# HTML5 is no mobile Holy Grail

The longer the native app vs HTML5 debate rumbles on, the more confusing things become for enterprises rea
to dive into the mobile world, but trying to decide how best to proceed.

By Wilter du Toit 28 Nov 2011

And, unfortunately, those that are touting HTML5 as a silver bullet, solving all the fragmentation problems that developing native mobile applications present, are guilty of badly misleading companies already confused by the plethora of mobile operating systems and handsets out there.

Let's backtrack a bit. Currently, the bulk of mobile applications are what is known as native apps, in other words built specifically for mobile operating systems, such as Apple's iOS, or Google's Android. The primary benefit is that the apps g to tap into the phone's capabilities, such as location, accelerometer, microphone, speakers, etc. Some nifty applications have been built and smartphone users have got used to slick interfaces, ease of use, advanced features and integration w their mobile device.

## Apps for disparate handsets

The problem, however, is that to serve an entire customer base, companies and developers have to build apps for all the disparate handsets that their customers use, keep the services uniform, and maintain and update all applications. A new handset or operating system enters the market? That needs to be supported too, with the latest version of the application.

Consumer application developers might get away with only serving certain markets; Facebook notoriously took a long time release an iPad app, and popular photo-sharing service Instagram has yet to lauch an app for anything other than the iPhone. But in the enterprise space you simply can't have a selection of your staff, customers or suppliers unable to acce your enterprise mobility solutions.

## Build once and deploy everywhere

Enter HTML5, the latest iteration of the mark-up language that writes the Web. In the mobile world it promises to allow developers to build web apps that are as feature rich as their native application counterparts. Many are heralding this as th solution to operating system and device fragmentation in the mobile world. Build once and deploy everywhere.

Unfortunately this is not going to be the case, for two main reasons: firstly, HTML5 offers nowhere near the user experienc that high-end smartphone users are used to and demand. And, secondly, it is incredibly naïve to think that the mobile web world is not also very fragmented. Finally, on the opposite end of the spectrum, some people are never ever going to upgrade from a feature phone, whether from personal preference or for economic reasons.

**Let's look at these in more detail:** The mobile web was originally intended to display, discover and read content, and it s does that incredibly well, with the added benefit nowadays that content can also be easily shared. For most other uses, however, native applications still offer the most optimised, high-end version with the best user experience of the service. Ir addition, it will still be a number of years before handsets fully compatible with HTML5 enter the market in any significant numbers.

## No one-size-fits-all

Then add into the mix the fragmentation of the mobile web world. Anyone who has developed for the desktop web knows h fragmented this is, so it boggles the mind that people would think the mobile web world is going to be any different. From different browsers rending the same code in different ways, to users simply not updating their browsers to the latest versic to browsers only partially supporting HTML5, to the differences between the same browser running on different operating systems or handsets, there is no one-size-fits-all in the mobile web world.

Take a look at any of the major players and you'll see that despite their lip service to HTML5, in reality they are hedging th
bets when it comes to supporting HTML5 outright over native apps. Apple, for instance, which famously hasn't included Fla
support on the iPhone or iPad, indicating its preference for HTML5-based video footage, is also king of the native mobile
application via its app store.

Another case in point is Facebook, which has been very public in its support for HTML5. But when it finally did launch its
iPad app last October, it was very much a native iOS application.

## All users need to be accommodated

And then there are the feature phone users, who despite the hype around smartphones are still very much in the majority,
and don't appear to be disappearing anytime soon, even with drastically cheaper smartphones entering the market. Again,
might be okay for consumer app developers to ignore an entire swathe of the market, but in the enterprise space, all users
need to be accommodated. Employees can't be excluded from mobile access to the HR system because they don't have a
new enough phone; suppliers can't be expected to process their orders in a more a cumbersome way than other suppliers
because they still use a feature phone; and customers can't be excluded from an m-commerce service because they don'
have a smartphone.

## More fragmentation?

So what does that mean? Rather than less fragmentation, more fragmentation in the mobile space? The short answer is ye
but the longer answer is that this doesn't necessarily need to be an obstacle for businesses making their first forays into th
mobile space and, indeed, is an opportunity for them to steal the march on their competitors. Rather than tackle mobilisatio
platform by platform and device by device, savvy businesses are basing their mobilisation strategy around mobile enterpri
application platforms, allowing them to roll out mobile services across all platforms to all users, offering each user the best
optimised and secured mobile service for his device. In addition, with the arrival of new platforms, such as HTML5 and
Windows Phone 7, these services are immediately supported without having to set up an entirely new team.

The bad news? Mobile fragmentation is here to stay and is likely to only get worse. The good news? There are ways of
turning this to your competitive advantage.

For more information, go to http://ramp.virtualmobiletech.com.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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