A Short Introduction to Android

Notes taken from Google’s Android SDK and Google’s Android Application Fundamentals
Plan For Today

• Lecture on Core Android
• Three U-Tube Videos:
  - Architecture Overview
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm6Ju0xhUW8
  - Application Lifecycle
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fL6gSd4ugSI
  - Application Programmer Interfaces
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPukbH6D-lY
Why Android?

- Mobile platforms represent important components of distributed systems.
- Android is a new and interesting mobile platform.
- Android may also become important on non-mobile platforms.
- We will look at Android from a developers point of view.
# What is Android?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applications</th>
<th>Contacts</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Browser</th>
<th>Home...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Window Manager</td>
<td>Content Providers</td>
<td>Location Manager</td>
<td>Activity Manager ...</td>
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<td>Framework</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>SQLite</td>
<td>SSL</td>
<td>WebKit</td>
<td>Android Runtime VM...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linux Kernel</td>
<td>WiFi Driver</td>
<td>Binder (IPC) driver</td>
<td>Camera Driver</td>
<td>...</td>
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System Architecture Diagram from Google
Linux Provides

• Hardware abstraction – drivers
• Memory management
• Process Management
• Security Model
• Networking
Native Libraries

- Sit on top of Linux
- Written in C/C++
- Drawing, Graphics (3D and 2D)
- Media framework (codecs like MP4 to code and decode MP4 bit streams)
- Font rendering
- Database (SQLite)
- WebKit
- Android runtime (VM) – multiple instances
Application Framework in Java (1)

- Activity Manager
- Package Manager
- Windows Manager
- Telephony Manager
- Content Providers
- Resource Manager
- View System
- Location Manager
- Notification Manager
- XMPP Service

This is a toolkit for applications. Applications are such things as the phone application and the contacts application.
Application Framework in Java (2)

- Activity Manager

Manages the lifecycle of applications. Applications cycle through various states: Started, Running, Background, Killed.

Maintains a common stack allowing the user to navigate from one application to another.
Application Framework in Java (3)

• Package Manager

Maintains information on the available applications on the device.
Application Framework in Java (4)

• Windows Manager

Performs window management.
Application Framework in Java (5)

- Telephony Manager

API’s needed to build the phone application and SMS.
Application Framework in Java (6)

- Content Provider

Allows one application to make its data available to another. For example, the contacts application makes its data available to other applications that may need it.

The phone or email application may need to consult contacts.
Application Framework in Java (7)

- Resource Manager

Manages the storing of strings and layout files and bitmaps.

“Android will run on many devices in many regions. To reach the most users, your application should handle text, audio files, numbers, currency, and graphics in ways appropriate to the locales where your application will be used”. (From the SDK)
Application Framework in Java (8)

- **View System**

  Contains the building blocks of the user interface – buttons, text boxes and so on. Handles event dispatching, layouts and drawing.

  The View class is the base class for the Widget class. All views in a window are organized in a single tree.
Application Framework in Java (9)

- Location Manager
  - Uses GPS – most accurate, slow, battery drain, and primarily for outdoor use.
  - Uses the Android Network provider which uses cell tower and wi-fi signals.
Application Framework in Java (10)

- Notification Manager

  Alerts the user about events. Status bar updates, flashing lights, vibrations and the like.
Application Framework in Java (11)

• XMPP Service
  IETF Standard: The Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol ("Presence = ‘who’s online?")
  XML Based Internet Instant Messaging
  Adopted by GoogleTalk (Voice over IP and Instant Messaging)
  Provides for offline messaging.
  Unsure if still supported by Android.
Example(1): Using The Telephony Manager

- import android.telephony.TelephonyManager;
- Your application requests READ_PHONE_STATE permissions.
- Ask the system for a pointer to the TelephonyManager.
- Register a listener for state changes.
- Make calls on the TelephonyManager class.
- The android.telephony.gsm package allows your application to send and receive SMS or MMS messages.
Example (2): Using The Location Manager

• Ask system for a pointer to the LocationManager.
• Permissions requested in the manifest.
• Implement a location listener.
• Receive a GeoCoder object.
• A GeoCoder provides geocoding and reverse geocoding. Geocoding is the process of transforming a street address or other description of a location into a (latitude, longitude) coordinate. Reverse geocoding is the process of transforming a (latitude, longitude) coordinate into a (partial) address.
Example (3): Maps in Two Ways

(1) Create an Intent with an Action_View and a URI holding longitude and latitude. Call startActivity with the Intent. 

(2) For greater control, add a MapView widget to your application.
Application Fundamentals

• An Android package (.apk file) holds an application.

• No single entry point. The system can instantiate and run components as needed.

• There are four types of components found within an application....
Android’s Component Model

• An application will be built from:
  • Activity Components
  • Service Components
  • Intent Receiver Components
  • Content Provider Components
Activity Components

A concrete class that may be subclassed. Often represents a single full screen window. One focused endeavor.

Has a well-defined life-cycle:

onCreate()
onStart()
onResume()
onFreeze()
onStop()
onDestroy()
Activity Components

One activity may start another within the same application.

Each activity usually represents a single screen.

The user’s interaction takes place through views.

Views consist of buttons, text fields, scroll bars, etc., and are organized in a hierarchy.

An application would usually consist of several activities.
Service Components

A service has no visual user interface. It runs in the background for some indefinite period of time. A service may expose an interface.

Using a service component, we can expose functionality to other applications. Services may be started by an Activity and may continue after the Activity leaves the screen.
Intent or Broadcast Receiver Components

The **Intent receiver** component does nothing but react to announcements. Many announcements originate in system code — for example, announcements that the time zone has changed or that the battery is low. Applications can also initiate announcements — to let other applications know of some change in state. (From [http://developer.android.com/Reference/android/content/ContentProvider.html](http://developer.android.com/Reference/android/content/ContentProvider.html))

May be used to start an activity when a message arrives.
A content provider makes a specific set of the application's data available to other applications. If you don't need to share data amongst multiple applications you can use a database directly via SQLiteDatabase. (From http://developer.android.com/Reference/android/content/ContentProvider.html)
When a request should be handled by a particular component, Android will start the application and make sure the component instance is available.
Each process is started with a generated unique “user-id”. Linux is built to protect users from each other. The “user-id” provides an application sandbox.
Inter-Process Communication

Two approaches:

1. Intents
2. Remote Methods
Inter-Process Communication - Intents

From Google’s Developer’s Reference:

“An intent is an abstract description of an operation to be performed”

Suppose, for example, that my application wants to make a phone call:

```java
Intent callIntent = new Intent(Intent.ACTION_CALL);
callIntent.setData(Uri.parse("tel:4122684657");
startActivity(callIntent);
```

This is an **agile, loosely coupled, asynchronous** approach. This is a classic example of the flexibility provided by late binding.
Inter-Process Communication - Intents

From Google’s Developer’s Reference:

“Three of the core components of an application — activities, services, and broadcast receivers — are activated through messages, called *intents*. Intent messaging is a facility for late run-time binding between components in the same or different applications.”

“In each case, the Android system finds the appropriate activity, service, or set of broadcast receivers to respond to the intent, instantiating them if necessary. There is no overlap within these messaging systems: Broadcast intents are delivered only to broadcast receivers, never to activities or services. An intent passed to `startActivity()` is delivered only to an activity, never to a service or broadcast receiver, and so on.”
## Some Intent Constants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>Target Component</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTION_CALL</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Initiate a phone call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTION_EDIT</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Display data for the user to edit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTION_MAIN</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Start of a task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTION_BATTERY_LOW</td>
<td>Broadcast receiver</td>
<td>A warning that the battery is low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intent Filters

“To inform the system which implicit intents they can handle, activities, services, and broadcast receivers can have one or more intent filters. Each filter describes a capability of the component, a set of intents that the component is willing to receive. It, in effect, filters intents of a desired type, while filtering out unwanted intents.”

From Google’s Android Developers Documentation.
Inter-Process Communication - Intents

Process A

Activity₁
Create an Intent Object
Set its action.
Set a URI.
Set a MIME type
call
startActivityForResult
with the Intent object
The onActivityResult
method is called when
a result is available

Activity₂
Launched because its
intent filter matches the
MIME type and action
return a new Intent
object to the activity
that started this instance

Process B
Inter-Process Communication – Remote Methods and AIDL

AIDL (Android Interface Definition Language) is an IDL language used to generate code that enables two processes on an Android-powered device to talk using interprocess communication (IPC). If you have code in one process (for example, in an Activity) that needs to call methods on an object in another process (for example, a Service), you would use AIDL to generate code to marshall the parameters.

The AIDL IPC mechanism is interface-based, similar to COM or Corba, but lighter weight. It uses a proxy class to pass values between the client and the implementation.

From Google’s Android Developers Documentation.
Inter-Process Communication – Remote Methods and AIDL

1. Define an interface in AIDL.
2. Implement the interface.
3. Invoke the method.
   The caller thread is blocked until the return.

AIDL is a java interface with in, out, and inout parameters.

Activity\textsubscript{1}

Process A

Service\textsubscript{2}

Process B

At run time the Parcel is unflattened.

Used to create client side proxy code that creates Parcel objects.