

Mobile App Development for Fun and... Profit?

ICT Design: Valorization and mobile applications

Peter Robinett

2012-10-10

First, who am I?

In short

I'm an American web
and mobile developer
based in Amsterdam.





Mediamatic

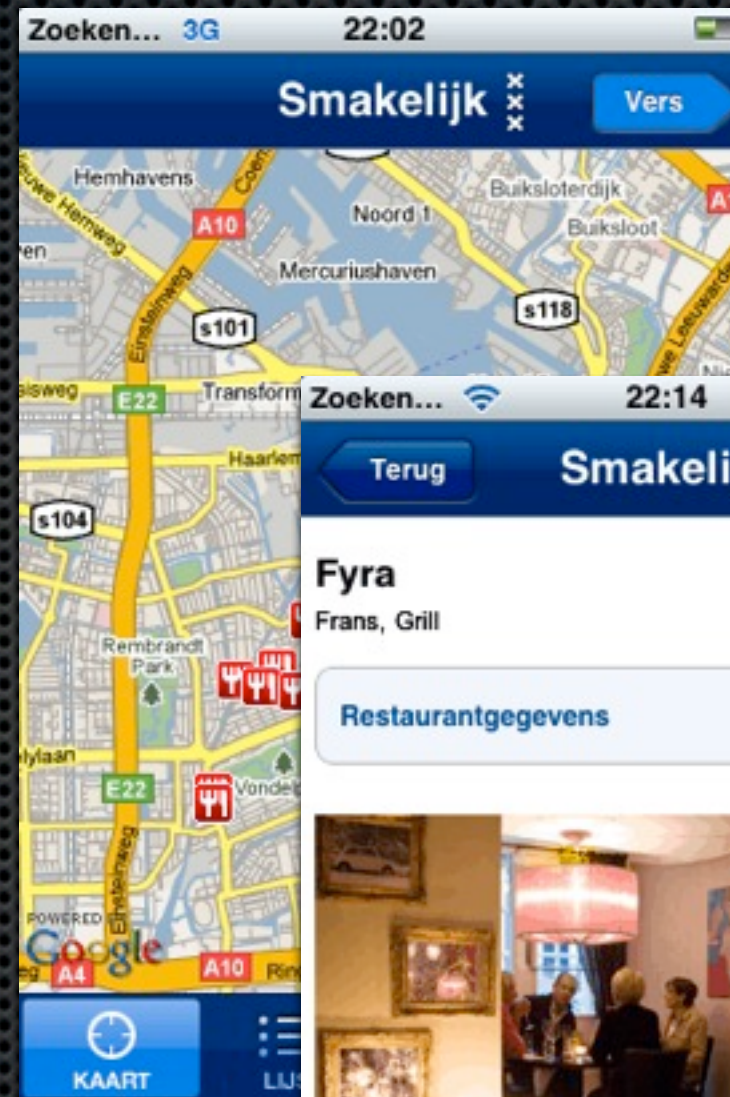
Freelancing for clients...



...including many mobile projects

Smakelijk Amsterdam

Het **PAROOL**
Duidelijk Amsterdams



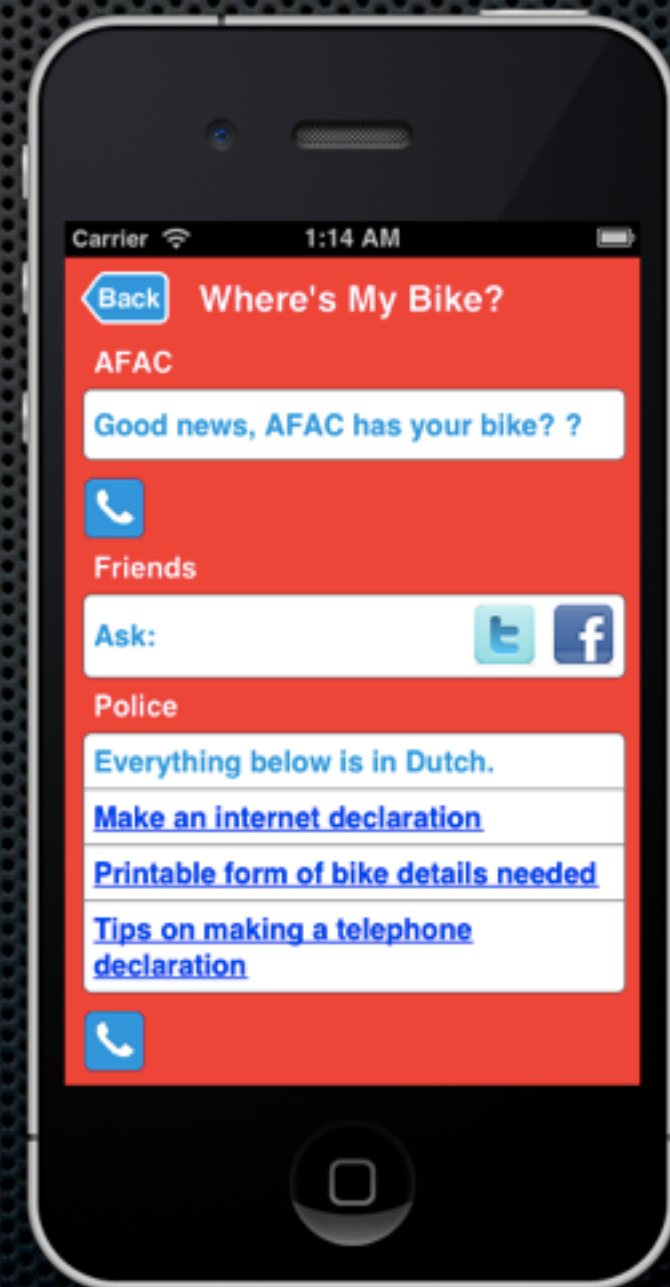
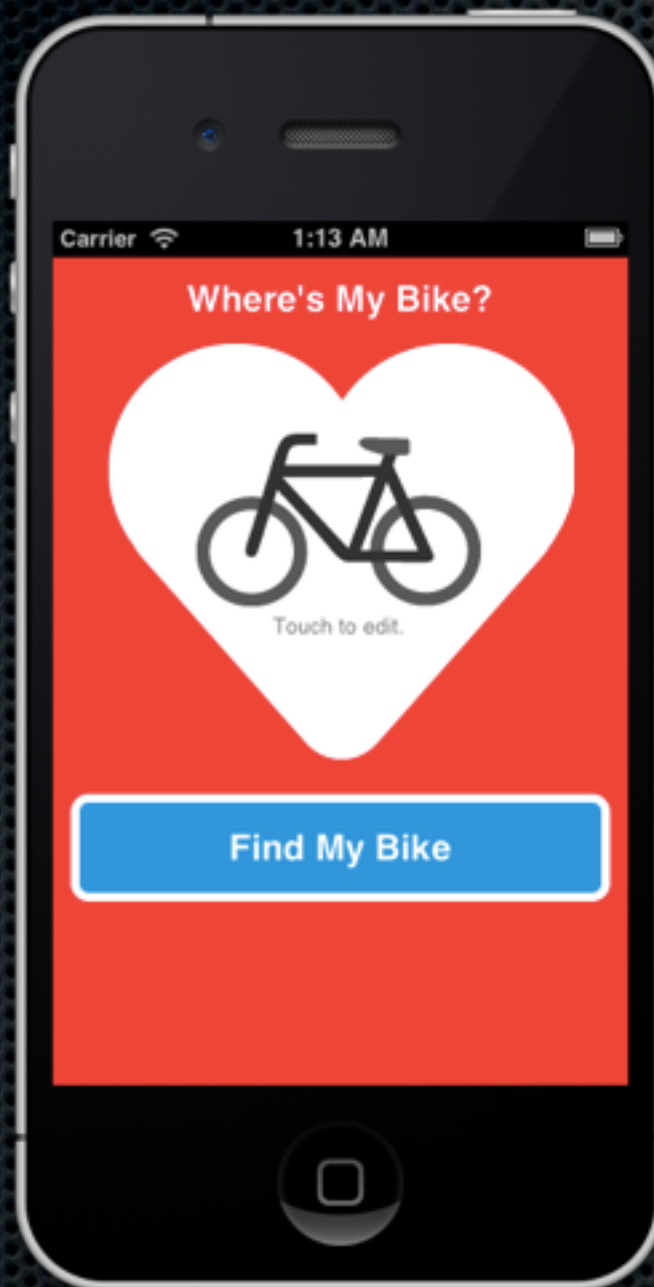
Coffeeshoppr



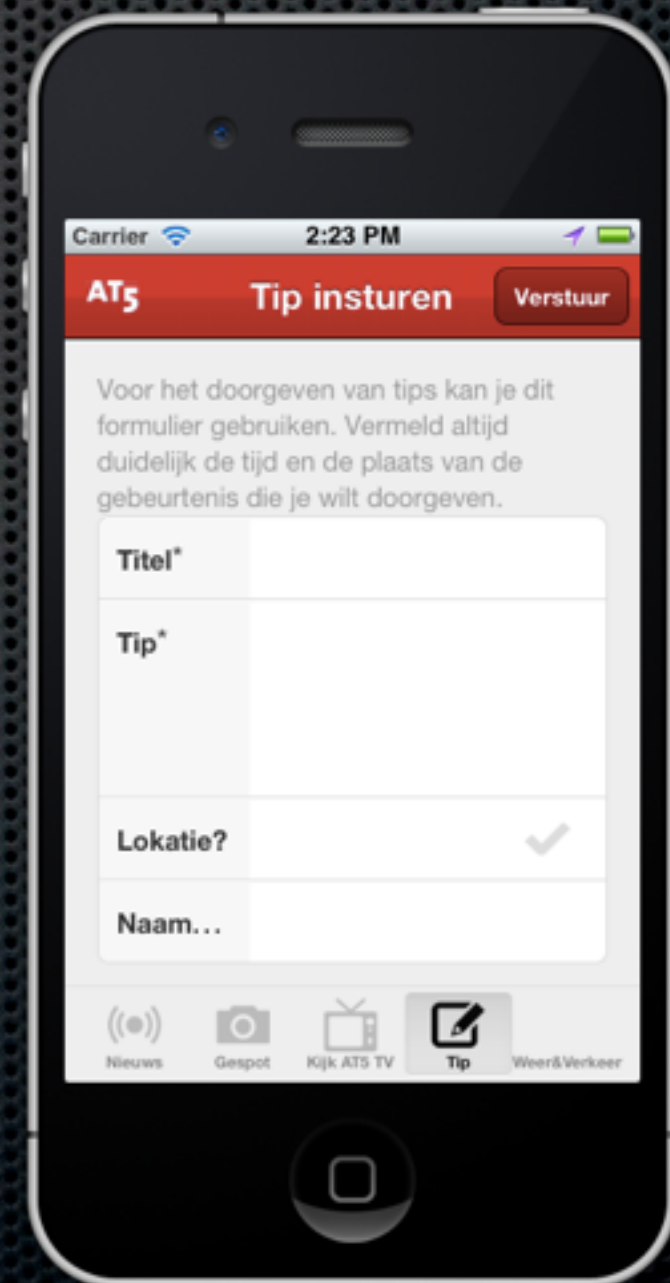
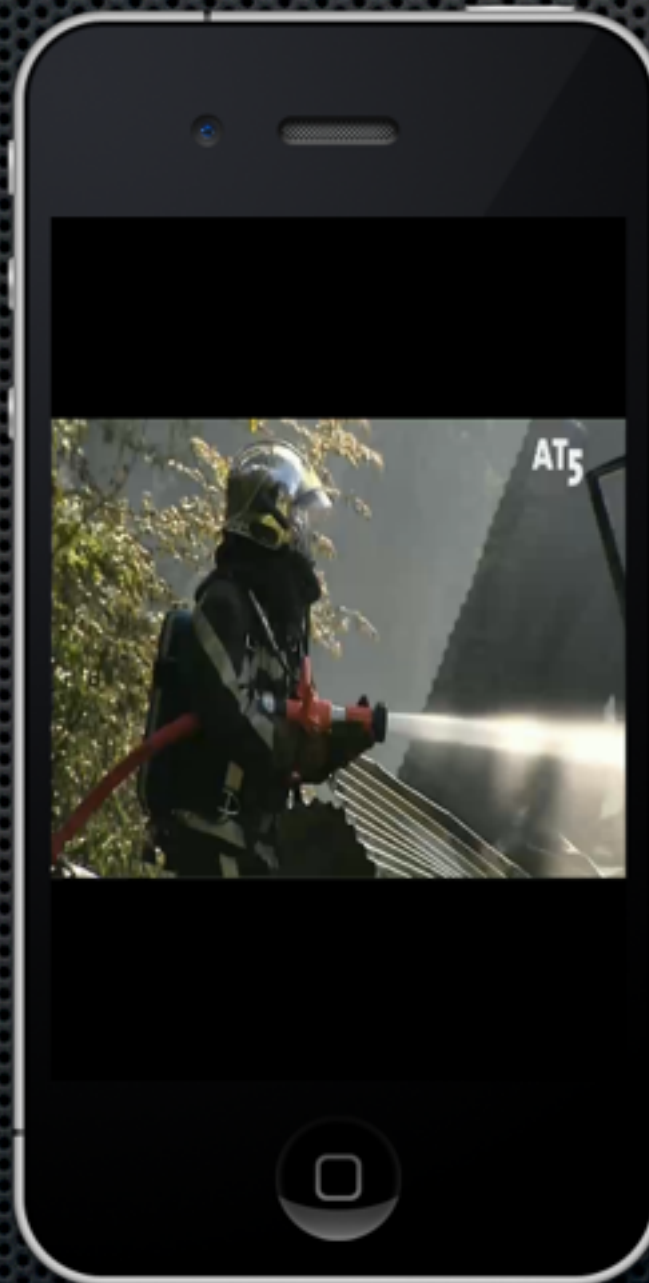
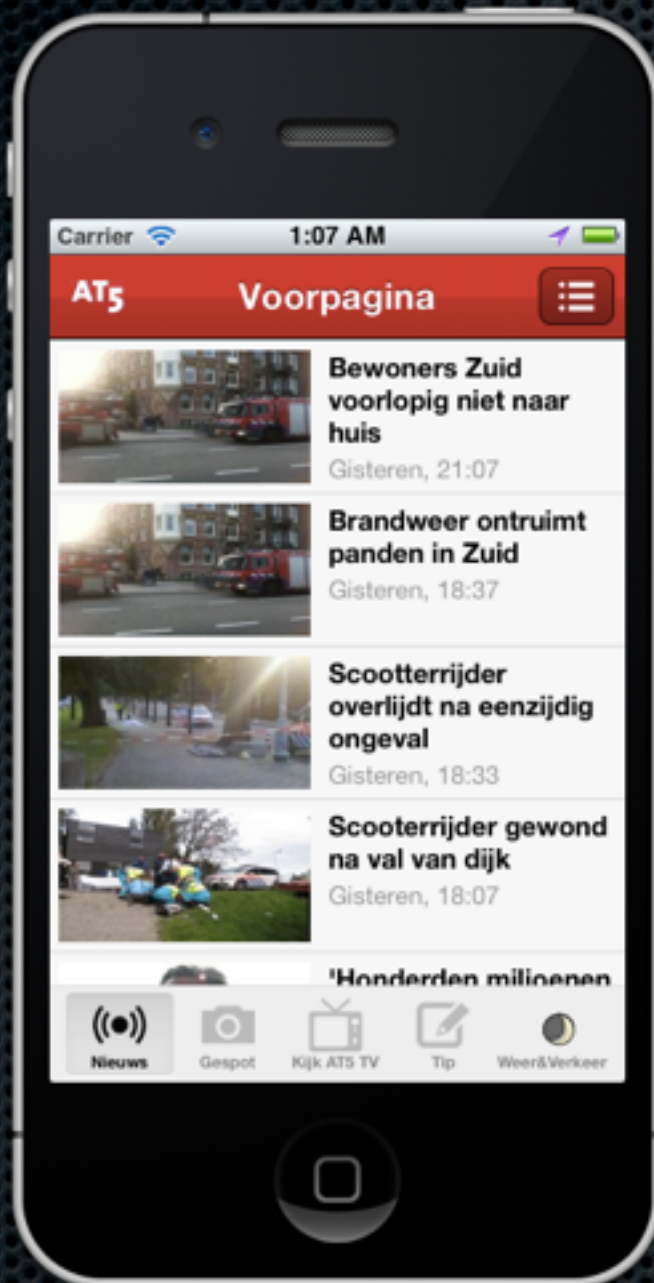
iFebo



Where's My Bike?



AT5



Goals for today

- ✦ present the lifecycle of an app from the developer's perspective
- ✦ highlight common pitfalls and challenges with examples from my own projects
- ✦ give you additional perspectives as you do your class project

The rules of the game

How can we make money?

Three ways:

- ✦ Sell apps
- ✦ Sell advertising
- ✦ Sell your skills

Selling apps

You make an app and people pay you for it.

BUT

Most developers make < \$500 per month from their
apps

- <http://gigaom.com/2012/10/04/most-app-developers-make-less-than-500-a-month-chart/>

Selling ads

Easy to drop into an app, many mobile ad networks

BUT

CPMs for mobile ads are very low: "a third of those developers [of advertising-dependent apps] make less than \$100 a month in ad revenue"

Selling your skills

guaranteed money, rates for app developers are high –
a good app starts at €10k

BUT

- ✦ not participating in any potential upside of the app's success
- ✦ nor working on own idea
- ✦ no one's going to hire a non-developer to build an app for them
- ✦ almost always the client must come to you

there are exemptions to any
rule...

Example: iFebo



Apps are a **hits-based**
business

Costs

Main expenses

- ✦ development
- ✦ marketing
- ✦ maintenance

Expect to spend at least
€10000

What about making apps for other reasons than money?

Ok, we know the rules of the game. Let's make an app.

Stages

- ✦ Concept
- ✦ Research
- ✦ Goals
- ✦ Picking a platform

Theory

-
- ✦ Design
 - ✦ Development

Creation

-
- ✦ Testing
 - ✦ Submission
 - ✦ Launch

Distribution

Behind every app is a
theory

Concept

Comes about in three ways:

- ✦ client-driven
- ✦ idea-driven
- ✦ platform-driven

Client-driven concepts

- some back and forth, but is basically whatever the client wants
- almost everyone I've encountered has fallen into one of two camps:
 1. companies wanting an app to promote their brands and build engagement
 2. people with an idea who think there's easy money in apps

Idea-driven

- ✦ this is your usual "wouldn't it be great if you could order beers delivered directly to your seat at the football stadium?..." thinking

Platform-driven

- ✦ when a platform is new or updated, there are chances to stand out
- ✦ solve the discovery problem with a first mover advantage
- ✦ a novel hook and time to market becomes more important than quality and even marketing

Example: Drum Kit

- ✦ One of the first apps on the iPhone App Store
- ✦ Its sales have supported the developer for the last 4 years.
- ✦ **It's still a very well made app.**



A black and white photograph capturing a dynamic scene of a bison hunt. A large group of hunters, mounted on horses, are spread across a vast, open grassy plain. They are in various stages of pursuit, with some horses galloping and others in more controlled movement. In the foreground and middle ground, several bison are running, their bodies angled away from the hunters. The background shows a flat horizon under a bright sky. The overall impression is one of intense action and movement.

Landrush!

Example: iOS 4

- ✦ iOS 4 added lots of new features
- ✦ knew that people covering apps would be writing stories about iOS 4 and apps enabled by it
- ✦ spent a week investigating the new features and brainstorming app concepts

Landrushes are a crapshoot

An alternative platform
strategy:

**Make an app for a small platform
whose owner is desperate for
apps!**

Research

Research for the general concept, plus in app form

- app stores
 - are there similar apps?
 - what are they charging?
 - how are they made?
 - how well are they doing?
- general web
 - is there a web concept that could be 'app-ified'?
- platform development timelines, developer buzz
 - what's coming next?
 - what are your colleagues and competitors excited about?

Goals

- ✧ Do we want lots of users?
- ✧ Lots of money?
- ✧ The most money possible for the least amount of maintenance costs?

Picking a platform

Platform = Stage

- ✧ Teemu Kurppa
- ✧ <http://bit.ly/PmnrkL>

potential market

=

total users

x

% with flat-rate data

x

% installing apps

Exact equation less relevant
now, but concepts still spot on.

- ✧ flat-rate not so important now
- ✧ but Willingness to Pay is important
- ✧ so are the number of other apps on the platform

balance user reach with technical
capabilities *vis-a-vis your specific
requirements*

- ✦ don't always need to put distribution & monetization first, technical requirements can come first if the concept is solid
- ✦ can be worth watering down your concept for a technically inferior platform if more business potential

Multiple platforms

- ✦ hard enough to develop one app, harder to do multiple
- ✦ most mobile developers specialize in one platform, so more developers are needed
- ✦ the iPhone + Android + other strategy

iPhone + Android + other

- ✦ development of iOS and Android versions are more or less aligned
- ✦ Android app invariably ends up shipping later
- ✦ if resources large enough and initial app successful enough, app may be ported to other platforms

But what about cross-
platform tools?

- ✧ Flash
- ✧ cross-compilers
- ✧ PhoneGap
- ✧ **the web**

How much can you reuse across platforms?

- ✦ most use different libraries and even different languages
- ✦ most tools are not nearly as cross-platform as they claim

Examples: Voice of Holland,
AT5

Why not the web?

- ✦ performance – especially with animation or long lists of data
- ✦ offline usage tricky
- ✦ missing App Store distribution, promotion, and monetization

But really, the web is **the**
cross-platform solution.

Now let's look at app
creation

Design

More than just pretty
pictures...

iOS5 GUI PSD (iPhone Retina Display)

A few things we ask of you:
Please don't repurpose this file or its contents as your own.
If you like it and use it, tweet about it.
Most importantly, use it to pitch, design and build amazing software.

You can follow us @teehanix

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Label

Alert Label
Tap Continue and sign in to view account information

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

label

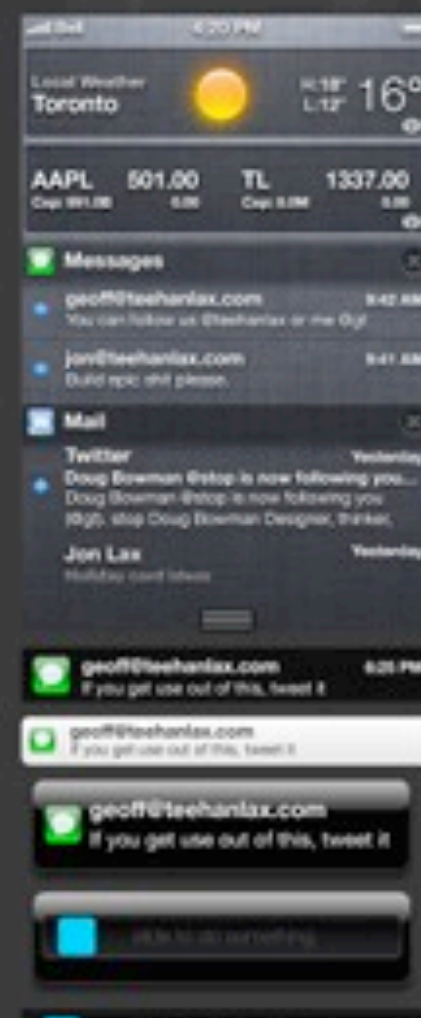
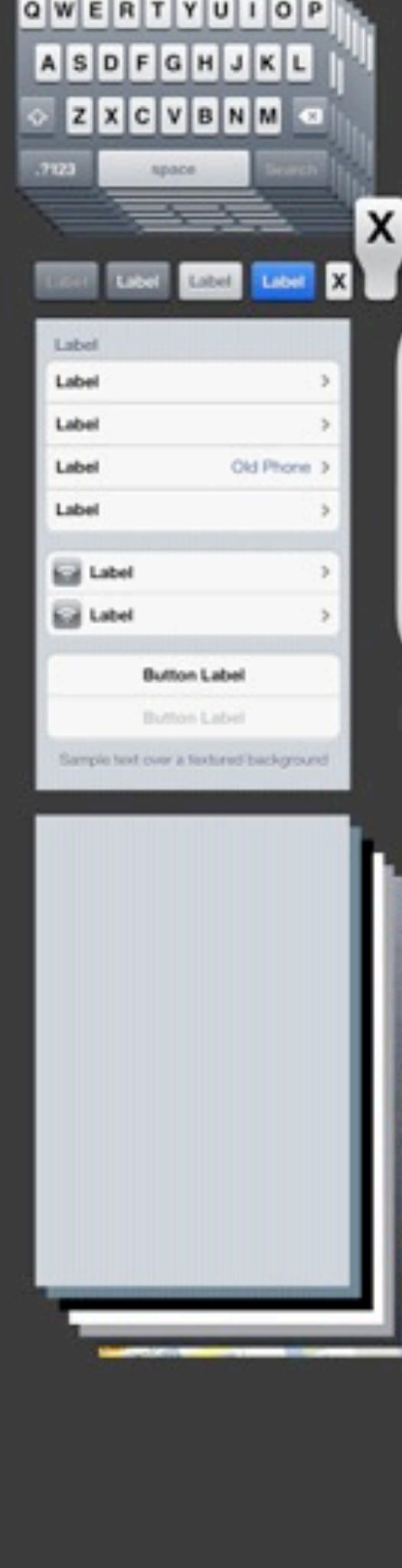
label

label

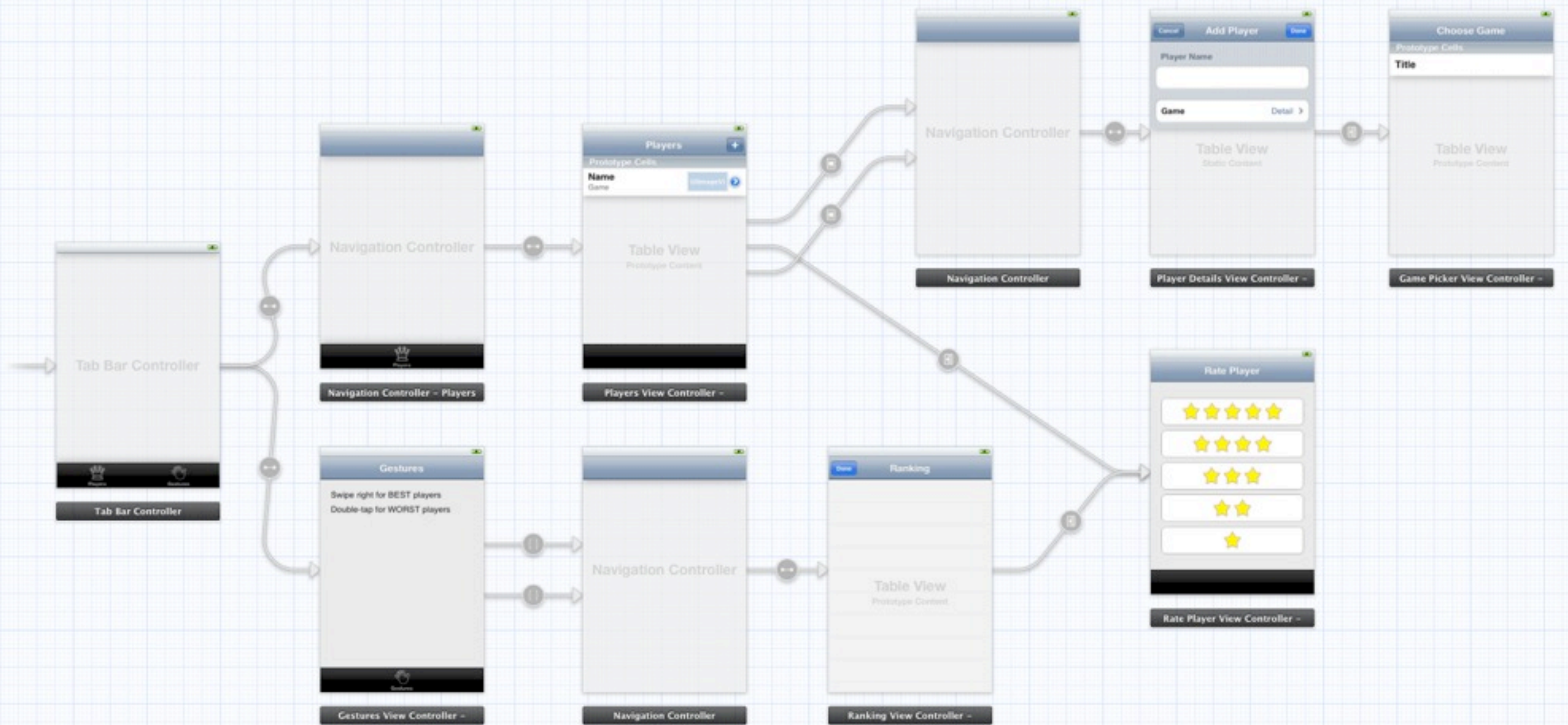
label

label

label



- ✧ how each screen looks
- ✧ how you transition from one to another
- ✧ what happens when each button is pressed
- ✧ how it should work when there's no internet connection
- ✧ etc



All sorts of design needed:

- ✦ visual
- ✦ interaction
- ✦ technical

Hire an *app* designer!

Beware the Uncanny Valley of App Design

Think beyond the app

A new app is a new global microbrand

Needs:

- ✦ a logo
- ✦ a website
- ✦ promotional materials
- ✦ etc

How are you going to present yourself?

Development

Just execute!

Don't forget about servers

Splendid isolation

The rules of the game can
change at any minute.

Learn about mobile networks

Example: Smakelijk

- ✦ found late in testing that some updates were very slow on a few phones in certain locations
- ✦ discovered T-Mobile's optional compression was rewriting our requests
- ✦ would have taken a different route if had known earlier

Register with the app stores
ahead of time

Now let's talk about app
distribution

Testing

Don't have the luxury of
iterative releases....

...so test early, test often.

Testing requires *at least*
two weeks

Focus should be on:

- ✧ does the app work correctly?
- ✧ does it continue to work in abnormal situations?
- ✧ do users understand the app and can achieve their goals?

Sharing development
versions is a pain...

...so use Testflight

Manage your testing
intelligently

- ✦ have a basic tasks or sequences of actions that you ask people to test
- ✦ look for a good distribution of users and device types
- ✦ a few dedicated testers are worth a lot more than many indifferent ones
- ✦ you can have up to 100 devices per iOS developer account, so pick your beta testers wisely
- ✦ save some device slots for journalists and other promotional activity

Submission

Most App Stores' submission
processes are pretty quick and easy

Apple **not so much**

iOS App Store criteria

- ✦ technical quality
- ✦ obeying of technical limits
- ✦ within legal constraints
- ✦ not morally objectionable

Example: Coffeeshoppr



- ✦ **rejected**

- ✦ removed smoke in logo, instructional videos, textual references to cannabis

- ✦ **rejected again**

- ✦ applied again a year later after review guidelines published

- ✦ **rejected again for ‘promoting explicit drug use’**

- ✦ appealed to Review Board with line-by-line breakdown of app guidelines

- ✦ **rejected within 24 hours**

Beware the double standard

Launch

App discovery

- ✦ hundreds of thousands of competing apps
- ✦ little price tolerance or willingness to spend time trying apps
- ✦ bad search and discovery tools

This makes App Store lists
very influential

The New list is your one
guaranteed list placement

Your promotion needs to be
going by Day 1

Marketing

Build interest ahead of time

Research your targets, make personalized pitches

- ✦ some people are interested in being part of betas
- ✦ but most want to use the release version and publish right when the app launches
- ✦ people will expect a download code if you're pitching them your app

Media

What sites are relevant?

- ✦ big name media are useful – e.g. NU.nl tends to drive lots of traffic
- ✦ specialized sites can be very effective – e.g. iPhoneclub, One More Thing
- ✦ also community (e.g. Tweakers) and personal blogs and forums

Social media

Support

Don't buy downloads you
can't monetize

And then what?

Maintenance

- ✦ Technical maintenance
- ✦ Maintenance of publicity
- ✦ Regular app updates or promotions to maintain ranks

Thank you

Any questions?

I'm happy to answer any questions later too.

You can email me at
peter@bubblefoundry.com.

I'm @pr1001 on Twitter.