


Running a Successful Usergroup

Author: Jeff Rush <jeff@taupro.com  >
Copyright: 2008 Tau Productions Inc.
License: Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0
Date: March 14, 2008
Series: PyCon 2008 Chicago

Tips and resources for starting and running a successful Python usergroup.



PyCon 2008 CHICAGO

Introduction

- who am I
 - organizer of DFW Pythoneers group
 - chair of PyCon 2006/2007
 - Advocacy Coordinator
- Python not being a proprietary language
 - usergroups are avenue to bring new folks into Python
- build careers at usergroups
- incubator for one-laptop-per-child contributors
- rise of regional conferences
- support from the Python Software Foundation

What Kind of Person Starts a Usergroup?

- initiative
- persistence
- consideration of others
- **NOT** necessarily
 - a polished speaker
 - a programming guru

Steps to Starting a Usergroup

- invent a name e.g. BayPiggies, SunPiggies
 - PIGs, PUGs, Pythoneers
- create a wiki page e.g. <http://wiki.python.org/moin/BrisbanePUG>
- create a mailing list
 - postmaster@python.org **not** mailman@python.org
- add your group to the roster of all groups
<http://wiki.python.org/moin/LocalUserGroups>

Steps to Starting a Usergroup (cont'd)

- announce a few times its creation to
 - python-announce, python-users, your blog, group-organizers

<http://mail.python.org/mailman/listinfo/group-organizers>
- build consensus on the mailing list:
 - meeting location, duration and frequency
 - group focus and special interest
- locate a place and start holding meetings

Deciding the Type of Usergroup

- pure lecture model
- study group model
- sprint/team project model
- dinner/social gathering model
 - when small or lack meeting facilities
- topic focus
 - Plone, Django, Scientific, general interest

Spreading the Word

- announce upcoming meetings on python-announce/python-users
 - **consistently** for several months
- post meeting summaries to shared usergroup blog

<http://python-groups.blogspot.com/>
(to get an account) advocate@python.org

- circulate flyers at stores, schools

<http://wiki.python.org/moin/Advocacy/UsergroupSupport>

- create a chapter on <http://python.meetup.com>
 - costs money but PSF may help fund it

Spreading the Word (cont'd)

- co-announce at other related usergroups
 - Unix, .NET, Apple, Programmers, Web
- record pod/screen casts and put in a publicity blurb
- produce club t-shirts
- list your meetings on Google Calendar
- start a **local-area** Google Adwords campaign
 - locality keeps cost down, pass a hat

Possible Resources for Usergroups

- a mailing list on python.org
- a wiki on python.org
- a subversion repository
- a chatroom for spontaneous hanging out
- free books and discounts at o'Reilly Publishing

<http://ug.oreilly.com>

Finding a Meeting Place

- corporate offices
- universities
- storefronts with backrooms, like bookstores
- churches
- restaurants with free WiFi

What to Do at Meetings

- module of the month
- code walk-throughs
- lightning talks
- start a group project, like a sprint
- invite a guest speaker
<http://wiki.python.org/moin/PythonSpeakers>
- play video lectures
<http://wiki.python.org/moin/Advocacy/VideoLectures>
- get ideas from the shared usergroup blog
<http://python-groups.blogspot.com/>

Key Elements for Success

- **consistent** meetings and announcements
- provide a way for others to find you at meetings
- prepare for meetings; bring a book, learn a module
- summary reports of meetings
 - post to your mailing list, for archiving
- don't decide focus, location, project too early
- mentoring/professional development

Risks of Failure

- inconsistent meeting times and location
 - giving up too soon
 - having one presenter again and again
 - lacking a strong leader
 - too many strong leaders
 - not balancing beginner and advanced
 - non-Python social gatherings
-
- Discussion? Birds-of-a-Feather Saturday evening!