



Social Media Case Study:

SourceForge Community Choice Awards.

400% increase in voter participation. Twitter. Tattoos. Open source.

Overview

SourceForge, Inc. (NASDAQ: LNUX), is a publicly traded e-commerce, publishing and services company for the open source software and technology industry. Each year the company hosts the Community Choice Awards (CCA) to recognize the year's best open source projects, nominated by the open source community.

Business Goals

After disappointing participation in its 2007 Community Choice Award (CCA) program, SourceForge turned to Page One PR in 2008 to dramatically improve voter participation and better engage the targeted audiences it wished to reach. There were many challenges. Messages had to be relevant to the open source community, and voters were required to complete an eight-page online nomination form before voting.

Company Background

SourceForge is the global technology community's hub for information exchange, open source software distribution and services, and goods for geeks. The network of media and e-commerce websites serves more than 33 million unique visitors each month from around the world. Some of SourceForge's online properties include SourceForge.net, Slashdot, ThinkGeek and freshmeat.net.

Strategy and Tactics (The Page One Process)

To complement our traditional media campaigns, Page One PR recommended a social media campaign that leveraged Twitter and video as rich content channels. The goal and business objective of the social media campaigns were to help drive attention toward the CCA and ultimately increase voting and participation. The target groups for the CCA consisted of open source developers and open source companies. Because we knew that the target audiences were already heavy consumers of Twitter and video — as well as blogs — Page One PR developed a comprehensive blogger outreach, Twitter and YouTube strategy.

SourceForge's awards program was rolled out in three phases:

- Phase I: Award nominations by the open source community.
- Phase II: Voting on the nominees by the open source community.
- Phase III: Culmination of the CCA at an awards party during the OSCON conference in Portland, Oregon, to announce the winners.

Page One PR developed two integrated social media campaigns to support the different phases of the CCA as follows:

- Phase I and II: Twitter campaign
- Phase III: Video campaign

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For Phase I and II, Page One PR used Twitter to drive awareness, encourage registrations and nominations, and finally, promote voting by pushing content designed to interest and attract developers and voters during the weeks leading into the awards ceremony. An online Twitter presence helped SourceForge increase visibility of the awards and drive traffic, nominations and voting to the CCA website. As 2008 was the first year the CCA was open to all open source projects, Twitter helped reach a much broader audience of nominations and voters.

For the targeted audiences — developers and voters — Twitter offered real-time information and updates on the CCA nominating process, and people could track the progress of their favorite projects. Micro-blogging offers a quick, more in-depth and personal feed into the thoughts of influential bloggers who follow Twitter. It was a depth of personalized engagement not possible through any other channel of communication. Page One PR updated the Twitter feed multiple times daily with an authentic and distinctive voice attractive to the technology community who cared about the contest. We also tracked comments by other Twitter voices and often engaged directly through Twitter with different people following the contest.

In Phase III of the contest, while still continuing the Twitter feed, Page One PR shifted the campaign focus to video and leveraged the reach and popularity of YouTube to talk to SourceForge's audiences. Page One PR attended SourceForge's CCA Awards party at the OSCON conference in Portland to produce a series of videos onsite to be promoted through YouTube, blogger/media outreach, Twitter and the CCA website. We created numerous types of videos — live interviews with the award winners (question and answer format), candid interviews with prominent party attendees, and live video from the party floor to capture the scene and ambiance and create a "wish you were there" feeling. All this different video content helped entice developers to participate again the following year.

The SourceForge social media campaign relied heavily on several key elements: a SourceForge CCA Twitter feed, creation and distribution of content daily via the feed, and promotion of the feed to industry influencers. Content ranged from logistical award information and updates, fun facts on the nominees, finalists and winners and live Tweets coming from the OSCON award ceremony.

In order to attract followers and keep them interested in the SourceForge Twitter feed, Page One PR not only posted interesting facts and reminders about the CCA daily, but also hosted a series of Twitter-only contests for followers.

The contests were edgy and creative, with just enough developer attitude to capture the attention of our audience. During the nomination phase we asked the Twittersphere how

many nominations they thought the awards would receive. Followers of the CCA Twitter feed were asked to Direct Message their guesses, and the closest guess received a free Screaming Monkey from SourceForge's affiliate company, ThinkGeek (<http://bit.ly/ACT4W>).

Next, we invited a local tattoo parlor to send an "artist" to SourceForge's award ceremony in Portland and gave out 10 free tattoos to anyone who was willing to get an open source tattoo during OSCON and show it off at the CCA party. We announced this contest on Twitter and used the Twitter feed to promote and urge people to participate. More than 20 people attending the CCA party got their own open source tattoos onsite.

These campaigns were a fun way to entice followers with the SourceForge Twitter feed, keep them checking for updates and make sure they remain engaged in our programs. The Twitter contests also created a positive and fun vibe for the CCA and encouraged people to participate and become more involved.

Page One PR also promoted the new CCA Twitter feed, growing it from zero to hundreds of followers by the time of the contest. The Twitter feed alias was added to all outgoing SourceForge marketing material for the CCA, including a link on the CCA website, the SourceForge homepage, mailing lists and newsletters. During our pitching to alert the media and analysts of the CCA nominations, Page One PR also included a "Follow us on Twitter" link at the bottom of each pitch and included it in relevant press releases about the CCA. In order to gain followers, Page One PR also employed a number of tactics such as following and engaging with known media/analysts, key members of the developer community and open source figures.

For the video campaign, Page One PR developed a list of potential interviewee targets in advance of the awards party. The event was fluid and since it could have been difficult to get everyone on camera, we listed more people than we needed (15 to 20) as interview targets. These people included industry thought leaders, members of the media and important executive members of SourceForge. The more interesting the person, the better traffic they would drive to the SourceForge YouTube channel. Page One PR drafted a list of questions in advance to use during the onsite video interviews.

Page One PR contacted our interview targets a week before the CCA party, alerting them that we would be conducting live Q&As during the awards party and would like to interview them.

After each interview, Page One PR promptly edited the takes into short three-minute video segments, immediately uploaded the production to YouTube and then promoted

them through a series of tactics such as blogger and media outreach onsite at the party. In addition, Page One PR promoted the videos through the CCA Twitter feed and to our media and analyst targets. Many of the subjects blogged or Tweeted about their interview live from the party. The videos were also posted to SourceForge's main CCA website.

Challenges

The biggest challenge in the social media campaign was finding the appropriate “voice.” The developer community is very good at sniffing out a hack or a marketing person. Open source developers also have specific personalities and traits, which are difficult for outsiders to mimic. By joining the community, Page One PR had to adopt a tone that was “developer friendly” and would appeal to their sense of humor. In order to fully integrate and capture the attention of the developers we had to create contests that would appeal to them. For example, once we decided on the open source tattoo contest, we had to match that concept with a specific, slightly sarcastic and dry tone on the Twitter feed in order to connect with our developer audience.

Results

Our social media campaign largely contributed to a 400 percent increase in voting participation. The top metric for the CCA campaign was participation—specifically how many people would complete an eight-page form to qualify their vote for the contest. In 2007, 38,000 people voted. In 2008, voting jumped to more than 160,000. In addition to increasing voting participation, the SourceForge Twitter and YouTube channels also saw hundreds of new followers, ultimately increasing SourceForge's social media footprint and laying the ground for future campaigns.

Blog Coverage 2007 vs. 2008



CCA Voter Participation 2007 vs. 2008

