

# DEVELOPER RELATIONS

HOW TO BUILD AND GROW A SUCCESSFUL  
DEVELOPER PROGRAM

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*Caroline Lewko*  
*James Parton*

Apress®

# ***Developer Relations: How to Build and Grow a Successful Developer Program***

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*Caroline:*

*To Mom and Dad (posthumously) for letting me  
carve my own path.*

*To Alain, my spicy frog, because  
it's already been discussed.*

*James:*

*To my parents for their love, security, and patience.*

*To Michelle, Jacob, and Holly – everything is for you  
and because of you. x*

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# About the Authors

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**Caroline Lewko** is an accomplished visionary and entrepreneur who has spent over two decades helping develop groundbreaking technology and nurturing community connections and innovation. She started VIP, the first boutique Developer Relations agency in 2006, after founding a community and incubator for mobile startups. She'd led consulting engagements and developer events in over 20 countries, spanning a wide range of platforms and technologies, from edge computing and machine learning to mobile. She's a regular keynote speaker and conference moderator.

Now as CEO of Revere Communications, she continues to work with the top ranks of the Fortune 500 and Global 500 to fast-growing startups, with a focus on training and mentoring the next generation of DevRel leaders.

When not speaking, training, or traveling, Caroline can be found gardening, biking, and wine tasting in her beloved Vancouver, BC.

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**James Parton** created and ran Developer Programs for O2 (O2 Litmus) and Telefonica (BlueVia) before joining Twilio in 2012 as their first hire outside of the United States to launch and run their European business. He did that successfully for five years, leaving just after Twilio's IPO in 2016. James has held board positions with the Application Developers Alliance and the Mobile Ecosystem Forum where he championed the needs of developers with industry and government. He regularly advises startups, corporates, and venture capital firms on their Developer Relations strategies via his boutique agency Land and Expand.

In addition to his Developer Relations activities, James is the Managing Director of the Bradfield Centre in Cambridge, which provides entrepreneurial opportunities for students at the University of Cambridge and acts as a tech community hub for Cambridge and the wider east of England region. He is also a cofounder of the Triple Chasm Company, which provides data-driven tools, training, and content to help companies successfully scale.

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# About the Technical Reviewer

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**Phil Leggetter** has a broad experience of Developer Relations, from hands-on execution through to strategic planning with C-level executives, justifying multimillion-dollar budgets and successfully achieving multimillion-dollar revenue targets. He has led DevRel teams within startups through growth, acquisition, and accelerated growth at a publicly traded enterprise. Phil supports the DevRel community through actionable knowledge sharing such as the AAARRRP DevRel Strategy Framework that has helped numerous Developer Relations teams map company-level goals through to team activities that bring value to a business. He continues to lead DevRel teams in addition to holding Developer Relations and experience advisory roles at a small number of startups.

# Foreword

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In the 1990s, Java was a young, exciting programming language that made it possible to write portable applications easily. I was overjoyed and spent the better part of the six years after university graduation training, educating, and promoting this world-changing technology to anyone who would listen.

These efforts were given a platform (and at the time an amplifying megaphone) at BEA Systems, the market leader in Java application servers, where I carried the title of Chief Evangelist. Developers, at the time, were seen as fickle, idiosyncratic, and with low influence authority in the IT decision-making structure.

Little did I know that “evangelism” was how early technology companies were establishing a Developer Relations function. At the time, we were thrilled when developers attended our workshops to acquire new skills or when our articles outlining innovative techniques in Java programming were published in hip trade magazines. Evangelism was, in many respects, fun because while we were spreading essential technology insights, it kept our own knowledge growth curve piqued.

In the following 20 years, developers have become an economic force. Businesses that build products sold to or consumed by developers generated \$40B in 2020 annual recurring revenue, putting developers at the center of the multitrillion-dollar IT industry. More than 1200 companies have created commercial products within this landscape, and it’s growing 19% annually. With more than 20 million professional software engineers, and 250 million knowledge workers transitioning into civilian developers through low-code technology, the influence of developers will be increasingly as important as advertising in the Super Bowl or the reach of TikTok.

Developer Relations has emerged as the professional practice by which organizations build sustainable and endearing relationships with developers in their new role as economic influencers.

The industry’s understanding of Developer Relations is in its infancy. Only 24% of the Fortune 500 companies have established developer program management offices, and cursory scans of job boards show DevRel positions available in only the best-funded venture capital technology startups. And, in the companies that I’ve invested in, only one third have established DevRel programs even though it’s always highlighted as essential in the boardroom!

When Caroline Lewko told me that she was combining her and James Parton's many years of Developer Relations experience into a book that outlines a recipe for creating, building, and growing a Developer Relations group, I knew that their efforts would have a profound and lasting impact upon marketing, product, and customer success organizations.

Well-run DevRel groups have a significant impact on the bottom line. By reaching developers to facilitate solving their technology problems, businesses can expect a lower customer acquisition cost, lower support costs which improve gross margins, and lower customer churn rates improving the net retention rate.

In *Developer Relations, How to Build and Grow a Successful Developer Program*, Caroline and James provide a blueprint for organizations to build high-performing DevRel organizations.

In Part I: Develop a Common Understanding, they define Developer Relations and articulate how it is different from B2B and B2C techniques by laying out a framework that combines education, marketing, experience, and success, and emphasize the value of the Developer Economy.

The definition of a developer changes with the nature of technology, and with low-code systems making nearly every knowledge worker a developer, there may be up to 500 million reachable professional developers in the coming decade. In Part II: Key Differentiators, Caroline and James provide the constructs necessary to define, segment, and identify different categories of developers, and the companies they work in, which inform the nature of how your marketing and education investments will be made, and the type of monetization strategy you might deploy.

Developers as buyers are more likely to buy from companies implementing a Product-Qualified Lead motion rather than the traditional, sales-heavy Sales-Qualified Lead process. In Part IV: Go-to-Market, Delivering Your Strategy, Caroline and James codify the PQL experience from discovery through activation and scaling. It delves you into the mindset of the developer to help you address key questions that must be addressed at every stage of engagement with developers. Combined with Part III: Alignment on Goals, they also emphasize, whether it's a Product-Qualified Lead or a Developer Relations Qualified Lead, the importance of collaborating with the sales and other teams inside your organization.

Successful DevRel programs are tribes that leverage the collective experiences of team members and your user community to become stronger together. In Part V: Managing and Growing Your Program, Caroline and James provide actionable processes, frameworks, strategy, and tactics to measure and grow your DevRel team and investments.

This book is more than a how-to guide for DevRel professionals. It'll help your organization gain years of knowledge without the years of trial and error so many groups have gone through previously. I hope it becomes a reference that you turn to frequently as you build and grow your DevRel team.

—Tyler Jewell

Managing Director, Dell Technologies Capital

Formerly product at BEA, Oracle, Quest, Red Hat, and MySQL

Formerly CEO of three different developer-led businesses

Investor in 15 developer-led businesses

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# Introduction

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## What Is Developer Relations?

This is a question of fierce debate within the DevRel community and one not well understood outside the DevRel community. That this question has yet to be conclusively answered reflects the multifaceted nature of DevRel. We must also recognize that DevRel is a relatively new endeavor, with its origins in the Apple Macintosh marketing team of the early 1980s.

There is a growing body of work that's been created by DevRel professionals to improve the strategy and tactics of the practice. This work has been driven forward by various DevRel books, podcasts, events, and communities including WIP, DevRel.net, DevRel Weekly, and others. There is also specialist research and data from a new breed of industry analyst firms focused on the Developer Economy like SlashData, RedMonk, and EDC.

We want to support the drive to further professionalize DevRel as a practice and achieve board-level recognition for it. We believe any company with a developer program or an ambition to engage with the Developer community should appoint a Chief Developer Relations Officer. The CDRO role would represent the voice of the developer at the executive team level and ensure the DevRel effort is coordinated and connected to the core strategy and objectives of the company.

To support this goal, we have created, updated, and tested frameworks and tools for DevRel professionals. We've used our 20 years each of experience and combined it with the experience and input of the wider DevRel community, who graciously supported the development of this work.

If you are a practicing DevRel professional or aspire to be one, this book will equip you to create and pitch your strategy. It will also teach you how to engage developers, build a DevRel program, hire a team, and measure your activities' impact.

If you are a stakeholder in a business that has an existing Developer Relations program or is thinking of creating one, this book will define and demystify the activities of DevRel and show you how to ensure alignment with your overall corporate objectives.

We have open-sourced all of the included frameworks, and we look forward to seeing them adopted, adapted, and extended by the community.

—Caroline Lewko and James Parton

## This Book Is for You If...

- Your company wants to **start a new developer program**, and you've been tasked to lead the initiative. You need to understand how to get started, hire a team, how to sequence the investment, and how to maximize the program's chance of success.
- Your company has an existing developer initiative, and you want to **audit and benchmark** the program's activities to increase its impact and to justify its continued existence.
- Your company has an existing program and wants to **launch a new product or tool** successfully.
- You need standardized language and tools to set and manage your **internal stakeholders' expectations**.
- You come from a business background and need to understand **how working with developers is different**.
- You **come from a technology background**, and you need to have a **better handle on marketing to developers**.
- You think you might want to **become a Developer Relations practitioner**, and you want a better understanding of what it is all about and the tools needed to be effective.

Good news!

The strategy and many of the tactical challenges around engaging developers are common regardless of company size, type of product, or business maturity. Whether you have the luxury of a blank sheet of paper in an early-stage startup or are trying to turn around a supertanker, this book is for you.

Let's get started!