

Filemaker Go or No Go?

A brief overview of iOS solution
development challenges

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The Challenges

1. Filemaker or SAAS? Is Filemaker the right way to go? WebDirect?
2. Requirements: Stand-alone + Sync or direct access ('Open Remote')
3. Syncing options (GoZync, EasySync, MirrorSync, In-House..)
4. Layout design (iOS before desktop, grids, consistency, styles)
5. To Kiosk or not to Kiosk that is the question
6. Security (use FM built-in security or build a management interface, encryption)
7. Version control (updating users in the field)
8. Compatibility (making sure everyone is on the same iOS and FM Go version)
9. Back Office
10. Filemaker Go limitations

1. Is Filemaker Go the right way to go?

- How many users will be using the app?
- Is the client willing to provide iOS devices for all the users?
- Are they going to input information or just pull? (Webdirect?)
- 'Heavy users' or ad-hoc?
- Is there an off-the-shelf free or cheap app that will do the job?
- If so, does it make more sense to use it than creating a new app?

2. Stand-alone + Sync or direct access

(assuming Filemaker Go was chosen)

- Are they going to use it over Wi-Fi (LAN) or the internet (WAN)?
- If WAN then most likely you will need a Stand-alone+Sync
- If LAN then 'Open Remote' (direct from local server) may do
- If Wi-Fi signal is unstable or weak you may still need a Stand-alone+Sync solution (e.g. in basement where there no signal)
- Sync integration is costly both in integration and maintenance (3rd party solutions require licenses in addition) – Avoid if possible

3. Syncing

- Avoid if possible
- Developing on your own is extremely time consuming and could cost you more than integrating someone else's solution
- Consider how and when to suggest a sync to the user. (Don't shove it down their throat when they have a slow 3g connection)
- Make sure not to leave an open link to the server after the sync
- Keep the number of tables down, even at the cost of some 'de-normalization' (in some cases breaking up tables can speed up things)
- Make the solution lean and mean

4. Layout design

- Use a grid and snap-to (big time saver). We use a 64/16 grid for flexibility
- Design first for iOS, then adapt to desktop
- Use Apple's guidelines as long as it makes sense (button sizes, fonts, etc.)
- Keep colour scheme simple (we don't use more than 5 colours usually)
- Always use styles, except for one-offs (reduces maintenance later)
- Decide in advance if to kiosk or not otherwise you will need to change all layout sizes
- Stick to familiar design patterns – don't confuse the users
- Less is more

5. To Kiosk or not to Kiosk

- Pros:
 - Limit user damage
 - Save screen real-estate (20 pixels?)
- Cons:
 - More hassle to prepare/edit (especially if removing Admin user)
 - Causes issues when opening on PC (not sure about Mac)
 - Breaks the 'edit value list' from drop-down

6. Security

- Using the 256AES encryption on a stand-alone causes an extra pop-up
- Create a user management module or just use the built-in one? (problem if more then one file solution)
- Modular Filemaker has a user management module (partial solution)
- How do you manage new users with stand-alone apps?
(we log in a minimum access user that is allowed to sync user list)
- Forgot password option

7. Version control (updating users in the field)

- Capture the version (build) that the user is using and suggest updates to users if not current
- GoZync and EasySync have a module for pushing new versions out

8. Compatibility

- Try to make sure that everyone (including yourself) is using the same iOS and FM Go
- Create a log tool that can send info (or the whole file) back for analysis

9. Back Office

- In most cases you can use the iOS version as a basis for the back office and add the missing functionality
- Consider a separation model: iOS file as the main data source and a back office file to store additional office data and UI (not advisable with GoZync)
- Keep the same look and feel as the iOS for simplicity

10. Filemaker Go limitations

- Less processing power than desktop
- Wi-Fi only
- No plug-ins
- iOS only
- Can't use Apple Script
- Different design quirks than PC\Mac
- New iOS releases can break things
- Printing (there are options but requires either special printer or more complex)

Resources

- Best Practices:
 - Filemaker:
 - http://www.filemaker.com/solutions/ios/docs/fmi_guide_design_en.pdf
 - http://www.filemaker.com/solutions/ios/docs/fmi_guide_ios_usage_en.pdf
 - http://www.filemaker.com/solutions/ios/docs/fmi_guide_sync_en.pdf
- Syncing:
 - <http://360works.com/filemaker-sync/>
 - <http://www.seedcode.com/filemaker-sync-gozync/>
 - <http://fmeasysync.com/>
 - Filemaker Sync group
- Layout Design
 - Grid tool: <http://www.infografix.eu/gridmaker/>
 - Richard Carlton video – the use of styles

Resources

- Icons:
 - <https://icomoon.io/>
 - <http://icons8.com/>
 - <http://retinaicon.com/>
- Filemaker Modules:
 - <http://www.modularfilemaker.org/> (date picker, contact picker, navigation..)
- Colour Schemes:
 - <https://color.adobe.com>
- UI\UX
 - <https://developer.apple.com/design/tips/>
 - <http://www.designingfilemaker.com/>