

# How to grow a successful online community

From the first seeded post to a self-sustaining flywheel. What a community really is, why it is worth the effort, and how to get real people to show up, post, and keep coming back.



## The shift from audience to participants

An online community is a branded space where the people who care about your product, your topic, or your mission gather to talk to each other and to you. The key word is "each other." A social following is one-to-many: you broadcast, they react. A community is many-to-many: members answer each other's questions, swap ideas, and build relationships you are not even in. That shift is what makes a community compound instead of just consume.

One more distinction matters. An owned community lives on a platform you control, with your branding, your data, and the ability to wire it into your product. A rented one lives in someone else's house, where you borrow the audience and play by their rules. Both can work, but the further you want to take a community, the more the owned model pays off.

### THE JOBS A COMMUNITY DOES



#### Support that scales

Members answer each other, deflecting tickets around the clock.



#### Product feedback

The cheapest, fastest voice-of-the-customer channel you will run.



#### Belonging

The one nobody puts on a slide and everybody feels.



#### Retention

Customers with a relationship beyond the product churn less.



#### Advocacy and acquisition

Superusers bring the next members in.

You do not need all five on day one. Pick the one that matters most right now, because that choice shapes everything that follows.

# Know which type you are growing

Not every community is built for the same job. Knowing which type you are growing keeps you from copying tactics that were never meant for your goal.



## Support and Q&A

Members solve each other's problems

ATLASSIAN COMMUNITY



## Product and feedback

Ideas, votes, and roadmap in the open

XANO, BETTERMORE WISHLIST



## Brand and fan

Identity around a product people love

LENOVO LEGION



## Customer and user

Onboarding, best practices, retention

MOST B2B SAAS HUBS



## Learning and academy

Cohorts, courses, peer learning

CREATOR ACADEMIES



## Creator and network

Member-made content and collaboration

NOTION, DISCORD SERVERS

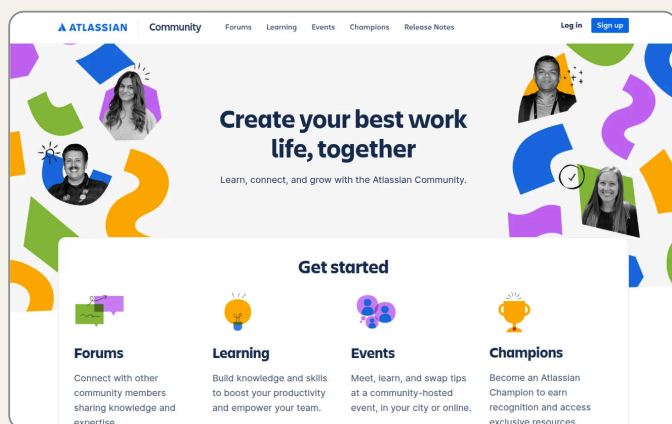
Most real communities are a blend, but one type leads. Pick the lead, build for it, and let the rest come second.

## Before you chase numbers

A bigger member count is the vanity metric that kills more communities than anything else. Write down the one behavior that defines a healthy community for you: questions answered, ideas submitted, or members returning each week. That is the number you are actually growing.

# Communities worth learning from

The fastest way to understand what a grown community looks like is to look at five that work, and the one thing worth stealing from each.

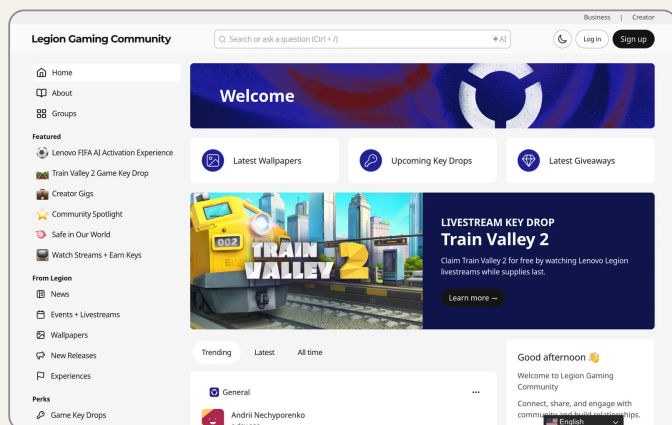


## Atlassian: peer support at scale

Customers answer each other's questions and surface edge cases the day they appear, deflecting an enormous ticket volume while keeping every answer searchable for the next person.

**Steal this:** when members help members, support cost stops scaling with customer count.

[community.atlassian.com](https://community.atlassian.com)

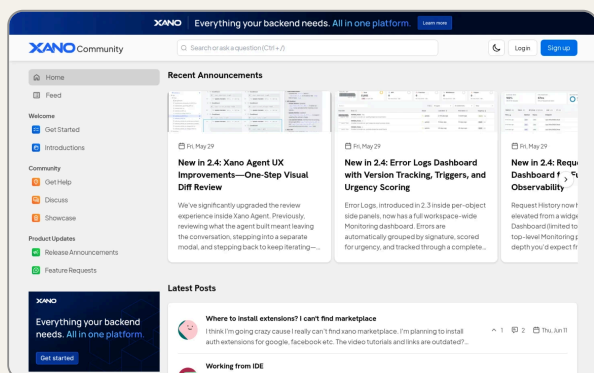


## Lenovo Legion: a destination, not a pitch

Lenovo built the Legion community on Bettermode into a place players come back to for reasons that have nothing to do with buying a laptop: game key drops, livestreams, and other players.

**Steal this:** a brand community grows when it gives members an identity and a reason to return.

[gaming.lenovo.com](https://gaming.lenovo.com)

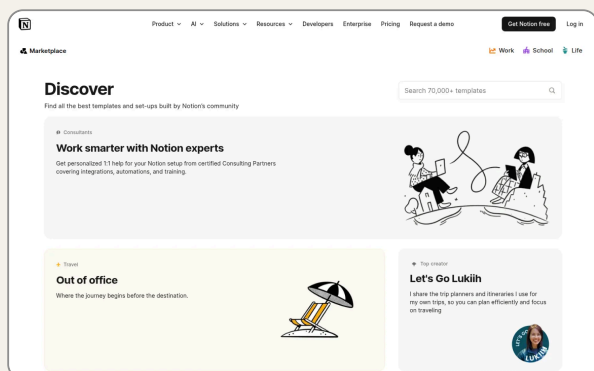


## Xano: product feedback in the open

Xano runs its developer community on Bettermode with feature requests, product updates, and support in one owned hub. Members vote on what gets built and watch it ship.

**Steal this:** a roadmap that is a conversation keeps its shapers around to see it through.

[community.xano.com](https://community.xano.com)

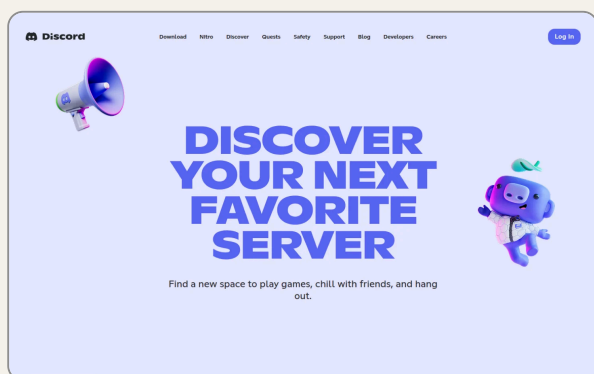


## Notion: growth powered by what members make

Notion's community produces tens of thousands of templates, setups, and tutorials that members search, share, and sell. The community is the product's distribution.

**Steal this:** make it easy for members to create and showcase, and their work becomes your most credible acquisition channel.

[notion.com/templates](https://notion.com/templates)



## Discord: real-time belonging

Discord communities thrive on synchronous, low-stakes conversation. Fantastic for energy, weak on permanence: conversations scroll away and are hard to search later.

**Steal this:** real-time chat builds culture fast, but pair it with something searchable if you want the knowledge to last.

[discord.com/servers](https://discord.com/servers)

# Growth is a flywheel, not a funnel

Growing a community is not a funnel with an end. Each stage feeds the next, and the payoff is the loop. Get the wheel turning and growth compounds. Skip a stage and it grinds.



ADVOCATES BRING IN THE NEXT MEMBERS, AND THE WHEEL TURNS AGAIN

## Where new members actually come from

"Build it and they will come" is not a plan. The channels that reliably bring members, in rough order of value:

- 01


**Your own product**  
 The highest-intent members already use you. Prompt them in-app at the moment they would benefit.

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- 02


**Email to customers**  
 The warmest audience you will ever have. Point to a specific space, not "we have a community now."

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- 03


**Search**  
 Indexed member threads rank and pull in people searching for those answers. Compounds slowly.

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- 04


**Existing members**  
 Make sharing easy and recognize the people who bring others in.

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- 05


**Events and social**  
 Webinars, AMAs, and a steady presence. Each one a doorway, not a standalone moment.

**Start narrow.** Pick two channels to start, not all five, and make each point to a specific space with a specific reason to join.

## The playbook, step by step

None of these steps are glamorous. Run them in order and a community grows; skip the boring ones and it stalls.

1

### **Win internal buy-in with a number, not a vision**

Tie the community to something leadership already counts: support cost, retention, pipeline. Find the metric it can move and promise a small, early win. Quick wins buy the long runway a community actually needs, because the real payoff is a year out and nobody funds a black box for twelve months.

2

### **Start with one goal, not five**

The most common launch mistake is trying to serve support, marketing, product, and success on day one. A community that does everything does nothing well, and members feel the lack of focus immediately. Pick one primary goal and build the spaces, the seed content, and the welcome around that single job.

3

### **Meet members where they already are**

The right platform is the one your members will actually open. A developer audience that lives in docs wants something different from a creator audience that lives on Discord. Owned platforms give you control and the integrations to wire the community into your product, which is why branded communities outlast rented corners of someone else's network.

4

### **Seed it before you open the doors**

Nobody wants to be the first to speak in a silent room. Before you invite anyone, seed thirty to fifty genuine posts and recruit a founding group of ten or twenty people who will reliably reply. The first real member who walks in should see a room that is already alive.

**5****Make onboarding do the heavy lifting**

The first five minutes decide whether a new member ever comes back. Show them the one space that matters, prompt a single action like an intro or a vote, and make the value obvious before you ask for anything. A generic welcome email that leads nowhere does not work.

**6****Moderate lightly, and let members own it**

Write clear, human content rules, then trust your members to hold the line. When something crosses it, a quiet private message usually beats a public ban. The communities that feel alive are the ones where members, not staff alone, keep each other on track.

**7****Wire the community into your product**

A community that lives off to the side stays a side project. The ones that earn their keep get integrated: discussions that become support tickets with context, member activity in your CRM, community answers surfaced inside the product itself.

**8****Turn your superusers into advocates**

Every healthy community grows a handful of people who answer more questions than your own team does. Find them, recognize them, give them status and early access. They make the community self-sustaining and bring in the next wave through genuine word of mouth.

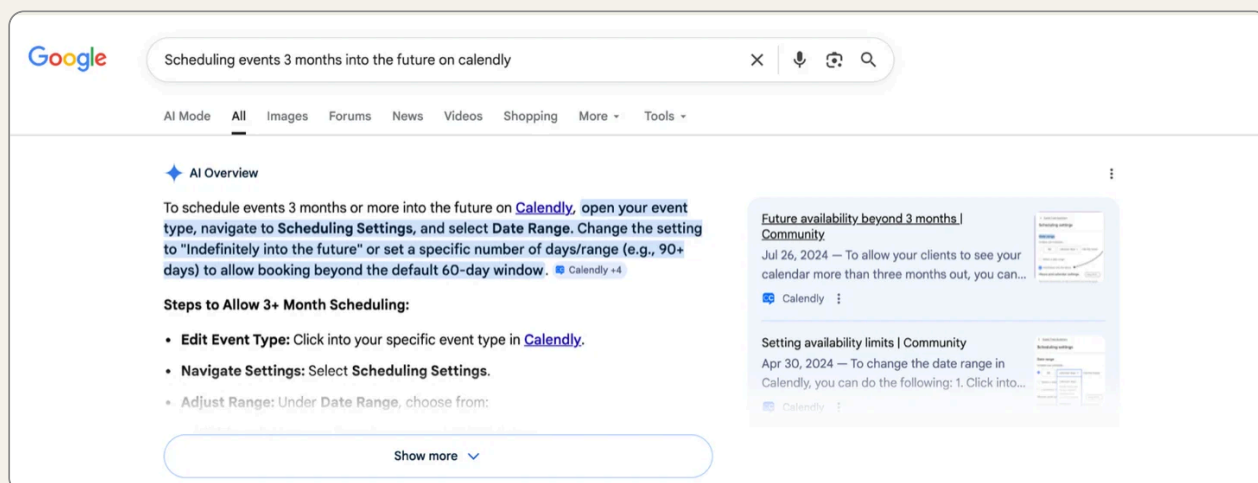
**The engagement engine, honestly**

Engagement rarely sustains itself early. For the first several months you are the engine: posting, asking, replying, recognizing contributors, showing up daily. Build a rhythm you can keep: a weekly prompt, a recurring event, recognition for the members who answer. Organic momentum is real, but you earn it after months of manual work, not by flipping a switch.

# Your community is becoming an answer engine

Search is no longer a page of ten blue links. Google's AI Overviews and tools like ChatGPT answer questions directly, and they pull those answers from somewhere. More and more, that somewhere is community threads, because a real member question with a real accepted answer is exactly the format these systems trust.

Ask Google how to schedule events further than three months out in Calendly, and the AI Overview writes its answer straight from two threads in Calendly's own community.



A Google AI Overview answering from Calendly's community threads.

Your help docs might get cited. Your community has a better shot, because the exact long-tail questions other customers are typing into Google are already asked and answered there in public. An owned community that lets its threads get indexed is building an asset that pays off in answer engines as much as in classic search. A closed group, invisible to every crawler, builds you none of it.

# Measure behavior, not headcount

A community where members answer each other and keep coming back is growing even if the headline number is flat. Track behavior, and put it next to the business metric you tied the community to at the start.

## WHAT TO ACTUALLY MEASURE



### Return rate

Whether the community pulls members back without a nudge.



### Member-answered rate

The share of questions answered by members, not staff. The number that says self-sustaining.



### Active contributors

The core actually creating value, tracked against lurkers.



### Time to first response

How fast a new post gets a reply. Slow answers quietly kill a young community.



### Your business metric

The support deflection, retention, or pipeline you promised at the start.

Report the behavior numbers next to the business outcome in your leadership update, and the budget conversation takes care of itself.

# Why communities fail

Most communities do not fail loudly. They fade. After enough of them, the causes rhyme, and every one is avoidable.

## CAUSE ONE



### No owner

Split across people with full-time jobs, the community quietly dies. Even a part-time owner beats no owner.

## CAUSE TWO



### No focus

Five goals on day one means none served well, and members feel it immediately.

## CAUSE THREE



### An empty launch

Inviting people into a silent room loses the members you worked hardest to attract.

## CAUSE FOUR



### Vanity metrics

Chasing signups instead of return visits grows a mailing list, not a community.

## CAUSE FIVE



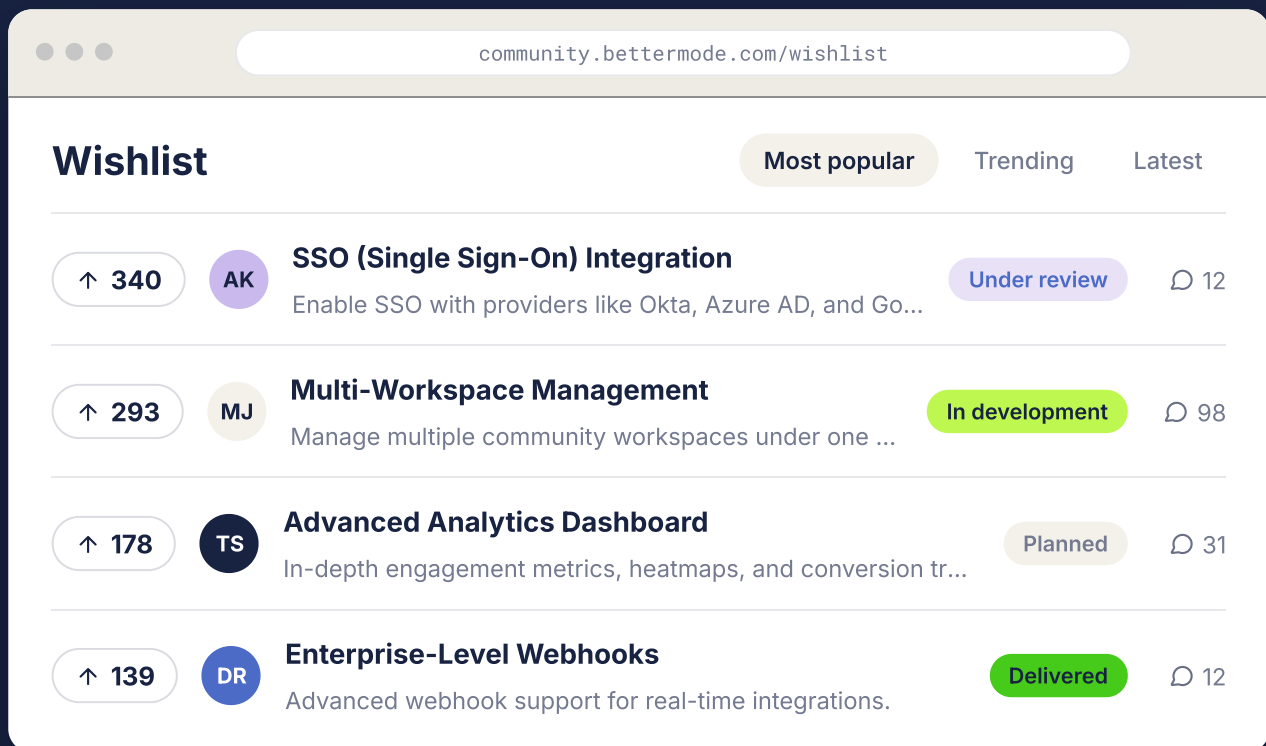
### A neglected loop

Seeding a community and expecting it to run itself is the myth that has killed countless of them. The engagement engine is manual until it is not.

Fix the owner, the focus, the seeding, the metric, and the follow-through, and you have avoided almost every way a community dies.

## The whole flywheel in one screen

We run our own product feedback inside a Bettermode community, on a public Wishlist board where customers post ideas, everyone upvotes, and the status moves from "under review" to "delivered" in the open. A focused goal, members doing the work, the loop closed in public.



Bettermode's public Wishlist: ideas, votes, and shipped work in the open.

## See it live, on your use case.

Lenovo Legion, Xano, FlutterFlow, and thousands more run on Bettermode.

[Book a Demo →](#)