

FILEMAKER DEVELOPER CONFERENCE: COMING BACK FOR MORE

The FileMaker Developer Conference has assumed a cult-like status among those FileMaker developers who attend the conference year after year. The conference provides developers with creative solutions, technical ideas, a wide array of fun events and lots of inspiration to tackle new database challenges.

Overview

- Conference exclusively for FileMaker developers
- Conducted 14 years in a row
- The largest gathering of FileMaker developers in the world

Industry

- Database development

Solution

- The annual FileMaker Developer Conference

Benefits

- Attendees reconnect with friends and forge new relationships
- Technical solutions and creative ideas emerge
- Many attendees garner new business

Expect the Unexpected

First-time attendees of the FileMaker Developer Conference (DevCon) are often surprised by what they find. Considering the subject matter at hand - database development - participants might expect a somber experience replete with dry folk and droning technical briefings. Yet DevCon is nothing of the sort.

On any given night, DevCon entertainment might feature FileMaker engineers who could easily give up their careers in the software industry and become successful comedians in nightclubs. The legendary, annual jam sessions unveil the talents of many FileMaker developers who are also gifted musicians. Attendees might encounter the raucous FMDiSC Fez Brigade, sporting their unusually distinctive and colorful headgear. In previous years, a trip to the local zoo or a float down a river might also be on the agenda. And rather than stuffy or reserved, the atmosphere is typically noisy and energetic.

Yes, there is a serious side to the largest gathering of FileMaker developers in the world, but as Bob Gossom of Absolute Advantage says, "If DevCon weren't fun, then we wouldn't go."

Peer-to-peer networking

Gossom - who returns every year mainly for the networking - is among a large section of developers who have attended the event 13 out of 14 times, and keep returning, each for their own reasons. "My first DevCon was amazing," says Tony White, of Tony White Designs, Inc.

"There was so much to learn and so many people doing things I hadn't heard about. Don't get me wrong - I was doing cool FileMaker stuff, but it never hurts to get other opinions from the best and the brightest among your peers."

For many, DevCon serves as a perfect venue for dedicating the time to fine-tune current skills, as well as develop new ones. Mike Williamson of Custom Database Design has been to 13 DevCons, despite the fact that he has five children, four of whom are currently in college. "With five kids, it was often hard to justify spending the money to go to DevCon," says Williamson. "But every year I've found invaluable new skills and tricks that outweigh the cost of attendance." His advice? Come early and stay late to take full advantage of networking opportunities.

It's these networking opportunities that give DevCon its unique feel: a community of people who take their database development very seriously. Yet they still make it a goal to help each other out and have fun. "The FileMaker Developer Conference is the one place where you, as a developer or user, can truly get in touch with the heart of the FileMaker community," says Chris O'Connor of The TRICON Group. "I've been involved with many development communities over the years and none have even come close to the openness and community spirit that overflows from this group worldwide."

O'Connor has been a FileMaker developer for over 15 years, but he says he still needs inspiration on a regular basis. DevCon is a great opportunity to see what peers are doing, which sparks dramatic, ongoing improvements. He's also landed several large jobs while at the conference. "You'd be surprised what a small world it is. The people sitting next to you at lunch might be looking for ideas or ways to mobilize FileMaker in their company," he says. "I don't go to DevCon looking to generate business, but the conference has resulted in new jobs several times."

Surveying the current capabilities of the FileMaker family of products, as well as satellite products such as plug-ins, is among the main reasons Steve Gerow of Abrazos Data Consulting attends DevCon. "With a range of experts advancing the product in every conceivable direction, I've left each year's DevCon inspired with new ideas to apply to my projects, as well as new sources to help on projects I don't wish to tackle myself," says Gerow.

A community of close friends

Olga Camacho of the University Of Miami has attended 13 FileMaker Developer Conferences. Her best advice is to prepare ahead of time by selecting session topics that are most interesting, with a backup choice in case a session is full. "Be prepared to be blown away by some of the possibilities FileMaker brings," she says. "We have been using FileMaker for over 13 years now and it is like a fine wine; it ages very well. Each new version brings a new set of options created based on developers' requests and the availability of new technology."

Several years ago, the University of Miami hired a consultant firm to create a user-based security platform for its existing solution - no easy task at the time. When Camacho attended the Developer Conference, she learned immediately how to solve the university's security issues, all from talking with fellow attendees. "FileMaker cares about its community like no other software company out there," she says. "Attending the FileMaker Conference will make you part of a community of close friends who are always willing to help."

The FileMaker Developer Conference also provides opportunities for developers to rub shoulders with FileMaker engineers through the "Under the Hood" session that provides an in-depth look at key components of the FileMaker technology. "I was on the bus with a nice, soft-spoken guy, and we were talking about family stuff," says Gossom. "It turned out to be Jon Thatcher, one of the original developers of FileMaker Server, who was going to deliver the 'Under the Hood' session. You don't get that kind of direct contact with FileMaker experts every day."

Advance planning for long-term gain

Like many others, John Swart of Dead Eye Concepts prepares in advance, planning out his DevCon experience before he goes. He concentrates on one or two topics that will help him with current projects. One year, it was PHP development; another it was complex scripting and debugging. He says DevCon is a great way to recharge his developer batteries. As an independent developer, he notes that it can be difficult to keep up with the latest tricks. "I've found in the past that going to one session or talking with another developer can open new insights or break a log jam more quickly than hours of searching on the Internet," says Swart.

For Swart and many other developers, the return on investment from attending the conference is clear. "I can't put an exact number on it," says Swart. "But I've found that DevCon usually pays for itself within a short while either through knowledge gained, a new contact, or just putting a fresh perspective on my work. I always plan well in advance and put the money aside for DevCon - I wouldn't miss it for the world."

What are the not-to-be-missed events at the 2009 FileMaker Developer Conference? A jam session on the top floor of the Hilton San Francisco will blend amazing musical talent with stunning views. A Hornblower Cruise complete with dinner and drinks will feature casino-type games on the bottom floor, smooth jazz and conversation on the second floor, and music and dancing on the third floor for those who want to let loose.

Quote:

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[Olga Camacho](#)

Project Manager/Programmer
University of Miami

Learn more about the FileMaker Developer Conference:

www.filemaker.com/devcon

Contact Info for Customers:

Abrazos Data Consulting, Inc.

Steve Gerow
626-398-1506
steveg@abrazosdata.com
www.abrazosdata.com

Absolute Advantage, Inc.

Bob Gossom
818-718-2027
bobg@absoluteadvantage.com
www.absoluteadvantage.com

Custom Database Design

Mike Williamson
620-242-8616
mikewson@mac.com

DeadEye Concepts

John Swart
704-799-3340
jswart@deadeyeconcepts.com
www.deadeyeconcepts.com

The TRICON Group

Chris O'Connor
610-459-9848
coconnor@thetricongroup.com
www.thetricongroup.com

Tony White Designs, Inc.

Tony White
718-797-4175
tony_white@twdesigns.com
www.twdesigns.com

University Of Miami

Olga Camacho
305-284-5514
olga@miami.edu
www.miami.edu

For FileMaker:

Kevin Mallon
Public Relations Manager
FileMaker Inc.
408-987-7227
Kevin_mallon@filemaker.com
www.filemaker.com

