Deloitte & Pressly:
Exponential Growth and Why Over 124k Engagements Wasn't Even Close to the Biggest Win

Back in February of 2014, Deloitte had a problem.

One of the largest international professional services networks in the world, Deloitte had just launched a new sector called Exponentials with a lofty [purpose](): "to educate, inspire and help leaders harness exponentials technologies to improve the way we live and work."

In essence, Deloitte Exponentials needed a way to bring that mission to life … in the real world.

This meant creating a new, digital environment where employees, partners, influencers, and clients could share knowledge, discuss the nuances of today's modern marketplace, and stay engaged in the fast-paced technologies surrounding their industries.

More than that, the Exponentials' team wanted a place where both small and large businesses could rapidly adopt those technologies and grow not just *exponentially but unencumbered by traditional enterprise-level structures that actually inhibit communication and community*.

This is the story of how Pressly solved those problems, garnered Deloitte over 124,324 engagements, and why that big number wasn't close to the hub's biggest win.

The Challenge of Exponentials

In February of 2014, the Deloitte Greenhouse team in Canada held a Singularity-sponsored event with clients and employees. There they discussed the technological developments changing the business landscape. These *exponential* technologies were enabling new companies to grow better, faster, and cheaper than traditional methods.

To stay ahead of the game, companies like Deloitte, and many of their partners and clients, needed a way to keep up with the news about exponential technology, developments, and adoption.

So, when Ian Chan -- Deloitte Partner, Exponentials and Innovation Leader -- asked guests at the event if they wanted to "keep the conversation going," 99% gave a resounding: "Yes."

The question was, "How?"

Naturally, a host of communication tools already existed inside and outside of Deloitte: social media, digital newsletters, memos, internal and external facing websites, email in all its various forms, project management software, chat applications, and more.

Unfortunately, none of these tools were up to the primary challenges Deloitte was facing.

How could Deloitte …

1. Facilitate communication that was simultaneously wide in reach as well as deep in expertise?
2. Improve their visibility online and overall customer confidence.
3. Engender a genuine sense of community, shared ownership, and ongoing interaction?
4. Deliver content fast without forcing each piece to travel through the usual laborious hierarchy of enterprise marcomm?
5. And, lastly, accomplish all those tasks in an aesthetically rich environment?

To carry out this vision, Deloitte wanted to create its own visually appealing, expertly curated platform that was easily accessible on mobile, one that would serve as a living repository for information and exchange, rather than just a temporary dumping group for ethereal "sharing."

As Oren Berkovich of Deloitte puts it, "That's the challenge Pressly beautifully answered."
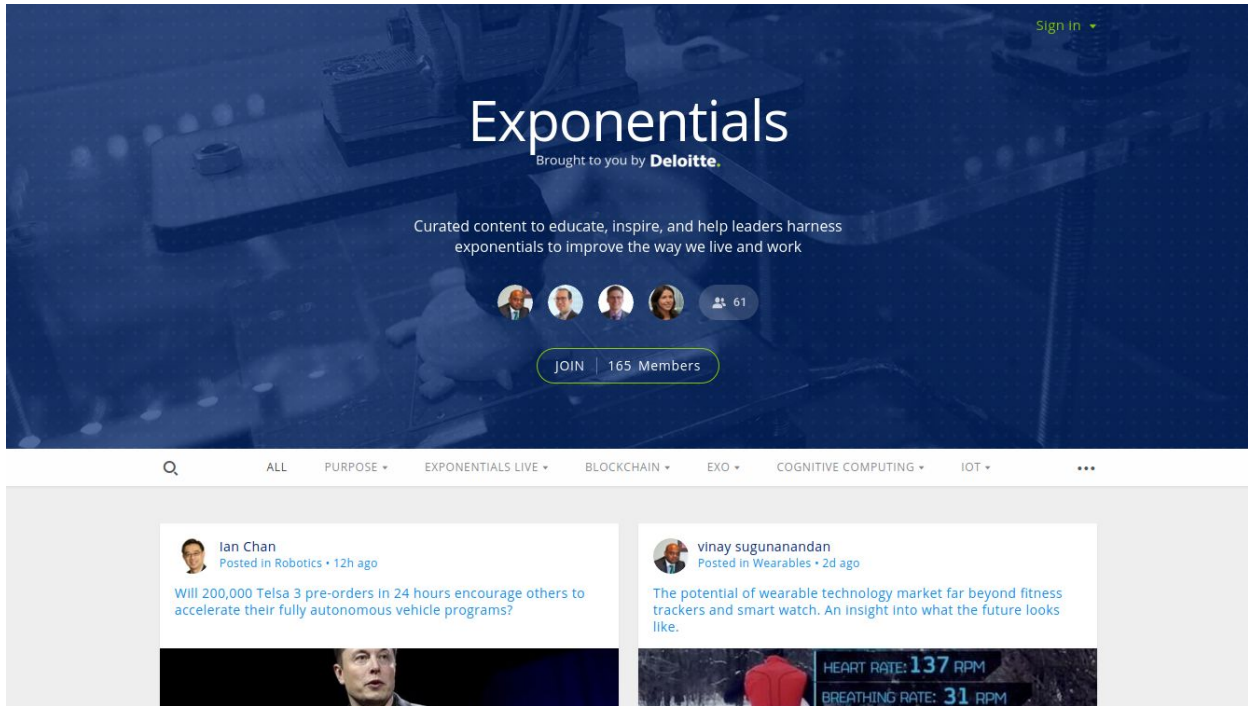
The Creation of Exponentials

Faced with a business demand but no clear mechanism to meet it, Ian tells the origin story -- what he calls the "lore" -- like this:

> Serendipitously, we met Jeff [Pressly's co-founder and CEO] two days later and the following Friday at four o'clock he, Tara [Deloitte's National Marketing Director], and myself sat down together.
>
> Halfway through Jeff's presentation, I stopped him, turned to Tara, and asked, "Is there any reason can't we fire this up … like now?"
>
> Don't ask me how we did it -- especially with IT and legal -- but by the following Wednesday, we had a live site. And then, we just started using it.

Using it, however, didn't mean throwing resources at it.

Instead of promoting the newly created hub to the wider Deloitte organization, the team set about proving to themselves they could curate content to educate, inspire, and help leaders harness exponentials to improve the way they live and work.

Things moved fast.

The Deloitte team spent the next few months inviting select team members and outside experts -- including [David Rose](#), CEO at Ditto Labs and MIT Media Lab Researcher, and serial entrepreneur and venture capitalist [Anthony Di Iorio](#) -- to become curators: thought leaders who were willing to share their own content as well as *contribute content created by others*.

That last point is key. Unlike traditional websites or enterprise-level marcom, Exponentials -- just like most of Pressly's hubs -- runs on a combination of both content creation as well as content curation: collecting, sharing, commenting, and evaluating other people's content.

The simplicity of this approach allowed Exponentials' contributors to follow their passions.

Rather than paying writers and designers to constantly create something new, the team decided to focus their attention on bringing together the best news, discoveries, and statistics by experts in their various fields. In fact, none of the outside collaborators were paid positions and (besides those tasked with maintaining it) neither were its internal participants.

Instead, what drove participation was each person's love of the content itself … as well as calling in a few favors.

Letting the hub grow organically, by December of 2014 it was receiving just under 2,000 unique pageviews each month.

In and of itself, that's not a massive number. However, what that number represented was where Deloitte was to unearth the hub's biggest win.

As Ian explains:

> One of the natural benefits that I didn't think I was going to get was the creation of an internal Deloitte community. I had wanted to create an external community. And while what we created was external, it was far more an internal network of leaders and collaborators.
>
> By forcing contributors to not just share articles, studies, podcasts, and more … but write up a brief commentary on them, it made them actually learn the content.
>
> Compare that to the shallowness of email strings or social media posts where all people do is glance and click "share" and what we found was a level of engagement, interaction, and personal growth we simply hadn't expected.

This overlapping approach of a site that straddles both worlds -- external exposure and internal community -- is the foundation of Exponentials' success.

The Wins of Exponentials

In creating the hub, the Exponentials team had a loose collection of goals based on the original aim of "keeping the conversation going." Simply put, the desire was to inform their existing clients of technological changes in transportation, finance, and manufacturing. By doing this, they also hoped to position themselves as thought leaders in those same spaces.

Looking back, the hub's actual wins far exceeded those initial goals … both qualitatively -- in terms of metrics like traffic and engagement rates -- as well as qualitatively, solidifying Deloitte's position as leaders and establishing a robust community of online subject matter experts.

1. Increased Engagement

Since its inception, Exponentials has moved from 6 collaborators to 66 who regularly submit content.

On the surface, the most impressive statistics revolve around the hub's engagement rates. Not only are its participants signing up and actively contributing, they are returning time and again to see what's new and to get more information to discuss with peers, clients and partners. All told, the hub has generated 63,205 unique pageviews.

In and of itself, that's not a small number.

However, among those visitors, what really stands out were Exponentials' engagement rates, which were and are well above the current global averages.

For example, the average Exponential visitor spent 7.47 minutes on site per session.

That's a 163% increase over the current global average of just 3 minutes.

What's more, as a stand alone web property, generated 124,324 engagements across a mere 1,229 individual posts.
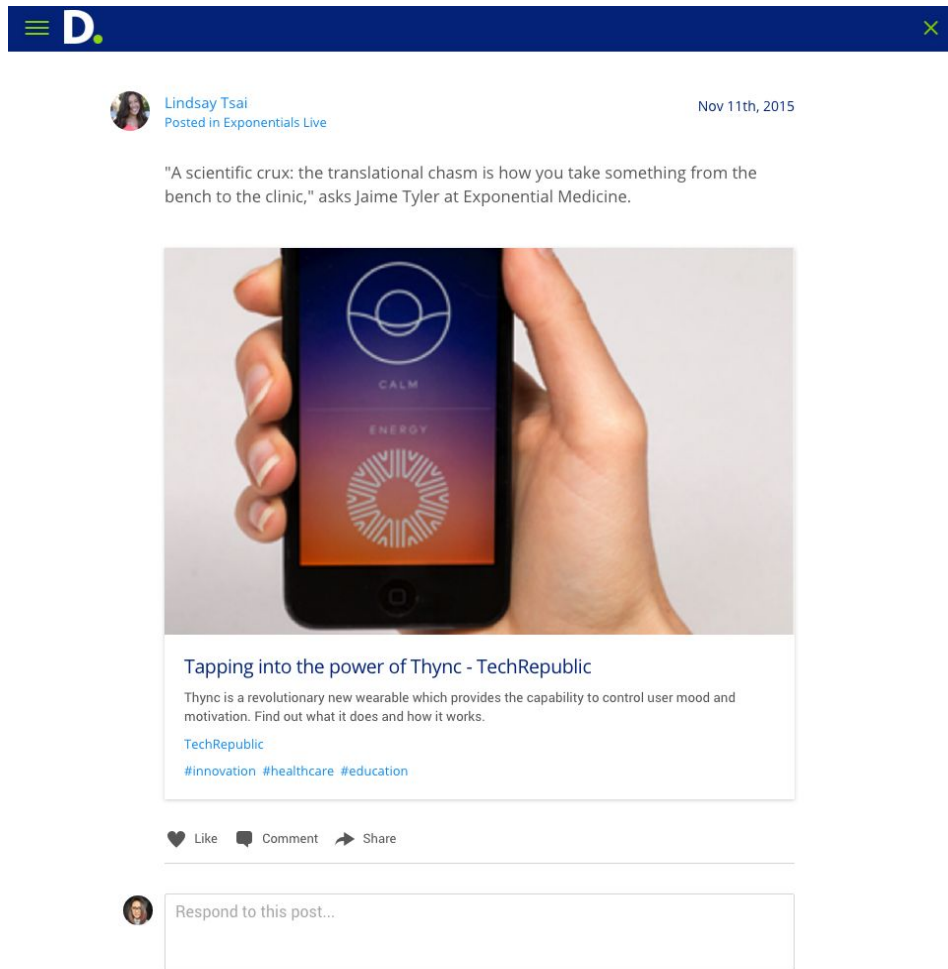
Moving forward, the team aims to double the traffic to Exponentials every six months. A lofty goal, but definitely achievable if past performance is any indication.

2. Live Presence

In addition to traffic, the hub has also become a rallying point for Deloitte's presence at live events.

In November of 2015, a small group of Deloitte US collaborators covered the #XMed event in San Diego, California. The hub housed an embedded live video stream of the event, enabling increased distribution and user access.
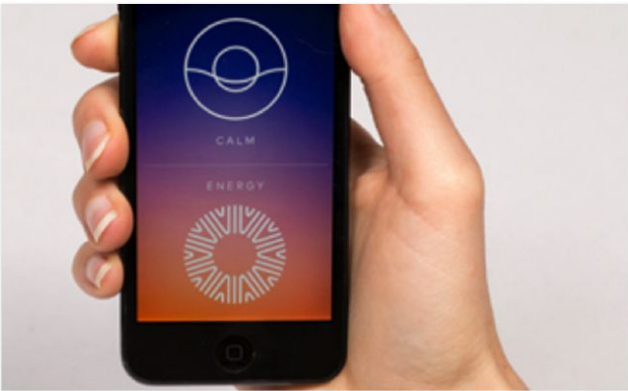
From this event, Exponentials garnered 5884 page views and 1945 sessions, with nearly half (43%) being new users. Visitors also viewed an average of 3.03 pages per session and spent an average 4:32 minutes on the site.

In January 2016, an on-the-ground team arrived at CES 2016 (Consumer Electronics Show) and were highly active in sharing their live, on-and-off-the-floor experiences. As before, the hub's coverage gained a large increase in traffic, with 5852 pageviews over 2482 sessions. This time, a full 60% of those visits were from new users.

TIM STEVENS
Editor-in-Chief, Roadshow. Editor-at-Large, CNET.

"Siri is at the forefront of a tech revolution that may finally kill off the keyboard."

exponentials.xyz   POWERED BY **PRESSLY**

Death of a Keyboard?

Why has it taken so long to get good voice control? This was the big question at the CES talk "The next big thing: Is the keyboard dead?"

A few responses came up:

• It takes natural language understanding

• Being able to interrupt while the computer is still talking and have it understand was an advancement in of itself (but we have been averaging 20% reduction in error rates for the past decade and that's not slowing down any)

• Disambiguating who is speaking by using gaze and body language will be important as the number of listening devices increases

Do you use voice commands with your devices regularly? Would you say your own keyboard is near extinction?

This enthusiastic live presence also extended to Deloitte's internal events. Chris Neels, Editor of Exponentials, explains:

> I participated in a global meetup in Chicago where a bunch of different member firms got together to think about how we can share knowledge across firms, and Pressly and Exponentials.xyz was constantly used as an example of how to do that.

3. Thought Leadership

Since the Exponentials hub is public facing anyone can view it. As Innovation Lead for Deloitte Amandine Dhennin put it, "Within months, the Exponentials team at Deloitte Greenhouse was transformed into a group of thought leaders."
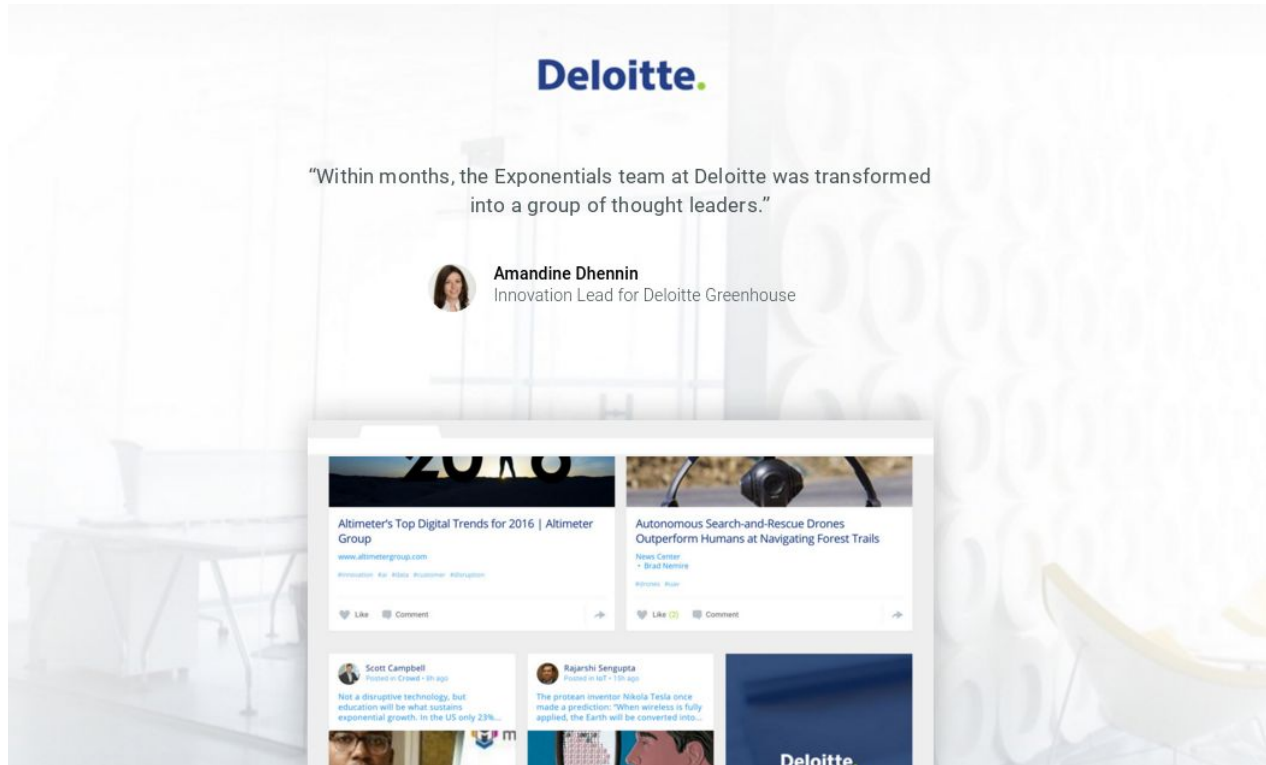
Being considered forerunners of the exponentials movement isn't just good for furthering the conversation, it's great for business.

Deloitte's clients depend on them to know what's happening in the marketplace and guide them accordingly. With consistent curation of the latest developments, Exponentials gives customers great recommendations for growth and original insight.

While, it hasn't been a priority in the past, the team aims to put metrics in place to separate the data received from Google Analytics so they can determine just how many visits come from within the company and outside the company.

4. Learning Community

Certainly, the above numbers are telling.

But the real value of the hub manifested in an unpredictable way: not only was the hub generating online interest, it sparked offline conversations and created a robust internal Deloitte community.

Take this example shared by a moderator of the hub, Oren Berkovich:

Sometimes we get posts that actually encourage a conversation off the platform. Chris [Neels] posted this very interesting article about vertical farming and all of a sudden we get an email from another Deloitte practitioner from Australia, who's like, "Hey, this is really interesting, we're actually working with a client that is interested in learning more about vertical farming, can we have a discussion?"

As we get moderators and more curators, it sparks these serendipitous connections.

Chris Neels
Posted in ExO

Aug 25th, 2015

Vertical farms have the benefit of offering consistently fresh, high quality vegetables grown in an optimal climate-controlled environment. The organic foods market may be feasible within the next few years as the economics of high crop density per square foot, streamlined logistics, and lower operating costs offset the advantages of conventional farming.

Are Vertical Farms The Future Of Agriculture?

www.youtube.com • The Good Stuff

In fact, content from the hub regularly makes its way into meetings and everyday conversations as employees and partners shared their insights about these technologies and how they will impact the company and its clients in the future.

A big part of this win was in how Exponentials encourages participation.

Rather than making the hub a mandatory element of communication at Deloitte, Exponentials continues to take an organic approach. What few requirements there are for participation are sketched out in the Exponentials Onboarding Guide. For example, these simple instructions accompany what they call posting and amplifying:
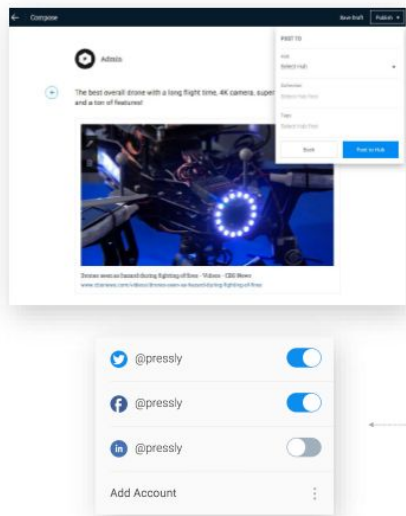
Posting Content

1. Go t o Compose and paste the link to an article or video
2. Add some context with a 20-30 word description of the content (see appendix for guidance)
3. Select the relevant Collection and tag this content with keywords. Edit the title and picture (Optional)
4. Click Publish and look at the result on http://www.exponentials.xyz/

Amplifying

- Promote content on personal Linkedin and Twitter. Share the hub internally and externally
- Like and comment on other collaborators material

Don't be misled by its seeming simplicity. Under "Posting Content," the crucial ingredient is, "Add some context with a 20-30 word description of the content."

This description has led to not only more in-depth conversations surrounding the content, but far more learning on the part of the person posting.

Prior to Exponentials, content with Deloitte (like most companies) was being circulated via links through emails. This meant, viewership was limited to the people receiving the email and that often people would spread their selected articles without reading them.

As Ian put it:

> The fact someone has to ingest and summarize everything they share means that without even knowing it they themselves consume that content and actually learn.
>
> Pressly has essentially created an internal network of SMEs (subject matter experts).
>
> In turn, that has led to natural teachable moments that deeply influence and have built a learning community through the entire organization.

More Than Just Numbers

With Pressly, Deloitte was able to provide immense quantitative and qualitative value for its employees, partners, and clients.

In answer to Exponentials' challenges, what came to life was a visually-appealing, expertly curated space that portrayed Deloitte as thought leaders.

Due to the hub's success across multiple fronts they even plan on launching two additional sites in the coming months, one of which is the Future of Financial Services:
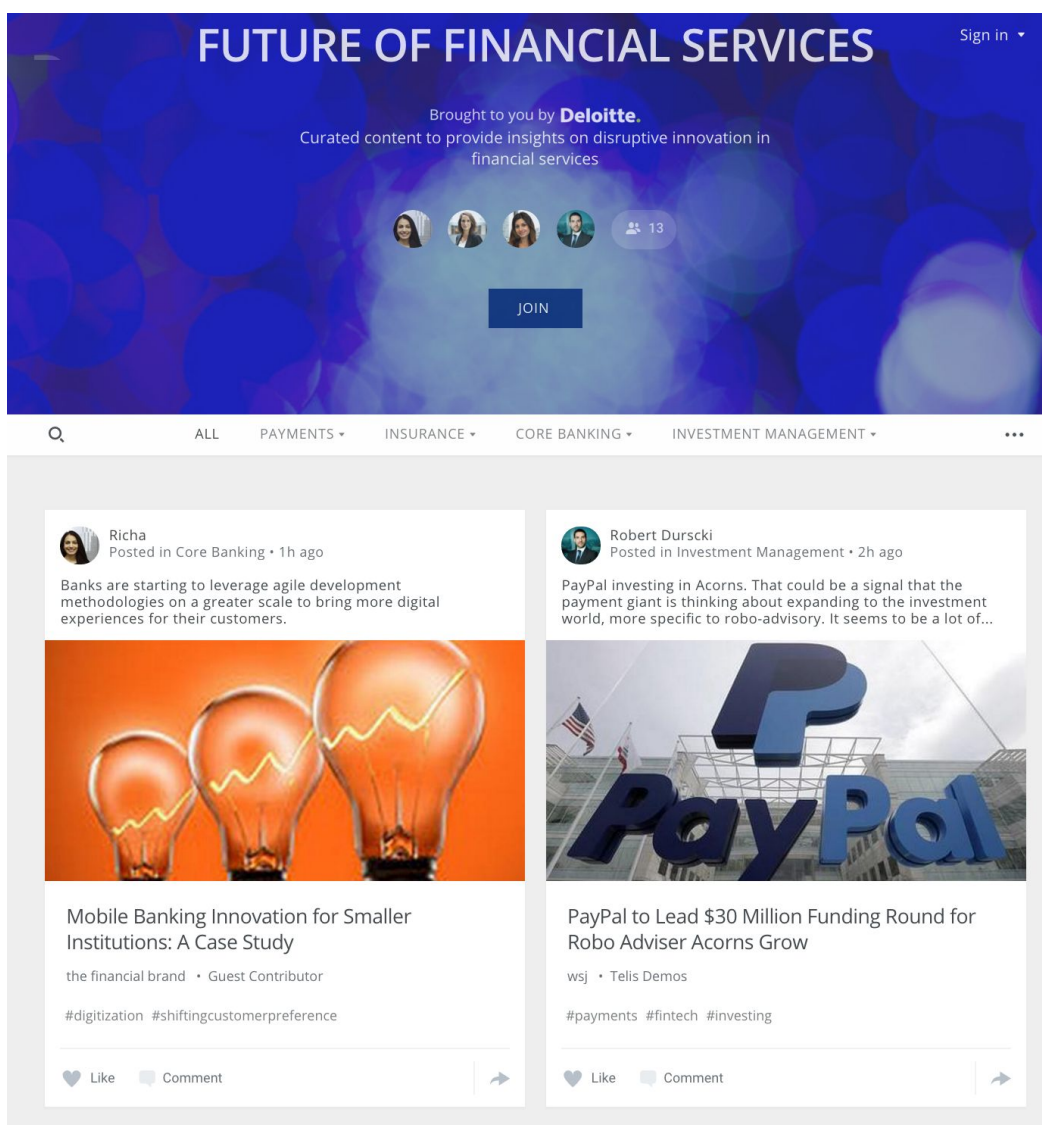
Certainly, the metrics prove that Exponentials has already earned immense traction.

However, the true power of the hub lies in its ability to merge Deloitte's inside stakeholders with the outside world.

Why? Because at the end of the day, exponentials themselves have to be about more than just numbers.

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