

# Developing a Digital Community: How to go from 9 to 9000 online members

Kasandrea Sereno

Watch the webinar here: <https://youtu.be/wG1vFXWMLEY>

# Hello!

## Kasandrea Sereno

Kasandrea is the Founder of #HigherEdSocial, the world's largest professional society for social media managers working in the education space, alongside her role as a Lead Academic Advisor at the University of South Florida.

## Background

- Kasandrea recently completed her doctorate in Organizational Leadership & Policy at Vanderbilt University and currently works as the Executive Director of MyAdvisorSays.com specializing in college admissions coaching specifically for underserved youth
- She holds an MBA, a Master's in Education, and a bachelor's degree in business management and industrial psychology
- Her research interests include organizational behavior and digital marketing specifically the areas of buyer behavior and brand loyalty



# Origin story:

## How #HigherEdSocial came to be:

- Established on May 28, 2015
- End of 2015 = 399 members
- 2016 = 880 total members
- 2020 = added 3773 new members
- 2021 = 9000+ members in 69 countries
- Expanded our presence to FB, LI, YT, TT, IG, CH, website, and now a membership site on Toucan Tech and a full professional society



# Our Purpose

- Connect those working in social media roles at colleges and universities
- Learn from one another
- Overtime this has evolved and we have added to our strategy;
  - a place to showcase their work
  - provide trainings & expand the knowledge beyond the well-resourced campuses
  - Mentor program
  - job board and career advising
  - mental health support





# Starting from scratch: 9 members

## The early stages

- May 2015, created a Facebook group for a social media managers who were also working in colleges and higher education: the aim was just to bring people together and see what happens
- For the first year it was slow, organic growth. New members were personal referrals from current members. At the end of 2015 we had 399 members
- There wasn't a push to grow the group or expand beyond our niche, it was simply to provide value for our current folks
- We amplified free resources by sharing articles and webinars from listservs, professional societies, universities, marketing platforms
- Make connections with platforms, digital tech companies on Twitter and LinkedIn and invite them to present to the group
- Very much a grassroots organizing endeavor



# Where we are now: 9000 members

## Huge increase in members during COVID & building a business

- Fast forward to 2020 we added 3773 members just since the pandemic started. Today we are at 9,000+ and growing every week especially after conferences and talks
- Our audience has expanded to cover k-12, student affairs, and professors who are being asked to manage social accounts, as well as those moving from corporate backgrounds into higher ed
- We have very high engagement rates: 35-40k interactions per month & feed moves very quickly
- Outgrown the Facebook platform capabilities and are now pivoting into a full professional society and expanding the scope of work and value we provide to members. **So how did we get here?**



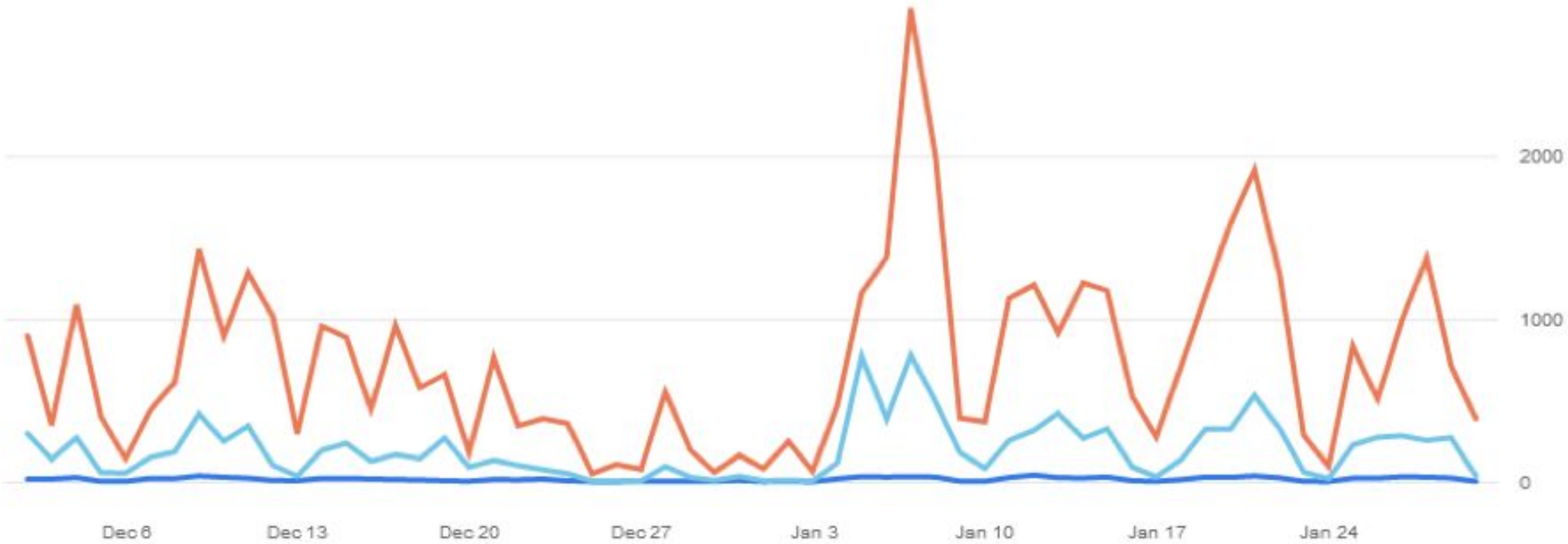
# Recent engagement

All ⓘ

- 931 Posts ▼ 1%
- 11,616 Comments ▲ 37%
- 43,853 Reactions ▲ 31%

Dec 2, 2020 - Jan 30, 2021

Posts Comments Reactions All

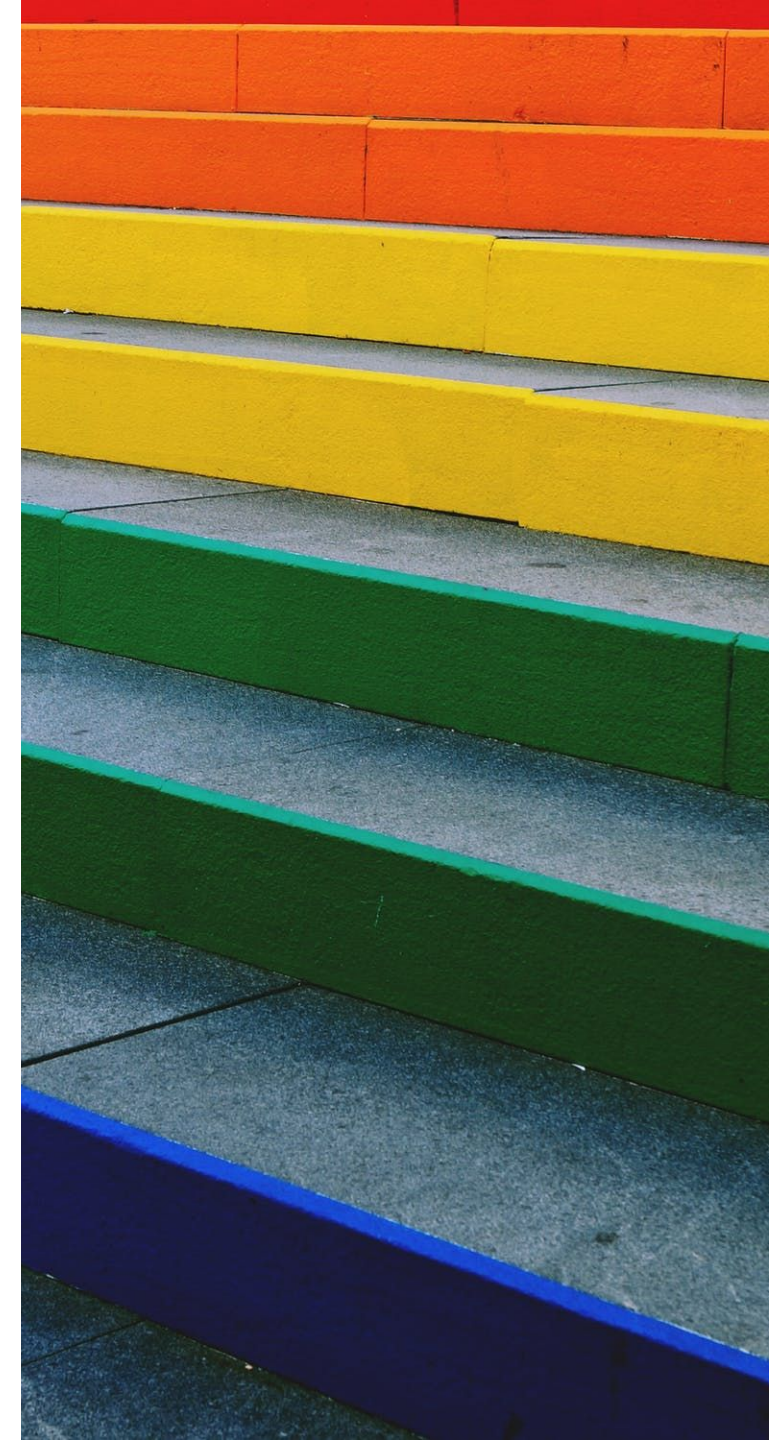




# Establishing early-stage steps:

- Very simple start. Just bring people together and see what happens.
- Share articles & webinars from higher ed and advertising listservs, professional societies, universities, marketing platforms
- Amplified free resources
- Make connections with platforms, digital tech companies, etc on Twitter and LinkedIn and invite them to present to the group
- Very much a grassroots organizing endeavor
- Current: After 5 years -> 35-40,000 impressions per month and the forum news feed moves very quickly
- We have outgrown the Facebook platform capabilities and are now pivoting into a full professional society and expanding the scope of work and value we provide to members.

So how did we get here?





# Diving engagement 9 ways to engage your members

1. Start with a strong foundation
2. Identify the needs your community will fill
3. Shape the path
4. Build your community culture
5. Seed the conversation
6. Choose your community managers and admins well
7. Like/Know/Trust: The golden triangle of social media
8. T&E | Trial & Error & Test & Evolve
9. Never stop learning



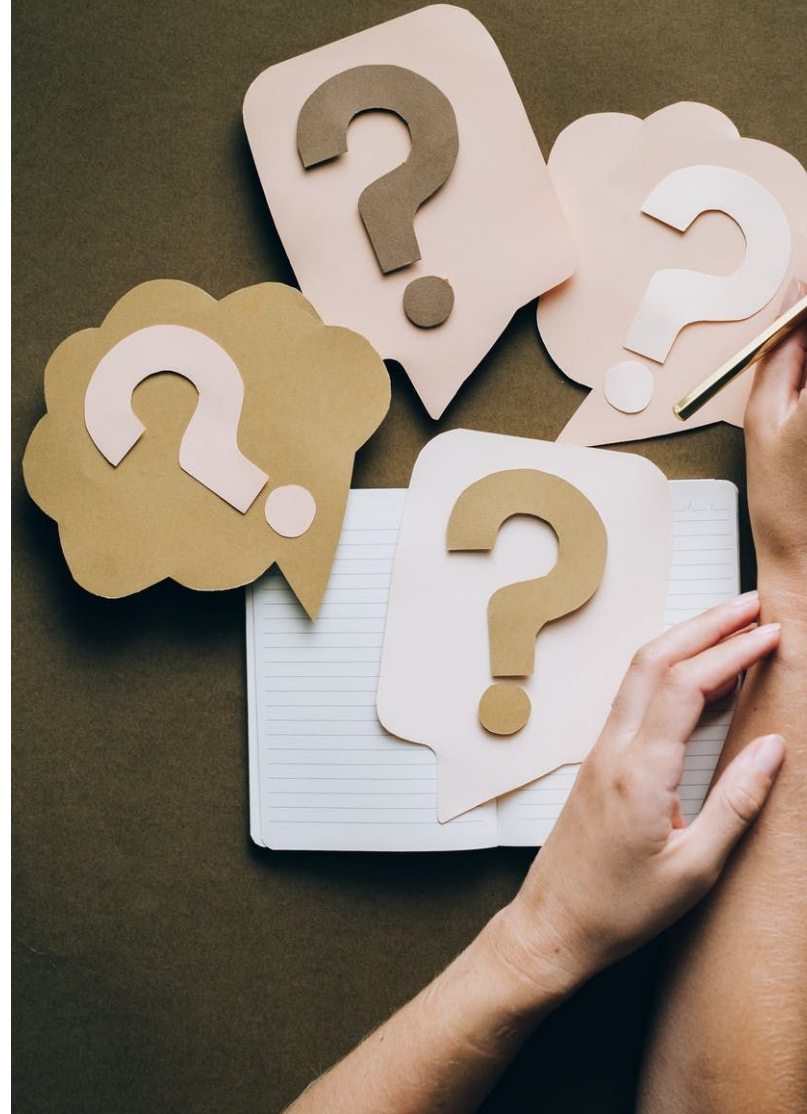
# 1. Start with a strong foundation

## Identify your niche

- Who is your population?
- What are they like?

## Build a persona for the types of members you want to attract and best serve

- What are their needs and pain points?
- What are they doing well?
- What do they want more off?
- What do they need but aren't telling you?



## 2. Identify the needs your community will fill

- [What > How > Why]
- People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it
- You can't be everything to everyone so what position will your community play in the larger landscape?
- Who can you partner with, collaborate, share tips from, in adjacent spaces so that you aren't having to reinvent the wheel?
- Will your organization primarily raise money?
  - If so for who?
- Will your community be mostly knowledge sharing?
  - How will you create that content?





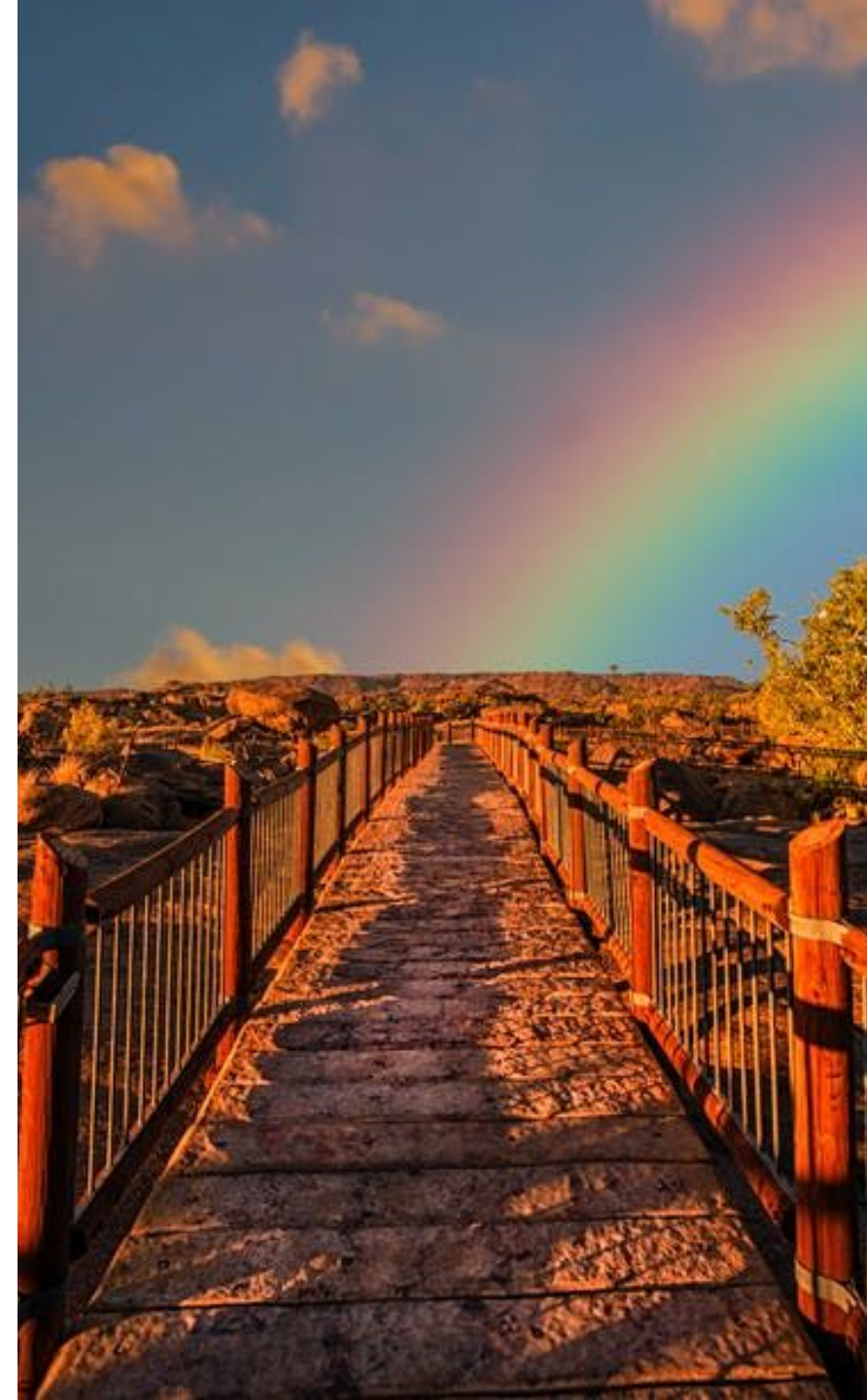
# 3. Shape the Path:

## Why > How > What

- Show members what they are supposed to do in the community
- Make it easy to understand how to interact

### Think about...

- What are the unspoken norms and implicit knowledge that needs to be conveyed?
  - Make this as easy and intuitive as possible
- Is there specialty vocabulary that is often used?
- You want your new members to come in, easily understand the expectations and group norms, and be able to see themselves in the group's activity





## 4. Build your community culture

- Understand human social systems and how they evolve
- Think of a party:
  - You invite them (*make sure to get the word out*),
  - When they show up you thank them for coming and offer them a drink (*warm welcome and a gesture of good will*)
  - Introduce them to other party attendees and get the conversation rolling between them. (*onboarding*)
- A good hostess knows that managing the guests is super important
- The atmosphere will mean nothing if the party vibe isn't there



# 5. Seed the conversation

- Be consistent.
- If all you have is a group where people come to get information and leave, then you have a bulletin board, not a community.
- Create ways for members to interact.
- Think the 5 S's: similar, stable, small, supportive, & satisfied = cohesion
- Figure out what your people want and then over deliver.
- The best way to get new customers is to treat your existing customers exceptionally well. Community is the same thing.
- Exclusive opportunities, coupons & discounts, freebies, product demos— what can they get only from you?
- Video Conferences or Webinars. Connect and engage.
- Initiate discussion opportunities
  - Add discussion points to content calendar
  - Prepare extra resources ahead of time; activity, poll, or graphic
  - Ask for feedback on a current project or trending topic
  - Ask folks to share their work or their opinion

*toucancommunity*

Home Network **Forum** Clubs Business Directory Media Careers Support Us Events Shop New Page

Welcome to the community forum!  
Post questions, suggestions and thoughts and remember to tag your post

Share here  
Something to share? Write in the box below!

Share something here...

Search posts Search Question Suggestion Thought Sport Music Art

Technology ...

**Merryn Parks** What is everyone doing for the public holiday??  
1 month ago

Public Holiday Question

Hide comments

**Ed Suchy**  
**@Merryn Parks** I'm off down Bondi, surf and a smoothie on the cards!  
1 month ago

*toucancommunity*

Home **Network** Forum Clubs Business Directory Media Careers Support Us Events Shop New Page

Find friends, connect with your network people in your community and build your network.

People you may know

- Jenny Smith Self-Employed Entrepreneur
- Sophia Goldman Self-Employed Actress
- Amanda Court Self-Employed Founder @ Pisteure Perfect
- Alice Falcone Self-Employed Accountant
- Kate Murray Big Company Operations Manager
- Toucan Tech University College London
- Chris Franklin-Hollier ToucanTech Product & Support Manager
- Nikhil Sathyanarayana ToucanTech Sales Manager
- Sophie Jillings (Jillings) ToucanTech Regional Director

Search for people on this network

Type keywords...

Enter name... Enter city...

Select a country... Select class of...

Select House... Select Boarding house...

Select Sports Team...

Clear search Search

# Why does this work?

- Operant Conditioning (Rewards & Punishments)
  - Use intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards
- Variable ratio schedule for rewards
  - Slot Machine payouts
- Classical Conditioning (conditioned stimulus becomes associated with an unconditioned stimulus in order to produce the conditioned response)





## 6. Choose your community managers and admins well

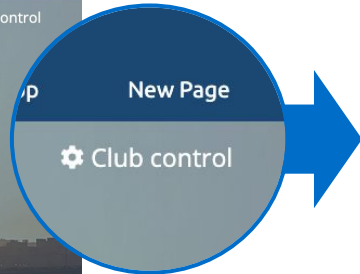
- Building a community is more than just being liked and being charismatic and being able to connect with other people
- A community manager should have a deep interest in people and customer service
- Have set policies, procedures, and rules. Be ruthless in enforcing them
- Don't shy away from the tough conversations. Lean into them
- If you mess up, fess up. Acknowledge and do better
- Transparency! Be the most ethical person you know



Club control

# Entrepreneurs

Leave Club



## Welcome to Entrepreneurs

We'd love for you all to share your experience in running your own businesses. What tips can you share amongst your fellow Toucans?

### Club managers



Sian-Anne Jones



Mehdi Jawad



Ella Steinert

### 15 Online members



### Share here

Something to share? Write in the box below and your comment will be displayed and circulated in a round up email to all members



Share something here...

Search posts Search Question Sport Technology Placement Fundraising Event

Help ...

Club page design
Members
Emails
Events
News
Go to club page

## Members

Entrepreneurs

Filters ▾ [+ Add members](#)

17 Member/s found matching your criteria, shown: 1 - 17

<input type="checkbox"/>	Name	Status	Approved by	Approved date	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shelly Washington (Knight)	Approved	n/a	n/a	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Diyanah Abdullah	Approved	n/a	n/a	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kiana Noble	Approved	n/a	n/a	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Robert Digital	Approved	n/a	n/a	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Thomas Slater	Approved	n/a	n/a	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rory Evans	Approved	n/a	n/a	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>

Club page design
Members
Emails
Events
News
Go to club page

## Events

Entrepreneurs

Filters ▾ [Create event](#)

1 Event/s found matching your criteria, shown: 1 - 1

<input type="checkbox"/>	Title	Date	Status	Attendees	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Entrepreneurs Virtual Meet-up	29 Jan 2021 12:48		1	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>

Club page design
Members
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Go to club page

## Emails

Entrepreneurs

Filters ▾ [Create email](#)

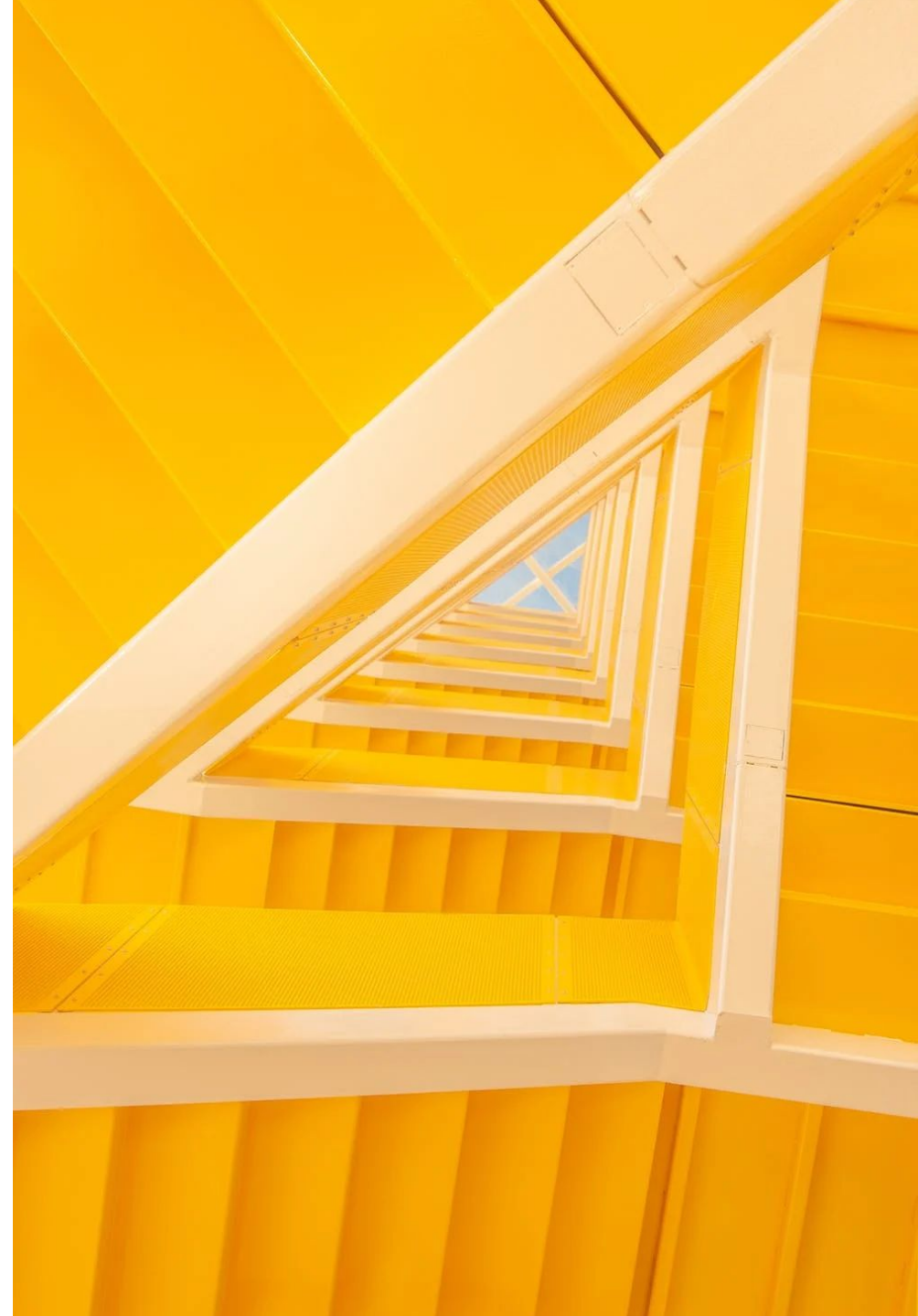
1 Email/s found matching your criteria, shown: 1 - 1

<input type="checkbox"/>	Name	Scheduled	Status	Sent to	Open rate	Actions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Club Event!	n/a	Draft	0	0%	<a href="#">Actions ▾</a>

1 Email/s found matching your criteria, shown: 1 - 1

## 7. Like/Know/Trust the golden triangle of social media

- They need to like you. Be nice.
- They need to know you; don't be afraid to be a real person
- They need to trust you; do what you say you are going to do
- Over-deliver on promises & support when needed
- This is the hallmark of good leadership





## 8. T&E

- Key to keeping your content from getting stale and having your community check out
- Outdated content looks worse than no content because it shows you don't care
- Try different content and phrasing. Some things will go well some things won't
- Learn from this; catalog those posts and analyze what about it didn't work
- Was it the timing? The verbiage? The graphic? Something else?
- Test your strategy often and evolve it as need be

**Trial & Error**

**Test & Evolve**





# Sending round up newsletters of club activity, and promote your new content using drag and drop into newsletters

The image shows a web-based newsletter editor. The main preview area on the left displays a newsletter layout for 'Mycommunity' with the title 'Monthly Newsletter' for November 2018. It includes a header with the logo and a 'View in browser' link, a main content area with placeholder text, a dropdown menu for selecting an article, and a section titled 'Where in the world are you?' featuring an interactive world map of ToucanTech customers. A 'Read More' button is at the bottom. The right-hand side is a control panel with sections for 'CONTENT' and 'HEADING'. The 'CONTENT' section has desktop and mobile view toggles and a dropdown menu for 'Select content type' with options for News, Events, and Admins. Below this are dropdowns for 'Select article', 'Select admin', and 'Select event'. The 'HEADING' section includes a color picker (set to blue), a font size dropdown (set to 8px), and a font style dropdown.

## 9. Never stop learning

- Community management is at heart, deeply knowing and understanding humans, as well as your niche market/industry
- Shift happens. New technology, platforms, societal, cultural events
- Integrate what you are learning with how it could help/impact your community.
- Read a variety of industry blogs, white papers; psychology, education, as well as your industry connections, public policy, and business.
- Find your sherpas



# Building a business

Our progress: As of 2021, we are now a full professional society for social media managers working in higher education.

## How we're building into a business:

- There's nothing out there is like it so we have to invent the organization we want to be
- We know what we don't want to be like
- Will over deliver in value, and we're taking the time to do it right
- Setting the groundwork, bringing on partners, and making it robust and before launching to the community
- Chose Toucan Tech as our platform partner because of the array of features that fit us now as well as features we can grow into

## How we're delivering value in HigherEdSocial

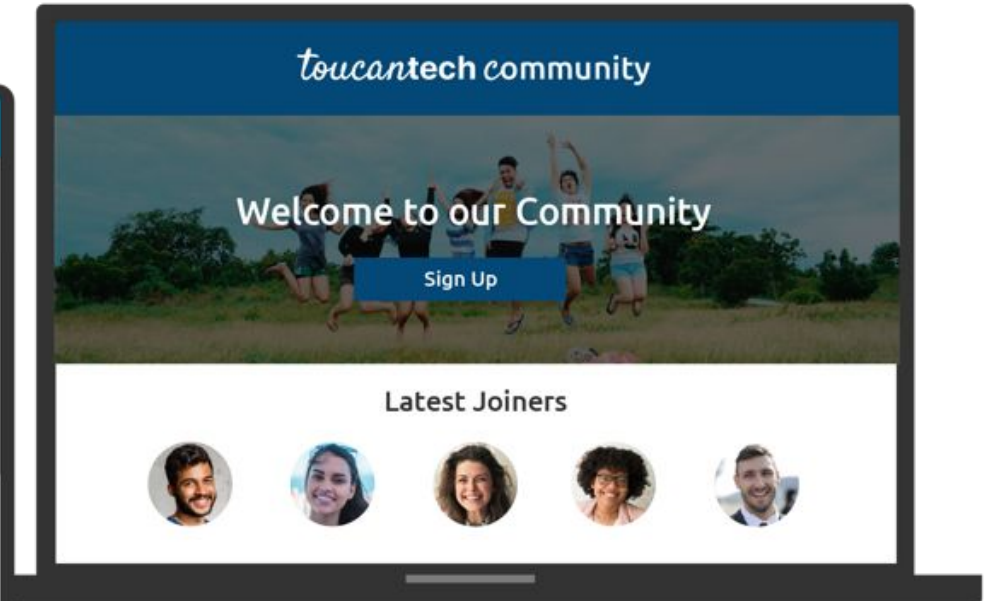
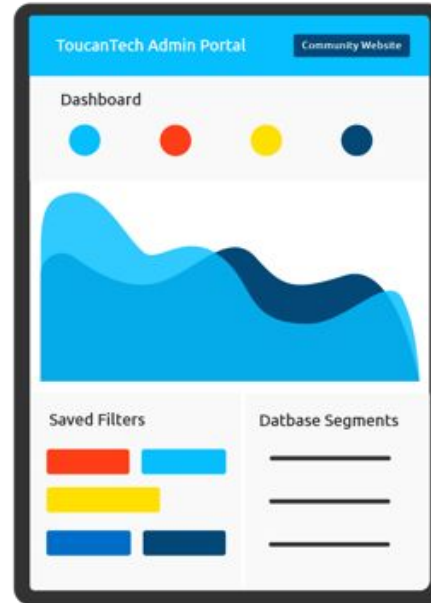
- Mental health support via text messaging
- Bringing on community managers to help seed discussions
- Designing webinars and training from other platforms/ vendors
- Out of the box templates & samples, e.g. a pre-made social media template

**Questions?**



# About ToucanTech

ToucanTech is an easy, affordable and beautiful fundraising CRM and website software to manage your supporter records, email newsletters, online payments, events, mentoring, careers and more!



**Any questions?**

Please contact Ed – [ed@toucantech.com](mailto:ed@toucantech.com)  
[www.toucantech.com](http://www.toucantech.com)

