

Social Media Case Study:

Appcelerator Titanium. 3,500% increase in Web traffic in one day.
10,000+ product downloads in first three days.

Overview

Appcelerator, a venture-backed startup software company based in Silicon Valley, is the leading provider of open source technologies for building and managing rich Web, desktop and mobile applications. Appcelerator planned a two-phase launch for a new product line – Titanium – that competed directly against Microsoft Silverlight and Adobe AIR in a multi-billion dollar market.

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Business Goals

Both Phase I and Phase II of the Titanium product launches had the same PR business goals. Each goal could be measured quantitatively:

- Increase website traffic to specific Titanium pages;
- Increase Titanium software downloads;
- Encourage developers to write Titanium applications and to participate in the Titanium open source project.

Company Background

Appcelerator competes in the RIA market, a multi-billion dollar industry dominated by products from global technology vendors such as Adobe and Microsoft. Appcelerator saw an opportunity to enter this market as the only company with an open source strategy.

Appcelerator's main product, Titanium, makes it easier for developers to quickly and easily build applications using standard web technologies and deploying them to multiple platforms and on multiple operating systems. In addition to its benefits as a market disruption business strategy, open source is a significant differentiator for Appcelerator because the company can provide a much more extensible, flexible and open software platform for developers. Developers are not locked into a single language. They can use multiple languages (even historically Web-only languages), any library, any widget or toolkit within Titanium – they can even use Flex, AIR, or Silverlight, if they choose. If a developer has more choice, and it is easier to use, Appcelerator's big bet is that Titanium will be preferred over the proprietary offerings.

Strategy and Tactics (The Page One Process)

Knowing the target audience and the channels most likely to reach them, the next step was a messaging exercise with the executive team at Appcelerator. Since we wanted to speak directly to the developer, and avoid the intermediary media, we needed to properly message each channel. Page One PR positioned Titanium as an open source alternative to Adobe AIR, to draft behind the excitement and awareness Adobe had created around their AIR offering. Developers—and the media—like a David vs. Goliath story. So long as the audacity of the claim is supported, the targeted audiences would be interested to know more about Appcelerator.

Phase I

The Phase I launch targeted developers and technical bloggers. Page One PR decided that the best way to reach these audiences was through social media channels such as Twitter and direct blogger outreach.

- Appcelerator already had a small social media presence. Page One PR had earlier produced a handful of developer-focused videos and created a YouTube channel, and Appcelerator already managed its own small Twitter feed.
- To maximize impact, Page One PR created a synchronized social media and traditional public relations campaign targeted at seven parallel communication channels, including YouTube, Twitter and the blogosphere, and focused on driving Web application developers to the new product line web site.
- To speak directly to developers we created a product vision video with the CEO and CTO. Page OnePR also created a series of screencast videos to explain product features and use—we wanted to make it as simple and quick as possible for developers to understand the product and how to get started.
- Page One PR managed the community email alert and technical blog distribution on the day of launch.
- Page One PR managed the Twitter feed, including content creation and response, on the day of launch. We chose Twitter as our main monitoring and response tool because Twitter demographics skew strongly towards developers (male, technical, late 20s to early 40s).
- Page One PR monitored blog posts, not only by top media blogs but developer blogs too, and recommended when it was necessary for the CEO to engage and respond.
- Page One PR managed a proactive community-engagement campaign to draw targeted audience members into ongoing blog discussion forums.
- For traditional PR, Page One PR contacted key media and bloggers prior to launch with embargoed background materials and coordinated executive briefings with key industry analysts prior to launch to organize testimonials for the media.

Phase II

Three months later, Phase II targeted the same audiences as Phase I but with a more granular focus in the strategy and tactics. Phase I of the launch successfully built up a major online presence (see graphic), so in Phase II we chose to drill down into more detail and extend our reach deep into specific communities. We had already created a critical mass at each social media channel so we now had the opportunity to identify specific developers, build the buzz, and encourage them to create content on our behalf.

Community-created content is the most compelling content because it gives third party validation to Appcelerator's message. It also gave us more content to work with and to promote to other communities. We had a large interested community now that we could energize and perhaps even encourage some members to become outright evangelists.

To focus our community outreach program between the two launches, we identified the top 10 developer communities (Ruby, Python, Javascript, Dojo, jQuery, MooTools, YUI, Cappuccino, Aptana, AJAX) that Appcelerator wanted to attract to their community and we crafted specific messages for each of them (why would they want to get involved with Appcelerator, why is it easy for them) and primed their interest in advance. Twitter, IRC and blogger outreach were our main tools for monitoring and engaging with these communities. We also prepared a series of screencasts addressing the new functionality of the Phase II launch. We used a two-pronged approach for the announcement: social media channels plus a packaged exclusive story with TechCrunch to drive the right qualified traffic. On the day of the announcement we monitored and responded on Twitter, IRC and blogs.

Challenges

Appcelerator has a very technically detailed product. It was difficult, even for a very technical agency such as Page One PR, to grok the nuances of their product within the competitive landscape. Also, they were launching into an already crowded market with some huge brand names — Microsoft and Adobe — well positioned and already enjoying success. How to differentiate the Appcelerator story?

There are no shortcuts to understanding technology. The Page One PR team dug into the Appcelerator architecture, downloaded, installed and played with the software, and reached out to the developer communities we knew well already. We strove to become Appcelerator developers ourselves, to understand not only how the technology worked, but why the community would want to embrace it. We learned to walk the walk and talk the talk.

That deep technical immersion allowed us to craft spot-on messages for our different developer audiences that resonated through both launches. We even hung out on their IRC channel to chat in real time with other developers.

Results

Phase I launch

- Web site traffic page views increased 3,500 percent;
- 40 percent of traffic went to the launch's target pages: product demos, downloads, documentation, FAQ;
- 10,000+ views of product videos in the first week;
- 10,000+ product downloads in the first few days;
- 44 unique stories covered by the traditional media;
- 300 percent increase in Twitter followers.

Phase II launch

- 900 percent increase in page views
- 200 percent increase in Twitter followers;
- TechCrunch story that linked to the company blog, screen casts and product download page;
- TechCrunch and Twitter were the top two referring sources to the Appcelerator web site.

Web Site Traffic Increase

