MENU

`Type Here to Search`

</> DEVSWORLD NEWS

AxiaTP Engineer Discusses the Power of the API

By Paula Bernier /
July 13, 2016

The opportunity for small businesses to thrive in a highly competitive market has never been better, notes John Harden, senior software engineer for AxiaTP. Application programming interfaces, he adds, are one of the enablers of this new reality, given they provide the ability to have the expertise in almost any field through just a few lines of code. On the eve of the All About the API event, we interviewed Harden to learn more.

Is there a market for APIs you would consider the low-hanging fruit?

Harden: The API concept is not as entirely mainstream as one would imagine. There are plenty of companies that insist on keeping their software inside an extremely expensive, closed box. For every business wanting to remain in a closed software environment, there is another competitor coming up right behind them shifting with the new marketplace models. The low-hanging fruit is everywhere; it is just a matter of finding a problem that cannot be solved easily/inexpensively and creating a solution to allow engineers to utilize it.

What are the major challenges API developers face?

Harden: One of the major challenges that developers face is: How do you create the API in such a way that everyone can adopt and utilize it easily? The main objective of an API is to allow another developer to leverage your expertise without knowing the ins and outs of the product. If your API is not intuitive, or creates even more work than just becoming an expert on the subject itself, the API will not be successful. Finding a healthy balance of intuitiveness and applicability is a difficult task.

What titles should businesses target when marketing their APIs?

Harden: You should be targeting the decision-making technology staff that will be integrating it. Find a way to easily justify the cost of the API with the value added to the product, and your target can be as broad as you want. Business leaders, C-Suite and developers all love being able to make more money with less effort.

How do you measure the ROI of an API?

Harden: The ROI of an API can be measured directly with the value added to the product. Follow the same process you would use to justify the cost of any development project. The only difference is that there might be some inherent recurring costs with APIs; however, when you develop something internally you often will have costs associated with maintaining and updating that software as well.

Is API security more challenging than securing other things?

Harden: Security is a two-way street when it comes to this type of project. The API is only as secure as its secrets (i.e. you can develop the most secure process for configuring an API, but if the keys to the kingdom are left in plaintext on a server that anyone can access, then your security is worthless).

Furthermore, if security is incredibly important to your solution, you should consider using more advanced features such as whitelisting where the API can be accessed from, rotating passwords, etc.

Which is better, SOAP or REST?

Harden: SOAP and REST each have their advantages/disadvantages. My current vote would be for a REST-based API. They are significantly easier to integrate with and are becoming the day-to-day standard. SOAP does have an advantage of better documentation (mainly due to being forced), although a properly documented REST application should be just as competitive in this area.

How frequently are APIs typically changed or updated, and how can you do that with minimal disruption?

Harden: APIs should be updated for every architecture-changing release you have. It is always the objective and duty of engineers to reuse code where possible, so if there is no impact/need to re-release the API structure then it should be avoided. If new versions are to be released, then it is absolutely necessary to offer support for the prior API structure for a set amount of time, allowing for time to adapt to the new standard.

What standards are needed to enable APIs reach the tipping point?

Harden: It would be great if we could come up with a generalized way of solving every problem, but this just isn't possible. Standardization does a great job of making it easy to pick up the base elements of an API, but over-standardization could cause a bottleneck in the development cycle. In a world where technology moves incredibly quickly on a day-to-day basis, it is important to be mindful of the standards, but not to hamper your development cycle with them. I don't know if there is really a great one-size-fits-all solution to the multi-vertical problem out there.

How important is building an ecosystem around your API(s)?

Harden: In today's technology, it is critical to build your development ecosystem with APIs. Every part of your product (from the UI/backend) should be leveraged by APIs so that you can provide easy access and integration to clients. Inserting an API into [an] existing product often creates clunky, non-intuitive APIs that do not provide much value for the people using the product. Sure, products can be successful without APIs, but you would be leaving out a massive amount of market by ignoring the market-driving (near requirement) feature of having an API in your product.

Why should attendees at All About the API make sure to attend your session and visit your booth?

Harden: I will be speaking as a panelist on Wednesday, July 20. The panel, which is called "Moving with the Market: Enhancing the Value of Your Product with API," will discuss the shifting go-to-market strategies and why you should be moving your product toward utilizing the API technology. We are asking people to come to our booth and tell us in a minute or less what the power of the API is, and we'll give them a portable phone charger and post their videos on our website.

Edited by Alicia Young

Author Info

Paula Bernier
Executive Editor, TMC

👤 **Click here to read full bio**

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

Tweet | 0 | 8 | in

G+1   f Share   in Share