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TRANSCRIPT

# Padraic Ryan on Engagement

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

community, people, members, events, engagement, thread, forum, onboarding flow, onboarding process, curate, email, post, many distractions, software, experts, moderators, flows, super, case study, inactive

**SPEAKERS**

Anne Mbugua, Padraic Ryan

**Anne Mbugua** 00:03

Okay, Patrick, if you could introduce yourself. Yeah, what you do and the community you work with, and also how many, how many years you've been in community.

00:13

My name is Patrick Ryan, I work with E commerce fuel. I'm the community manager there. And we are a paid community of about 1100 members in the E commerce space. I've been the community manager there for about three years member about five years. And before that, I was also a QA manager for a software platform called X cart. That's an E commerce platform.

**Anne Mbugua** 00:35

Okay, sounds like you've been on that line of E commerce, right?

00:38

Yeah, for a long time, I was a developer, e commerce developer as well. So that's kind of how I found this community that I work for now.

**Anne Mbugua** 00:44

Fantastic. So you wrote a really beautiful thread about how to drive engagement actually was five things and how to drive engagement and what you are currently doing in your community. And I really loved that thread, because you really broke it down to those specific five things. And it sounded like these are, you know, lessons that you have learned from, and probably some of the challenges that you've been facing. So I'd like you to sort of briefly describe to us that process of these five things to drive member engagement.

01:20

Sure, if I can remember what five I think. So we, we try to be really personal with our members as far as when we bring them on. And throughout their whole journey in the community. I know, that's not something everyone can do, because some of these communities are massive, but we only bring about five to 10 new members on each week. So one of the things we've been able to develop over the past few years is a kind of an onboarding flow that kind of puts people in a little green room to start. So we introduce them, we give them an email, we give them a welcome video. And then we personally welcome them in this kind of staging area. And we have some Community Guides on board who also welcome them, make them feel welcome, give them answers to their questions and problems, point them in the right direction. So they really feel when they join the community that they're instantly part of it. They're not just a number. And that's something we try to do throughout their whole journey. They have problems of issues, we use a really highly customized email flows and notifications that are tied to their skills and their the preferences that they don't get a lot of garbage, they get something that's really catered towards them. And then in the Friday newsletter we send out every week, we give them catered specific topics that are relevant to their experience, their problems, their their issues. And then as I mentioned before, we have Community Guides, we also have experts that are subject level experts in the forum. So then when there's a question about legal we have a lawyer there to answer their questions or question about marketing, we have a marketing expert. So we try to curate those leaders. And then our live events, we also have kind of emcees and leaders that are responsible for that local community so that they feel like they always have somebody nearby they can talk to so leadership's really strong. And then the curated, live and virtual events, we really tried to do events that are specific to we have a large event and local events. But we also have a specific event for our $10 million sellers, for example. So they're all in the same kind of business level, the same kind of experience level. So we try to curate almost everything in our community towards people so that they get exactly what they're after. And finally, our last point is tons of valuable content. So those new members generate really great case studies when they first joined, that's a requirement. Everything really so there's always something new people are sharing with the community, our experts post annual and quarterly updates on what's happening in the space. And then I personally and my founder, Andrew, we try to create a lot of off topic discussion. So not just people feel like imposter syndrome sometimes. So when we have like a fun thread, like share your pet photos, or, you know, do you still use this kind of software or anything like that it really gets everyone to engage and not feel like they're just like, oh, like, I can't answer this. I'm not an expert. Everyone's got pets. Everyone's got, you know, fun stuff, cars, bikes, motorcycles, whatever it is. So we really try to keep everyone engaged, and we get about 85% of our members log in at least once every 90 days. So that's pretty good. We're pretty happy with

**Anne Mbugua** 04:09

that. Yes, absolutely. So what were some of the challenges that you faced, prior to coming up with these ideas of how to drive up engagement,

04:19

what it was, people weren't reading, people were just joining and kind of getting thrown into the forum. And they weren't really, I mean, we send a personal email, but like we're talking about before this, no one reads email anymore. So it was tough to get to them tough for them to kind of feel like they belong somewhere. But when they really can see a face and a name and a person that really is paying attention to them, you know, feels really great when you're a new member in a place. So I think just personalization and engagement right from the beginning was our biggest challenge when I first came on and now we look at our own onboarding flow and we have like 25 emails that are 300 pages long and it's not gonna work right Crime we talked about earlier, some video is probably going to be in our future for that tick tock format so that all the attention spans that are 10 seconds will actually pay attention to what we're trying to tell.

**Anne Mbugua** 05:10

Yeah, so it sounds like it's really busy. So are you just a team of one? Or are you you know, are you doing community with other people who are helping you do all this?

05:19

Well, we just hired an event director of events. So she is in charge of putting on six live events a year from 50 people that aren't the one next week is 250 people. So that's kind of her whole game, I manage the community itself. So moderate the forum's we have some moderators, but it's really my job. The founder Andrew ease, he does a podcast he does. He's in the forums a lot too, but and we have a virtual assistant and a part time developer. So that's, that's really it. It's a kind of a small team, but we all kind of do everything.

**Anne Mbugua** 05:49

Yeah. Which is, which is good. You're not a team of one. No, I could not do this by myself. Yeah, absolutely. So what would you tell a community manager who is, you know, struggling to drive engagement, you know, what would be some pro tips that you would advise them?

06:09

Hmm, that's a good one. It's tough, because everyone runs such a different kind of community. But I think giving people value for their time is really what it's all about. For us. I mean, these are super busy entrepreneurs, I'm sure everyone's running a community that's super busy. So getting their attention and getting them to come in, there has to be a reason for it. So providing good content, providing in our case, discounts on software that we negotiate with software vendors, that kind of stuff gets people to come into the forums. And once they're there, they find all sorts of other things they can get involved with. So I think providing value is super important, providing unique daily value, not just you know, once a month for posting something this is, you know, we keep our forum pretty busy. We, I would say there's probably a couple 100 posts new threads every week. So it's fairly busy. There's lots of content for people to digest, keeping them informed by a text or email, whatever it is, no, don't let them just disappear, keep them coming back for more and engaged, providing new ways to connect them, whether during the pandemic, it was virtual events, Zoom calls, it was kind of informational digest that we sent out. So it's just about keeping their interest. It's really hard with so many distractions these days. Yes, yes.

**Anne Mbugua** 07:19

What do you do with the, you know, new members who have come on board? I'm curious to know what your onboarding process can be looks like.

07:27

Yeah, so they come into the the new member greenroom and they're greeted by like, we have a team of 12 Community Guides now. So they try to open the discussion, they talk about things they have in common, or if they're from the same town or the same sports team, we ask a lot about hobbies. And we mentioned that as part of the onboarding, because it's easy to talk about that stuff. You don't feel intimidated. So there's, we have threads on golf, we have threads on skiing, so we point them to that they get involved that way. They're required to post a case study in the first 30 days. So our community guys encouraged them, hey, you know, I really like this about your business, why don't you do a case study about that. So within that first 30 days, they're kind of getting a feel for what the case studies are about. And then they share it and they get a lot more engagement. So that first 30 days is really important to kind of grab their attention and show them that they're getting the value because it's paid community. dollars a month is not cheap for some people. So they want to, you want to make sure that they're getting their value for that. So it's a very, you know, we hold their hand a lot in the first 30 days. And we have a lot of flows that we send out. Hey, you know, we just noticed you haven't logged in, in the first couple of weeks, my check out a lot of people in welcoming you. So it's all about getting them to feel super part of the community in that first 30 days for us. And then we have about, I would say 75% retention rate on new members that come in. So it's working, there's always improvement, but it's it's important to make them feel welcome from day one.

**Anne Mbugua** 08:46

And what do you do with because this is this, this can be a problem in most communities anyway, most communities do happen, we have people who are inactive, you know, the or inactive members. What do you do with your inactive members? How do you get them to sort of be active, if that's, you know, something that you really want to do, because they are communities where they are okay with them sort of being inactive, and they can be looking, you know, as they're doing, you know, reading, you know, information and content and things like that. So what do you usually do? I'm curious.

09:18

So yeah, the lurkers are always an issue for us, we do have a flow, a couple of flows, that when they start to get, they can build up a lot of cred over time. So if a super active member goes dormant for a year, we're not going to bother them too much because they've given so much in the last year, they're they're entitled to a break, but the new member comes in and post a case study and we don't hear from them for six months, they'll start to get a series of emails that are nudging them to hey, you know, here's a topic that you might be interested in. You talked about this before. So about over the span of two weeks, we kind of encourage them to come back and if they don't, they get dumped into kind of an inactive pool and then we we kind of remove probably two to three inactive members a month just to kind of people don't like lurkers they don't. Members don't like not Not just to managers, but the members when they don't see someone posting and just lurking, they get suspicious, they think, Oh, they're gonna steal our ideas. They're here. They're not giving back. So our community is really about giving back. And we don't really tolerate people who don't. So, yeah, they eventually get phased out if they don't ever share.

**Anne Mbugua** 10:16

Yeah, that is, I really like the way that you have sort of, you know, worked around that. Because that that can that can present actually a problem, depending, obviously, once again, on the business use case. Yeah. So my thoughts are around, now that you have tested and tried this, what would you do differently? Let's say you had to start a community, from, you know, from launch or from scratch? How would you do something differently compared to what you're doing now?

10:46

Good question. So I wasn't around. I mean, I was around as a member at the beginning of community, but not as the manager. But it's fun to see how it's evolved since then, mistakes that were made. And I think keeping people that in our case, it's a community for ecommerce store owners. So there's a lot of variants of that there's contractors, their service providers, or software providers, and Andrew, the founder led in a lot of those kind of people in the beginning. And that became a problem because of pitching and sales. And you know, people don't like that at all. So I think we would have been a lot more restrictive in the beginning as to who was going to be a part of the community. And we would put this onboarding process in place a lot longer ago, because it, a lot of people just came in, and we're numbers, and those people never really engaged. And we found that since the new member greenroom and onboarding process came about, the engagement is much higher, and they stay around a lot longer. So I would kind of plan ahead and make sure that all of that was thought out from the very beginning, rather than just opening up the gates and saying, All right, everybody come to our community and gray, you know, I don't think you can do that anymore. So there's too many people, Facebook's pulling on you and tick tock, please, there's so many distractions for people that you have to be a really central source of information. And I think we would have developed our community leaders a lot more from the beginning. Community Guides, experts, moderators, people who are kind of watching over our shoulders, I'm not in there. 24/7. So I can't moderate things that are offensive, or doesn't happen often. But it's nice to have some backup in different time zones that can handle that for me, when I'm not there.

**Anne Mbugua** 12:23

So are you moderators? And the guides? Are they part time? Or are they just volunteers,

12:30

they're volunteers. So we, the guides, the experts, and the moderators all get free memberships, and they get discounted tickets to our live events. And we did before the pandemic, it kind of a leadership retreat for three days where we just kind of got to know each other and bonded, and it kind of gives them a stake in the community, it makes them feel like they're part of things and they you know, when you really meet when you meet someone, and that's the other thing, I'd say, if you have a community and can do live events, it is astounding how much better those members are once they connect with other people in person. They just, they feel like a family. They feel like it's someone that they are, you know, some of these people have been friends for seven years now. And they hang out outside of our community now. So it really bonds people, it really strengthens the community. It's hard to do. It's a lot of work. But you know, it's it's worth it. I think so I would Andrew's done a good job with that with holding a live event every year, except for the past couple. And we'll continue to do that even more now with six events here.

**Anne Mbugua** 13:28

Wow, that's That's amazing. Six events a year, but it's much needed. I do agree the in person really makes a difference than food show. There's just something about doing in person events, and live events, right? Yes. So um, I always like to end on this note, what inspires you about your community?

13:48

Just how giving people are I mean, these are businesses that compete with one another. In some cases, they're selling the same products, they're selling in the same space. They're trying to be unique in their space, and they are more than willing to share all of their strategies, numbers, mistakes, they're super vulnerable. They're super caring, they'll go out of their way to help other members and it's just, it floors me that people who don't have never met in real life, a lot of them will just, you know, spend an hour with a stranger giving them life advice or business advice or it's it's fantastic that to see that especially in this day and age that there are people that still really care about other people and I love that's my favorite part of the job is seeing someone who's struggling, get help and 10 people and turn their business around. It's it's a lot of fun. So I really enjoyed that.

**Anne Mbugua** 14:36

Thank you, Patrick. I really appreciate you sharing with us about how to drive engagement or even to increase engagement and I am going to stop the recording now. Great