

Why Apps Aren't Going Away (And Why You Should Care)

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There is some debate, or rather, confusion about what is the future of mobile. Is it native apps or HTML5 apps? While no one can predict the future, there are a number of factors that will contribute to the future of apps and that point almost unanimously to the eventual triumph of native apps over HTML5 apps.

Who Is Maintaining the Status Quo?

First, consider who is in charge of the mobile ecosystem and what is their agenda. At the moment, there is a two-horse race between iOS and Android. Since the hardware of the mobile phones and tablets is becoming commoditized and there is little innovation on the hardware side among mobile device manufacturers, the main competitive advantages that iOS and Android have over other mobile platforms are the native apps that are available on their platforms. Android and iOS have a far larger variety of apps than their nearest competitors. They realize this and will continue to exert influence on mass consumer behavior to favor native apps and to think native apps first and HTML5 apps a distant second.

Advantages of Being Directly on The Hardware

There are a few distinct advantages of having the app installed directly on the hardware. The first is that the apps are available when the device is offline. The second is that the apps are faster since they are not slowed down by having to access the Web as much as their HTML5 counterparts. And lastly, being directly on the hardware, and accessing native APIs gives the apps access to more hardware features, which in turn produces more feature-rich mobile apps.

Small Developers are a Driving Force

Many of the wonderful apps in the app stores come from the creativity of independent developers. Those developers create great products for platforms where they feel confident that they can make money. And having the app in app stores allows them to get customers from the app stores and the Web since most of them have websites to promote the app.

And considering how difficult it is to get Web distribution for a business via SEO, PR, going viral or social media, the app store distribution becomes quite attractive to developers. As an example of how large the disparity of distribution is for new businesses on the Web vs. mobile app stores, the first app that I ever made (this business plan app) reached 50,000 downloads before my

website Problemio.com reached its first 2,000 visitors from all possible sources combined. That is 25 times more via the app store than the Web.

Apps are Just Sexier

While sexiness may not be tangible, it is difficult to deny that there is just some kind of a new appeal that apps bring. Websites are something that is quite familiar to us, but apps are new and exciting. There is a wow factor to them and tech-obsessed enthusiasts just want to discover, make and use new apps. In fact, discovering a cool new app and showing it to friends has become a kind of a social phenomenon, and a way for geeks to show off at parties.

Advantages of HTML5 Apps

But HTML5 has advantages as well. It can be much cheaper to make an HTML5 site than a full mobile app for both iOS and Android. HTML5 apps work on Blackberry and other mobile platforms. So you can serve all mobile devices with just one app. HTML5 has no approval process such as the one for iOS apps. That means that as the developer you have more flexibility to do what you want and can let your creativity flourish.

There are many pros and cons for both HTML5 and native apps. But it does seem that the native mobile apps have more momentum and practicality. After all, if I embarked on building a new app today, I would immediately throw away the possibility of an HTML5 app because no app store distribution would mean an extremely difficult marketing environment for my app. And that would likely cause it to have a quick death as a business, before it can realize its full potential.