



# Marketing & Community Management

For Early Access and onward

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For help/questions, poke me at:



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# 1.0 Introduction:

This document outlines a handful of good practice examples of marketing and community management, both for early access and live service titles. Each of these practices are derived from case studies of existing games who have executed their strategies well. This is not a checklist of things that must be done, but rather a collection of suggestions that have proven successful for these given titles.

Whether these solutions are fit for what you are building (and what resources you can spare) is up to you - implementing just one of these practices will still be helpful.

## 1.1 The games:

The games I have chosen to use as case studies are listed in this chapter. Note that the criteria I have chosen from are not just games that are financially successful, but also loved by their communities. It is important to emphasise that the game needs to be of a certain calibre of fun, to also succeed financially. Thankfully, good communication and good design tend to go hand in hand.



## 1.1.1 Subnautica



A trendsetter when it comes to doing Early Access well, by putting their production tasks on a public Trello board and doing themed updates. While the second game in the series followed a similar model and ended up not quite as well rounded, this appears to be more on the design choices that were made elsewhere, as I would still consider their external communication methods to be solid.

### References:

- [Subnautica Trello board](#)
- [Subnautica YouTube channel](#)
- [Subnautica update history pages](#)
- [Subnautica post mortem](#) (on benefits of open development)
- [Themed update page example](#)





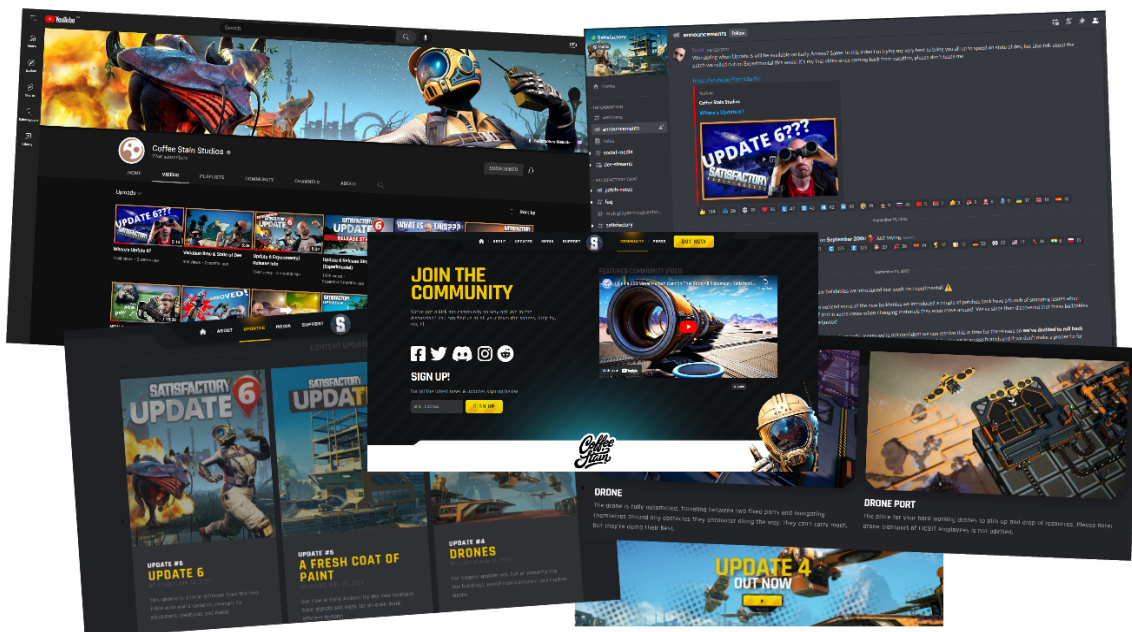
## 1.1.2 Satisfactory



Satisfactory largely follows in the footsteps of Subnautica, using themed updates to push hype around new content. However, they also embrace a more frequent video upload schedule on their YouTube channel, talking about impactful changes and acknowledging community feedback. All in all, they are generally great at dispersing their social media presence across their platforms, to make them fun and interesting to follow outside of the big updates.

### References:

- [Coffee Stain Studios Youtube channel](#) (check out their Satisfactory playlists)
- [Satisfactory Discord](#)
- [Satisfactory homepage](#) (check their Updates pages)



### 1.1.3 Dead Cells



Listed here almost purely for their patch notes, Dead Cells was developed in a way that always highlighted community suggestions with little badges in their bulletpoints. This both creates a better sense of ownership and encourages constructive feedback, which is an amazing mindset to put your players in and getting more playtest data that you can work with.

#### References:

- [Dead Cells patch notes example](#) (Look at those shiny bullet points!)
- [Dead Cells Steam community](#) (Note the categories)

SUB FORUMS	THREADS
HUB: Important information.	11
Patch notes	144
General Discussions	7,386
Bugs & Crashes	7,537
Suggestions & Ideas	4,538
New Player Help and Guides	672
BETA Branch Forum	416
ALPHA Branch Forum	570
Workshop Discussions	241
Events & Announcements	148



## 1.1.4 Deep Rock Galactic



Ghost Ship Games has a pioneering approach when it comes to their Discord integration with Deep Rock Galactic, they are held as the golden standard by Discord. They allowed people to join the server from an ingame interface on a wall, while simultaneously getting assigned to a role in the game and on the server. This resulted in massive growth of their Discord community, which subsequently made outreach much easier.

### References:

- [Deep Rock Galactic Discord server](#)
- [Deep Rock Galactic Steam community](#)





## 1.1.5 Valheim



While Valheim itself had an amazing atmosphere and feel right out of the box in Early Access, I have chosen them for how they are handling their issue-tracking and feature recommendations with a public upvoting system. The game also has sandbox elements and tools that let players make aesthetically pleasing constructions - lending itself well to community activity by simply having a channel to post pictures and videos of player creations.

### References:

- [Valheim FeatureUpvote page](#)
- [Valheim Steam community](#)





## 1.1.6 Fall Guys



A great demonstration of early community building efforts and game design that lent itself well to it, there's a lot to dissect about the way this game was pushed to the spotlight. Covid not considered (insane timing - I don't recommend starting another pandemic to get more people to play your game), the documented legwork behind this game is an invaluable resource.

### References:

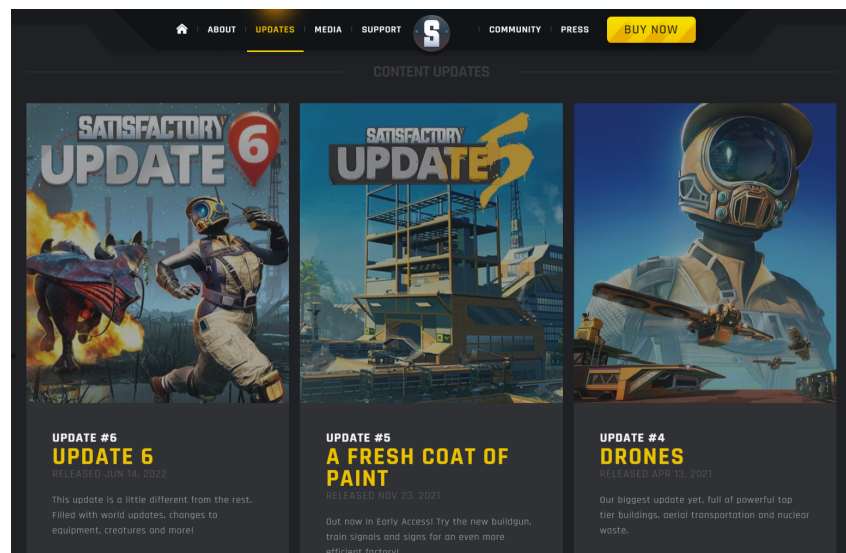
- [Fall Guys Community Twitter thread](#)
- [The appeal of the design of Fall Guys](#)

A collage of images and text related to Fall Guys community building. It includes a screenshot of a Twitter thread from the account 'Fall Guys... SPAAACE!' (5,226 tweets) showing a tweet about the game's release. Overlaid on this are several text boxes with key takeaways: 'As entertaining to watch as it is to Play' (Games that are fun to watch are easily shammable...), 'Do things that don't scale' (Growing a community or social platform gets easier as you grow...), 'Honest, authentic and open' (Players love seeing devs talk candidly about why things were difficult...), and 'Listen and Acknowledge' (Players mostly just want to feel like they're valued and are being listened to...).

## 2.0 The practices

With the sources listed, let's dive a little deeper into the different practices. Please note that the separation between the marketing and community practices is fairly loose: The core of community is to make people so excited to play and be involved, that they talk to their friends about it - which in turn makes them want to buy and play the game as well etc. I am a strong believer that prioritising the quality of the game, the community engagement and involvement in development, will lead to an increase in sales through word of mouth and positive recommendations.

### 2.1 Themed updates:



Theming updates is a great way to create hype around new content releases, by headlining the update with a theme. This requires coordination with the development team, so be mindful of how this may impact your roadmap and make sure everyone is onboard with the idea.

Keep in mind that themed updates don't always have to be to the same proportion each release - they just require an interesting headline-feature, but the surrounding parts of the update do not all have to be related to this theme (great if they do though, makes it stand out even more).

**The team effort** when it comes to the rest of the team, is to think in terms of how the current roadmap supports this kind of periodic headliner. It might turn out that this is how you are already operating, in which case the marketing and community people just need to board the train.

**The risk** here is that you may be compromising a better flow for your game's development, if it is not inherently well suited to this type of update. It may also be beneficial to try to stick to a certain update cadence to keep the players around, but this can cause very harmful cram periods and take focus away from equally important tasks. Always focus on quality over quantity, should the choice come down to the two when scheduling updates.

**Keep in mind that themed updates are FREE - not paid content.** This is *especially true* for Early Access titles, as making new paid content while your game is still not out, tends to leave an awful impression on the playerbase.

### 2.1.1 Summary video



At the core of a themed update is a summary video. The point is to blast the key information at the player, with a video that is both showing the features and is entertaining to watch. The entertainment aspect of the video is very important, as it should also appeal to people who are not already playing the game - it is still a trailer even if the content might be very contextually specific.

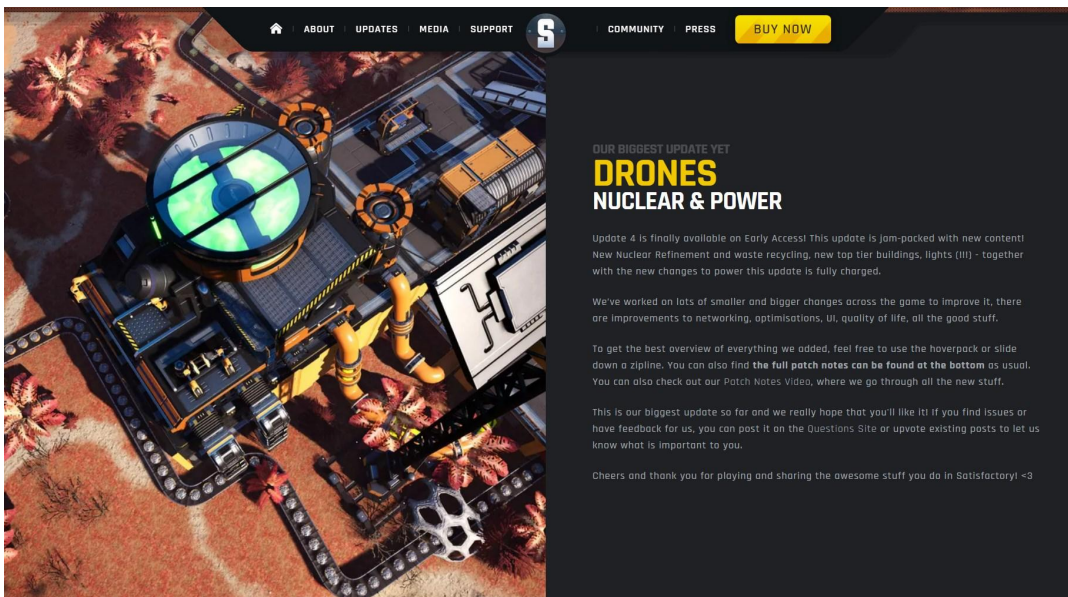
**It is important that the game's look and feel is "gif'able"** - which means the game itself can communicate visually interesting interactions in one or two seconds. Moments that make for a nice gif on a steam store page also fare well as clips in a promotional video. This can

always be upped with good editing skills, but I think it's important not to depart from the actual player experience, so be wary of overdoing this.

### Examples:

- [Subnautica "Silent Running" Update](#)
- [Satisfactory Update 4](#)

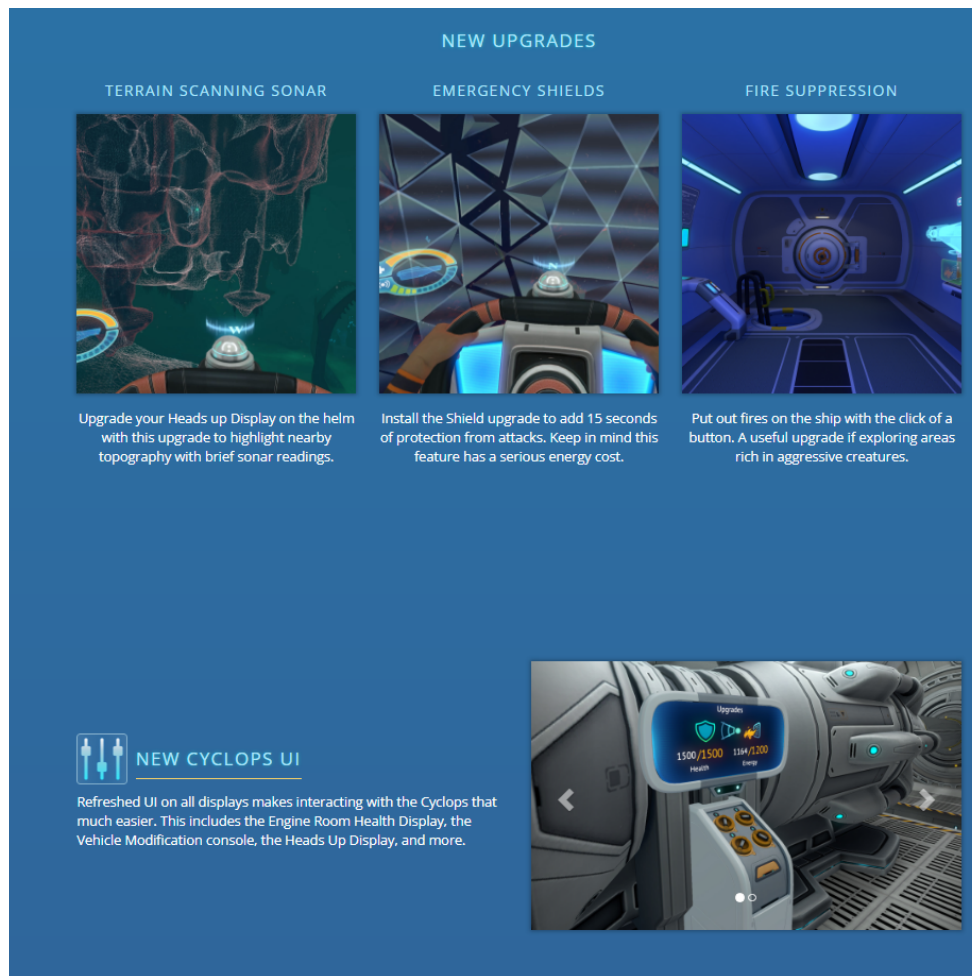
## 2.1.2 Dedicated webpage



Sharing YouTube videos is great, but having a dedicated page for a deeper (but still visual) overview is also a good way to communicate to people who are in a hurry or can't be bothered to read patch notes. This alleviates some of the responsibility of the summary video as well, as it can keep its focus on the headlining detail and the editing, instead of trying to cram everything inside of it.

These dedicated pages usually start with the summary video at the top, followed by an elaboration of the headliner and then the smaller pieces of content further down. The content itself can be as simple as some nicely framed pictures and adherent text, but can also be in video form, depending on the scale of the update. Satisfactory, for example, usually does short video clips instead of pictures, to show things in motion.





I recommend linking to the actual patch notes at the bottom of the dedicated webpage as well, so people can easily read into further technical details.

**Examples:**

- [Subnautica "Silent Running" Update page](#)
- [Satisfactory Update 4 "Drones" page](#)

## 2.2 Highlighting community influence:

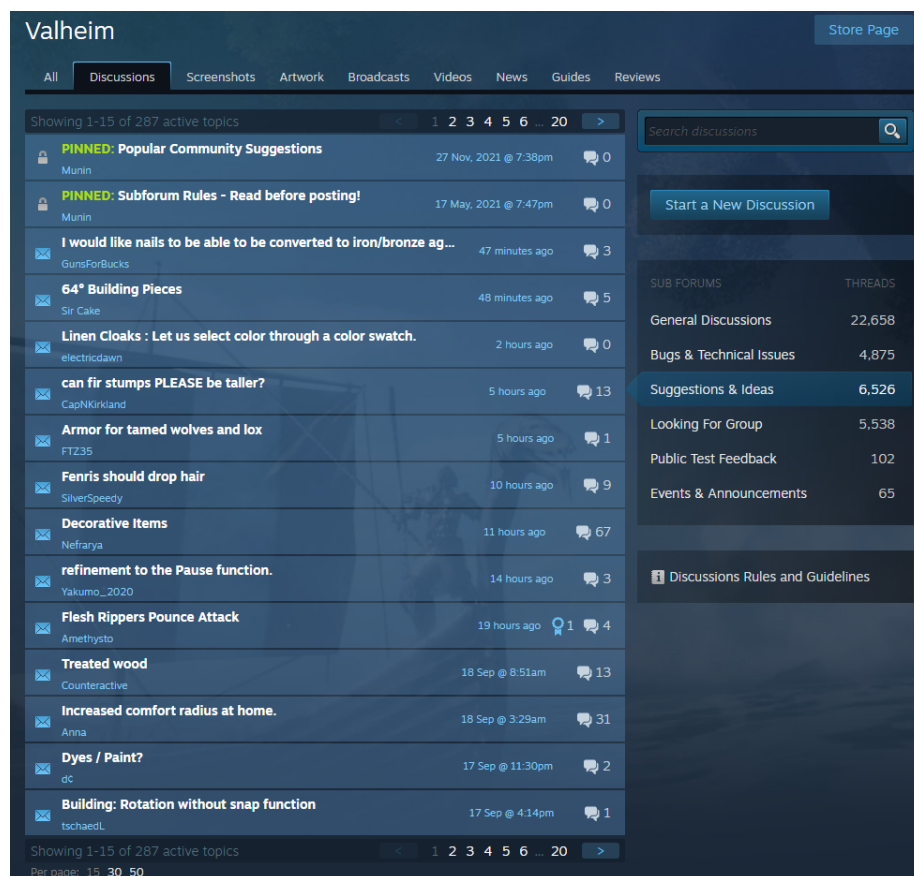
One of the most amazing feelings you can get as a player is to feel like the developers are listening to you. Which makes it incredibly important to look for ways to do this, whether that's simply through acknowledgement of current dialogue or highlighting in patch notes, this feeling of involvement is what I believe to be a big driver in word-of-mouth advertisement (feeling of ownership + quality of the experience = likelihood of recommendation).

## 2.2.1 Building feedback frameworks

We can't highlight community input if we don't know what the community thinks. Accessible frameworks for feedback that also show newcomers what the most prominent current input is, as well as the activity surrounding these feedback channels, is a great way to cultivate this kind of correspondence.

### 2.2.1.1 Steam Community

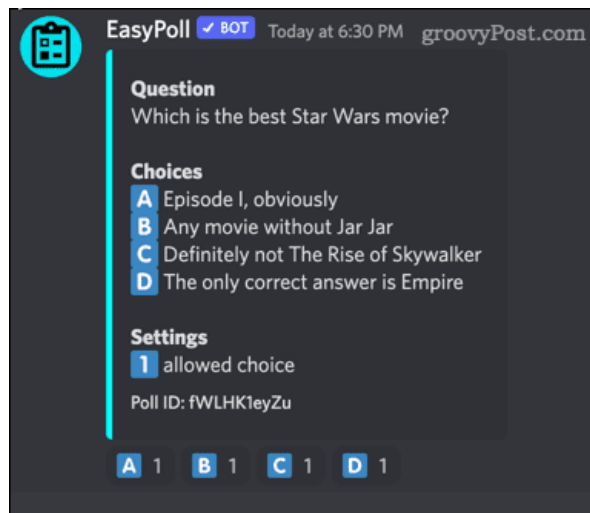
The easiest form of implementation for Steam games is to just use the Discussions categorization, to create a section for feedback:



### Examples:

- [Valheim Suggestions & Ideas Steam Community page](#)
- [Deep Rock Galactic Suggestions + Ideas Steam Community page](#)

### 2.2.1.2 Discord discussions and polling

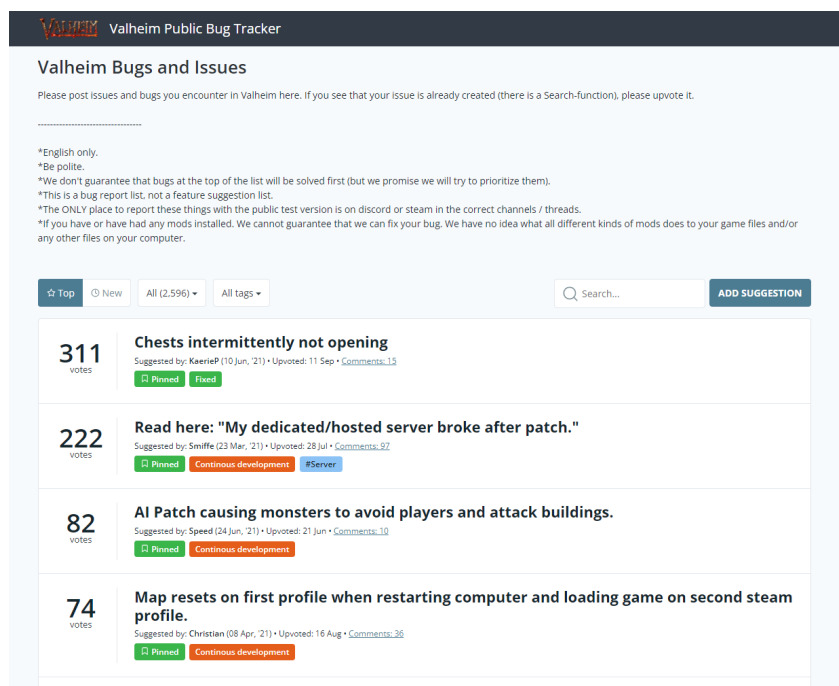


Discord is also great for live polling. If you ever need to confirm what the players are most interested in, even something fairly simple like the initial look of an object, throw up a live poll for people to react to and make decisions.

There's quite a few ways to do this:

- [Discord poll creation methods](#)
- [Simple Poll bot](#)

### 2.2.1.3 Dedicated issues and bugs page with voting

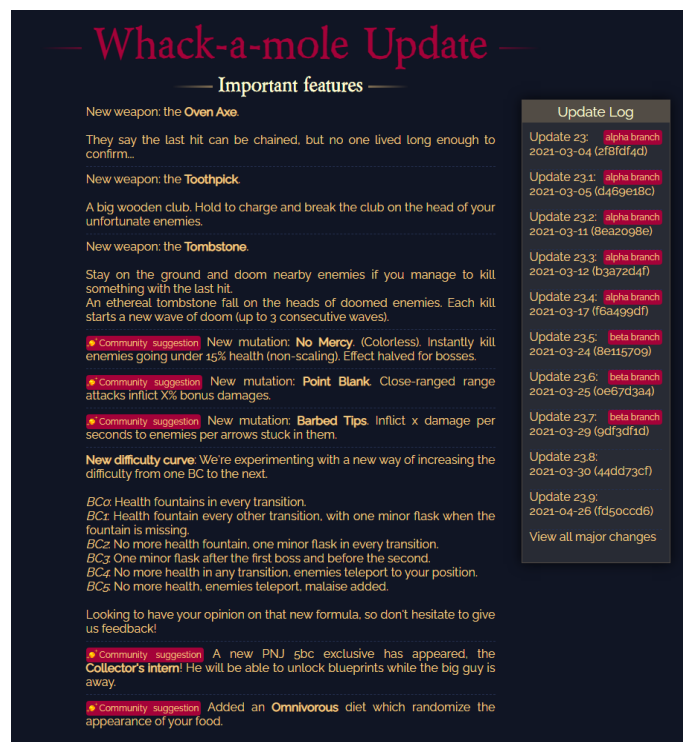


A powerful way to get information and encourage the conversations surrounding your game's development, is to have a place like Valheim's FeatureUpvote page (which they use for bugs, primarily) that doesn't require registration to place a vote.

- [Valheim's Bugs & Issues page](#)

This also helps guide the conversation for update-videos. It's a great way to discover pressing issues that can be acknowledged to ease concerns. People are generally very accepting if things move a bit slower than anticipated, as long as they feel heard.

## 2.2.2 Highlighting changes from community input



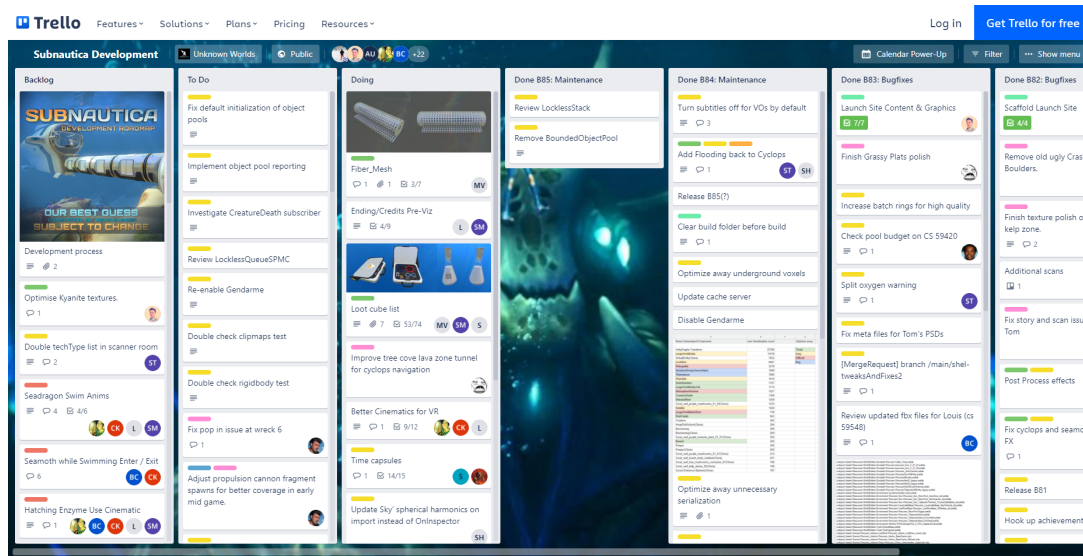
While a simple act in practice, the effect of this on making people feel like they have an impact on the development, is extremely valuable. All it requires is a note to be made when the feature/issue is submitted to the development team, that it originates from the community. And then when the update containing the feature/issue is pushed, slap a little badge on it like Motion Twin did with their patch notes for Dead Cells.

### Example:

- [Dead Cells patch notes](#)



## 2.3 Pushing roadmap and/or kanban board to public



Having a public roadmap can be a little daunting, as it can put pressure on dates for the development cycles, which may otherwise have been a little less rigid. With that being said, it is also a good exercise in reflection - where do we want to go and where are we now? And with good communication it does not have to be rigid, as long as the playerbase understands that these are general predictions that are subject to change.

The community-responsible person should be knowledgeable enough to participate in general status updates on the game's development, to properly convey predictions and changes to the players at a respectful level of technical detail.

For a game in very early development that is still figuring out its design strengths however, it is best to have the roadmap very loosely defined. Building hype around things that are still purely speculation, may result in locking into features that don't play to the game's strengths - be careful.

Putting things out to the public should really happen as early as the team is comfortable with. It's a great way to show people exactly what is happening, so no one feels like there's a veil of secrecy over how the studio's time is being spent. This is also good for gathering feedback on prototypes, if someone comments on an item in one of the forums.

### Examples:

- [Subnautica: Below Zero Favro-board](#)
- [Rokoko product board](#)
- [Subnautica Trello-board](#) (old but still interesting)

### **Note on the Rokoko product board:**

This product board is from where I worked previously. It is a nice presentation of what is being considered, what is being worked on and what has most recently been released. People can submit ideas but the dev team themselves push them to the public ideas page, where anyone can then upvote. It is a slightly different take, but it gives some extra control over what people can see and vote for, minimising the risk of unrealistic expectations if people hype each other up over ideas rather than actual features.

## 2.4 Streaming

There are an assortment of uses for streaming, aside from just showing your community that you are also playing your own game. If this is done correctly, it can really help to both market your game and create a better sense of transparency with your players.

### 2.4.1 Collaborating with creators

If you have any interesting people that are already streaming your game, invite them to do a co-stream with one or more people from the development team. This both creates good conversations surrounding the game's development potential and interesting issues, as well as grows your own social media presence.

**Don't be too picky** when it comes to choosing collaborators. While big names can carry your marketing and should be given stream time, creators who simply care a lot about the game are just as important, and generally represent the playerbase more than a big name who might just be playing intermittently. If you can get a big name who cares a lot of course, that is the goldilock zone. ***Just remember to always be appreciative of people's willingness to be involved in such activities!***

### 2.4.2 Broadcasting updates

Going hand in hand with the themed updates, doing a dedicated stream to talk to people about a new update when it comes out, is a great way to both create hype and verify if the content matches people's expectations.

### 2.4.3 Developer hangouts

Perhaps best suited for games aimed at replayability, studios like Ghost Ship Games usually have their Friday wind-down hour on stream, where they just play their own game and sometimes bring random people from the community or streamers to just hop in and play with them.

The benefit of this is not only relatability by having people listen to the developers talking, but also showing that we are also actively playing the game ourselves, noting potential issues and talking to less prominent community members to better understand the game's strengths and weaknesses.

## 2.5 Content!

If you are at a point where people are making fan art, make sure you acknowledge and share the good stuff on your channels! Not only is this free, quality advertisement - sharing also encourages other people to dive in and gives publicity to the artist (always make it easy to go to the source).

### 2.5.1 Sharing (using hashtags) is caring

As mentioned above, sharing fanmade content is an incredibly helpful dynamic. It shows people who don't play the game that other people care about it. But staying on top of this can be a little tricky if you don't know where or how to look for it.

Thankfully for most social media platforms, the hashtag is your friend. Especially for a platform like Twitter, taking 30 minutes per day to look for cool content to share on the official page, is super easy. Just keep an awareness of the brand perception when you do - make sure the things you choose to retweet also work with people's idea of the game's account "personality".

As for getting people to use the hashtag you want, sometimes you can kickstart it by using it yourself, but other times it might be better to see if there is already a trend and just jumping on that instead. Better to go with people's existing habits than trying to bend them.

#### Examples:

- [Ultrakill Twitter](#)
- [Fall Guys Twitter](#)

## 2.5.2 Set the tone yourselves

As an extension of the point with fan art above and “account personality”, a great way to attract certain types of players and artists is to make your own art in the desired tone.

On that note, good marketing content is also something that gets people thinking about the universe being presented to them. For example, your adverts can easily have some form of worldbuilding quality to them; like it’s an ad, but for something you can only purchase or participate in, within the fictional universe, presented with the in-universe aesthetic. ***If you do this, make sure to touch base with the rest of the team!*** Especially in early production where features may not be a given, using the mood-boards of the art team can be tempting to figure out the tone, but if the focus of the ad is on something very specific, make sure it’s something that is actually in the game in some way.

## 2.6 Making the most of Discord

Out of all of the many social media platforms, Discord is the most customizable and hands-on with your playerbase, as it is both live and the go-to voice-chat and hangout for most people playing together online nowadays. While its possibilities for organic growth are limited, it should be considered the heart of the most close-knit and active part of your community.

Discord is also changing fairly quickly (at least in the nine months I’ve worked as a community manager), meaning that it can be super helpful to stay on top of recent developments, to find new possibilities for community engagement and optimising your server layout and functionality. For example, since I started using the platform, voice chats got integrated text channels, a new hangout functionality for co-watching streams with no limit on participants (like having a Twitch-chat on Discord directly) was added - and now “Home” is adding a frontpage to the servers → give an overview of recent news and activities.

Thankfully, the Discord developers are very good at highlighting these changes when they come around, but it is often possible to get access to them while they are still in development, especially as a community server. And with so many features lying around and so many different ways to build and maintain a server, I highly recommend taking a deeper dive into the documentation to look for these opportunities.



### Helpful resources:

- [Discord Community Resources](#)
- [Discord Blog](#)
- [Discord Game Dev Playbook](#) (Check out the [TicketTool bot](#) they mention)

For a practical example, here is a list of the things that Mediatonic (The developers behind Fall Guys) were using Discord for:

- *Live chat between community members*
- *Live chat between ourselves and the community*
- *Gathering feedback/bug reports from players*
- *Customer Support/Service*
- *Taking suggestions/ideas from the community*
- *Instant updates to the community about any news*
- *Gathering and encouraging the community to create fan-art*
- *Answering FAQ*
- *Creating and embracing community in-jokes/memes*
- *Sharing any streams/videos/content that the community creates*

### 2.6.1 A note on social media platforms in general

The one thing to note about social media platforms is that they are always changing. Both in terms of functionality but also in popularity. While we may look back at what Mediatonic did with the Fall Guys community, the important thing to note is the principles of why - what are you aiming to achieve and which platforms are currently best served to do this? Discord is amazing because that is where most gaming communities are currently located, it still serves the purposes listed above quite well.

But when we look at other platforms that have emerged and shifted people's attention (I'm looking at you, TikTok) we also see changes in how people consume this form of content, not just where it is located. With that in mind, it is valuable to think about how advertising works best on different platforms and try to focus on content that resonates the best with that audience. But don't overstretch yourself - if there's limited resources for community management, you will quickly discover that trying to stay on top of trends from day to day on all platforms can easily eat a lot of your time; even more so if that same person is also

responsible for answering comments. *A good way to tackle this is simply engagement analysis, focus your efforts on the platforms that are easiest to engage with.*

As a practical example and something to think about, here is what Mediatonic did with their Twitter account. As you go through the bullet-points, think about what each of these actions contribute to the community and how they can be reapplied on different platforms (list by Oliver Hindle) :

- *Retweet competitions*
- *Asking for retweets*
- *Celebrating milestones*
- *Tastefully jumping on trending hashtags*
- *Tastefully jumping on Twitter memes*
- *Tweeting in first person and breaking the 4th wall of 'company/brand' accounts*
- *Gifs of the game*
- *News/Updates about the game*
- *Call-To-Actions pushing people to other platforms*
- *Shout-outs when we have new content on other platforms*
- *Sharing community artwork and memes*
- *Sharing development shots, concept art, gifs and videos*

## 2.7 Maximum impact at minimum effort

Might sound like a weird heading but minimum effort should never mean reduced quality. Instead it is the idea of optimising your content strategy, to be able to do more with less. That means automatically reposting Tweets to a Discord channel and vice versa - resharing content on social media channels, from the Discord server etc. The point is to look for opportunities for engagement across all public points of contact, increasing impact while reducing time to produce such content. Whenever something unique goes on one platform, all the other platforms should echo this content - either with links or reposting.

This goes well in hand with embracing community content, doing artist mentions and generally incentivizing an active fanbase outside of playing the game itself.

## 2.8 Do things that don't scale

This one's a little weird but hear me out. This sentence is something that is often heard surrounding startups - and in many ways even if it's not your first game being developed, it also applies to new games coming out of the woodworks and trying to get people's attention. While it sounds a bit abstract, it simply implies doing manual work with the players that wouldn't be possible past a certain number of players.

While not everything listed here applies, this infographic is a pretty good illustration of what that can entail: [Do things that don't scale](#)

## 2.9 The Fall Guys Autopsy

For a good illustration of the effectiveness of “things that don't scale” out in the wild, consider the success of Fall Guys. While it also hinged on [the game design supporting this approach](#), the early community efforts before the game even went public, has been largely credited to the explosive growth it experienced when it did come out. While there isn't really a cut and dry method for what should be done, putting in this extra legwork early on and having a game to support it, can make a huge difference in the long run. Especially on the front of getting Streamers and YouTubers (increasingly muddled nowadays with YouTube Live) involved as early as possible, both through attraction and outreach. To clarify the difference, here's an infograph I yonked from the community manager of Fall Guys:



All rights to MediaTonic for the above illustration.

Speaking of MediaTonic's community manager; Oliver Hindle has written an extensive overview of his methods and philosophies when it came to community building, in his amazing Twitter thread: [Fall Guys Community Building Gospel](#)

There's a ton to be said about what's being listed here, but most of it is already so well put that I think it's better I simply write it out in this document for reference, then give a summary at the end.

## 2.9.1 The Community Management GOSPEL!

Here's Oliver's list of things to keep in mind:

### **Of the platform, not just on it**

*Speak in a similar language and tone to your audience, in a way that resonates best on that platform.*

### **Do things that don't scale**

*Growing a community or social platform gets easier as you grow. We can build momentum by going the extra mile and doing things that will become impossible as we grow.*

### **Value**

*Make sure posts always have obvious value. This can be informative, entertainment, educational, relatable or technical. Never post for the sake of it.*

### **Learn from influencers**

*Influencers are generally way better at growing communities and audiences on social media than companies. Watch them and see what we can learn and steal.*

### **Collaboration**

*Mediatonic (the Fall Guys dev) is excellent at collaborating with partners, let's extend it out to the community too!*

### **Data-driven**

*Monitor and measure what's working using analytics. Use this to help inform future posts and creative direction.*

### **Honest, authentic and open**

*Players love seeing devs talk candidly about why things were difficult, how things work and sharing things that aren't finished or perfect. It makes GameDev seem more personal and relatable.*

### **Listen and Acknowledge**

*Players mostly just want to feel like they're valued and are being listened to. We don't always need to action their feedback, but we should always be listening to their concerns and acknowledging their feedback.*

### **Positivity**

*Always be more positive than is necessary. Kill any negativity with kindness. Respond to love and hype with even more love and hype.*

**W H O L E S O M E // V I B E S // O N L Y**

### **Focus on Growth**

*It's important to engage with our current community, but the focus should be on reaching new audiences and growing our community.*

### **Empower the community**

*Encourage in-jokes, memes and community created content. Promote this content and use it to attract new players, while rewarding community members with a platform to share their creations and amplify their voice.*

### **Strength in numbers**

*Find creative ways for the community to help us with marketing the game. Whether it's asking for retweets on Twitter, getting them to invite their friends into the Discord or tagging their friends in our posts.*

## **2.9.2 Fall Guys Strengths**

The following bullet points are what strengths Oliver identified in the Fall Guys game design and leveraged in his strategy. While it does show a design that works very well for its replayability and watchability, keep in mind that alternative strengths may be leveraged for your title, if it leans in a different direction than this.



While something less fun to spectate or less replayable may be a trickier thing to market, the essence is to look at what works well about ***your design*** and leveraging that in the marketing strategy. My point being - don't sacrifice good design just to get more marketability, if that doesn't ring true to your intended vision. Just make sure the player experience is good and that the person behind the marketing understands why it is good (they should play the crap out of the game themselves).

### **Fall Guys Strengths:**

- *Perfect for Twitch Streamers and YouTubers*
- *Has mainstream/wide appeal. Highly accessible*
- *Taps into pop culture of classic TV Game Shows*
- *Different combinations of rounds each time you play*
- *Unpredictability of what may happen - Interactions aren't hard coded, they emerge from the physics*
- *Fall Guys feel like Pop! Vinyls, hugely loveable, strong desire to collect them and customise them. They're iconic, loveable and people are already creating fanart of their own versions.*
- *Game is super easy to understand/explain to people that have never seen it before - even through a single gif or picture.*

In the end, I think the accessibility (simple design - easy to understand, fun to watch) of Fall Guys, the competency behind the community management strategy and the release timing, are all contributing factors to its success.

If we take the lockdown out of the equation I still think the game would have been successful, but to a different degree. However, that doesn't stop us from reaching in that direction. I think it's important to set ambitious targets, as it helps to reflect more analytically about what does and does not work, instead of just sticking to one method. With that being said, *always remember to celebrate milestones and keep your progress in perspective!* It's a lot like self improvement, don't lose sight of how far you've come because you are too busy comparing yourself to the success of others, as that is no way to motivate yourself to do better.

## 3.0 Actionable points

Now what? That's a whole lot of text and pointers to take in, but what matters in the end is how you put it to use. This in turn depends on:

- What is the current status of your game's development?
- What resources do you have available for building these platforms?
- What is the long-term plan for your game (feature-wise, not player numbers)?

Once we begin answering these questions and going through the practices listed above, look for opportunities that can be taken right now, platforms that would be easy to embrace with your current resources, as well as thinking about how the development roadmap and community campaigns can play together.

In the starting stages as a community/marketing person, the most important thing to do is aligning with the rest of the studio. Knowing how your development milestones are shared publicly and having others from the Studio prep some simple resources that you can work with (could literally just be a screenshot or two), can really help streamline these efforts. *A little pro-tip from my personal experience, is that genuinely caring about the work that your teammates do and expressing that care and interest to them openly, can go a long way in cultivating more organic collaboration. Actually knowing how to code, 3D model, texture, game design etc. even just a little, is tremendously helpful in fostering this dynamic of sharing.*

This also comes back to the practices of transparency and doing things that don't scale. Having someone from the dev team join the community manager for a dev talk now and again, sharing some less curated pictures on Discord (eg. "look at this beautiful 3D model I just finished!"), requires everyone to be onboard with this approach. Creating excitement internally about people's work carries over into the development livestreams.

## 3.1 Say hi if you need a hand

I am always happy to talk! If you have any questions or would just like to have a chat, you can join my Discord channel or poke me on Twitter, by clicking one of the icons in the page footer. You can also click on my face (or the link below) to be taken to my messy website: <https://www.undefinedgames.org/>