Quicker Go-to-market techniques for Windows Phone apps

This article explains how to accelerate development time of WP7 apps and quickly publish to marketplace

Introduction

You have a great app idea, now how do you get it out to the masses quickly? This article discusses a few methods to accelerate the time to deploy your application to the marketplace. It also enlists numerous resources on the web that will be useful in doing so.

Icons, graphics and all the art work help you need

It is obvious that getting some help on the artwork will further reduce the development time. Most of us Google for images, look for icon packs and then use them as reference art for graphics in our application. Also remember that windowsphone follows the Metro UI style guide, which is minimalistic in nature.

There are further complications coming into picture because you unintentionally design for two themes in windowsphone (dark and light theme). When the default theme is changed in the phone, color change of the "default" application bar in the application - This change cannot be controlled unless a custom application bar is designed. To create an application bar icon that works for both themes, read this article on Kirupa.

So overall, design has to be carefully dealt if you are sole developer working without a designer. But wouldn't it be wonderful if you can get a royalty-free icon pack?

Here is a list of free metro icon packs (not complete, please feel free to add, when you notice something new)

1. http://metro.windowswiki.info/mi/
2. http://icons8.com/download-huge-windows8-set/ - this is designed for Win 8 (desktop) but can be reused with minimal effort

But probably the best resource with over 600+ icons that are customizable come from SyncFusion. Their free desktop application MetroStudio allows you to customize and generate PNG icons of different sizes or even make a XAML code block out of the same. This tool is extremely useful for developers.

SyncFusion intro video

Complex UI components and other libraries

The default SDK comes with a great bunch of UI components, but let's accept it, with UI there is constant innovation happening. Data representative grids, charts, category-based long lists, date pickers are not available in the default SDK. Every now and then you'll need these controls and hence here is a resource list for such UI components built for WP7. Please read their copyright information in their website and not necessarily free.

1. From telerik http://www.telerik.com/products/windows-phone/overview/all-controls.aspx
2. From SyncFusion - http://www.syncfusion.com/products/user-interface-edition/windows-phone

(C) Copyright Nokia 2014. All rights reserved.

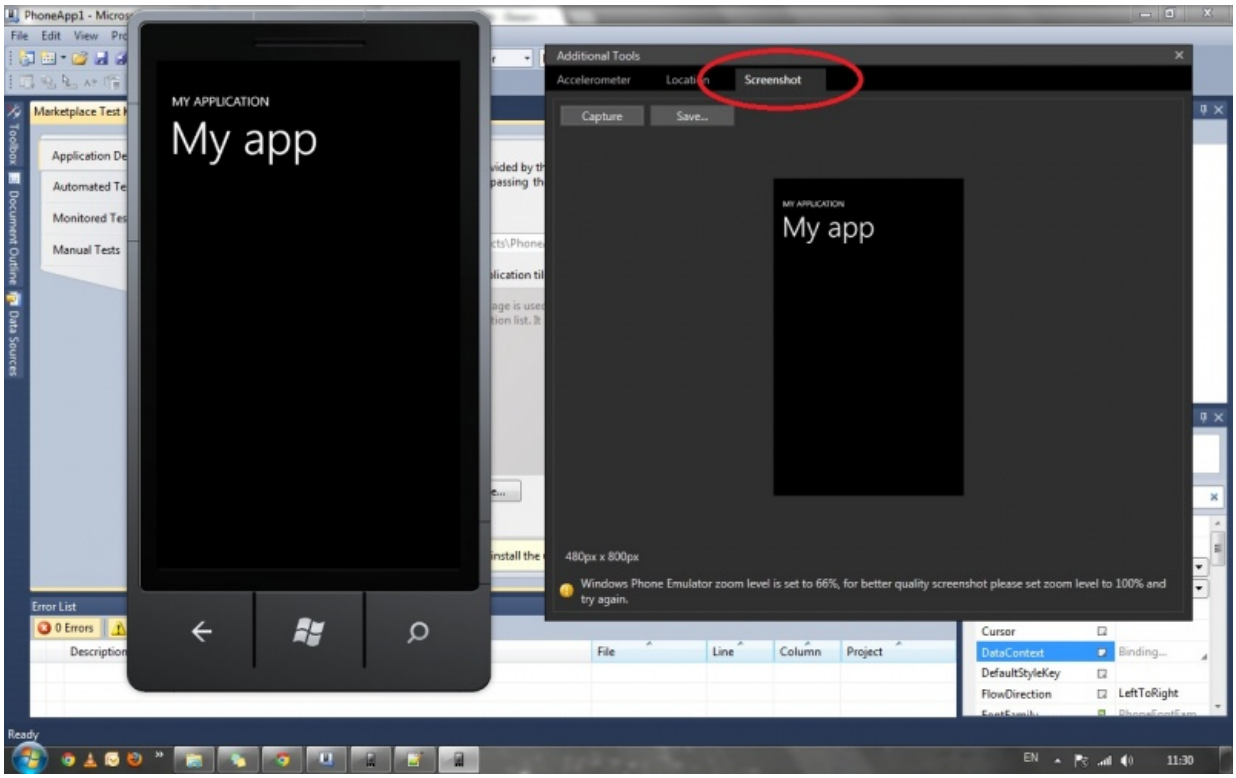
3. From Codeplex - http://silverlight.codeplex.com/releases/view/75888

Testing in emulator

The windowsphone emulator is your first friend who helps you to test your code on a quick basis. Your developer-unlocked device (how to ?) can also help you on this. The emulator comes built-in with the SDK and is integrated with the Visual Studio environment and hence gives you a comprehensive toolchain to build and test apps. The emulator is quite complete and can be used to test features like accelerometer, GPS location, alarms, live-tiles etc. Since this is well-known topic, let's leave this here.

Taking screenshots with emulator

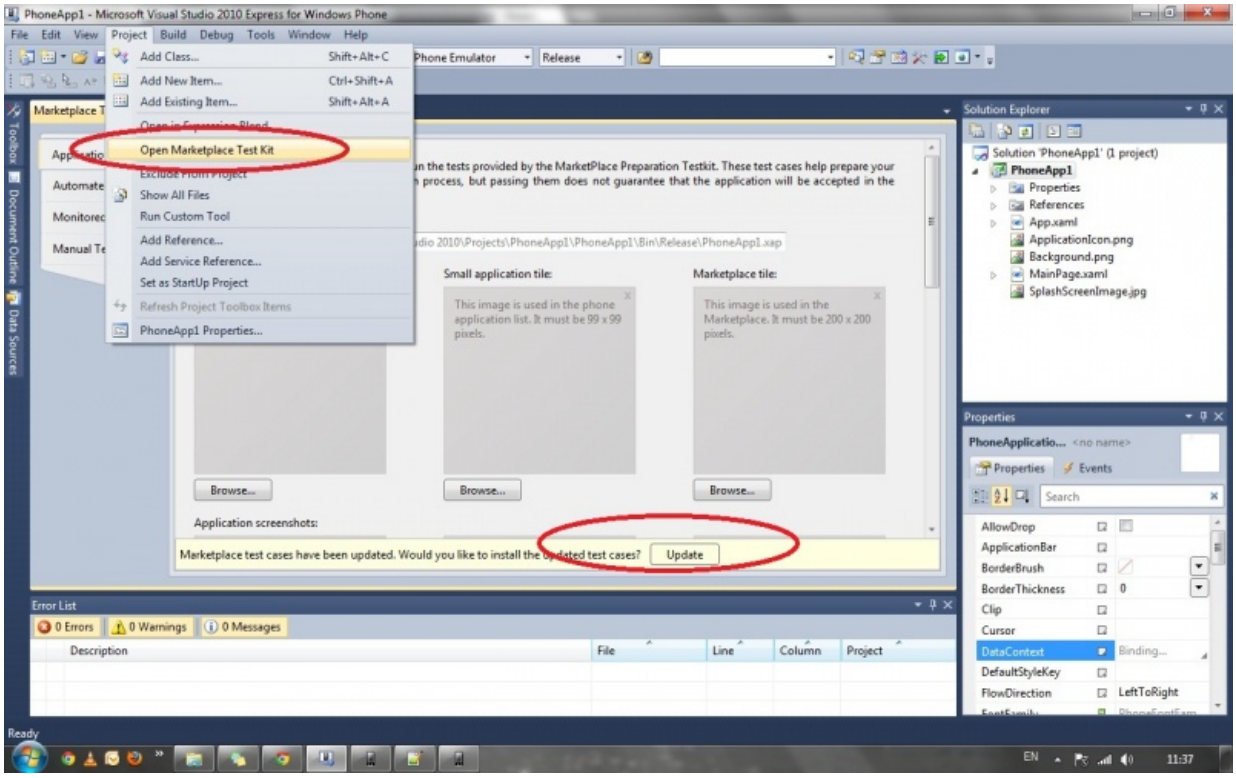
Now with all the help above and your own prodigy, you have completed your own application. You are now close to publishing to the market and for the same, you need marketplace metadata. The marketplace needs some screenshots to showcase your application better. Honestly, this step is a bit of a drag in most other mobile platforms but it's super easy on WP7. The emulator has an in-built capability to take screenshots and save them.



Windows marketplace testkit

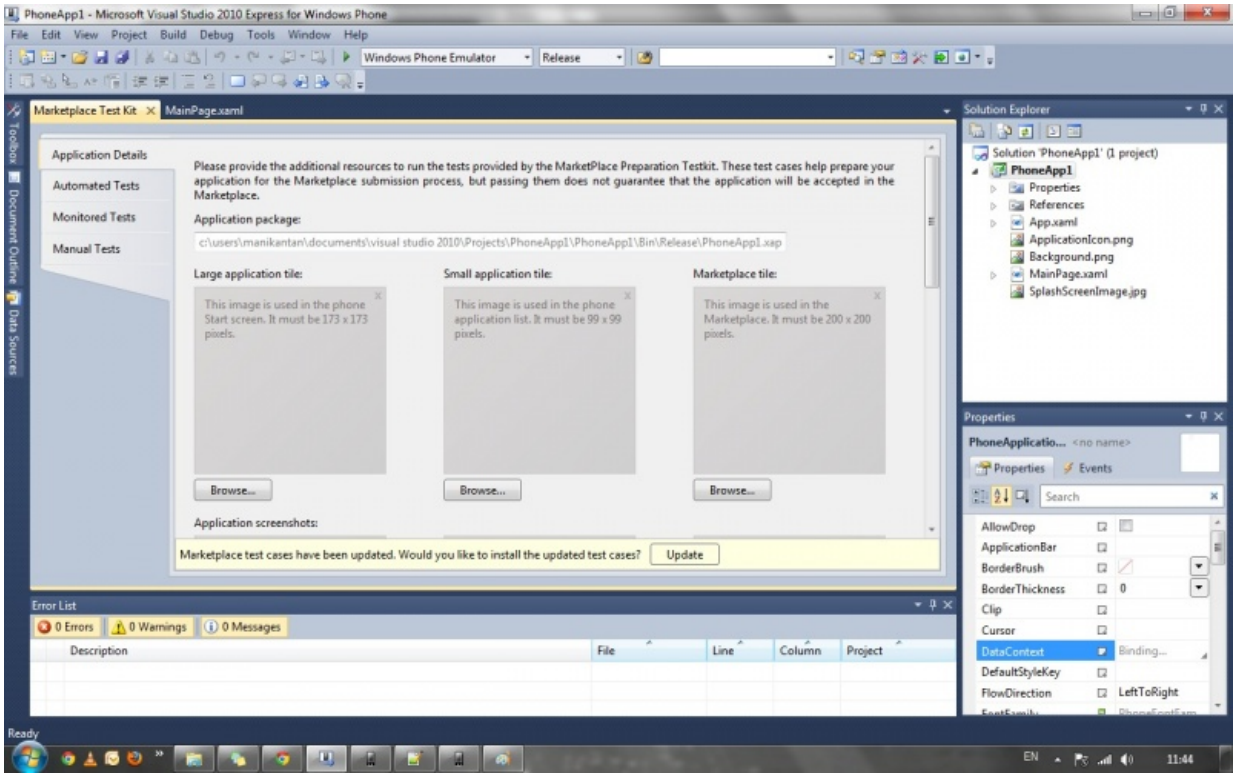
We all know how frustrating it can get if you published your application for approval to the market and 2-3 days later we get to know it fails their test. So wouldn't it be great if you knew what they tested for? Because if you tested for compliance in those tests the chances of passing are not only higher, but you also know that your app is of great quality. The Windows marketplace testkit comes built-in with Visual Studio for Windows Phone; it is a short checklist for the marketplace and hints what kind of performance metrics the QA approval team looks for when they validate your application. Microsoft also frequently updates their compliance requirements to ensure better standards of the apps. So whenever there is an update, there is a prompt to help you update this data, so you only test against their latest validation requirements.

(C) Copyright Nokia 2014. All rights reserved.



There are four tabs in this kit, the first tab APPLICATION DETAILS tells you the different files required to submit to marketplace. The XAP file, application icons, tile icons and the screenshots constitute this checklist. The second tab AUTOMATED TESTS simply checks if the images uploaded are of the right dimensions and if you have all this required information. MONITORED TESTS is a short list of test cases that have to be run on the actual windows phone device. The tool checks for memory usages and existence of any unhandled exceptions during execution. The last tab is a list that has to be checked manually one-after the other. For a more detailed review of the marketplace testkit, visit this MSDN page.

Here is the first tab



Video

This video broadly discusses the usage of the windowsphone marketplace testkit. NOTE : I'm not its creator

(C) Copyright Nokia 2014. All rights reserved.

WindowsPhone marketplace Testkit

Summary

This article describes shortcuts to develop your application and get them to market quickly.

DISCLAIMER : There are several toolkits and products listed in this article, the author does not directly endorse any of them.

(C) Copyright Nokia 2014. All rights reserved.