

The rise of community-led thinking

 By [Ashleigh Burton](#)

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Centuries ago, community living was a given. From the beginning of humanity, our brains have been programmed to live near others, to share food and tools, to protect each other, and to exchange ideas. We've since shifted from these communal societies and no longer rely so heavily on our 'village' to exist but the need and desire for community remains.



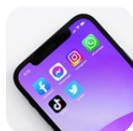
In July 2021, South Africa was gripped by a frenzy of catastrophic looting and arson. Three women; Emelda Masango, Mbali Ndhlovu, and Natalie Church, took to social media and created an over 70,000-strong online network of volunteers, sponsors, and donors who came together to help rebuild the communities, small businesses, and lives most affected by the riots in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

Community has always come naturally to us, and the pandemic has only further perpetuated this.

Human beings are wired for and instinctively crave connection and community. At the height of the pandemic, we were reminded of the critical importance of this human connection and our digital communities became more central to our experience of everyday life.

The internet has always had thriving tight-knit communities tucked away in every corner. These communities have power and the voices within those communities are growing louder – it's time for brands to tap into community-led thinking by

listening and fostering these communities.



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It's easy to believe that an engaged audience on social is the same thing as a community, especially when the title 'community manager' has varying job descriptions from agency to agency. Community and audience may be intertwined concepts, but they are not the same thing.

An audience, by definition, is a group of people who witness something. A community, by contrast, is an interconnected group of people who participate in something together:

- A great community thrives beyond the leader, the platform, or even the product it is related to. The standard components characterising communities are:
- A group of people with shared interests and passions
- An intrinsic sense of belonging and connection to something bigger than the individual
- A sense of caring for members of the community driving people to come to each other's aid
- Safe shared spaces for interaction, or a set of shared practices that bring the community together

According to the 2021 CMX Community Industry Report, 56% of professionals said their organization's leadership viewed community as more essential since the start of the pandemic. In 2022, we're likely to see forward-thinking brands either work at building a community from the ground up through the current social platform features available or tap into existing creator communities to learn more about their consumers, simplify content creation, and break through the noise.

Here are seven key community categories to get you started:

1. Identity: groups that come together around a shared life experience
2. Local: groups that come together to support their local communities
3. Uplifting: groups that bring people inspiration and support
4. Social Impact: groups that are making an impact by working to solve a societal issue
5. Career: groups that are bringing people together to share career advice
6. Passion: groups that come together around common interests and shared passions
7. Play: groups that come together around niche topics that bring them joy

When building a community, keep in mind - there has to be a reason for people to go there and there has to be a reason for people to want to stay once they've arrived.

Community isn't just a digital marketing strategy – it's also a key business strategy. The theory of human motivation in Maslow's hierarchy of needs showcases how humans crave connection to, and acceptance from, others. A relationship-based approach in any organization is always going to drive results and better outcomes.

Community-led thinking will continue to influence business models in 2022 as organisations move from creating a 'work-family' to creating thriving communities.



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When people feel connected to others, there's an accountability to others and themselves. You're more likely to stay

mission-minded, achieve the goals you set out for yourself, take care of those around you and most importantly, take care of yourself.

The adage 'it takes a village...' still rings true and this year, we'll see more brands and businesses tapping into our intrinsic need for community.

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ABOUT ASHLEIGH BURTON

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