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Wireless Video and Learning

Updated twice a month!

NEW! **What's New in BREW 2?**
QUALCOMM Product manager Jason B. Kenagy talks about the new client features and highlights, and gives a glimpse of potential future client features.

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NEW! **Tools Overview**

Senior Staff Engineering Manager Ken Geib and Product Manager Katy Zhi run you through the BREW-related development tools, test and debugging tools, web-accessible tools, and packaging tools for commercialization you'll be using.

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NEW! **Entering the BREW Developer Community**

BREW Developer relations chief Jan Lezny tells how you get into the BREW Developer Community, the training available, the authentication process, the benefits of the Developer Extranet and the lab, not to mention the tools you'll use, and explains how you set prices for your apps.

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Developer's Diary Episode 1: "It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time"

Come with us now as we follow Joe Kerr and his company on the great adventure of starting a wireless software company and getting funding, making distribution deals, evaluating the whims of a market that's just starting, and achieving fame, fortune, and... well, OK, the fame and fortune part are still just around the corner--BUT they do have products out the door and in the BREW distribution system and available for consumers to download onto their Verizon Wireless phones!

In the coming months, Joe will tell his story, chapter by chapter, including the thrills, spills and chills; the mistakes made and lessons learned; the we'll-never-do-that-again hiccups and brilliant workarounds; and, ultimately, finishing actual products, making real deals with Big Companies, and seeing their real products on virtual shelves.

We join Joe now as he chows down with colleague Craig, little realizing how fateful a meal this will turn out to be...

by "Joe Kerr"

There's this burger joint down on the corner that serves this awesome bacon-cheeseburger with a fried egg on top--the Bypass Burger we call it--and if that isn't enough grease to get you through the afternoon, they throw in all-you-can-eat fries. I love that place. It's the perfect lunch spot for the day after your once-a-month workout. You know, because you've earned it.

So anyway, I'm sitting there dabbing my fries into a pile of seasoned salt when Craig hits me with his latest bolt of inspiration. I'm telling you, we have got to find a way into wireless, he says. Qualcomm's behind this thing, and they've figured out a way for everyone--from the carriers on down to the developers--to make money.

Money is good, I say. Especially since I forgot my wallet and you're paying for this burger.

Craig doesn't slow down. Okay, he continues, so the Internet didn't turn out to be the early retirement plan we thought it was. You gotta admit we had some fun.

I admitted it.

Well this is going to be more fun. The cell phone is going to become the new, cool marketing medium. You think about a color handset with a boatload of memory and suddenly the potential of the thing becomes clear: Millions of users, scattered all over the map, accessing email, playing games, sending and receiving digital photos, participating in multi-users contests--I'm telling you, done right, the branding opportunities are unbelievable.

A cell phone rings. The guy behind me answers it, and I notice that he is one of about a half a dozen people in the diner with a cheeseburger in one hand and a mobile phone in the other.

Unbelievable? I just smile, because in truth, it's not hard to believe at all.

Next thing I know we're holed up in a borrowed office--along with a few of our nerdy friends--repapering the walls with flip charts and Post-it notes. One thing I've learned is that when Craig gets geared up, it's a pretty good idea to grab one of his belt-loops and let him drag you along for the ride.

The afternoon flies by. Six hours and an entire container of Jelly Bellies later, we've made more lists than David Letterman. Application Ideas. Rich Guys We Know. Former Clients to Stay in Touch With. Possible Business Names. Hungry Children Counting on Us to Bring Home a Paycheck.

That day we make two important decisions: After rejecting such sure-fire winners as Spicy Tuna Roll and Wire You Looking At Me? we decide to call our new venture Thumbworks. We

also decide that the best way to play this wireless game is to get somebody else to pay for it. (I'm reminded of that old joke Steve Martin used to tell, back in his stand-up days. He'd say: "You can be a millionaire and not pay any taxes." Then, after a pause for effect: "First: Get a million dollars. . . ." Easier said than done, I thought.)

Ever the visionary, Craig puts it into terms even I can understand. Think of it this way, he says, diagramming something indecipherable on the flipchart. If we start building apps today, we're not going to make a dime for--what? Six months? A year? But if we get *somebody else* to pay us to build them--we're in business tomorrow. So we used to look for clients . . . now we look for *sponsors*.

Over the next few weeks, we become the suck-up kings. We send e-mails to everyone we know who has any professional affiliation with a brand we might be able to leverage. We contact old friends, meet former colleagues for breakfast, we make up excuses to call people who have never heard of us. And everywhere we turn we make a similar pitch--that is, we make it up as we go. We just need one of these people to catch the vision, Craig keeps reminding us. We need to help them recognize that wireless is a cheap new opportunity to build the brand. We get them to pay to develop the app--and cover our costs--and then we get a piece of every app that's sold.

Of course, as it turns out, most of the people we contact don't have a clue what we are talking about. Why would anyone want to put a computer program on a cell phone? There's no keyboard. Isn't that what PDAs are for? Sounds like the Internet revisited to me. So we have to compose the wireless primer--and try to teach our prospects things we only learned a few months earlier ourselves.

(True story: I remember this awful moment just when we were getting started. I'm sitting at some sort of wireless confab--you know, the sort of thing where we all get together to try to get the outside world to take us more seriously. Anyway, everyone keeps talking about SMS and--I kid you not--I don't have a clue what they're talking about. I work up the nerve to ask the guy next to me . . . *and he doesn't know either!*)

After a couple of weeks of casting about, we finally settle on a lure that seems to interest a couple of big fish. I go to lunch with a buddy of mine who works in the sporting goods business. For an hour I try to explain to him about BREW and J2ME and Magic 8-Ball. And I'm getting nowhere. Finally, as I'm paying the check with my new AMEX, the light goes on. "You know, I'm supposed to come up with some fresh ideas for launching a new product," he offers. "See if you can come up with something like that and well talk." Meanwhile, Craig is across town trying to wheedle some work out of a former associate who has recently landed in the car business. After some cajoling, he reluctantly agrees to set up a meeting with the boss. "You guys get one shot," he says. "You'd better make it good."

We meet back up to compare notes. Everyone's very excited. But one question lingers, hanging over the celebration like clouds at a picnic. Finally someone speaks it, and the rain begins to fall:

"Um, guys? Now what do we do?"

Next month: In Episode Two, Joe and team put on a show!

Joe Kerr is the pseudonym of a software engineer working for a real wireless software company that has just published several real products, including the one profiled in this series. He can be reached at kerr@devx.com.

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