

UN TETHERED²⁰²¹

THE COMMUNITY CONNECTION CHAPTER

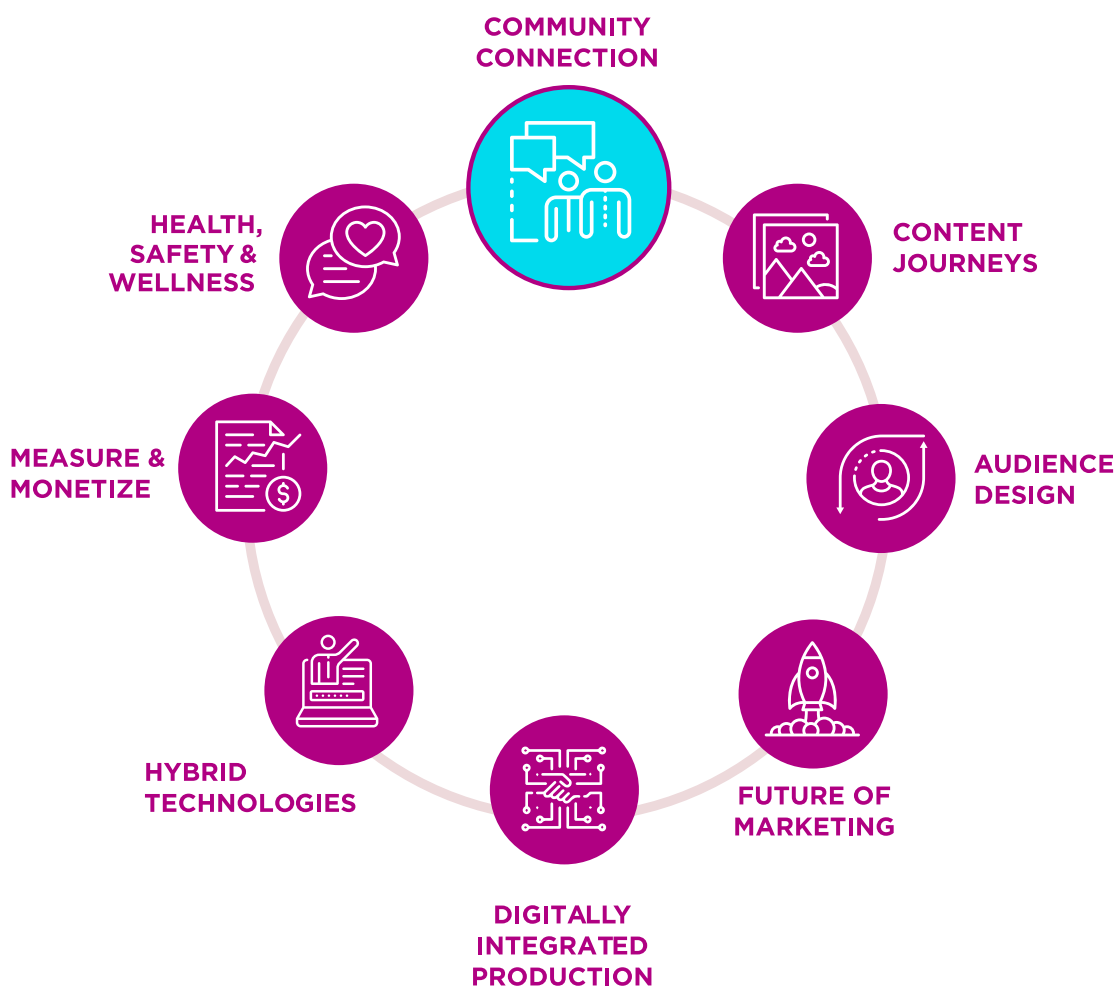


BIG IDEAS

In the events-management business, we're all about community. So folks in the Community Connections circle workshops had plenty to offer on how to build community, how to get people engaged, and how to keep relationships going long after the final session. We separated the wheat from the chaff and collected the best of them here for you.

We've sorted the content into two sections: mind-blown moments and tactical ideas. The mind-blown moments give you a new way to consider an existing problem. These are best read while in a reflective mood, perhaps after your morning meditation session or after reading another chapter of the Tao Te Ching.

The tactical ideas section offers activities you can try out at your next event. These are best consumed after your second cup of Joe while listening to Drake or some classic AC/DC.



MIND BLOWN MOMENTS

Think community. The event is more than one moment in time: It's part of a process of building community that can stay engaged for years to come. When you refocus your lens on community building, you extend the lifecycle of your event into a continuum of touchpoints. That's great news for the sales funnel!

Virtually connected. When you focus on building community, you realize that your attendees are connected with you—and not just during the event. With your new mindset, you find they're plugged in digitally before, during, and after. In a way, technology turns us all into virtual attendees. Even while attending an event in-person, we're still connected digitally in our hotel rooms, in hallways, at restaurants and watering holes—even (can you spare a square?) in the restroom.

People are more open to connecting virtually. You know how it goes at in-person events: People like to hang with their own peeps. That sometimes makes it harder to network for the 25 to 40 percent of the population who are introverts. But virtual connection removes a lot of those barriers. It helps you meet new people without the awkward social dances and back-in-middle-school cliques. We've also found that there's less small talk. People dive right into the heart of the matter.



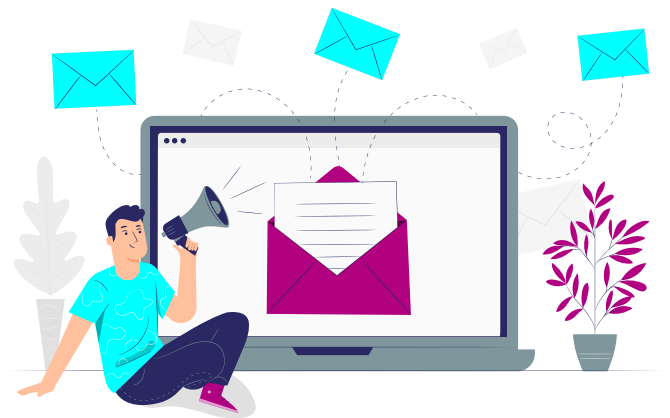
The world is full of inspiration. Just look at the Super Bowl. It's a great model for community connection at events. Think about how fans gather at sports taverns to cheer for their team. Likewise, your sponsors and influencers can act like the local pub (sans the IPAs and margaritas), gathering people with common interests in micro events. And, by creating some kind of competition, it's amazing how people will tune in.

Something happened on the way to the event. The pandemic forced us into virtual mode. It also changed events forever by showing the power of massive lead gen and associated data. For many, the default is now the virtual experience, not the in-person event. We'll likely never return to the old way of doing things.

Communities design the event

experience. Now that events have blown up, all the norms are out the window. So don't guess what people want. Ask. Then use their input to design your events.

Personalization creates community. Sure, it's great to have hundreds of hours and web pages full of content. But people only want to consume what interests them. So, during registration, allow folks to select their interests. Then set up content journeys mapped to different personas. Like magic, attendees will meet like-minded people in their sessions and connect. Take advantage of these pop-up communities with special-access sessions or follow-up events.



Community is as valuable as content. Take a simu-live session. The chat box often provides as much helpful information as the presenter. Plus, it gives those sessions a level of energy and pizzazz that rivals even the best of live sessions. So look for ways to bring your community to your content.



TACTICS TO TEST

CHALLENGE 1: HOW CAN WE CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AT OUR EVENT?

There's a difference between attending and participating. The former tends to be passive, while the latter tends to be active. Being active means being engaged. And being engaged means you feel part of something bigger than yourself. You feel part of a community. And that's the gold of event management.

START EARLY

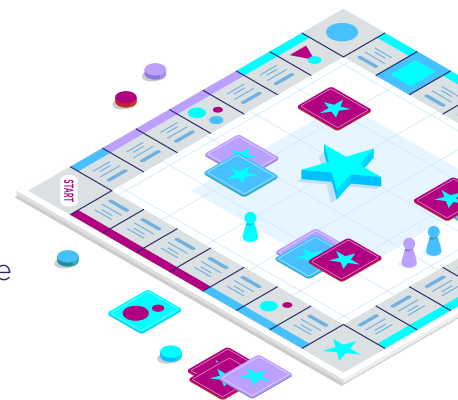
- A lot of excitement comes from anticipating what's going to happen at the event. Tap into this early enthusiasm. Create pre-event networking or meet-up opportunities for your community to connect. (In-person attendees really crave this extra time to connect.) This can include virtual networking sessions through apps like twine, online collaboration games, group discussions with an influencer, and local wine-and-dine experiences. Include sponsors, too—just make sure they know the rules of engagement (no hard-selling). Sponsors also can enhance the experience by bringing in cool games and entertainment that your budget can't handle.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

- All work and no play? Cindy Lauper reminded us that girls (and boys) just want to have fun. So get some games going, themed to your event. Divide your audience into teams, with influencers or sponsors acting as team leads. Use Easter egg-style hunts or other types of gamification. Create team leaderboards to promote engagement. You can even start before the event: Have people vote on a social activity or some other engaging experience.

LET THE INFLUENCERS INFLUENCE

- Influencers can create a buzz just by showing up. Attendees want to know where they're going and what they're saying. And guess what? Influencers love the attention. So give it to them. Publish your influencers' journeys. Let attendees know what sessions they'll join (both virtual and in-person). Try having a roving reporter interview them between sessions. Make it interactive. Field questions from event-goers. Have the reporter ask influencers for a response and then publish the Q&A.



CHALLENGE 2: HOW CAN WE KEEP THE COMMUNITY GOING AFTER THE EVENT?

Remember what we said above about events being just part of the process of community building? Okay, so what do you do long after the final session closes and the sponsors give away their last tchotchke? Here are some ways to build the momentum and keep it going.



BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

- Don't sweat the big events. Instead create a slew of micro events. Bring back a popular speaker to workshop their idea. Create a networking session for segments of your audience. Focus on consistent delivery of content and networking. Follow community-driven formats that allow participants to take charge.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

- If they can't come to the mountain, bring the mountain to them. Bring the event or sessions to the people that missed it live. You know the sizzling and relevant content that attendees just shouldn't miss, right? So make sure they see it. Send reminders with links to the targeted group. Don't be shy about reminding people—they're busy and may have missed your previous reminder. Just don't overdo it. Twice is nice, four's a bore.

SPEAKERS AND SPONSORS AND INFLUENCERS—OH MY!

- Take advantage of the key individuals who are invested in engaging with your audience. Sponsors, speakers, and influencers are part of your community, and they'd love to be more involved in it. They've got relevant content? Leverage it. They've got cool experiences and games? Share it. They've got sexy tech? Use it—and get more mileage from your budget. Dream up events and community forums with your speakers, sponsors, and influencers. Get them invested in your event, and their followers will be more likely to become your followers as well.

THE GREAT DEBATE

- Want to start a brainstorm? Develop a juicy question or challenge from your event and pose it to your audience on social media. With a single social post, you can stir up few weeks of interaction and involve tons of people. Plus, it positions you as a thought leader.

CHALLENGE 3: CHALLENGE 3: HOW DO WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE?

When it comes to formatting and programming events, vive la difference! What works for me doesn't necessarily work for you. While we share many like interests, we're all over the map in terms of our preferences for how we like to meet, engage, interact, and consume content. The key is to create inclusive experiences that meet the needs of a diverse audience.

AVOID THE THREE-RING CIRCUS

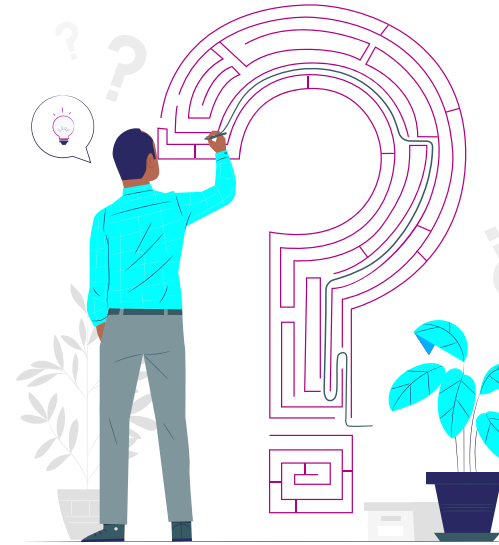
- Unless you plan on joining the circus soon, leave the juggling to the professional multi-taskers. If you try to do everything at the same time, a few items might crash to the floor—including yourself. To avoid flopping, make it easier by holding the digital and in-person experiences on different timelines. Then give your 100% to each audience.
- Budget tighter than that friend who does a disappearing act whenever it's their turn to pick up the tab? Try recording the in-person experience first. Then bring it to the virtual participants later.

YOU DO YOU

- Next time you're at a bar, watch how people interact. Some like to sit across from each other and make eye contact. Others like sitting next to each other and watching the human parade. Similarly, people like to engage with your content differently. Some prefer to listen on headphones while walking, some like sitting in person right across the table, some like to sit at their desktop but with their video disabled. You get the picture. So, provide a variety of experiences: clubhouse-inspired sessions, speed networking, small-group discussions, and so on.

YOU WANT MUSTARD ON THAT?

- There's a sure-fire way to give people content in the way they want: Ask them. Poll your community and audience in advance on how they prefer to engage with your event. Just make sure your planning team draws from a diverse set of opinions. People have different learning and engagement styles: Some are auditory, some visual. Some like plenary sessions; others like small breakout sessions. Once you gauge your audience's preferences, align your content and event to their wants and needs.



FACILITATORS AND PARTNERS

We want to give a huge thank you to everyone that participated and contributed in the Design-a-thon. In particular, we want to thank our incredible Facilitators. Not only did they share their ideas, but they also devoted their time to train and run these workshops



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Bárbara Rosa,

Bianca Ferrer, B&L Creative Group

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Kayla Gill, Dynamic Events, Inc.

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Kevin Sweeney, APPA

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Kristen Pumphrey, Pharmaceutical Care Management Assn

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Lauren Higbee, Laserfiche

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Liza Millan, MASTERPIECE

Lori Jenks, Jenks Events and Meetings Consulting Services

Luciane Klein, ebdi

Lucy Hicks, VEI

Matthew Cibellis, Cibellis Solutions

Megan Powers, Powers of Marketing

Melanie Walker, Consortium Health Plans

Melissa Campion, D2L

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Morgan Jennings, CUE, Inc.

Natallia Zarembo, Zarembo Consulting GmbH

Pamela Hemann, Association Management Services, Inc.

Paul Jones, Bridgio

Phil Graham, Hubb

Poliana Lopes, ebdi

(Enterprise Business Development Innovation)

Rachel Smith-O'Rourke, O'Rourke Media

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Rahul Sawant, Intuit Inc

Raquel Freitas, conecta

Rebecca Zent, Hubb

Robin Anne Ellis, UW Medicine Advancement

Robson Lisboa, Midiacode

Russell LoPinto, ON Services

Sandi Toungate, Revionics, an Aptos Company

Sang Hyun Kim, SAS Institute

Sarah Brush, Sage North America

Sarah Mills, Sarah Courtney Consulting

Sasha Lee, YWCA Minneapolis

Shaina Dorow, NAFSA:
Association of International Educators

Shannon Malliet, GPJ

Stephanie Donley, Aya Healthcare

Stephanie Wells, Workday

Suzanne Medlicott, CPA Alberta

Sydney Oehm, Contractor

Sylvia Gonner, CultureWiz

Tady Villatoro, Synopsys

Taylor McLoughlin, Twine.nyc

Ted Hacker, American Freedom Foundation

Tiffany Olson, Cadent medical communications

Toire Vince, National Association for Campus Activities

Tracy Hefti, Annenberg Presidential Conference Center

Tyler Skinner, Connected Communities LLC

Veroniqueca James, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

Victoria Petersen, E3 Planning

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LOVE THESE IDEAS?

Join us at the Fall UNTETHERED event for more ideas, inspiration, and innovation! Go to untethered.events to learn more.