What Is a Developer Advocate?



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Developer advocacy can take many forms and go by many names, including developer evangelist, developer relations manager, DevRel lead, or even tech marketer. But, although the names and duties vary by organization, there are common threads. In this Life in Tech article, we'll look at what it means to be a developer advocate and provide resources for you to learn more about this strategic role.

As Ashley Willis (McNamara) says, developer advocates represent software developers. "I like to say that it's my job to ask dumb questions so you don't have to, but the real goal of a developer advocate is to become the voice of the user. We gather feedback in a way developers can't (since they know the codebase too well), then use that feedback to shape the product to become what it needs to be," she writes.

In other words, as Jennifer Riggins at The New Stack says, “the role of the developer advocate is to help get software developers excited about building on top of your product.”

What Does a Developer Advocate Do?

According to Typeform’s Nicolas Grenié, the role can be divided into six main parts:

- Creating code examples and working on proofs of concept
- Amplifying documentation
- Writing blog posts about the platform and new features
- Internal advocacy, including giving feedback to the product and customer success teams
- Speaking at industry events
- Engaging with the community through meetups, forums, GitHub, and Slack

Similarly, according to the description of a developer advocate position at New Relic, the role involves:

- **Coding:** Spend time contributing to open source software that's directly relevant to your community and building internal tooling to automate workflows.
- **Presenting:** Speak at conferences, live stream, host podcasts, and write articles.
- **Collaborating:** Advise product, marketing, and engineering teams on how best to engage your specific community.
- **Teaching:** Share your research with peers and colleagues.
- **Traveling:** Join the conversation by meeting developers where they are and exploring their cultures.

Skills and Traits Needed for Success

To perform these various roles, developer advocates need an array of traits and technical abilities that allow them to build relationships and trust both within an organization as well as in the broader community.

“To be a developer advocate means lending a helping hand when people need it most, or meeting someone halfway when a product is missing the mark. To be put in a position where you can facilitate this dialogue takes trust,” Willis says.

In an article for opensource.com, Jason Blais lists the five qualities of great open source developer advocates, as follows:

1. A genuine passion for helping others
2. An authentic communication style
3. A natural flair for building relationships
4. A personal investment in the community
5. Technical sharpness

Hoopy and WIP’s State of Developer Relations 2020 report says the top three skills needed for success are: empathy, communication, and creativity. The report also notes that DevRel practitioners mainly learn on the job and bring skills from other roles.

“Developer advocacy is not a discipline that is taught in universities; there’s no training specifically for this. Most often, somebody will come to realize that what they already do is developer relations,” Bruno Borges, Principal Product Manager at Microsoft says.

According to Willis, most developer advocates have backgrounds in software development and contribute to open source. They also know whether or not a product is easy to use, and they know how to fix it, which “involves all of the usual development activities like architecture, design, implementation, testing, and debugging.”

“Making your products easy to use is the most important thing you can do to help your fellow developers,” Willis says.

Learn More

- DevRel Collective

- Planning your dev rel career by Jessica Rose
- *The Business Value of Developer Relations: How and Why Technical Communities Are Key To Your Success* by Mary Thengvall
- *The Developer Evangelism Handbook* by Christian Heilmann