



Contentful helps Axel Springer reinvent news on the go

Back in 2013, Axel Springer Ideas Ventures decided to build a brand new type of news app. Targeted at busy German commuters, the Kompakt app presents curated daily news in the format of micro stories. Each of these stories consists of up to a dozen individual cards mixing together news reporting, editorial photos, interactive polls and rich media like online videos or embedded tweets. Kompakt readers can easily navigate between news stories and individual cards using simple swipe gestures, while subtle visual cues help them retrace their steps in the app. It is available both on iOS and Android, and was featured as App of the Year in 2014 by Apple.

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Axel Springer Ideas Ventures (IDEAS) is strategic product development and seed stage laboratory of Axel Springer, a leading European publishing company. Based in Berlin, the lab develops products that will help shape the future of the media. IDEAS build companies, further Axel Springer's existing properties and connect an international portfolio of brands with entrepreneurs that know how to leverage the assets of Europe's leading digital media house.

Requirements

- Template-free platform for creating & managing content
- Easy-to-use editing interface;
- A scalable way to deliver content to mobile apps

Results

- Fast and reliable API for plugging content into mobile apps
- Ability to quickly produce structured content for non-linear storytelling
- Highly scalable CDN architecture for handling peaks in user traffic



Dark Before Dawn

The creative team charged with building the app had a good idea of how the new app should look: numerous user tests with high-fidelity prototypes helped to identify navigation patterns and layouts that worked best on a smartphone screen. The real challenge, however, was to find a scalable way of publishing daily content. “We knew that we will have to rely on APIs to get the content into the app,” says Christian Chyzyk, CTO for strategic product development. “But all the traditional CMS platforms we looked at implemented API support as an afterthought and - as a result - suffered from absolutely terrible limitations.”

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“We started thinking about building our own content delivery service; we even sketched some technical specifications, but, frankly, the thought of building such service with limited resources, in a period of just three months was daunting,” he continues. “Discovering that Contentful has worked on exactly this problem for almost two years was a big surprise to us.” Early prototypes followed and after experimenting with API services and the underlying content model, Kompakt’s team soon grew convinced that Contentful’s technology could fill the missing gap in the original puzzle.



Now more “wow”

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Grischa Rodust, Senior Editor at Die Welt

The content for Die Welt Kompakt’s app is prepared by the team of nine editors, who select around fifty top stories of the day and produce anywhere between 300 and 500 individual cards for these stories. “The key advantage of using Contentful was the fact that our editorial team could focus on getting stories out rather than sweat technical details,” says Grischa Rodust, Senior Editor at Die Welt. “Our efficiency gains came down to two critical factors: the ability to define our custom content structure and strict separation of content, managed by our news editors, and its presentation, done by the design and development team” concludes Grischa Rodust.



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The Contentful platform did not only offer a straightforward way to define (and modify) content types, but also allowed editors to piece together related entries of different types. Christian Chyzyk sums up his experience of setting up app content in the following way: “If before, the challenge of creating a robust informational architecture lied in meticulously defining underlying data structures and praying they work for years to come, with Contentful our attention shifted to prototyping and tweaking as we go along. After all, we can update an existing data model in under a minute.”

Use of the Contentful platform to power mobile content simplified the development efforts around Kompakt in another crucial way too: Contentful’s entry editor stripped away any presentational elements and encouraged editors to create their content in a structured way. Thus, texts are saved in markdown format, images are stored as assets to be resized on the fly, and dates, locations and code snippets are explicitly stored in appropriate formats. This in turn led to a highly consistent app design - since there was no need to worry about unescaped tags and legacy CSS - and a much improved user experience stemming from the use of native iOS effects for content formatting and presentation.

The Winning DNA

“Whatever concern we had - be it ensuring business continuity, solving technical issues or finding out what new features to expect in the coming months - members of the Contentful team responded to our requests and solved problems in a timely manner,” continues Ulrich Machold, Creative Director of Strategic Product Development at IDEAS. “Once the Kompakt app was launched and featured in the App Store for six weeks without a single technical glitch and a number of emergencies on our side received a prompt response, I came to be convinced that the team at Contentful has the right DNA to become a highly successful player in the CMS market.”

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In retrospective, the bet Axel Springer Ideas Ventures has placed on Contentful technology paid off handsomely: the Kompakt app not only stood out among the competitors for its radical simplicity and fresh user experience and was featured by Apple as App of the Year 2014, it also was completed in just two months leading to considerable financial savings. And the benefits of using the Contentful platform did not end there: several months after the successful launch of Kompakt iOS app, the team launched an app for Android phones as well. Good thing is – the editorial team didn't have to put any extra effort to make the iOS-ready content reach the Android screens.



Contentful is content management platform for web applications, mobile apps and connected devices. It allows you to create, edit & manage content in the cloud and publish it anywhere via powerful API. Contentful offers tools for managing editorial teams and enabling cooperation between organisations.

To learn more about how Contentful can help you scale your publishing efforts, please visit our website at www.contentful.com or email us at sales@contentful.com.