Developers Trending as the New ‘Hard to Reach’ Audience

By Russ Wojcik (IT/Business Manager)

KS&R has a long history of interacting with hard-to-reach decision makers. In the B2B purchase journey this has included C-suites (CIOs, CFOs, CEOs, etc.), narrow vertical entities, and targeted healthcare professionals (doctors, pharmacists, hospital administrators, etc.). From the consumer decision making perspective, we regularly target high net-worth individuals, ethnic populations, and influencers.

Over the past 18 months, we have seen increasing demand for insights from a new, hard-to-reach target who crosses both B2B and B2C realms... the Application Developer.

Developers are now critical to almost every field, including finance, healthcare, logistics, and retail. There are many examples of start-ups offering their app to new markets (e.g., Convoy, the “Uber of Trucking” that connects shippers with truck drivers), and newer companies reliant on internal software development (e.g., Stitch Fix, which uses machine learning to provide personalized clothing/styling deliveries to customers). Developers have become the lifeblood of innovation and new delivery models.

Obtaining Developer opinions has become more difficult, in no small part, due to the technical skill shortage in general (CIOs commonly report “talent shortage” being the greatest challenge to meeting objectives). This environment makes Developers an even more precious asset when looking to build platforms and deliver on corporate strategy.

We have found it useful to consider Developers through four unique, but related lenses:

- **Front-end/client-side Developers** - user interface (UI) or user experience (UX) design using CSS, JavaScript, HTML
- **Back-end/server-side Developers** - often integrating with databases, data storage systems, etc., using programming languages such as Elixir, Clojure, Python, C#
- **Full-stack Developers** - doing both front-end and back-end development, there is a wide range for how Developers are applied in technology companies
- **Enterprise Developers** - build apps in-house for their business versus those who build apps in software houses to whom companies look when outsourcing this function

Identifying and reaching this group can be more elusive than one might expect. We use questions to get at individuals’ regular job responsibilities/authority to understand who really qualifies as a Developer (since often ‘developer’ is not in their title). Customizing our language and screening criteria for each of the four application developer personas also helps to increase response rates and clarity.

A few specific approaches are well suited to recruiting and improving Developer participation in research.

1. **Online bulletin boards** provide an opportunity for more in-depth, free flowing but guided discussions with limited participants. It has many of the benefits of a focus group (e.g., the ability to build off of others’ comments), without needing all participants in the same location. This minimizes the barriers for Developers to participate – particularly not requiring them to leave their home or workplace.
2. **Ethnographic platforms** allow us to interact with respondents using a mobile device to capture “in the moment” experiences through photos, audio, and video. This type of interaction simulates the type of online social interaction many tech savvy individuals like Developers are comfortable participating in.

3. **Advisory council/expert panel management** engages an established group of qualified respondents who have opted into periodic research. This approach allows for capturing feedback on a particular topic of interest without seeking out new respondents. Providing an exclusive environment where Developers have the opportunity to interact with their respected peers as well as the sponsoring organization, makes them more likely to contribute when quick feedback is needed on a topic of importance.

We expect to see a continued shift and elevation in the importance of the developer function and KS&R will continue to seek out new ways for accessing and learning from this important population.

If you have a hard to reach target or difficult audience, give one of these approaches a try.

---

**About the Author**

Russ has been with KS&R for 20 years. He has filled several roles in both the business and IS/IT organizations. His responsibilities have run the gamut from writing and programming surveys to overseeing project day-to-day operations, particularly within the Technology industry. Russ earned a B.S. from Syracuse University’s School of Management, and an MBA from Clarkson University. In his free time, Russ likes to spend time outdoors, whether it’s riding a bike, rowing on the lake, or hitting the beach with his wife and two daughters.


---

*Return To Thought Leadership >*