SendGrid + *Hacktoberfest*

HOW SENDGRID INCREASED OPEN SOURCE
CONTRIBUTIONS BY 3,510% WITH HACKTOBERFEST

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ABOUT SENDGRID

Founded by three developers in 2009, SendGrid has valued open source from the beginning. We heavily engage with the community to drive innovation and improve the ease of integration for our API email service. We discovered Hacktoberfest, started by DigitalOcean and in partnership with GitHub, in 2015 and jumped at the opportunity to get involved. After seeing the benefit of increased engagement in our open source community from Hacktoberfest year over year, the Developer Experience team at SendGrid decided to go all in on Hacktoberfest in 2017. We did so by formalizing our planning, strategizing engagement drivers in our repos, increasing promotional efforts, encouraging contributions internally, and maximizing the productivity of our lean team.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

We began planning for Hacktoberfest in May of 2017, by forming a team led by our Developer Experience (DX) Product Manager, DX Engineer, our Documentation team, Product Marketing Manager, as well as stakeholders from our Support, Customer Success and Expert Services teams. We also created a centralized planning document to maintain our promotional plans, goals, deliverables and related dates. The planning document served as a valuable reference to share information on Hacktoberfest internally and act as a benchmarking mechanism for future reference. We also scheduled regular meetings to define our goals, brainstorm promotion ideas, divvy up the creation of the necessary deliverables, design our custom SendGrid swag pack, and determine appropriate contributor requirements for swag. In sum, we handled preparation for Hacktoberfest like preparing for an October 1st product launch.

> ### ✅ KEY TAKEAWAYS
> ### Planning for Success
>
> - Begin early
> - Form a stakeholder team
> - Document your goals and plan
> - Meet regularly to brainstorm and implement
> - Budget for and coordinate swag ordering
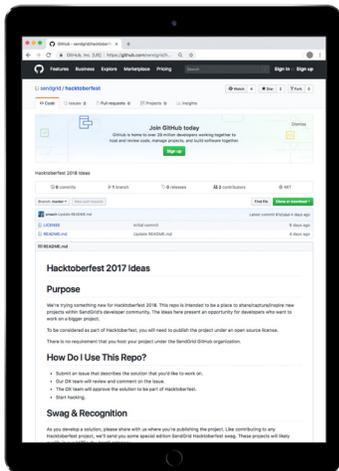
Hacktoberfest Repo on Github

DRIVING ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

We have a highly engaged community in our open source repos, so we knew Hacktoberfest could be valuable virtual event. First, we wanted to make involvement easy and welcoming for newbies and repeat contributors alike. We did this by labeling issues based on their ease to complete. Second, we wanted to promote deeper contributions with a broader payoff for our customers, so we spent time migrating our backlog into GitHub and sweetened the deal with an awesome custom SendGrid swag pack. We wanted to be sure to always have issues for our community to address, so we front-loaded Hacktoberfest-labeled issues and then continued to add new issues throughout the month.

> ### ✅ KEY TAKEAWAYS
> ### Driving Engagement Within the Community
>
> - Labeled issues with Hacktoberfest
> - Labeled each issue with a level of difficulty
> - Shared our internal backlog by moving issues to GitHub
> - Continue to add issues throughout Hacktoberfest
> - Make sure to support contributors by being an active community owner

PROMOTING OUR INVOLVEMENT

We wanted to share our excitement around Hacktoberfest with our customers and prospects and be sure Hacktoberfest contributors outside of the SendGrid network were aware of our involvement. We did so by utilizing several marketing channels including our blog, social media channels, our newsletter, and by creating unique channels for Hacktoberfest like our leaderboard and in-person meetup.

We wrote four blog posts sprinkled through the event window of September through November to promote our involvement, our custom swag pack, share progress, call out specific high-priority issues, and to give props to impactful contributions. We highlighted these posts in our monthly email newsletter. We saw awesome traffic to those posts - nearing 5,000 unique visitors! Social media was especially important for our engagement and promotional efforts. We created 39 social posts, supplemented with 212 internal posts/retweets, which included daily updates on PRs with a special image template designed by our creative team, Friday leaderboard updates, highlighting the top 3 contributors, and updates on our stretch goals as we smashed each goal. We added a spirit of friendly competition by creating a leaderboard of Hacktoberfest SendGrid contributors ranking contributors by the points associated with the ease of PR(s) they submitted. This helped drive contributions beyond the minimum swag requirement and gave more exposure to our most engaged participants. We also went beyond the virtual promotion by hosting a Denver meetup the first week of Hacktoberfest at our office so participants could meet and hack together in real life. We promoted the meetup externally through local meetup organizations, internally, and on the official Hacktoberfest site. It was an extremely successful meetup, from which we received 52 pull requests, equal to about 60 story points.

> ### ⊘ KEY TAKEAWAYS
> #### Promoting Our Involvement
> - Blog posts + email newsletter
> - Social media promotion
> - Gamification with a leaderboard
> - Local in-person meetups
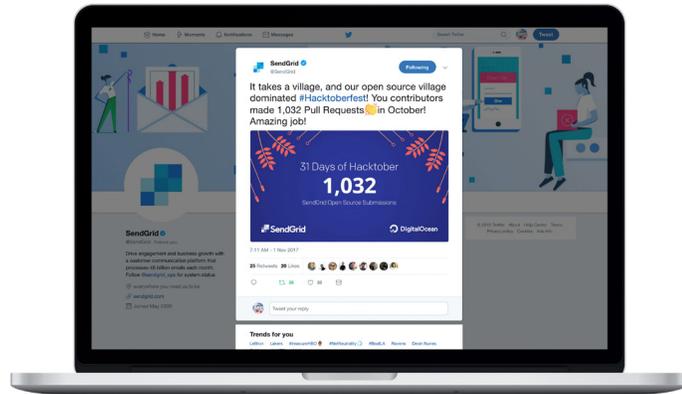
Example of a social call out

7
Months of Doc work

3.4
Years of Library work

ENCOURAGING CONTRIBUTIONS INTERNALLY

Luckily for us, here at SendGrid we have a lot of open source advocates in-house that we knew would be interested in getting involved in Hacktoberfest. We first initiated conversations with engineering and customer-facing team leadership in order to receive buy-in for their individual contributors to get involved during the month of October. We communicated to these leaders the value we can pass on to our customers from the contributions we receive, the community goodwill open source engagement promotes, and the investment

> ### ⊘ KEY TAKEAWAYS
> #### Encouraging Contributions Internally
> - Leadership buy-in
> - Promotion internally
> - Custom swag
> - Gamification with an internal leaderboard

internal contributors feel when they get involved in our repos. We then introduced Hacktoberfest to the company by requesting time in departmental and all-company meetings to explain the virtual event, how to complete a GitHub pull request, and the value contributors bring the SendGrid. Since our code libraries and our product documentation are open source, we broadened our reach to include any possible contributors regardless of their technical aptitude. Within the month of October, we sent departmental emails asking the leaders to weigh in with their support as well. We also promoted engagement internally with our Hacktoberfest swag pack and invited some friendly competition across teams with an internal leaderboard.

INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

Our biggest challenge for Hacktoberfest in 2017 was managing the massive number of contributions we received with our lean team of four. We beat last years engagement by October 5th, and our stretch goals for the month by October 10th. In fact, 8 days during Hacktoberfest 2017 were each uniquely bigger than Hacktoberfest for SendGrid in 2016. We knew we needed to be responsive to our community, reviewing and accepting PRs, as well as continuously creating issues in order to maximize engagement in October. We addressed this challenge by automating common processes when possible, asking for temporary assistance from other teams within SendGrid to help review PRs, and prioritizing Hacktoberfest efforts for the Developer Experience and Documentation teams. We did our best to reciprocate the massive engagement we saw from our community by working weekends and re-prioritizing our project and normal routine work as well as communicating with our contributors when there were delays or swag delivery issues.

> ⊘ **KEY TAKEAWAYS**
> Increasing Productivity
>
> • Dedicate time to Hacktoberfest
>
> • Respond quickly
>
> • Automate routine tasks
>
> • Ask for help

	2016 Actual	2017 Goals	2017 Actual	% Increase	Libraries	Docs
Contributors	40	80	625	1,462%	515	110
Pull Requests	43	80	1,249	2,804%	1,015	234
Story Points	46	105	1,661	3,510%	1,385	276

Ultimately, we strive to provide a welcoming developer community where people can come to learn, test their skills, and help each other solve problems. Open Source Software (OSS) is one of the most critical drivers of software today, and virtually all of the software we all use today contain some element of OSS. Open source libraries reduce development time for our customers so that they can start and continue to use SendGrid faster. But, this work doesn't just magically appear, real people contribute hours and hours of their lives to move a project forward, fix bugs, improve documentation with the result of software getting better and better. In fact, Hacktoberfest contributions accounted for work that would have taken our documentation team over 7 months, and our DX engineer almost 3 1/2 years. I think it's fair to say that getting involved in Hacktoberfest has been highly beneficial for SendGrid and our customers.