



Autodesk Expert Elite Advocacy Program

 **SNAPSHOT**

SPEAKERS

Katinka Santa (Autodesk),
Hillary Boucher (TheCR)

COMPETENCIES

Leadership, Community
Management

MATURITY PHASES

CMM2, CMM3

TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

Case studies are always a great way to learn as they offer real-life, tried best practices. As such, Hillary asked Autodesk to share their Expert Elite Advocacy Program.

1. **Interested in learning tried and true requirements for successful advocates?**

Katinka shared her 3 must-have requirements for nomination into the Expert Elite Program.

2. **Do you want to know what keeps the Expert Elite Members motivated?**

Katinka shared 4 motivators that help these Members continue to contribute to the Program.

3. **Learn what Autodesk promotes as its 11 benefits of being a part of the Expert Elite Program.**

The first has a surprising, easy to implement feature in the welcome package.

OVERVIEW

1. **Background – Katinka Sanka:** Based in California, Katinka oversees and runs the Autodesk Expert Elite Advocacy Program. In this call, she shared the foundation of the Program, how it is managed and how to scale some of the member characteristics of the Program.
2. **Program:** The basis of the Program is recognition. Individuals who have a strong passion for sharing their knowledge to help others are recognized by Autodesk, their peers, the community and, in some cases, the industry at large.
 - a. All members are volunteers. The Program was built around them to deliver key value to other members and to also extend it to Autodesk customers looking for online solutions

CASE STUDY – AUTODESK EXPERT ELITE PROGRAM, CONT.

6. **Recognized Sharing Channels:** Autodesk recognizes the following channels for knowledge sharing:
 - a. **Community Forums:** Obviously, community forums are recognized.
 - b. **Autodesk Knowledge Network (AKN):** This is a spot for customers to write articles and create videos called “Screen Casts.”
 - c. **Brand Advocates on Other Social Media Channels:** Expert Elite Members are recognized for helping customers through other social channels, such as YouTube.
7. **Nomination Process and Nomination Rules:** Nominations can be submitted by other Expert Elites, Autodesk technical teams or product divisions that have a relationship with a customer.
 - a. If a potential candidate has a blog in Russian, Katinka will reach out to different groups to ensure that the content meets the caliber of the Expert Elite status.
 - b. All Expert Elite Members must sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA). This way, the Company can speak freely and openly with the Members about product division and design decisions.
 - c. The time commitment is 1 year. They do not have to re-apply as long as engagement is maintained.
 - d. Nominations occur in February and August. Katinka will add 32-35 Expert Elite members each time.
 - e. The website hosts the nomination form.
 - f. Members who are selected receive a fun and engaging email that is Autodesk Expert Elite branded. Once they reply with an acceptance, the on-boarding process begins.
8. **Statistics:** The Program will be 5 years old at the end of 2017.
 - a. 378 members in the Program. It’s about qualitative engagement vs. a higher number.
 - b. 445,000 post replies. Through these replies, solutions are offered. Others have had their questions answered as a result. Articles can be created from these solutions.
 - c. 47,000 solutions authored and 130,000 kudos received.

CASE STUDY – AUTODESK EXPERT ELITE PROGRAM, CONT.

9. **Geographical Breakdown:** Expert Elite Members exist globally.
 - a. There is a significant growth in AMEA and also in APAC.
 - b. There are 53 different countries around the globe and 28 different languages.
 - c. Autodesk University has approximately 15 different events around the world.
 - d. The Autodesk University is a great opportunity for Expert Elite meet-ups.

10. **Motivating Contributors:** It is crucial to keep the Expert Elites engaged. Autodesk looks for historical engagement and their historical contributions. The expectation is to stay at that same level when they become an Expert Elite. Keep in mind that all of them have full-time jobs.
 - a. **Personal Drive:** Most of these Expert Elites have an inherent personal drive.
 - b. **Connection:** They enjoy interfacing with the Company.
 - c. **Giving Back:** These individuals want to connect and learn, as well as give back to customers.
 - d. **Rewards:**
 - i. **Recognition:** Expert Elites are hungry for recognition. They carry an Expert Elite logo in the community forums so that customers can identify them. They love having a voice.
 - ii. **Connection to Autodesk Development Groups:** Expert Elites love connecting with Autodesk’s product designers to influence product designs and prioritize features and functionalities.
 - iii. **Keep it Healthy:** This means keeping an eye on those Expert Elites who have become stale.

11. **Member Benefits:** Katinka broke this down into 2 columns.

Reputation	Access
Autodesk Community Forums: The Expert Elites have a badge beside their name and dedicated signature lines.	Expert Elite Private Forums/Lounge: A place to share, contribute ideas, vote on enhancements & sign-up for events.
Welcome Kits and Swag: New members receive a welcome kit containing a recognition letter, a recognition certificate, Expert Elite jacket, a pen set, a pin and stickers.	Free Access to Members: All members have access to most Autodesk products for free, which is probably the biggest benefit.
Autodesk Press Release Templates: Katinka’s PR team drafts press releases for the Expert Elite Member to be released by his/her company.	Expert Elite Member Webinars: Monthly webinars that feature guest speakers who could be industry experts, product designers, etc.
Free use of the Expert Elite Logo: Expert Elites can use the logo on their business cards, blogs, websites, LinkedIn, etc.	Free On-Learning Content: This is for content outside of AKN that is hosted by a third party.
Website Feature: This is a public-facing website that features members on a quarterly basis. It is a self-promotion opportunity for the Expert Elite Member.	Autodesk Events: Autodesk offers events for members with a discount for Expert Elite Members. They also host an annual Expert Elite Summit.
Guest Bloggers: Expert Elites give their time to be guest bloggers for various Autodesk-hosted product blogs.	

BEST PRACTICES

1. **Have a Plan for Retiring Advocates who No Longer Contribute:** If Katinka notices that an Expert Elite is not longer contributing, she makes contact with them via email. She gives them a week to respond and if they don't, she sends another email letting them know that they need to respond with their intentions by a certain date or they will be offered a role as an "Autodesk Expert Elite Alumni."
2. **Consider Full-Time Management for this Type of Advocacy Program:** Katinka works full-time on this program and has since its inception.
 - a. Other positions include a team that helps Katinka, as well as a group of international coordinators, a community forum moderator and a team to keep Autodesk forums healthy.
 - b. The staffing number will depend on the number of advocate members.
 - c. Katinka believes it was necessary for her to be full-time in the beginning because they ramped up the program quickly, starting with 60 members each in the first 2 years.

LESSONS LEARNED

- When the advocates were invited to join the program, they enjoyed being called by that name. The branding resonated with them. It was an excellent representation within the community.
- The hardest part of identifying potential Expert Elite Members is validating their credentials. Katinka verifies certifications, but also looks at what the potential advocate does without certification. They may host a blog that has several page views. Katinka validates the blog for expertise. They can still be nominated if the knowledge is validated and all other criteria are also met.
- Katinka was asked to clarify her definition of “supportive style”. The community forums have ranking ability. It ranks members from 1-13 and is represented like a badge. The ranking is based upon the level of engagement that the individual has in the community forums.
- Hillary wondered if AKN and the community forums feel like a unified experience for community members. Katinka replied that it is becoming more and more integrated.
- Retiring an Expert Elite can have a negative effect on other members. Katinka has had to deal with that problem. It is a difficult part of the job, but necessary in order to maintain the integrity of the program.
- The reception of personally signed certificates by the Autodesk president in the welcome kits was an unexpected win. Members use social media to display their certificates with pride.
- Expert Elite status has helped the careers of some members.
- Katinka reviews the content of the Expert Elite guest speakers before they present in the monthly calls to make sure it is positioned correctly and that it hits on some of the questions presented by others.
- The turning point for acceptance of the program centered on the engagement statistics. Interestingly, Katinka shared that they did present an ROI case, but decided against doing it again because it could appear threatening to the technical support team. Their ROI calculation showed millions of dollars in savings attributed to a decrease in support calls. A threat like this could actually sideline the program.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Hillary asked participants to share the status of their community's customer advocacy program:

- Most participants did not have a customer advocacy program and were on the call to learn. For the few that did have a program, they were on the call to learn how to take the program to the next level.