Getting developers’ attention the right way

Twilio sees traffic to technical content more than double with Direct to Developer advertising solution

When it comes to reaching developers, Twilio has a simple maxim. “We aren’t going to write a blog post with some sensationalist clickbait headline in the hopes you’ll check out our code. It won’t get people’s attention. We find developers are very utilitarian, very practical. We want to put our expertise forth,” says Troy Blanchard, a senior manager on Twilio’s marketing team. “What will move the needle is the code, the stuff we’ve already created. If you save somebody a dozen hours of development time or help their processes run faster than their competitors, now you have their attention.”

The Challenge

Over the years Twilio’s engineers and developer advocates have created many technical pieces explaining how certain software works and optimized it to appear in searches around those topics. But after months or sometimes years in-market, Twilio was eager to find new sources of traffic beyond SEO and social media. The challenge was to find a cost-effective way to generate new, qualified traffic for these pieces without resorting to tactics that would put off the developer audience Twilio was trying to reach.

The Solution

To refresh interest, they turned to Stack Overflow Advertising’s Direct to Developer product, an ungated content distribution solution that helps position documentation, videos, tutorials and other assets across Stack Overflow and technical Stack Exchange sites. Twilio’s assets would appear when users were searching for questions or answers related to specific tech topics. Following the launch of their campaign, traffic to many of these articles doubled or tripled, with the monthly readership in some cases increasing by a factor of ten. “There is tons of content that before wasn’t really getting much attention and now we see a lot of traction.”

With Stack Overflow, Twilio was able to reach developers on their second screen, the knowledge base visited by over 100 million developers and technologists each month, many of whom visit the site multiple times a week to find help with coding questions. “It’s been this smooth journey from looking up a question on Stack Overflow to finding interesting content to learning more about Twilio. It’s hitting home with the developer audience.”

Twilio is taking a bottoms up strategy to winning business through this marketing campaign. “When it’s time for someone to consider investing in a system like ours, or switching over to us from a competitor, the engineers lay their marker down,” says Blanchard. “Having someone on the tech side who will advocate for your solution is critical to winning a deal with a decision maker at the CTO or CEO level.”

There are other ways to grow traffic to your technical content, but they don’t always bring in the right cohort. When Blanchard sees a lift from social media, he can never be sure if it’s developers visiting, or people who happened to see Twilio mentioned in the news or on TV. “This is not what’s happening here. We know this is qualified traffic, that we’re reaching the right audience.”

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Troy Blanchard
Senior marketing manager, Twilio
The Results

For a marketing campaign like this, some of the key metrics are tied to growth in monthly active users and the rate of growth in terms of new signups. “We can see that this is a strong lever and it’s helping to add to stronger sequential growth in these areas,” says Blanchard. If a developer arrives and wants to try out Twilio tools, they can get a free credit to try it out. “There is a growing trend of the developer not just being key to the sale, but being the sale. I see us doubling down on this effort to get more self-starters.”

The audience coming from Stack Overflow isn’t just skimming the surface. “The traffic we see from this is equal to the organic engagement when someone is searching for us or our tools. They are spending as much time on site and going to as many pages, and compared to our cost per reader through other distribution channels, it’s very affordable.”

Stack Overflow ads continue to be simple. You won’t find animated GIFs, videos, or pop-ups. But for Twilio, that’s not the point. Relevance, reach, and respect for the audience are the keys to success when trying to reach programmers. “Our chief product officer asked me, are we doing stuff on Stack Overflow? It’s an emotional and intellectual thing, wanting to be seen in the places where developers are,” explains Blanchard. “As the product officer, he’s not asking to see a Twilio billboard every time he goes to the airport. He’s thinking, I want people to see Twilio when they are in the act of building something with code.”

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