

Four Steps to Getting Your Developer Program Ready for Primetime



Powering software competitions that drive innovation and awareness

If engaging third-party developers is going to be a long-term priority that extends beyond the results of an app competition, or even a series of them, then it is essential to lay the foundation for building a first-class developer program.

1 API Design and Strategy

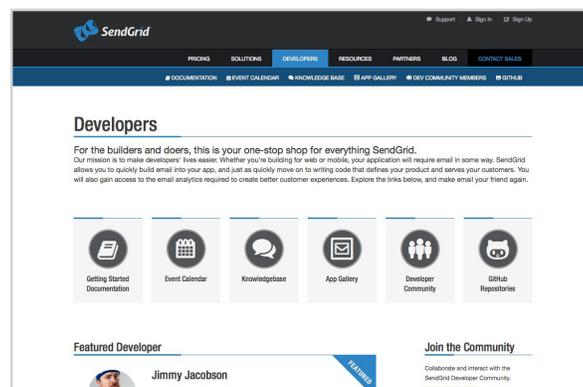
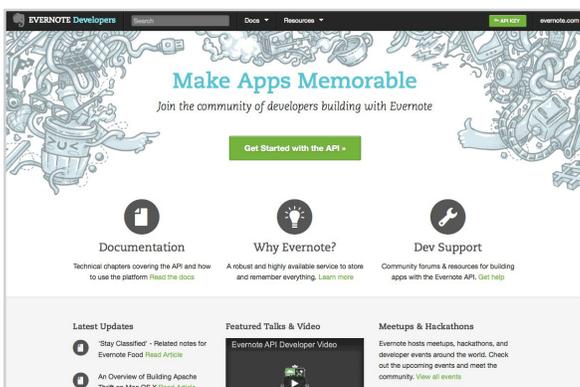
Several API management services have emerged to help you prepare your data or platform for developers to work their magic. Partnering with these companies will help you think through how you want to present, track and monetize the usage of your API, and avoid the inevitable setbacks of taking on this complicated project internally. Shop around, ask for references and make them prove they're the best for your needs. This is an important partnership for your developer program.

2 Set up an Engaging Developer Portal

Make it clear that catering to third-party developers is a priority.

1. Developer Program Homepage

Usually located at `developer.YourDomain.com`, this page should be prominently linked to within the rest of your website, and given as much design attention as any other piece of marketing collateral. Visitors should easily understand why your tools are helpful and how they can be put to use. Maybe even give the program a name (e.g., "COMPANY Developer Community") to make it feel more like a club than a website.



Evernote and SendGrid have robust developer communities within their websites.

2. Documentation

Nothing turns off developers quicker than inaccurate or incomplete documentation. They want to know what goes where and why without having to think too hard, so constantly work to revise and improve your documentation. Keep in mind that you are competing for developers most valuable asset – their time. If they don't get answers quickly, they'll move on.

3. Sample Code

The more you can save developers from dirty work, the more they can focus on innovating. It makes sense to provide a directory of pre-built code snippets, nodes and gems that solve basic needs inherent with using your platform.

4. Use Cases / Examples

Tasking developers with imagining the possibilities for innovation does little to drive meaningful app development. Instead, provide some broad use cases to get their gears turning. Or, better yet, set up your own app gallery, which showcases past accomplishments while inspiring new ones.

5. Support Forum

Developers are a forthright bunch. When they have questions – and they'll have many, no matter how thorough your documentation may be – they'll ask them bluntly and publicly, and expect answers quickly.

3 Dedicate Full-Time Staff

Hiring the human face of a first-class developer program is tough. The best people go by many names – Evangelists, Advocates, Fanboys, Community Managers – and serve as equal parts mentor, ambassador and shepherd. Don't settle for somebody with great people skills but no technical chops, or vice versa. This is a very public and important position, so choose wisely, compensate handsomely, and arm them with enough budgetary and personnel resources to succeed.

4 Set Clear Goals

Developer programs can be measured by any combination of community size, API calls, revenue produced, key requests, apps built, or press and social media mentions. If you don't know what you're aiming to achieve, then you're doomed to chase your tail. Pick some bold objectives to strive towards and make sure they're trackable.