[研究ノート]

There Is Now an App for That™

Justin Nightingale

In my previous paper I detailed my journey of creating an iPad app ("There Isn't an App for That"[1]) to aid me in presenting a library of PDFs to students in an active and entertaining way. While there are already numerous PDF readers available in the App Store, my particular needs required me to make something with the third person in mind (my class) as opposed to the teacher/user themselves.

Why is it called "Sticky PDF"? All of my previous flashcard learning apps have used the "Sticky" prefix (alluding to a sticky Post-it note). I thus loyally used it on this app, too, in part because it can greatly influence Google rankings having such an unusual and unique name.

Initial Coding

The Xcode IDE (Integrated Development Environment) is the free software Apple provides to developers to build applications and submit them to the App Store[2].

Once the specification requirements for my proposed app were finalised, it was just a case of going through the list and expressing each desired function as code via the Objective C++ language.

"Third party libraries" are often used when developing. They are ready made chunks of code that have been developed by an often unknown (and generous) individual out there on the web that can be downloaded and integrated into your app to save you coding time. There are many PDF displaying libraries out there that can be used freely (and many a sane person would use them to speed up development) but, unfortunately, none of them fit my needs.

Coding between lessons and some late nights at home burning the midnight oil, the app took me one and a half years from start to release. Just making a large PDF (600dpi) display quickly and satisfactorily without using said third party libraries took about 4 months. If I wasn't teaching and didn't have a 4 year old at home, you could probably reduce that all to 2 months.

Beta Testing

Coders get tired of testing their own code. They also consistently fail to see obvious issues in their code hence the need for beta testers during the testing phase.

At my place of work I have 450 delightful little guinea pigs who have been on the receiving end of my efforts by unconsciously participating in my initially flawed and buggy attempts at introducing something new into their world.

These initial months were immensely valuable for me in honing the app.

Public Release

I have released (and discontinued) ten or so apps in the App Store[3] since its inception in 2009 and even now I find it to be a nerve racking experience; no matter how stable and bug free you think your app is, a user is going to find the biggest of bugs and leave a 1 star review for the whole world to see.

In my experience, adding your own personal name to an app instead of a made-up, cool sounding company name promotes warmer relations and therefore a more forgiving reception from users. The image of a large, faceless corporation behind an app reduces this forgiving nature manyfold.

The process of actually releasing an app is as follows:

1. Download Xcode, create an iCloud ID and write your app.

2. Create an iOS signing identity for distribution (i.e., create your identity as a developer).

3. Create a provisioning profile (i.e., permission to use the App Store).

4. Create an app ID (a unique string code to ID your app).

5. Download the above, install them into Xcode, and make sure they are recognised correctly.

6. Upload the complete app to the App Store by following the on-screen instructions.

Early versions of Xcode made certain the above steps would take me a few days of frustration. Now, if fortunate, 30 minutes.

From Now

The App is now available[4]. It's tempting to continue working down my to-do list of features that I want to add in the coming updates, but my priority right now is to make sure the app is perfectly stable and able to fulfil its specification, bug free and without issues.

On the flip side not moving forward with planned (and hopefully interesting and useful) features will continue the reality of having an app that doesn't stand out (feature wise) enough for it to make its way up the rankings of the App Store from the dark and deep doldrums where most apps stay unseen and unloved for the rest of their binary existence.

I have to say that if I had known how long it was going to take, I would have most certainly gone down another route and made do with what the App Store has to offer. But seeing as the app is ready and able, I'm finding it to be a wonderful partner in keeping the children's attention while pushing forward with my desire to bring more of the "Oxford Reading Tree" into the classroom and in so doing, supplementing the tried and tested grammar and comprehension focused text books we currently use.

References

1) https://irdb.nii.ac.jp/en/01017/0004079892 (Last visited 2020/02/11)
2) https://developer.apple.com/Xcode/ (Last visited 2020/02/11)
3) https://www.stickystudy.com (Last visited 2020/02/11)
4) https://apps.apple.com/jp/app/sticky-pdf/id1457785256?l=en (Last visited 2020/02/11)

（ジャスティン・ナイティンゲール　聖学院大学総合研究所特任講師）