Why Wikipedia chose phoneGap for its mobile app?

Searching for information, encylopedia style on your smartphone? Chances are 99% that you normally head to Wikipedia for information. Wikipedia has been operating as one of the most popular Open-to-all web property for over a decade. When you have an asset that has millions of unique visitors a month (over 450 million to put it in perspective), you definitely need to consider the various platforms that the content needs to be available on. Mobile has been gradually increasing its pie share of internet traffic. A good number of its over 450 million users visit Wikipedia from mobile phones. The problem, they use different mobile operating platforms. So how do you give all these devices a common application to consume Wikipedia content?

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Being a nonprofit organization, involved in creating and distributing wiki based content worldwide, when they decided to mobilize their platform on additional mobile platforms, they did it while keeping their Open Source ethics in mind. Cost becomes a concern too when you think of supporting varied mobile platforms.

By identifying their mobile audience Wikipedia was looking for an app that could deliver best of user experience, offer wide range of platform support, and be easy to manage app updates. The biggest challenge was to maintain the faithfulness of open source computing without compromising on the quality of the product.

For the type of user interface that Wikipedia needs, enabling it to offer Contextual and searchable content in a simple user interface, HTML 5, Javascript and CSS 3 would work just fine. This also meant that they could readily use much of the infrastructure that they already have in place to service PC browser based experience.

Highlights for choosing PhoneGap

Narrowing down on the core implementation technology would be a good starting point and strategy to evaluate lot of tools built on top of these core technologies that are available in the market. According to a seminal report by Vision Mobile (2012) there are over 100 cross-platform technologies available. Evaluating and shortlisting them can prove to be a highly daunting task.

The desired platform should use HTML 5, CSS3 and Javascript to mobile enable their existing backend infrastructure and should be dedicated to Open Source computing.

This challenge could be achieved by Wikipedia team by using Adobe-PhoneGap for their first mobile app on Android Platform. They utilized PhoneGap - an open source development tool for creating high performance cross platform mobile apps using HTML5 and Java-Script. "Wikipedia has to be everywhere, and Adobe PhoneGap helps us get it there," says Tomasz Finc, Director of Mobile and Special projects at Wikimedia (Wikimedia Foundation is the caretaker of Wikipedia). "This achievement marks an important milestone in Wikimedia's strategic growth plans. It fulfills a key mobile initiative that aligns with

our commitment to open mobile standards, not just for people who consume content, but eventually for content contributors as well."

A team of three dedicated developers worked for three months and brought Wikipedia app for Android mobile platform. The company already worked hard for localization and languages, till now more than 25 languages are done with localization with more than 50 additional languages.

"PhoneGap helped us polish the app so that it has become the best browsing experience for Wikipedia on Android devices," says Finc

Today, the Wikipedia Android app built using PhoneGap successfully brings core Wikipedia features from the desktop to mobile in simple, easy-to-use ways, providing intuitive, yet powerful experiences that engage mobile users. The Wikipedia Android app lets users not only pick articles, it also saves them in case connectivity is lost. Users can easily share their favorite articles with friends. Multilingual users can easily switch an article to any of a number of translated versions.

"We made a conscious decision to use web standards and Adobe PhoneGap, which made it challenging in the beginning, but we knew that if we put the effort in it would pay off down the line," says Finc. "As we push our products out to multiple mobile platforms, the PhoneGap development process becomes easier and easier. If we're spending less and less time on each platform then we're doing something right."

PhoneGap empowers Wikipedia's worldwide community of contributors to build and distribute content across platforms in the least amount of time using open source technologies most familiar to developers. Code can be easily ported to multiple environments, the learning curve is quick, andof particular importance for Wikipediathe app remains flexible and alive in the hands of readers and content contributors on more platforms than any other framework.

"I'm really happy about the number of people who suddenly understand that they can contribute at will," says Finc. "In a very real way, Adobe PhoneGap helps us democratize knowledge by breaking down barriers and creating new ways for people to participate in wiki-based content."

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About MobilePundits

Mobile Pundits is a leading provider of Outsourced Mobile Development & Mobile testing services. We are part of our parent company, Ideavate Solutions (www.ideavate.com). We help our clients to translate their Product Vision into commercially viable Software Products, by offering a wide range of Outsourced Product Development (OPD) solutions such as: Product Co-Development, Managed Development, Modular Product Development, Product Migration, Re-Engineering & Enhancement, Product Testing etc.

Mobile Pundits also has been ranked 12th in Deloitte's Technology Fast 50 India Listing and Deloitte's Technology Fast 500 Asia-Pacific Listing for the year 2008. Mobile Pundits also has been ranked 13th in Deloitte's Technology Fast 50 India Listing and Deloitte's Technology Fast 500 Asia-Pacific Listing for the year 2009.

We were founded 10 years ago in the year 2003, by a team of highly experienced & qualified software professionals, who have worked for some of the world's finest IT companies like Infosys Technologies, TCS, L&T, Sasken etc. and have been educated in premier education institutes in the US & India like LSU (Louisiana State University, USA). We have been at the forefront of embracing world class Quality and Management practices, being the youngest ISO 9001: 2008 certified company in central India.

We have also conducted training sessions at Quality Assurance Institute of USA on various topics pertaining to software testing & automation.

Contact Us

North America
2101 Highway 516, Suite F
Old Bridge, NJ 08857
Tel: 732-588-5959/732-952-5395
Email: info@mobilepundits.com

Australia
55 Station St West Ryde NSW 2114, Australia
Phone: 61-2-8015-5723
Email: info@ mobilepundits.com

India
306, Silver Sanchora Castle,
RNT Marg, Indore
MP – 452001, INDIA.
Phone: +91 731 4025351
Email: info@ mobilepundits.com