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How to Win Pioneer

3-4 minutes

Pioneer is an online startup accelerator where companies are chosen based (partially) on weekly peer-review of progress updates. **Roboflow** has now been #1 on the **global leaderboard** for 18 consecutive weeks. In this post, I'm going to reveal our secrets and tell you how you can dethrone us.

Note: this post was originally a reply to a [Hacker News comment](#).

Step 1: Set Clear, Measurable Goals

Each Sunday you'll declare what you hope to accomplish in the week ahead. Setting concrete goals is the first step to a good update. Your goals should be things that the voters will be able to clearly understand and judge whether you completed them or not.

Goals of the form "start x", "think about y", or "continue z" are not good. *Anything* could fulfill them. You will lose out to competitors whose goals are "launch x", "deploy y", or "complete z".

Good goals should be just on the right side of manageable. If you're not routinely completing all of your milestones, you should try to set more realistic goals the next time.

Step 2: Exceed Them

Hard work is necessary (but not sufficient) for winning the tournament.

We never publish goals that are governed by forces outside of our control. Getting revenue, press, and users aren't deterministic. Instead of setting goals on these outputs, we set goals for the inputs (like doing demos, pitching journalists, and publishing content).

The 2nd-order outputs are *great* bonus items for your end-of-week updates!

Step 3: Communicate Clearly

The Pioneer community consists of all sorts of people with various backgrounds. Developing effective communication skills will help you not just in the tournament but also when fundraising, selling, and explaining what you do to your mom.

This is a valuable skill. If people don't understand what you do it's going to make it very hard to get them to vote for you. Don't use jargon. Give details on your accomplishments (don't just copy/paste your goals and change them to the past tense).

One Pioneer-specific tactic we use is emoji bullet points. This lets people easily match up our stated goals with our progress report.

Step 4: Show the Receipts

Pioneer supports links in the updates; use them. If you said you were going to blog, don't just say "posted to our blog", link to the post!

We link to an imgur album each week showing screenshots of new features and additions. We also include screenshots of our stats dashboards and relevant tools when applicable.

Tip: [Bit.ly](#) shortlinks are helpful for adding links while remaining under Pioneer's character limit.

Example Update

So what does that look like when you put it all together? Here's one of our recent Roboflow Pioneer updates that kept us in first place on the leaderboard for another week:

The screenshot shows the Roboflow Pioneer leaderboard interface. The top navigation bar is yellow with the Pioneer logo, 'Home', 'Leaderboard', and a user profile 'Brad Dwyer'. The left sidebar is yellow and contains a 'Submissions' section with a list of weeks from June 17th, 2019, to February 10th, 2020. The main content area is white and displays a user's profile for 'Brad Dwyer'. It includes a 'What are you building, in a sentence?' section, a 'Here's what you planned to do this week:' section with a list of tasks, a 'What did you accomplish this week? Did you do everything you planned?' section with a list of achievements, a 'Bonus:' section, a 'What do you want to have done by the end of next week?' section, and a 'Project website' link.

Submissions
Infinite Tournament

- Project Description
- Week of June 17th, 2019
- Week of June 24th, 2019
- Week of July 1st, 2019
- Week of July 8th, 2019
- Week of July 15th, 2019
- Week of July 22nd, 2019
- Week of July 29th, 2019
- Week of August 5th, 2019
- Week of August 12th, 2019
- Week of August 19th, 2019
- Week of August 26th, 2019
- Week of September 2nd, 2019
- Week of September 9th, 2019
- Week of September 16th, 2019
- Week of September 23rd, 2019
- Week of October 30th, 2019
- Week of October 7th, 2019
- Week of October 14th, 2019
- Week of October 21st, 2019
- Week of October 28th, 2019
- Week of November 4th, 2019
- Week of November 11th, 2019
- Week of November 18th, 2019
- Week of November 25th, 2019
- Week of December 2nd, 2019
- Week of December 9th, 2019
- Week of December 16th, 2019
- Week of December 23rd, 2019
- Week of December 30th, 2019
- Week of January 6th, 2020
- Week of January 13th, 2020
- Week of January 20th, 2020
- Week of January 27th, 2020
- Week of February 3rd, 2020**
- Week of February 10th, 2020

April 2019 Tournament

- Project Description
- Week of April 8th, 2019
- Week of April 15th, 2019
- Week of April 22nd, 2019
- Week of April 29th, 2019

What are you building, in a sentence?
The best way for data scientists to manage their computer vision datasets. Organize, transform, export, and share annotated images.

Here's what you planned to do this week:

- Auto-fix common errors on upload
- Improve functions' cold-start time
- Speed up exports of large datasets
- Add aspect ratio insights
- Implement annotation heatmap
- Release self driving car dataset
- Publish blogs 7/8
- Prospect + email 30 leads
- +1 model library

What did you accomplish this week? Did you do everything you planned?

- Auto-fix common errors on upload
- Improve functions' cold-start time
- Speed up exports of large datasets
- Add aspect ratio insights
- Implement annotation heatmap
- Release self driving car dataset
- Publish blogs 7/8
- Prospect + email 30 leads
- +1 model library

Bonus:

- 3300-person enterprise demo booked!
- Registered w/ sam.gov
- Started YC app
- 29 new users

What do you want to have done by the end of next week?

- Setup internal stats dashboard
- Add "Delete Version" feature
- Implement v1 of train/test split
- Automate Python deployments
- Release 2 public datasets (cells, raccoons)
- Publish blogs 9.10.11
- Post client case study
- ID+Email 50 leads
- Record YC video

What would you like feedback on from the community?
We just setup a twitter account; could you help us look more legit by giving us a follow?
<https://twitter.com/roboflowai>

Project website
<https://roboflow.ai>

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A link to the referenced album for convenience: <https://imgur.com/a/rJiKBD6>

That's it.

Do those things and we'll see you on the leaderboard.