

5 Ways to Get Top Mobile App Developer Talent for Your Open APIs



Introduction: The App Economy & Developer Ecosystems

Apps & the App Paradigm

In 2007, Apple launched the iPhone, effectively the first smartphone. With its touch-screen interface and ability to run lightweight apps, the iPhone revolutionized the mobile phone market. The arrival of the iPad tablet in 2010 increased the potential of mobile apps significantly, simply by offering a larger touch-screen.

In the wake of the iPhone and iPad has come a deluge of mobile devices, with Google's Android operating system emerging as a serious competitor to Apple's iOS technology. In addition to smartphones and tablets, the app paradigm is increasingly being used to enhance and connect all types of devices – from TVs to gaming systems to vehicles to utilities meters and beyond.

Apps Increase Value

Apps offer incredible business opportunities by making it possible to reuse and add value to existing information assets. All sorts of organizations are using APIs to open up on-premise databases and applications, allowing developers to build apps that enhance the value propositions of existing offerings, create new revenue streams and expand customer reach.

Cultivating Developer Ecosystems

Opening APIs to developers outside the enterprise can enable the creation of apps that add value in innovative and often unexpected ways – without the enterprise having to invest directly in app development. However, this will only happen when the enterprise can grow an ecosystem of visionary developers creating cutting-edge apps that provide consumers with something of real value.

In this eBook, we will provide a detailed overview of five key ways smart enterprises attract and nurture top third-party developer talent.

Example 1: Real-Time Flight Status App

An app is designed that provides an intuitive interface for accessing a particular airline's up-to-date flight information. If consumers enjoy using the app and find it useful, they will be more likely to fly with that airline.

Example 2: Content Delivery App

An app allows consumers to access a TV network's online streamable content. This empowers the network to maximize its audience while providing a convenient, high-quality alternative to illegal streaming/downloading.

Overview: 5 Ways to Get Top Mobile Developer Talent for Your Open APIs

Sponsor Hackathons

Hackathons represent a great first step for engaging developers, getting them familiar with your API and facilitating collaboration.



Run Developer Challenges

Online challenges allow you to go beyond the hackathon, giving developers more time and incentives to build more complete, polished apps.



Create a Brand Around Your API

Promoting a brand around your API helps you get marketplace traction and allows you to market your API as a business in itself.



Offer Interactive Documentation & Forums

Interactive documentation and forums provide intuitive, social ways to engage and educate the type of developers you want using your API.



Launch an Easy-to-Use API Portal

An API Portal allows you to provide a one-stop-shop for API registration, documentation, exploration, collaboration, discussion and more.





Sponsor Hackathons

Hackathons represent a great first step for engaging developers, getting them familiar with your API and facilitating collaboration

WHAT

A hackathon is an intensive programming session, usually organized by a single API publisher, local developer meet-up group or industry organization.

The organizer will gather developers in a single location where they will be assigned to teams and given 24-48 hours to produce and present a functioning app prototype.

Often, a hackathon will focus on a particular theme. For example, AT&T regularly runs hackathons that aim to produce apps that benefit education or the social good.

WHY

Simply put, talented developers gravitate towards hackathons. Sponsoring hackathons can be a great way to catch their attention and grow your API's profile.

Hackathons provide a way for you to engage directly with developers and help them understand not only the value offered by your API but also how to actually use it.

Often, a hackathon is the quickest way to start developers building against your API. Even if no full-functioned apps are produced, important groundwork will be done.

HOW

Hackathons should be promoted through channels developers use and trust e.g. meet-up group mailing lists, training organizations and computer science programs.

Many API publishers find it useful to sponsor hackathons in collaboration with other organizations – particularly those that offer APIs complementary to their own.

Successful hackathons generally provide introductory presentations from industry experts, as well as onsite technical support and even prizes for the best app.

Run Developer Challenges

Online challenges allow you to go beyond the hackathon, giving developers more time and incentives to build more complete, polished apps.

WHAT

Developer challenges provide a way to take hackathons online, allowing a much wider timeframe, so that developers can build more complete prototype apps.

Online developer challenges offer prizes based on specific requirements, such as integrating a unique and socially impactful dataset like US Census data.

Prizes are usually offered for the best apps. As developer challenges require more commitment than hackathons, they usually offer more valuable prizes.

WHY

Hackathons represent a quick and easy way to get publicity and traction but the effects are often short-lived, with few meaningful mobile apps actually getting built.

The time constraints of hackathons force teams to cut corners, delivering rough prototypes or alpha/beta apps. Increase the timeframe and you get better results.

Developer challenges give API publishers more meaningful ways to truly engage developers, while encouraging greater long-term commitment from the devs themselves.

HOW

It should be made clear that the goal is to create an innovative app with real-world value – something people need but don't have (and maybe don't know they need!)

Prizes must be compelling and relevant to the target audience's interests. A well-chosen prize can yield much better results than the equivalent cash reward.

As with hackathons, it is vital to promote a challenge through relevant channels, then provide the support and documentation developers need in order to be productive.



Create a Brand Around Your API

Promoting a brand around your API helps you get marketplace traction and allows you to market your API as a business in itself.

WHAT

An open API is often seen as something that adds value to an existing product or service. However, some of the most effective APIs are marketed as products in themselves.

In fact, more and more companies are starting up with business models based entirely around their APIs – in these cases, the APIs are the products.

Even companies that are using APIs to extend existing products and services are increasingly building separate brands around their APIs.

WHY

Separate branding distinguishes an API as something of value in its own right and can help overcome preconceptions about your offerings.

Essentially, a fully-branded API will be seen as having a life of its own. It shows that you take your API seriously – that is not just an afterthought or add-on to your core business.

Promoting your API as a separate brand is particularly useful if you want to monetize the API directly, rather than simply using it to add value to existing offerings.

HOW

Approach your API like a product, with its own unique branding and messaging. Make it stand out from your standard brand, as it needs to speak to a new audience.

Remember, what works for your existing products may not work for your API – what engages consumers or B2B customers may not be appropriate for a dev audience.

To effectively brand an API, try looking at how some of the hottest API-based start-ups market themselves. Twilio and Stripe provide good examples.

Provide Interactive Documentation & Forums



Interactive documentation and forums provide intuitive, social ways to engage and educate the type of developers you want using your API.

WHAT

Interactive documentation allows developers to learn about an API through a fluid, Web-based interface – and even test the API or see it in action as they go.

Forums are online message boards where developers can discuss APIs as well as sharing best practices, code examples, works in progress etc.

These are just two examples of social, interactive ways you can educate developers about your API. Others might include webinars and on-site workshops.

WHY

Interactive documentation is inherently more attractive and engaging to developers, when compared to – for example – a static SDK delivered as a PDF download.

Forums allow you to create an ever-growing knowledge-base for your API, while building an engaged, informed (and therefore more effective) developer community.

The key here is to make developer education a living process – rather than presenting devs with lifeless documentation, which will quickly become outdated.

HOW

The fact that open APIs are inherently Web-based presents all kinds of opportunities for building compelling interactive documentation around an API.

Various tools exist that can enable you to build your own forum. To get started immediately, it may also be possible to stimulate discussion on existing third-party forums.

The easiest and most effective way to create interactive developer resources like these is to adopt an API Portal product (see chapter five, below).



Launch an Easy-to-Use API Portal

An API Portal allows you to provide a one-stop-shop for API registration, documentation, exploration, collaboration, discussion and more.

WHAT

An API Portal provides everything that developers need to access an API platform, giving them the ability to register, explore and learn about an API.

Your Portal should aid developer onboarding by providing a central location for devs to discover your API, test its functionality and sign up to use it.

The Portal should also help developers make effective use of your API by providing access to your interactive documentation, a forum and other resources.

WHY

By providing a central repository of all your developer resources, an API Portal provides an SEO-friendly, one-stop-shop for attracting targeted developers.

Additionally, creating an API Portal helps you build a brand around your API, by presenting it in the context of a consistent, custom-designed look and feel.

An API Portal also delivers vital components necessary for building an active, engaged and informed community of developers around your API.

HOW

Numerous products and solutions exist for turnkey API Portal creation and management, making it easy for any organization to get started.

APIfy offers the quickest, easiest way to create a simple developer portal for an API. Furthermore, APIfy is provided free of charge during its beta period.

For a full-featured system with greater customization options, it is easy to graduate from APIfy to the Layer 7 API Portal, part of the company's API Management Suite.

For more information, visit ca.com/api.

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