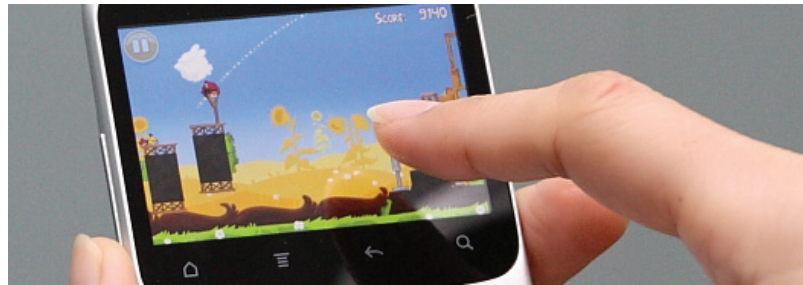# Introducing Android

Android is an operating system for mobile/cell phones and tablets, in much the same way that Microsoft Windows is an operating system for PCs. The Android operating system is maintained by Google and comes with a range of useful features as standard.

Standard Android features include Google Search and Google Maps, which means you can easily search for information on the web and find directions from your phone – as you would on your computer. This is handy for discovering things like train times and getting directions when out and about. Other Google services, such as Gmail and Google Earth can also be accessed from cell phones running the Android operating system. You can easily check Facebook and Twitter profiles too, through a variety of applications (apps) – making it ideal for social networking.

There is a huge range of custom apps available to download from the Google Play Shop. For example there are camera apps such as "Camera 360" – that allow you to take photos with artistic effects, and music player apps such as "Winamp" – that allow you to import MP3s and create playlists, and popular game apps, such as "Angry Birds" – that provide great fun entertainment.

Don't forget

Many apps available on the Android Market are free but some will require payment.

Android is an open-source operating system, built on the open-source Linux Kernel, which means it can be easily extended to incorporate new cutting-edge technologies as they emerge. Android was brilliantly designed, from the ground-up, to enable developers to create compelling apps that can fully exploit all the host device's capabilities. For example, an app can access all of a phone's core functionality such as making calls, sending text messages, or taking photos. The Android platform will continue to evolve as the developer community works together to build innovative mobile applications and you can be part of this exciting innovation process with App Inventor for Android.

App Inventor for Android

App Inventor enables you to develop applications for Android phones using a web browser and either a connected phone or emulator – without writing a single line of code. It is a web-based tool developed by Google Labs in which the App Inventor servers store your work and help you keep track of your projects. When the app is finished you can package it to produce an "application package" (Android **.apk** file) that can be shared around and installed on any Android phone, just like any other Android app. App Inventor is supported by a wide range of operating systems and web browsers, with these minimum specifications:

Computer operating system requirements:

- **Windows** : Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7+

- **Linux** : Ubuntu 8+, Debian 5+

- **Mac** : Mac OS X 10.5+

Web browser requirements:

- **Internet Explorer** : 7.0+

- **Mozilla Firefox** : 3.6+

- **Google Chrome** : 4.0+

- **Apple Safari** : 5.0+

Additionally App Inventor requires two pieces of software to be installed on your computer:

- **Java** : to provide software libraries for the web-based App Inventor development environment

- **App Inventor Setup** : to provide client-side support for the web-based App Inventor development environment

The installation process for both Java and App Inventor Setup is described on the following pages.

Hot tip

Since its original development at Google Labs, App Inventor is now hosted by the MIT Center for Mobile Learning (CML).