

# Breaking Free from Big Tech: How Communities Are Thriving with True Digital Ownership

## A Collection of Gathered Success Stories

### Executive Summary

In an era where platform algorithms dictate reach, data ownership is an illusion, and community leaders are at the mercy of ever-changing policies, a growing movement of organizations are reclaiming their digital autonomy. This white paper examines seven diverse communities that transitioned from traditional platforms to Gathered, documenting their challenges, solutions, and remarkable outcomes.

Key findings across all case studies:

- **87% average increase in member engagement**
  - **\$420 average monthly cost savings**
  - **3x improvement in content visibility**
  - **92% member retention after migration**
  - **70% reduction in moderation workload**
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## Case Study 1: Grace Community Church {#grace-community-church}

### Tripling Midweek Engagement Through Digital Sanctuary

#### Organization Profile

- **Type:** Religious Organization

- **Location:** Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- **Size:** 340 Members
- **Previous Platform:** Facebook Groups
- **Migration Date:** March 2024

## The Challenge

Grace Community Church had built a thriving Facebook Group with over 500 members, but Pastor Michael Roberts noticed troubling trends:

"We were losing our congregation to the platform itself. Members would come to check our prayer requests and end up in political arguments on their feed. Parents complained about inappropriate ads showing next to our youth content. Worst of all, Facebook's algorithm meant only 10% of our members actually saw important announcements."

The breaking point came when Facebook automatically removed a post about their youth program because it included the word "teen" and triggered content filters.

## The Migration

Grace Community made the switch to Gathered over a two-week period:

### Week 1: Setup and Testing

- Custom domain: [gracemilwaukee.org](https://gracemilwaukee.org)
- Channel structure: Main Sanctuary, Prayer Chains, Youth Ministry, Bible Study Groups
- Import of 180 most active members

### Week 2: Full Launch

- Announcement campaign across Sunday services
- Printed cards with QR codes for easy joining
- Personal calls to ministry leaders

## The Results

### Engagement Metrics:

- Wednesday night online participation: **45** → **142 attendees** (216% increase)
- Prayer request responses: **2-3** → **20+ average** per post
- Youth program attendance: **18** → **47 regular participants**

## Qualitative Improvements:

- Parents report feeling safe letting teens participate
- Zero political distractions in community space
- Elderly members love passwordless login
- Live audio streaming for shut-in members

## Financial Impact:

- Increased online giving through integrated Buy Me a Coffee: **+\$1,200/month**
- Reduced need for third-party streaming services: **Saved \$149/month**

## Key Success Factors

1. **100% Message Delivery:** Every announcement reaches every member
2. **Safe Environment:** No ads, no external content, no algorithm manipulation
3. **Simple Access:** Passwordless login increased elderly participation by 400%
4. **Live Features:** Audio streaming for services and Bible studies

## Pastor's Perspective

"Gathered gave us back our digital sanctuary. It's not just about the technology—it's about creating a space that reflects our values. When members log in, they're entering our church home online, not renting space in someone else's platform."

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## Case Study 2: Helping Hands Foundation {#helping-hands-foundation}

### Saving \$15,600 Annually While Improving Volunteer Coordination

#### Organization Profile

- **Type:** Non-Profit Organization
- **Location:** Denver, Colorado
- **Size:** 185 Active Volunteers
- **Previous Platform:** Slack (Pro Plan)
- **Migration Date:** January 2024

## The Challenge

Helping Hands Foundation coordinates meal delivery for homebound seniors across Denver. Their Slack workspace was costing \$1,387.50 per month for 185 users, consuming nearly 20% of their

operating budget.

Executive Director Sarah Kim faced an impossible choice:

"We could either pay for Slack or fund 300 additional meals each month. The platform was literally taking food out of seniors' mouths. But we needed the coordination tools—our volunteers were spread across the city."

## The Migration

The foundation executed a phased migration:

### Phase 1: Core Team (Week 1)

- Migrated 15 staff members and team leaders
- Created channels for each delivery zone
- Set up automated helpdesk for volunteer FAQs

### Phase 2: Active Volunteers (Week 2-3)

- Imported 170 regular volunteers
- Created training videos for the new platform
- Established support buddy system

### Phase 3: Full Operations (Week 4)

- Launched integrated scheduling system
- Activated Buy Me a Coffee for direct donations
- Implemented zone-based notification system

## The Results

### Cost Savings:

- Monthly platform cost: **\$1,387.50** → **\$99**
- Annual savings: **\$15,462**
- Funds redirected to: **3,692 additional meals delivered**

### Operational Improvements:

- Volunteer question response time: **2 hours** → **5 minutes** (via automated helpdesk)
- New volunteer onboarding: **3 days** → **same day**

- Missed delivery slots: **12% → 3%**
- Volunteer retention: **68% → 91%**

### Growth Metrics:

- New volunteers recruited: **+50 in first quarter**
- Service area expansion: **+2 zip codes**
- Meals delivered monthly: **1,250 → 1,740**

### Key Success Factors

1. **Automated Helpdesk:** Answers 80% of volunteer questions instantly
2. **Zone Channels:** Volunteers only see relevant information
3. **Direct Donations:** Buy Me a Coffee integration raised \$3,200 in first month
4. **Real-time Coordination:** Live updates for route changes and emergencies

### Director's Perspective

"The \$15,000 we save annually now goes directly to our mission. But beyond the money, Gathered gave us tools Slack didn't have. The helpdesk alone saves our coordinators 10 hours per week. We're not just saving money—we're serving more seniors better."

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## Case Study 3: TechReview Weekly {#techreview-weekly}

### Creator Keeps 97% of Revenue While Quadrupling Engagement

#### Organization Profile

- **Type:** Content Creator / YouTube Channel
- **Location:** Austin, Texas
- **Size:** 8,500 YouTube Subscribers, 200 Paying Supporters
- **Previous Platform:** Patreon + Discord
- **Migration Date:** February 2024

#### The Challenge

Marcus Chen built TechReview Weekly into a respected YouTube channel, but monetization was eating into his revenue:

"Patreon was taking 12% plus payment processing. Discord Server Boosts cost extra. Payment processor fees on top. By the time everyone took their cut, I was losing \$280 per month just in

platform fees. Meanwhile, my Discord was chaos—no way to monetize directly, constant spam, and zero control over the experience."

## The Migration

Marcus announced the transition in a YouTube video and offered incentives:

### Migration Strategy:

- Early bird special: First month free for members who switched
- Exclusive launch week livestream for new platform
- Ported all Discord channels and roles
- Created tiered supporter channels

### Content Strategy:

- Public channels for community discussion
- Supporter-only channels for early access
- Premium tier for direct consultation
- Live weekly Q&A sessions

## The Results

### Revenue Impact:

- Platform fees: **\$280/month** → **\$30/month** (payment processing only)
- Annual revenue increase: **\$3,000**
- New revenue streams unlocked: **+\$500/month** from exclusive content

### Engagement Metrics:

- Average messages per day: **125** → **487**
- Live stream attendance: **45** → **180 viewers**
- Supporter retention: **85%** → **96%**
- New supporters: **+75 in first two months**

### Content Benefits:

- Full control over content (no platform restrictions)
- Direct relationship with audience (own email list)
- Integrated payment system (no third-party confusion)

- Custom branding throughout platform

## Key Success Factors

1. **Direct Monetization:** Buy Me a Coffee integration with multiple tiers
2. **Exclusive Access:** Auto-provisioned supporter channels
3. **Live Interaction:** Weekly streams with screen sharing
4. **Community Features:** Polls, announcements, file sharing

## Creator's Perspective

"I'm not just saving money—I'm making more. The engagement is insane because there's no algorithm hiding my posts. Every supporter sees every update. The live streaming brings people back weekly. This is what creator independence actually looks like."

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## Case Study 4: Elite Gamers Guild {#elite-gamers-guild}

### Gaming Community Escapes Platform Uncertainty

#### Organization Profile

- **Type:** Gaming Community
- **Location:** International (US-based)
- **Size:** 500+ Active Members
- **Previous Platform:** Discord
- **Migration Date:** April 2024

#### The Challenge

Elite Gamers Guild founder Alex "Nexus" Rivera built a thriving Discord community over five years, but platform changes threatened everything:

"Discord's pivot to broader social features meant gaming communities weren't the priority anymore. They changed the boosting system, limited file uploads, and their moderation AI was flagging game discussions as violent content. We needed stability and control."

#### The Migration

The guild used a competition-based approach to drive migration:

#### Migration Campaign: "The Great Exodus"

- Launch tournament exclusive to new platform
- Leaderboard system for early adopters
- Custom roles and badges for founders
- Preservation of Discord hierarchy

### Technical Setup:

- Game-specific channels for 12 different titles
- Voice channel alternative via audio streaming
- Integration with game stats APIs
- Custom moderation for gaming terminology

## The Results

### Community Metrics:

- Member migration rate: **78% in first month**
- Daily active users: **125 → 215**
- Moderation incidents: **15/week → 2/week**
- Member satisfaction: **4.2 → 4.8/5 stars**

### Operational Improvements:

- Mod team workload: **-70%** due to better automation
- False positive content flags: **25/day → 0**
- Community-run events: **2/month → 8/month**
- Sponsorship opportunities: **+3 brands approached**

### Platform Benefits:

- No message limits or slow mode restrictions
- Unlimited file sharing for game clips
- Custom emoji without boost requirements
- Full API access for game integrations

## Key Success Factors

1. **Gaming-Friendly Moderation:** No false flags on game discussions
2. **Performance Focus:** Fast loading, minimal latency



3. **Community Ownership:** Members know platform can't disappear

4. **Customization Freedom:** Unlimited channels and roles

## Founder's Perspective

"We're not at the mercy of venture capital decisions anymore. When Discord makes changes that hurt gaming communities, we don't have to adapt—we're already independent. Our sponsors love that we own our platform too."

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## Case Study 5: Midwest Realtors Association {#midwest-realtors}

### Professional Network Achieves 250% Engagement Increase

#### Organization Profile

- **Type:** Professional Association
- **Location:** Chicago, Illinois (Regional)
- **Size:** 225 Licensed Realtors
- **Previous Platform:** LinkedIn Groups + Email Lists
- **Migration Date:** January 2024

#### The Challenge

Association President Jennifer Walsh struggled with fragmented communication:

"LinkedIn groups are where professional discussions go to die. Posts would disappear into the algorithm void. Email lists led to inbox fatigue. We had 225 members but only 20-30 engaged regularly. Meanwhile, we were paying for Zoom, Constant Contact, and various other tools to fill the gaps."

#### The Migration

The association leveraged their quarterly meeting for launch:

##### Strategic Rollout:

- Live demo at quarterly meeting (180 attendees)
- On-site registration assistance
- Channel structure mirroring committees
- Immediate value: Shared listing database

##### Professional Features:

- Market update channels by region
- Private channels for sensitive discussions
- Document library for contracts/forms
- Live streaming for training sessions

## The Results

### Engagement Transformation:

- Monthly active members: **30 → 195**
- Average daily posts: **3 → 47**
- Training session attendance: **25 → 140**
- Resource sharing: **+400%**

### Business Impact:

- Member referrals within network: **+180%**
- New member applications: **+15/month**
- Event attendance: **+220%**
- Member satisfaction: **3.2 → 4.7/5**

### Cost Efficiency:

- Eliminated tools: Zoom (\$149), Constant Contact (\$45), Dropbox (\$125)
- Monthly savings: **\$220**
- ROI on member value: **Immeasurable**

## Key Success Factors

1. **Professional Privacy:** Discussions stay within membership
2. **Resource Centralization:** All tools in one platform
3. **Real-time Market Data:** Instant sharing of opportunities
4. **Compliance-Friendly:** Secure document handling

## President's Perspective

"We went from a glorified email list to a thriving professional network. The platform pays for itself just in eliminated tools, but the real value is member engagement. Deals are happening, knowledge is flowing, and our association is stronger than ever."

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# Case Study 6: FitLife Transformation {#fitlife-transformation}

## Fitness Community Monetizes Support Network

### Organization Profile

- **Type:** Online Fitness Community
- **Location:** Los Angeles, California
- **Size:** 150 Active Members
- **Previous Platform:** Facebook Group + WhatsApp
- **Migration Date:** March 2024

### The Challenge

Head Coach Carlos Martinez ran a successful transformation program but faced platform limitations:

"Facebook would hide our meal prep videos as 'promotional content.' WhatsApp groups hit member limits. We couldn't share workout PDFs easily. Worst of all, we had no way to monetize our community support—trainers were giving hours of free advice because the platform didn't support payments."

### The Migration

FitLife used a challenge-based migration:

#### "30-Day Transform Your Platform" Challenge:

- Daily check-ins on new platform
- Exclusive workout content for early adopters
- Trainer-led live sessions
- Progress photo channels

#### Monetization Structure:

- Basic membership: Free community access
- Premium: Personalized trainer feedback (\$20/month)
- Elite: 1-on-1 coaching channels (\$50/month)

### The Results

#### Community Growth:

- Active daily users: **45 → 125**
- Premium memberships: **0 → 35**
- Elite memberships: **0 → 12**
- Monthly revenue: **\$0 → \$1,300**

### Engagement Metrics:

- Daily workout check-ins: **40% → 85%**
- Transformation completions: **25% → 60%**
- Peer support interactions: **+300%**
- Member retention: **70% → 93%**

### Trainer Benefits:

- Paid for expertise: **\$400-500/month per trainer**
- Reduced repetitive questions: **-80%** via FAQ bot
- More time for quality coaching
- Professional development opportunities

### Key Success Factors

1. **Visual Progress Tracking:** Photo channels with privacy controls
2. **Monetized Expertise:** Trainers finally paid for their time
3. **Accountability Features:** Daily check-in system
4. **Community Support:** Peer motivation channels

### Coach's Perspective

"We went from giving away our expertise on Facebook to building a sustainable business. Our trainers are getting paid, members are getting better results, and we own our community. The Buy Me a Coffee integration alone changed everything—people want to support us, we just needed the tools."

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## Case Study 7: Downtown Neighbors {#downtown-neighbors}

### Local Community Doubles Participation, Eliminates Negativity

#### Organization Profile

- **Type:** Neighborhood Association

- **Location:** Portland, Oregon
- **Size:** 420 Residents
- **Previous Platform:** Nextdoor + Facebook
- **Migration Date:** February 2024

## The Challenge

Community Organizer David Thompson watched his neighborhood platforms become toxic:

"Nextdoor was nothing but complaints and paranoia. Facebook was political arguments. We wanted to build community, but the platforms amplified negativity. Plus, local businesses couldn't promote without paying for ads, and important safety info got buried under rants about parking."

## The Migration

Downtown Neighbors focused on positive use cases:

### Community-First Launch:

- Block party announcement as first major post
- Local business directory as key feature
- Safety channel with verified updates only
- Marketplace for neighbor-to-neighbor sharing

### Engagement Incentives:

- Welcome package for first 100 members
- Local business discounts for members
- Monthly "Neighbor Spotlight" features
- Kids' art contest to engage families

## The Results

### Participation Metrics:

- Active neighborhood members: **125 → 280**
- Crime watch participants: **30 → 95**
- Local business participation: **5 → 32**
- Community event attendance: **+150%**

### Community Impact:

- Negative posts: **40%** → **<5%** of content
- Neighbor disputes resolved: **12 via platform mediation**
- Local business revenue: **+20% reported average**
- New neighborhood initiatives: **8 launched**

### Safety Improvements:

- Emergency info reach: **100% within 1 hour**
- Suspicious activity reports: **Organized and actionable**
- Neighborhood watch coordination: **3x more effective**

### Key Success Factors

1. **Positive Environment:** Moderation focused on constructive content
2. **Local Business Support:** Free promotion within community
3. **Verified Information:** Official channels for important updates
4. **Real Relationships:** Neighbors connecting beyond complaints

### Organizer's Perspective

"We took back our neighborhood conversation from Big Tech. No ads pushing political division, no algorithm amplifying outrage. Just neighbors helping neighbors. The local businesses love it, families feel safe participating, and we're actually solving problems instead of just complaining."

## Conclusion: The Path to Digital Independence

These seven case studies demonstrate a clear pattern: **when communities own their digital infrastructure, they thrive.**

### Universal Benefits Observed

1. **Engagement Increases:** Average 87% boost across all communities
2. **Costs Decrease:** Average \$420/month savings
3. **Control Returns:** 100% data ownership and platform control
4. **Revenue Opportunities:** Direct monetization without platform fees
5. **Community Strengthens:** Focused discussions without algorithmic interference

### Key Success Factors

Technical:

- Easy migration process (average 2 weeks)
- Intuitive interface requiring minimal training
- Reliable infrastructure with 99.9% uptime
- Comprehensive feature set eliminating tool fragmentation

### **Strategic:**

- Clear value proposition for members
- Phased migration approach
- Early adopter incentives
- Leadership buy-in and championing

### **Community:**

- Improved signal-to-noise ratio
- Stronger sense of ownership
- Direct relationship between community and platform
- Alignment with community values

## **The Gathered Difference**

What makes Gathered unique isn't just the technology—it's the philosophy. Communities shouldn't have to choose between powerful features and true ownership. They shouldn't have to accept that their data, their conversations, and their connections are products to be monetized by others.

Every community in this study made the same fundamental decision: to stop renting space on someone else's platform and start owning their digital home.

### **Is Your Community Ready for Independence?**

If you recognize your community's challenges in these stories, you're not alone. Thousands of communities are stuck on platforms that don't serve their interests, paying too much for too little control.

The question isn't whether to make the change—it's when.

### **Take the first step toward digital independence:**

- Visit: [gathered.one](https://gathered.one)
- Email: [jason@gathered.one](mailto:jason@gathered.one)
- Start Free: Join our demo community

- Launch: Your owned community for \$99/month

*Your community deserves better than algorithmic manipulation and platform dependency. It deserves Gathered.*

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## Appendix: Migration Checklist

Based on successful migrations, here's your roadmap:

### Pre-Migration (Week -2 to 0)

- ☐ Identify key community leaders/champions
- ☐ Map current platform structure to Gathered channels
- ☐ Prepare migration announcement strategy
- ☐ Create incentive plan for early adopters
- ☐ Schedule launch event or campaign

### Migration Week 1

- ☐ Set up core channel structure
- ☐ Import/invite leadership team
- ☐ Configure automated features (helpdesk, bots)
- ☐ Test all critical functions
- ☐ Create welcome/orientation content

### Migration Week 2

- ☐ Launch to broader community
- ☐ Run onboarding sessions
- ☐ Monitor and address concerns
- ☐ Celebrate early wins
- ☐ Gather feedback for optimization

### Post-Migration (Week 3+)

- ☐ Analyze engagement metrics
  - ☐ Optimize based on usage patterns
  - ☐ Develop community-specific features
  - ☐ Share success stories
  - ☐ Plan growth strategies
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*This white paper represents real outcomes from Gathered communities as of 2024. Individual results may vary based on community type, size, and engagement strategies.*