

Simperium Boosts Power of iPhone Note-taking with Google App Engine

simperium™

At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Create an app that synchronizes content between mobile devices and computers
- Provide scalability for a seamless user experience
- Open the app to third-party developers

What they did

- Used Google App Engine to host Simplenote
- Added a Google App Engine-hosted API so third-party developers can build their own apps to work on Simplenote

What they accomplished

- Simplenote now has hundreds of thousands of users; the app receives an average of 10 million requests a day
 - More than 750 developers have signed up to build apps that use the Simplenote API
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Organization

Simperium is a fast-growing startup company (with seed funding from Y Combinator) that makes mobile products for phones, laptops and tablets. It released Simplenote as a showcase of this platform. Today, with hundreds of thousands of users, Simperium serves 10 million requests daily and provides cloud-based access to over 500 gigabytes of text notes.

Google App Engine is at the heart of it. The Simperium team chose App Engine so they wouldn't have to worry about scaling, deploying more servers or complex system administration.

Challenge

When the iPhone was released in 2008, Simperium co-founders Mike Johnston and Fred Cheng immediately saw a business opportunity to add to the built-in Notes app. Notes had only one font and no search function, and they quickly created the Simplenote app to address these deficiencies.

Once Simplenote was released on Apple's App Store, Johnston and Cheng were ready to keep going. "We wanted to take our app to the next level by solving the problem of being able to get text notes from your smartphone onto your computer, and vice-versa," explains Johnston.

Their solution had two components, allowing users to create and sync text notes on their computers as well as on their smartphones. Behind the scenes, the app would use a server to store and synchronize the notes across both device platforms.

The entrepreneurs were excited about the opportunity. Their only concern was the expense and effort of buying, deploying and maintaining the servers required to store data from users' mobile devices and computers.

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—Mike Johnston, co-founder, Simperium

Solution

During the development period for the synchronized version of Simplenote, the original release had only a few hundred users, but Johnston and Cheng knew that those numbers might increase rapidly. After their new synchronization features were incorporated, thousands of new users would likely flock to the

About Google App Engine

Google App Engine enables businesses to build and host web apps on the same systems that power Google applications. Google App Engine offers fast development and deployment; simple administration, with no need to worry about hardware, patches or backups; and effortless scalability.

For more information visit

www.google.com/enterprise/appengine

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—Mike Johnston, co-founder, Simperium

app, meaning they needed to find a reliable server solution that could scale for fast growth.

When they were researching options, Google App Engine surfaced as a highly recommended option.

"Google App Engine was big news and everywhere we looked, people were blogging about it," Johnston says. "You don't have to deal with setting up servers, and you can scale without concern. We knew we had our answer."

Once they started using Google App Engine, the Simperium team found the platform simple to use. Its intuitive dashboard interface made it easy to deploy code, maintain different versions and modify the app while still serving live traffic. It even lets them test new features and make changes before rolling them out to users.

Deploying the new version of Simplenote on Google App Engine went quickly, and Simperium started to see immediate interest from users. Soon after, Johnston and Cheng presented during Demo Day at Y Combinator, a program that helps startups find funding. Celebrity couple Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher were at the event; Moore liked the Simplenote app so much that she tweeted about it.

The Simplenote creators were thrilled with the attention – and not the least bit nervous. "If we had our infrastructure on anything other than Google App Engine, we would have felt a great deal of anxiety because of the impending traffic spike," Johnston says. "We didn't even consider that this might be a problem because we had enormous confidence in its ability to scale." When Kutcher tweeted about another company at the event, "their servers went down," Cheng recalls.

Results

Simplenote now has hundreds of thousands of users and averages more than 10 million requests a day. It has more than 500 gigabytes of text note data stored in Google App Engine.

"We wouldn't be where we are today without Google App Engine, because we would have been spending too much time dealing with servers," Johnston says. "You don't have to buy servers. You don't have to hire people with the experience required to configure and maintain those servers. Google App Engine handles all that for you so you can focus on developing your product."

Johnston and Cheng continue to add more features and functionality to Simplenote, including an API (also hosted on Google App Engine) that lets third-party developers build their own apps to access Simplenote from all kinds of devices, including Windows™, Mac OS X, Android™ and Blackberry®. More than 750 developers have signed up to do this.

Using Google App Engine should be a "no-brainer," Johnston says, especially for entrepreneurs just getting started. "If you're trying to build an application where the value is more in the user experience than the guts of the technology, it makes sense to start with something like Google App Engine," he says. "It gives you time to focus on the user experience, which is so essential. We're living proof that you can successfully build a product on Google App Engine."

Johnston also recommends Google App Engine for established companies that want to quickly deploy tools and don't want to configure and manage servers.

