The Five Essentials for Building a Developer Community Base

Powering software competitions that drive innovation and awareness

Once the foundation of your developer program is in place, it's time to focus on outreach.

1 Social Media

Create a dedicated blog and Twitter account for your developer program to separate developer-facing activities from corporate marketing chatter. Post frequently and honestly, making it clear that you plan to keep improving your tools and celebrating those who use them best. LinkedIn has several groups worth monitoring, including a fairly active "Developer Evangelists" group and many others focused on various software topics and categories.

2 Industry Associations

As the app economy continues to evolve, offline and online communities are emerging to serve both sides of supply and demand — software companies and app developers. Join, contribute meaningful content and commentary, and offer to serve on a committee if you can help.

3 Conferences

Developers with the skills and freedom to enter (and win!) app contests are the most courted group in technology, and the rapid increase in the popularity of APIs has many on the sidelines looking to learn what all the fuss is about. This situation continues to birth an array of conferences geared towards education about API management and development best practices, as well as inevitable prognostication about what comes next. Attend, learn, network, "evangelize" when appropriate, and maybe someday someone will ask you to speak on a panel.

4 Meetups

Most cities have groups that regularly get together in person to learn from each other by sharing experiences of working with their software tools and languages of choice (usually organized through Meetup.com). The major tech hubs (NYC, San Francisco, Boston, Austin, Chicago, Boulder, etc.) even have "Developer Evangelist" meetups. Get out from behind your monitor, and make some new friends.

5 Hackathons (a.k.a. Hack Fests, Code Jams)

In case you're not familiar with the process, here's how these mini-app contests work: Organizers cast an open call for developers to convene in one place and spend a day or two rapidly "hacking" together an app that either uses a certain tool (e.g., API, SDK, data set or cloud service suite) or benefits a specified cause (e.g., "Hack for Hope"). Usually teams of 2-5 are informally formed in the early hours, then copious amounts of caffeine, beer and pizza are consumed, culminating with teams presenting their (often goofy, and rarely operational) work to the delight of peers and judges. New relationships are formed between developers and sponsors. Innovation is sparked. Everybody wins.

Except… most apps started at hackathons are abandoned soon after, and never make it to market. Wouldn't it be nice to extend the conversation in a way that ensures these apps turn into viable products? (Hint see: "How to Run a Big, Virtual Developer Contest")