

Developers Benefit as Adobe Offers iPhone Support

Eric Knipp, Gene Phifer, Ray Valdes

Apple's iPhone is a popular device for mobile applications, and Adobe is taking a practical approach to allow Flash developers to create applications for it.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 5 October 2009, Adobe announced that Flash Professional CS5 will allow developers to author native iPhone applications using ActionScript 3.

Analysis

Flash Player 10.1 will begin to appear in 2010, adding support for mobile devices as well as a more consistent approach to the browser-based Flash runtime. Although Flash Player 10.1 is not available for the iPhone, Adobe is making the iPhone platform available to developers through a cross-compiler. Instead of creating a SWF or AIR application, the developer generates an iPhone-specific build, opening a new world for Flash developers.

Apple has chosen not to allow native Flash Player support on the iPhone, meaning that Flash content meant for a browser continues to be unreachable. Ironically, Apple also uses the open-source LLVM cross-compiler Adobe uses, creating a common technology foundation. The availability of a specialized approach for the iPhone challenges a Flash value driver — the cross-platform ubiquity of a single runtime for browser (Flash Player) and standalone (Adobe AIR) applications. Some manufacturers may question why Adobe will build a custom compiler for the iPhone, but not for their device.

Adobe is taking this unorthodox approach because Apple probably won't open the iPhone platform to Flash and risk challenging the App Store with free Web-based Flash applications. In the meantime, the popularity of the iPhone as a runtime environment for applications is growing, and Adobe would rather see developers spend time building Flash applications than learning how to use Apple's Cocoa to write applications for the iPhone. Adobe would prefer a native Flash runtime, either in the browser or through AIR, but the cross-compiler approach is practical and adds value for Flash developers.

The announcement is a win for both Apple and Adobe. For the time being, Adobe has the upper hand over Microsoft for mobile rich Internet applications, and Adobe has demonstrated the iPhone is technically capable of running content built by Flash developers. Apple benefits because Adobe is enabling more developers to reach the iPhone platform by providing an alternative to Apple's Cocoa language, even though native Flash Player support is still unavailable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Developers:

- Focus on Flash development skills when designing cross-platform mobile applications that go beyond the browser. But take time to assess the overall platform landscape if you are developing consumer-facing applications.
- Recognize that applications designed for a Flash Player embedded into Web sites will not execute on the iPhone.
- Approach cross-compilation to the iPhone with caution and execute additional tests. Other cross-compilation options are emerging, so don't limit your search to just Adobe, although it is one of the most promising.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Adobe to Buy Omniture, Gain Differentiation and Integration" —, Tying Flash and other Adobe Web media products to the proprietary Omniture technology may limit its adoption by the developer community and drive some lower-end Adobe customers to competing technologies unless the business model changes. **By Eric Knipp, Ray Valdes and Bill Gassman**
- "Microsoft Goes for the Gold With the Release of Silverlight 3.0"— Silverlight 3.0 closes the functionality gap with Adobe Flash, offers a compelling value proposition for Microsoft-centric enterprises, and should be on the shortlist for any organization considering heavy RIA projects. **By Eric Knipp and Ray Valdes**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Corporate Headquarters

56 Top Gallant Road
Stamford, CT 06902-7700
U.S.A.
+1 203 964 0096

European Headquarters

Tamesis
The Glanty
Egham
Surrey, TW20 9AW
UNITED KINGDOM
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters

Gartner Australasia Pty. Ltd.
Level 9, 141 Walker Street
North Sydney
New South Wales 2060
AUSTRALIA
+61 2 9459 4600

Japan Headquarters

Gartner Japan Ltd.
Aobadai Hills, 6F
7-7, Aobadai, 4-chome
Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042
JAPAN
+81 3 3481 3670

Latin America Headquarters

Gartner do Brazil
Av. das Nações Unidas, 12551
9º andar—World Trade Center
04578-903—São Paulo SP
BRAZIL
+55 11 3443 1509