



EarShots

FALL 2026 REPORT

Developer marketing in the age of AI

Trust in AI output fell while adoption rose. Communities started banning generated content. Discovery moved into docs, repos, and answer engines. What changed, what developers are actually saying, and what to do about it.

If you only read one screen

Five things a GTM team selling to developers needs to know this quarter.

- 01 Developers use AI every day and still check its work. 83% use AI tools. 6.6% trust it with important decisions.^[1]
- 02 The largest programming communities now filter or ban generated content. Your AI-drafted post is a liability there.^[2 3]
- 03 96% of developer marketing teams have tried AI. 7% call it very useful.^[4]
- 04 Discovery is shifting from search to docs, repos, and AI answers. One devtool now gets most of its new paid users from AI referrals.^[5 6]
- 05 The channels that still work are the ones where a real engineer shows up and answers a real question. 64% of teams say community and events deliver their highest ROI.^[4]

01 / TRUST GAP

Developers adopted AI and kept it on a short leash

The 2026 Stack Overflow Developer Survey, with 30,903 respondents across 169 countries, found that 83% of developers use at least one AI tool at work, and 73% of coding assistant users use one daily. Trust did not follow. Only 6.6% trust AI output for important work decisions, and among developers with one to five years of experience that drops to 4%. The largest group, 48%, trust AI only when they can easily verify the output. Another 12.3% do not trust it for most work tasks.^[1]

That gap is the operating condition for everyone marketing to this audience. Developers are not rejecting AI. They are checking everything it produces, and human review is now the default way they work with it.

83%

USE AI TOOLS AT WORK

Stack Overflow 2026^[1]

48%

TRUST AI ONLY WHEN THEY CAN VERIFY IT

Stack Overflow 2026^[1]

6.6%

TRUST IT WITH IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Stack Overflow 2026^[1]

4%

EARLY CAREER DEVS WHO TRUST IT WITH IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Stack Overflow 2026^[1]

LLM-generated projects, articles, blogs are low-effort products lacking authenticity.

THECHAPLAIN / HACKER NEWS, APRIL 2026^[7]

WHAT THIS MEANS

Anything you publish that reads as generated gets the same treatment as generated code. It gets reviewed, discounted, and often called out in public. The bar is no longer whether it is correct. The bar is whether a person who knows this stuff actually wrote it.

02 / COMMUNITIES

The places developers talk are now filtering for humans

In April 2026, r/programming, the largest programming community on Reddit at 6.9 million members, announced a ban on LLM-related content. The subreddit had already banned LLM-generated posts. The new rule extended to the topic itself, after months of AI posts crowding out discussion of actual programming.^[2] Hacker News added a line to its official guidelines saying the site is for conversation between humans.^[3] Other technical subreddits, including r/rust, made similar moves.^[7]

The signal is not that developers hate AI. Many of the same people arguing for the ban use coding agents daily. The signal is that they are exhausted by content that wastes their time, and they now enforce that at the community level, with automation.

2025	Early 2026	April 2026
r/programming bans LLM-generated posts. Automated review flags clearly generated content, sometimes months after posting. ^[7]	Hacker News guidelines add a line against generated and AI-edited comments. ^[3]	r/programming extends the ban to LLM discussion itself. r/rust follows. ^[2 7]

Genuine question: how to distinguish yourself from the stream of slop?

VOVA_HN2 / HACKER NEWS, APRIL 2026^[7]

I personally can't wait for no-ai communities to proliferate.

ARCHAGON / HACKER NEWS, APRIL 2026^[7]

WHAT THIS MEANS

Volume plays are dead in developer channels. A single flagged post can mark an account as blogspam permanently. One HN user reported being flagged three months after publishing a hand-written article, by what looked like an automated AI review. The only durable presence is a real engineer, on a real account, contributing before they ever mention the product.

03 / MARKETING TEAMS

Marketers went all in on AI content. Developers noticed.

Draft.dev's 2026 Developer Marketing Survey found that 96% of developer marketing and DevRel teams have tried AI, and 85% use it mainly for content ideation and drafting. Only 7% describe it as very useful.^[4] Across marketing more broadly, the share of teams that can prove AI ROI fell from 49% to 41% in a year, even as most teams reported AI delivering more value. Leadership stopped accepting productivity gains as proof.^[8] HubSpot's 2026 report found 61% of marketers believe this is the biggest disruption in marketing in 20 years, and that most AI content is average.^[9]

The pattern is consistent. AI made it cheap to produce, and producing was never the constraint. Getting a skeptical engineer to read past the first sentence was.

96%

DEV MARKETING TEAMS HAVE TRIED AI

Draft.dev^[4]

7%

FIND IT VERY USEFUL

Draft.dev^[4]

41%

CAN PROVE AI ROI, DOWN FROM 49%

Jasper / Navigate AI^[8]

61%

CALL THIS THE BIGGEST DISRUPTION IN 20 YEARS

HubSpot^[9]

HN should also limit all these self-promoting AI posts.

FEVERZSJ / HACKER NEWS, APRIL 2026^[7]

WHAT THIS MEANS

AI is fine for the parts of marketing developers never see: research, sorting, drafting internal notes. It fails the moment it becomes the voice. Put the model behind the engineer, not in front of them.

04 / DISCOVERY

Developers find tools in docs, repos, and AI answers. Not on your homepage.

The 2026 State of Marketing to Engineers report from GlobalSpec and TREW Marketing, built on more than 1,000 engineers and technical buyers, found that 69% now use generative AI during the purchasing process, yet rate the trustworthiness of its answers 4.7 out of 10. Buyers spend 62% of the journey researching online before talking to sales, and they validate AI answers through technical publications and vendor sites.^[10] A growing share of questions about what to use for a job never reach a search box at all. Similarweb data shows ChatGPT's share of generative AI web traffic fell from roughly 76% to around 53% in a year, with Gemini past a quarter and Claude the fastest growing platform in the category, particularly among technical, high-intent users.^[11] DevTune's study of 43 devtool categories and 54,000 AI answers found that documentation authority drives most citations for category leaders.^[6]

69%

USE GENERATIVE AI WHILE BUYING
GlobalSpec / TREW 2026^[10]

4.7/10

TRUST RATING FOR AI ANSWERS
GlobalSpec / TREW 2026^[10]

62%

OF THE JOURNEY IS ONLINE BEFORE SALES
GlobalSpec / TREW 2026^[10]

FIELD NOTE: VAL TOWN

In July 2026, before any deliberate answer engine work, Val Town found that the majority of new Pro users with a known referral source came from AI, mostly Claude. Their conclusion: a docs page is now a very long search query aimed at agents.^[5]

WHAT THIS MEANS

Your docs are marketing now, and they are being read by models before they are read by people. Every unanswered question in a GitHub issue, every thread where someone compares you to a competitor, is training data for the next answer. Being present and accurate in those places is the new top of funnel.

05 / WHAT WORKS

The channels that survived are the ones with a human in them

The Draft.dev survey found 64% of developer marketing teams say community and events deliver their highest ROI, and 73% are increasing investment there. Content marketing and SEO remain the most common investment at 51%, but the returns are increasingly tied to whether the content came from someone who has actually done the thing.^[4] On Hacker News, front-page Show HN posts convert at 5% to 12% for signups, and what gets a post there is a founder or engineer answering questions in the thread, not a polished launch page.^[12]

64%

SAY COMMUNITY AND EVENTS DELIVER HIGHEST ROI

Draft.dev^[4]

73%

ARE INVESTING MORE IN COMMUNITY AND EVENTS

Draft.dev^[4]

5 to 12%

SIGNUP CONVERSION FROM A FRONT-PAGE SHOW HN

daily.dev^[12]

WORKS	DOES NOT WORK
An engineer replying from a personal account with a link to the relevant docs page	A brand account replying with a link to the pricing page
Answering the question someone asked, including when the answer is that you do not do that	Answering a different question that makes the product look better
Replying within hours while the thread is alive	Replying next week with a template
Disclosing you work there, once, plainly	Explaining that your post is meant to promote your company. One HN user got flagged as blogspam for exactly this. ^[7]
Content that reads like it was written after a long day of fixing the problem	Content that reads like it was written before the problem was understood

...followed by a torrent of hype and buzzwords.

MRCSHARP / HACKER NEWS, ON WHY AI CONVERSATIONS LOSE DEVELOPERS, APRIL 2026^[7]

06 / RESPONSE TIME

Most teams miss the moment because they never see it

8 in 10

MISSED AN OPPORTUNITY LAST QUARTER
BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT RESPOND IN TIME

Adobe^[13]

7%

HAVE EMBEDDED AI IN A WAY THAT PRODUCES
MEASURABLE BUSINESS RESULTS

Adobe^[13]

Adobe's 2026 research found that more than 8 in 10 marketing teams missed an opportunity last quarter because they could not respond in time. Only 7% have embedded AI in a way that produces measurable business results.^[13] In developer channels the window is shorter than anywhere else. A GitHub issue asking whether something works with a given stack, or an X post saying someone is switching off a tool and wants suggestions, is live for hours, not weeks. The team that answers first with something true wins the thread and the citation.

WHAT THIS MEANS

The bottleneck is not writing the reply. It is knowing the conversation exists, deciding whether it matters, and getting a real person to it while it is still alive. That is a listening and triage problem, and it is the one place where AI helps without ever touching the voice.

07 / PLAYBOOK

What to do about it

01 Watch where the conversation actually happens

GitHub issues and discussions, X, LinkedIn, Hacker News, Stack Overflow, and technical blog posts show up first. Search and dashboards will not surface them. Set up monitoring that reads these channels continuously, not weekly.

02 Sort before you respond

Not every mention deserves a reply. Separate questions, friction, buying signals, and noise. Most teams lose time on noise and miss the buying signals.

03

Ground every reply in your docs

If the answer is not in your documentation, either write the docs page or say plainly that it is not supported. A reply that links to a real page earns trust. A reply that links to a landing page earns a downvote.

04

Put an engineer's name on it

Draft with whatever tools you want. Post from a real person's account, with their real disclosure, after they have read and edited it. Community rules on HN and Reddit now treat undisclosed generated content as a bannable offense.

05

Measure presence, not impressions

Track how often your product appears in AI answers for the questions your buyers ask, how fast you respond to public questions, and how many threads end with your docs linked. These are the numbers that predict adoption now.



EarShots watches GitHub, X, and LinkedIn for you.

It sorts every developer mention into questions, friction, buying signals, or noise, and drafts a reply grounded in your docs for a human to approve. Built for technical GTM teams that would rather answer than broadcast.

[See how it works →](#)

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