Basic Planning and Structuring of Your Application

Thus far, we’ve gotten you straight into coding a few apps, given you some background information on screen resolutions, JavaScript, and CSS, and we’ve given you a giant bag of free (and cheap) “stuff” in the form of various resources that you can use while developing. It would not be difficult for you to, given this information, go completely crazy coding all sorts of neat things and putting them out there for the world to see and use. The only problem is, without you actually considering what you’re building, the world might not be too keen on actually using what you’ve built. And nothing can make one more depressed than spending hours and hours on a project that only you (and perhaps a few friends) will ever see.

In this chapter, we’re going to talk about application development in two different ways: Planning your application, which involves understanding what you’re building and how you can make sure you don’t overlook vital pieces; and structuring your code, which is a much simpler idea but just as important for reasons we’ll discuss. This is the “bringing order into chaos” chapter, and we hope that you’ll heed our warnings and advice!

Know Thy Audience

If you have any sort of passion for creating something, than you might have had the experience before of thinking, “I wish that I had a tool that did [insert witty idea here] ... I know, I’ll just build it!” At this point you most likely went out and hacked something together for your own use, and then realized that others might be interested in using it as well. I know I do this all the time whenever I create a new web or mobile application, building for my own needs or for people that have needs like my own. Perhaps these people are your audience.
Or maybe you are just one of those people who see problems that others don’t. You
know that if you put something out there to solve a certain problem, others will latch on
and praise your name. Perhaps they are your audience.

Or finally, maybe you’re an innovator that thinks you have tapped into the next great
game, service, or program that people will be clamoring to use. If you put a little effort
into it (maybe only 50–100 hours of coding), you can see the dollar signs adding up from
the addicted masses—they’re certainly your audience, right?

Well, perhaps your passion, ingenuity, and innovation will be enough, and the audience
will magically appear. But let’s think about this for a moment; in each of the preceding
examples, you’re taking a rather large leap in assuming that your passions, problems,
and joys will generalize to a lot of other people out there. If you were in a company and
pitched these products to others, the first question would be, “How do we know we
have an audience?” Simply answering, “I’d buy it,” is not enough. You’ve got to have
some idea of who you’re targeting and whether they’re interested.

**Giving People What They Want**

There are a number of ways you might start researching your next application.
Sometimes a need jumps out at you, or you see an obvious opportunity. Other times you
might think something would be a hit but have no idea whether it truly will or not. While
you can watch Twitter and Facebook for complaints you could remedy, or perhaps use
some sort of survey to understand what your audience wants, we’ll present a very easy
method here that speaks to one universal rule: Know what people are looking for. The
following method should give you some indication of how people are spending their time
online, and thus let you know where you may have an opportunity.

We start with a popular advertising system on the web, Google’s Adwords. It is free to
sign up, and even if you never place a single ad, one tool Adwords offers that you might
find very useful is the External Keyword Tool (https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal).
This tool tells you how
many people are searching Google for a particular keyword. It’s a great way to see if
people are actually interested in something you want to build.

For example, a project that I’ve considered building for some time (and actually have
built up, in some sense) would be a web site for aspiring writers to hone their skills. I
envision a web site where a person would get a topic, write some form of prose (short
story, essay, poem, etc.) and have others vote on the piece. Winners of topics would
have some “cred” given to them, and perhaps win real prizes.

How do I find out if there is a market for this? Well, I might use the Keyword Tool to do a
few simple searches, like those in Figures 4–1, for the keywords “writing contest” and
“writing help.”