



[Home](#) > [Courses](#) > [Bay Area Farmer Training Program](#) > [Business Development and Management](#)

[← Previous Module](#)

[Next Module →](#)

Module

17. Marketing

Module Progress: 

Background Material

Presentation Slides



[Online Marketing: The Story of Product Hunt](#)

Inspiring Action

Video: [How Great Leaders Inspire Action](#) by Simon Sinek

Simon Sinek has a simple but powerful model for inspirational leadership – starting with a golden circle and the question “Why?” His examples include Apple, Martin Luther King, and the Wright brothers.

Simon Sinek
How great leaders inspire action

The CMX Cycle

Article that follows is modified from [The CMX Community Engagement Cycle: How to Build Thriving Communities](#).

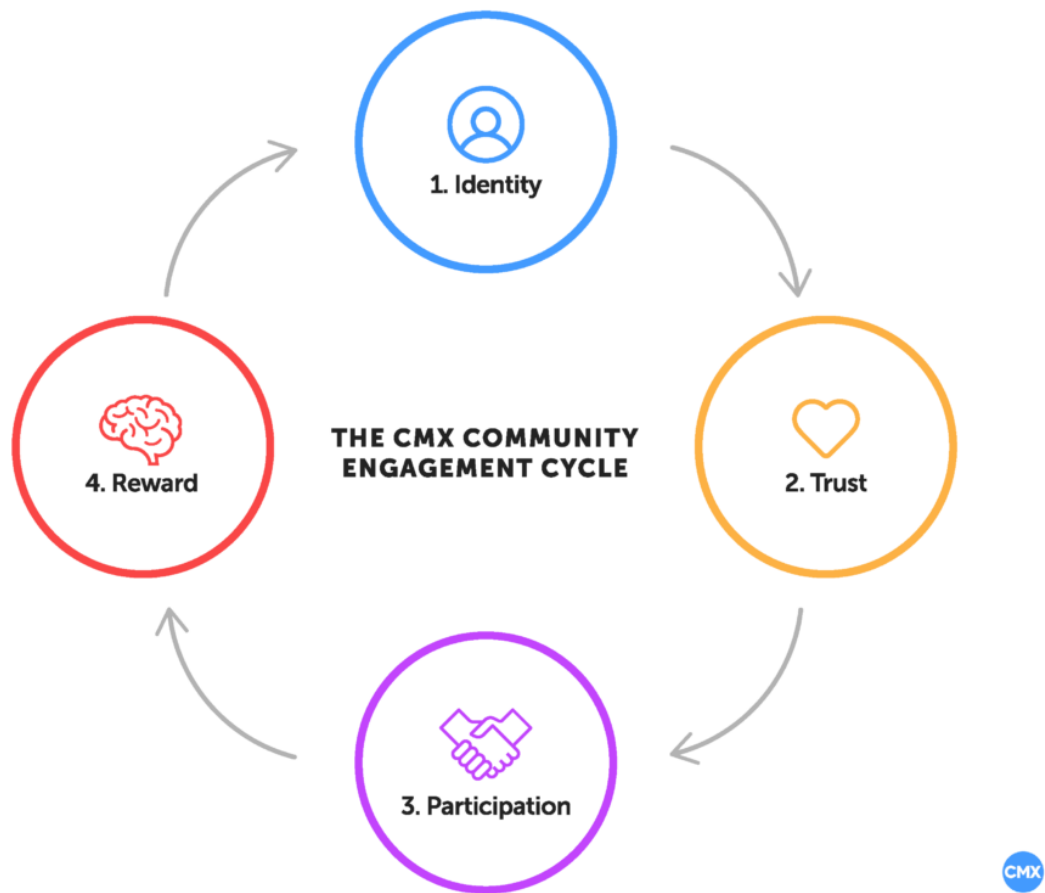
How do you build a thriving community?

It's a big question, one that people have been trying to answer for decades. Many books have been published, studies conducted, debates had, all on the subject of

how communities are formed and fostered. Community can feel like a very nebulous, emotional thing. Often community professionals find themselves just creating content, hosting events, and doing all the work without truly understanding how it all fits together.

That's why we developed a simple model to make sense of it all and to help you put a clear content and programming plan in place. **We wanted to simplify the process so that anyone can understand how to build a thriving community.** This model was developed based on our experience building communities and advising organizations over the last 10 years and builds on the concepts presented in some of the leading community psychology theories, which you'll see referenced throughout this article.

Introducing the CMX Community Engagement Cycle



The cycle you see here is presented from the perspective of the community member. **If you can understand how an individual member experiences a community, then you can create community content and programming to strengthen that experience.** In order for a member to feel a strong sense of community, they cycle through these four stages repeatedly, making them more committed to the community over time. The intensity of each of these stages increases over time, as a member gets initiated and moves through three levels of commitment.

- Initiation: A member's very first experience with the community.
- Level 1: Passive; a member is mostly consuming content.
- Level 2: Active; A member is contributing content

- Level 3: Power; A member becomes a highly active contributor and may take on a leadership role.

How do you move a member up these three levels?

Let's do a brief overview of the four stages of the Community Engagement Cycle that will move the member through each of these levels.

1. Identity

The member's identity aligns with the identity of the community.

At the heart of community is identity. When someone decides to join a new community, they consciously or subconsciously decide that some aspect of their personal identity is aligned with the collective identity of a community. After they join, over time, the identity of the individual member will start to conform to the identity of the community more and more, if they become more deeply engaged.

In the [social identity theory](#), an individual will go through three phases as they become a member of a community:

1. Social categorization; we consider ourselves to be in the same general category as a group
2. Social identity; we adopt the identity of the group
3. Social comparison; we compare our group with other groups

Our goal as community builders is to create a strong community identity that appeals to new members. Over time it will become a part of the member's personal identity.

Examples:

- Arielle joins the Yelp community and has an aspiration to identify as a “tastemaker”, being the person who knows about all the cool spots. Ultimately she becomes a power member of the community and identifies as a “Yelp Elite” member.
- Bart is an environmentalist and identifies with a subreddit community focused on that subject. Eventually he grows as a member of the community, launches a subreddit specifically focused on deforestation and identifies as a moderator in the reddit community.
- Doug learned about the Harley Davidson community and their identity appeals to him. He decides to buy a bike. Eventually he becomes a power member of his local Harley Owner’s Group and identifies as a leader, organizing rides for the local community.

2. Trust

The member develops trust in other members and in the community as a whole.

Trust is the oil that greases the community gears. Without it, members get stuck in the cycle and don’t engage more over time. There are two basic forms of trust here:

1. Trust in the community as a whole
2. Trust in specific members of the community

Both must exist in a strong community, and they fuel each other. So when someone is first presented with the opportunity to participate in your community, they have to trust that they will actually get value from participating. That trust

comes from the reputation of the community, or from existing trust in members they have a relationship with.

So if you're organizing a brand new community without a reputation, the only way to get people to participate is to develop personal trust with them yourself, or to leverage the trust your existing members have with other members. That's why it's so important to start small, and do a lot of personal outreach when first launching a community. Only after your community is established will it develop its own reputation to create that trust.

Examples:

1. Arielle decides to participate on Yelp because she has a friend who's really active on the platform. Over time as she participates more, she gets to know other members, whom she now trusts and who trust her. She also develops trust in the community and trusts that other members and the leadership team are listening to her needs and opinions.
2. Bart decides to join reddit because he's read about the community on a lot of blogs and trusts that it is a quality experience. Over time, he develops karma and improves his reputation so other members trust him.
3. Doug's dad rides a Harley Davidson and he's gotten to know some of the other members of the community. When he ultimately becomes a leader and starts organizing rides, the community develops a great deal of trust in him.

3. Participation

The member takes action to participate in the community.

You can't have a community without participation. Members must take action to move a community forward. Every time a member participates, their action

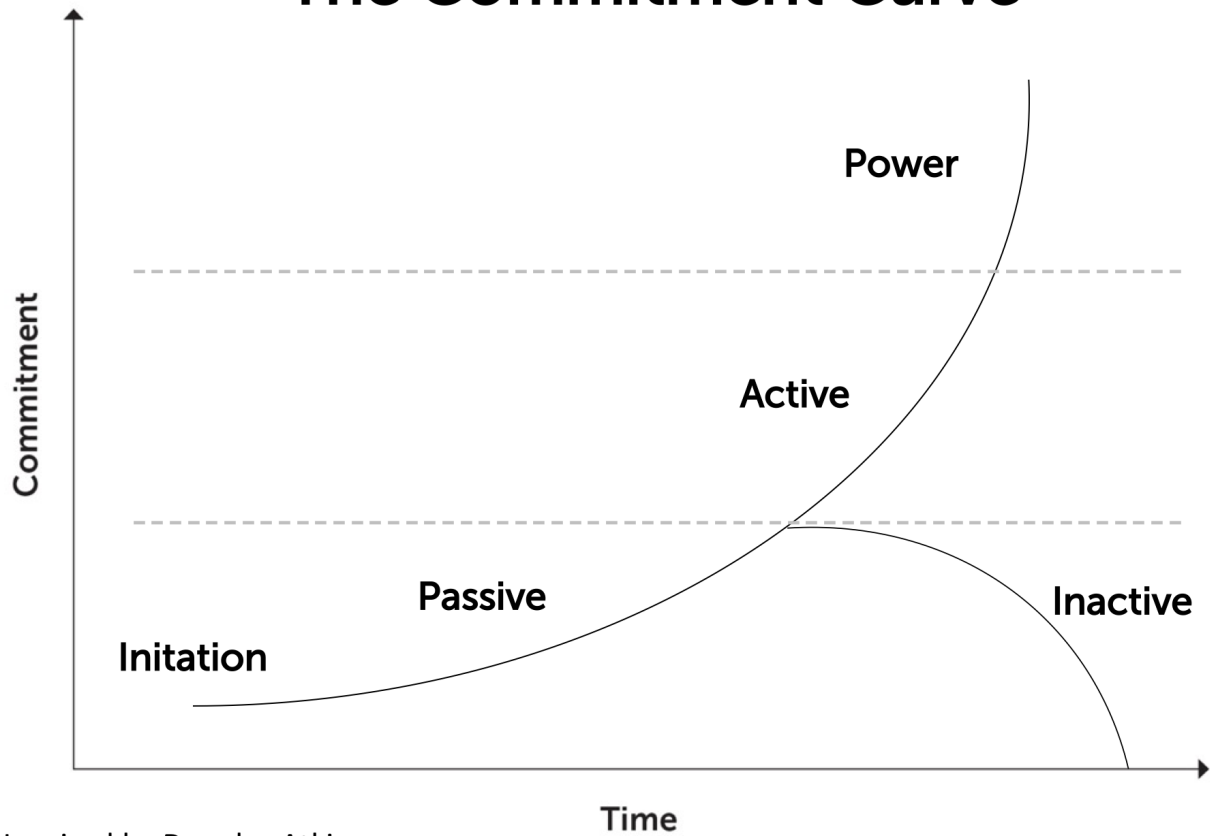
happens in three stages:

1. Trigger: What reminds the member to come back to the community. [The Hooked Model](#) by Nir Eyal teaches us that triggers can be external (notifications, emails) or internal (boredom, wondering what's going on, habits)
2. Action: How the member responds to the trigger to bring them into the experience (i.e. click the notification, open up the app)
3. Experience: What the member does after they take the action in order to participate

Participating doesn't necessarily mean the member has to create content. Just consuming is a form of participation too. As a member becomes more engaged, they'll take actions that require greater effort. To better understand this concept, we use something called "The Commitment Curve" which was popularized in community by Douglas Atkin when he was leading community at Meetup. He then went on to use this same concept as the community lead at Airbnb.

The concept is simple: Over time, a member's level of commitment goes up, and in turn, so does their level of actions. Early on, members are taking low-effort actions, just consuming. Eventually, they move up the curve, and they take high-effort actions. This is how we visualize the three levels of commitment described earlier.

The Commitment Curve



Inspired by Douglas Atkin

Here's the example Douglas used at Meetup, which maps out all of the main actions that a member might take over the course of their membership:

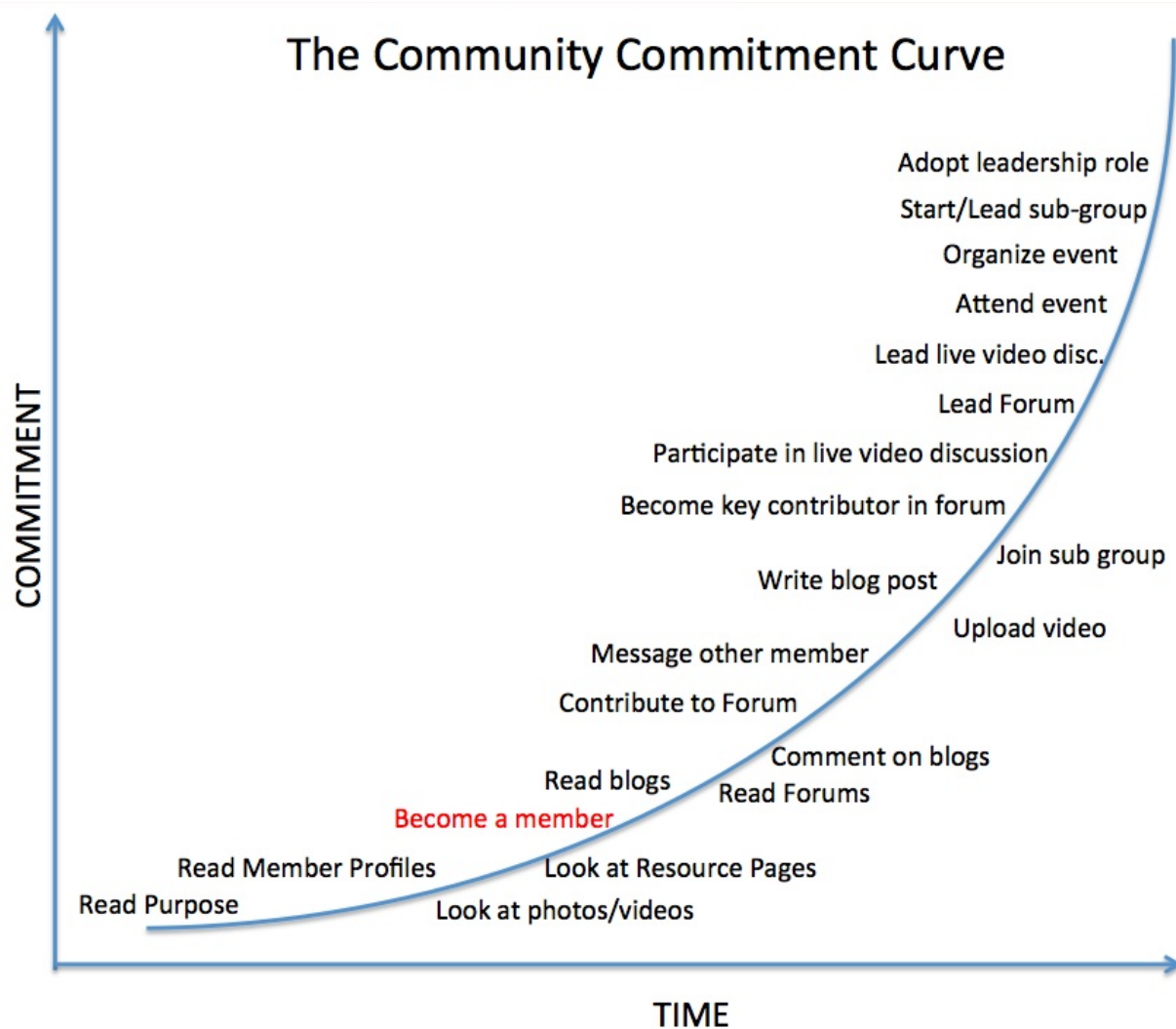


Photo via The Glue Project

One important caveat here: Members can, and often will, skip around on this timeline. They might jump ahead to be an active member right away. They will also fall back down the curve if you aren't efficiently driving one of the four stages of the engagement cycle.

Examples:

- Arielle first joins Yelp and for a while, she just searches for restaurants and reads reviews. Over time, she starts taking greater and greater actions, like commenting

on reviews, writing her own reviews and eventually becoming a Yelp Elite member who writes reviews regularly and takes part in Elite events.

- Bart first signs up for Reddit and starts to read the posts and comments that other users are creating in the environmentalism subreddit. Over time, he starts to write his own comments and creates new posts. Eventually, he decides he's ready to participate as a moderator and creates a new subreddit for deforestation.
- Doug initially gets interested in Harley Davidson and starts to look up pictures online and read blogs and magazines about the community. Then he takes the action of actually buying a bike and going to biker bars where other Harley owners spend time. Finally, he decides to become a leader and starts organizing new experiences for the community.

4. Reward

The member gets value from their participation and wants to experience it again. The reward is the last stage of an engagement cycle. It's a critical step because rewards release dopamine in our body, telling our brain that it was a good experience and makes us want to participate again. That's why it's a cycle, the reward reinforces the sense of identity we have in the community, which makes us trust it more, which drives us to take greater actions with greater rewards.

In behavioral economics, rewards exists in two norms:

1. Market norms – the exchange is transactional providing extrinsic rewards ie. money, gifts, information
2. Social norms – the exchange provides intrinsic rewards that are social, or emotional in nature ie. respect, sense of belonging, reputation

Ideally, you always want to have some aspect of social norms in your community. If someone is purely participating for an extrinsic reward, then you are not

developing the fabric of community because they're just doing it for the reward, not because of the people. As soon as the extrinsic reward is taken away or becomes less valuable, the participation disappears.

Typically, a community is providing both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The member is getting some sort of extrinsic value out of participating like advancing their career, perks, swag, etc. but they also feel a sense of belonging and care about improving their reputation.

Examples:

- Arielle first starts using Yelp to find great restaurant and bars. Every time she finds a great one and her friends are impressed, she gets an extrinsic reward (finding the restaurant) and intrinsic reward (improving her reputation as a tastemaker amongst her friends). When she becomes a Yelp Elite member, she gets more rewards like swag and invites to events, but also feels a sense of importance as a leader in the community.
- Bart develops a habit of coming back to reddit because every time he does, he finds an interesting piece of content to read. Once he starts participating in the community, he starts to feel rewarded for his contributions through the karma he receives (a score that reddit provides providing extrinsic reward) and the feeling of respect he earns as a quality contributor. Eventually as a moderator, he feels a great pride in his role and is also given more authority and tools in the community.
- Doug enjoys reading about Harley motorcycles and gets a lot of valuable information from the community. Once he gets his bike, he feels a pride and sense of belonging as a member of the community. Eventually, as a leader, he earns the respect of the community which is the greatest reward of all.

How to Apply the CMX Community Engagement Cycle

So there's the model, which gives you a clear idea of how a community is formed based on the experience of a member. **Now how do you use this model to build your own thriving community?** The first step is to apply this model to your community. Lay out every stage that your community member will go through as they're initiated into your community, and then move through each level of commitment.

To do this, we make a simple chart like this:

| Experience and Content Plan | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | Commitment Level | | |
| Stage of Engagement | Initiation | Passive (low) | Active (med) | Power (high) |
| 1. Identity | | | | |
| 2. Trust | | | | |
| 3. Participation | | | | |
| 4. Reward | | | | |

Here's an example of how we laid this out for the CMX community:

| Stage of Engagement | Initiation | Commitment Level | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| | | Low (Passive) | Medium (Active) | High (Power) |
| 1. Identity | Member identifies as someone interested in professional community building. | Member starts to identify as a community professional in the CMX community. | Member starts to identify as a "CMX'er" | Member becomes a "CMX Organizer" and takes on a leadership role. |
| 2. Trust | Member knows someone else in the CMX Hub group who recommends it to them. | Member sees the members who are active in the group and starts to trust them and the content. | Member has started to develop their reputation in the group and develops deep trust in the value of the community. | Member has developed a strong reputation in the CMX community and works to improve reputation in local community. |
| 3. Participation | Member joins the group. | Member visits the group regularly, but only reads and likes posts. | Member starts posting to the group, responding to others and/or attending CMX Series and CMX Summit events. | Member hosts CMX Series events in their local cities, creating new experiences for the community. |
| 4. Reward | Member gets a personal welcome in the Monday morning welcome. | Member finds a lot of answers to their questions and enjoys learning from the community. | Member starts to feel a stronger sense of belonging and community in the CMX community. | Member feels strong sense of belonging and pride in being a leader in the community. Also gets a lot of perks as a CMX Organizer. |

Once you have the full experience laid out, you can then fill out the table again and in each box, describe the content and programming that your team will create in order to define and fuel that experience for the member. This model will help simplify for you and your team what it means to build a community. This way you won't just be creating content, hosting events, and doing all this work without truly understanding how it all fits together. This is the framework we use to help businesses make sense of it all and put a clear content and programming plan in place. Hopefully it helps you do the same.

Reflection Questions



17. Marketing

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