

Web App Performance: Think 1990s.



Don MacVittie, 2012-16-03

As I've mentioned before, I am intrigued by the never-ending cycle of repetition that High Tech seems to be trapped in. Mainframe->Network->Distributed->Virtualized->Cloud, which while different, shares a *lot* of characteristics with a mainframe environment. The same is true with disks, after several completely different iterations, performance relative to CPUs and Application needs are really not that different from 20 years ago. The big difference is that 20 years ago we as users had a lot more tolerance for delays than they do today. One of my co-workers was talking about an article he recently read that said users are now annoyed literally "in the blink of an eye" at page load times.



Right now, web applications are going through one of those phases in the performance space, and it's something we need to be talking about. Not that delivery to the desktop is a problem, network speeds, application development improvements (both developers learning tricks and app tools getting better), and processing power have all combined to overcome performance issues in most applications, in fact, we're kind of in a state of nirvana. Unless you have a localized problem, application performance is pretty darned good. Doubt me? Consider even trying to use something like YouTube in the 90s. Yeah, that's a good reminder of how far we've come.

But the world is evolving again. It's no longer about web application performance to PCs, because right about the time a problem gets resolved in computer-land, someone changes the game. Now it's about phones. To some extent it is about tablets, and they certainly need their love too, but when it comes to application delivery, it's about phones, because they're the slowest ship in the ocean. And according to a recent Gartner report, that won't change soon. Gartner speculates that new phones are being added so fast that 4G will be overtaken relatively quickly, even though it is far and away better performance-wise than 3G. And there's always the latency that phones have, which at this point in history is much more than wired connections – or even WLAN connections.

The Louis CK video where he makes like a cell phone user going "it.. it's not working!" when their request doesn't come back right away is funny because it is accurate. And that's bad news for IT trying to deliver the corporate interface to these devices. You need to make certain you have a method of delivering applications fast. Really fast. If the latency numbers are in the hundreds of milliseconds, then you have no time to waste – not with excess packets, not with stray requests.

Yes of course F5 offers solutions that will help you a *lot*, that's the reason I am looking into this topic, but if you're not an F5 customer, and for any reason can't/won't be, there are still things you can do, they're just not quite as effective and take a lot more man-hours. Going back through your applications to reduce the amount of data being transferred to the client (HTML can be overly verbose, and it's not the worst offender), go through and create uber-reduced versions of images for display on a phone (or buy a tool that does this for you), consider SPDY support, since Google is opening it to the world. No doubt there are other steps you can take. They're not as thorough as purchasing a complete solution designed around application performance that supports cell phones, but these steps will certainly help, if you have the man-hours to implement them.

Note that only one in three human beings are considered online today. Imagine in five years what performance needs will be. I think that number is actually inflated. I personally own seven devices that get online, and more than one of them is turned on at a time... Considering that [Lori](#) has the same number, and that doesn't count our servers, I'll assume their math over-estimates the number of actual people online. Which means there's a great big world out there waiting to receive the benefits of your optimized apps. If you can get them delivered in the blink of an eye.

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