



Alida.

Why the strongest
insight programs
**have communities
at the core**

As a customer-centric brand, your goal is to improve the experience across every interaction. If you only knew which changes and innovations would most move the needle, then you'd be able to prioritize your product roadmap, refine user experiences, and maximize the impact of your marketing efforts.

Deeply understanding your customers is the best way to test and validate your assumptions. But, as any insight professional knows, that's easier said than done.

Gathering customer and user insights is often bogged down by slow processes and limited or inaccurate data. By the time feedback reaches your desk it's out of date or leads to more questions than answers.

There's a better way forward that's fast, accurate, and actionable. That's why product and user experience teams are turning toward community-centered research.

In this ebook you'll learn how community-centered research:

- Increases engagement with customers, including hard-to-reach segments and the people with greatest influence on your growth
- Taps into a community of devout fans and followers that love to talk about your products and brand
- Enables you to test, validate, iterate, and co-create strategies with customers
- Gives you the insights you need to create an exceptional user experience that your competitors can't match

Fueled by the power of community, you'll increase adoption, lower churn, and increase your competitive advantage.

Only real customers tell it like it is

The most effective way to improve your products and experiences is to connect with real customers. Only they can share illustrative examples from specific experiences AND explain the impact.

Unlike people who participate in research only to make some extra cash or get some freebies, your actual customers have skin in the game. Their ability to realize their personal and professional goals depends on you. Therefore, they're more likely to share unmet needs, deliver honest feedback, and collaborate with you on meaningful improvements. Until you get feedback from your customers, your work hasn't been battletested.

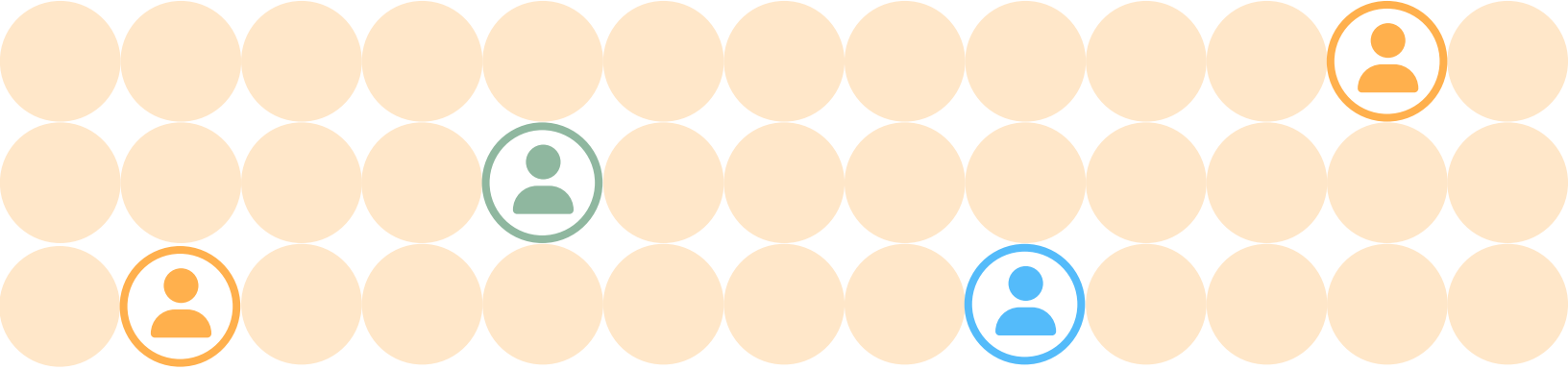
Unfortunately, recruiting customers and users is one of the most daunting aspects of research, especially when working on tight timelines. Research panels made up of third-party samples make this process difficult, if not impossible. Even if participant identities are known, you must match data with internal customer information, which is time-consuming and may not be accurate or up to date. If participants are anonymous, you have no way to check if they truly represent your target audience or can provide informed feedback.

Third-party samples create additional challenges for researchers. Most sample providers typically only allow one interaction with a research participant, so you can't follow up to clarify responses or measure before-and-after results. Plus, each study you conduct requires fresh recruiting and drains your budget.

So, where can you find real customers?

Your customers enjoy being part of a cohort that shares values, goals, and experiences. They are drawn to communities. Let's explore why that is and how you can tap into that desire for connection to achieve meaningful outcomes.





Why all the buzz around community?

At its core, community is a dense network of connections with shared experiences. People choose to join communities to convene with others who care about the same things they do. In essence, they “find their people.” When you engage in community, your brand is among them.

“Community is the only type of marketing people love,” says marketing expert Mark Schaefer. Consumers are sick of ads that interrupt, he notes, and they’re increasingly worried about privacy. While nearly half of consumers distrust communications coming directly from a company, only 14% distrust communications disseminated through a community.³ Unlike typical marketing tactics, Mark says, “community actually makes people feel good and increases self-esteem.”¹

Community is no longer a nice-to-have business strategy. It’s become core. Over half of the Fortune 50 and the 50-highest valued startups in the world are investing in community programs.² Among companies investing in community, 80% consider it to be critical to their company’s mission.³

Communities can be growth engines, not just cost centers. Having a dedicated customer community raises the value of your company for investors. Community-led growth is an effective strategy for many types of companies, from large B2C brands to niche B2B products with specialized audiences.⁴

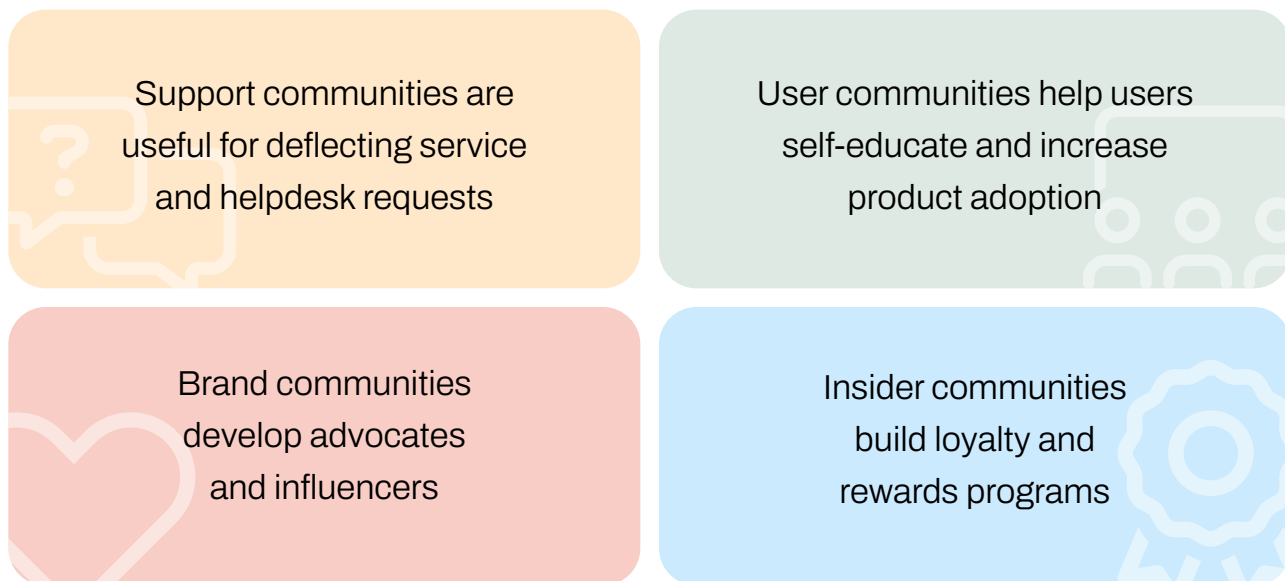
Communities can facilitate new product adoption. They disseminate information and influence attitudes of peers toward new products. Participation in a brand community increases the likelihood that consumers will buy new products from the brand rather than from its competitors.⁵

According to IDC, “64% of the G2000 will own online communities by 2027.”⁶ That’s an interesting word: “own.” It indicates that communities companies are investing in are fundamentally different from public social media communities that are open to everyone. In the next section, we’ll explore the different types of communities and how their purpose and design influences your ability to achieve your research goals.

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1. Mark Schaefer, *Belonging to the Brand*
 2. *Built to Belong: How the World’s Top Brands Invest in Community*. Gather Community Consulting. <https://www.gathercommunityconsulting.com/blog/2019/12/2/built-to-belong-how-the-worlds-top-brands-invest-in-community-a-2019-trend-report>
 3. <https://cmxhub.com/community-industry-trends-report-2020>
 4. <https://builtin.com/product-management/community-led-growth>
 5. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1014825/full>
 6. IDC FutureScape: Worldwide Future of Customer Experience 2023 Predictions

The rise of communities in the enterprise

Many business functions, such as marketing, tech support, and customer service, are already dipping a toe into community strategies.



These types of communities are a good start, but they only scratch the surface of the power of community.

Here's why:

They're mainly focused on transactional value, such as answering support questions or gaining a loyalty point for a purchase, not real relationships. Too often, they're thinly disguised promotions or simply cost-saving measures.

Companies that focus only on these transactional communities are missing the opportunity to have a profound impact on their business by building long-term customer relationships.

Best-in-class research teams need a different type of community – one that nurtures deep, ongoing relationships with customers, not just transactions. Conversations, back and forth...

We call these “insight communities” and they have the power to supercharge a customer experience program.



The power of insight communities for customer research

Let's define what we mean by "insight community" and how it's unique among community types.

Insight communities are private, digital communities created and managed by a brand, versus public social media platforms that anyone can join (and where they might adopt any persona they choose). An insight community creates a dedicated online space for research, including surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and more, with a group of participants that have been pre-vetted and have agreed to provide their feedback. They're safe spaces where customers and users feel free to share honest opinions, knowing their responses will be private and secure. Because companies know who they're interacting with, they can connect in meaningful ways to understand their users' needs and motivations.

You can think of insight communities in the same vein as customer advisory boards, research panels, and focus groups, but with an important difference. In an insight community, members agree to participate on an ongoing basis, which

means you can have two-way conversations, build an increasingly detailed profile of each person, and conduct iterative research. In this way, insight communities become more valuable over time.

Insight communities make those all-important user relationships both intimate and scalable. Communities can be quite large, from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of members. Because each user in a community is deeply profiled, you can easily create research segments based on demographic, psychographic, or behavioral attributes, including product or feature usage, spend, and more. Therefore, you can target research queries to specific groups and granularly analyze results with ease.

You can launch and manage an insight community for less than half the cost of a traditional UX research tool.

Putting community-centered UX into practice

The scale and flexibility of insight communities make them adaptable to solve a wide range of problems. With a community at the core, UX research can be instrumental across the design and development process, not just as a tactic to find and fix issues in prototypes.

You can easily recruit users from your insight community to execute flexible, mixed-method research across the entire design lifecycle. The most advanced teams embed UX research at every stage, from discovery and ideation to evaluation and validation, and ultimately to monitoring and continuous improvement.

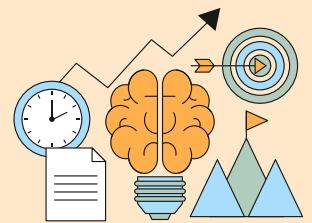
Generative UX research

Generative UX research is a qualitative research methodology that investigates user needs, behaviors, and motivations. Also known as "discovery" or "exploratory" research, generative UX research is helpful in uncovering opportunities for innovation and informing the development of new products and services.

Generative UX research is like being a detective. You're digging deep to understand

why your users do what they do. You're looking for those "aha" moments that reveal what your customers really need. It's all about exploring and generating new ideas, not just testing what's already there.

With in-depth interviews, you can delve into users' personal experiences, motivations, and needs. Facilitating group discussions with panels of users is useful to brainstorm ideas and share diverse perspectives.



Evaluative research

Evaluative research is primarily focused on testing and validating existing ideas. Let's say you have a hunch or hypothesis you want to test, or a specific stimulus (new design, product prototype, campaign content, etc.) for which you want to gather user input. Your goal is not to identify problems as much as it

is to evaluate if a solution is adequately solving them.

Conducting evaluative UX research with a user community can include early access and beta test programs, for example to fine tune features before a public launch.



Moderated and un-moderated UX research

Because they care deeply about your brand and are highly engaged, community members are willing to complete qualitative and quantitative research activities even when a moderator isn't there. For example,

unmoderated usability testing allows people to complete tasks while answering questions or talking through their actions out loud. Users can also conduct diary studies and record videos asynchronously.





Community success stories

A dating app relies on their insight community to keep a consistent pulse on Gen Z audiences, college culture, and dating behavior. Community feedback indicated that the capability to block people and other security controls are highly important to users. To make sure the app is a safe space, they continuously test new features that help users feel more in control. New features have been successfully adopted and the app's subscriber numbers have grown in each of the last five quarters.

A healthcare provider taps into their community to improve the end-to-end patient experience, including supporting patient adoption of digital tools. Based on community feedback, they've made changes that result in patients scheduling appointments online at higher rates and increasing their use of the patient portal.

An automobile manufacturer was preparing to introduce a new feature in their app to support electric car customers. They released the new feature to community members six weeks prior to the full launch. During that time, customers tested the feature and shared their feedback on the user experience. User feedback identified a few bugs, which developers quickly resolved before the feature was exposed to a much larger audience.



Attributes of a healthy customer insight community

Healthy insight communities have several things in common.

1 Real people

Insight community members must be authentic, verified stakeholders. Only then can you trust the information they provide.

2 The right people

The people in your insight community should be representative of the people you serve and/or want to serve, especially when those people are hard to find or hard to engage.

You're looking for people whose success is tied to your brand. For many brands, this means people who use your product or service frequently. For some, it's the people who have built their business around yours.

The most valuable community participants are what's known as "superconsumers," a term coined by marketing evangelist Eddie Yoon to indicate consumers that generate the most power in a category. "Although Supers are few in number—usually about 10% of consumers for a particular product or category (not 10% of your customers)—they can drive between 30% and 70% of sales, an even greater share of category profit, and 100% of the insights.⁶

3 Three types of interactions

There are three types of interactions a healthy insight community enables:

- **From brand to consumer**
- **From consumer to brand**
- **From consumer to consumer**

In the past, insights teams and market researchers worked hard NOT to be seen. They passively observed focus groups from behind a mirror. In contrast, with a community strategy, the brand gets engaged. You want you to see the humans behind your brand.

If you build a relationship with people, they're significantly more honest, and the insights you receive will be more valuable to your business.

That said, you're there to listen more than speak. You want to give your community members a variety of opportunities to interact with you, in diverse formats. For example, some people may be more comfortable sending video messages than writing. Others may prefer a one-on-one session to a group discussion. Sure, some participants will observe, or "lurk," but they're still important members, especially if they receive valuable information from your brand and from the rest of the community.

It's when members start to engage with each other that the value of the community increases exponentially. Your job as a brand is to enable that type of consumer-to-consumer communication and nurture it so it grows, according to what the community needs.

4 Emotions

Having an insight community enables you to understand what people are thinking and feeling, not just what they're saying and doing.

Your insight community should be a place where people feel good about themselves and their role. You want your users to feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves. In a healthy community, reciprocity isn't a requirement, it's a natural outgrowth of feeling part of a community.

Shower your community members with love. It's crucial to let community members know their contributions are valued, for example, showing them how products were developed based on their input, or how their contributions have contributed to your company strategy.

In addition to making users feel valued, the community should be a place where people go to enjoy themselves. It should provide moments of conspicuous value that delight them. These moments keep people engaged and make them want to talk about their experiences with others.

6. Eddie Yoon, Superconsumers.

What to look for in a community platform

(aka “Don’t build your community on rented land”)

**Audience
management**

**Research
execution**

**Insights and
analysis**

**Enterprise-
level support**

Great, you’ve decided you’re ready to embed an insight community at the core of your research program. How do you go about it?

Why not use platforms like Slack, Facebook Groups, or Discord to manage your insight customer community? The answer is, these platforms aren’t designed with the needs of the enterprise in mind. You can’t influence the functionality, which means you’re wholly dependent on third-party organizations to

determine capabilities, integrations, privacy, etc. In fact, the very existence of your community rests in their hands. If they shut down, your community goes with them.

To get the most benefit from your insight community, you need an enterprise-level platform you can directly manage. That doesn’t mean building your own technology. It does mean having a software that addresses the challenges and goals of researchers.

Audience management

- Confirm that people are who they say they are. Weed out bots, validate identities, and make sure all participants have opted in and have agreed to share their feedback.
- Ensure security and privacy (with access controls, hosting, and PII management) to create a safe space for unfiltered feedback.
- Ensure a diverse set of members to accurately reflect your user base. Your recruitment process should give you the ability to set maximum and minimum representation from different groups of users.
- Allow for segmentation and targeting of questions and activities based on user types, geographies, behavior, and other variables.
- Streamline the process of scheduling, reminding, thanking, and rewarding users who participate in research.

Research execution

- Provide a variety of capabilities to execute mixed-method research, quantitative and qualitative, synchronous and asynchronous.
- Include built-in, on-demand survey and communication tools for rapid response.
- Include forums or discussion threads to enable ongoing conversations with and among customers on specific topics.
- Allow stakeholders to be part of qualitative interviews, for example by allowing product managers to observe live interviews and focus groups or having a co-pilot assist with moderation and note-taking.
- Allow for video interviews and video recording to capture body language and facial expressions.
- Provide a place to share and organize content designed for the community, such as videos, articles, and results of their feedback.
- Make engagement (likes, comments, shares, etc.) easy for community members, especially on mobile devices.

Insights and analysis

- Get all relevant data in one platform that builds over time, so you don't have to ask users the same questions again and again. You want one source of truth that integrates customer data from your CRM, ERP, and other systems. Being able to combine insights from your community with behavioral and purchase data is key to developing rich customer profiles.
- Include actionable analytics to measure changes over time and allow you to slice and dice data by different segments.

Enterprise-level support

- Offer professional support, guidance, and ongoing education to help with community recruitment, best practices for engagement, content cadence and style.
- Scale without technical issues that cause friction or a pricing model that discourages growth.

Get ready to spin the community flywheel

Once you select your community platform and get your community up and running, it will take some care and feeding.

The community flywheel is when your community has momentum. Members proactively participate, offer feedback, and contribute ideas even when your brand isn't asking. The community takes on a life of its own and offers exponential value to everyone involved.

To learn more about how you can nurture your community and deliver value for your customers and your company, check out [The Ultimate Guide to Insight Communities](#).

About Alida

The Alida Research Platform enables innovative brands to create highly engaged research communities to gather feedback that empowers better user experiences and product innovation. Over 6 million participants around the globe actively engage with the Alida research platform.

Leading companies like HBOMax, Adobe, Warner Bros. Discovery, and lululemon depend on Alida's community-centered research platform to deliver fast and reliable customer feedback at scale so they can build better products, refine user experiences, and test marketing campaigns.

Learn more at www.alida.com.