LDS Art and LDS Hymns Projects -- Interview with Hilton Campbell

Written by Tom Johnson
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In this interview at the last LDSTech Service Day, Hilton Campbell talks about a couple of LDS apps he's working on -- an LDS Art app and an LDS Hymns app.

Here's a general transcript of our conversation.

Tom: We're at the LDSTech Service Day in August, and I'm talking to Hilton Campbell about a couple of new applications he's working on. So Hilton, you're working on an LDS Art application as well as a Hymns application. What can you tell us about these?

Hilton: The LDS Hymns application was donated to us by a member of the community who created a hymns app including sheet music for all of our hymns as well as a Children's Song Book app. He has kindly donated the code to the Church so that we can continue to improve on it and add more content. That's what we're working on now.

Beyond the sheet music he already included, we're trying to add the ability to play music and also create a playlist, so you can listen to it on a commute or in a classroom setting or at home.

Tom: Tell me little about the LDS Art application.

Hilton: The LDS Art application is something I thought of creating several months back, and I created a prototype for my children. It turned out to be really helpful during sacrament meeting. For example, when we wanted to help my little three-year old be more reverent, we would just pull the app out and she could flip through the hymns -- just like the photo application on the

iPhone -- and see pictures of Jesus, New Testament and Book of Mormon prophets, as well as zoom in and out. She likes to look at the sheep next to Jesus, that kind of thing. Although it was helpful for keeping her reverent, it's also something that could be useful in a classroom study at Church or presentations.

Tom: Is the hymns app an official community project that is open right now, or it is still in process?

Hilton: It's still in process. We have one community volunteer already doing some work on it. He's created a really cool prototype that makes it look like an iBook with flipping pages. And again we have the source code donated by someone in the community who released it privately before.

[Update: The hymns app is now an official community project. Go to Projects and join the LDS Music for iPhone/iPad project.]

Tom: The model where somebody creates an app, takes it to a certain point, and then donates the code is interesting. For example, let's say you want to make a certain app but the Church says, "No, we want to focus on these other projects right now." You code the app anyway and maybe at some future point donate that code. What do you think of that model? Is that something you see as appealing?

Hilton: Yes, I think it's a great thing that happens, because like you say, the Church has only so many resources that we can dedicate to projects. And it often takes someone who is entrepreneurial and innovative to come up with something that is really cool, that they think really needs to be done and they have the resources to do it and put it together. Suppose they put their app out there and people love it. Maybe they don't have the time to take is as far as they would like to, so they might donate the code to us so we can move it forward. It really helps to get the app out there to prove it so we can see that it's something we should focus on.

Tom: You worked on some other community projects prior to this. One was a Clean Water Evaluation app or something, right?

Hilton: That's right.

Tom: Tell me little about that.

Hilton: I came to the last LDSTech Conference and was signed up to work on the Gospel Library Project, so I came in and we were having a meeting. Then someone came to the meeting to say they needed someone to work on the Clean Water Evaluation project. They said some people signed up for it but haven't shown. They were in need of a developer, and I decided to devote myself to do that.

I went and learned about this project -- they were creating an app for Church service missionaries to visit sites in Africa where they had installed water pumps or water wells. They used the app to evaluate the status of the wells, to get the geo-coordinates and take pictures of it and upload it all to the Internet so we can analyze it here at the Church.

Tom: That's a cool app. I remember we did a post about that and showed some screen shots. It looked really interesting and intuitive. Another question -- you used to be just a community volunteer and now you transitioned to being an actual employee. What motivated you to come and work for the Church?

Hilton: It's the Church! It's something I've always wanted to do. I always felt that it was great that I was able to program something that I enjoy and felt that it was a talent the Lord gave me. I wanted to give back to the world and the Church. I've always felt it would be a really great thrill to work for the Church and do that kind of thing.

It didn't seem like the opportunity was right when I talked to the Church a few times before, but this last time I was approached by Dave Hamilton and we had a really good conversation. I just felt like this was the right time to make this move.

Tom: So how long have you been an employee now?

Hilton: This is my third week.

Tom: Your third week! Where did you work previously?

Hilton: At Google.

Tom: So how does it compare working for Google versus working for the Church? What are the main differences?

Hilton: Well, sadly there are not as many perks here at the Church as there are at Google – no sleep pods, no massage on site…

Tom: Sleep pods?

Hilton: Yes, to take little naps in the afternoon, and there's also a doctor on site. You don't even have to pay a co-pay or anything. You can just knock on the door and talk to him for an exam or whatever. I don't know, the benefits go on and on.

But nevertheless, working here at the Church is really great too. I feel that that the team that I'm working with right now is fantastic -- people share the same kind of vision. I feel like at Google I was a small fish in a really great pond, filled with lots and lots of talented people, that my contributions were not so great. But here at the Church I think there is a lot of opportunity for talented saints to come and really contribute. And I think to be here, we need to use everything that the Lord is blessing us with.

Tom: Great, do you have any last thoughts or any closing remarks you would like to say?

Hilton: No, thanks for your time.

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Tom: Well, thanks Hilton. I appreciate you coming to LDSTech.

If you'd like to get involved in the hymns project, log in to the site with your LDS Account. Then click Project and join the LDS Music for iPhone/iPad project. Special thanks to Richard Bernard for transcribing this video.