Don't make a false start: 4 questions a startup should answer before building a community

Getting them right can help your startup seize the opportunity to avoid common mistakes. Community building has recently become one of the most trending topics in the startup world, but the idea of it is not new.

Temps de lecture : minute

5 March 2022

An increasing number of entrepreneurs and startup executives get inspired by multiple stories about the purported benefits of having it as part of a business strategy, including its proclaimed potential to accelerate organic growth, strengthen a company's resilience to outside events, and deepen meaningful relationships with customers.

As a result, they pursue community building by default, focusing on designing a seamless member experience and seeking opportunities to boost engagement levels in an attempt to get a competitive edge over other offerings in the market. But they often overlook an important consideration: does their startup *really* need a community?

When crafting a community, many startups tend to prioritize the "doing" parts of building it — the spotlight is taken by the part of the process where most activities occur and where its members engage with each other and the startup's representatives.

Quite a few companies, however, fail to give proper attention to what

happens either before launching a community or after scaling it over time: they assume that having it by itself will be enough to unlock the full potential. This confusion may be damaging, priming companies for various pitfalls.

To make the right decision, forward-looking founders and startup leaders should reflect on the following set of four questions.

What role will a community play in your strategy?

Figure out why you want to launch the community in the first place. Conduct deep brainstorming sessions with your team members, talk to individuals from your target audience and try to get a better grasp on their perceptions and opinions. This process will result in the discovery of valuable insights, leading you toward a better understanding of the reasons and an approach to grow a loyal member base.

One of the biggest mistakes that many startups make is enthusiastically rushing to create a community, even though they do not need one. Without clarity on the actual place of it in their development strategy, companies can be arbitrarily affected by biased opinions on why they are building it. Having a community may prove successful for some companies, but not for others.

For example, one direct-to-consumer startup declared a community an essential element of its growth roadmap and put tremendous efforts into bringing it into existence. The final results were met with disappointment and frustration.

While there were a few reasons for underperformance and failed expectations, the major one was making a baseless assumption of the need in the community that in turn led to following the wrong path

covered with inefficiencies and downfalls.

To prevent falling into the trap of this enticing assumption and wasting a lot of resources, startups need to get a holistic picture of their unique situation and decide according to circumstances.

Who comprises your target audience?

A good understanding of your target audience is essential for not just identifying the directions for forming a thriving circle of people but also for acquiring common knowledge.

At times startups do not comprehend the relevance of their offerings to the potential community members. They begin to organize annoying activities and present information that does not meet the expectations of the target audience. In consequence, dissatisfaction can gain a foothold among people, resulting in members holding it against the community and leaving.

This is why cultivating closeness to the participants and listening to them is important for increasing the potential likelihood of people opting in and fostering an authentic community.

What value can people get if they join your community?

People care about their time and do not stay in the community for too long if they do not get something in return. As just discussed, you need to deliver offerings that add value to both newcomers and existing members.

Too often many startups make a misstep when they invite people to a so-called community without creating a genuine value exchange. No doubt,

setting up a place to socialise — a group on Slack or a reserved room in a restaurant — is understandably important. Still, it is not sufficient to unite a group of people.

Inventing a way to provide a smooth experience and fruitful interactions inside a community is also vital. Not to cover a lot of ground here, but artificially manufactured attempts to push a person into participating in a trivial contest or a purposeless meetup do not deliver in the durable growth trajectory.

True communities can help fulfill their members' potential and bring lasting positive impact.

Are you ready to commit to long-lasting relationships with your community members?

With today's technological advancements and a plethora of available communication solutions, it is not challenging to lapse into building a community. What truly matters is whether you not only implement short-term tactics but also follow consistent community management, which takes time, dedication, and patience.

Amid all the uncertainty in the early days, this approach requires founders to embrace a broad view of their startup's community development strategy and proactively seek ways to provide a continuous member experience that goes beyond one-off endeavours such as contests and meetups.

Companies can get discouraging results if they actively initiate activities for members in the very beginning but stop to properly support them afterwards. As a result, such a community becomes unsupervised, lacking a clear direction to move forward. In the end, it gradually goes into

decline.

Of course, there are other questions startups should explore when deciding whether they should build a community, but those mentioned above are on the first page of the success-achieving playbook. Getting the answers earlier will set companies on the right track, saving time and efforts.

Svetlana Stotskaya is a consultant with deep expertise in strategic marketing and brand management.

Article by Svetlana Stotskaya