

2018 ATD KC Excellence in Practice

Learning and Development

Cerner—DevCon

Challenge

In 2010 a group of Cerner developers went to leadership with an idea: a Cerner convention just for its development community, built and run from the ground up. The idea for a conference like this had been brewing at Cerner for several years as an opportunity to create a large scale sharing and learning experience for associates in Cerner's technical workforces when the team took their plan to Mike Nill, executive vice president and chief operating officer. They demonstrated how conferences like Strangeloop and JavaOne were run and how putting on a conference for Cerner's developers would be a great opportunity.

The goal was to provide a conference experience for each technical associate at Cerner, creating opportunities for knowledge sharing, networking, and collapsing long standing organizational silos by placing the teaching and learning opportunities into associate's hands.

Action

DevCon creates opportunities for Cerner associates to take the reins of their own learning and sharing in the context of a large-scale program design.

Analysis: The team began with the desire to create opportunities for sharing. Throughout trial and error and analysis of feedback data, it became clear that the conference needed clearly defined paths for associates to think about their opportunities, including everything from the "Nuts and Bolts" of day to day work to specific tracks regarding the organization's goals for the workforce, like "Continuous Delivery and Integration".

Design: DevCon is a two-day conference open to all technical associates at Cerner; not only is it open, associates are encouraged to take two full days to learn and network with each other. There are 85-90 talks every year, providing insight to the work, successes, and opportunities available at Cerner. There are over 250 talk submissions, which are carefully vetted by a committee of cross functional associates for inclusion in the conference. There are also three external keynotes at each conference, intended to provide an outside view of the industry. Lastly, each year includes a quirky visual theme, ranging from 8-bit vintage video games to large film and book franchises like Star Wars and Marvel Comics.

Development: Within Cerner engineering, it is commonly considered a privilege for associates to participate on one of the DevCon planning committees. Over 100 volunteers work each year to

Result

The first DevCon had 600 associates attend, compared to 3,600 in 2017.

In 2017, associates rated their overall conference experience at 4.2/5 and the likelihood that they would apply the learning at 3.9/5. The videos from the conference were posted in June and have been watched a total of 2,844 times by associates at Cerner.

Perhaps the most compelling measure of DevCon's success, however, is the continued investment in the conference from Cerner's most senior levels of leadership, including rental of the Overland Park Convention Center as a venue to accommodate all of the associates who attend.

[Overview video from 2015](#)

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vet talks, design and produce props and signage to support the visual theme, and help organize the conference attendees. Speakers are offered opportunities for feedback and coaching on their slides and presentations prior to the conference and all talks are recorded and made available on Cerner's internal Jive social media platform, called uCern Connect. Highly rated talks are frequently featured on Cerner Engineer's YouTube channel for others to consume as well.

Implementation: The conference days themselves are packed days involving set-up of the visual theme, counting session attendees, collecting feedback, providing catering for several thousand people, and ensuring that the AV doesn't fail. It is imperative that the environment supports associate sharing at every turn, with all of the program details silently humming along, unnoticed, in the background.

Evaluation: The team collects data on virtually every aspect of the DevCon experience, from registration to overall opinions on the visual theme. The team also asks associates whether they will apply the information they learn at the conference and tracks follow-on views of recorded talks which are frequently used as resources for other course material, including virtual courses.