

Registered Developer Guidelines for good practice

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to Registered Developers in approaching the development and marketing of both software and hardware applications for use with Acorn's 32 bit computer platforms.

The points noted are not intended to tell the developer how to run his or her own business. They do, however, reflect areas of third party product design and marketing that customers sometimes have concerns about and around which, in particular, their complaints to Acorn are centred. Some of the content also relates to the need for Registered Developers to be in tune with Acorn's overall product strategy. If both Acorn and its third party developers provide a consistent message with regard to added value and deliver effectively against that to the benefit of the customer then the customer will come back for more and pass on the good news to others.

Guidelines

1) Developers should design to the interface specifications (in terms of both hardware and software) published by Acorn from time to time.

2) The look-and-feel and ease-of-use of RISC OS are valued by most customers. Applications should provide a user interface consistent with the intent of the RISC OS Style Guide. Applications writers should not normally differentiate by Look-and-Feel to the detriment of consistency and intuitiveness. If, however, they believe there is a sound reason to bring forward new ideas, Developers should approach Acorn Developer Support with a view to discussing those ideas. Differentiation is best approached by virtue of customer problem solving, information content, ease-of-use etc.

Customers are often best served by small applications which multi-task on the Desktop, each of which targets a specific need. As the customer needs change, these small applications can then be upgraded or replaced on an incremental basis.

3) Applications should be expected to work across the range of Acorn 32 bit platforms wherever possible and be flexible enough to allow the user to choose from a wide range of peripheral equipment. In practice this means designing for screen-mode independence, avoiding any assumptions relating to the filing system in use, not programming to the machine hardware and so on. Following the guidance in the Style Guide and PRM should ensure that these requirements are met. Where Acorn already provides a suitable module to carry out a specific task e.g. the colour picker, then this should be used in preference to custom code.

Acorn's customers will often expect to move applications products onto a new Acorn platform. This should not be considered a lost sale, but the opportunity to sell an upgrade to the customer with enhanced features suitable for capturing the best of the new platform and providing fixes to the inevitable bugs found during the life of the previous version.

4) It is important that developers have a defined development process that ensures that the customer receives a quality product. The term 'quality' relates not just to performance to published product specification but also to delivery against any published dates as well as adequate after-sales support. Having BS5750 quality accreditation, although desirable, is not in itself necessary for many third parties but the discipline of setting objectives and measuring performance against these objectives will help the developer to meet customer expectations.

5) In creating a new product, the developer should be clear on the benefits, if any, of each of the product features and determine at which part of the market these features or the product itself should be targetted. It is especially important that the designer, whether hardware engineer or programmer, carries out some market tests of the product specification and prototype product so that the product features are customer driven, not just technology driven.

6) The developer should carry out quality audits on pre-release products against defined specifications and only release products for sale when reasonable performance has been achieved. If features are not fully functional based on the quality audit, he or she should consider deleting these features and introducing them later at a suitable product upgrade point. Whatever is provided to the customer, it should work as expected; if the customer is left happy, he or she will normally return and pay for a suitably enhanced product at a later date.

7) Developers should not promise delivery dates unless they have a plan with suitable resources to enable delivery on that date. If they wish to announce or demonstrate a product early, it should be made clear to potential customers at what stage the product is in the development process. Developers should not accept orders or money without the customer understanding the true position. If something should go wrong, they must keep the customer informed in writing. Customer payments should not normally be cleared through until actual product despatch. Worst case delivery on mail-order sales should normally be 28 days from order receipt.

8) Developers should keep Acorn Developer Support informed, in writing, of any bugs or other problems encountered of which they believe Acorn should be aware. They should not assume that Acorn already knows of a problem; they may well be the first to find a problem resulting from a particular combination of circumstances.

9) Developers should try wherever possible to avoid introducing yet another similar product where there is already adequate choice and competition available to the customer. Competition is desirable but additional investment should preferably go towards extending the market or range of differentiated products rather than diluting the return on investment for all in an already overcrowded market or product area.

10) If a Developer believes Acorn has some software that would help achieve his product objectives faster, then he should ask if it is available for Developer use. We are very keen to help and wish to avoid developers re-inventing the wheel when their resources could be used more usefully in developing new ideas.

11) If a Developer would like guidance on new product opportunities or the chance of using our engineering or marketing staff as a sounding board, then we will try to assist if asked.