

Whitepaper

How Digital Transformation Enables Professional Communities To Thrive

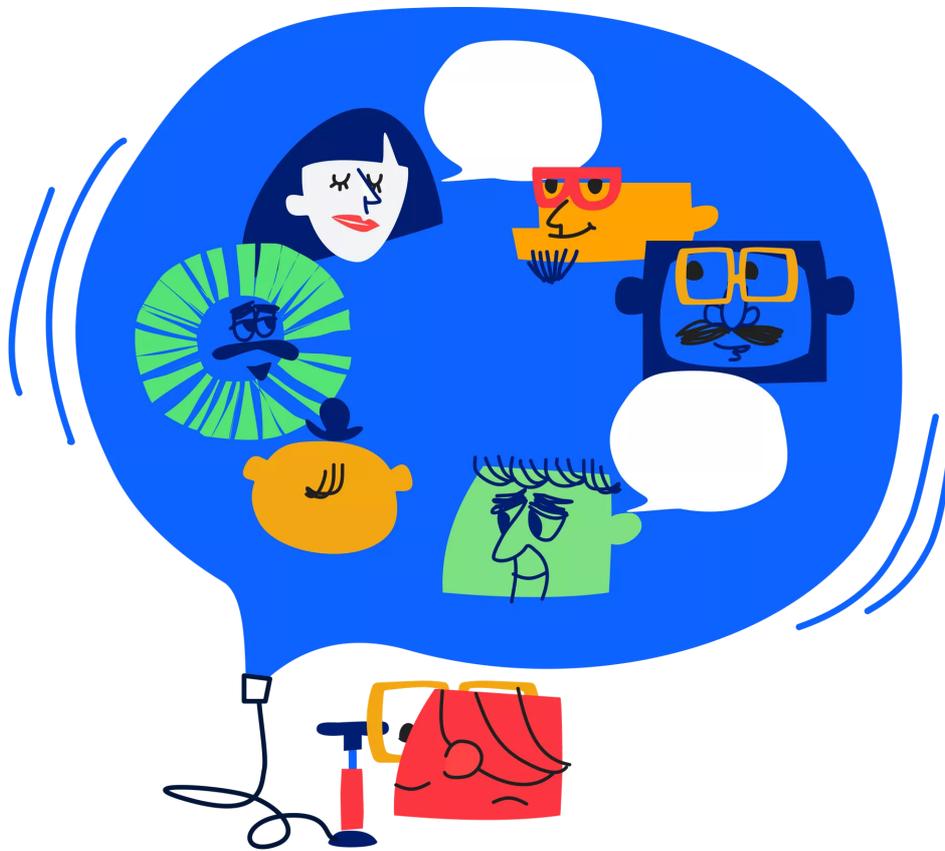


Table of Contents

Introduction

A Look At The Current State Of Associations During The Pandemic

Biggest Challenges Professional Communities Face During the Pandemic

How Are Community Engagement Strategies Affected By COVID-19

How To Engage Community Members During The Pandemic

How To Thrive In Communities During And Post Pandemic

Tips to Managing Your Community Through Digital

Online Community Engagement Tool Is The Way Forward

The New Normal And The Future Of Community Engagement

New Normal And The Future Of Associations

Conclusion

Video Recordings from Webinars

Contact Info

Introduction

The current pandemic crisis has impacted professional communities and because of this, the landscape is bound to adapt. Many professional communities have implemented ways to communicate with members when in-person communication is no longer permitted.

Digital methods of communication and engagement are important to ensure the consistent spread of information. Professional communities can see a rise in digital communication but must also be prepared for a resurgence of in person events in the future. This however does not negate the implementation of established digital communication channels.

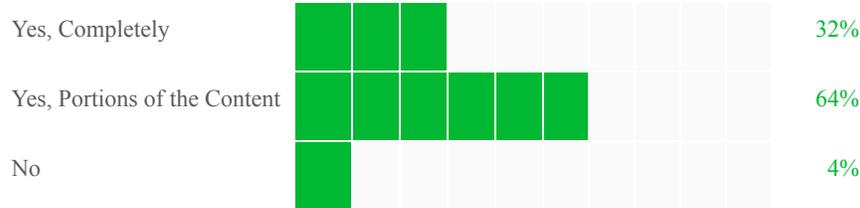
Last July, Glue Up (formerly EventBank) hosted virtual events in North America, Asia Pacific and Africa regions to talk about the importance of digital transformation in professional communities. Leaders and experts from across these regions shared their insights on why connecting and engaging is imperative that members of a community come together to help one another.

A Look At The Current State Of Associations During The Pandemic

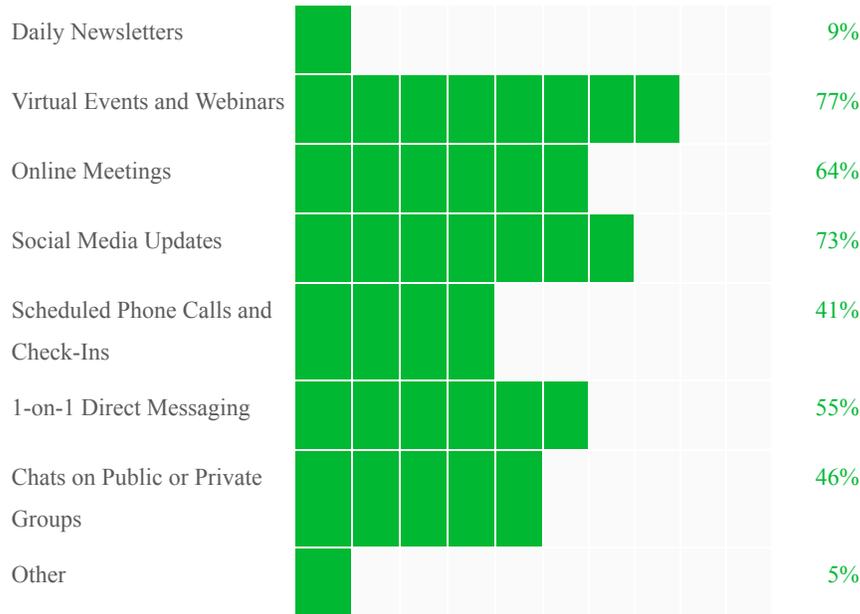
100%

of North American communities use social media updates in addition to other methods to communicate with their communities

Did you or will you move your face-to-face events to a virtual platform?



How do you communicate with your community when you can't meet in person



Biggest Challenges Professional Communities Face During The Pandemic

The biggest challenges facing communities during the COVID-19 pandemic trickle down into financial stability, bad connectivity issues, cancellation of events, and inability to meet.

Among surveyed communities

36%

will monetize their virtual events using sponsorship.

Financial Stability

Financial Stability is another important concern to make not of within your community. Non-essential workers could possibly not making a salary during the current situation, this renders their inability to pay for community payments during this time. To ensure that your members continue to stay within your community, you may need to waive fees or not collect membership payments during the current time. This ensures you do not provide an additional cost for your members to worry about during their financial instability.

Bad Connectivity Issues

With all events still currently running being hosted on digital platforms, bad connectivity on the participants side as well as the host's side can ruin the experience of the event. High speed internet connection is not accessible by everyone. Connectivity is an aspect that all communities need to consider when making a decision on what platform they host their events on.

Far less opportunities to meet face to face. Networking more personally is a challenge.

Sue West

Pharmaceutical Executive

Cancellation of Events

With the pandemic came the cancellation of meetings and large scale events that communities were used to hosting. These events were either cancelled or postponed due to the restrictions placed on social gatherings placed by the government to slow the spread of the virus. Communities would either need to find a way to implement a virtual event platform to continue hosting their events, or they would need to postpone any community events until it is deemed safe by the government. However, the latter option creates an unforeseeable date at which large scale community event can be hosted once again.

Inability to meet

The inability to meet raises problems with communications within a community. With the current situation and health protocols, different countries are limited to different amounts of small number in person gatherings. This poses risks for larger communities who have not been prepared for such a change to migrate their communications online.

Communities who have largely been reliant on face to face communications have to adapt fast to ensure that their members are in the know. However, the implementation of online communication is not an easy task for a community to enact. Push-back from members about certain programs or lack of technology to participate can be problems communities may have to manage.

How Are Community Engagement Strategies Affected By COVID-19

Community engagement strategies have shifted as the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Communities have taken a toll since they are an industry that primarily thrives on in person connections and communication. With the increased isolation of people during pandemic because of health regulations communities are not able to run to the best of their ability.

Every person's life is precious, continuous communication in any given crisis is very important and key to moving forward, adjusting quickly to any given circumstance

Esther Omoche Abuyeka,
Asaray Tours

Communities have turned their strategy to hosting online events rather than physical events. With some communities this was not a exacting strategy because they had already implemented digital forms of communications before COVID-19 hit. However, other communities who had not digitized were compelled to go online and some communities were able to digitize their whole medium within a week. As the government restrictions on stay-at-home orders and restrictions of gatherings prolonged, communities started increasing the amount of webinars and online events they hosted from once a month to 3 times a week to keep their members engaged.

These online events have not hindered the communication process for communities but have improved engagement for these communities. With online events, there are not as large sunk costs and obligations to join these events, such as travel expenses, time in your calendar, and the size of the event space. These virtual events are attracting more attendees than physical events which has created more engagement for the communities.

Not all communities have invested in creating their own webinar and virtual event platform and the debate remains on whether to invest in virtual event software or sit tight and hope that that by January 2021, the health climate has return to the status quo. Larger communities have invested in the webinar and virtual event software, but smaller communities who may have the ability may be opting to sit tight and hope the medical crisis will return to normal.

We will have to change our thinking by getting an App and having online presence and capabilities. This will also include training events, sponsorship via the App and exhibitions online.

Sabelo Nkosi
eThekweni Municipality

To keep providing value to their community members, communities have been setting up call times for their members to reach out if they need assistance in running their organization during these tumultuous times. These call centers have been busy since the global pandemic has impacted all international organizations across the globe.

How To Engage Community Members During The Pandemic

As less people are able to meet together in a face-to-face setting during the global pandemic, ensuring that community members stay engaged is vital for professional communities. To do this communities would need to implement digital methods of communications and a method to host virtual events.

The ability to convert a physical event into a hybrid or an online event is key during the pandemic. Cancelling all of the community's events is not a viable solution because it cuts all engagement from community to community members. Online events need to be implemented and as the pandemic slows down and countries start reopening and enabling face-to-face events, hybrid events need to be used. This digital transformation ensures that community members can continue to be engaged even if they prefer not to attend an in person event in fears of the virus.

No one has figured out the "right" way to do it - everyone is trying multiple things to figure out what works well and what doesn't.

Juli Balestrieri
BioCentury

50%

of surveyed African communities utilized Virtual Events and Webinars to communicate with their communities

In addition, online events, unlike physical events have no costs associated with rent of event space, and this can be utilized to increase engagement with community members. Instead of hosting a 4-8 hour event typically associated with a face-to-face event, you can extend it over to a few days. On your platform, you can have a recorded video prepared as well as a chat room for community members to interact. This can increase engagement between members and ensure that members have adequate time to join the event if they have a full schedule.

Moreover, when planning virtual platforms, such as virtual exhibitions, allow the community member to use an avatar to “walk” around the exhibition to create a more realistic experience. Content delivery is important when engaging one’s community members since there are changes to move the content online. If a the exhibition is not delivered online in the avatar format, it may just be a list of links to websites of all the organizations participating. This is not an ideal content delivery format, as people will not be willing to go through all the webpages to each organization. Content delivery is important in engaging your community members.

How To Thrive In Communities During And Post Pandemic

Among surveyed communities

50%

of North American Communities did not move face-to-face events to a virtual platform however

100%

of communities in India, Africa, and the APAC region have or plan to do so.

During the pandemic and the post pandemic years, communities will take a hit if they do not adapt quickly enough to the changes that the situation has brought. To thrive, communities need to adapt to the consistently changing conditions and be flexible to enable them to continuously engage their community members.

Communities need to think about **hitting the restart button** since they have a chance to reflect on what was working and what was not. Removing the things that were just traditions to do, but was not adding value to the community members should be removed and replaced with something of more value. Ensure that things that are done are relevant to the community and implement things that will work and improve on things that are already working.

Accessibility is also easier now since many aspects of business and communities are moving online. Taking this aspect and using it towards your advantage in the future can also help your community thrive during the post-pandemic years. Events held by communities that are online during the pandemic can be updated into a hybrid format when restrictions are relaxed. This allows some community members to attend the event in person and allows the community members who cannot attend the event to attend online which creates a larger amount of accessibility for all members. This creates value for the community members and can help the communities thrive post pandemic.

Among surveyed communities

91%

of them are using Zoom to host their webinars and online events

Monetizing events that are virtual by ticket sales or sponsorship is a strategy for communities to thrive during the pandemic and the post pandemic years. These webinars and events that are commonly being used can do not need to be offered for free but can be used to make revenue for communities. However, ensure that your success is not measured by the amount of revenue gained but the engagement that there is between your community members.

Tips To Managing Your Community Through Digital

Create Community Guidelines

Guidelines are a simple but highly important set of implied rules that must be agreed upon in any community that aims to thrive. Guidelines set expectations of actions not just for members, but also for management as well. It keeps you on-track to fostering a fair, decisive, and coordinated community that others can trust in.

These can be as simple as: be respectful to others, don't share personal or sensitive information, etc. Or it can encompass anything that potentially leaves your organization open to legal penalties like following industry practices for professional communities, reserving the right to ban members, and so on.

The important aspect of community guidelines is that it is generally unchanging, and it sets the precedence for moderation, communication, and any other rule pertaining to your community.

We have to think about how people engage online versus how they engage during face-to-face events so it's not taking that physical event and just translating or trying to carbon copied onto a digital environment that's not going to work. It is got to be a different approach. You need to create a really good online experience at our own virtual events for your communities.

Scott Craighead

Vice President of Exhibitions & Events
International Association of Exhibitions
and Events (IAEE)

Among surveyed communities

18%

will not have revenue
generating virtual events

Foster Networking

Guidelines can only dictate the limits of power and precedence in a community, but actively growing a community takes a little more finesse. Members in a community are there to communicate with others, and if you're not fostering communication and networking, then the community will in all likely fail. Probably very quickly.

Fostering Networking is an important aspect of communities, most especially online where communication barriers are much lower than in-person meetings. An online forum, event, chat group, bulletin board, webinars, and other forms of discussion are great places that once arranged with a certain amount of moderation, can become quite active and in a lot of cases can be the core attraction to a community.

Host Events & Webinars

Events are a great way to take a singular topic that can drive discussions you want. They're highly engaging and they can even be a point of ROI for communities looking for more options to fund their growth. As we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic, webinars are also a growing trend with events.

Creating an event based on a certain topic can help drive discussion and activities that benefit your members, as well as helping your community attract new members. Community engagement online and offline are most generally at events, and so it's important to host and manage your event smarter professionally while bridging the online and offline engagement.

Among surveyed communities

36%

are using Facebook to host online events.

Broadcast News

Broadcasting news, promoting products and services, sharing content, and other ways of blasting communicate to your community members act as a way to keep them in the loop. Keeping members in the loop doesn't necessarily help attract new members, but rather it's a way to keep members who were close to forgetting the community exists reminded that the community is still active.

It keeps members in the know for upcoming events, aware of news relevant to them, and it even serves as a great way to deliver promotions that benefit members. A newsletter is a great way to start, as a monthly low-down on everything related to your community, but news broadcasting can be done in a myriad of different creative ways like social media posts, chat group messages, stickied posts in a forum, and more.

Analyze the Data

At the back-end of things, it's important to analyze data that you can collect from your community. This can be surveys, or it can be web data, all of it can come together to paint a great image of your community's trends and activities. A great example of using data to a community's benefit is with events, where online-to-offline activities can be tracked with the right tools in order to encourage more attendee registrations.

Engagement runs deeper for different people and we need to keep our eye on that as well, doesn't necessarily need to be an event, could be on the content we deliver but that feeling that they are part of a community and making sure that everybody's seeing one another.

Toni Brearley

CEO

Australian Society of Association

Executives

Be Regular

It seems like a no brainer, but a whole month went by without any activities, communication, or any visible sign of change in the community can cause major issues, members to leave, or an entire collapse of a community. Humans are sensory people, and in a world of constant content-white-noise online and in the real world, and members who see a lack of anything relevant in the community will very quickly decide to leave once they take notice.

So, it's important to be regular. Set a schedule for those activities that can benefit from a schedule like social media posts, blog posts, events, and newsletters. Leave room for any ad-hoc communication, and generally, the community will be in a constant state of activity from the management side, which in turn will impact the activity from members.

Online Community Engagement Tool Is The Way Forward

There is a longer tail on engagement for events when they are virtual- there is the recording, whitepapers, and other media assets. I think we are going deeper in engagement post event.

Deborah Rosati

Founder & CEO

Women Get on Board Inc

Digital transformation is forcing organizations to change their business models and adapt to the new market reality. Now is the time for professional communities to redouble efforts with new messaging and offerings that support, enhance, and enable their communities to thrive.

Community engagement tools gives organizations a new way to provide their community with a digital place where they can share ideas, discuss industry news and best practices, and sell their products or services even when meeting in person is not an option.

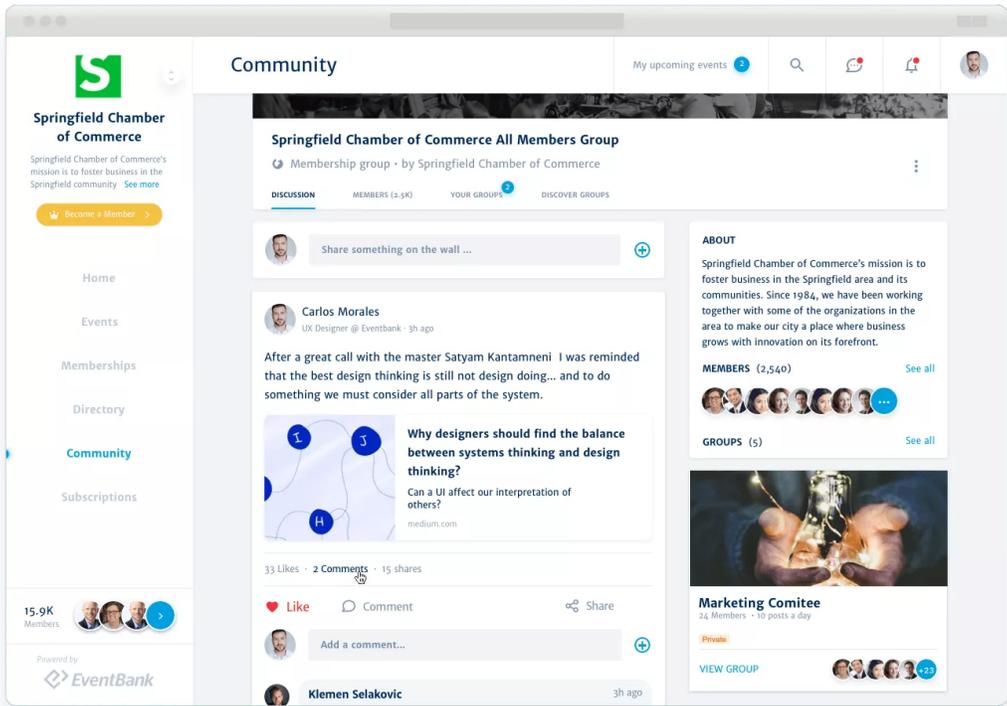
Glue Up's new **Community Engagement Solution** helps organizations bridge the gap on engaging and providing value to your communities. Glue Up platform will deliver "Communities" to organizations to better structure their members into committees, special interest groups, and so on. Communities will give sub-discussions to members who want to engage outside of the broader organization pages.

Learn more about Glue Up's Community Engagement Suite:

<https://www.glueup.com/community-management-software>

Online networking is now crucial for sustained community growth. That's why Glue Up's new community features includes Digital Business Card and Meeting Request features. Through these new features, organizations can enable their communities to create and share their own digital business cards, manage their contacts, and effectively network with everyone from their homes. The Direct Messaging feature enables everyone in a community to develop lasting relationships with each other via 1-on-1 chats with the option to share photos, emojis, and more.

In difficult times, it is imperative that members of a community come together to help one another and this new community engagement solution gives the perfect place to make this happen.



Among surveyed communities

91%

believe digital communication is very important during the crisis

The New Normal And The Future Of Community Engagement

As the world has been changed by COVID-19 pandemic, communities need to adapt a digital community engagement platform. Professional communities have entered a new era that requires rethinking tools of the past. The world is more connected than ever before – from a digital point of view. Online engagement allows for continuous conversations between communities, which, in turn, builds positive relationships.

Changes internally should be made during this global pandemic because many things about communities have been changed throughout this time. It should be taken back as a time to reflect and decide which strategies are working and would work in this changed era. Strategies and events that have been tradition may need to be retired for newer strategies that bring better engagement and value for the community members. These changes need to be made rapidly because the world has been and will continue to alter rapidly post-COVID-19.

Content is king in the larger space of virtual meetings and exhibitions. We must up our game and the content we deliver and the why and what we are delivering. Technology platforms give us that opportunity to make it bigger and reach a larger audience.

Siobhan Das

Chief Executive Officer

American Malaysian Chamber of
Commerce

A digital model needs to be introduced in the new and changing world as well. When countries start opening up, not all community members will be comfortable accessing large scale in-person events. Keeping a hybrid model will improve accessibility for all members. It allows people to join in at home or need to make a far trip to attend the event. It lowers the barriers of entry for the members to join the event as well as creates a possibility of more members to join into one event without being limited by even space.

Not only does content need to be moved online, content delivery will need to be altered for the changing world. Webinars are a first step for community member events to be viewed by everyone at the same time, but also consider a pre-recorded event with a discussion board that can be hosted for multiple days. This allows more members to discuss and engage with each other without a time limit which can create more meaningful engagement. New technology such as avatars may be the process of moving exhibitions online to try to mimic the in person experience for those who may live in a different city.

As the world changes, professional communities need to keep up. The post COVID-19 world will be a different world compared to the pre COVID-19 world. Communities need to stay flexible and adapt as quickly as they can to digital communities to ensure they provide value to their community members as well fostering engagement.

Video Recordings From Webinars



EventBank is now Glue Up!

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For more expert insights, tips, and articles to help you become smarter, check out our blog:

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