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STATE OF DEVELOPER RELATIONS
2019

In partnership with

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The **Vonage**® API Platform

ABOUT HOOPY

Hoopy is the world's leading developer relations consultancy, working to help companies build awareness, adoption, and community for developer-targeted products.

With offices in the UK and Germany, our clients come from across North America and Europe and represent almost every industry that works with software developers. Global banking giants, international telcos, travel industry leaders, some of the biggest names in tech, and brand new start-ups have all worked with Hoopy to build and execute developer relations, developer marketing, and developer experience strategies.

DEVRELCON

We're also the people behind the global DevRelCon series of events, with editions in San Francisco, London, Tokyo, and Shanghai, as well as the home of developer relations on the web, DevRel.net.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The State of DevRel 2019 draws on the sixth annual developer relations survey, interviews with dev rel professionals, and Hoopy's other research projects.

The annual developer relations survey was initiated by WIP, who then ran it for five iterations before asking Hoopy to take the baton.

Neither Nexmo nor Typeform had input to or oversight over the data or conclusions reached in this report.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THIS REPORT

MATTHEW REVELL

Founder and Principal Consultant, Hoopy.

Matthew is a well known speaker and writer on strategies for building awareness and adoption amongst developers. He is the founder of DevRelCon and Hoopy.

CARLA TEIXEIRA

Researcher, Hoopy.

Carla has managed developer communities across industries, from enterprise to startup and blockchain. Now she heads-up research into developer relations best practices at Hoopy.

Get in touch about how we can help you with your developer relations strategy

✉ **hello@hoopy.io**

THIS REPORT WAS SUPPORTED BY

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STATE OF DEVELOPER RELATIONS 2019

In the six years since the first developer relations survey, dev rel has grown beyond the handful of companies who then practised it as part of their core strategy.

In 2019, brands that previously would have seen developers only as a cost centre now pursue developer-centric strategies. And the role of developer advocate has spread across the globe.

As champions of developer relations, we at Hoopy see this growth as a good thing both for developers and for the people who use the products they build. However, there are growing pains.

GROWING PAINS

For companies, hiring experienced developer relations talent remains the biggest challenge. As you'll see later in this report, over half of dev rel practitioners have less than four years of experience; 39% have been doing dev rel for two years or less.

This has led to developer relations leadership roles going unfilled or taken by people who have management experience in adjacent fields. In turn, newly minted developer advocates are hired as individual contributors to programmes that are effectively leaderless and where there is no institutional understanding of dev rel. If we see an economic downturn, it's probable that such programmes will come under intense scrutiny.

Of course, not all developer relations programmes are suffering in this way and certainly not those with the largest budgets. However, the lack of experienced practitioners and leaders is, perhaps, dev rel's greatest challenge in 2019.

For individuals, and especially those new to dev rel, there are two primary areas of discomfort:

- reality doesn't necessarily match expectations
- there is a lack of training and support

From afar, developer relations has a touch of glamour. Dev rel people have a platform, they travel, they speak at conferences. The reality is, more often than not, more tiring and stressful than it ever is glamorous. More importantly, lack of understanding of dev rel at companies can lead to painfully mismatched expectations between executives and dev rel teams. The problem of training and support is one that we at Hoopy have worked to solve since our formation. Through DevRelCon, the DevRel newsletter, our DevRel website, and our consultancy, we have sought to improve developer relations knowledge.

We're excited to see others across the world start dev rel meet-ups, write books, record podcasts, and find other ways to support each other.

DEV REL IS IN A GOOD PLACE

Despite some problems, developer relations is in a good place. Twilio have continued to show that, even after IPO, putting developers at the heart of their strategy is a great way to build an exciting and profitable business.

More companies than ever are investing in building awareness, adoption, and community amongst developers. The giants of dev rel — Microsoft, Google, AWS, and IBM — have enormous teams of developer advocates. But, as this report shows, non-tech businesses, such as banks, travel operators, and retailers, are also building dev rel programmes. In effect, dev rel is becoming normalised.

Best of all, though, the conversation around developer relations is becoming more thoughtful, even if there are still attempts at framing dev rel as an Instagram lifestyle.

As this report shows, developer relations professionals are active worldwide, come from diverse backgrounds, work for a variety of companies, and yet all share a passion for serving developers. We at Hoopy are excited for what 2019 has in store for developer relations.

MATTHEW REVELL

Founder and Principal Consultant, Hoopy.

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THE STATE OF DEVREL IN 2019 - WHERE DO YOU THINK THE FUTURE OF DEV REL WILL TAKE US IN 2019?

PHIL LEGGETTER

Director of Developer Relations at Nexmo, the Vonage API Platform

In the past, I've spent a lot of time looking at other developer relations teams; the activities they undertake, where they focus geographically, how they measure success, who they hire, how much noise they make on social media and more. But I've come to realise that whilst it's important to keep an eye on what other teams are doing (and on the competition) the most important thing is to focus on yourself and your team. So this past couple of years I've focused much more on working with the Nexmo Developer Relations team to ensure we are doing what's right for the communities we serve and the needs of Vonage as the business that supports us. With that in mind, my opinion will reflect the experiences I've had in working with the team to grow the Nexmo developer relations team to 25 people and beyond, and how we plan to evolve from here with a few external observations.

All companies that build products for developers should have at least one person with a developer relations role. Many leaders in businesses now understand this need or at least see the trend, which has resulted in continued demand for advocates, community managers, evangelists and tech writers. However, with this realisation still seems to be a lack of understanding about what the business specifically requires from the individual or team and hence everyone is looking for a Director, VP or Head of developer relations to define their strategy. So, in 2019 I think there are two primary goals:

1 For business leaders to better understand the need and responsibilities for developer relations within their organisation and then to provide the individual or teams with the support they require to succeed.

2 For experienced developer relations professionals to encourage others to consider devrel as a career.

THE BUSINESS NEED FOR DEVELOPER RELATIONS

Back in early 2016 when I was looking for a new opportunity, each interview felt a lot like a consultancy gig; helping each company I interviewed or chatted with understand their developer relations needs and strategy. That experience resulted in a defining developer relations blog post (https://www.leggetter.co.uk/2016/02/03/defining-developer-relations.html) and the AAARRRP developer relations framework that provides a mapping of business needs through to activities that will deliver for the business. Here are a couple of examples:

If a company is unknown to the target developer audience, then the focus of developer relations will be awareness and acquisition (the first two "A"s in AAARRRP) through activities such as community support, event sponsorship and content creation that reaches those developers. The measures of success, in this case, are ultimately more developers attempting to use your product. If you have good brand recognition, you're seeing developers try to use your product but very few are successful then your developer relations team may focus on activation, retention and product (the last "A", first "R" and "P" in AAARRRP). In this case, the team would undertake activities such as writing docs, creating sample code, working on onboarding experiences and developer tools in addition to sponsoring hackathons to get in-person feedback on the product to improve the developer experience.

All companies need to bring in revenue. How much and how important revenue is depends on the stage of the company. A new startup with a reasonable level of investment may be much more focused on getting more developers on their platform and less concerned, right now, with converting signups into revenue. More established companies who are listed on a stock exchange and have shareholders to answer to, such as Vonage, may require a clearer path to revenue from some of the work. I say "some of the work" here because the developer relations team may be in charge of documentation and libraries which are required for a product to exist at all.

A PIPELINE OF DEVREL TALENT

The significant demand for developer relations professionals has resulted in a hiring dilemma. It's difficult enough to hire an advocate with experience, let alone somebody who has the expertise to define the strategy for a business. The small devrel pipeline results in people with less experience having opportunities very early in their career. Some will succeed and some will fail but I believe both candidate and company would benefit from a bit more experience to help set the initial direction. Companies with established teams and strategies also find it difficult to hire people with devrel experience when their team would benefit.

It's, therefore, our responsibility in 2019 to encourage software developers, writers and community professionals to consider a move into developer relations (at Nexmo 70% of the team had no official previous experience before joining the team). In addition to encouraging people to change career paths, it's also essential that people start to consider devrel as their first career. Programmes such as GitHub Campus Experts and Major League Hacks are doing a great job at this but other established companies need to get involved too.

CONCLUSION

We need business leaders to better understand what a developer relations team can deliver for their organisation and we need more experienced people in devrel. I see it as the responsibility of those of us, such as myself, who have been in devrel for a number of years to educate business leaders and to bring more developers, community professionals and writers into our line of work. Only by creating a larger talent pool of devrel professionals that then have the opportunity to gain experience of understanding both community and business needs, and how to map those two things together (in "business speak" this is the art of "synergizing"), will we see more successful developer relations teams. And successful devrel teams powering successful businesses are fundamental to the continued growth of the developer relations profession in 2019 and beyond.

PHIL LEGGETTER

April 2019

We're hiring!

Let's build something great together.

Whether you're an experienced Developer Advocate or looking for that first Developer Relations role, our award winning team would love to talk to you...
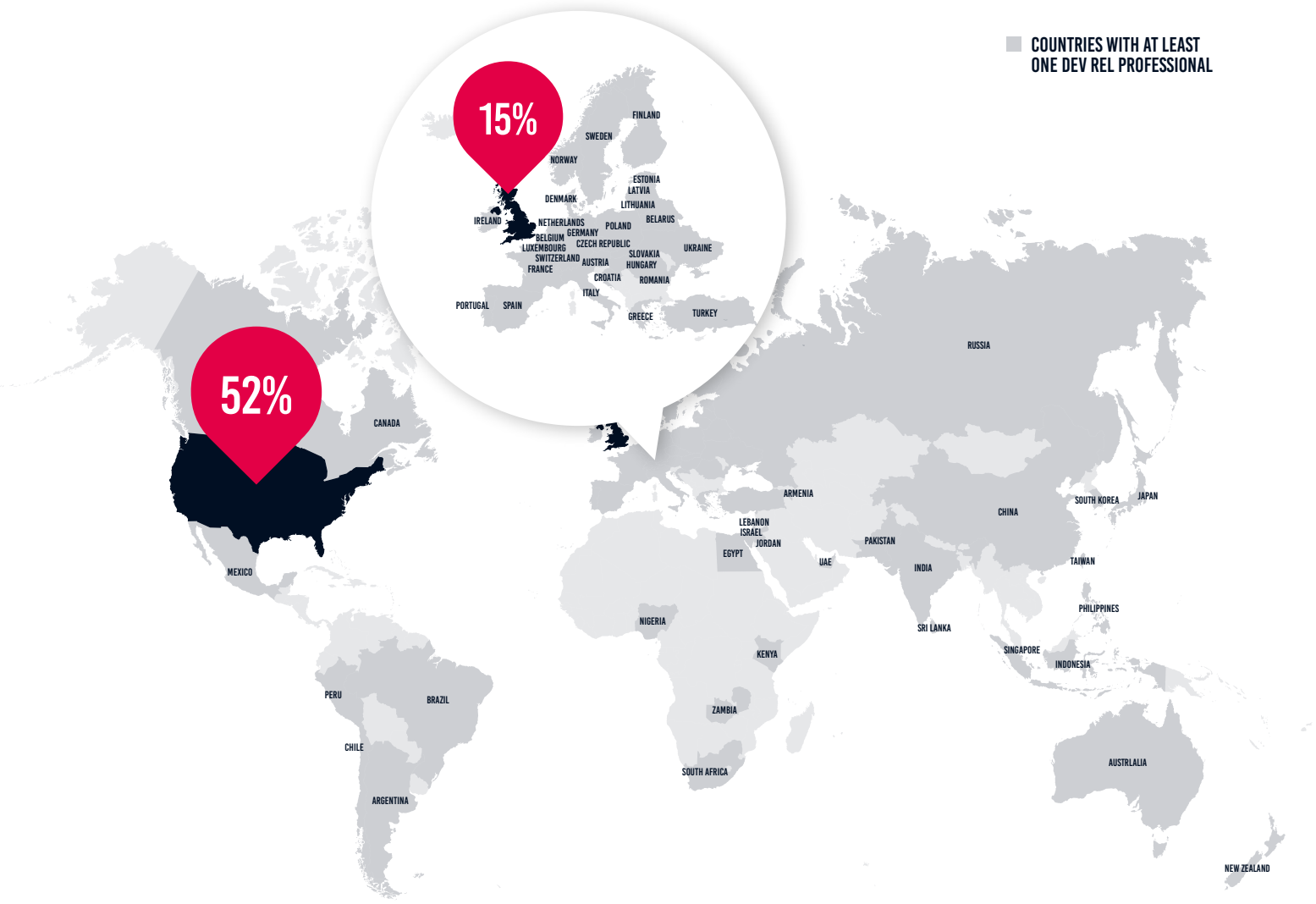
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DEVREL
PROGRAMMES

WHERE IN THE WORLD

15%

52%

COUNTRIES WITH AT LEAST ONE DEV REL PROFESSIONAL

FINLAND
SWEDEN
NORWAY
ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
DENMARK
IRELAND
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM GERMANY POLAND BELARUS
LUXEMBOURG CZECH REPUBLIC
SWITZERLAND SLOVAKIA UKRAINE
FRANCE AUSTRIA HUNGARY
CROATIA ROMANIA
PORTUGAL SPAIN ITALY
GREECE TURKEY

CANADA

MEXICO

RUSSIA

ARMENIA
LEBANON
ISRAEL
JORDAN
EGYPT
UAE
CHINA
SOUTH KOREA JAPAN
PAKISTAN
INDIA
TAIWAN

NIGERIA
SRI LANKA
PHILIPPINES
SINGAPORE
INDONESIA
KENYA

ZAMBIA

SOUTH AFRICA

AUSTRLALIA

PERU
BRAZIL

CHILE

ARGENTINA

NEW ZEALAND

Developer relations is truly global. While the majority of developer relations professionals are based in the US, there are now practitioners in **59** countries around the world.

The USA and western Europe as the main centres of dev rel is unchanged from last year's survey. However, we're now seeing increasing numbers of developer relations practitioners across Africa and Asia, which were almost unaccounted for in previous surveys.

Where in the world are dev rel professionals based?

**52%** MORE THAN HALF OF RESPONDENTS WERE IN THE US

15% THE NEXT BIGGEST GROUP WERE FROM THE UK

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INDUSTRIES

The tech industry remains the heart of developer relations, with 90% of respondents saying they work in tech. Telecoms, financial services, and consumer electronics form the remainder. It seems likely that the proportion of pure tech companies will decrease over the coming years as traditional industries make APIs available.

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

FINANCIAL SERVICES

TELECOMS

OTHER

TECH
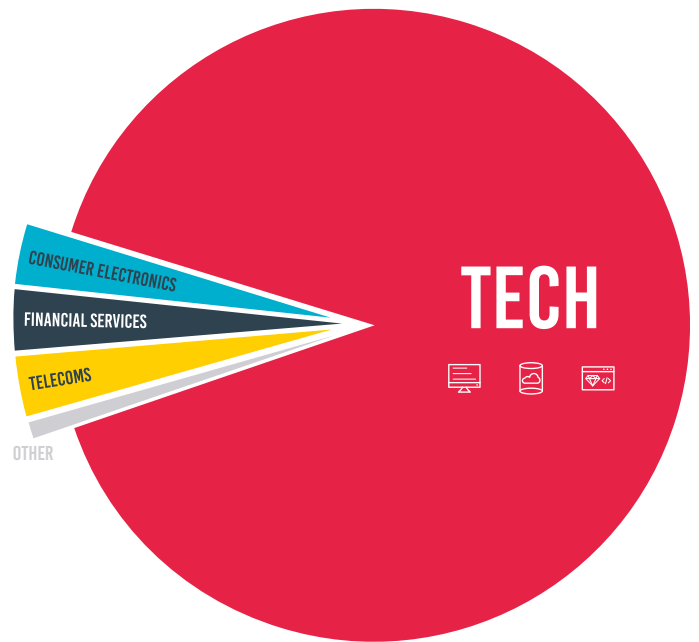
WHO IS THE CUSTOMER?

Who is the customer?

A key distinction between dev rel programmes is whether or not developers are the company's main customer. Think about the difference between, say, Stripe and a retail bank that happens to make some APIs available.

As with past years, we find that a majority of respondents say they work for a company whose main audience is developers. However, we expect the proportion of non-developer focused companies to grow over coming years as APIs become a standard channel.

29%
NOT DEVELOPER-FOCUSED
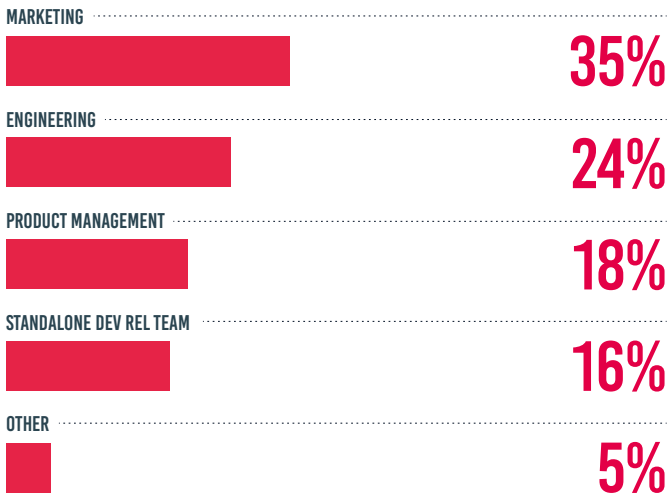
71%
DEVELOPER-FOCUSED

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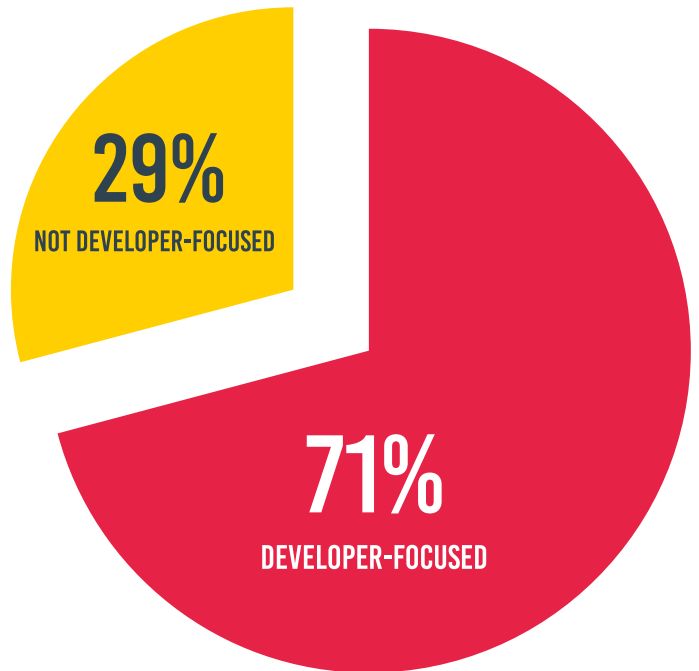
WHERE IN THE COMPANY IS THE DEV REL TEAM LOCATED?

The department within which dev rel sits can shape the expectations, metrics, and make-up of the programme. Compared to previous years, we've seen a growth in the number of programmes located within marketing departments. Last year, 28% sat under the CMO whereas this year it's 35%.

Engineering and product management are the next two most common departments. Perhaps most interestingly, though, a standalone developer relations team is the case for 16% of programmes, which increased from 12.5% last year.
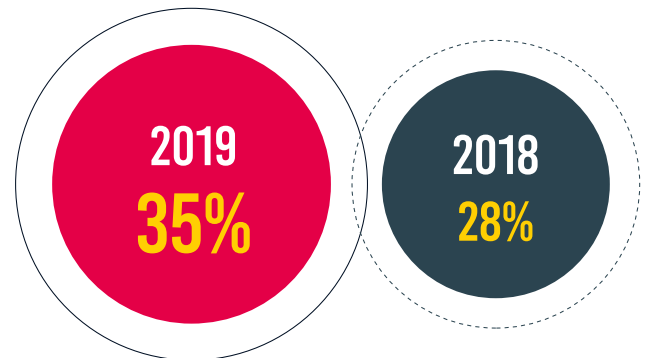
Where in the company is the dev rel team located?

MARKETING

2019
35%

2018
28%

Location by department

MARKETING
35%

ENGINEERING
24%

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT
18%

STANDALONE DEV REL TEAM
16%

OTHER
5%
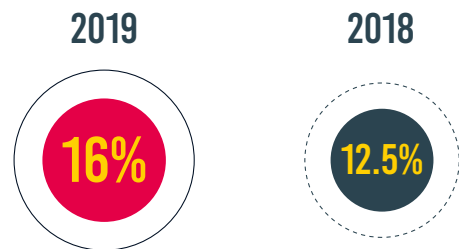
STANDALONE DEV REL TEAM

2019
16%

2018
12.5%

This hints at two things. First, it seems likely that companies new to dev rel are establishing their programmes within marketing. The strategic parallels make it a sensible choice, especially for companies that are not engineering-led. Second, as developer relations proves its worth then teams are graduating to report directly in to the CEO and, indeed, the majority of standalone programmes have communities of 10,000 developers or more.
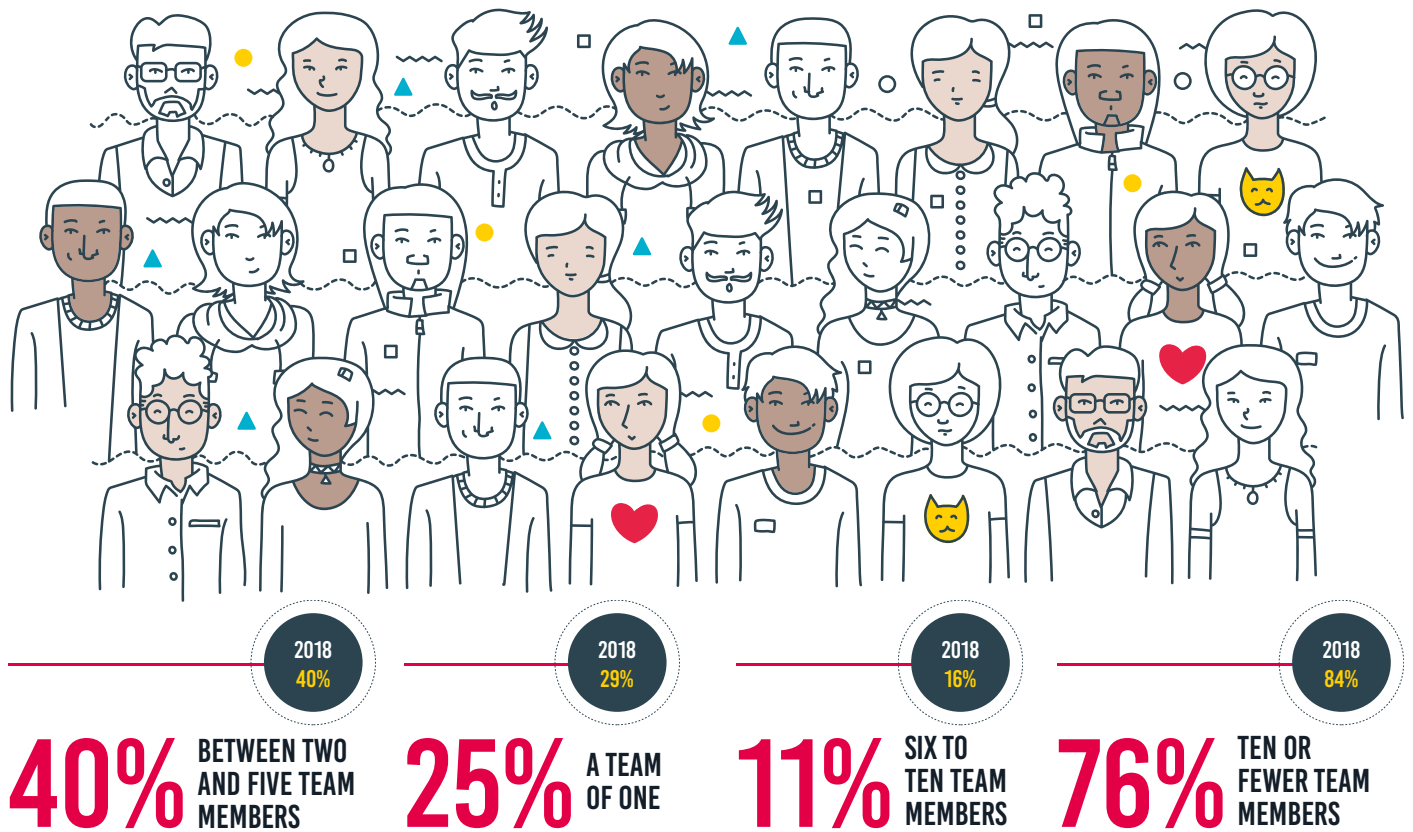
The majority of standalone programmes have communities of 10,000 developers or more.

10,000+

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TEAM SIZE

Dev rel team size.

40% BETWEEN TWO AND FIVE TEAM MEMBERS
2018 40%

25% A TEAM OF ONE
2018 29%

**11%** SIX TO TEN TEAM MEMBERS
2018 16%

76% TEN OR FEWER TEAM MEMBERS
2018 84%

Just like last year, 40% of people reported that their team had between two and five members. A further 25% said they were a team of one, a decrease from 29% last year. If we add the 11% whose teams have six to ten people, then 76% of developer relations teams have ten or fewer members, down from 84% last year.

Large teams are rare, but less so than previous years. Teams of 30 or more accounted for just 3% last year, growing to 15% this year. Next year we'll add a further category of 100 or more, to take account of the very large teams at companies such as IBM and Google.

Dev rel teams with 30+ members.

TEAMS OF 30+ **15%**

2018 **3%**

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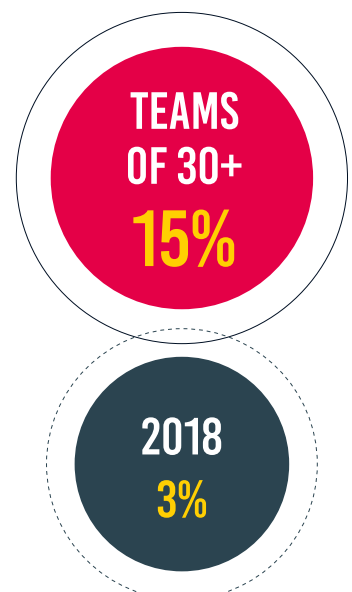
DEVELOPER COMMUNITY SIZE

Almost a quarter of developer communities have more than one million members.

1,000,000+

DEVELOPER
COMMUNITIY

Almost a quarter of developer communities have more than one million members, with just 5% reporting fewer than 100 members. Interestingly, there doesn't seem to be a correlation between community size and team size.

However, there might be a link between community size and team priorities. While similar proportions prioritise awareness building (for example, 43% for teams working with 1 million developers or more and 40% for those with fewer than 1,000 community members), the teams working with larger communities put more emphasis on driving engagement and sales, whereas those working with smaller communities are more likely to prioritise acting as a channel for developer feedback.

Just 5% of developer communities report having under 100 members

< 100

DEVELOPER
COMMUNITIY

Dev rel community size and priorities

SMALL COMMUNITIES
(< 1,000 MEMBERS)

AWARENESS BUILDING 40%

TOP PRIORITY:
ACTING AS A CHANNEL FOR DEVELOPER FEEDBACK

LARGE COMMUNITIES
(> 1,000,000 MEMBERS)

AWARENESS BUILDING 43%

TOP PRIORITY:
DRIVING ENGAGEMENT AND SALES

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PROGRAMME AGE

Supporting the idea that developer relations is experiencing rapid growth, 54% of programmes are two years old or younger.
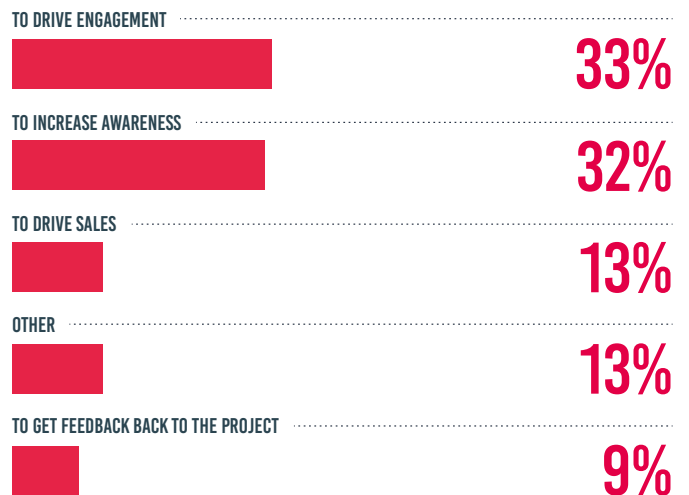
54% of dev rel programmes are two years old or younger

54%
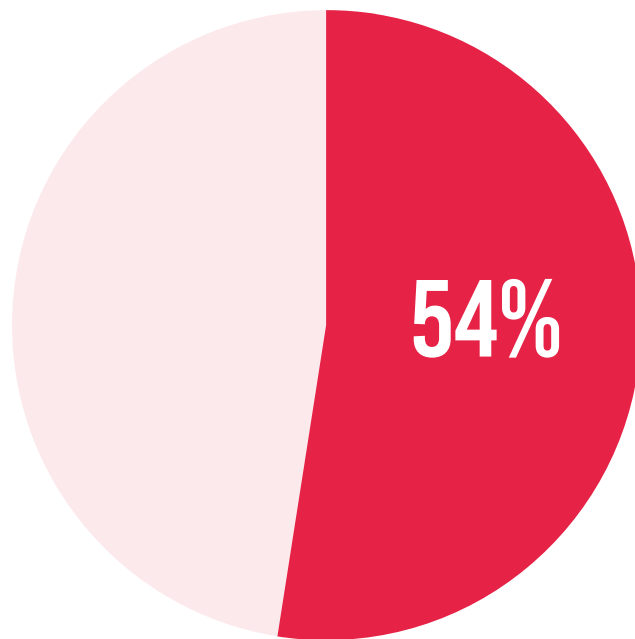
THE REASON BEHIND DEVELOPER RELATIONS PROGRAMMES

As you might expect, two thirds of dev rel programmes were founded either to build awareness or drive engagement with developers.
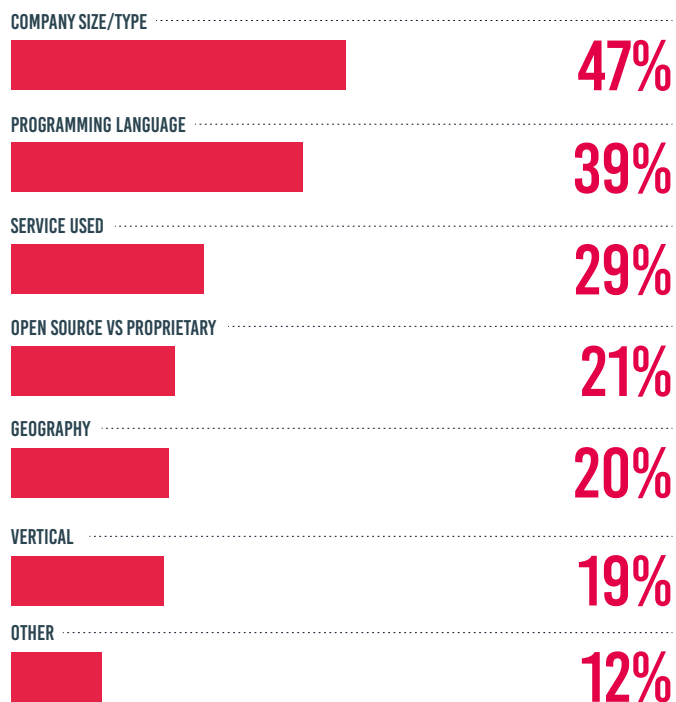
The reason behind dev rel programmes

TO DRIVE ENGAGEMENT
33%

TO INCREASE AWARENESS
32%

TO DRIVE SALES
13%

OTHER
13%

TO GET FEEDBACK BACK TO THE PROJECT
9%
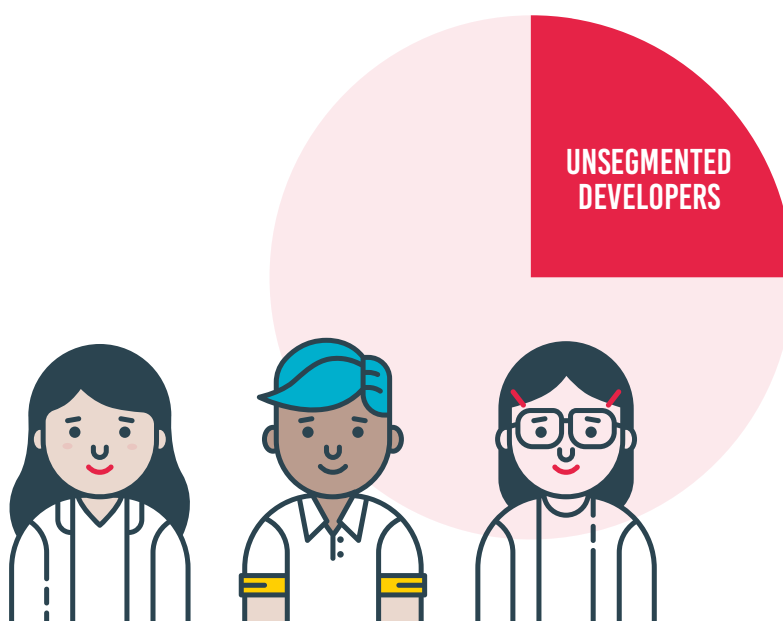
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SEGMENTING DEVELOPERS

Understanding who your target developers are, and then tailoring your strategy towards them, is a key prerequisite for the success of developer relations programmes.

How do you segment your developers

COMPANY SIZE/TYPE
47%

PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE
39%

SERVICE USED
29%

OPEN SOURCE VS PROPRIETARY
21%

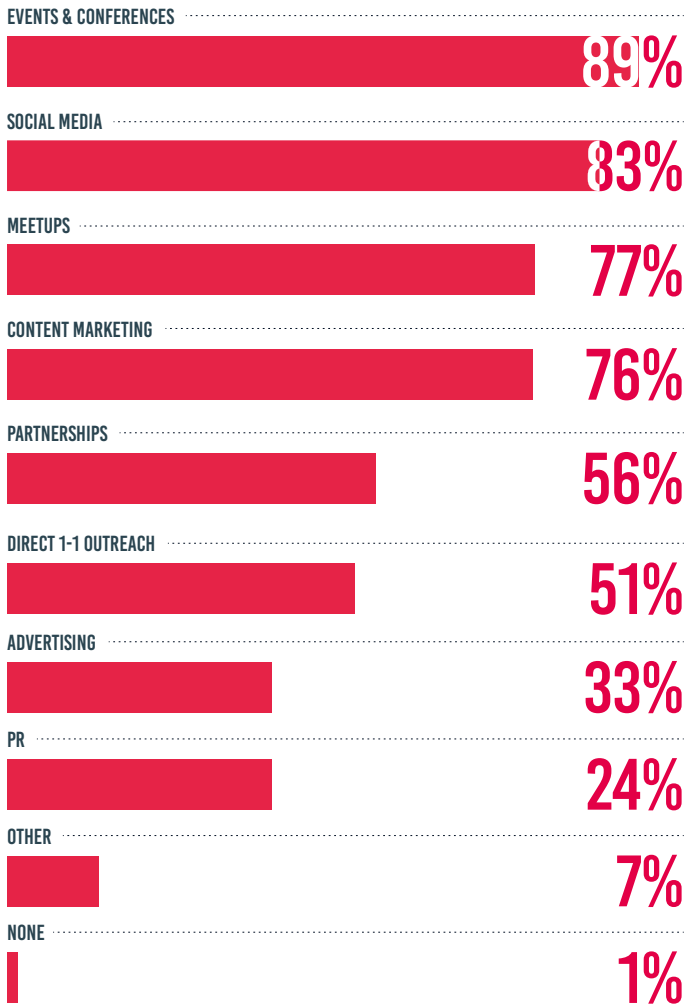GEOGRAPHY
20%

VERTICAL
19%

OTHER
12%

However, almost a quarter of programmes do not segment their developers. This might be correlated to the fact that the majority of those programs are less than two years old.

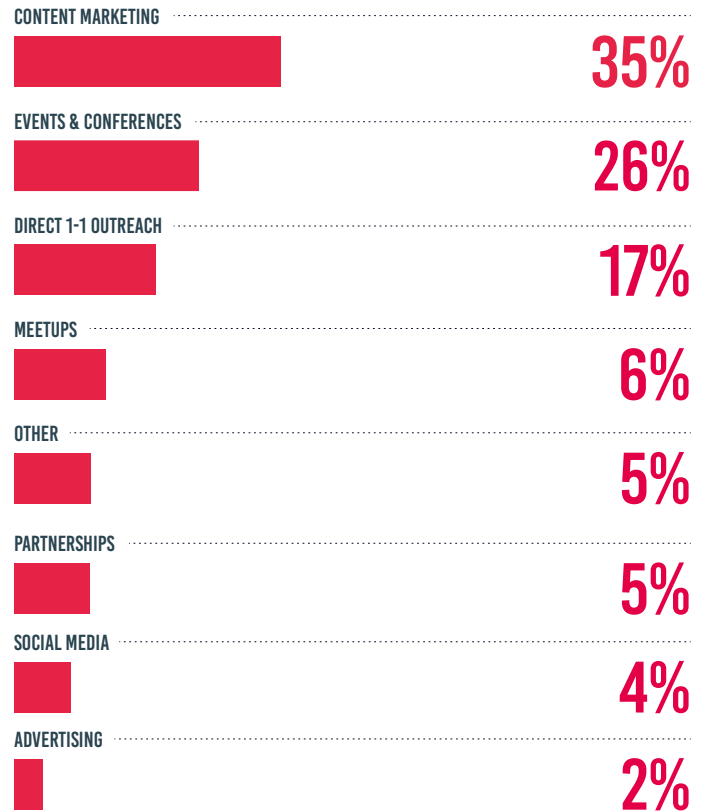**Almost a quarter of programmes do not segment their developers**

UNSEGMENTED DEVELOPERS

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CHANNELS FOR OUTREACH

What channels do you use to reach out to developers?

EVENTS & CONFERENCES
89%

SOCIAL MEDIA
83%

MEETUPS
77%

CONTENT MARKETING
76%

PARTNERSHIPS
56%

DIRECT 1-1 OUTREACH
51%

ADVERTISING
33%

PR
24%

OTHER
7%

NONE
1%

Which one (of the one/s you picked) have you found most effective?

CONTENT MARKETING
35%

EVENTS & CONFERENCES
26%

DIRECT 1-1 OUTREACH
17%

MEETUPS
6%

OTHER
5%

PARTNERSHIPS
5%

SOCIAL MEDIA
4%

ADVERTISING
2%

89% EVENTS AND CONFERENCES ARE THE MOST POPULAR CHANNEL FOR OUTREACH
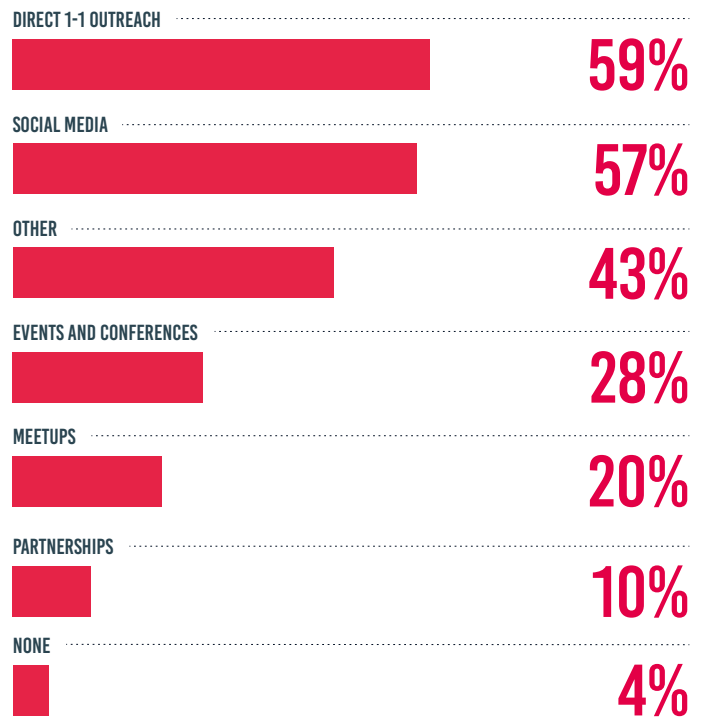
35% THE MOST EFFECTIVE CHANNEL FOR OUTREACH IS CONTENT MARKETING
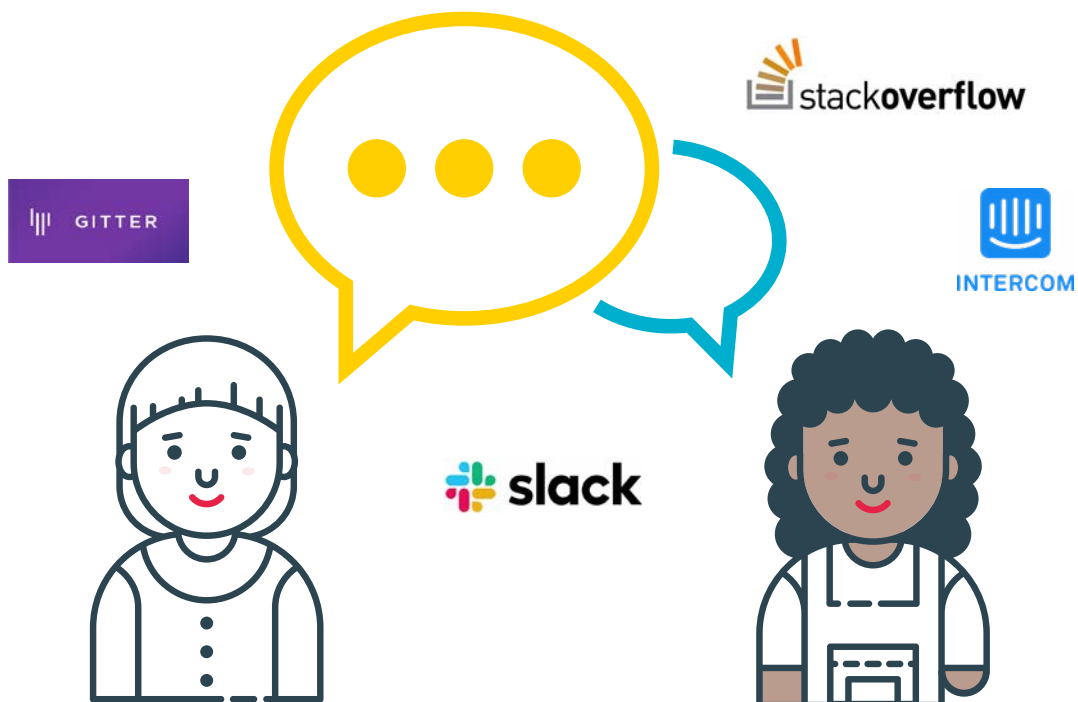
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CHANNELS FOR SUPPORT

43% of respondents selected *Other,* as a support channel, which included:

- Gitter
- Stack Overflow
- Dedicated forum
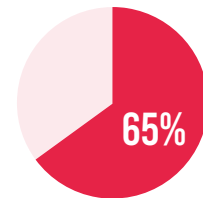- Slack
- Intercom

What channels do you use for support?

DIRECT 1-1 OUTREACH
59%

SOCIAL MEDIA
57%

OTHER
43%

EVENTS AND CONFERENCES
28%

MEETUPS
20%

PARTNERSHIPS
10%

NONE
4%

Channels for support

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EVENTS

65% of developer relations programmes run meetups

PROGRAMMES RUNNING MEET-UPS

65%

Many developer relations programmes make events a key part of their strategy and it's no surprise to see 65% of programmes run meet-ups.

However, events are notoriously resource-intensive and hard to measure, which is perhaps why 17% of programmes run no events. Diving deeper in, of the programmes that run no events, 41% of them do no segmentation, 41% report to engineering, and a similar proportion find that content marketing is their most effective outreach channel.
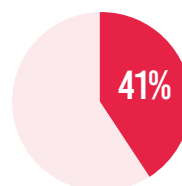
More than half of the respondents said they run a developer event of some kind at least once a month, with a monthly cadence accounting for almost a quarter.

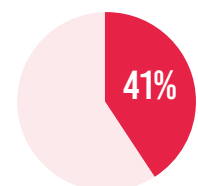**17% of of developer relations programmes run no events.**

DEV REL PROGRAMME EVENTS:

17%
RUN NO EVENTS

OF THE 17% THAT RUN NO EVENTS:

41%

41% DO NO SEGMENTATION

41%

41% REPORT DIRECTLY TO ENGINEERING

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CHAMPION PROGRAMMES

Whether you call them champion, ambassador, or MVP programmes, they help to mobilise a developer community's most enthusiastic members in a way that aligns with the dev rel programme's strategic goals. At Hoopy we see them as one of the key areas for growth in the next two years and we'll explore their pros and cons in our forthcoming report.

Champion programmes can help to mobilise developer communities
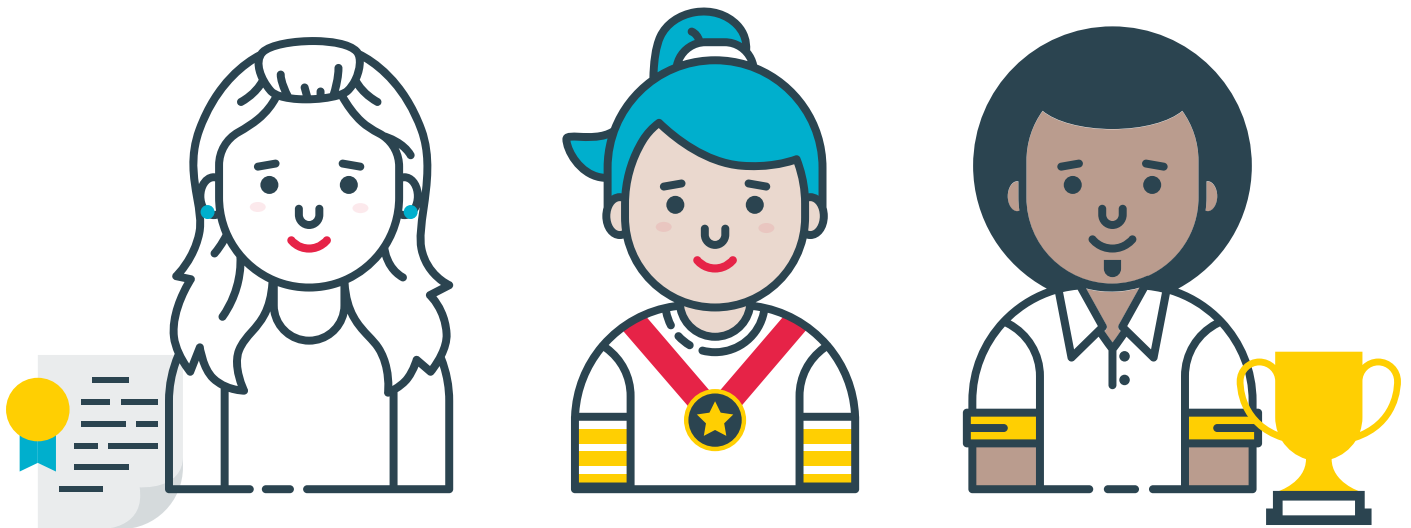
Do you currently run a champion or advocate program?

NO, BUT THINKING ABOUT IT
50%

YES
39%

NO, AND NOT PLANNING ON IT
11%

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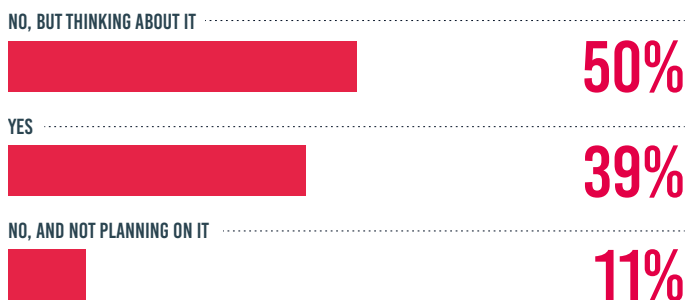
TOOLING

Sales and marketing teams enjoy products and platforms from multiple vendors to support their work. Dedicated tooling for dev rel teams, though, is in its earliest days.

As such, almost three quarters of teams are using custom in-house tooling, with close to a third repurposing CRM systems. And the multiple, sometimes quite different, threads of dev rel are reflected in all the other forms of tooling that teams are employing.

Tooling - almost three quarters of dev rel teams are using custom in-house tooling, with close to a third using repurposed CRM systems
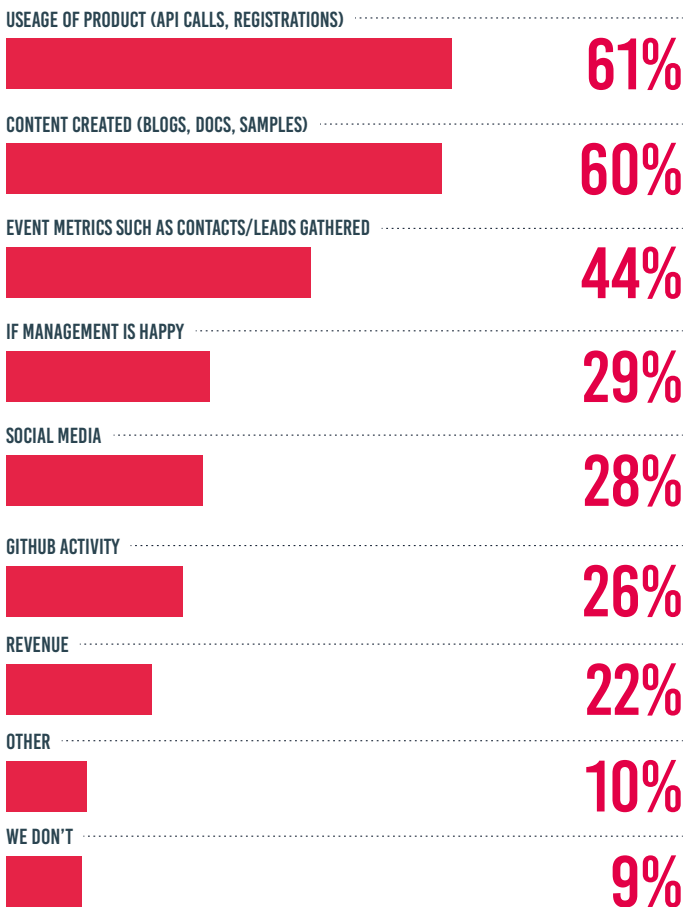
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MEASURING DEV REL

The big question of the past few years has been, "How do you measure dev rel?" For the vast majority of programmes, the fundamental metric that decides their future is the number of sign-ups or downloads, if not plain old revenue. Indeed, 61% of programmes take product usage as a key measurement.

A thorough understanding of what numbers matter, and how the programme drives those numbers, are signs of a competent dev rel strategy. However, 29% of respondents use management happiness as an indicator of the success of their programme. Management happiness, while important, is not a metric in itself. Not only is it vaguely defined and hard to measure but it is not necessarily coupled with strategic success. Arguably it's a sign of programme immaturity; 55% of programmes that use management happiness to measure success are less than two years old.

How do you measure the success of your dev rel programme?

USEAGE OF PRODUCT (API CALLS, REGISTRATIONS)
61%

CONTENT CREATED (BLOGS, DOCS, SAMPLES)
60%

EVENT METRICS SUCH AS CONTACTS/LEADS GATHERED
44%

IF MANAGEMENT IS HAPPY
29%

SOCIAL MEDIA
28%

GITHUB ACTIVITY
26%

REVENUE
22%

OTHER
10%

WE DON'T
9%

When looking at the age of the programmes that measure success by looking if management is happy:

55% ARE IN PROGRAMMES THAT ARE UNDER 2 YEARS OLD

21% ARE IN PROGRAMMES THAT ARE FROM 5 TO 10 YEARS OLD

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PEOPLE
IN DEV REL

ABOUT YOU

Developer relations professionals are an increasingly diverse group. Sixty four percent of respondents have a tech-related degree, meaning that around a third do not.

When it comes to learning developer relations itself, 89% say that they're learning on the job. The characteristics necessary to succeed in dev rel are not a surprise: more than half of respondents cite communications ability and empathy as key skills. Perhaps less expected, only 39% of respondents say technical ability is important and this is at the heart of one of the great debates in dev rel: how technical does a dev rel practitioner need to be?

Sixty four percent of respondents have a tech-related degree, meaning that around a third do not.

Travel is almost synonymous with dev rel and it's debatable whether that's a good thing for developer-focused companies, developers themselves, dev rel practitioners, or the environment.

However, there seems to be a decrease in the amount of travel when looking at the two past years. In 2017, 34% of people said they travel for work a few times a month. In 2019, only 24% of people say they travel that often. Similarly, in 2017, 33% said they travel once a month, whereas this year it's down to 27%.

Read Hoopy's take on sustainable dev rel in our post on the subject

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WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

The answers to this open ended question fell into four main themes.

What is your biggest challenge?

HIRING AND SCALING

"Creating a strategy around scaling as a developer relations team"

"Defining the scope of the team, hiring, and proving value to other parts of the org"

"Maintaining focus while scaling the team"

"Finding out how we can scale"

"Structure the many people in dev rel to really work together"

"Juggling a million things while staying effective"

"Finding dev rel talent"

"Scale and hiring"

What is your biggest challenge?

MANAGEMENT BUY-IN

"Explaining dev rel to new management"

"Proving the business value of dev rel as the company targets more Enterprise customers"

"Selling the worth of developer relations to upper management and avoiding empty metrics"

"Measuring influence and how do we quantify the impact to the business made by dev rel efforts"

"Getting internal folks to recognise the importance of our work and using data to measure progress"

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COMMUNITY GROWTH AND ENGAGEMENT

"Leveraging ambassadors"

"The changing developer landscape"

"Increase meaningful interactions with our developer audience"

"Doubling growth year on year"

"Getting more experienced people into community"

"Being helpful and adding value vs. being noisy and distracting"

"Building community in a very crowded, noisy space"

What is your biggest challenge?

STRATEGY AND MEASUREMENT

"More accurately measuring meaningful impact"

"The company's switch from an open developer community to trusted partners"

"Complexity in the platform will make using the APIs harder"

"Successfully measuring developer experience friction as well as showcasing the improvements made"

"Feedback loop with product"

"Figuring out what the hell we are doing"

"To get away from engagement metrics and instead move towards impact metrics, especially around community"

"Selling the technology without selling the product"

"Adjusting to large pricing changes in primary product"

"Figuring out goals and strategy"

"Capturing and prioritising developer feedback and improving the developer product accordingly"

"Getting organised, working out how we will measure success, and starting to run experiments"

"Automating more of the devrel programme"

"Implementing long-term solutions instead of short-term gains"

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WHAT ELSE DO DEV REL PEOPLE WANT TO SHARE?

"Alliances between us DevRellers are so SO important, for support and growth both"

"The industry needs to grow up if it wants to survive."

"We need to mature more as a profession past being seen as talking heads"

"It's hard for marketing teams to understand that dev rel is bottom up and not top down. It's a conversation, not a soapbox"

"We can support internal developers as much as external/customers!"

"Creating and running Hacktoberfest for the past 5 years has been an invaluable experience that has contributed to my growth and the company's awareness."

"DevRel is highly misunderstood and highly varied. It is possible to take many different approaches to DevRel depending on an organization's needs. Like programming languages, tech philosophies, or any other tech problem - there is no golden hammer."

"We need to shift away from talking about the basics — document it and refer people to those places when they have basic questions, and start addressing the bigger issues, which require us to have conversations with people outside of our own teams. Moving the dev rel industry forward requires us to have conversations with Product, with Engineering, with Marketing, to help them understand our value. We need to get out of our echo chamber."

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