MIGHTY
CAPITAL

Countable Podcast Series:

How to Build Engaged and Empowered Communities

Foreword by Countable CEO & Founder
Bart Myers

Just as author Priya Parker believes that "the way we gather matters" in person, I believe the way we gather online matters, too. Allow me to explain why.

As more of our lives are spent on the web, we gravitate towards social networks and media sites with hopes and expectations of connecting, getting inspired, taking action. But often, online gatherings fall short. The connections we make are fleeting. Transactional. Moments become memes. Texts fill in for conversations. Content ignites audiences and then dumps them back, IRL, many times feeling even more disconnected and powerless to make a difference.

I founded Countable out of a conviction that a different way is possible. Over the years, my team and I have developed a deep understanding of the dynamics of online communities. We know what charges these gatherings, what motivates them to act. But more than that – and this is something many attempted online communities have gotten very wrong – we understand what it takes to inspire the sustained trust of communities online. Part of that understanding might be thought of as the art of online gathering. But since we're a tech product company, there is obviously a lot of science involved, too.

This eBook offers a look behind the curtain, revealing both the art and science of online gathering. What is the significance of that knowledge? For the marketer, it means building brand loyalists and advocates. For businesses, it means retaining your employees and building team satisfaction. For impact organizations, it means mobilizing your most passionate believers in change.

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> **The way we gather matters. Why? Because of what can happen when people come together, exchange information, inspire one another, test out new ways of being together. And yet most of us spend very little time thinking about the actual ways in which we gather … We spend much of that time in uninspiring, underwhelming moments that fail to capture us, change us in any way, or connect us to one another.**
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> **Priya Parker**
> *The Art of Gathering*

In the conversations below, you will learn from four different engagement experts. These include Countable team members who have inspired online movements and moved the needle toward positive social impact. Also included are partners who have built digital clubhouses for passionate live communities and engineered the components of powerful online experiences. You will have the chance to consider issues of authenticity, the idea that communities are the future of tech, and why the next generation of online gathering will increasingly blur the line between digital and physical.

The way we gather online matters. Here's to better connections.

Bart Myers
CEO & Founder of Countable

01 Countable CMO on Building Community 3.0

This is episode one in the Countable Podcast Series. Here, Countable Founder and CEO Bart Myers speaks with Countable CMO Jory Des Jardins. Their conversation covers the transition from print to digital media, and from the beginning of the Internet up to web3. In particular, Bart and Jory discuss Internet communities, and what to expect in building Community 3.0. Topics include the end of the cookie and the return of authenticity in online communities. Vehicles for that authenticity include AR/VR, the metaverse, cryptocurrency, IoT, and more. Above all, here is an optimistic vision for the future of the Internet. Users will have more control over their data and their identities, and ultimately more agency.

On the end of cookies and the return of authentic communities

A main feature of the web 2.0 – aka the Internet as we now know it – has been the use of HTTP cookies. These are small pieces of data used to track user activity and customize experience, as well as to target advertising. The things you see online are very much influenced by this cookie data. In effect, your Internet community is largely created by third party marketers.

Users haven't been very happy about this. And following the GDPR's "cookie law" and Google's announcement that it will not support 3rd party cookies after 2023, things are about to change. Given that, how will things change for users? According to Bart Myers, there will be a return to the more authentic communities of message boards and Internet 1.0. Bart says, "Because of the end of the cookie, we're now going to see a return to branded communities, trusted communities

that are authentic, and have a connection with their audience. So what's old is new, again."

Jory elaborates, saying "I think now with cookies going away, marketers are asking themselves, *how do I have an authentic connection?* Again, how do I get not just **first party data**, but zero party data. For folks who don't know the difference, first party data is what we willingly give to a platform or a brand, because we want to take part in something. I provide my name, or my age, or where I live, because I want to have the product sent to me, or I want to participate on the platform.

"But **zero party data** is pure opt-in. Here's what lights me up. This is how I want to get content. This is the content I really am interested in. These are the things that I want to pursue my passions. This is what I'd be interested in hearing more about. Which is the Holy Grail for a brand that wants to have an authentic connection with an audience."

On building Community 3.0

More and more there is an idea that trust can be conveyed in web3. In previous incarnations of the Internet, it was difficult to know who somebody was online. In web3 communities, users will theoretically be able to control aspects of their identity that get shared, which can increase trust and enable verification. In brief, then, what is community 3.0?

Jory explains, "I think of community 3.0 as very aligned with web3. I think it's decentralized. Think about communities running the web itself. The web was always very centralized, and then became even more so with big tech. Platforms like Facebook, that had so much of your data, were almost too big to fail. So much of your data was tied up in one platform.

"And now web3 is really saying, Alright, our data is everywhere. But it's immutable. And it's totally transparent. But it's also secure. And it's still difficult for people to get their heads wrapped around. But knowing that my data is secure, and it's immutable. And yet anyone can access these transactions, not just one company, actually makes me trust the platform even more.

"So I think that community is going to be built on those principles. And I think it's going to be built on other platforms. So AR/VR/MR. All of these other media, where we're starting to engage, but there's still a lot of friction. When those frictions go away. We're going to apply rules of engagement to those as well. And it'll be just like swimming. You just dive right in and you know what to expect. And then we'll start to see communities that are cropping up more and more in the metaverse."

On future trends in online communities

Trends in future technology will undoubtedly impact the development of online communities. These trends include cryptocurrency, the metaverse, virtual reality, a fully connected Internet of

Things, and decentralized identity. Beyond that, what else will influence these conversations? Jory argues that major innovations will be centered around how users are able to control their data and their privacy.

She says, "We're seeing a lot of legislation around data and control of data. And more and more, I think that we're going to have more control over our data. We think we have control over our data because we can opt to give it to an entity or not. But then we can't participate if we don't, often. That's not really a choice. That is a false choice. So being able to control our data, and knowing exactly where it is once we have opted into providing it. So innovations around identity, and how you are portrayed online, and having a greater awareness of that.

"And technology that shows – we see this with Apple – I've opted in and out of these ads. I've opted here. I've opted out of this. That wasn't even a conversation that was being had two years ago. Now everyone is aware of where their data is. I think there will be more innovation there and how we are maintaining our identities online. Privacy, and more privacy technology."

02 Countable VP of Product on Engaging Authentic Communities at Scale

This is the second episode in the Countable Podcast Series. Here, Countable Founder and CEO Bart Myers talks with Countable VP of Product Emily Bell. The main theme is engaging authentic communities at scale. For Countable, one challenge is offering a B2B product that must satisfy clients as well as end users. Another complicating factor is decreasing trust in institutions generally, especially in the US. And because Countable works with clients globally, they need to consider various contexts and cultures. Identities are multidimensional, unique on an individual level. Considering these factors, what are best practices for scaling authentic connections?

On engaging audiences in an era of low trust

In the post-covid era, confidence in institutions appears to be at an all-time low. In this climate, how can brands engage audiences? For Countable, that involved looking at what consumers were most interested in, and helping brands tap into that.

Emily says, "There's a trend of people not trusting the government, and wanting to look to CEOs of companies to make those decisions. Or thinking that they can have the power to make decisions more quickly than the government might be able to. And so more and more CEOs of companies are making stances on social issues. So with that, we saw the rise of cause marketing

and then purpose marketing. We saw each company wanting to do more, do good. Not just make money, but also do good in the world. And that is a trend on the consumer side, too. Consumers are much more likely to want to engage with a brand if they're doing good for the world.

"All of that kind of led to the evolution of our product. We were initially engaging with consumers around causes that they cared about. But then we shifted to engaging with brands, so that they can own that purpose that they want to create in the world, and be able to engage their audiences with it. So we took our expertise in engaging audiences and were able to bring that to brands, at a time when brands really needed it."

On meeting the needs of two types of customers

One challenge of many B2B companies is meeting the needs of two types of customers. In the case of Countable, one is the customer using the platform to achieve a purpose. Namely, they want to bring together their customers, their partners, or their employees around particular outcomes. But there is also the end user, and the ultimate success of the client user is very much tied to the satisfaction of the end customer. How does a B2B company balance the needs of these two customers?

According to Emily, "They each have their own distinct set of challenges. With the client, those challenges can be things like how to create engaging content. We have a services team that can help our clients with that. Because some of our clients just aren't as savvy when it comes to a content marketing strategy, or just content strategy in general.

"On the end user side, they're coming to a brand new platform and thinking, *Why should I join this site? What benefit am I going to get?* That's an important perspective. Because ultimately, if that audience member is not joining the site, then the client is not getting the benefit of using the platform. And there's a lot of things out there vying for audience members' attention. We have all these social media platforms. Why should they join a new site?

"It's also important to remember that quality is better than quantity. It's okay to maybe not reach a million people right at once. Instead, who are those initial customer advocates, or audience advocates, that are going to take those first actions? How can you engage them to move them up the ladder of engagement, as we call it, and start to invite their communities and get more people rallied around your brand's cause?"

On building authentic communities at scale

Countable helps its clients create authentic communities. Bart says this is about "moving beyond total strangers into actions that have real value, that are more than just clicktivism. Creating that sense of connection, of shared ownership within a community and platform." Considering the

reality of clients dispersed around the world, in many different contexts and cultures, what are best practices for building these authentic communities at scale?

Emily says, "It's all about relevance. How does this relate to my identity as a person? Our identities, as we know, are vast. We can have lots of different identities, both online or in person. Whether that's where I live, my interests, my passions, things that have happened to me that affect my views on the world. Any type of identity, and diversity comes into play.

"And so when you come to a site or a platform like ours as an end user, the ideal goal is to be able to find where you fit in. There's so much vying for our attention online right now. If I know, Oh, this relates to my interest in this cause, or this is relevant to me, that's where I can make that connection. There's value in me engaging in this.

"That can be a challenge, depending on who the client is, who their audience is, and how they want to engage them. I wish that localized, super relevant knowledge was easy to scale. It's just not. And so you have to figure out, *Who are the people that you want to engage? What are their main identities that you want to connect with?* And kind of think about it in that way. Which is a really fun way to try to cut through the noise of the Internet right now."

03 — Tesla Fmr Sr Program Manager on the Power of Brand Enthusiast Groups

Here is episode three in the Countable Podcast Series. In this conversation, Countable Founder and CEO Bart Myers speaks with Tesla Fmr Sr Program Manager William Masterson. William is a big believer in the power of brand enthusiast groups. He explains the role of community in building winning products, which he has seen first hand at Apple and Tesla. He also argues that brands should let enthusiasts take the lead. Meet them where they are and get out of the way. Finally, William argues that community is the future of products, solving problems of marketing, retention, and customer outreach. As he says, "Community is everything."

◉ On the role of community in building winning products

Among the first topics discussed was the formula for winning products. William says sometimes it involves timing. But to really grow a product, he believes in community.

William says, "Let's assume that a product comes to market at the right place and the right time, and roots itself into the zeitgeist. And maybe it's one of a handful of similar competing solutions. I think the question ends up being, how does a product win out over its competitors? And that

goes back to Betamax versus VHS. Some of those factors really are being in the right place at the right time.

"Then, from a concept and design perspective, does the product actually solve the problem it sets out to solve? Is it a viable solution? Does the product have a reasonable learning curve for its target audience? The product needs to fulfill the most basic of day one user expectations. If the product is something complex enough to have a varying array of different user expectations, there needs to be an appropriate support structure for that product. Are there knowledge bases or appropriate training? If someone has a question, can they find an answer? Sometimes that is a website, or videos.

"And sometimes it's being a part of a community. That's the stuff that I get most excited about. I love seeing how communities can grow a product. And what they'll do is literally turn around for the company and say, *Here's what you need to know. Here's all of the trade secrets. Here's all the experience that we've built up over time.* And you're gonna find out much more about why that product is a winning product, from the community, than you will from the company."

◉ On letting brand enthusiasts take the lead

William discovered the power of brand enthusiasts working at Apple and Tesla. At Tesla, he oversaw the global "Owners Clubs" which unite enthusiasts who enjoy modifying their vehicles, among other things. While Tesla laid down some ground rules for these groups, they recognized their power in growing brand loyalty.

William says, "We started off with 15 or 20 groups and about 20,000 members in early 2017. Five years later, there were over 200,000 members in almost 200 clubs globally. The only thing that it required was letting these people do what they love to do, and building a relationship. We said, *You're doing this thing already. Tell me about what you're doing. And let's find ways to legitimize what you're doing.* To that end, there are going to be some rules. But how do we grow from there, and how do we work together? And how can I introduce you to all these other amazing people that are doing the same thing, so that you all can learn from each other?

"We continued to look for new opportunities, people, and emerging markets. To find people ahead of taking products to market and saying, *If you want to be an advocate for our brand, let's find ways to make sure that you're doing it that aligns with our priorities. And that's not necessarily to say, We're going to muzzle you and prevent you from saying stuff.* Quite the contrary. We're going to say, *This is a direct line of feedback. Let us know if we're not doing things right.*

"You have to work with those people. Recognize that they love your brand. They love your products. They want to use them. They want to be a part of your story. Show those people that you care."

On why communities are the future of technology products

In the end, William's experience has taught him one clear lesson: "Community is everything. Communities are an opportunity for us to share ourselves with other people, and other people that are into the same stuff that we're in.

"Right now we're seeing a saturation of marketing. Anywhere you go online, you are inundated with ads. Whenever you spend time consuming content, you're inundated with, Here, buy these things. Care about what we're doing. Maybe that'll help you sell the product. But is it going to help you keep the customer and the community?

"Brands need to recognize that the community is part of your brand story. Lean into the hype, as we say. That draws more people in. And the more people that you draw in, and get into your little group, the more people that you can focus on brand loyalty. You can focus on customer retention.

"It drives down marketing costs. It makes it easier to support your customer, because you're not the only one doing it. People are going to Facebook groups, to Twitter, to Reddit, to a Countable site to actually talk to each other about why they love a brand. And saying, Oh, by the way, while I'm here, I got this little thing that isn't working right. Can you help answer this question? That saves that person having to go straight to the company to ask that question.

"Leaning into communities allows customers to be more nimble and allows companies to run a little bit more lean. And maybe they don't need to. But if it makes your customer feel better about their experience being your customer, then do it. That's what matters. The customer experience is paramount. If you don't have a good customer experience, then you don't have a customer."

Countable VP of Client Success and Operations on Digital Organizing Products

This is the fourth and final episode in the Countable Podcast Series. In this conversation, Countable Founder and CEO Bart Myers is joined by Countable VP of Client Success and Operations Jaime Peters. Jaime has ample experience with political organizing, first on the ground and now in the digital realm. When it comes to building digital organizing products for clients, Jaime shares tips on a different MVP – the minimum viable community. She also explains why storytelling across platforms is especially important with digital organizing products. And perhaps most important of all, when asking customers to get involved in digital organizing, PMs need to maintain trust. If users don't trust the product, they simply won't use it.

On minimum viable community

Product Managers all know about minimum viable products, or MVPs. That is the product that can go to market with the least amount of features while still being usable. But when it comes to digital organizing products, what's a minimum viable community?

Jaime explains, "Many of our clients are coming to us saying, *We want to build a community. We have to dig in and ask a lot of questions. Like, What does community mean to you? What do you want this community to do? What's the goal of building this community in the first place?*

"A lot of times people are coming to us thinking we need thousands and thousands of people in one place doing this thing in order for it to be absolutely successful. And when you break it down with them, it's like, *Do we really need that many people? Or do we need an engaged community?* If we have thousands of people on a platform, but only ten of them are taking action, but we're trying to support all of the people that are there, we're never going to be successful and hit our goals. But if we have ten really engaged users on our platform taking action, and track the metrics across *What actions do they take? How do they take them? How did that impact our larger goals?* Then we're going to have a lot better data on how we continue to grow and expand that community.

"So the best practice is, like, Your goal is amazing. I love your goal. This is great. What does that actually mean to you? How can we break this into smaller pieces? And how can we break it down into achievable pieces so that we can see success along the way?"

On the impact of storytelling

Great products tell a good story. Great digital organizing products allow their users to tell stories, and share them across platforms. Given that users are spread out in different platforms, Jaime says that unifying quality is key.

She says, "Storytelling is the most impactful thing we see online every single day. And even the concept of what a story is, has changed over time, especially in online iterations. Nowadays, storytelling happens in 6 second videos on Snapchat, or in 30 second videos on Tiktok. It happens in still imagery on Instagram, or in posted articles on Facebook. The idea of what a story is has changed so much over time. How a story can spark a movement, how a story can make an impact – that hasn't changed. But how impactful those stories can be has changed because of the products we see online.

"One of the things you learn very early on in digital organizing is not everybody is on the same platform. And not everybody you want to talk to is on one platform. So if you're doing really great on Facebook, that's great. But let's say you're trying to reach out to voters in one district. If everybody that's engaging with your Facebook post doesn't live in that district, you've got great engagement, but you're not actually reaching the community of people who can vote. You're missing out on an opportunity there.

"What great products have done is they've provided us with a place to build community that doesn't take people away from the places where they are online. It brings them together and allows them to share it wherever they want to share it. They can all find it in one place and easily share it to the place where they have built their community."

On building trust with digital organizing products

As noted in Bart's conversation with Emily Bell in episode two, we are living in an era of low trust. With that in mind, it is very important that PMs treat the trust of users with the utmost care. Building (and maintaining) trust may be even more vital when it comes to digital organizing products.

Jaime cautions, "Don't break your trust. I'm sure most people can open their email inbox and see at least a few emails asking them to donate money to a person, or a cause, or anything. We get donation email after donation email after donation email. And sometimes, we end up giving and sometimes we don't end up giving. But right now, most of the articles you see online are about how those emails aren't even for the candidate that they're trying to raise money for. It's actually for a Political Action Committee (PAC). Or it's actually for something else. Or it's actually for a committee that's working against that candidate! And you didn't read the fine print.

"People get angry, and they get upset, because they feel tricked. They feel deceived. It all comes back to trust and honesty and communication. It doesn't matter whether you're standing in front of somebody at their door or whether they're reading your email in their inbox. It's about trust and honesty in communication."

In closing

When it comes to building engaged and empowered communities in the technology age, the line between digital and physical communication is often blurred. The final two conversations make that clear. William Masterson's experience with Tesla encouraged the intersection of digital interaction with physical car enthusiasts. Jaime Peters explains her transition from on-the-ground to digital political organizing while emphasizing that the similarities between the two realms outweigh the differences. And though Jory Des Jardins and Emily Bell speak specifically about online communities, their conversations with Bart underscore the need to verify the authenticity of online communication with individual identities.

In the end, human beings need ways to connect with each other. And they need those connections to feel authentic and real. Companies like Countable offer myriad and individualized ways to connect people and products. In doing so, they offer a glimpse into the future of human communication.

These four conversations show that human connection in 2022 is limited only by our imaginations.

Countable Podcast Series

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