

Recruiting Speakers For Meetings - How can you get more people signed up to talk?

Finding technical and industry experts who are willing to speak at user groups is always one of the most difficult aspects of being a user group leader.

Here are a few ideas to try when recruiting presenters:

The Trap

During any breaks in the user group meeting, when talking to other members, lead the conversation towards any particular LabVIEW function or new application the guest would like to share. Suggest that this is definitely something which should be shared with the rest of the user group and perhaps they would be interested in doing so at the next scheduled meeting.

They might say something like, "well, I really don't like presenting..", and the reply from the leader should be "great! thanks, I'll put you on the agenda and here is a coffee mug in appreciation of your participation".

Getting someone to commit to a presentation is easier in person than on email. People can dodge emails but it is difficult to not answer when everyone is there looking at them expectantly.

Local Groups

Contact local Alliance Members to talk about their services, interesting applications they've been working on and tips/tricks they would like to share at the next user group meeting.

In addition, technology leaders from the area are great presenters. Be sure you find people who are passionate about what they do.

LabVIEW and NI products are used in almost every industry imaginable so having someone talk about new trends in aerospace or whatever might appeal to the group. Make sure the content lines up with the groups interests though.

Reward

One trick is to simply reward speakers with some swag. Keep it reserved for speakers: you have to earn the mugs and t-shirts. And thus gain some "street cred" in the group.

You can also contact your local NI Sales contact (<http://www.ni.com/niglobal/>) about other giveaways you might be able to offer such as NIWeek discounts, training discounts, etc

Round-table Discussion

Another trick is to try to have a very relaxed, informal, fun and friendly atmosphere during the meetings, like saying "I have my own ideas, does anyone else have anything to offer?", and then look around for help: people will volunteer to fill in the void. First with answers, then with more questions, then more answers and suddenly a mini-presentation has occurred with many people interacting.

Those who like sharing and have something credible to say have been "smoked out" and it's now psychologically a very short step for someone to volunteer for a full presentation.

Conclusion

I reassure the prospective speaker that having an authentic presentation about their own use of LabVIEW is often more interesting than listening to an NI talking head meeting after meeting. Perhaps, then the presentation will turn into a conversation.

In general, scheduling speakers is one of the core elements of the leader's job. The better your LabVIEW user group is known locally, the greater chance people will do the job in exchange for the "promo". It also requires a lot of networking. Make sure you or someone on your team is good at it and has oodles of contacts.