

How to Communicate with Developers

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Employer branding, job listings, and emails
that resonate with a tech audience

Developers are one of the most in-demand groups of employees these days. And guess what, they noticed this as well: Countless approaches by potential employers, sometimes several messages a day through LinkedIn, and a few desperate recruiters even cold calling.

So those with technical talents are by no means oblivious to the talent shortage. The good news is that they don't just use this bargaining power to simply negotiate the highest salaries and most outrageous benefits. Instead, developers are intrinsically motivated. They are looking for the right place to work. Your challenge in this noisy jobs market is to **clearly communicate what defines your employer brand, what work needs doing, and, ultimately, who might be the right fit for the role.**

All of this is easier said than done. Because tech recruiting is a complex business, it is easy to not see the forest for the trees. This guide will help you decide where to start or what to fix next.

In the first and more general part, we would like you to take a step back. Before we even think about how to package our job opening and approach a candidate with our offer, we look at what information and knowledge you should gather about your tech team and the company at large. Following that, we will take a practical look at how to write and talk about your company and the role, with a special focus on the job listings and a recruiting emails as a first introduction.

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What to talk about?

As much as you might need to find the right tone to represent your company and your team culture, a big part of communicating with the developers is knowing what to talk about. As many recruiters do not actually have a technical background themselves, this gets tricky in two ways. First, it is already a challenge to understand what all the terminology and technical details mean. Once you mastered that, it is a completely different challenge to figure out what is interesting and exciting to developers.

How to expand your technical knowledge as a recruiter?

Three starting points

- **Start with some developer 101 knowledge:** If you are completely new, a good starting point might be to create your own little vocabulary cheat sheet. You could start with our [guide to the top 12 developer types and expand from there](#).
- **Look at tech trends in the Stack Overflow Annual Insights Report:** Even for those who already have an elementary tech vocabulary, [this survey among the global developer population](#) provides insights not only into the most common technologies in the industry, but also gives you insights into the most loved and most dreaded technologies. Let's hope the ones your team uses are on the former not the latter.
- **Get a technical newsfeed and inbox going:** Nobody expects expert knowledge from you, but developers appreciate it if you are up to date and can chat a little about current trends. As a tech recruiter, your news feed and inbox should not only be filled with recruiting and HR news, but also some technology news.

Getting started is often as easy as building a reading list. Here's a short list of sources to help you get started:

[CNET](#)
[Gizmodo](#)
[Hacker News](#)
[TechCrunch](#)
[Wired](#)

Learn about the tech that drives your team

As much as it is valuable to be aware of some of the biggest trends in tech, of course, the next step is to put it into context with your own team. In order to get a grasp of that, you need to open the lines of communication with your tech team. This should be with senior staff, like hiring managers and team leads, but not limited to that.

The good news: technical people actually quite enjoy talking about their work, even to non-technical people. The trick is to find out how to get the relevant information from such a conversation.

If in the past you've seen the question of "What are you working on?" drift off into an enthusiastic lecture about "Everything that is so amazing about a developer's job," here are a few conversation starters to prepare beforehand to guide the meeting.

Five Example questions to start a conversation

1. How is what we are building (or how we are building it) different from other companies?
2. Which changes in the past two-five years have been most fundamental to the tech team?
3. What things on the roadmap for the next year are you most excited about?
4. Talk me through our tech stack? Which technologies were added/dropped most recently?
5. What's a way in which we solve a problem differently from the competition?

Once things start to make sense to you, and you have become somewhat of an expert on your own team's way of working, make sure you don't flip into the other extreme. Don't start explaining tech to a tech audience.

Developers are aware that you don't understand why some technology or project is hard, clever, or challenging down to the smallest details. But if you know that it is hard, clever, or challenging and even have a developer on your team to quickly answer a candidate's further questions, this will undoubtedly earn their trust.

Remember: If the goal your tech team is working towards is something you can genuinely be excited about, this will undoubtedly resonate with candidates you speak to.

Some technologies that we use

php symfony3 redis memcached rabbitmq freebsd java debian
percona hadoop javascript mysql twig cassandra nosql maven
tomcat selenium cucumber node.js phpunit junit collectd
influxdb go git jenkins apache-kafka zookeeper solr storm
salt sharepoint slack lodash webpack jest service-worker redux
babeljs yarn nomad kubernetes docker kotlin google-cloud-platform
amazon-web-services rocksdb cuda

In our trivago tech teams, we love to experiment with new technologies and we use the best in production for our large-scale system, which serves a great user experience which helps millions of users find their ideal hotel every day.

We use **Docker** and **Kubernetes** as our main platform backed by **Redis**, **Memcached**, and **Kafka** as our primary data exchange layer. Our core systems are written in **Kotlin**, **PHP**, **Java**, **Python**, and **Go**.

The frontend layer is based on **JavaScript**, **Redux**, **webpack**, **Melody**, **Swift**, **Kotlin**, and **Babel**. For crunching jobs on the humongous amount of data we store, we use **InfluxDB**, **Elasticsearch**, **MySQL**, and **Hadoop**.

Not only do we rely on **Open Source** technologies, we also [give back to the community](#) through development and financial support.

At trivago, we want to make our developers feel empowered by providing various learning, monitoring, and development opportunities. What does this actually mean? Find out on our [Tech Blog](#), where our engineers share their thoughts.

Want to come learning with us? Check out [our events](#).

Tip: On Stack Overflow company pages and job listings, there's a [specific field](#) to describe your tech stack, but it should not be missing on other platforms. You should include or at least link to it usually under the sections for requirements or the job description.

Employer branding for developers

At the very core, a good employer brand means being a great place to work and making it known. Well, how do you do that? In the previous sections, we looked at how to get all the details you need to understand how your team works. Or rather, we looked at all the hard facts like the technologies they use. But what else is there that defines the culture on your team?

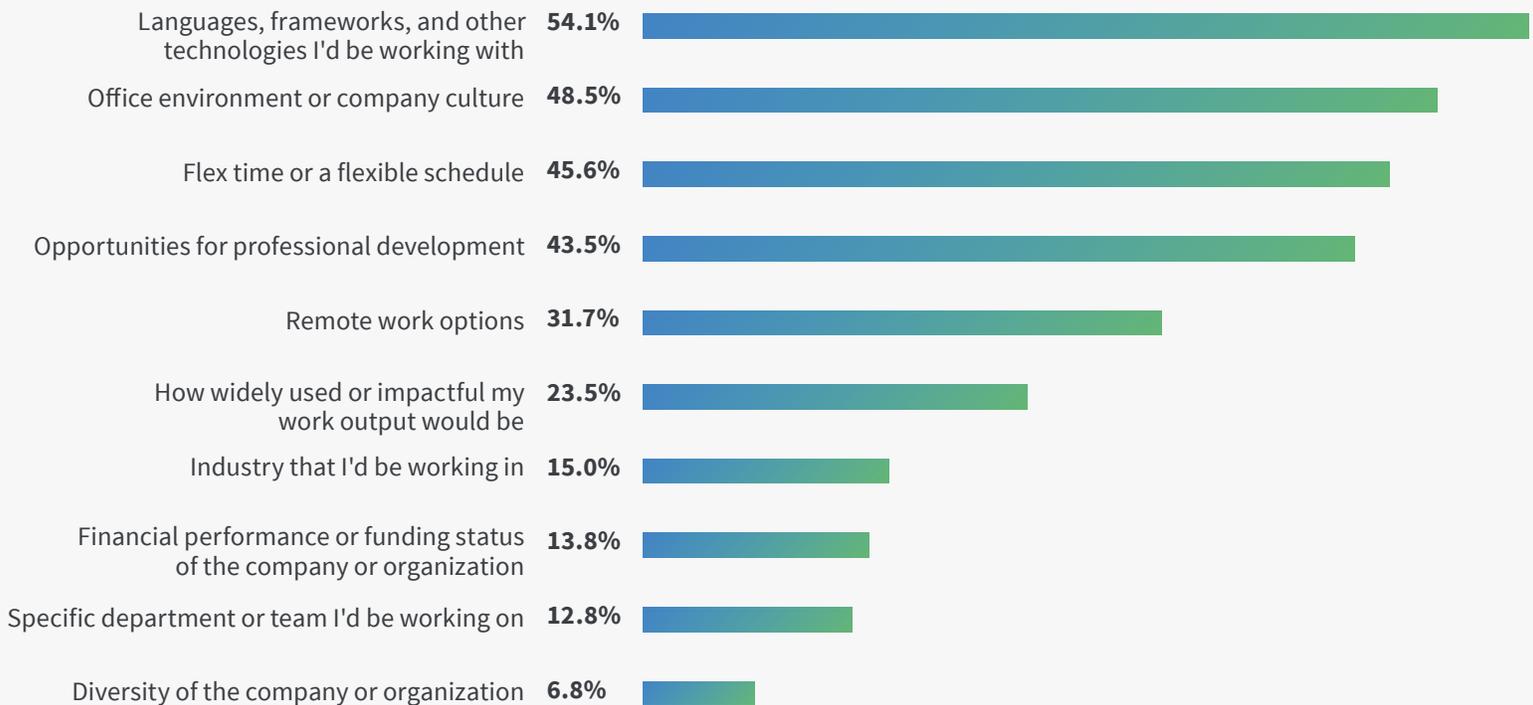
Know what attracts tech audiences

Over the last few years, we've asked developers a lot of questions through our yearly survey. Each time, we've seen new programming languages emerge, changes in developer salaries, and increases in employment rates. But one thing has remained consistent: Developers expect potential employers to be transparent through the recruitment process.

But what if you're still trying to figure out how to get transparency "right?" What do developers want to see on your careers page, in job listings, and in online advertisements? We asked developers for the most important factors when comparing job offers.

Number one for all respondents are the **languages, frameworks, and other technologies** they would be working with. They also care a lot about the **office environment** and the **company culture**. They appreciate **flexibility** around **schedule** and the **location** they are working from. One thing we want you to keep in mind for your recruiting email is: candidates want to know about the **impact** of the code they write.

Most Important Job Factors for Technical Talent



79,371 respondents globally;
top 3 factors selected

Note: Developers who belong to gender minorities in tech rank the office environment and company culture as their highest concern when assessing a new job and are more likely to say the diversity of an organization is a top concern for them.

Highlight benefits specific to tech employees

Some of the above mentioned factors mean changes that affect the whole company and take some time to get right. So you might ask: Aren't there any quick wins? When it comes to employee benefits and your developer brand, it gives you an extra chance to show you get what matters to them.

It is unlikely that one benefit will make the difference. But it is one more way to stand out from the crowd by highlighting benefits around **state-of-the-tech** ways of working, how you ensure a distraction free **work environment** and how you foster **life-long-learning**.

If you have a budget for developer benefits, here are three ways to spend it wisely:

- **Let developers choose their own hardware.** Your equipment budget shows developers how much you value their work. Developers pay very close attention to the equipment you provide your current tech team—and over 40% of them say that it's one of the most important benefits an employer can offer.
- **An account for online classes.** Considering that 90% of developers are at least partially self-taught, it should come as no surprise that they value company-sponsored professional development opportunities. So rather than giving them a gym membership, discuss free accounts for Pluralsight, Udacity, or Coursera.
- **A conference allowance.** Not only can a budget to attend one or two conferences a year be very attractive to developers. It also means the kind of talent you attract is looking to be on top of industry developments and will be future-proofing your products. Most importantly, with a little nudging, conference attendance can lead to great content to share on your company social media accounts.



How to write a great developer job listings

Finding great new tech employees who also fit into your existing team is no easy task. It can only succeed if both recruiters and hiring managers work together. Go through our cheatsheet with your tech partners.

What developer type are you looking for?

Examples:
Full-stack web, front-end web, back-end web, mobile, database administration, desktop, graphics programming, developer with a focus on statistics or mathematics, machine learning, system administration, DevOps, SRE.

Key Technologies

There will be a place to describe your tech stack, but for the header consider if there are some technologies to call out.

Job Description

The best job advertisement should appear as if a developer was explaining his position to a colleague.

What makes the position particularly interesting?

Describe team, projects, tech stack, and what developers can expect on the job.

TIP: Avoid descriptions that are too general. In other words, you don't have to explain a developer's job to a developer. Rather explain what makes this job interesting.



Must-haves and Nice-to-haves

Make sure to keep the requirements list short. With 3-4 necessary and 3-4 desirable requirements in clearly separated paragraphs.

Note: The university degree as a requirement might scare off excellent candidates, who are self-taught. If possible, consider losing it.

Don't overdo the bullet points

Instead, convey thoughts with full sentences and use bullet points appropriately to convey crucial bits of information.

Company Benefits

Don't focus on benefits that everyone will provide. Insurance, 401k, and two weeks vacation should be standard perks of any job.

Instead, focus on the perks or benefits that go above what other companies provide. What makes your company unique over others?

Company Description

Here all the things we discussed in the previous section should be condensed down into a few paragraphs.

Start from the job opening and move outwards: highlight how the role supports the great work of a larger team and how that team impacts the business goals.

Do your job listings leave the candidate with more questions than answers?

You would be surprised how many job listings don't answer the most basic questions. So make sure to tick these off before you hit upload.

- 1. What is the actual title of the role?** - You're not doing yourself any favors with a vague title.
- 2. What team will the developer be on?** - Will they be a member of the Mobile team or the Security team? Additionally, you can include some of the projects that the developer may work on in this role.
- 3. What product or platform will the developer be supporting?**
- Developing a marketing CMS is very different than a billing system.
- 4. How critical to the organization is this role?** - Some common examples may be that this developer would work to modernize an outdated system, help the company reach more people, or help lead a digital transformation.
- 5. What are the unique technical responsibilities and challenges of this role?** - Skip the boilerplate responsibilities. Does the product support a huge user base? How much data does the platform push on a daily basis?
- 6. What are the key technologies this developer will be working on?**
- Developers will skim over the listing, so seeing a familiar technology will grab their attention.

How to turn a recruiting email template into a conversation starter

When developers read recruiter emails they want to know that the message was written specifically to them. It should come as no surprise that to do this well, you'll need to do your homework. At the very least, you should know what types of projects they're working on and what they look for when they evaluate new job opportunities.

This brings us to one hard truth: tech recruitment emails should take you more time to write than most other messages you craft in your day-to-day. It would be easy to take pride in the volume of emails you're able to send to developers on any given week, but if you're able to crank them out this quickly, you've probably omitted a lot of information that would make a developer excited about continuing the conversation.

Hi Name,

I noticed you're doing some really interesting work over at *current company or industry they work in*. Specifically, I'm impressed by *describe a project of theirs here*. Compny name is looking to bring someone onto their team who can *name a specific skill set or duty* and *describe a specific impact the role has*.

This specific role will consist of working on *name a few specific examples of what they'll be working on*.

I'd love to set up a time to have you speak with our *Tech Hiring Manager/VP of Technology/CTO* to further discuss the role and answer any questions you have. Please let me know if you're open to having a quick chat with *name*.

Best,

Your name

Your contact info

Look at this example. The content itself is pretty straight forward, but it will show how much research you have done on the candidate. It can be really disheartening to developers to open up a recruitment email with the subject line “We love your resume! Would you be interested in a position with us?” only to find an impersonalized message about a job listing that’s not even relevant to them.

A recruiting email is not the same as a job listing—you don’t want to overwhelm the candidate with irrelevant details. Instead of focusing on the job or company itself, focus on the developer. Mention a side project of theirs that you found interesting (or even better: a compliment from a dev you consulted), what skills of theirs stood out to you, or how you see them impacting the success of the company.



At Stack Overflow, we'll partner with you throughout the entire developer hiring process. From understanding the developer market to sourcing the right talent, we help you reach the right talent right now.

[Talk to an expert >](#)