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Table Of Contents

Foreword

Chapter 1:

Introduction To Facebook Apps

Chapter 2:

Exploring Facebook API

Chapter 3:

Discovering Facebook Markup Language

Chapter 4:

Understanding Facebook Query Language

Chapter 5:

Working With Facebook Java Script

Chapter 6:

Creating Apps Working On Fan Pages & Profile Pages

Chapter 7:

Integrating Apps On Newsfeeds And Notifications

Chapter 8:

Register Your Applications On Facebook

Chapter 9:

Optimizing Facebook Applications

Chapter 10:

Expand your Facebook Apps To Mobile

Wrapping Up

Foreword

Integration of apps into Facebook can be very beneficial for developers. You will be able to integrate your app into the News Feed and also the notifications. The core technologies on Facebook are platforms such as Social Plugins, Graph API and Platform Dialogs.



Coding Facebook

Ultimate Guide Of Creating Killer Facebook Applications

Chapter 1:

Introduction To Facebook Apps

Synopsis

There are three concepts behind building an app. If you have a good understanding of them then they will be easy to execute. They are:



Basics On Facebook

Canvas Page – this can be loaded into Facebook as an app. The language or tool to build an app must support web programming. Some of the tools used are Java, C#, PHP or Python. A Canvas URL which contains the HTML, Javascript and CSS is used to display the Canvas Page within the Facebook web page.

Bookmarks are used to enable users to easily navigate back to your app from within Facebook. Users can add the bookmarks to favorites which prioritizes your app. Bookmarks also show a counter that represents the number of requests for your app.

Notifications are meant to provide up to date interesting changes to content relevant to users. You can trigger a notification to users who may find it useful. There are two types of requests that can be sent.

- User generated requests – these are requests confirmed by the user's actions and updates.
- App generated requests – these are requests that can be sent only to users who have authorized your app.

News Feeds are shown to users upon logging into their Facebook account. These stories can be an experience, a new app or a new game that they are playing. New experiences can be posted onto Facebook with photos or a video detailing the events of that experience. Your friends can share in that experience by looking at the pictures or videos and can also make some comments.

Chapter 2:

Exploring Facebook API

Synopsis

To begin with an API, you have to have an API key. To get this key, you have to create an application, select an application name and agree to the terms of use on the developer's application page. Once you have done this you will be assigned an API key and a secret key.



All About API

To start coding, use FQL also known as Facebook Query Language to allow you to extract data from Facebook. The data extracted can only be obtained from users who share their information with everyone.

To improve on Graph API and to make it easier to write apps, use the Graph API Explorer. This app will make it easy to get started with the Graph API and test the API as you build your app. The Explorer can help you to do the following:

- Make requests and see formatted results in-line from the Graph API
- Explore connections of objects and field descriptions to help you understand what the response means
- Easily obtain permission necessary to access the data you need to optimize your app for users.
- It is easy to switch between HTTP, GET, POST and DELETE to get, update, create or delete objects.
- Easy to move between objects in the graph by clicking their id in the formatted result.

The Explorer is simply an application built on Facebook platform that uses the Graph API with the permissions you grant it to help you explore connections and objects in the graph.

Chapter 3:

Discovering Facebook Markup Language

Synopsis

FBML also known as Facebook Markup Language is Facebook's version of the HTML language used on the internet. There are some exceptions of the tags used in FBML and they are HTML, HEAD, BODY and Javascript.



Try New Things

It has been reported that FBML will no longer function as of June 1, 2012. Developers are encouraged to develop new applications using HTML, Javascript and CSS.

HTML – is the abbreviation for Hyper Text Markup Language. HTML is the main markup language for web pages. HTML is written using HTML elements consisting of tags enclosed in angle brackets within the web page content. The tags usually come in pairs `<h1>` and `</h1>` with some exceptions like ``. The opening tag in the pair is called the start tag and the closing tag is the end tag. In between these tags, developers can add text, comments, tags and other text-based content.

Javascript – is a prototype-based scripting language. It is dynamic with first class functions. It is a language that supports object-oriented, imperative and functional programming styles. It is implemented as part of a web browser to provide enhanced user interfaces and dynamic websites. It is also used outside of web pages in PDF documents, site-specific browsers and desktop widgets. Javascript uses syntax influenced by C and copies many naming conventions from Java but the two languages are unrelated. Javascript's key design principles are taken from Self and Scheme programming languages.

CSS – it stands for Cascading Style Sheets. CSS was created by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to solve the problem of

developers using HTML when they needed to add fonts and color to large web sites. In the latest HTML 4.0, all formatting could be removed from the HTML document and stored in a separate CSS file. All browsers support CSS today.



Chapter 4:

Understanding Facebook Query Language

Synopsis

FQL also known as Facebook Query Language is Facebook's version of SQL also known as Structured Query Language, which is widely used on the internet. FQL is a query language that allows users to query other user's data by using a SQL-style interface, thus avoiding the need to use the Facebook Platform Graph API. Data returned from an FQL query is in a format called JSON.



Understanding Queries

Queries uses tags like SELECT, FROM, WHERE and for subqueries that use the IN keyword. All queries must also be indexable. That means that it queries properties that are marked as indexable. Indexed properties make querying faster and easier. That means that any request made will return the data queried at a faster speed than normal.

Multi-query is a series of FQL queries in one that returns the data at one time. This type of query uses the JSON structure where individual queries use the exact same syntax as a simple query and allows for more complex queries to be made. You can fetch data and use it in another query within the same request.

FQL like SQL, can also handle simple math, basic Boolean operators, AND or NOT logical operators, and ORDER BY and LIMIT clauses.

The use of FQL has the following advantages.

- Bandwidth costs are reduced because you only get the fields you asked for. Less data downloaded, less cost.
- More complex queries allowed will reduce the number of requests. This is convenient for users as they like fast and easy browsing.
- Unified interface that is consistent
- It's easy and fun

Chapter 5:

Working With Facebook Java Script

Synopsis

For accessing Facebook's server, the use of Javascript SDK (JS SDK) is recommended. This is a set of features that includes REST API, Graph API and Dialogs. It provides the rendering of XFBML versions of Social Plugins and a way for Canvas pages to communicate with Facebook.



Exercise – How it Loses Weight?

An app ID is needed from the app dashboard in order to initialize the SDK.

The JS SDK requires the root element in order to load properly. The root element must not be hidden or some parts of the JS SDK will not work properly in Internet Explorer. The root element should be placed in a position close to the top of the body or some parts of the JS SDK will not work properly. This code will load the JS SDK asynchronously to ensure fast page loads for users and search engine robots like Google and Bing. The URLs found in the code are protocol relative and let the browser load the SDK over the same protocol as the containing page, which will prevent warnings like “Insecure Content”.

Channel file must be cached by the browser for as long as possible. This will ensure a smooth user experience on the website. Without caching, users will experience severe degrading of page loading.

The JS SDK allows your users to sign-in to your site using their Facebook account. This means they remain logged in to your site as long as they are logged in to Facebook.

Synchronous loading is useful for debugging but is not recommended for typical use as it will block the web page resulting in slower user experience. This is a negative impact for search engines when they are searching the web for user requests.

Chapter 6:

Creating Apps Working On Fan Pages & Profile Pages

Synopsis

There are numerous apps that can easily create a profile page that is comprehensive, attractive and user friendly. The following sites are good recommendations.



Emotional Eating Defined

Here are the recommended sites:

About.me

This is a popular site that offers profile making services with your photo, list of favorite sites and a short biography of yourself. It even offers a pack of free business cards based on your profile's content. The overall aim of the service is to create a single place to send all your contacts to, without the social constraints of being invited to Facebook or LinkedIn. This site also has a personal analytics dashboard to show how many people are visiting and bouncing from your page.

Gravatar

This site offers a service for associating a public avatar with an email address. You can add a short biography, add links to social networks and even some photos.

Chi.mp

This site puts all your social networks into one page. It pulls in feeds from sites like Facebook, Flickr and even Twitter. This site is good as it can show all your social networks in one place and is made easier for your contacts to check up on you.

Google +

This site has a good mix of features between Facebook and Twitter. You can also share photos and videos as well as allowing viewers to

add you to their own circle or network. There are also more fields to input more information onto your profile page.

Flavors.me

This site is a good alternative to about.me and is centered on the same kind of functionality. You can also register a custom domain with Flavors.me and make it one incredible service.

Carbonmade

This site focuses on projects and is ideal for creative types. There are on-going projects listed and can be viewed by members.



Chapter 7:

Integrating Apps On Newsfeeds And Notifications

Synopsis

Facebook uses its Groups product to integrate with their existing features. Here's how you can start integrating apps.



Integrate Your Apps

News Feed – for distribution parameters on sharing, Facebook’s content publisher now includes Groups. Users can now set a news feed status update, photo, video or link to only be visible to members of a single group. This group privacy is good for members of a specific group like old boys association, old school alumni and others. All information and photos posted will be privy to members of the group only. All posts and feeds posted to the group can only be viewed by members of these groups. When a user posts their feed with a group, all group members will get a notification of that feed. This feed is similar to wall posts and can only be viewed by members of the group. If any member of a group is tagged, that member will receive notifications of future Likes and Comments to that post. Users will also see news feed stories pertaining to Groups, including those they’re not members of and stories detailing events hosted by a Group on their own page.

Notifications - users can change and set what actions will generate notifications across all their Groups. The email settings for individual Groups can be changed using a link near the bottom of the Groups Notification settings. Users can also go into each Group that they are a member of and click the “Edit Notifications” button in the top right corner to change and set what actions in that specific Group will generate what type of notifications and which email address these notifications will be sent to.

Chapter 8:

Register Your Applications On Facebook

Synopsis

Before creating any applications for Facebook, you must have a Facebook account. Go to the Facebook website and register for a free account. When you have an account you can start creating apps for this account.



Before You Make Your App

You have to go to facebook.com/developers and may need to log in again if prompted. You will be asked to allow developer applications and you must click allow. When you see a “Create New App” tab, click on it to start the application creation wizard. You have to enter all requested data, check the agree with Facebook Platform policies and click continue. You will have to create an App Display Name. This is the name of your application that users will see on your app. Next you have to fill in the App Namespace which is an app identifier for your application. After this you have to pass a captcha and click submit.

Your application is now created!

Basic Settings for Setup :

- After the application has been created, you have to setup some basic settings in your app. Go to the applications page at facebook.com/developers
- Click the Edit Settings at the top right button in Settings
- Under Select how your app integrates with Facebook, click App on Facebook
- A form with three fields will be displayed. Only two fields can be edited. Fill those two fields and click Save Changes at the bottom of the page. The two fields are:
- Canvas URL – this is the URL of your application

- Secure Canvas URL - this is the secure URL of your application for users navigating Facebook through https

As of 1st October 2011, all URLs must be in HTTPS, so your server requires an SSL certificate. Without this certificate, your app will not function. If you cannot afford this certificate, go to social-server.com.



Chapter 9:

Optimizing Facebook Applications

Synopsis

There are many ways in which you can optimize your applications on Facebook. They are:



Optimize Your Apps

Featured Photos Feed – this is the feed of 5 photos that will change position each time a visitor lands on the page. Some branding companies use this feed for marketing their brand. Close up shots of products and company to entice visiting users.

Links Panel – this is located on the left side of the page and limits 8 links to be viewed on the landing page. You can have more links but these will be hidden from users and to view these links, users have to click MORE. Most visiting users will not click on this. Make sure you display the best 8 links for maximum exposure to visiting users.

Feedback - see trends of interaction on your page by content type, time of day or frequency as the administrator of your pages.

Featured Likes – there are 5 featured Likes displayed under the Links Panel. You can set the 5 featured pages in your settings so that they do not rotate. They must represent the best features of your brand.

Different Layouts – you can change the wall layout of your landing page for visitors. They are Most Recent or posts made by the page. If Most Recent then users will see every interaction made on the page. Many businesses choose the posts made by the page.

Vanity URL – if you have your own domain, you can set it up to point to your own profile on Facebook. The same can be done for Twitter, LinkedIn and others.

Chapter 10:

Expand your Facebook Apps To Mobile

Synopsis

Facebook apps are becoming more friendly with mobile. They are allowing app developers to connect users more easily to the mobile or web version of their apps when using the site on a mobile device. In support of this, Facebook is launching support for the Facebook Mobile website as well as support for iPad, iPod touch and iPhone. There is also support for other platforms like Android, Blackberry, Windows phone and Palm.



How To Expand

Facebook is allowing developers that already have a mobile web or iOS version of their app, a more seamless way to integrate the experience within Facebook for mobile.

For instance, if I send a request to play Texas Hold Em from Facebook on my desktop to my friend, he can respond to my request on Facebook for iPhone. The Texas Hold Em app will automatically launch on his phone. This feature can be done with Facebook's Single Sign-on which will tie the two together.

Facebook is also offering tools for mobile web app developers that will enable the apps to take advantage of integrating with the Facebook API and even be able to accept Facebook Credits.

At this present time, Facebook is looking at the mobile platform primarily as a way to improve app discovery and increase engagement on mobile devices. It's the engagement aspect that is going to be critical for them. Even though their mobile platform is not robust, Facebook is keeping an eye on the mobile market which they view as a great potential for further investment and expansion. Future enhancements to their mobile website is in the planning.

Some of the apps found in mobile apps showcase are:

- Magic Land
- Words with friends
- Social Poker

- Word Racer
- World War
- iMobsters
- Texas HoldEm Poker
- Vampires
- Farmville Express
- Flixster
- HuffPost
- AudioVroom
- Gilt Luck
- BranchOut
- Demo: Hackbook



Wrapping Up

Developing and then integrating your apps into Facebook is a task easily accomplishable with the help from this book. If you take the time to follow these steps correctly you will have a much better chance of your app being a success. Now with apps integrating into mobile there is even more profit to be made! So what are you waiting for? Get started now! Good luck!

