Musings of an App Inventor Hobbyist

Scott Ferguson
Scott, Lousiana
USA

scottfromscott@gmail.com

Summary

The purpose of my talk is to discuss some of my initial experiences using App Inventor and how my roles have changed over time from apps development to proofs-of-concept projects based on 'what-if' questions to test the boundaries of the software or simply to demonstrate basic features of the software for the benefit of new users. I will give an overview of some of these projects and discuss methods that I have used for their demonstration and documentation.

Focus on Apps Development

My initial experience with App Inventor was focused on creating and publishing free apps on the then Android Market (now Google Play). In this section I will discuss my published apps and describe the more interesting features of each.

Among them are:

Graph-O-Doodle (fall, 2011) - a polygon drawing program
Multiplication Drill with TTS (fall, 2011) - multiplication drill and practice for elementary students
Kreyol Navigate Intenet - a WebViewer-based browser that converts web page text to Haitian Creole
Tic-Tac-Toe - the traditional game for one or two players
'ruminos - the tiles game' - a board game based on the Passman Toys Rummikub™ game

Focus on user support and testing

During the time I was developing apps to publish I began to browse the App Inventor forums -- answering questions of new users when I thought that I could help. I found that it was more fun to share what I knew than to make apps so I spent more time doing that. I set up a few google groups for hosting projects that I developed that were designed to test or demonstrate various features of the software. Eventually these were merged into one Group - App Inventor Developers Library. It can be found by searching Google for 'app inventor developers library'.

In the talk I will discuss some of the features of the group and the types of reference materials that I have posted there in the past such as snippets of code blocks, library screens, projects requiring php scripts, demonstration projects, proofs-of-concept projects and tutorials. When users in the forums ask a question that can be answered by referring them to one of my projects or videos, I include a link to that post or video.

Current Day

My current focus is on making App Inventor video demonstrations which are linked to my Google group. The video demonstrates use of the app and how it is constructed and the link to the group provides additional documentation, images and the aia project file for download. Examples of these videos may be found here or by doing a YouTube video search for 'App Inventor Sandbox', then clicking the first link.

The video demonstrations are often based on some idea that I wanted to explore, such as scrolling the Canvas as in the 'CityScape scrolling Demo' canvas-scrolling project based on a Scratch project, or on the 'Build the Ladder Truck and Make it Go' project which demonstrates a method for doing drag-and-drop while avoiding sprite cannibalism. Some videos provide tools to aid the user in structuring their project blocks such as the 'Logic tests or Conditions' video and the 'Even Odd and Data Validation' videos.

I am also interested in methods to best aid new users that do not have a computer science background in completing their projects by using the DRY (do not repeat yourself) principle of software development, understanding how to do basic data validation, how to form proper logic expressions using 'and', 'or' and 'not', as well as needing to do basic image editing, sound editing, layout design, publishing, marketing, or other tasks required for creating or publishing an App Inventor app.