# Building Internal Developer Communities

#YOW20

**Why community matters and how grow sustainable communities**

By Mark Birch @ AWS

# A Launch to Nowhere…

**"The interface failures, however, exposed an inherent problem. Independent small groups were very effective at exploratory work, but trouble erupted when the projects of the disparate teams had to be integrated into the vehicle going into orbit."**

*- from the book Team of Teams*

# ...Catastrophic Consequences

# What we've got here is a failure to communicate.
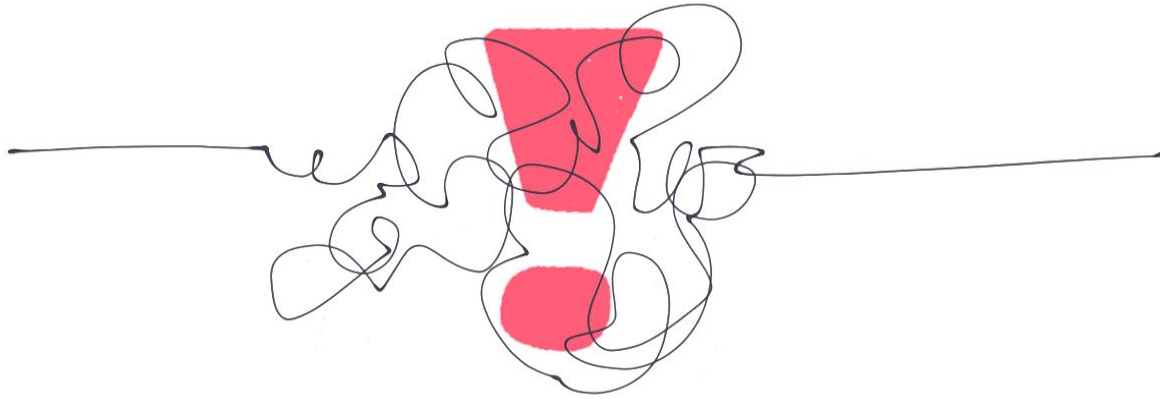
# We Communicate Because...

- Avoid catastrophe
- Solve problems
- Learn faster
- Share ideas
- **Invent the future**

# Not Programmed to be Alone

# We Need Community

# Community Is...

# A group of people with common interests & goals that care about each

# Core Aspects of Community...

- Shared identity
- Cultural norms
- Rules of engagement
- Psychological safety

# The External Developer Community

- Open Source in 96% of All Software
- GitHub 190+ Million Repositories
- Stack Overflow 20+ Million Questions

# Developers Value Community

- Three modes of flow; Creation, Ideation mode, Problem Solving

- Ideation & problem solving are collaborative

# But Internal Community is Hard

# Ingredients of Community

# Getting to the right size of community

# Community is Market

**Too Noisy and Crowded and Unfocused**

**Too Quiet and Empty and No Value**

# Trust is the Currency



**Community only works when everyone trusts each other**

# Defining Success the Right Way

*"Having everyone or even a majority contribute is not the success criteria. Success is in growth of value created within the community."*
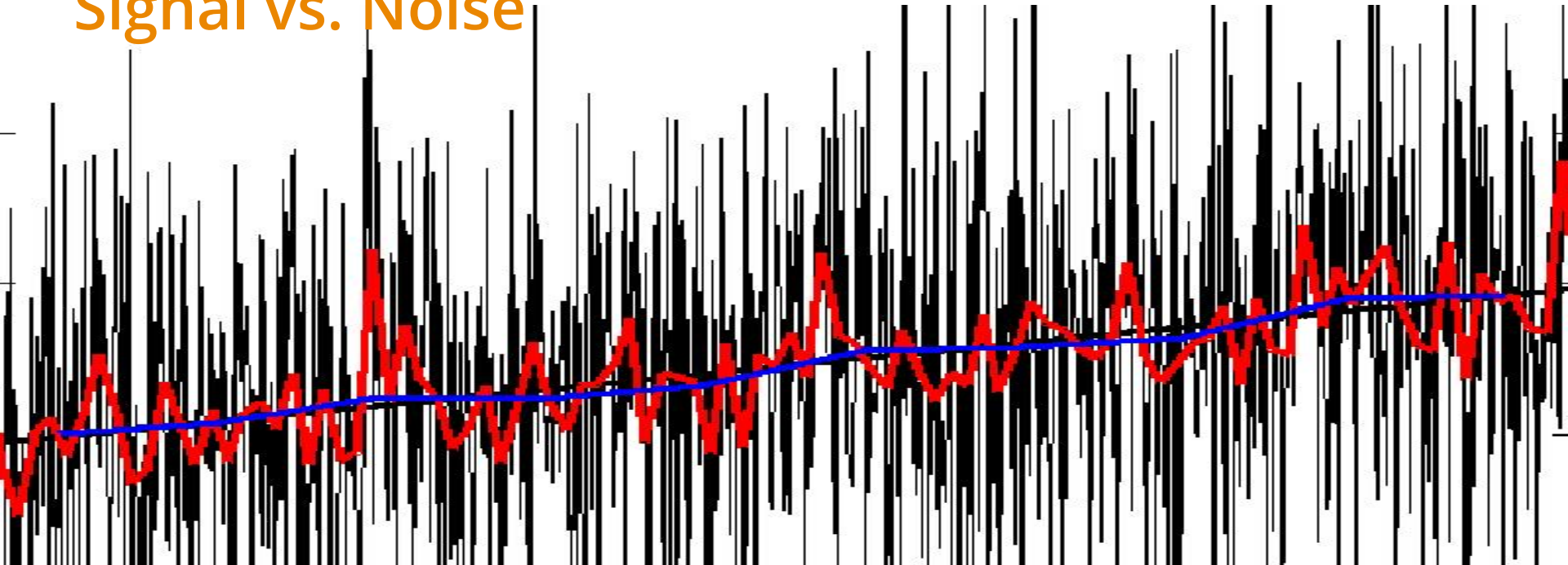
# Starts With True Fans

# The Rule of 90–9–1

- Participation inequality is the difference between levels of participation of users in a community

- Online communities observe a user ratio of 90-9-1

  - 1% are highly engaged

  - 9% are moderately engaged

  - 90% are non-engaged lurkers

# Signal vs. Noise

**Too much content creates distraction, focus on quality over quantity**

# Internal Community Ratio

**For internal communities, observed participation ranges \***

## 5-10%  30-40%  50-65%

Highly engaged     Moderately engaged     Non-engaged Lurkers

*Based on data from implementations of community-oriented software

# Launching Community

# Eight Steps to Launch

- Define the why
- Create value upfront
- Make it easier to contribute
- Rally your internal fans
- Promote quality contributions
- Provide right incentives
- Integrate into everyday work
- Encourage leadership involvement

# Define the Why

Convey the "What's In It For Me" (WIIFM) to potential members

# Create Value Upfront



**"Seed" the community at the start with great contents / events**

# Make It Easier To Contribute

**Allow members to get involved at the level they feel comfortable**

# Rally Your Internal Fans



**Help your true fans & believers to evangelize the community**

# Promote Quality Contributions

**Show your lurkers & moderate users what great content looks like**

# Provide Right Incentives

**Instead of money, offer swag, recognition, or non-monetary rewards**

# Integrate Into Everyday Work

**Build community as an integral part of normal, everyday work**

# Encourage Leadership Involvement



**Invite leaders / executives to actively participate to encourage others**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Define the why** | Convey the "What's In It For Me" (WIIFM) to potential members |
| **Create value upfront** | "Seed" the community at the start with great contents / events |
| **Make it easier to contribute** | Allow members to get involved at the level they feel comfortable |
| **Rally your internal fans** | Help your true fans & believers to evangelize the community |
| **Promote quality contributions** | Through newsletters, chat, lunch & learns, show your lurkers what great content looks like |
| **Provide right incentives** | Recognition is the best reward, can also offer swag, tickets to tech events, or non-monetary rewards |
| **Integrate into daily work** | Build community as an integral part of normal, everyday work |
| **Involve leadership** | Invite leaders / executives to actively participate to encourage others |

# Scaling Community

# Lesson from Collaboration Platforms
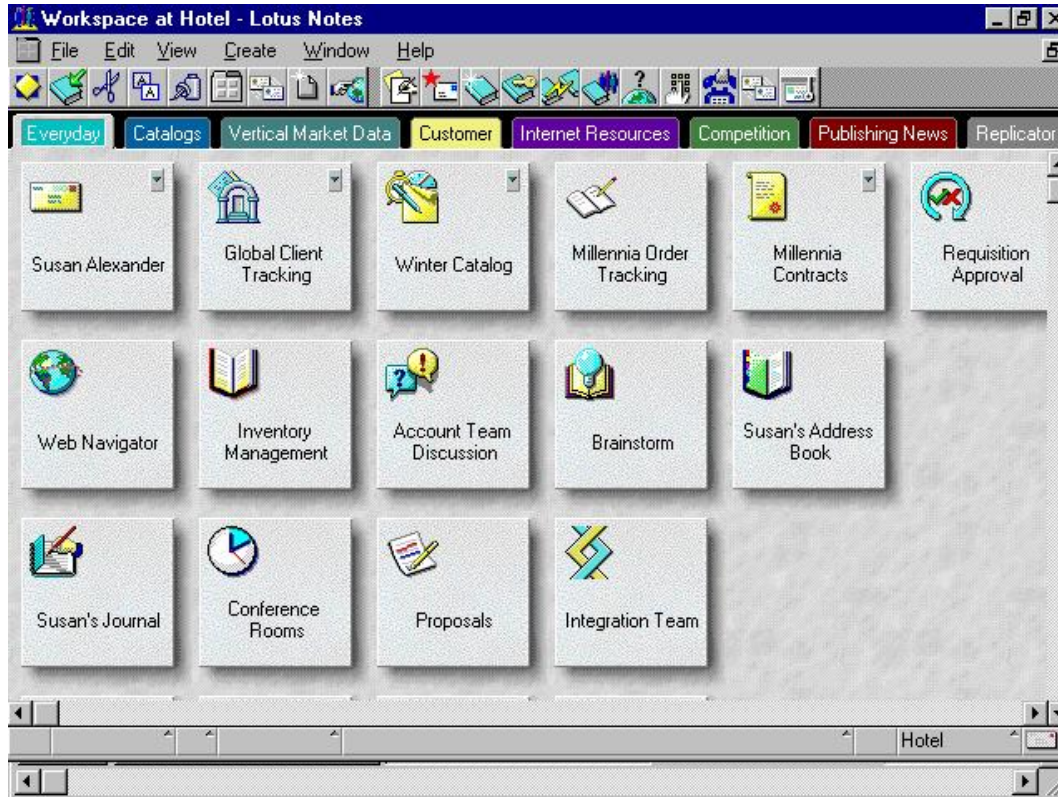
# How Facebook Did It

Viral growth was a series of deliberate steps to add similar groups



FACEBOOK MONTHLY ACTIVE USERS
JUNE 2017
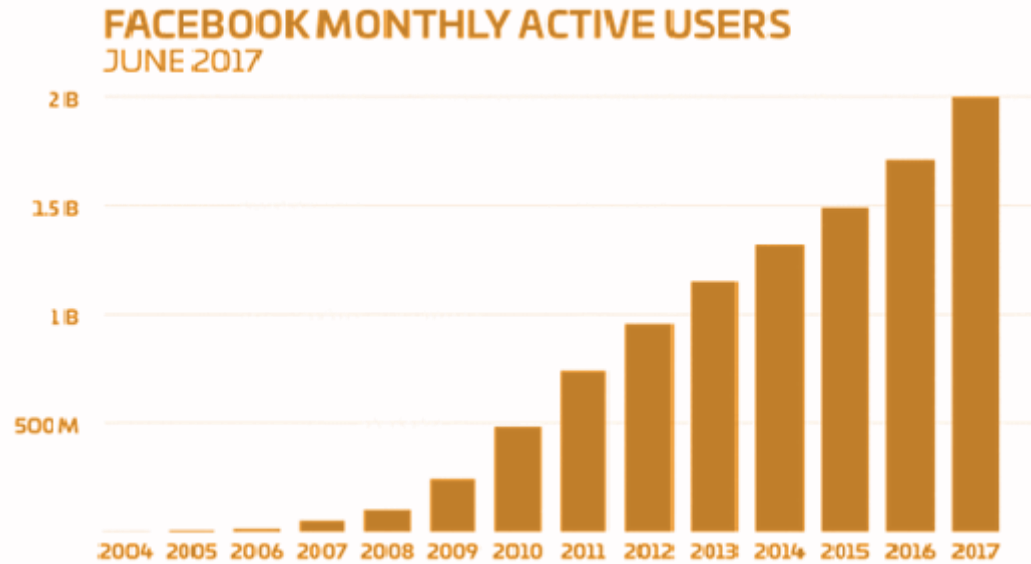
# Metcalfe's Law

The value of a network grows by the square of the size of the network
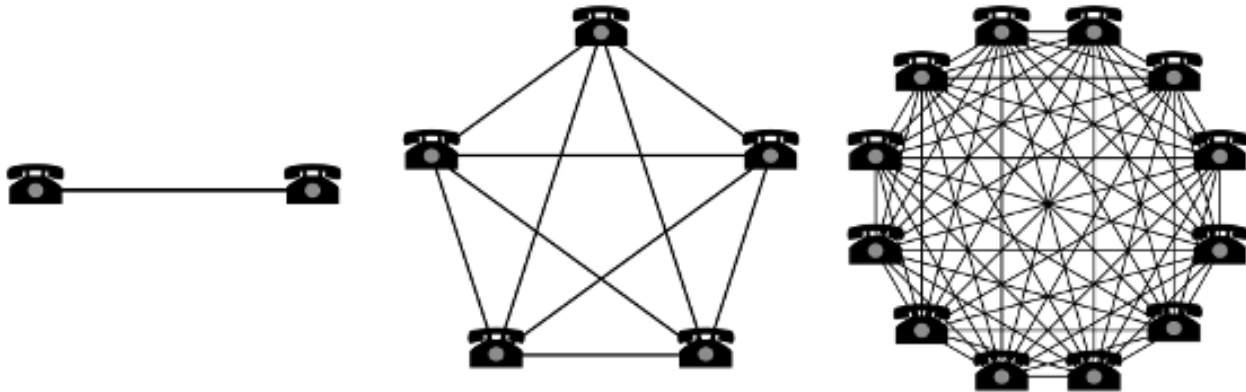
# The 50–500–5000 Principle

- The strongest and healthiest communities

    ○ Avoid the big bang, top-down approach

    ○ Start in a deliberate manner

    ○ Build organically

- Each growth step a magnitude larger than last

# Launch Phase – "50 Stage"

- Forming the community norms

    ○ Only invite most supportive fans

    ○ Fans seed the community

    ○ Set community culture

- Important to keep group small at first

# Expansion Phase – "500 Stage"

- Preparing to scale community

    - Invite to more groups beyond fans

    - Connect groups with close affinity

    - Seeding generates value for newcomers

- Limit access to test, learn, iterate & monitor

# Scale Phase – "5000 Stage"

- Community reaches tipping point

  - Achieves Metcalfe's Law scale

  - Organic growth takes hold

  - Significant value creation


- Large enough to sustain long-term existence

The Community People

# Secret Sauce of Communities

- All communities require a mix of participants

    - Superusers that are very committed & contribute often

    - Moderate users that contribute on occasion

    - Lurkers that simply consume content

    - Managers that monitor community norms

- Community Managers ensure community health, do not force "community" to happen

# Supporting Community Managers

- **Trust** – the currency of community

- **Support** – providing resources for their success

- **Agency** – empowered to make decisions

- **Accountability** – ownership of decisions

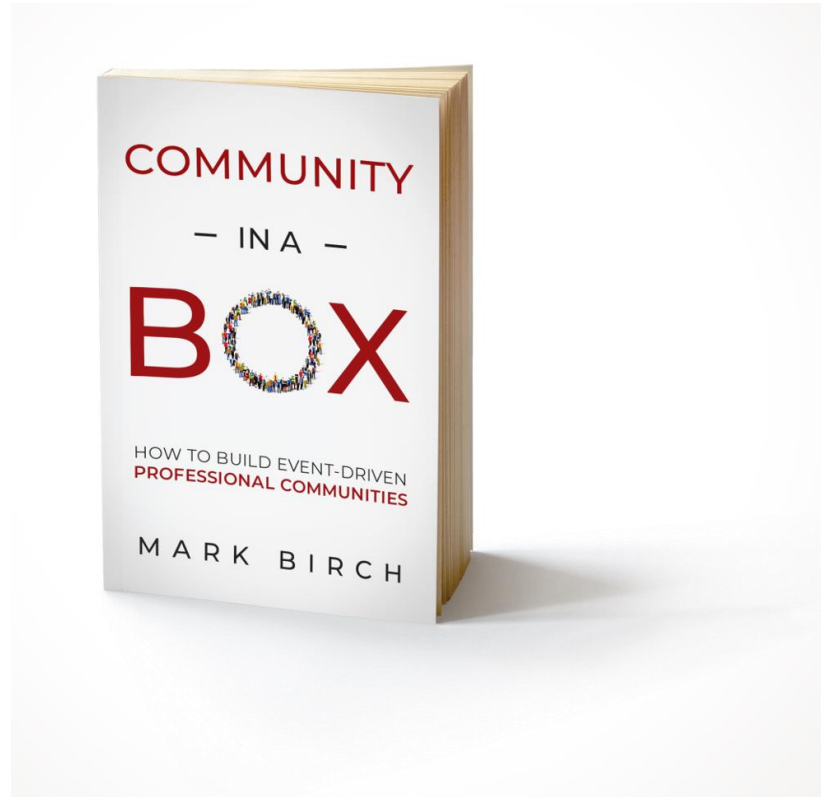- **Autonomy** – freedom to act on decisions

# Final Thoughts

# The Big Idea

**Community is the bedrock for innovation inside organizations.**

- The **learning first culture** needed for innovation depends on a **trusted community**

- Community is an **exchange of trust based on knowledge**, trust **speeds pace of innovation**

# Playbook for launching & scaling community



## Community-in-a-Box

Available in Paperback on Amazon and eBook on most online stores

Go to the following website
**books2read.com/community**

# THANKS!

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