

When thinking Desktop “first” still matters (Part 2)

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Great experiences are not just for mobile

In an era of high user expectation and the demand for great user engagement, Application User Interface (UI) design has never been so important. We've heard this message before of course, when the virtues of Web 2.0 and Rich Internet Application were espoused in the mid 2000's and browser based applications along with the proliferation of smartphones, tablets and mobile apps cemented that reality. Many organisations have now caught up and are starting to realise that users demand more usable experiences and providing them can have productivity benefits. The results can often be seen on a business's bottom line or through competitive advantage. I worked on a call centre application where improvements to the User Experience (UX) dramatically reduced call times and improved the quality of data collected. This led to efficiency within the call centre and improved outcomes for both the business and the customer. Costs were reduced and customer satisfaction rose. In a desktop first world designers will still need to provide users with great UX. At the same time they need to appreciate the potential for different end user form factors. Application interfaces will need to adapt to alternate screen sizes. The modern desktop could be a traditional 20 inch monitor or a 10 inch touch screen. Where the desktop application spawns mobile apps they will need to have consistency with the desktop experience. A user should be able to move from desktop to tablet to mobile very easily because the app experience is familiar to them. This is best achieved if the original design considers the possibility of mobile from the beginning.

Plan for a “multi endpoint first” future

For all of those development professionals out there who have spent their careers building desktop applications their future should be secure. But they will need to adapt their skills, thinking, tools and possibly their processes to a new world in which mobile may not always be first but will be relevant. Many desktop applications will remain installs but many others will be delivered via a web browser. Equally for the IT decision makers they need to think about investments that are not just about mobile. It is very easy in the current climate to think that the future is mobile and therefore investing in mobile only platforms is the way to go. Instead they need to consider that the desktop is going to be around for a while and they need to invest in platforms, tools and skills that will support a broad portfolio of applications. Essentially this comes down to being efficient with the code base. Not replicating code should always be a core aim. Creating code that can be tested at all levels of the stack should be a further key ambition; making the functions of that code base available through services to multiple end points should be another. With a services based architecture, the application may be spread across both the company data centre and public cloud environments. Where development moves to being Agile, development will need to work with Operations in order to speed application changes into production. This will most likely mean embracing a DevOps culture, processes and tools. The modern desktop app will require more regular updates than the old fashioned quarterly release. There will certainly be many situations where a mobile first approach will make sense in future. Studies show that people are accessing the internet more from mobile than desktop and so for websites mobile first will probably be a good idea in the majority of cases. However, the future will be a combination of mobile, tablet and desktop experiences. Developers and organisations will therefore need to consider each application and in some cases it will make sense to go desktop first.