



Engaging digital communities in the age of CX

How brands and community managers can elevate marketing and care experiences with empathy

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Delivering effective, empathetic community engagement in a CX-driven world

As consumers, we can now connect with our favorite brands in ways many could not have imagined just a few years ago. In our constant search for quicker, better, more personal experiences, social media and messaging have become preferred channels for many seeking information and customer support.

What we expect from these brand experiences is also constantly evolving. Our need for efficient and convenient experiences is challenging community managers to find ways not just to keep up with these expectations, but to exceed them, too.

What makes for effective community management and engagement in the age of CX? What can help your team meet your community's growing expectations for experiences that are empathetic to their needs?

We take a closer look in this report.



What is a truly empathetic experience?

It's one that caters to a people's expectations and preferences at every step of their journey, and does not ask them to adapt to your brand.

It's an experience that delivers the digital conveniences and the level of personalization they seek, one where they feel recognized and understood, and feel they can get support from your brand when they want, how they want.



The trends that make community management a top priority





Customer expectations are growing the CX gap

Closing the customer experience gap — the distance between customer expectations and how well brands feel they are meeting them — presents an ongoing challenge, especially when these expectations are constantly in flux.

People today want fast experiences that are convenient to them. They want brands to adapt to their preferences, not the other way around. Most importantly, they want to feel like they are being heard, and that their experiences feel personalized to them.

31%

of US consumers expect a response to their social media questions within 24 hours.¹

In the age of CX, consumers' patience for slow and impersonal digital experiences is very low.

To close the CX gap, brands must truly understand their community — their needs, preferences, and sentiment at any given point and time — and adapt to best support their community as a whole and individual community members when they reach out.

¹ Statista, Expected response time for social media questions or complaints in U.S. & global 2018.

Experiences are becoming more digital (and social)

It's no secret the world is only becoming more digital. COVID-19 and the resulting regulations forced companies to speed up the digitization of the entire customer journey and find new ways to cater to new preferences and habits.

The world was already spending nearly two and half hours daily² on social media. However, research shows how vital a channel it was for consumers during this time, seeking fast answers to questions they never faced before.

This digital shift and an ever-growing online community are generating an endless flow of conversations. Community managers must continually and efficiently make sense to help ensure they can best engage the community and deliver great brand experiences.



40%

**Increase in digital customer
service interactions
expected in 2021.³**

² Statista, Daily social media usage worldwide 2012-2020, 2020.

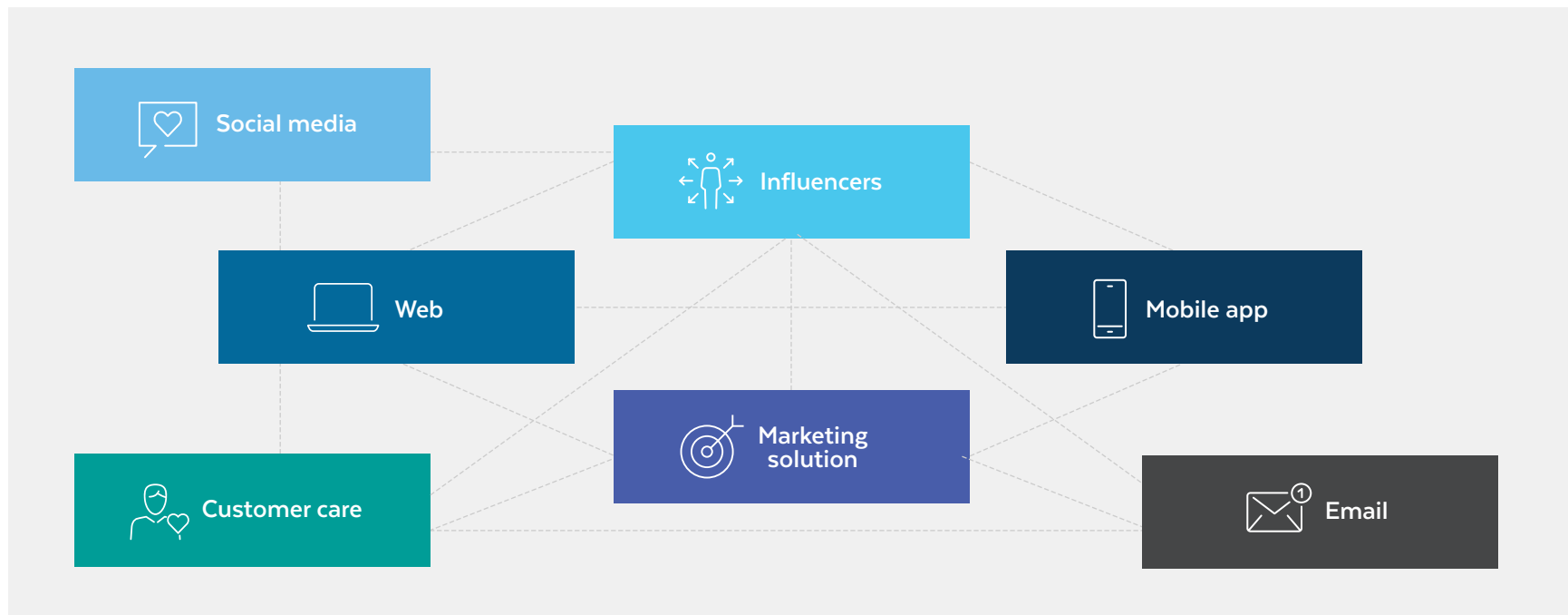
³ Forrester, Predictions 2021: It's All About Empathy, Digital, And Virtualizing Customer Care (via Forrester blog)

Consumers are becoming more omnichannel

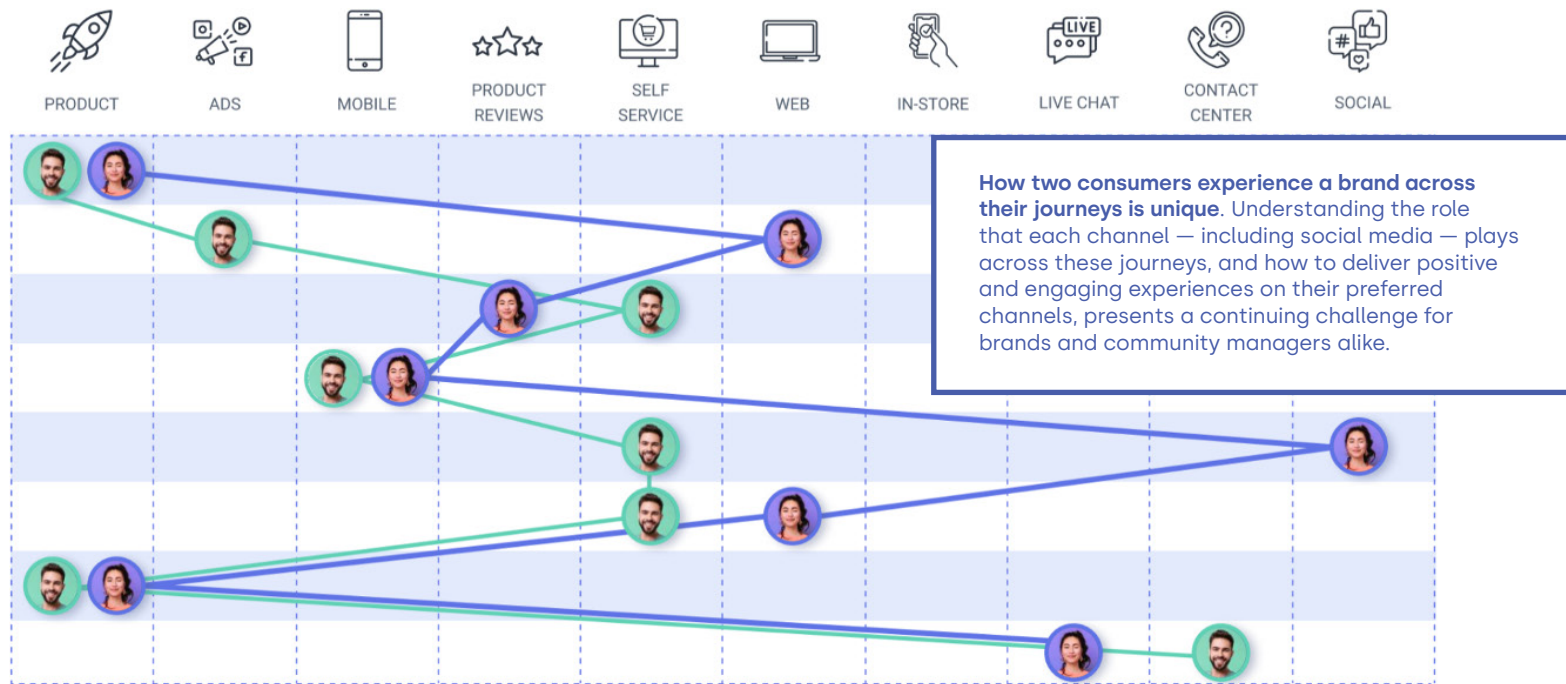
Consumers can now interact with brands in many ways – no longer limited to a specific set of channels. The customer journey now takes place across several channels, from social media to more traditional support channels like email and phone.

They can now also connect more easily with one another than ever before, increasing the speed and power of word-of-mouth on the customer journey.

For you and your team, staying on top of these conversations is critical to gain insights to guide you towards how to best engage with your digital community. But also, to be able to mitigate issues quickly and effectively, not to mention manage your brand's reputation



Customer journeys are growing more complex



The community's evolving role in driving decisions and brand trust

The world is more connected than ever. The digital community only keeps growing, with the proliferation of social media and review platforms providing people an array of channels they can turn to for information, helping drive their purchase decisions, and in many cases, building trust in a brand.

For example, many now instinctively turn to review sites and social media to help them validate an upcoming purchase decision or narrow the brands and products in their consideration set.

Communities increasingly rely on each other to guide them along their journeys. As a result, brands face the arduous task of keeping up with how people speak about their brand across a wide range of different channels while seeking how best to manage feedback and comments about their brand (especially the negative ones).

79%

of consumers trust online reviews just as much as personal recommendations they get from friends or family.⁴

⁴ BrightLocal, Local Consumer Review Survey, 2020



The keys to effective and empathetic community management



What does a community management team need today?

We established that CX is everything today. The next obvious step is taking the necessary strides to close the CX gap.

You can divide your teams' work towards community engagement and management excellence into key categories:

- **Understand what consumers need** so your teams can respond to them instantly and with genuine empathy.
- **Establish a clear workspace and processes** to ensure your teams are not burning time on inefficiencies.
- **Set up automation** to free up time on tasks that genuinely need personal attention, and handle influxes in inquiries.
- **Create a measurement framework** so you can track the impact of your efforts and improvements.

We cover all of these essential items in the next section.

54% of US consumers say that most companies need to improve their customer experience.⁵

⁵ PwC, Experience is everything: Here's how to get it right, 2018

Understanding people: The heart of community management

Community management can sometimes feel like the job of a mind reader. Yet, empathizing with people, understanding their experiences across their journeys, and instantly pinpointing what will yield the best interaction, are all hard to do without the right insights.

It is, of course, essential that your community team has all the case information and history available immediately. However, it's also crucial — and more often overlooked — that your team has deeper information on customers' needs and sentiment, which direct feedback can help unearth.

For instance, understanding the sentiment trends behind specific conversation topics can help your team prepare accurate responses ahead of time. Listening to your community can also help uncover issues and errors early before your community even turns to you.

In both these scenarios, these insights help ensure your team is prepared to provide timely and effective responses. But also, to help mitigate issues before it becomes a crisis.

Let's look at the essential insights your team needs to do this.



Tools to understand the community

What are the key tools that can give insight into your community?

Track conversations, at scale

Social media listening is about ensuring that any issues with products, campaigns, or even conversations around industry events are not missed. A strong listening setup is essential for your team to generate better, more empathetic messages when the community turns to them, or to engage the community proactively.

Identify trends in consumer sentiment

Guessing how people feel can take time. Depending on the number of conversations your brand regularly faces, time is often a luxury many community managers don't have. AI can be used to help instantly recognize **sentiment** and know what types of requests are tied to poor or great sentiment. As important, to help you prioritize urgent matters first.

Get feedback directly from people themselves

Sometimes, the best approach is to ask people directly. **Voice of Customer** research can be a powerful tool that can give you direct feedback on how customers feel about your service experience.





Having an ideal community management workflow

In an ever-changing digital environment, “ideal” can sound like an oxymoron. The trick for effective community management is to be prepared for the unexpected and organize your workspace to ensure as little distraction as possible.

A key thing slowing down community managers today is the sheer volume of work they have to get through in a given day. Distractions can be detrimental to effectiveness.

In addition, any step that must be repeated because of an inefficient interface will add up to hours of lost time over a given week.

It's essential to set up your community inbox the correct way from the start and see where AI and automation can help do some of the heavy lifting.

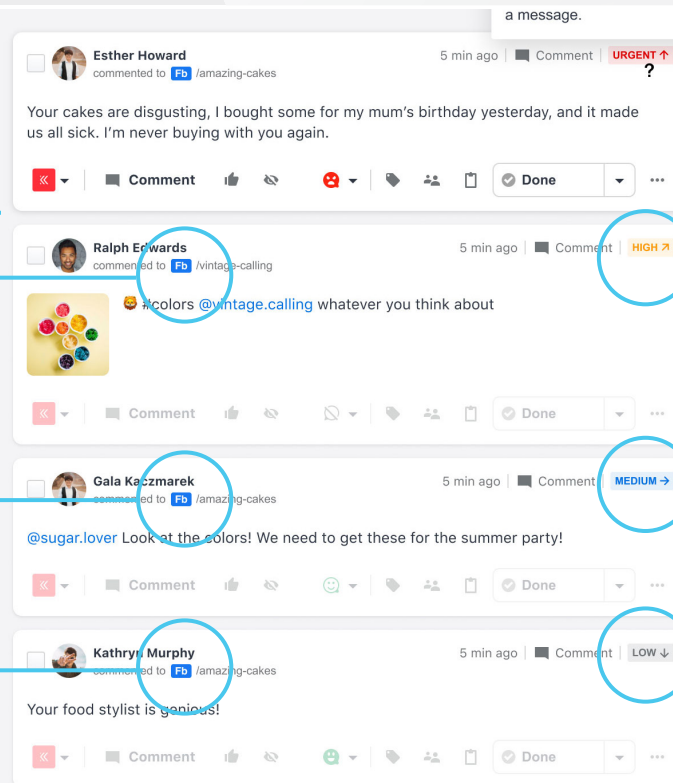
Ideal omnichannel, unified inbox setup

Unclutter the space to limit distractions

Hours can be lost due to a cluttered inbox. All case knowledge and next steps should be a click away.

All channels in one environment

Community managers should not be flipping through channels or platforms to answer queries. Ensure your setup covers it all, including review sites.



A clear system for prioritization

With the sheer number of conversations taking place, your community managers need to know instantly what tasks to tackle first — especially to help them identify and mitigate a crisis early before it spreads.

Automating this process, especially using AI, is essential to ensure that urgent items are addressed first.

This prioritization system could consider factors like sentiment, previous case history, or any custom parameters.

Balancing automation and the human element

Businesses must predict customers' next move to design fast and effective experiences empathetic to their needs. That means understanding their preferred engagement channels. More and more customers prefer using self-service channels to answer their questions instead of speaking to an agent. However, not every brand is meeting this demand.

The technology is already there. For example, AI chatbots with a powerful Natural Language Processing (NLP) engine can help deliver fast and frictionless experiences to your community, all while freeing up hours for agents to focus on more complex customer queries.

Important to note, though, that some consumers will always prefer to speak with a human agent. Ensuring they can easily escalate to an agent at any time — and without having to repeat information they've already shared via the chatbot — is essential to a positive customer experience.



Finding the right balance between what can be automated and what requires the human touch is key to cater to your community's preferences, but most importantly, to help maintain and build relationships.

Bringing scalability and stability during unexpected spikes

A true test of a community management workflow is during influxes in posts and incoming inquiries. Quickly identifying, tracking, and addressing spikes in engagement and sentiment is essential to shaping sustainable CX and avoiding potential nightmare scenarios for your team.

Even when people love a brand or product in the US, one study found that 32% of customers will walk away after only one bad experience.⁶

Many brands turn to automation and AI to mitigate these crises and ensure that they can still deliver efficient and empathetic customer experiences.

⁶ PwC, Experience is everything: Here's how to get it right, 2018.

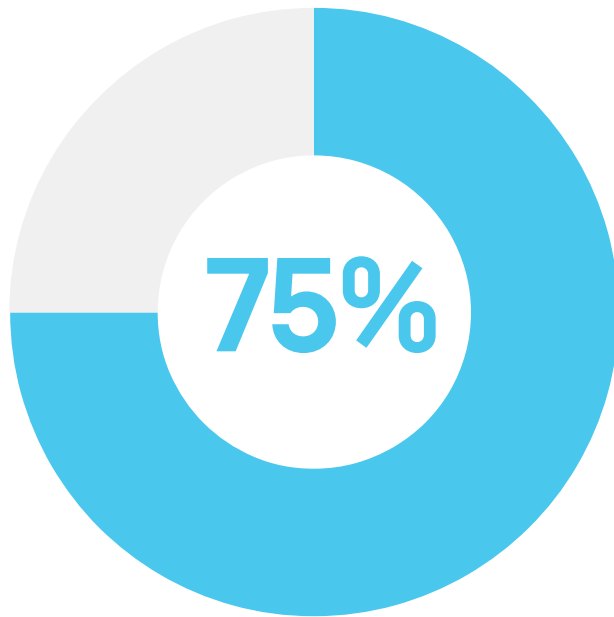
2 examples of how AI is helping scale community engagement and management

Prioritization: AI can help process incoming messages and posts in real-time to assign priority levels to each, preventing agents from having to sift through every comment for the most urgent cases manually.

Chatbots: AI-driven bots can help answer the most common questions and adapt over time. These can help address queries that would have otherwise reached agents, so that they can focus on critical queries that require a more human touch.



Smooth self-service experiences are a top priority



of businesses place a high importance on customer self-service.⁷

Although community management and engagement strategies must be constantly evaluated via regular customer feedback collection to gauge their success.

\$8.01
vs.
\$0.10

The cost per contact when customers use live service channels (phone, live chat, email) vs. using self-service channels like websites and mobile apps.⁸

⁷ Ecosystem and Local Measure, Think your business offers a true omnichannel experience? Think again!, 2021

⁸ Gartner, Customer Service and Support Leader poll, 2019 (via Gartner press release)

You cannot improve community management and engagement without measurement

It is impossible to deliver the best customer experience without rigid measurement and reporting practices.

Today, community management is as important a business function as any other. However, the reporting infrastructure to gauge the effectiveness of community management is sometimes overlooked.

There is no need to overcomplicate it. Only one clear community dashboard is needed to track key trends in the volume and progress of cases, response times, sentiment, and your team's overall effectiveness.

What metrics should you be tracking? It depends on you and your team's current needs and KPIs. Here are some key metrics to check in regularly to help track the impact of your team's efforts, and ensure their efforts are optimized.

What should you be measuring?

Topic sentiment

Tracking sentiment is crucial to consumer understanding. However, it's also essential to track how these trend over time for specific topics.

Distribution of cases

Create a view for the type of requests your organization receives. You can then take steps to reduce the high volume requests.

Time to resolution by case type

Understand what cases take the longest to process and the most effort to address. This can help you allocate resources effectively and help pinpoint the steps to reduce such instances.

Individual agent performance

Sometimes, your team's effectiveness can come down to individual performers. Determine who you can reward, and those in whom you may want to invest more training.



The takeaway

With people's expectations continuing to grow and their journeys becoming more complex, brands and community managers alike face a tough challenge to close the customer experience gap.

The key to closing this gap? Understanding what your community needs, expects, and prefers from their experiences, and having the tools in place to extract real-time insights through AI and automation.

A strong community management and engagement infrastructure should empower your teams to:

- Continually listen to and empathize with your community
- Deliver on customers' expectations for fast, personalized and engaging experiences
- Tackle more urgent and sensitive cases and leverage automation to help prioritize inquiries and handle repetitive tasks.
- Better understand the impact of their efforts through targeted insights.

Digital community management and engagement are around-the-clock initiatives in an age where customers always expect the most from their favorite brands. With the right pieces in place, your teams can continue to meet and exceed the ever-growing demands of your community for years to come.



About Emplifi

Emplifi is the leading unified CX platform that brings marketing, care and commerce together to help businesses close the customer experience gap. More than 7,000 brands, such as Delta Air Lines, Ford Motor Company and McDonalds, rely on Emplifi to provide their customers with outstanding experiences at every touchpoint.

For more information, visit emplifi.io

