



How Online Communities Improve Every Stage of the Customer Journey



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Khoros delivers authentic digital customer experiences at scale for the world's biggest brands. Comprising Social Media Management and Communities, the Khoros engagement platform enables brands to manage multiple digital touchpoints, facilitate millions of conversations, and drive smarter decisions through data — connecting customers, content, and conversations at the right digital moment.

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Executive Summary

Great communities are built to meet the needs of an entire customer journey: from when a problem is discovered, through purchasing a solution, learning to use it, and becoming an expert. Communities organize this way naturally because they are built by people who are making their way through these journeys. People who share similar interests tend to ask similar questions, provide helpful tips and answers, and share ideas about how to do things better. However, many communities today are underutilized because of a misperception that communities are for answering questions about broken products. Communities have a lot of untapped potential, and new technology makes it possible to place all those valuable conversations in places where everyone can easily find them. This book is a guide to help communities build more connections and solve more problems by embedding the best community experiences in more places along the customer journey. This not only helps people solve problems and get better, it also helps communities grow.

Introduction

Finding, acquiring, growing, and delighting customers in today's world is tough. Attention and trust are both vital to winning customers, and they are both **vanishing commodities**. The amount of distraction, misinformation, and degrading trust in brands can make the journey from uncovering a problem to finding a solution a meandering, frustrating process for customers.

People have a natural inclination to seek answers and input from peers whenever they have an issue. There are many ways to do this: in person, online, social media, or joining a professional association. In this digital age, online communities are the best way to find and interact with peers around specific needs because they are an organized, yet organic way to get answers without having to interrupt anyone else. Questions are posted and answered at the most convenient time for everyone, and all answers are recorded for future audiences. The best answers and sources of information also naturally become the most popular! This rapidly builds a giant library of trusted, specialized, updated, and relevant educational material that helps people solve problems.

The screenshot shows the GoDaddy Community page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Help, How-To, Community (highlighted), Blog, and System Status. A user profile picture and 'Contact Us 24/7' are visible in the top right. The main heading is 'Community' with a search bar. A featured post box contains a question about hosting platforms and a 'Read it here!' button. Below this, there are two columns: 'Forums' and 'Top Contributors'. The 'Forums' section lists categories like 'Welcome and Announcements', 'Managing Domains', 'Domain Transfers', and 'Domain Investing' with their respective post counts. The 'Top Contributors' section lists users like MrVapor, PL281, Nate, davisdre317, and ZulWeb with their post counts and kudos.

Forum Category	Description	Posts
Welcome and Announcements	Learn how to use the Community and introduce yourself!	686
Managing Domains	Discuss all things regarding domain names, including registration, management, and auctions.	5670
Domain Transfers	Discuss and learn about domain transfers.	1014
Domain Investing	Learn and discuss all aspects of domain investing from buying a name to selling a name and everything in-between.	462

Contributor	Kudos
MrVapor	75
PL281	70
Nate	42
davisdre317	18
ZulWeb	13

GoDaddy supports over 71 million websites through a popular, well-run community. Top contributors receive Kudos for good answers to questions.



Key reasons communities are so highly valued by consumers today:

- **Peer content is more trusted.** 75 percent of customers viewed interacting with other customers in a brand’s online community as a valuable experience according to a [Forrester Study \[TLP\]](#). This is why you see reviews embedded in almost every online commerce site today. From social media to the sharing economy, the backbone of these new industries is reputation—as determined by your peers.
- **Community content is fresher.** Active communities operate around the clock, around the globe, and users are constantly posting new ideas. In today’s fast-moving world, the most recent content is also the most relevant.
- **Communities scale and specialize.** As communities grow, they gather more answers with every new question that is asked. Communities also find new, innovative ways to use products and generate new ideas.
- **Inclusion.** People exchange personal information and details about problems they are facing specifically, so they can feel more connected to other people they might otherwise never meet. Communities help people feel connected to something bigger.

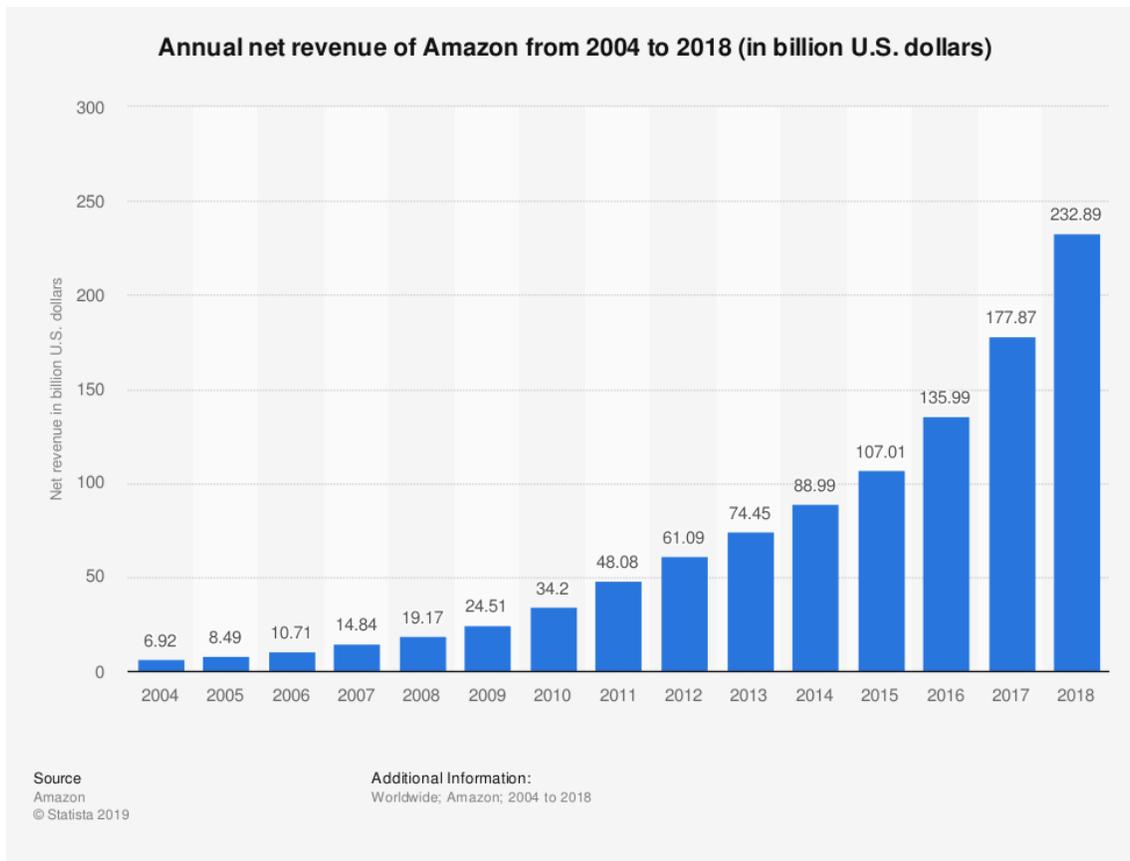
At Khoros, we have built hundreds of communities, and our customers have taught us many new ways to use them. This book is about sharing those best practices, and others that are out there in the world to help other brands create more connections and solve more problems.

Communities are already everywhere

Many companies have already built very successful businesses powered by communities, they just are not explicit about it. Market leaders and innovators today are succeeding because they understand the value of a sense of community, and they are leveraging it across their entire customer journey—even to provide the physical product they are selling. Every company in the “sharing economy” is built on a thriving community of hosts/drivers/walkers/owners/doers. AirBnB for one, calls their entire category “Community-driven hospitality.”

However, there are less obvious brands that are extremely successful as well. The first name that comes to mind when you think of community is probably not Amazon, but community is critical to their business in many ways. They were one of the first to embed questions and answers about products from previous buyers into product pages. Marketplace sellers [represent more revenue than Amazon listings](#), and they now have a network of last-mile delivery companies. Amazon’s business is so large that it HAS to be powered by multiple communities.

Overall, communities are immensely valuable in building new business models and capturing people's attention. However, there are many more ways that communities could be used by nearly every brand to help their customers discover, evaluate, and interact with their products.



What is a customer journey?

A customer journey is the collection of events that a customer encounters from the moment they uncover a problem, until the time it is fully resolved. When the problem is a daily task, that can mean the journey never really ends, as it is continually optimized. Ideally, the journey is a linear progression, but often customers can meander back and forth through the process.

There are many models of a customer journey, but usually it includes four main parts:

- **Discovering the problem:** This is where you realize you have a problem. This can happen slowly over time or instantly.
- **Researching solutions:** This is usually made up of Googling your problem and collecting ideas about different ways to solve it.
- **Evaluating solutions:** For large purchases, this is the phase where they want to learn everything possible about features — before making the purchase. This can involve some sort of trial or free version of a product.
- **Implementing and solving the problem:** This phase includes purchasing, using, and solving your problem.



Community-powered discovery

In a world of over 7 billion people, chances are pretty good that you are not the first person to have any particular problem. This is one reason why [nearly 70 percent](#) of traffic to a mature community comes from search engines. Search algorithms rank peer-generated content higher than branded website content, and especially content in active communities. In addition, many very specific searches are most accurately matched with a community post about the exact same problem.

Community-powered discovery becomes more valuable as the community gets larger and more active. Posts will get more search results as they receive more likes and responses. Also, supplementing your website with different discussion types, like Q&As, can provide better results than blogs alone. This is why sites like Quora often rank well in search results.

As far as embedding community into users' discovery experience, it is challenging for a company to fabricate these types of results. One brand that we see do this very well is Microsoft. Like most brands, this benefit was discovered almost by accident because they experienced rapid growth in product usage, which led to rapid growth in support questions. In order to scale support to meet demand, they started directing more questions to their online community (which is segmented by product). Because the answers to questions were then recorded for everyone to see (including search engines), their call volume started going down at the same time traffic to their community skyrocketed. Not only did users enjoy having their questions answered on their own, but they also turned out to enjoy answering other users' questions. This creates a positive feedback loop where every post increases the value of the community and brings in more users, who then become active customers and users.



Make community your own

Our community helps answer your Microsoft product and service questions with responses from other knowledgeable community members.

Along the way you'll meet recognized experts in consumer software - people who use our products every day, and other new users from virtually every walk of life.

We developed this community to give you the power to make Microsoft Community your own and the opportunity to see that using Microsoft products can be fun and easy.



Communities for research

There is a general theory that most communities follow the 90/9/1 distribution of content use: 90 percent of people are observing, 9 percent contribute by replying, and 1 percent creates new content. What most communities do not realize is the 90 percent are just as important for most brands as the other 10 percent, because they are checking other people's experience with the product to see if buying that product will solve their problem.

Proof point: eCommerce pages with reviews and ratings convert at a 270 percent higher rate. Most people don't realize it, but ratings and reviews are created by their peers and are therefore community content.

But what if you don't have a robust library of reviews? Obviously, the answer is not to create fake reviews. The answer is to use the best content you have that resembles user reviews. It is possible to find similar stuff in regular discussion forums if you can leverage tagging and filtering.

The screenshot displays a product page for 'Ratings & Reviews' with 4382 reviews. A star rating distribution shows 5 stars (2981), 4 stars (1095), 3 stars (208), 2 stars (54), and 1 star (44). The overall rating is 4.6 / 5 stars, with 88% of users recommending the product. A chat window titled 'Chat Live with other Sephora Shoppers' is open on the right, showing a question: 'is there a 15% off for insiders?' and several other user questions.

Stars	Count
5 stars	2981
4 stars	1095
3 stars	208
2 stars	54
1 star	44

Rating	Count
5 stars	2981
4 stars	1095
3 stars	208
2 stars	54
1 star	44

Overall Rating: 4.6 / 5 stars
Recommendation: 88% would recommend

Filters: Show reviews from my Beauty Matches | Color: All | Filter | Sort by: Most helpful

Reviews:

- jstbee** (5 stars): **Amazing while it lasts**. This is my favourite pencil, the texture is perfect. I can draw on perfect hair strokes and fill without it making my brow hairs waxy and fake looking. The only problem is the amount of product you get. This is literally half the amount of most eye pencils. And the packaging is kind of obnoxious and unnecessary. I love the product so much though; it's just a pain to repurchase every 3-4 weeks.
- ashhersh** (4 stars): **I like it**. 4 stars because even though I love it, it rubs off way too easily and doesn't last long enough. It's easy to use and looks great, it just wipes off so easily and fades throughout the day, even though it's from benefit.

Chat Window:

- SephoraShopper** (35s ago): is there a 15% off for insiders?
- SephoraShopper** (2m ago): hi whats ur go to lip
- CNWeqa89** (3m ago): Has anyone used the Skin Inc Optimizer Voyage Tr-Light? Do you actually touch the light head device on your face?
- SephoraShopper** (5m ago): Did Too Faced Naturally Radiant concealer change their color match selections?
- SephoraShopper** (7m ago): How do you use navnal to buy a diff



The second P of the 4 P's of Marketing is Place—be where your customers are. That should be extended to say “create the community where your customers are.” Fortunately, you don't have to look far to find where your customers are—they are probably already communicating with you in multiple channels. You just need to take those communications and place them in places where other customers will see them:

- **On your branded website.** Can you place the most popular review or discussion threads on your product pages? This will not only help build credibility and trust by seeing how many people are actively using your product, but it will give your prospect the assurance that if they do have questions, they can get answers from multiple sources.
- **On your ecommerce.** Amazon is leading the way with both reviews and Q&A embedded in every product page. They also highly encourage users to provide reviews and ask questions. Google also does this with their [Local Guides program](#) by reaching out to people who have visited places to help answer questions about them.

Sephora is a first-class example of how to embed community into product pages in retail. Community accounts are also linked to loyalty cards, so the shopping and community experiences are intimately connected.

Communities for evaluation

The world is becoming more complex every day, and the products we use are rapidly changing as a result. This makes it really difficult to find an expert in your personal network or physically near you who has the time and ability to teach you. When you are in the middle of learning to use a new product or software, communities are a great place to go for advice and build expertise.

In fact, most online communities are started by a few experts who are looking to push the boundaries of knowledge in their field. They actively search out new members because they know that higher membership increases the odds of new information being added to the pool. As an added bonus, online conversations are written down forever. Communities are a more efficient form of education, since all future users can quickly search through them.

Brands can help rapidly distribute critical information and increase the size of their communities by embedding the best community information into places where customers already are, such as:

- **In the product** (software only). Can you link users to places where other users are asking questions — or even better — link them to places where they can share ideas on how to improve the product? Tribal knowledge bases, where users create the help articles they use, are also amazingly productive and helpful ways to embed community into products.
- **In your support channels.** Today, support generally happens across many channels — email, chat, phone, messaging applications, and more. It is very valuable for those teams to be able to send links or helpful tips from peers into whatever channel they are using. This is especially relevant as messaging, email, and chat applications all unify into one interface for distributed support teams.

The screenshot shows the Debenhams Beauty Club Community interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Debenhams', 'Create Account/Sign In', and 'My Beauty Club'. Below that is the 'beautyclub community' logo and a search bar. A secondary navigation bar lists categories like 'Shop beauty: New arrivals', 'Makeup', 'Tools & Brushes', etc. The main content area features a post titled 'Urban decay stay naked' by user 'MFBeauty1'. The post text describes the 'UD STAY NAKED' foundation, highlighting its 'buildable medium coverage', 'real-skin matte finish that lasts up to 24-hrs', and 'waterproof, longwear' properties. To the right of the post is a 'Related topics' sidebar with links to 'Join the URBAN DECAY STAY NAKED Community tour!', 'WIN tickets to our Urban Decay Stay Naked event!', and 'Urban Decay Stay Naked Birmingham'. Below the sidebar is a 'Labels' section with a list of tags: 'Armani' (4), 'bareMinerals' (15), 'bb cream' (3), and 'beauty club' (124).

Using communities for evaluation may seem like a fit only for complex products, but you would be amazed at the content that is out there for using simple hardware tools or how many “hacks” there are for vinegar! Don’t underestimate the value of timely delivery of peer information.

Debenhams is another great example of rich evaluation and research content living on a community. They incentivize people to write reviews with gamification (points) and regular contests. They then associate any posts about products with that page, so that people who want to buy the items mentioned in the peer-written story can do so with a single click.

Turning frustration into advocacy

Every challenging customer service situation is also a huge opportunity to create a customer for life. Have you ever had a bad experience turned around at a nice restaurant, or read a review about a very compassionate employee written by a customer who was having a terrible day? Many of these stories not only get told by the customer to their personal network, they actually get turned into news stories or articles.

USAA COMMUNITY

SUPPORT FINANCIAL ADVICE DISCUSS EXPLORE LOG ON

USAA Community | Support

**Need product or service support?
You're in the right place. Just ask.**

Quickly find answers and get help with USAA products and services. For immediate support, contact us at (800) 531-USAA (8722). If you are deployed, call 1-877-2DEPLOY (33-7569), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Get Help

ALL PRODUCTS

Banking 11972	Health Insurance 125	Insurance 6378	Investing 668
Real Estate 320	Retirement Planning 237	Shopping & Discounts 341	Technical Support 1366

Communities can help scale these types of recovery stories because they expand the interactions to more people in more efficient environments — allowing the problems to be solved by crowds rather than through 1:1 interactions. They also increase the impact of those stories because everyone in the community sees them happen live!

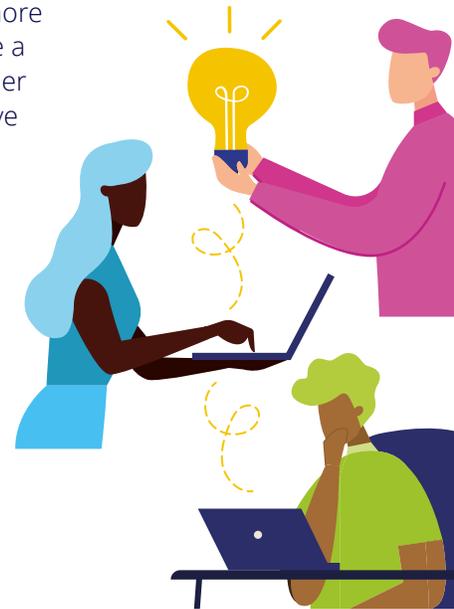
For example, USAA is a company that offers insurance products, so they talk to a lot of customers in the middle of really stressful situations. However, they have an [amazingly high Net Promoter score of 91 percent](#) across 9 channels of customer service. They use a combination of community and advanced customer service technologies to do this at scale across millions of customers.

When these positive experiences happen in a branded channel, it reflects well on your brand. Who knows, they might come back after solving the problem and express gratitude and impart some new wisdom of their own!

Conclusion

Customer journeys have changed, and the primary driver of that change is trust. Specifically, a lack of trust in what brands say about their product. Communities are more trusted because they are built on peer interactions. But what if you don't already have a vibrant community with thousands of active users? You can still improve your customer journey and help them make those valuable connections with their peers, but you have to start soon. The right technology can help you quickly scale those peer interactions and make the experience seamless by embedding it across your customer journey.

Starting an online community can be done in parallel to improving your customer journey. Creating content, finding users, building the infrastructure, writing the rules, moderating, and iterating all take time. It is possible, and critical to success in a digital-first world, to fully realize the return on investment by embedding that community in as many places as possible. Embedding community experiences not only helps customers solve problems, it helps you grow your community; creating a cycle of positive growth that will quickly make you a leader in any industry.



[Learn more about Khoros Communities](#)