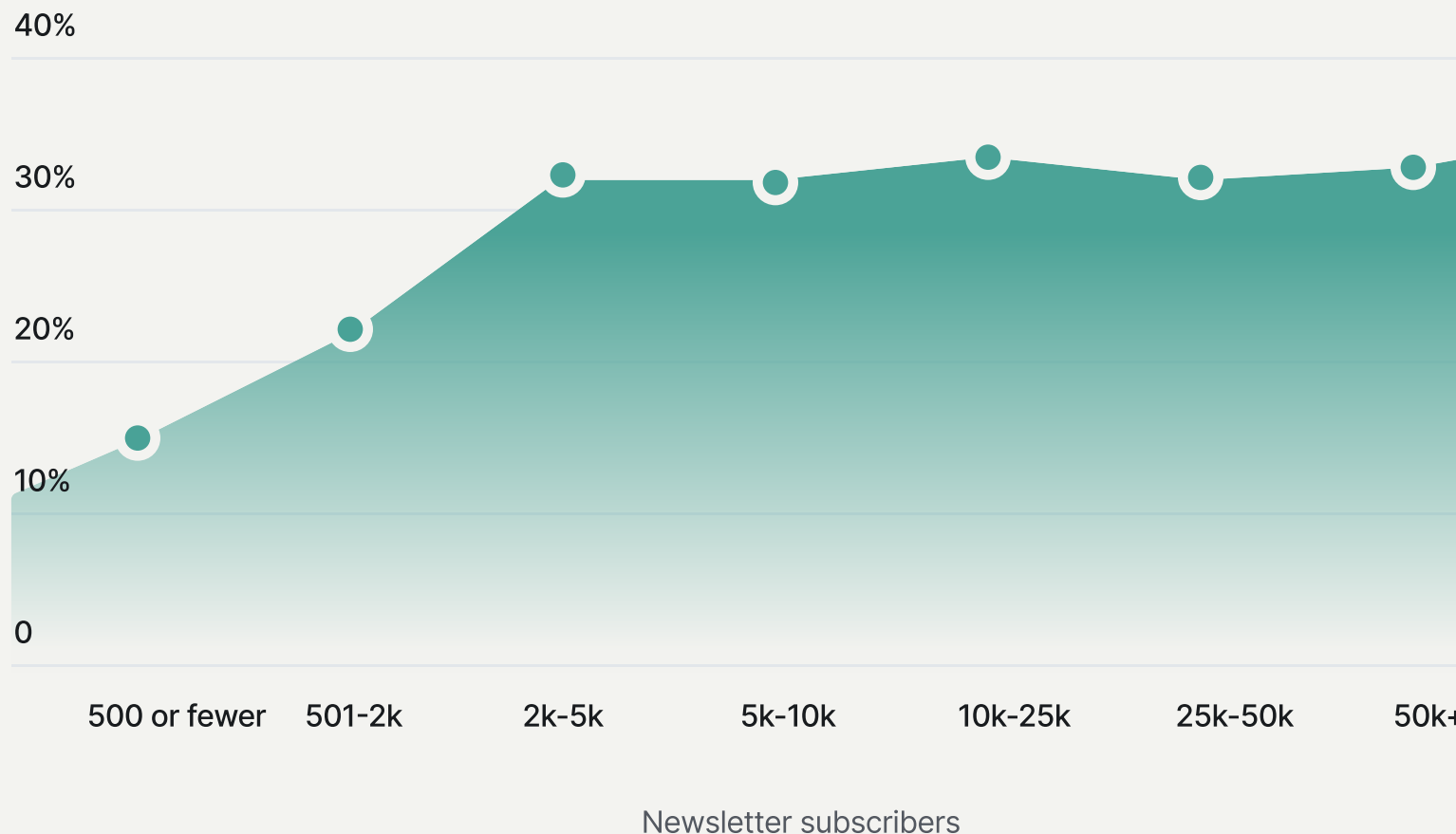
As social media reach becomes more unpredictable, newsletters remain a reliable, trusted way to build authentic connections—and, more importantly, drive real business results.

"The comeback of newsletters shows people want highly curated and thoughtful long-form content—not just fleeting social media posts.

For community builders, it's also a wake-up call to own access to your audience with direct channels, so you're not at the mercy of algorithms."

Sid Yadav
Circle Co-Founder and CEO

How Jay Clouse grew his newsletter 7x in two years (and built an $800k+ business off the back of it)

Jay Clouse
Founder, Creator Science

Jay Clouse founded Creator Science with a clear mission: to help creators cut through the noise, and be recognized and compensated for their hard work. From day one, he decided email would be the backbone of his business— and that decision has paid off, big time.

His newsletter has skyrocketed to over 60,000 subscribers, growing 7x and helping power an $800k/year business.

Jay knew email was the key to helping creators future-proof their businesses and unlock big growth opportunities.

But scaling a newsletter wasn't easy—it meant figuring out how to build strong subscriber funnels, grow consistently without resorting to gimmicks, and juggle content creation with audience-building.
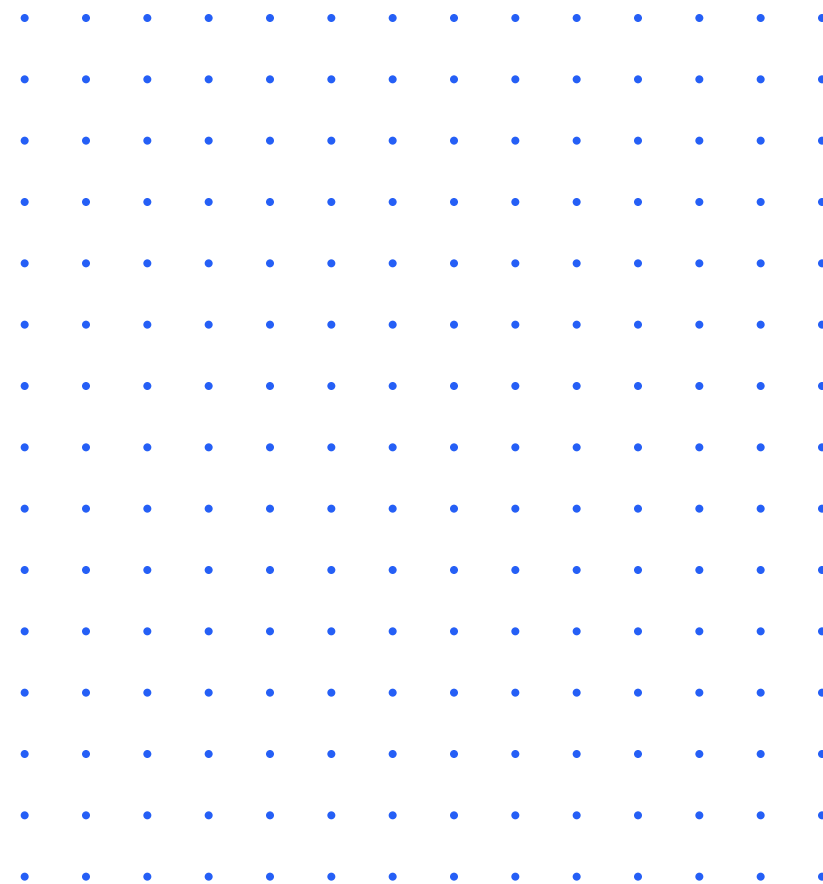
Jay created a repeatable playbook to turn his newsletter into a growth machine by:

Experimenting with organic and paid strategies

like SEO, newsletter swaps, and low-cost advertising campaigns.

Building an inviting "front door"

with lead magnets like free courses, templates, and challenges that instantly deliver value.

Running data-driven experiments

by continuously testing what works, from LinkedIn newsletter promotions to Sparkloop's Upscribe recommendations.

Designing shareable content

that hits an emotional chord and drives viral growth.

Creating "side doors"

to promote the newsletter through collaborations, YouTube videos, podcast appearances, article opt-ins, and more.

By focusing on high-quality content, relentless experimentation, and diverse acquisition strategies, Jay turned his newsletter into the engine behind his entire creator business.

"If there's one hill I will die on, it's that all creators should include email as part of their creative platform. And I'm not alone on that hill."

7x

increase in newsletter subscribers, growing from 9,000 to over 60,000

$800k

year in revenue, with $100k directly from newsletter sponsorships

54.89%

conversion rate, on cross-promotion experiments using Sparkloop's Upscribe

Chapter 4: Community

AI's true potential lies in supporting human relationships, not replacing them

AI is freeing many community builders up to focus on meaningful work

Community AI isn't about automating everything in sight. It's about the thoughtful, intentional application of AI to enhance human connection. The technology is already taking on more behind-the-scenes work than ever, including tasks like moderation, content curation, data analysis, and member onboarding.

On the one hand, it's a huge help for community builders looking to streamline and scale their operations.

On the other hand, the overwhelming abundance of AI content and interactions is making authentic, human-led experiences that much more valuable.
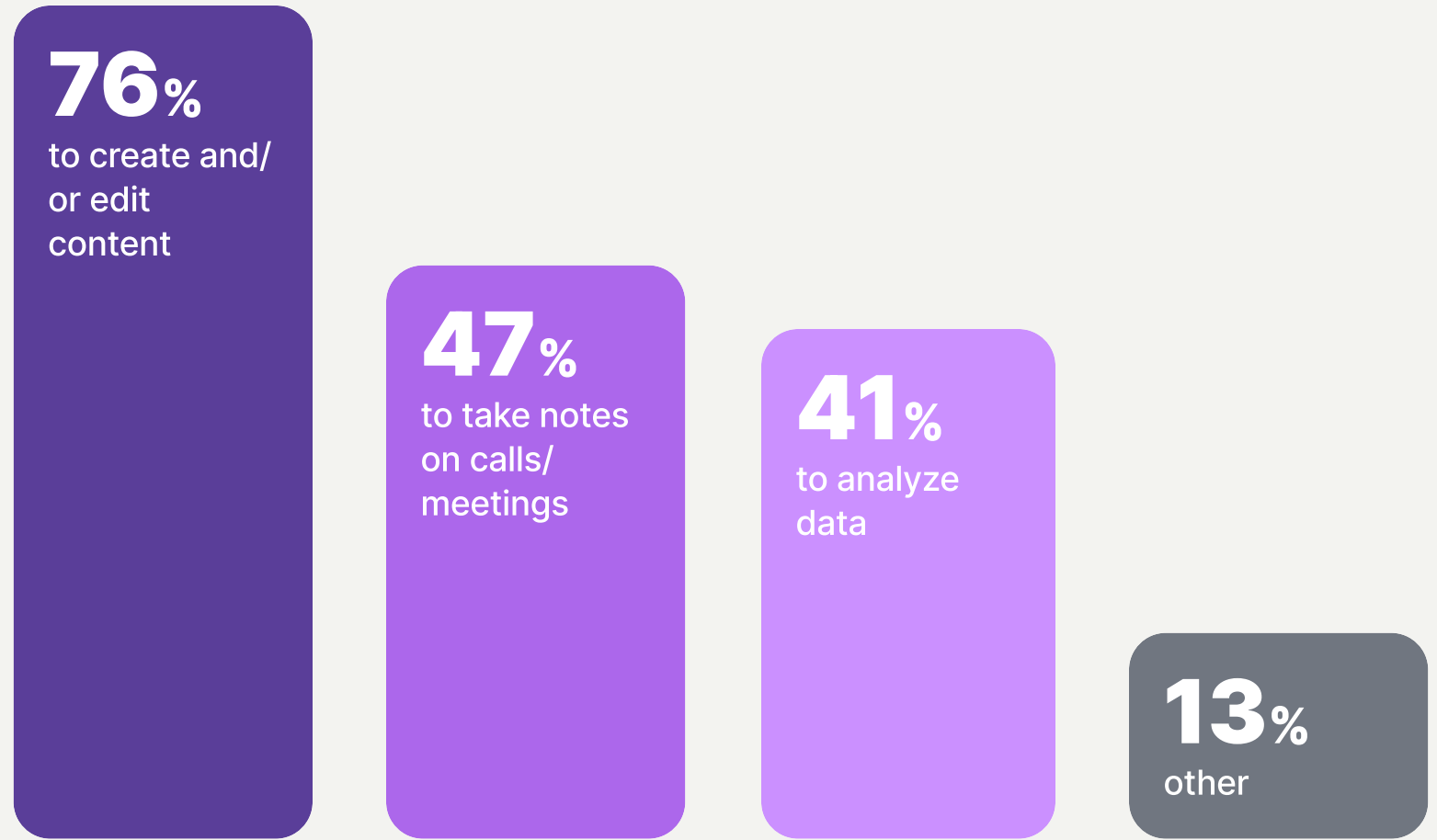
Before we dive into that story, let's take a look at what the data tells us about AI's biggest use cases in community right now.

How survey respondents use AI to support their community business

76%
to create and/or edit content

47%
to take notes on calls/meetings

41%
to analyze data

13%
other

Content creation

Over two thirds of the community builders we surveyed are using AI to help with their content—and it's easy to see why. Far beyond simply generating content, many community builders are using AI to:

Overcome writer's block

Help with creative ideation

Repurpose content into new formats

Edit existing content

Repackage content for different audiences

76%

of survey respondents already use AI to create and edit content.

Justin Welsh

Solopreneur Coach &
Serial Entrepreneur

"The AI wave isn't just hype — it's transforming how I work. I've been using AI tools to help brainstorm and organize ideas for months now, and I've got to tell you: it's a game-changer for my thinking process.

But here's the thing:

AI shouldn't do your writing for you. It should help you think more clearly. When used right, AI helps me organize my thoughts and explore different angles. Then I can bring my own voice, experience, and insights to the content. It's an incredibly helpful tool for clear thinking."

Admin, note-taking, and transcriptions

Nearly 47% of respondents are using AI note-taking and transcription features to speed up their workflows and reduce admin-related tasks. Now, it may seem like a small use case, but it reflects a bigger trend in relation to the use of AI in community management.

Eventually, community AI will become a junior "community manager" that takes all the tedious admin work off your plate. (More on AI Chat Agents in Trend 11.)

Instead of getting bogged down in repetitive tasks, you'll be able to focus on genuinely connecting with your members and helping them connect with each other. This means community builders can focus on the big-picture—strategy and creativity—while AI sweats the small stuff.

47%

of survey respondents use AI for note-taking and transcriptions

Data analysis

Community builders are also using AI to unlock insights about their members. AI can sort through all that data like a pro, spotting trends and providing learnings that can shape everything from your content strategy to your community management approach.

The data is clear: the bigger the community is, the more likely they are to lean on AI-powered analytics.

Our survey data revealed that for communities with over 5,000 members, it's common to see AI stepping in to analyze engagement, feedback, and member activity.

But as you can see, even the smallest communities are leveraging AI to analyze data. There's no need to hold back until a certain size to use this powerful tool for understanding your community better.

The bigger the community, the more likely they are to use AI-powered insights
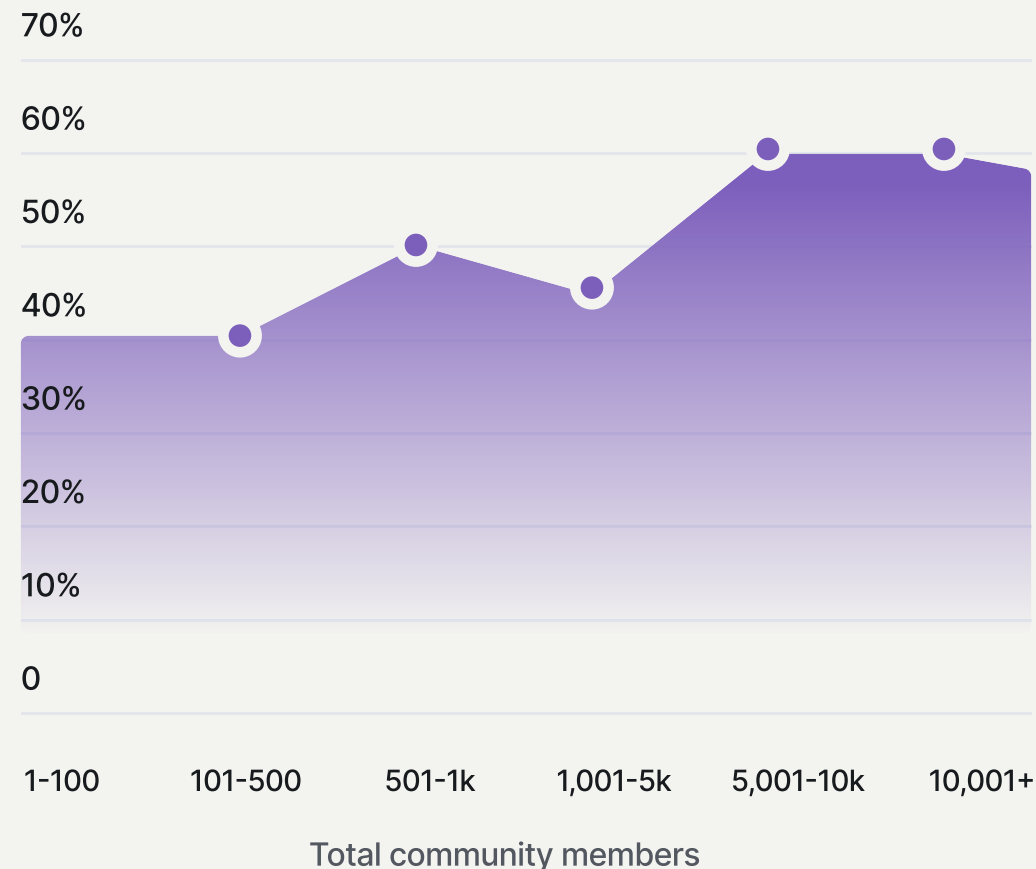
Total community members

"For community managers, the most scarce resource is time. There are lots of daily admin tasks that pull you away from the most important work: delivering value to your members and driving real connection.

Now, these early AI wins are great for community managers to help them scale themselves. That said, we're just beginning to scratch the surface of what will be possible when AI agents are more prevalent in communities."

Andy Guttormsen
Circle Co-Founder and Chief Revenue Officer

Jordan *Godbey*

Community Building Coach
Founder of GrowthCommunity
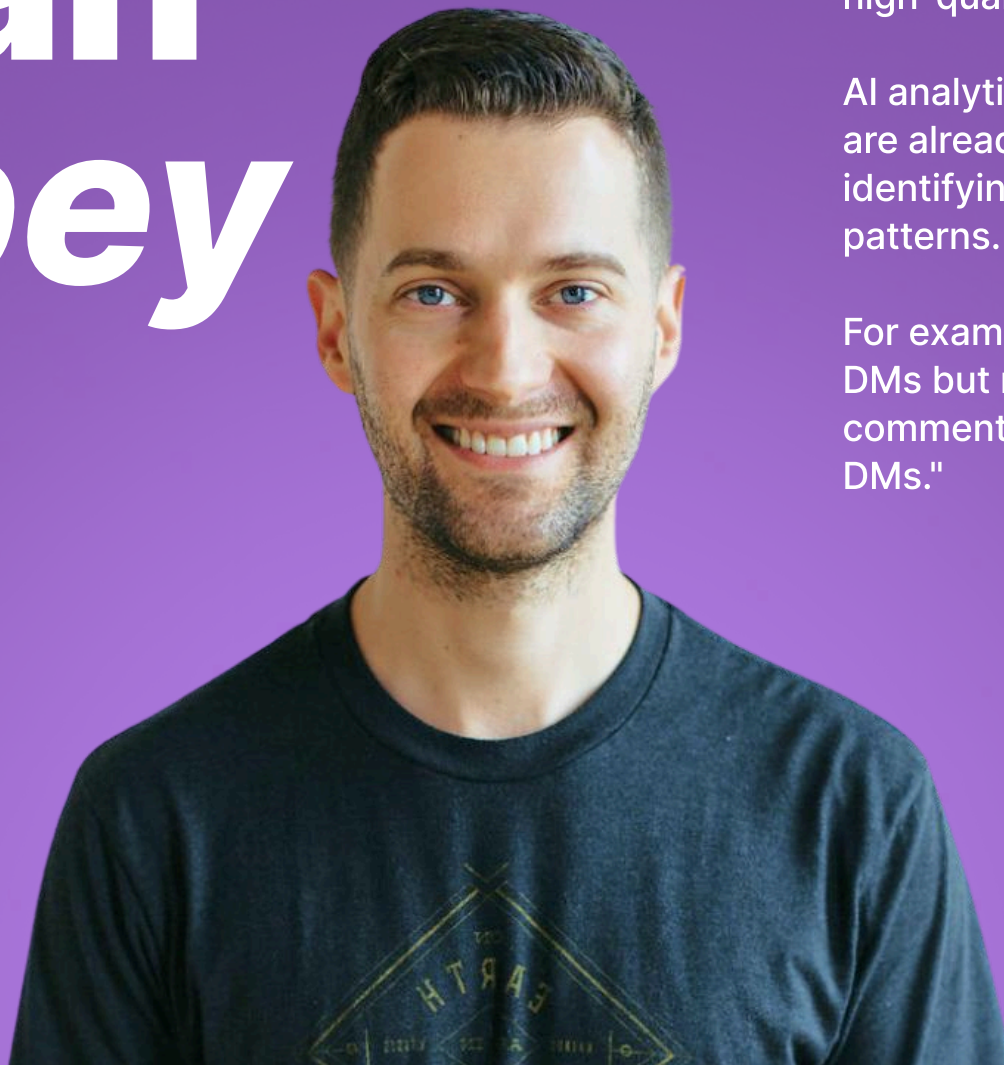
"As communities scale, managing engagement manually just isn't sustainable. AI fills the gap by offering personalized insights and automated touchpoints that keep the experience high-quality for members.

AI analytics like activity scores in Circle are already game-changers for identifying member engagement patterns.

For example, lurkers who are active in DMs but not posting—or connectors who comment and post, but rarely engage in DMs."

"Community managers can leverage these insights to craft targeted nudges—encouraging lurkers to post or posters to deepen connections. There's room for growth, though. Features like automated workflows tied to activity breakdowns (e.g., sending personalized prompts or engagement strategies) could take this to the next level.

Here's where I think things are heading in the next year. AI workflows will become more tailored and essential, allowing for:

Predictive analytics to flag disengaged members and trigger re-engagement strategies.

Chat agents that provide not only support but also customized onboarding experiences.

Searchable transcripts for calls and videos will become table stakes, improving accessibility and knowledge-sharing.

Communities crossing revenue thresholds will increasingly invest in AI tools to save time and scale effectively."

"Circle is already ahead of the curve with tools like activity scores, and there's a huge opportunity to enhance these further. As communities grow, the need for usability, scalability, and automation becomes even more critical—and I'm confident Circle will continue leading the way."

Still early days for AI agents in communities, but adoption is about to skyrocket

While adoption is still in the early stages, many community builders are starting to see how AI chat agents can scale their presence and impact. When set up properly, a chat agent can become the ultimate extension of you.

Although only 19% of our survey respondents were using AI chat agents last year, 70% are considering or planning to implement them in 2025.

24%
are going to implement them

46%
are considering implementing them

29%
are not considering implementing them

Respondents plans for AI chat agents for 2025

11th Trend

The reason is simple. As communities grow, manually managing interactions gets harder and harder. But instead of spending hours responding to repetitive queries, community builders can now train custom AI chat agents, freeing up time to focus on building meaningful connections.

They're more than just quick answer bots—when you take the time to set them up right, you can:

Make them your own

You can customize your agent's tone, behavior, and responses, maintaining what makes you uniquely you. As they adapt and improve over time, they start to feel almost human, creating a warmer member experience overall.

Scale your presence

From onboarding new joiners to coaching them on your behalf, your agents are there to help your members whenever they need it most, 24/7. This is super helpful when juggling tasks across timezones—chat agents don't need to sleep (unlike us!).
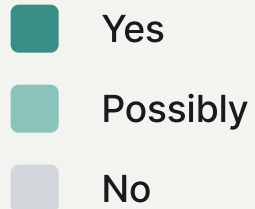
Automate support

Your agents can handle platform support on your behalf, so that you have more time and energy to foster authentic connections.

Who's going to invest in AI chat agents in 2025, based on community revenue
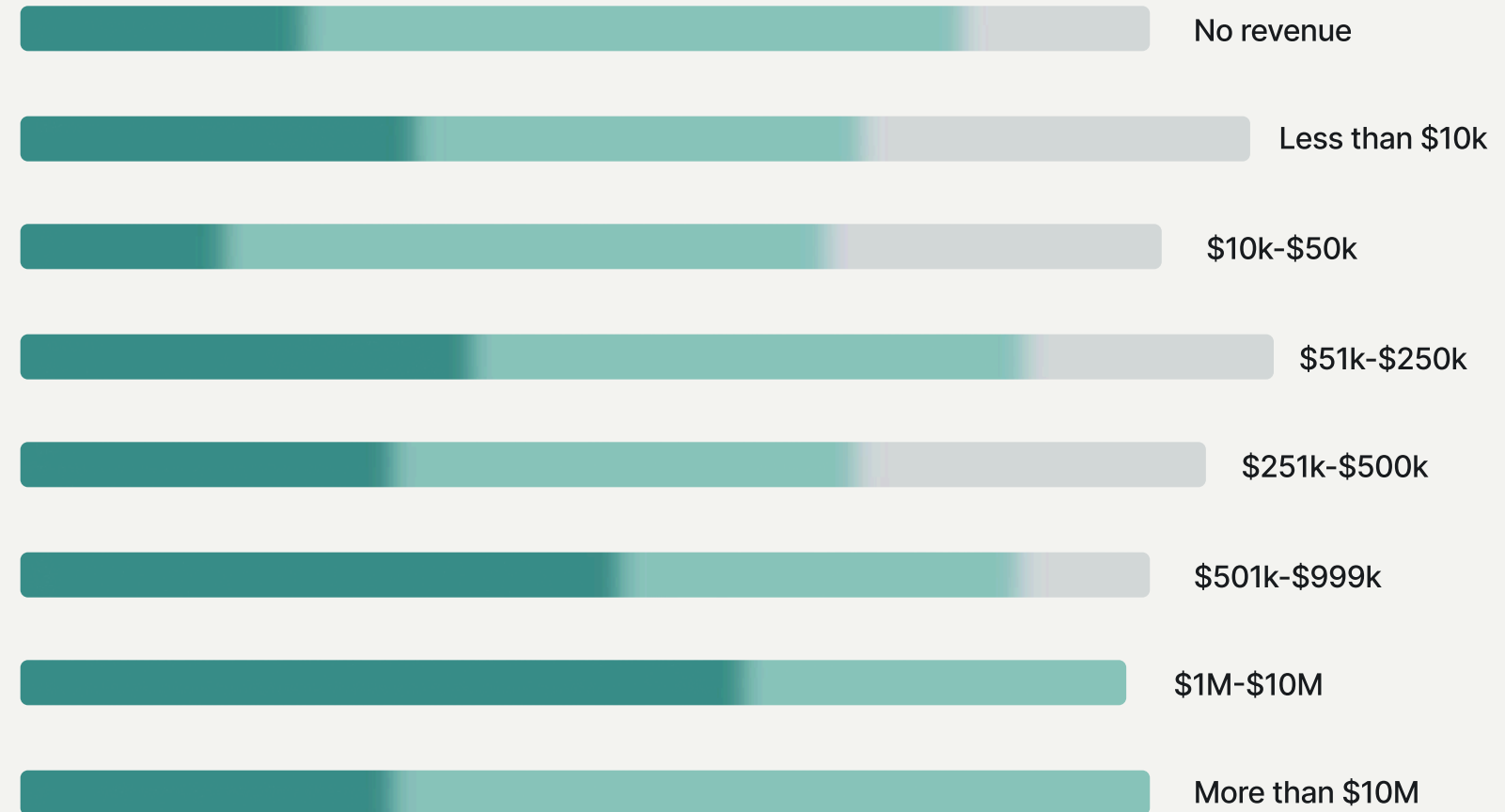
Community businesses making over $50,000 annually are more likely to invest in AI chat agents, and it makes sense why. These chat agents don't just simplify operations—they help you keep that personal touch without hiring an army of assistants.

No revenue

Less than $10k

$10k-$50k

$51k-$250k

$251k-$500k

$501k-$999k

$1M-$10M

More than $10M

■ Yes

■ Possibly

■ No

If you haven't tried an AI chatbot yet, don't worry—you're not behind. Even a small investment now can pay off, especially as your community grows.

Plus, as AI keeps getting smarter and smarter, there's no better time to dive in.

"I believe AI's next major impact will be in experience design. AI will help us create more personalized, adaptive interfaces that respond to how members actually use communities. Picture a community that learns what your members love and puts their favorite content front and center.

Forward-thinking AI implementation stands apart through its focus on enhancing human connection. Unlike generic chatbots, well-designed AI agents understand your community's unique context and culture, making technology feel personal and purposeful."

Rudy Santino
Circle Co-Founder and Chief Design Officer

The Good Inside AI Chat Agent

GooD INSIDE

Good Inside, founded by the wildly popular Dr. Becky Kennedy, is a community dedicated to offering practical, science-backed parenting support. To make the member experience even better, Dr. Becky introduced the Good Inside app, complete with an AI chat agent that's like "having Dr. Becky on speed dial."

Still in its early stages, this chat agent already provides support in a non-judgmental, affordable, and scalable way—making it a valuable resource for their growing community.

Here's what it brings to the table:

It's available 24/7

Parenting doesn't follow a 9-to-5 schedule, and neither does the Good Inside Chatbot. It's available any time, offering help when parents need it, day or night, and at times when community leaders may not be online.

It's familiar with their parenting journey

No generic answers here. The chat agent gives personalized advice based on the child's age and the parent's specific challenge, making sure the guidance is practical and relevant.

It provides empathetic, judgment-free advice

Sometimes parents need a safe space to ask tough questions that they might not feel comfortable discussing with people in their lives yet. The chat agent offers a non-judgmental, empathetic environment for parents to open up about tough topics.

It's an affordable, accessible option

At just $30 a month for an app subscription, parents get access to expert advice without the cost of therapy or coaching—making it an affordable option for busy families.

It provides Good Inside a way to scale support

As the Good Inside community grows, the chat agent can scale to meet the needs of more parents, seamlessly integrating with other tools in the app to offer a full, supportive experience.

The Good Inside AI chat agent is a great example of how the technology isn't here to replace creators, but rather serve as a powerful addition to a well-rounded community.

If you haven't played around with the tech yet, now is the perfect time to experiment and see how it can help your members feel more heard and supported, without losing the human touch.

GooD INSIDE

Communities will become the antidote to an AI-dominated digital world

Here's our prediction.

No matter how smart AI gets, one simple, powerful thing remains true. People crave real connection.

We're wired for community— to share stories, give each other support, and feel seen by others who really get us. People want genuine conversations and shared experiences. Somewhere to belong.

So, here's what we see happening:

As AI becomes a bigger part of our online lives, there will inevitably be some pushback against things that feel cold, impersonal, or overly automated. Some people might even outright reject things that feel 100% AI generated.

Instead, people will actively seek out smaller, intimate, personalized spaces. Communities where they can show up as themselves and connect with peers, away from the noise and distractions of algorithm-driven, AI-saturated platforms.

So, how can creators and brands navigate this shift (and use AI to help?)

Just to be clear, AI isn't the enemy. It's a tool, and a powerful one at that. But while AI can (and is already) helping many community builders streamline community management, it's still you who shapes the community culture and creates that sense of belonging.

AI can lend a helping hand, but it's your uniquely human touch which makes the community feel alive.

Own your audience and distribution channel

Algorithm-driven platforms like social media limit your reach and engagement more and more every year. Instead, build direct, unfiltered relationships through email lists, branded communities, and memberships—places where you control the connection.

Invest in memorable, interactive experiences

Whether it's an IRL meet-up, an immersive virtual event, a live Q&A, or even something like a really thoughtful DM, it's moments like these that will set you apart from the AI-generated noise.

Make human connection your superpower

It's the real conversations, personal touch, and authentic engagement which keeps people coming back. Focus on creating high-trust, transformative communities where members feel they truly belong.

The bottom line?

The future isn't AI vs. community—it's AI *and* community. The community builders that thrive most will be the ones who use AI thoughtfully, freeing up their time to focus on the one, irreplaceable thing it can't replicate: human connection.

Tom Ross

Founder and CEO
Design Cuts

"The impact of AI in the future can't be under-estimated, and this extends to the world of community. Knowledge has never been more freely available. We only have to open our phones to feel like we're drowning in information.

As a result, this information becomes less valuable. I believe we're seeing a shift whereby implementation and connection are the values that people are now seeking most. We still want to deeply connect with other humans and we need support in actually implementing all we're learning. We want to feel part of a tribe. We want to lean on others emotionally. We value friendships. We value the shared perspectives of a trusted group.

In my opinion, communities can live in harmony, alongside AI. They can also leverage it to run more efficiently.

AI can in essence, help facilitate human connection, but not replace it."

Closing thoughts

Looking ahead, we're seeing a clear trajectory: the future belongs to communities that create intimate, curated spaces where members feel truly seen and heard. **With better technology, more sophisticated platforms, and a growing demand for meaningful connections over mindless scrolling, it's never been a better time to build a community.**

Here are five key takeaways to consider as you plan your community strategy for 2025:

Takeaway one:

Depth beats breadth

What do we mean by that? Quality trumps quantity. Focus on building meaningful relationships over vanity metrics. Pick a specific niche and own it. The most successful communities don't try to please everyone—they serve their core audience exceptionally well. At the end of the day, it's more powerful to have 1,000 highly engaged, passionate members than 100,000 passive followers.

Takeaway two:

Impact > size

Speaking of members, whether your community has 100 or 10,000, what matters is the value you provide and the connections you nurture. Sometimes, smaller, focused communities can have an even bigger impact than massive ones on members' lives—and your bottom line.

Conclusion

Takeaway three:
Keep it simple

Your community doesn't need elaborate productions to thrive. Whether it's casual meetups or virtual coffee chats, people are craving genuine interactions and varied programming more than ever. They don't need fancy venues —they just want interesting and authentic experiences.

Takeaway four:
Flywheel, not funnel

Member journeys aren't linear paths with an endpoint. Great communities find a way to turn engaged members into champions who create content, host events, and bring in new folks—each positive interaction strengthening the next.

Takeaway five:
It's never too late

How many times has the idea that we've "missed the boat" or "all the good ideas are taken" held us back? You can always try something new (or bring back tried-and-true classics). Whether it's launching a newsletter, experimenting with AI, or diving into in-person events—your timing is just right.

Trends are great, *but taking action?* Even better.

Whether you're just starting out or growing an established community, remember that you're building exactly what people are looking for right now: a space away from the noise, where genuine connections can flourish. Your community's next chapter might just be its best one yet—and it's never too late to write it.

Already thinking about how to put these trends into action?

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