

CASE STUDY

# AARP's *SongTheme*<sup>™</sup> custom Khoros extension



## Executive summary

<b>WHO</b>	AARP
<b>GOAL</b>	Turn a popular online community activity into a multi-media gamification feature to further boost member engagement and value
<b>CHALLENGE</b>	The feature was not native to the customer engagement platform and required the integration of third-party platforms
<b>SOLUTION</b>	Build a custom gamification feature integrated with AARP's database allowing members to play songs from Spotify from within the community, as well as export community-built playlists to members' Spotify accounts
<b>RESULT</b>	A popular online activity that has increased online user engagement, improves cognitive function and memory, and delivers a pleasant musical experience

## Overview

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older through advocacy and other quality-of-life-enhancing programs. AARP has a large and active online community powered by Khoros where users can communicate and exchange ideas.

In 2009, AARP created a "Rock-n-Roll Board" where members played song games. Each month there would be themes and "song challenges" that required members to answer questions with song titles. The activity was hugely popular, generating nearly 100,000 replies and over five million views within the community. This activity spawned an "Oldies" spinoff and dozens of additional unique song challenges.

Based on this demonstrated community interest, an idea was born to develop a more structured song theme activity hosted by AARP on its site, incorporating an integration with Spotify to collectively create themed playlists that can be listened to and enjoyed.

Listening to music has been scientifically shown to improve cognitive abilities and stimulate areas of the brain responsible for movement and memory. AARP has teamed up with the Global Council on Brain Health to promote healthy habits that help maintain mental health. AARP's *SongTheme*<sup>™</sup> activity is a significant addition to AARP's services as it aligns perfectly with the organization's social mission.

## Challenge

There were several challenges to overcome when it came to making AARP's vision a reality. First, since the original activity grew organically from within the AARP community, the goal was to keep it there. Secondly, the team wanted to limit access to certain premium features to AARP members only, which requires a paid subscription (joining the online community is free). It was also important to keep it simple and clean without needing elaborate actions or downloading additional apps to play.

Since this functionality does not exist natively on Khoros and had never been created before, the solution had to be custom-built from scratch and integrated with AARP's database.

The next challenge was adding this activity to AARP's loyalty program. This enables AARP members who play to gain loyalty points that they can redeem on exclusive deals, discounts, and more. This process required the integration of the activity with AARP's existing rewards program system, which is internal to AARP but has components that are managed externally by a 3rd party, increasing the complexity of the endeavor.

Finally, AARP wanted the community activity to be integrated with Spotify so that users could listen to songs from inside the community. The team also wanted an AARP member-exclusive functionality that allows exporting community-created playlists to players' personal Spotify accounts. One of the most demanding aspects was understanding Spotify's API, including what it can and cannot do. Spotify's adherence to copyright laws and other regulations requires it to keep the inner workings of its API close to chest. Getting the integration to work required an exceptionally skilled DevOps and systems integrations team.



## Solution

AARP chose iTalent Digital to build this functionality at the recommendation of Khoros.

The result is AARP's *SongTheme™* web page, where authenticated users can select a theme from the currently active 10 available themes and submit song choices that match those themes. Users can submit up to five songs per theme, and AARP members can earn reward points for each.

They can then view the latest entries added by other users and listen to about 30 seconds of each song right on the web page. AARP members also have the option of clicking the "Open Spotify" button, which takes them to their own Spotify account, where they can listen to the chosen songs in full and can also save the full playlists that have been collectively created by the community for each theme.

It's an extremely simple, clean, and straightforward process with a very small learning curve, making participation easy and pleasant, resulting in little to no technical support overhead.

Referencing the successful partnership between AARP, Khoros and iTalent Digital, AARP's online community manager noted, "This was the smoothest experience we've ever had on a project for which we brought in a third party."

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—  
AARP online community manager

## Results

The development of AARP's *SongTheme™* activity has not only made the activity more functional but has also vastly increased its usage. Results perceived three months after the launch in early 2023 include:

- Fully 26% of AARP online community unique visitors engage in this activity
- 85% repeat visitors
- 92% of visitors to this page are known users (registered and logged in on AARP.org)
- Social mission engagement (music listening) occurs in 70% of community visits
- AARP's *SongTheme™* represents 16% of all member actions (joins, renews) and power actions (site registrations and activations to AARP Rewards and AARP Staying Sharp programs) from the AARP online community

The activity is dynamic, and there are always 10 active themes controlled and modified by community admins. They change based on holidays as well as categories that are relevant to AARP's social mission.

The activity is further designed to ensure it improves memory by disabling auto-complete prompts as you type in the name of a song. The benefit is twofold: it limits API calls to Spotify, further simplifying the implementation, and obliges users to exercise their memory rather than be helped by the suggestions engine.



## About iTalent Digital

iTalent Digital is one of Khoros's most established and capable global technology partners. iTalent has invested in a Community Management Center of Excellence as well as an ISO27001-certified and SOC2-compliant Engineering and Quality Assurance Center of Excellence undergirded by our deep systems integrations and customer support expertise to deliver the highest quality outcomes for our joint customers. iTalent's innovative work on the Khoros platform has earned us more than 20 industry awards.

Founded in 2005, iTalent is a woman- and minority-owned software engineering and full-service tech consulting company headquartered in Silicon Valley that champions the people side of tech. It challenges the status quo and helps companies achieve exceptional business outcomes through a suite of digital transformation services such as enterprise community, personalization and unified search, data transformation and business intelligence, SaaS solutions, and change management.



Contact: [khoros@italentdigital.com](mailto:khoros@italentdigital.com) | [www.italentdigital.com](http://www.italentdigital.com)

SILICON VALLEY (HQ) | AUSTIN, TX | WICHITA, KS | LONDON, UK  
HYDERABAD, INDIA | KRAKOW, POLAND | GUADALAJARA, MEXICO

