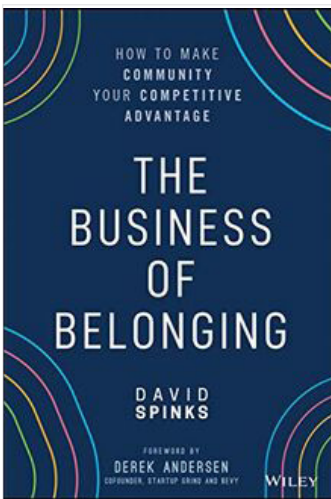


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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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David Spinks is Cofounder of CMX, a 20,000-member organization dedicated to helping community professionals thrive. David is also the VP of Community at Bevy, an enterprise software platform that powers event-driven community programs and virtual conferences, following its acquisition of CMX in 2019. David has personally advised and trained hundreds of organizations in community strategy, including Facebook, Waze, Salesforce, Airbnb, and Google.

The Business of Belonging

THE NUTSHELL

John Wiley & Sons, 2023

As someone who struggled to fit in in my childhood, I searched for community and a sense of belonging. I found it in starting and maintaining a community around my favorite video game. Later, in college, I learned to connect community building to the world of business and realized that it has the potential to be a serious competitive advantage for a business. It allows a business to achieve incredible scale and through activating their loyal customers and motivating them to contribute their energy, knowledge, and skills, a business can have access to exponentially more people to contribute to their mission. Community has the potential to become an extension of your team.

To build a community, you need to have a strategy. The first step of that is to make the community a priority and figure out ways that you can track success through the community so that you can justify covering the costs associated with the maintenance of a community.

However, a community can't be formed by simply investing money in it. To build a highly engaged and healthy community, you need to create a social identity. You need to select an audience and set up a community around them so that they feel like they belong to your community and feel validated as its members. Before starting your community, ask yourself: Who are we? What do we believe in? What do we do?

The Business of Belonging

Moreover, remember that your community can't be for everyone. Be as inclusive as you can, but where you need to exclude people to create a safe space for your members, don't feel guilty.

Once you set up a social identity, you also need to figure out how your members will participate in your community. Remember, there will always be members with different levels of commitment to your community. They will all contribute in their way, and they are all crucial to your success. You just need to know how to provide value for each one of them. The more value you provide, the more likely they will be to devote more of their time and efforts to your community.

To recruit your very first members, you'd have to resort to manual growth. Make use of personal outreach and be hands-on with those first members. Make sure to have a prepared and planned onboarding experience for new members to make them feel welcome. Then, with time, you can motivate them to slowly move up the commitment curve. To achieve this, you must first make them feel validated in your community. On top of that, you can also plan rewards and incentives for certain levels of contribution, but make sure you don't overdo it.

As a community builder, your job will mainly be to create spaces and experiences for your community. Make plans to host events and experiences that are standard and recurring, e.g. monthly or weekly events. This helps your members develop a habit of coming back and knowing when and how to participate. Have clear objectives set in place for each experience you host, and make use of feedback to constantly improve it.

Finally, remember that building a community is a unique process for everyone, so don't be afraid of failing. Try different things, and keep innovating until you find what works best for you and your community. Go Forth and Build Community!