Article published on January 13th 2012 | Software

Android Framework engineer Adam Powell wrote recently about the Android Holo theme family.

Android 4.0 showcases the Holo theme family, further refined since its debut in Android 3.0. But as most Android developers know, a new system theme for some Android devices isnâ€™t a new or uncommon event. For an Android developer, new system themes mean more design targets for their apps. Using system themes means Android app developers can take advantage of a userâ€™s existing expectations and it can save a lot of production time, but only if an Android app designer can reliably predict the results. Before Android 4.0, the variance in system themes from device to device could make it difficult to design an app with a single predictable look and feel. We set out to improve this situation for the Android app developer community in Ice Cream Sandwich and beyond.

If youâ€™re not already familiar with Androidâ€™s style and theme system, you should read Styles and Themes before continuing.

Compatibility Standard

In Android 4.0, Holo is different. Weâ€™ve made the inclusion of the unmodified Holo theme family a compatibility requirement for devices running Android 4.0 and forward. If the device has Android Market it will have the Holo themes as they were originally designed.

This standardization goes for all of the public Holo widget styles as well. The Widget.Holo styles will be stable from device to device, safe for use as parent styles for incremental customizations within your app.

The Holo theme family in Android 4.0 consists of the themes Theme.Holo, Theme.Holo.Light, and Theme.Holo.Light.DarkActionBar. To use a Holo theme, explicitly request one from your manifest on your activity or application element. Your app will be displayed using the unmodified theme on all compatible Android 4.0 devices. The Holo themes may also be used as stable parent themes for app-level theme customizations.

What about device themes?

We have no desire to restrict manufacturers from building their own themed experience across their devices. In fact weâ€™ve gone further to make this even easier. In Android 4.0â€™s API level 14, weâ€™ added a new public theme family to complement the Holo family introduced in Android 3.0: DeviceDefault. DeviceDefault themes are aliases for the deviceâ€™s native look and feel. The DeviceDefault theme family and widget style family offer ways for Android developers to target the deviceâ€™s native theme with all customizations intact.

Formally separating these theme families will also make future merges easier for manufacturers updating to a new platform version, helping more devices update more quickly. Googleâ€™s Nexus devices will alias DeviceDefault to the unmodified Holo themes.

Article Source:
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Article Keywords:
android app developer, android app developers, android app programmer, android app programmers

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