Is Flex Dead?

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Related Categories: Flex, AIR

This question comes in from a reader; and to be honest I've been at a loss as to how to respond without writing a book. I finally found time to devote some time to putting down some thoughts.

I'll start by quoting the full question and then trying to answer points one by one:

> As I was viewing your blog I noticed you seem very knowledgeable about Flex. I've just become aware of Flex and bought a few books then realized that Flex is dependent on Adobe Flash which has recently been dropped from Linux support which affects Android and the growing mobile market. I was wondering what your insight, I know you don't have a crystal ball, is on Flex usage and could you tell me if you think it has a future. Also, what is Flex really good at? I've not been able to find any example Flex apps out there... only Adobe Air apps. Thanks!

I'm going to answer the question in reverse order. First,

> ...what is Flex good at?

Flex is a Software Development Kit used for building Enterprise Applications. It provides a component set and a framework for rapid development. By making use of the Flash Player runtime; it is easy to build a consistent experience across multiple desktop browsers.

> I've not been able to find any example Flex apps out there... only Adobe Air apps.

An AIR App can be a Flex app. Most Flex apps that I'm aware of are internal apps used for browser based applications in an "big business". You probably won't find too many public applications.

Now, Let's tackle this sentence; which is full of misconceptions:

> I've just become aware of Flex and bought a few books then realized that Flex is dependent on Adobe Flash...

This isn't necessarily true. Flex is dependent upon Adobe Runtimes; however the browser based Flash Player is just one of them. Adobe AIR is a second runtime which you can use to build Flex applications. Adobe AIR can be used to deploy your Flex app as a desktop for Mac and Windows, or as a native mobile application on iOS, Android, or Blackberry's Playbook.

I expect that, in time, we'll be able to use Adobe AIR to create Windows Metro applications and Native Applications for the Blackberry "next" phones. More info on Adobe and its runtime commitment is in the "[Roadmap for Flash Runtimes](#)" whitepaper.

However, keep in mind that Flex is in the process of being donated to the Apache Foundation and the [Apache Flex Project](#) is in the process of creating their first release.

There is interest in decoupling Flex from the Adobe Runtimes, so that we can use the same Flex code and deploy them to other languages or platforms, such as HTML5 / JavaScript, such as Native

Android, or Native iOS. I think it will be a couple of years before we start to figure out if such endeavors are going to become a reality for building Enterprise Applications. There are a lot of smart and motivated people, involved in the Apache project; and I have faith they will do great things.

> ...which has recently been dropped from Linux support...

Adobe has not dropped Flash Player support on Linux. However, as I understand it they will only be supporting the Flash Player on browsers which support a new plugin API that was developed in conjunction with Google. At the moment, only the Chrome browser will support the Flash Player on Linux; however if this API is implemented on other Linux browsers, it seems probable that this will also come with Flash Player support.

As I understand it, however, Adobe AIR, will not have any support on Linux moving forward. I understand a lot of developers find this troublesome because they were using Adobe AIR as part of their build and test process; which run on Linux machines. In practical terms, this has not affected any of my clients.

> ...which affects Android and the growing mobile market.

Adobe support for Linux is completely different than Adobe's support for Android. Adobe did cease development of the Mobile Browser Plugin for Android. But, you can still use Adobe AIR to build Native Android applications.

In terms of clients who I speak to; people are more interested in building Native Applications on devices and care less about browser based applications--which is where Flex excels. I do not know of anyone building Flash content targeted towards mobile browsers.

And finally....

> tell me if you think it has a future

It's hard to say. At the moment, a lot of people I talk to are taking a wait and see attitude. They aren't ceasing Flex development or retiring their current applications. However some are halting on starting new projects with a technology that is "deemed" To be abandoned. People want to see the Apache Flex team create a formal release. They want to see the Apache Flex team prove they can move the SDK forward in a relevant manner. Once we prove that; I think things will improve in terms of corporate mindshare for Flex.

If I were to "guess" what is going to happen, I'd say that browser plugins are going to go away completely in the future. Apple started this with the iPhone; and Microsoft is going to accelerate it with Windows Metro apps. However, I believe that Adobe AIR is going to thrive; as it solves a unique problem (Cross platform deployment on mobile) which the browser based Flash Player used to solve. I anticipate that AIR may become more focused / niche than the Flash Player was; but I anticipate it will be a profitable niche.

There is potential for great things; and I believe that the potential can be realized.

Update 6/20/2013
This page has been translated into Spanish language by Maria Ramos from Webhostinghub.com.