

Developing for BB10: A pleasant surprise

It has been a few months since the release of the BlackBerry® 10 OS and its impressive mobile devices: Z10, Q10 and Q5. Intelliware has had the time to put the platform through the paces with some real-world projects and develop an objective perspective on working with it.

You may have heard, or personally felt, the pain of creating apps for BlackBerry's previous platforms. Abandon those fears. BlackBerry learned their lesson and got it right this time. Starting with the BlackBerry Developer [website](#), the experience of working in this environment is much improved. Gone are the multiple developer portals, lost resource links and multiple logins to get the tools you need. Gone are the complicated toolset installs. Gone are days of pulling your hair out to manage the slightest UI complexity within your app.

BB10 is founded on newer, more open standards. At the outset, BlackBerry gives you an easy choice for your development strategy. Look at your team's strengths and select either an SDK suited for web developers or an SDK requiring C++ skills. With either strategy, both the install and setup processes are as quick and painless as you've come to expect from other mobile development platforms.

The BlackBerry 10 Native SDK includes the Cascades UI framework, which allows you to create compelling and flexible 2D layouts that easily integrate 60fps animations. It gives you all the UI widgets needed to build a rich, attractive and responsive native mobile app with minimal coding. A "cook-book" app is included that has a sample of how to use each UI widget. The Cascades framework can be implemented in Qt and QML or directly using C++. In what looks like another smart developer-centric strategy, BB10 is a Qt-based platform. With the decline of Symbian and Nokia abandoning OS development, all those Qt developers can leverage existing expertise and find a new home for their skills.



 **BlackBerry**®

A cross-platform comparison

At Intelliware, we built a consumer focused, data rich iPad® application for a large Canadian retailer. The initial release of the application required a developer effort of approximately 275 days. This is in line with other, comparable consumer facing iPad apps we've built.

After the success of the original iOS app, we were asked to port it to the BlackBerry® PlayBook™ platform when the tablet was launched. Then, another port was requested for the recently released BlackBerry 10 handsets. Developing the three versions of the app gave us a good perspective of the differences between the various platforms.

In our client's app, the primary screen is a grid view of high resolution images that re-sort themselves depending on user inputs. The screen has a great deal of complexity behind it, performing significant amounts of image and data processing and is a good benchmark for development effort.

On the PlayBook, the grid view took about nine days of work, whereas that same view was completed for the BB10 version in just two days. A significant portion of those nine days of PlayBook development was spent performance tuning the grid to allow for smooth paging and animations. Implementing this in BB10 using the native Cascades SDK produced performance that was smooth and fluid on its initial run, even with a grid of over a thousand hi-resolution images.

This mirrored our overall experience working on the BB10 version of the app. Despite having significantly different user interface requirements, varying device sizes and a richer feature set, we were able to complete the BB10 version of the app with approximately 90 days of total effort, compared with the 120 days required for the PlayBook. This 25% increase in development productivity is a tribute to the BB10 platform and device teams, and their efforts to make it a productive development environment. Interestingly, compared to the 275 day effort required for the iPad version, both BlackBerry environments were more productive to develop in, with a caveat. The work on the original iPad app included a fair amount of time devoted to the initial layout and design that didn't need to be duplicated for the BlackBerry platforms. However, even taking that extra effort into consideration, we were thoroughly impressed with the overall productivity of the BB10 environment.

The performance of the development environment and the quality of the devices are not the only considerations – you need to ensure your app will find an audience and that you, as a developer, have the resources available to make yourself successful. The following is a list of some of the additional benefits of BB10.

BlackBerry has gone out of its way to entice game developers to use its native SDKs and has partnered with third party tools like [Marmalade](#). Game development studio, [Funkoi](#), is releasing their multi-touch space shooter, [Alpha Zero](#), first on BB10 – before moving to other platforms. This studio was able to get their game “up and running in less than a day, including graphics, music, sound, video playback and life-cycle integration.”¹

¹ <http://www.fiercedeveloper.com/story/3-gaming-developers-explain-why-theyre-supporting-rims-bb10-launch/2013-01-25#ixzz2WWxo30Kg>

App Revenue

Looking at the mobile market it may seem that BlackBerry is struggling for third place against Windows' mobile offerings. What is significant is that even if BlackBerry ends up in fourth place, they already have a sizable user base that apparently spends more money on apps. BlackBerry has been enthusiastically presenting statistics that show greater revenue potential for app creators, like the fact that the bottom 95% of developers make more money in the BlackBerry App World™ than in any other market.²

Developer Support

Before the BB10 launch, the popular opinion was that in order to succeed, BlackBerry had to deliver a compelling number of apps and games to win over users. BlackBerry made this a reality by pursuing developers through multiple campaigns and through vastly improved developer tools and services. Besides robust documentation and sample code, BlackBerry has also been offering expanded technical support for developers with the ability to directly ask an expert for help with technical issues.

App Visibility

When you consider distribution, it's easy for your app to get lost in Apple's or Google's massive marketplaces. Launching on BB10 is an opportunity for your app to be featured and promoted by BlackBerry's marketing and support arms. You will also gain exposure to a community hungry for apps and content. This level of attention toward developer needs and their overall investment in marketing efforts should make you seriously consider BlackBerry 10 as a platform to include in your overall mobile strategy. Delivering a quality app to BlackBerry App World right now will give you a far greater opportunity to showcase your work and win a significantly larger user base than you could entice in the other markets.

Conclusion

The key to capturing this new audience is to build an app that really shows off the best user experience that the BlackBerry 10 platform has to offer. A watered down HTML5 experience or a recompiled Android™ app may not be the best way to do that. Don't get us wrong, creating the Android layer and the porting strategy were excellent ideas that brought a staggering amount of apps to BB10 and created a lot of excitement in the developer community. The 'port-a-thon' events where developers raced each other to recompile existing Android apps in minutes, followed by bug fixing, were wildly successful. This supported BlackBerry and their goals. But to really achieve your goals – to stand out in the marketplace with a best-in-class app – you need to develop a native BB10 app that will truly demonstrate the BlackBerry 10 experience.

If you are on the fence about committing to native BB10 development, don't be. It's productive, straightforward, and the end result is world-class. Combined with BlackBerry's sincere efforts to support and promote their developers and their active user base, your native BB10 app can outshine the ported competition.

² <http://www.slideshare.net/BBDevGroupNL/bb10-native-development>





About Intelliware Development Inc.

Intelliware is a custom software, mobile solutions and product development company headquartered in Toronto, Canada. Intelliware is a leader in Agile software development practices which ensure the delivery of timely, high quality solutions for clients. Intelliware is engaged as a technical partner by a wide range of national and global organizations in sectors that span Financial Services, Healthcare, ICT, Retail, Manufacturing, and Government.

Intelliware placed among the Top 5 Mobile Technologies Companies in the 2012 Branham300 report, the definitive listing of Canada's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry leaders, as ranked by revenues.

200 Adelaide Street West, Suite 100
Toronto, Ontario M5H 1W7 Canada

416.916.3457

in /company/intelliware-development-inc-

f /intelliware.inc

🐦 /intelliware_inc

www.intelliware.com

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