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A CMO's guide to
community-led
marketing in a
product-led world.

FAIR

MIND

SHARE

DEREK E. WEEKS

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PRAISE FOR UNFAIR MINDSHARE

“In the modern era, people crave connection. Companies fostering thriving, self-sustaining communities not only gain a substantial competitive advantage but also forge enduring connections, creating value for years. *Unfair Mindshare* is a tour de force in the art of attracting and engaging today’s buyers. Derek Weeks illuminates how community-led marketing can become a CMO’s secret weapon for driving significant pipeline and revenue growth. This book is a game-changer packed with strategic insights and fresh perspective.”

—**Dan Tyre**, CEO, Tyre Angel,
HubSpot

“Derek masterfully unpacks the critical role of community-led marketing in a modern, orchestrated B2B marketing plan. *Unfair Mindshare* serves as a strategic blueprint, providing step-by-step guidance for aligning community initiatives with both demand generation and brand strategies. If your marketing team is not part of the community conversation, you’re starting from a position of disadvantage. This book equips CMOs with the tools to shift from this vulnerable stance to one of considerable advantage, optimizing plans to drive tangible results.”

—**Terry Flaherty**, Vice President & Principal Analyst,
Demand Services,
Forrester Research

Unfair Mindshare masterfully engineers a seismic shift in marketing, propelling the conventional playbook into a new era of community-led strategies. Building upon traditional product and brand marketing strategies, Weeks introduces a paradigm that helps businesses rise above the market noise. A courageous approach, grounded in real-world case studies, which makes it all the more compelling. Viva la revolution!”

— **Paul Muller**, Co-founder, Denting the Universe
and former Worldwide VP Marketing,
Hewlett Packard

“Derek Weeks’ *Unfair Mindshare* is a masterclass in community-led marketing. With his three-fold approach to marketing strategy, he demystifies the process and provides transparent, actionable advice. This book is a treasure trove of insights for any marketer.”

— **Matt Heinz**, Founder/President,
Heinz Marketing
and Host,
Sales Pipeline Radio

Unfair Mindshare is the definitive guide to community-led marketing. Derek Weeks is a seasoned expert, whose ‘been there, done that’ expertise and comprehensive understanding of the synergy between product, brand, and community yield a book that’s both inspirational and educational. Above all, it’s brimming with actionable insights. This book is an indispensable read for the modern marketer.”

— **Kathleen Booth**, SVP Marketing & Growth,
Pavilion

Unfair Mindshare has redefined my perception of what’s possible in community-led marketing. Weeks unveils innovative methods that align perfectly with our current landscape. For CMOs hungry for transformative insights, this book serves as your marketing North Star.”

— **Missi Carmen**, Chief Marketing Officer,
Spirion

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments xvii

Introduction 1

1. How We Built Unfair Mindshare 7

Growing a 13,000-member community in 90 days. The All Day DevOps example. Detailing the tactics that unlocked growth to 100,000 members. Building partnerships that catalyzed community engagement.

2. Where CMOs Must Invest in Marketing 27

Where you market today. Exploring three orbits of marketing. Defining product- and brand-led orbits. Where you can expand tomorrow.

3. Launching Community-led Marketing 43

Learning from CMO Coffee Talk. Shifting your mindset. Defining the community-led orbit. Meet the Cybersecurity Marketing Society and Pavilion.

4. The Rules of Community-Led Engagement 65

12 rules of engagement. Avoiding self-promotion. The audience is the content. Saying “yes.” Mobilizing the middle. Eliminating velvet ropes. Committing to diversity.

5. The Rules for Scaling Your Operation 89

Why 1,000 hours is essential. Measuring engagement. Running bigger experiments. Tech stacks that work. Sustaining community trust.

6. Connecting Orbits for Internal Success 105

You must make more money than you spend. Establishing expectations between orbits. Integrating content and relationships. Learning from Lululemon.

7. Launching into Orbit 3 (Pre-flight Checklist) 111

Finding Orbit 3. Build your own or lead one. Assessing community health on three axes. Positioning your community. Forming your brand promise.

8. Organizing Your Team 135

Structuring the team for success. Picking the right leader. Budgeting for community. Improving your score with data. Tightening relationships between your orbits. The importance of feedback loops.

9. Exploring Community-led Engagement 167

Keeping members engaged. The importance of “feeling seen.” How digital natives engage. Measuring engagement with 55–25–20. Partnering with other communities.

**10. Building Relationships
to Spark Your Movement 187**

Cultivating the long tail of relationships. The Influencer50 example. Developing a relationship playbook.

11. Mapping Out Your Community Playbook 197

Four inspiring playbooks for CMOs. Engaging communities first and converting later. Integrating multiple community-led playbooks.

12. Growing with Community-led Sales 223

Leading with dialogue. Meeting the North American DevOps Group (NADOG). Experiencing warm introductions. Measuring sales outcomes.

13. Measuring Your Impact 235

Ensuring business outcomes. Tracking your progress. Linking to tangible results. Upgrading your lead-gen reporting. Measuring stickiness over engagement.

14. Improving Your Intent Signals for ABM Programs 251

Tapping into rich data. Analyzing community content. Identifying high-value accounts. Discovering untapped market segments. Refining ideal customer profiles (ICP).

15. Growing Affinity Matters 257

Identifying engagement trends. Tracking interactions over time. Becoming more personal builds emotional ties. Following KPIs across community, prospects, and customers.

What's Next? 269

Thank You 271

Helpful Resources 273

Notes 275

About the Author 285

INTRODUCTION

We're Not Reinventing Marketing

“Let them in. It’s dark outside.”

“How many of them are out there?”

“At last count, 35,000 people.”

“Then, let’s give them what they came for.”

The massive crowd wasn’t coming to see us. Instead, they were there to uplevel their skills, meet new people, and find inspiration. A while back, we noticed our community did not have a good place to gather so, working with a couple of friends, we built them a forum. Once we opened the doors, the community created an amazing experience for themselves.

With the help of several colleagues and friends, two people within our marketing team energized a vast community that would transform how software was created by thousands of businesses. The community provided a forum for people to learn, connect, and grow. That forum attracted more than 30,000 people each year for six years running. And our work in this community helped our business achieve unfair mindshare.

2 UNFAIR MINDSHARE

Building that community was less about luck and more about doing something audacious. One of the critical elements in our approach that helped us achieve this massive scale was something savvy marketing leaders have employed for years: We focused on *them*, not us.

Working on community-led marketing efforts was familiar to me. As a marketing leader for large and small software businesses, I had been evolving these concepts for over three decades (and continue to do so). I had come to realize that the combination of product, brand, and community efforts led to better marketing outcomes.

Product and brand marketing attracted audiences that were already looking for solutions. Community-led marketing introduced a new scale of reach and participation within a market.

In building and participating in communities, we made several discoveries, including that:

- Being helpful became a viral accelerator,
- Demand generation and brand awareness reached higher peaks,
- Our knowledge of the market and buyers compounded, and
- Our influence reached the escape velocity required to catapult our businesses from a market participant to a market maker.

Community-led marketing helped us achieve unfair mindshare.

Being helpful became our viral accelerator.

As a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), imagine the scenario of bringing a new vibe to marketing your employer's company. Everyone from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to the head of sales to the engineering team raves about the work marketing does in growing visibility and audience. Marketing transcends from being the ugly cost center that spends lavishly on overly promotional content to delivering the fuel that boosts business into a high orbit of performance.

Even more, imagine your reputation in the industry likewise skyrocketing because of your marketing strategies and initiatives. The community is buzzing. Competitors are wondering how you did it. And company board members are bragging about your moves to their peer investor community.

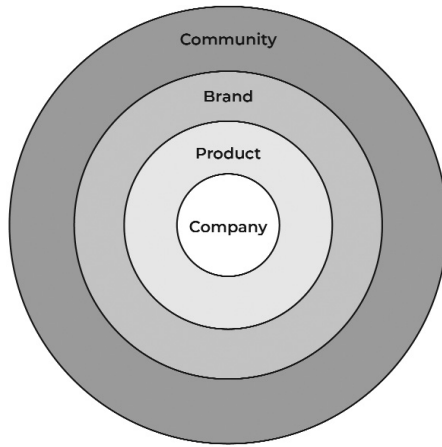
That has been my experience. As a CMO, I've taken a less-traveled road that others were afraid to take or were unaware was available to them, and that path made all the difference.

Every B2B start-up or scale-up CMO dreams of capturing enormous attention in their markets, and while some have achieved it, others run into challenges along the way. They share stories of their products, company, and people thousands of times, but their words don't resonate as much as they'd hoped with target audiences. The hooks they crafted to grab attention just don't hook. The company's growth is good, but could be better. The marketing team expends tremendous energy, but the momentum doesn't meet stakeholders' expectations. The plan was to achieve the escape velocity to zoom their business beyond the competition, but that dream never materialized.

CMOs are supposed to be experts in gaining the market's attention, and failing to do so attracts the wrong kind of attention inside their businesses. More often than not, their teams emphasize products and features over customer value, use cases, and desired outcomes. It can leave a CMO frustrated and exhausted. They were shooting for the moon, but got stuck in low-earth orbit.

This book is not about scrapping marketing as you know it. Instead, as a CMO, marketing leader, or head of community, this book will help you approach community-led marketing as a $1 + 1 = 3$ strategy. In fact, you'll continue with the tried-and-true marketing and demand-gen efforts you are already pursuing, then add a community layer to be most effective.

There are incredible books already available that focus on building and running communities. However, those books don't do enough to tie the community efforts back into the rest of the marketing engine you are responsible for running as a CMO. Their position often approaches community efforts



as an island. This book differs in that it's about integrating the marketing you're responsible for across three orbits: Product, brand, and community.

Blending product demand, brand, and community-led approaches at different businesses have helped marketing leaders, as well as myself, to generate unfair mindshare, accelerate growth, and transform the value of marketing for our employer companies.

Throughout this book, you'll read stories from my experiences in growing communities as part of an overall marketing strategy. You'll also read experiences from others who have advanced practices for community-led marketing, including companies and communities like 6sense, All Day DevOps (ADDO), CMO Coffee Talk, Chef Software, Cognism, CommonRoom, Commsor, Cybersecurity Marketing Society, End User SharePoint, Global 360, Heinz Marketing, The Linux Foundation, Lululemon, North American DevOps Group (NADOG), Pavilion, RevGenius, Salesforce, Sonatype, and Yoder Smokers.

You'll get to meet CMOs and community leaders like Jono Bacon, Kathleen Booth, Marc Cluet, Latane Conant, Alice de Courcy, Heather Foeh, Leslie Greenwood, Matt Heinz, Carrie Melissa Jones, Gene Kim, Erica Kuhl, April MacLean, Mark Miller, Jake Randall, Jared Robin, Rosie Sherry, Jim Shilts, Adrian Speyer, David Spinks, Scott Stockton, Gianna Whitver, and Mary Thengvall.

Pursuing product demand, brand, and community leads to better outcomes for CMOs. Combining these three elements will enable you to understand more about your markets and ideal customers. You'll have expanded access to data about the communities you serve. Enriched, relevant, and meaningful content will be developed, and its reach will surpass any of the traditional approaches you have taken previously. When demand, brand, and community initiatives combine, marketing becomes an even more exciting and rewarding career.

If you are not familiar with community-led marketing, you'll read detailed stories of leaders achieving successful outcomes for their businesses. You'll learn about a framework of three marketing orbits to help you understand how products, companies, and communities can be integrated into a common marketing motion for greater bottom-line returns.

Beyond storytelling, you'll get practical guidance on organizing community-led marketing in your team. We'll cover how to position, integrate, and budget for it. Sample playbooks will reveal how community-led efforts drive massive participation and build unfair mindshare while enhancing your core demand-generation practices. Finally, like all modern marketing approaches, we'll walk through various ways to measure the impact and report on community-led initiatives to help inform and sustain year-over-year investments.

You'll discover how to avoid common traps if you are new to community-led marketing. Traditional marketing approaches don't work the same when working in the community-led orbit, so we'll review some guardrails that can help keep your business and people in good favor. Furthermore, you'll find a simple model to help you assess the health of your community-led efforts.

B2B marketing is a competitive sport. You are either vying for attention in crowded markets or trying to drum up interest in the earliest stages of a new market segment. Over the past thirty years, as a four-time CMO and VP of Marketing, I have always sought the most efficient ways to rise above the noise, capture attention, and gain unfair mindshare over the competition. As a result, my successes include leading marketing initiatives that transformed companies lost among the noise within crowded markets into industry leaders

that became top of mind. I co-founded and operated one of the largest communities for software development professionals. And I also led grassroots community-marketing efforts that captured the global attention of markets within a couple of weeks.

In my experience, one of the best ways to generate lasting impact in markets is to embrace the communities being served. Deep empathy with members of those communities, along with the knowledge, inspiration, and connections they seek, led my teams and me to combine traditional demand-generation and community-led approaches in a way that became the envy of our peers. We won industry awards for the work. We grew our businesses and accomplished favorable business outcomes through strategic acquisitions along the way.

More importantly, our work felt more meaningful. It was a blast coming to work every day. Our marketing teams were respected not only by our colleagues, but by our communities at large. So much so that our efforts led IT leaders, software developers, business executives, cybersecurity pros, academics, channel partners, and industry influencers to join our efforts as people who were going after the same thing—to build better and stronger communities for our industry.

The stories told and lessons shared in this book are legendary. Those who worked in them typically reflect upon them in two ways: “*What an incredible ride*” and “*I still have to pinch myself that that was real.*” The approaches we took were simple, yet calculated for specific outcomes as success, and revealed common patterns of engagement and practice.

When you turn the page, you’ll move through an adventure of how we produced the world’s largest online community conference in just 75 days. It took the leadership of two colleagues, a small budget, and five industry friends to kickstart this community—and eight years later, it is still actively running and contributing to the industry.

CHAPTER 1

How We Built Unfair Mindshare

It's 2:59 AM. The sky outside is pitch black. Seven of us are in the office, and there is a definite buzz. In a few seconds, we would open our doors to 13,451 people.

When we kicked off the project just 75 days ago, none of us imagined this many people would show up. Our goal was to bring 1,000 people together.¹ We surpassed that milestone a month back.

"3. 2. 1. We're going live now," Mark said.

The dream of an All Day DevOps (ADDO) community came together. After that, there was no turning back. Over the next 15 hours, our small team would help thousands of people in 52 countries across our community learn more about new approaches to modern software development.

The community was not just showing up as an audience to a large production—they were participating as the main actors in the performance. Fifty-four people in the community volunteered to educate an industry by sharing their experience, producing 54 presentations, and recording over 30 hours of

educational content. Thousands of others would share their experiences in the community Slack workspace.

In the Beginning

In the 18 months before going live on air for the ADDO virtual conference, my colleague, Mark Miller, and I had traveled to, participated in, and sometimes spoken at over 40 conferences and community meet-ups in the DevOps arena.² At these events, attendees were sharing knowledge and soaking in information.

In addition, leading-edge software engineering teams were learning to transition from traditional waterfall development to DevOps practices. Engineering teams in the community were trying to figure out how to transform their practices and tooling from one or two waterfall-style software releases yearly to ten (or more) deployments daily. Those who had achieved it were in small teams within Amazon, Netflix, or Etsy. Everyone else was eager to learn how to do it too.

In *Crossing the Chasm*³ terms, we were in the early days of the market where innovators and technology enthusiasts thrived. Few practitioners existed in this space, but many people talked about it. Meet-ups in Detroit or Dallas might bring twenty people together for an evening. The most prominent conferences in this burgeoning arena attracted 600 to 800 people.

DevOps people were our community, our tribe. Traveling allowed us to meet many people and begin establishing relationships that would become critical later. We became good friends with people like John Willis, Damon Edwards, James Wickett, Nathen Harvey, Patrick Debois, and Gene Kim, who were there from the community's earliest days. We also met relative newcomers in the DevOps scene like Shannon Lietz, Paula Thrasher, Courtney Kissler, and Andi Mann. The “hallway track” (where people meet between sessions) at these conferences was abuzz with information, best practices, and newly forming friendships.

While on the road, we were able to exchange perspectives with others in the community and contribute to the overall uplift in the market. Mark and I learned from those we met, they learned from us, and we shared our

knowledge from the presentation stages to reach the greater audience in attendance. The more time we spent with the community, the more we realized what people wanted and how they would learn and benefit from a more deliberate, cohesive community.

Two Patterns Emerged

After some time on the nascent circuit, the cities and conferences would change, but the roster of speakers, leaders, and thought provocateurs was more familiar each time. That was the first pattern that emerged—we shared the same story repeatedly as we met with different local communities.

The second pattern came in meeting people from companies like Disney, Intuit, Oracle, Walmart, and Lloyds of London. The conversations would go something like this.

“It’s great meeting you. How many colleagues are you here with?”

“There’s just two of us.”

“How many people are in your DevOps practice or software engineering team?”

“Oh, there are about 700 of us in total.”

Was this the best way to facilitate learning? Two people flew to some distant city, attended a conference with valuable, relevant, and leading-edge content, absorbed all they could in the time they had, and reported on what they had learned to 698 colleagues when back in the office. Something in this formula needed to be fixed. It was simply not efficient for the knowledge exchange within a community focused on scaling software engineering to never-imagined heights in practical terms. In an ideal world, all team members needed to attend these learning events if their companies were invested in moving the DevOps needle.

The Need for A More Inclusive Community

One thing that rings true of all in-person conferences and community gatherings is that they were *exclusive* experiences. In the tech industry, only a couple of software engineers at each company would ever get a travel and

conference budget approved. For tens, hundreds, or thousands of others at their firm, reading a conference summary email from a colleague or stumbling upon a blog was the only opportunity they had to learn about this rising new world order.

Altogether, the significant efforts in producing an event and bringing people together were building a community, but the impact on the industry was too gradual.

Mark and I came up with a different approach. We imagined the opportunity on a different scale.

“Mark, what if we assembled the people who we’ve met on the conference speaking circuit and brought them together for an online conference?” I asked him.

“We could educate everyone in the world on this stuff.”

That was our originating idea—it was just that simple. Do something more for the community in which we were active and interested members.

Mark was all in. We established our mission. We were out to educate anyone who wanted to learn more about DevOps. We didn’t know how many people were seeking knowledge in space, but we could feel the industry’s energy coming alive. Interest in the topic was growing every day. And we wanted to include anyone in any role who wanted to learn more about DevOps.

We also recognized that, with the global population connected online and in social media channels, people who were once siloed could now self-organize into communities of interest without being restricted by geography or other limitations. In this case, all they needed was a way to facilitate connections and a forum in which to gather.

Develop the Plan and the Promise

Back when Microsoft’s SharePoint had achieved massive interest in the market, Mark and some friends organized a “follow-the-sun” conference hosted online featuring speakers and an audience worldwide. He brought know-how on how to engage a global community with our mission. That was the inspiration for ADDO that came to me for this burgeoning DevOps community.

Admittedly, I initially thought of having about ten speakers online for a few hours. Mark was always one to think bigger...much bigger. Over the next few months, we refined our vision and planned to build something amazing. Because ADDO would be a significant undertaking, we would need help.

The best place to search for talent to build and lead a community forum would be from within the community itself. The relationships we had built over the past 18 months elevated our posture. The net result is that we enlisted the help of five friends (Andi Mann, James Wickett, Karthik Gaekwad, Ernest Muller, and Shannon Lietz) from the industry and shared our vision with them. They bought into the concept and agreed to help us produce a new forum for our community.

On November 15th, we would bring together 54 speakers over 15 hours across 15 time zones. The concept was simple. The forum ground rules were simple.

- It's online.
- It's free.
- No vendor pitches allowed.

The digital venue meant that, no matter where an attendee lived or worked, that person could join with an internet connection—no flights, hotel rooms, or travel budget needed.

It was free because we wanted no barriers to entry—no credit card or budget approval was required. No vendor pitches were allowed because they were a turn-off for any crowd. No one wants to sit through 15 hours of pitches for products or services. People wanted to learn, not hear from someone schlepping products. At the time, nearly every conference hosted across the community allowed vendor pitches in some form; we had to be explicit that our community conference was different.

We set these ground rules out of respect for the community. We were building the kind of conference that people in the community wanted; these ground rules helped establish our brand promise to the community.

Unlike large organizations that run events as their business, we wouldn't need to operate by the same rules. We would be online from the beginning, so we didn't need to sell tickets or vendor sponsorships to cover the cost of staff,

food, union workers, or venue rental. We would be online from the beginning, like Mark's previous "follow-the-sun" conference.

There was no expectation that we would promote the community conference as a corporate thing. Of course, there could be corporate and/or personal benefits that would come from association with the conference as our employer connections were obvious. However, we insisted our companies not be front and center because we were building this community for the people of the community. It was about them, not us.

Our previous community-led experiences showed us that our corporate brand(s) would benefit in the long run when we treated the community members right. Building a new community forum would expose our employer to a more significant portion of the market—a portion of which might become future customers. In addition, the more time our team spent with the community, the more we could learn and use in refining our approach to the market.

Fund the Effort and Organize the Team

To support ADDO, we invested in resources like a website, a community channel, digital promotions, a basic community tech stack, and word of mouth to support our work in the community.

Mark and I adopted principles from our past work together when managing the community. For example, one of the ground rules of community-led marketing was to minimize the promotion of any company brands and outbound marketing that might conflict with the community's interests. We knew when we focused on our community's interests, the time and relationships we invested in would help build an affinity for the company where we worked.

Wave 1 of Community Growth — Announcing Our Intent

Influence came in waves, and the first one hit the shoreline on September 1st—at t-minus 75 days.

To pull off the conference, we needed 54 speakers. The seven core organizers put the word out on our personal social channels, and we listed the call for

papers on papercall.io. Incredibly, we had our first speaker submission that same day. Woot!

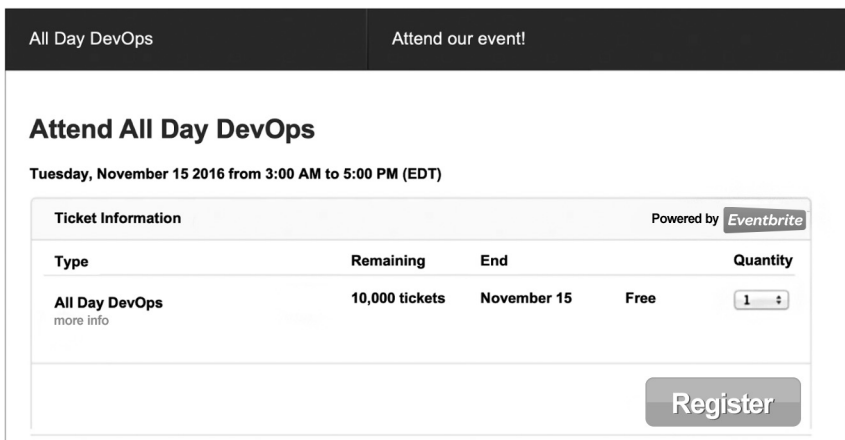
Then something strange happened. People came to us saying, *“This looks like a great idea. How can I register for the conference?”*

“Register?” we were thinking. *“For what?”*

At that time, we had a concept for a community conference and a date to host it. There were no speakers, no agenda, and no way to register for it. We had planned to get a decent pool of speakers and an agenda together before promoting the conference.

We should have thought further ahead, but we weren't event management pros. We were just a small band of people trying to do something good for our tribe. But we learned quickly, and we were nimble.

We didn't have a conference website, so Mark put up an Eventbrite widget on alldaydevops.com that asked for an email address. It could not have been more bare bones. We informed any visitor to the site that we would email them in October (about six weeks in advance of the conference date) once we had more information about confirmed speakers.



The screenshot shows a dark header with 'All Day DevOps' on the left and 'Attend our event!' on the right. Below the header, the main content area has a title 'Attend All Day DevOps' and a date/time 'Tuesday, November 15 2016 from 3:00 AM to 5:00 PM (EDT)'. A 'Ticket Information' section is displayed, powered by Eventbrite. It contains a table with columns for Type, Remaining, End, and Quantity. The table lists 'All Day DevOps' with 10,000 tickets remaining, ending on November 15, and being free. A 'Register' button is located at the bottom right of the widget.

Type	Remaining	End	Quantity
All Day DevOps <small>more info</small>	10,000 tickets	November 15	Free <input type="text" value="1"/>

When our community event was barely out of its ideation stage, people wanted to register. We quickly placed an Eventbrite widget on our website to capture interest.

By mid-September, 80 people had registered.⁴ This first wave of interest caught our attention—we were on to something big. While we were more concept than a conference, more than 300 people had registered to join us by the end of September.⁵ The value registrants recognized was tangible: The community was building something for itself.

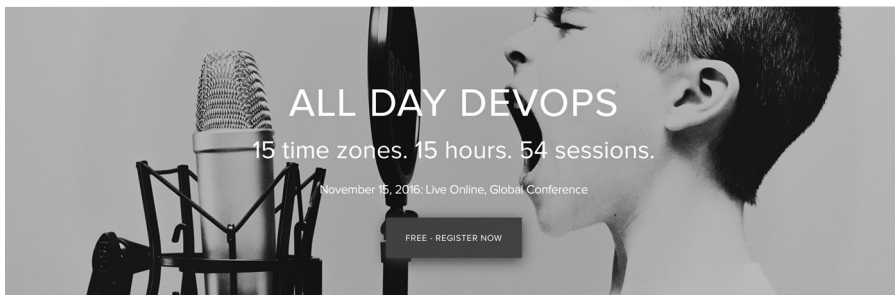
It was time to build a website.

Wave 2 of Community Growth — Email Blasts

Our creative agency turned around the site design in four days, and it went live on day five. It was a simple site. All it needed to say was 54 speakers, 15 hours, online, free, and no vendor pitches. The agency picked an open source picture of a young boy screaming into a microphone to represent our ADDO brand.

On October 10, at t-minus 60 days, we started promoting the first 20 speakers our team had selected to attract more attention. The next day, the company where we worked, Sonatype, sent its first email promoting the conference and encouraging people to register. The company was playing its part in helping get the word out about our community conference. Then came our next amazing surprise . . .

The first email our team sent for ADDO triggered hundreds of registrations. In any career, there are days that are rare and truly special—that day was one of them. It started like a typical day, and then *boom*—instant validation of



The original website for the ADDO community conference showcased our mascot, a screaming boy named “Bobby.”⁶

our work. Even though we thought we were onto something, the email response was much higher than we initially imagined possible. We were already making a foothold into something significant and worthwhile.

By mid-October, we were 45 days into our 75-day journey. Our original goal of 1,000 registrants had been surpassed as one thousand six hundred people had registered.⁷ We were in unknown territory. This was the first time anyone in our industry had ever put together something of this scale, and there was still a month of potential registrations ahead.

Wave 3 of Community Growth — Calling CMO Peers

By relying only on our small band of five external community members and the support of our company, ADDO might have been perceived as another corporate event. We had to reach beyond our circle for help in getting the word out. It became obvious and relatively easy to look for a couple of community sponsors.

Having crossed paths and built connections at events over the past two years with several DevOps industry CMOs, I called on five of them. None of us competed with one another directly on the technology side of things, but all our firms served the community in some way.

I explained we were assembling an online community conference to educate as many people in DevOps roles as possible. Their buy-in was swift and they agreed to help us spread the word. For each of them, we would add their company logo to the ADDO website to recognize their community support.

By October 20th, at t-minus 40 days, 2,700 people had now registered.

The Internet Broke

To continue the adventure, at t-minus 24 days from our *online* community conference, with thousands planning to attend, something went wrong.

“The internet is down on the entire eastern seaboard of the United States. We’re all in the dark,” Mark said.



A map of internet access areas experiencing problems tied to a significant botnet attack on October 21, 2016, and featured in The New York Times. ©OpenStreetMapContributors.⁸

Simultaneously, we all thought, *“This is not good. With no internet, we have no ADDO.”*

That was the day when Mirai malware compromised 55,000 IoT devices to trigger a massive, distributed denial of service attack (DDoS).

We took it personally. Here we had invited everyone to the start of a big online community, and there was no internet. We were dead in the water.

Fortunately, regular internet service resumed later that day. But for the time between realizing the internet had broken and its return to service, it was a white-knuckle feeling. We had no backup plan for a major region of the internet going down. Access to everyone was only feasible if the internet worked.

Wave 4 of Community Growth — Engaging the Locals

It started over breakfast. Mark and I were attending a conference in London on October 20th when he had an epiphany. He looked at me and asked:

“Would we be doing anything differently today if we wanted 15,000 people to participate in ADDO?”⁹

I thought for a couple of seconds and responded.

“Yes.”

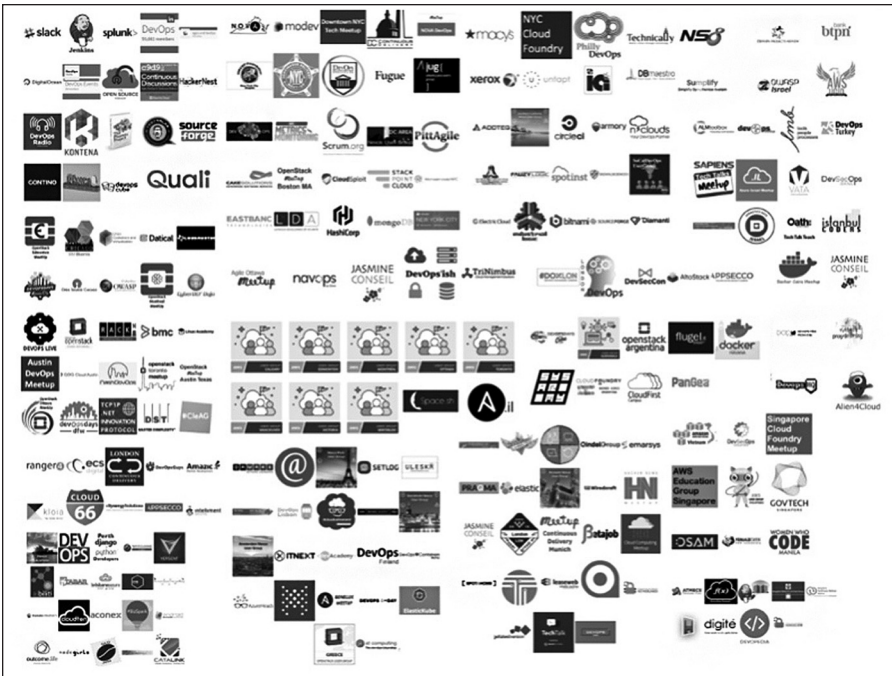
At that time, we had just shy of 3,000 registrations. Mark’s epiphany was to grow that number by FIVE times—in the next 25 days! Imagine how insane that sounded! Simple mental math showed we would need many more friends to help us spread the word.

As luck would have it, the DevOps London meet-up group would host an event at the conference later that day. We knew Marc Cluet, who headed that community, and he was at the event. We met up with Marc, told him about the community conference, and asked if he could help us get the word out. Like us, the London DevOps meet-up was trying to help people in the community learn from one another. As members of the same global community, we had a common mission.

Community is not about the actions of a select few. Community is about the motion of many.

The London DevOps meet-up had about 5,000 members at that time. Marc committed to spreading the word about ADDO at his evening event as well as sharing information about the conference via his email list.

That sparked the next wave of effort from the ADDO organizing team. We built unfair mindshare by working symbiotically with local communities that benefited as much as ADDO did. We reached out to stakeholders in the community who ran meet-ups or had a following in the DevOps arena.¹⁰ We asked our friends at the Open Web Application Security Project (OWASP) for help. We also asked several groups to help promote the conference: London’s Continuous Delivery meet-up, the DevOps Norway meet-up, Atlanta’s Java User Group community, Agile Orlando, Cloud Austin, Devopsdays Kansas, and Devopsdays Berlin. Industry friends from SOASTA, Perfecto Mobile, Cloud 66, Contino, Modev, Newt Global, and others also joined to help us spread the word.



Community groups worldwide helped spread the word about free DevOps education for all. Groups helping out had their logos featured on ADDO's community website.¹¹

The value of this growing community value came from offering access to free, high-quality speakers from around the world. For example, if you were running a DevOps community meet-up in Las Vegas, you might need help attracting top-name or geographically distant speakers to your local events. With ADDO, they could offer their local community more expertise at no cost. Placing a community meet-up logo on the ADDO site was a small gesture of gratitude and showed the wide span of interested organizations.

With the help of these industry friends, by November 6th, registrations jumped over the 6,000 mark with community members representing over 52 countries. We were at t-minus nine days. Registrations were pouring in at 250 per day. If that continued, we might have a chance of hitting 10,000 participants.

Wave 5 of Community Growth—Getting the Parties Started

Word of mouth was key to increasing registrations. Our promotions in late October had encouraged people to register themselves and then register their teams. We were looking for opportunities to serve the “other 698” people from those companies who typically send two or three employees to a conference. The good news is that people will find a way to get together even when you have no venue. That became apparent with one pivotal phone call.

An industry friend, Andre (his name has been anonymized), reached out to me. He was a software engineer at a large U.S. bank encouraging their teams to learn more about DevOps practices. Andre was not an executive from the business. Rather, he was a quiet engineer, always looking for new opportunities to learn. And he was calling me with an idea.

“Would you mind if our bank broadcast the ADDO community conference in auditoriums in our New York, Austin, and Seattle offices? We want all our software engineers to participate.”

“That would be awesome! Yes, please,” I said.

“Do they all need to register?” he asked.

“Officially, no,” I said.

Shortly after this call, Mark Miller posted about a similar community effort in our ADDO conference Slack workspace:

*“33 people just registered for a viewing party in London.”*¹²

The London DevOps meet-up had secured office space to invite their members to watch and discuss the community conference sessions.¹³ Even more, community members formed viewing parties, and we encouraged others to do the same.

Devopsdays Cuba, the DevOps meet-up group in Las Vegas, a large insurance company in Dallas, and other parties began to spring up. Large telecom, energy, consulting, electronics, entertainment, and financial services businesses were all encouraging teams of employees to reserve conference rooms,

gather, and watch together. Our aim to help the “other 698” in offices worldwide was coming to life.

By November 10th, t-minus six days, ADDO had jumped to over 10,000 registrations.

Sidenote: The viewing parties continued to evolve over the years. By the second year of running the conference, the ADDO website featured over 180 viewing parties.¹⁴ We had even heard of one viewing party at State Farm where they had encouraged over 600 people to participate, sponsoring food, handing out t-shirts, and providing vendor pitch-free content to their software development teams.¹⁵

A few years later, the same small band of managers at State Farm helped us recruit 4,000 of their IT employees to participate in the conference.¹⁶ Employees could watch together in conference rooms or auditoriums and then discuss what they had learned in a specific session, determining what practices, tools, or lessons they could apply internally. Again, we were enabling self-organized learning on a global scale.

Wave 6 of Community Growth — Encouraging More Involvement

In the first year of running the conference, the idea of viewing parties came late in the organizing process. People were showing up in teams and we wanted to encourage that further. So, we put two plans into action.

First, any company or community meet-up group hosting a viewing party could be listed on the conference site. Some of these viewing parties were private corporate events, which gave those companies visibility for their support of educational opportunities for software engineers. Other viewing parties were open to the public. All we asked was that those parties manage their event registration, so they would know how many folks were showing up in case they would order refreshments for their local community members.

Second, we wanted to understand better how we were reaching the “other 698” at companies. While not all participating companies had over 700 software engineers, we wanted to recognize those organizations helping advance

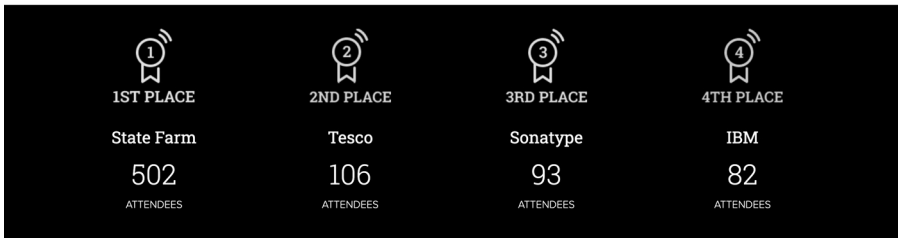
their employees’ careers. Our offer: If any company got 20 or more employees to register for the community conference, their company name and logo would be added to the conference website on the “Club 20” page.



CLUB 20

Club 20 members are those who put DevOps first. Over 20 people from these organizations registered for All Day DevOps 2020, and they continue to be active in the community year-round.

If your company has a big DevOps tribe, start planning to get your name on the leaderboard next year.



RANK	COMPANY	ATTENDEES
1	State Farm	2392 CLUB 500
2	Northrop Grumman	708 CLUB 500
3	Macquarie	443 CLUB 100
4	Keurig Dr Pepper	370 CLUB 100
5	PepsiCo	298 CLUB 100
6	Sonatype	265 CLUB 100
7	TJX	257 CLUB 100
8	Standard Bank	221 CLUB 100
9	Walmart	206 CLUB 100
10	TCS	137 CLUB 100
11	IBM	128 CLUB 100
12	HCL	98
13	Accenture	97

Companies with 20 or more employees registered for ADD0 were featured on the conference website.¹⁷

The idea took off. Club 20 sparked a new kind of community-activated behavior.¹⁸ DevOps leaders, managers, and internal champions were now trying to get their businesses on the list. The list reflected company investment in DevOps education for their employees and the recognition that these companies might be worth checking out for future career moves. In a burgeoning market, DevOps skills were hard to find for employers, and those who showed an investment in building talent had an easier time recruiting new employee expertise.

Some of the cool things that came from Club 20 resulted from the champions who made it their mission to activate their employer companies. A friend at a large financial services firm asked his Chief Information Officer (CIO) to invite everyone in the DevOps and developer practice to the conference leading to hundreds of their employees signing up. In another instance, two food and beverage competitors sparked a friendly competition by trying to see who could get more DevOps pros from their businesses participating in the community conference; each encouraged hundreds of colleagues to join in their respective in-house viewing parties.

Unfair mindshare was not achieved through a single voice or company.

Each annual ADDO conference meant featuring large numbers of organizations on the Club 20 leaderboard. The champions not only brought more people into the community but many were also recognized internally by their companies with promotions due in part to their ADDO community leadership.

The same was true for community meet-up groups that wanted to encourage greater participation in their local markets. The meet-up leaders would promote the viewing parties in their local areas to encourage more of their members to gather in person for the added benefit of personal networking mimicking the value people find at in-person conferences.

Flip the “Go Live” Switch

It was 2016. TechCrunch had reported¹⁹ that Uber was the world’s largest taxi service but owned no cars. Facebook was the world’s most popular media

owner but created no content. And Airbnb was the world's largest provider of accommodations but owned no real estate.

At the same time, our team at Sonatype—in collaboration with friends in our industry—had created ADDO. We were about to run the world's largest community conference but had no venue. Essentially, we built the community, not by having them come to us, but by delivering an attractive and appealing forum to the community. While the idea of a large-scale virtual conference was replicated—years later—numerous times during the pandemic years, in 2016 no one had done what we were about to pull off.

“Good morning, good day, good evening. Wherever you are, welcome to ADDO.”

It was 3:00 AM on November 15th. Total registrations for our community conference hit 13,451. It was time to deliver value to the community.

The community built and delivered the presentation content. The day split into three tracks. Fifty-four speakers from the community would grace our digital stage over the next 15 hours. That day, ADDO community speakers would generate over 30 hours of free educational content for anyone who wanted to learn about DevOps via a range of perspectives, insights, and practical tools.

Tracks were live-streamed, and every session was recorded for binge-watching later. All three conference tracks were moderated by our community organizing leaders in Washington D.C. (me, Mark Miller, Shannon Lietz), Austin (Karthik Gaekwad, James Wickett, Ernest Mueller), and Denver (Andi Mann).

Encouraging Conversations

One of our friends, Chris Corriere, from Atlanta, suggested using Slack for community attendees to chat with one another, meet the speakers, and exchange information. Chris designed a way for community members to jump on the platform by entering their email.

On the day of the conference, countless conversations were initiated in Slack. Every attendee had access to ask questions of every speaker. Every attendee had access to every other person in the community. Questions were answered. New connections were made. Sample code was shared between engineers.

Friendships were formed. The community wasn't just watching . . . people were participating and engaging.

Slack delivered persistence, which was critical to the community-building value of the conference. Communities that build value through content and connection with other members have greater longevity.

After the conference, the conversations and connections on Slack remained there. The community could remain active even when the conference was over. Those who made connections during the conference knew where to find one another again. Slack's search feature enabled them to find people, files, or code.

**Persistence meant that value
created and shared was preserved.**

Unlike physical conferences where people arrive and leave, participants formed lasting relationships and had an ongoing discussion forum. Regardless of location, people could connect.

Slack also brought a second face to the conference. Community members shared selfies from their homes and offices. "Hello" was shared by countless members with their accompanying country flag emoji. No matter where they were, people could see them. Everyone was welcomed and celebrated.

At one point, I remember vividly urging Shannon Lietz from Intuit to get up and take a break from moderating the DevOps security track. But instead, she refused to get up because she was having too much fun. She said, *"Do you know how many connections I am making with brilliant people? I'm not leaving my post. The Slack forum is too good."*

There Was No Exhibit Hall for Sponsors

ADDO was intended to be an educational event for our community rather than a product or company event. One of the three rules for the conference was "no vendor pitches," and we delivered on that promise.

ADDO offered no online exhibit hall for three reasons. First, traditional exhibit halls are rampant with vendor pitches, and the ADDO brand promise was not to allow them. Second, there was no swag to give away. And third, virtual exhibit halls are often impersonal and distract from the actual value of the event as delivered through speakers sharing valuable knowledge and experiences.

Measure Community Success

We were all amazed that year one of the conference community forum attracted so much attention and praise and achieved 13x the original participation target. Post-conference surveys revealed that most community attendees were satisfied with the experience, and nearly every attendee wanted to participate again. The community conference also achieved a significantly higher world-class net promoter score (NPS) than Apple's or Amazon's NPS.

In year two, the conference was expanded from a 15-hour program to a 24-hour format. This allowed registrants to participate in the conference at local reasonable hours, no matter their geography, by going to the 24-hour format. And amazingly, a few folks around the world choose to stay up around the clock for the full 24-hour experience each year.

The 24-hour format also led to a more extensive speaker base and tracks. The conference came to feature 180 speakers annually, which would produce over 90 hours of community-generated content. ADDO would see countless session views of the community content. Attendees would share tens of thousands of message exchanges in the Slack workspace each year.²⁰ Today, thousands of members continue to participate in the Slack workspace.

Over the next five years, Mark and I continued to organize and run ADDO. The annual conference drew in over 30,000 attendees each year, and our membership swelled to over 100,000.

ADDO provides a great example of building a robust community. Throughout this book, you'll hear many other stories of how teams of people built their community-led efforts. As you read on, you'll learn how to build, organize, execute, integrate, and measure your own community-led initiatives.

As an added bonus for you, at the end of each chapter, I'll share an expert tip. These tips are inspired by real-world experiences and are meant to educate, motivate, or spark an idea. Here's the first one for you.

EXPERT TIP: INVITE OUTSIDERS

When starting a community-led marketing initiative, invite people from outside of your business to take part. If writing a blog, invite others to contribute to or proofread it. If organizing a panel discussion, invite community members to join or ask your community who should sit on the panel. If starting a meet-up in your local area, invite a couple of people from your community to be part of the core organizing committee. When you start with community involvement by default, the thing you build is more likely to resonate with your target audience.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

If you're interested in elevating your marketing strategy, enhancing team skills, or inspiring your community with Derek's deep insights and proven methodologies, feel free to reach out. Direct message him on LinkedIn ([linkedin.com/in/derekeweeks/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/derekeweeks/)) to discuss speaking engagements, tailored workshops, or consultancy services tailored to your specific needs.

Looking for more resources to help with community-led marketing initiatives? Be sure to check out Derek's blog at unfairmindshare.com. Here are a few topics there you may find interesting:

- **The art of integrating community and demand gen**
(rebrand.ly/artofdemand)
- **The importance of empathy in marketing**
(rebrand.ly/empathymarketing)
- **The CEO asked, "Do we need a community?"**
(rebrand.ly/ceoasked)
- **Numbers don't hug back: why marketers must rekindle relationships**
(rebrand.ly/numbershug)
- **How we started All Day DevOps and attracted 13,000 people**
(rebrand.ly/13000people)
- **Top 5 community-led marketing books you need to read today**
(rebrand.ly/top5book)

- **What to do when community conflicts arise**
(rebrand.ly/conflicts)
- **Community-led growth: spotting the imposter**
(rebrand.ly/spotting)
- **Community-led growth: time to scale**
(rebrand.ly/timescale)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Derek Weeks is the founder and CEO of Unfair Mindshare, a leading marketing consultancy renowned for crafting boundary-pushing go-to-market strategies that capture the attention of markets, win more deals, and create remarkable brand experiences. As a four-time CMO and VP of Marketing with more than thirty years of experience, Derek has shaped marketing at Fortune 100 technology powerhouses and scaled growth for innovative venture-backed start-ups alike. Honored as one of the top CMOs in the Washington, D.C. metro area by DCA Live and snagging the coveted Marketing Department of the Year award from the Business Intelligence Group, Derek strives every day to make a positive impact in the community of marketers worldwide.



Derek is the pen behind *Unfair Mindshare: A CMO's guide to community-led marketing in a product-led world*, and a co-author of the insightful *Feedback Loops: Voices of All Day DevOps* trilogy.

Born in Philadelphia and raised in Silicon Valley, Derek now lives in beautiful Bethesda, Maryland with his wife, children, and tail-wagging Labradoodle.

Stay updated with Derek at unfairmindshare.com. Follow his insights on LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/derekeweeks](https://www.linkedin.com/in/derekeweeks). And keep up with his musings on X: [@weekstweets](https://twitter.com/weekstweets).