Grow and engage your community
Starter kit

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Introduction

This guide has been put together as a result of years of experience launching various communities big and small from all over the world.

Whether it's an A-lister who wants a private space for fans or a wellness coach who wants to create real and lasting change with a specific cause - we've been there, done that and got a success story that we're privileged to draw insights from.
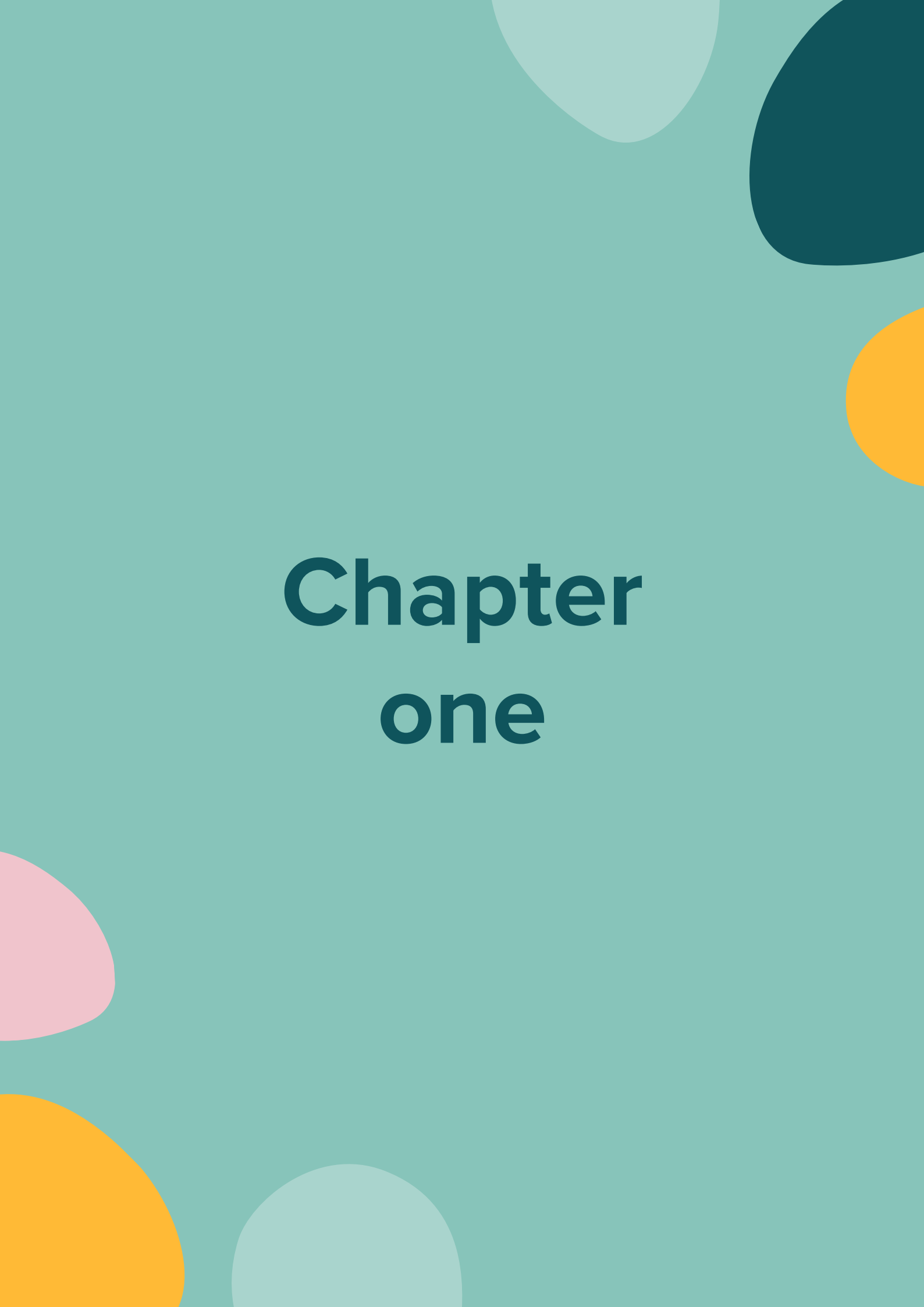
We decided to put our heads together and have compiled our expert learnings and packaged them into this ultimate guide to help you to grow and engage your community.

We've written this guide with the time-poor in mind. You're spinning a million different plates - we get it.

Our goal is to help you to grow and engage your community without weighing you down with an overload of information.

If you're looking for actionable takeaways from community experts who have walked the path and grown hundreds of thriving and highly engaged communities - you're in the right place..

Let's get started.

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Chapter one

Where to start with community engagement.

When people first think of community engagement they may assume it's as simple as posting memes, the occasional update or sharing inspirational quotes - getting a couple of interactions in the forms of likes or shares and that by some miracle - the sales will roll in.

The truth is, community engagement is much trickier than that. It's about knowing who is at the heart of your community, understanding what makes your people tick and learning how to speak to them in their language.

Building a meaningful connection with your online community doesn't happen by accident. It takes thought, planning and time - it's the difference between talking at and talking with someone.

When we feel seen, heard and understood - we're much more likely to engage with others who 'get us'. So how do you go about achieving that with your own community?

For the starters, it isn't an overnight process. It takes time. So, now you may be wondering, why bother? What's the pay off for investing your efforts into growing and engaging your online?

Here's just a few of the incredible benefits:

- Drive more leads
- Build meaningful relationships
- Create a movement
- Increase trust
- Strengthen brand loyalty
- Save money from ads or other costly marketing methods

If you want to take your community engagement to the next level - in the following pages, we'll unveil some of our best kept secrets.

Types of communities.

Before getting into the nitty gritty of engaging your audience, it's important to first get a clear understanding of the type of community you either have or are thinking about developing.

Each community type serves a specific purpose and having clarity on what categories you fall into will help you to define exactly what types of content will be of value to your audience.

What categories does your community fall into?

Interest Community.

Bringing people together who share the same passions, geographic location etc

Monetization Community.

Creating a level of financial return.

Brand Community.

Helps foster relationships with current and prospect clients.
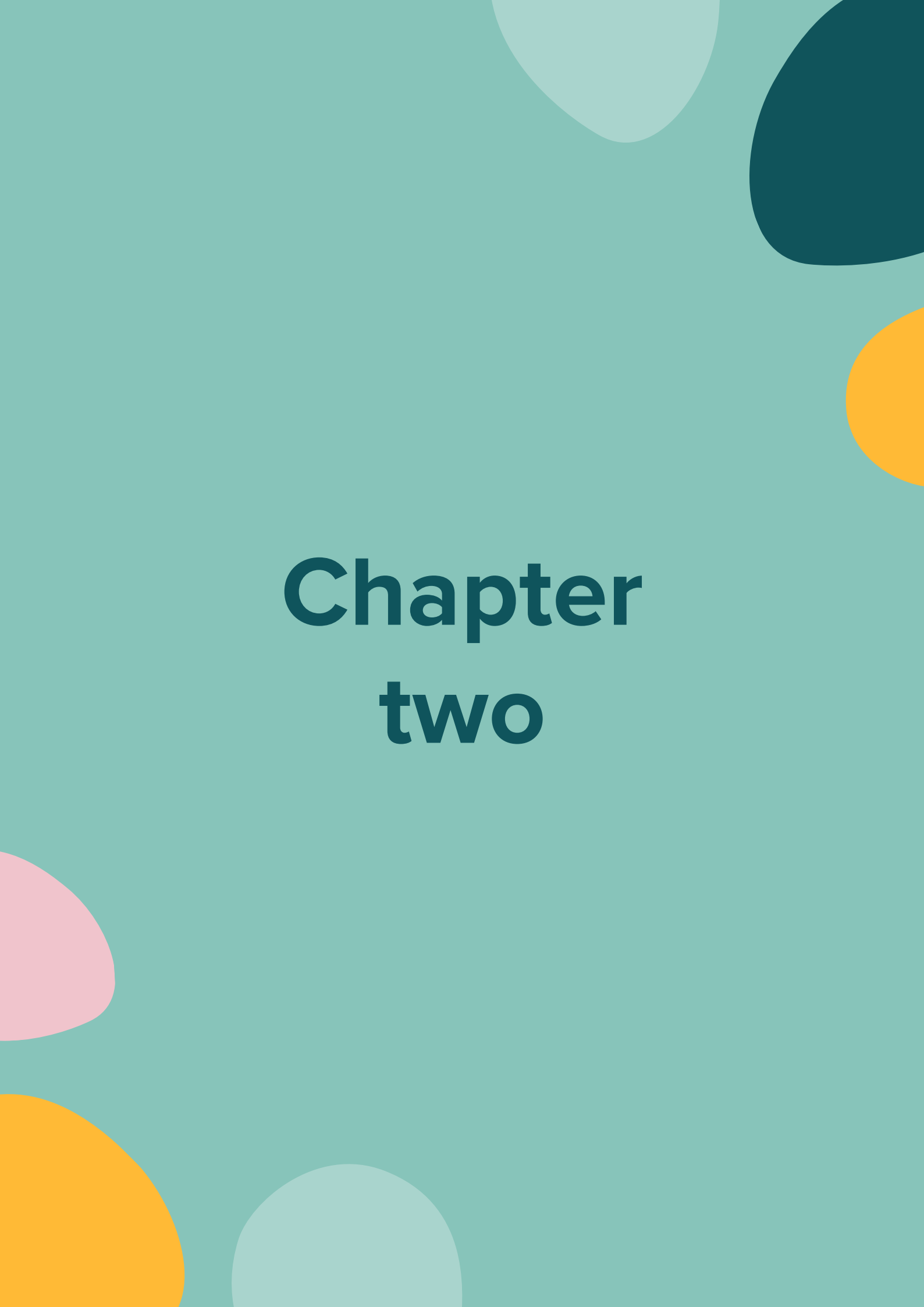
Learning Community.

For sharing knowledge and resources.

Insights Community.

Using qualitative and quantitative data to inform business decisions

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Chapter two

The 5 stages of your community's user journey.

Once you've defined the type of community you have, you can move to the next phase of focusing on the user journey to guide your members through.

Arming yourself with a clear understanding of what stage of the user journey your audience is at, will ensure that you're providing your community with the most relevant information at every step.

1. Inception.

This is the initial phase of community building. It's when founders and early adopters come together to start building a community.

The goal during this phase is to focus on inviting and on boarding members. Sparking conversations. Forging personal relationships and sharing any valuable knowledge or resources that members would find helpful..

2. Establishment.

Once the foundations are in place. The second phase of the journey is to focus on stepping up the engagement with your top enthusiasts.

This can involve recruiting ambassadors or moderators to keep posting content, engaging in conversations with your audience, creating weekly themes of content, solidifying your community and continuing to share more valuable resources..

3 - 4. Maturity and Saturation.

During these phases, the majority of your community will start to increase its momentum.

At this phase the goal should be to optimise your existing social strategy and engagement.

It's a good time to welcome feedback to improve the community experience. Consider hosting offline events such as Meetups and to start thinking of ways you can start monetizing your community.

5. Stable.

This is the ultimate phase of your community's growth. You've done the legwork and your community is evolving. You've most likely spotted some opportunities on how you can grow it even further.

At this phase, you're likely to set up sub-groups - for example if you're a fitness coach, maybe you'll have a subgroup for fitness coaching for 'new mums'. You'll also be considering what types of training and resources will be valuable for these sub-groups.

You'll be maintaining conversations with each of your groups and finding multiple ways to monetize your audience.

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How to engage users at each stage of the journey.

Now that we've talked about the different stages of your community user journey, you may be wondering what content will be most effective during each phase.

The honest answer is, there isn't a one-size fits all approach. The content that will drive the most engagement - will be the content that speaks to your audience the most.

It's vital to take a step back and really think about the answers to the questions that we've listed in our 7 P framework below.

The 7 P framework model is designed to help you have absolute clarity on the fundamentals of your community and to help you avoid rushing off to Canva and creating meaningless content that won't land with your audience.

People - who are your members?

E.g. New mums who live in the U.K, and who have recently given birth..

Purpose - why does this community exist?

E.g. To share tips on motherhood and to create a support group for women to share their journey.

Place - where do your members gather?

E.g. On online forums like Mumsnet, baby groups and baby classes.

Participation - what do members do?

E.g. Post and reply to content in the community, share tips and reviews of the best baby products, attend monthly virtual coffee chats, and bring others into the community.

Policy - what are the values, guidelines, and rules?

E.g. No bullying or discrimination, no selling, constant self-promotion or spamming.

Promotion - how is the community discovered?

E.g. Through other forums, word-of-mouth, networking at baby related events, paid search, local flyers.

Performance - how is success measured?

E.g. # of referrals, sign-ups, RSVP rate to events, post and reply frequency.

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Top ways to drive more members to your community.

If you want some quick fire ways to drive more members to your community, we've listed some hacks below:

1. Redirect from social media.

If you already have a substantial following on social media, now's the time to reach out to your followers and shout about your new community. If they value your offering, they'll happily follow you to wherever you've decided to host your community.

2. Partner with influencers.

If you already have influencers in your customer base, ask them to help you promote your new community. If not, consider reaching out to high-profile influencers in your industry to agree on a mutually beneficial arrangement.

3. Email announcements.

Email marketing might be old school, but it's still an easy way to get the word out. If you've already built up a database of email addresses, sending an announcement is a great way to encourage them to check out your new community.

4. Community landing page.

Every community needs a landing page. Your landing page should keep all the important stuff above the fold so that people don't have to scroll down to find it.

The main benefit of joining and participating in your community should be the first thing visitors notice. You can share the link to the landing page on your existing social posts, in relevant online spaces and on any paid ad campaigns you may be running.

5. Encourage refferals.

Many people are happy to dish out small favours, which is why you should ask your community members to spread the word.

You can even offer them a small incentive for doing so, whether it's a discount on your service or something as simple as a shout out in your community. Word spreads fast and referrals often turn out to be the biggest source of new members..

6. Keep it public.

This one should be obvious, but a lot of owned brand communities are entirely closed, open only to invitees.

For certain highly exclusive brands and insider communities, that might be a good thing. In most cases, however, you'll want to keep at least a portion of your community open to the public if only for the sake of increasing search visibility.

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Content ideas to drive engagement.

Now that you've asked yourself the vital questions, you may be wondering what content pieces will be of most relevance at each stage of the user journey.

We've listed some ideas below:

Inception.

- A welcome video
- Ice breaker question posts
- Tagging new members to welcome them

Establishment.

- Weekly themed posts e.g Weekly wins, or favourite product of the week
- Livestreams on trending topics of discussion
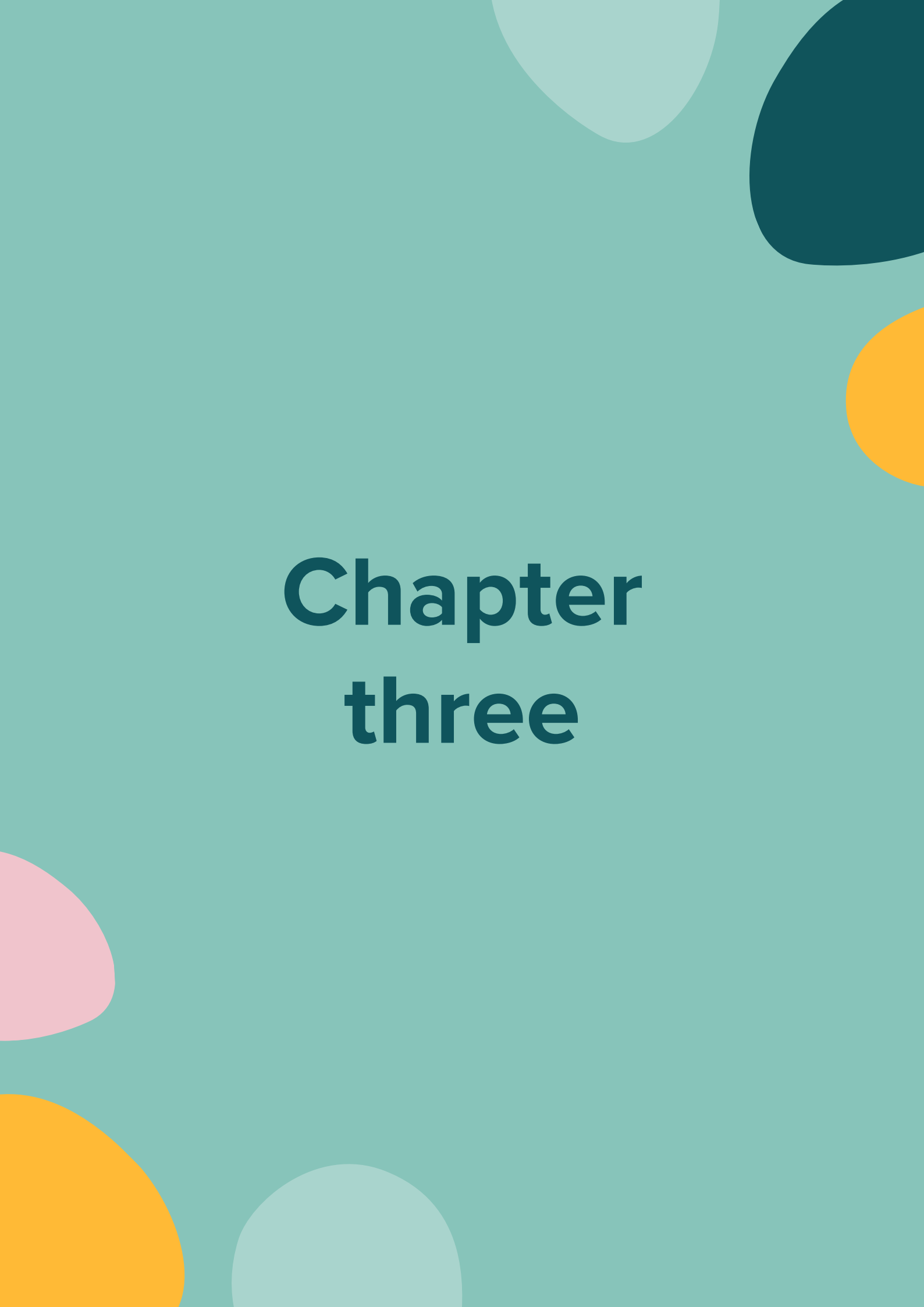- Virtual coffee hangouts

Maturity & Saturation.

- Polls to learn more about what your audience wants or would be willing to pay for
- Helpful resources such as PDF's, blog posts or FAQ videos
- Offline in-person meetups or events

Stable.

- Sub-groups with niche content e.g fitness coach training new mums
- Tailored resources, tips or downloadables
- Livestreams which are monetized
- Q&A mentoring sessions

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Chapter three

How to engage with your community in the right way.

Once you have clarity around your members, you may be wondering whether there are any guidelines on effectively engaging with your community.

We've listed some best practises below:

1. Base your voice on the areas you have authority to speak about.

Knowing exactly who you are and what you want to achieve is essential in knowing how to speak to your community.

What do you have expert knowledge on? How can you provide value to your readers? Why do people from your community seek you or your brand out specifically?

Having this knowledge can help you figure out how to speak to your community. Learn who your audience is and why they have an interest in you.

2. Establish your brand and focus on producing on-brand content.

Knowing your expertise and why members of your digital community trust your unique talents is essential for staying on message.

If you keep this knowledge at the forefront of your mind when producing content for your community it will be much easier for them to be crystal clear on who you are, what you stand for and how you can help them.

It will also encourage your members to buy into your bigger mission and feel more involved in it.

3. Understand your audience and find topics that matter to them.

Creating content that your audience cares about and which is relevant to their specific pain points will help you to ensure that you're always providing relevant and meaningful information.

Are they in your community purely to connect with likeminded people or do they want to achieve a specific weight loss goal? Do they prefer written content or videos?

Getting crystal clear on these factors will help you to tailor your community around their needs and goals. Always ask yourself what's important to them right now and how you can speak to them about what really matters to them..

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How to create posts that drive engagement.

When it comes to creating posts in your community, you may be wondering what the secret hacks are to creating posts that drive engagement.

One of the perks of having your own private community platform is that you won't have to be fighting for attention on a cluttered Newsfeed or trying to hack algorithms like you would on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter - this gives you a huge advantage to driving a lot more engagement.

We've listed some best practises for show stopping posts below:

Have a clear goal.

Before crafting a post, it's a good idea to have a clear objective of what you want people to do when they see it.

Do you want to drive people to upgrade to a monetized offering? Do you want to run a poll to see what type of content your audience prefers? Do you want to spark a debate?

Having a clear objective will help you to set the right tone and put the right call-to-action in your post such as 'tell us what you think' or 'click this button to upgrade'.

Set the stage to drive engagement.

If you want to drive powerful conversations in your community, set the stage by posting questions that your community wants to actually engage in.

We've listed some examples below:

Asking a question. It can be relevant to your product, service or their lifestyle (such as weekly or bi-weekly coaching calls? black/gold?)

Fill-in-the-blank statements. Posting a statement asking for a specific response (such as, "The one thing I can't live without as a new mum is _____.")

Photo caption. Posting a photo (or video) and asking for a funny (or relevant) caption is a great way to get user engagement. (#captionthis #photocaption)

Avoid constant self-promotion.

Ultimately your community is for your people so it's important to avoid the trap of using your community as a space to bombard your audience with self-promotional posts.

There should be a healthy balance of 30% promotion and 70% value-added content (relevant information that your audience finds helpful).

The main goal is to keep your content real, relevant and as an authentic representation of your bigger mission.

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How to stay consistent with your content.

A lot of people underestimate the power of consistency, but showing up for your community on a consistent basis has a big payoff.

Keep yourself ahead of the game by pre-planning what you want to post in your community.

Without a solid content plan in place, your community is unlikely to succeed due to lack of planning and inconsistency.

The trick is to keep things fresh while also providing a sense of familiarity.

Aim.

Think about what you're hoping to gain from your content, the vibe you're going for and the perception you want people to have when seeing your content.

Example: "To create engaging, fresh and insightful content to help retain current customers, to inspire and motivate prospects, to create the ultimate customer experience and to be thought leaders in our professional space."

Style and tone (copy and visuals).

Are you trying to educate your members, or talk about serious events or is the space filled with fun and laughter. Consider how that will impact the way you write and the visuals that you share.

Example: "Simple, uncomplicated copy. Short, punchy phrases that are non exclusive. Minimal hashtags, kept as relevant as possible. Always consider what value it adds to your target market."

Frequency and when to post.

You want to hit the times when you know your members are likely to be checking their phones; is that first thing in the morning or just before bed? Or do you need to think about touching multiple time zones?

Also consider what days work best, especially if you have an event you're trying to promote

Types of content.

There are so many types of content to post. What will work best for you and your community to create that ultimate engagement?

As time ticks on, you'll start to get a better understanding of your audiences preferred engagement styles. Maybe you'll discover they prefer videos to blog posts, or polls to ice breaker questions.

The key is to stay consistent - even during the moments when you feel like you're hearing crickets - it always pays off .

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Chapter four

Measuring engagement.

Engagement is what keeps your community alive. Without engagement, there'd be nothing to keep your audience coming back to your community.

If your community is a fun, engaging and exciting place to be, your members are much more likely to keep coming back. We've listed the top metrics to measure to ensure you're adding the best value below:

Measure retention.

Retention measures the percentage of your community that comes back after subscribing or visiting for the first time. For example, let's say that 10 people subscribe to join your community on Monday. Of those 10 people, 7 come back on Thursday. This would give you a 70% rate of retention over a three-day period.

Measure churn.

Churn measures the number of people who stop coming back to your community, or drop off. So, let's use the same example we used for retention. 10 people subscribe to join your community on Monday. Of those 10 people, 7 come back on Thursday. This gives you a churn of 30%. So this means that 30% of your community has stopped engaging with you and your community. Churn is also commonly referred to as "drop-off"..

Measure daily, weekly or monthly active users (DAUs, WAUs & MAUs).

The number of unique visitors who visit your community space on a specific day, week or month. These metrics instantly give you a snapshot of the number of people who have interacted with your service, product or visited your community space within the time-period that makes the most sense for your community. This helps you to get insights into whether usage of your community is on the up and if not, to think of ways to increase usage.

Measure average session length.

The average amount of time a member spends in your community space in a single session. The logic here is simple - the more engaged your members are, and the more they enjoy interacting within your community, the more time they'll spend in your community space. A short session length may suggest that your members aren't getting enough value out of your community which will help you to think of ways to keep them there longer.

When it comes to building a successful, thriving community, it really is all about quality and depth of engagement. Not just the number of followers you have or the overall size of the community.

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Final Words.

So, there we have it folks. We've given you a snapshot of the top things to think about to grow and engage your community. If you apply even 60% of the above, you'll start to notice a huge uplift in your engagement.

Over the past decade, many people have opted to launch their community on a Facebook Group. While Facebook Groups may be great for small groups of friends - they are becoming really challenging for creators, influencers or businesses to drive engagement.

Dying reach on social platforms is becoming a major frustration for change makers who simply want to get their message out and help as many people as possible. Why should you have to pay for ads to do that!? We've also heard countless people complain about how difficult it is to upload content or for members to find content.

Another challenge we've heard creators complain about is the lack of real privacy and their members being poached by competitors who have communities in the same niche. Luckily, times have changed and Facebook is no longer the only community platform option that's available. There are now a whole range of community platforms from you to choose from.

Here at Disciple, we are really proud to provide you with a space to keep your brand front and center, somewhere that you don't need to worry about privacy scandals, a lack of reach or engagement and dodgy algorithms. Another really cool feature is that all content can be stored in private folders making it really easy to share valuable information.

Our Livestreaming feature is better than Zoom and Facebook combined and the best part is that you can monetise your content with multiple monetisation options - all under your own brand across mobile and web.

If you're serious about creating a long-lasting and highly engaged community there's never been a better time to look at building your online community on your own platform - a platform that does way more than a Facebook Group or Slack could ever achieve.

Want to sky rocket your engagement ASAP?

Book a demo

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