

FileMaker Go for the iPad iPhone & iPod Touch by Arthur Evans



Arthur Evans, from the on site FileMaker training specialists AWE Consultancy, introduces FileMaker Go, the new App from FileMaker that enables a FileMaker file to be used on an iPad, iPhone or iPod touch

Introduction

Apple's iPad, with its 9.7-inch high-resolution screen, and the iPhone 4, with its 3.5 inch screen, are ideal devices for mobile database record management. The ability to view and edit records held within a FileMaker database on a device that is so much more portable than a laptop holds great potential for mobile workers. Doctors wishing to refer to patient notes while undertaking ward rounds, portable appliance testers, market researchers, and sales teams are all good examples of where an iPad or iPhone would be a far more discreet and practical platform for accessing a FileMaker file, in comparison with having to break off eye contact with a patient, interviewee, or customer, to unpack and switch on a laptop.

FileMaker have addressed the needs of the mobile database market with the launch of FileMaker Go for the iPad, iPhone and iPod touch. FileMaker Go provides direct access to FileMaker databases hosted with FileMaker Server or FileMaker Pro. Database files can also be copied directly on the iPad, iPhone and iPod touch to work with the records anywhere and without the need to remotely connect to a file.

This article presents FileMaker Go and demonstrates how easily a FileMaker Pro file can be optimised for use on Apple mobile devices.

Getting Started

FileMaker Go for the iPhone/iPod touch and FileMaker Go for the iPad are both downloadable from the iTunes App Store. The iPhone or iPod touch will need to be running OS4.0 and the iPad OS3.2 to install FileMaker Go.

While both versions of the app will run on the iPad, FileMaker Go for the iPad has been specifically designed to take advantage of the device's larger 1024 by 768 pixel screen.

As with other apps, FileMaker Go is installed on the mobile device using iTunes, after connecting and synchronising the mobile device, or alternatively can be purchased direct from the App Store using the device.



There are two ways with which FileMaker records can be used on the Apple mobile device, by connecting to a hosted file, or by storing the file locally on the device. Both methods are presented below.

Any version of FileMaker Pro that can create .fp7 files can be used to generate database files, which can be copied to the Apple mobile device and opened by FileMaker Go. However, where a connection to a remote FileMaker file is required, FileMaker Go connects to databases hosted by FileMaker Server/Server Advanced 11 and 11 and FileMaker Pro/Pro Advanced 11 and 10.

Working with FileMaker on the Mobile Device Part I

Connecting to a Hosted FileMaker Database

To access a hosted FileMaker database, once FileMaker Go has been installed on the device, the hosted file must have FileMaker Network Sharing configured. The device will need a Wi-Fi or 3G connection.

On the iPad, once FileMaker Go has been launched, the user should click on the  button, to search for local hosts, or click on the  button, to add a favourite host.

The iPad FileMaker Go home screen is shown in Figure 1.

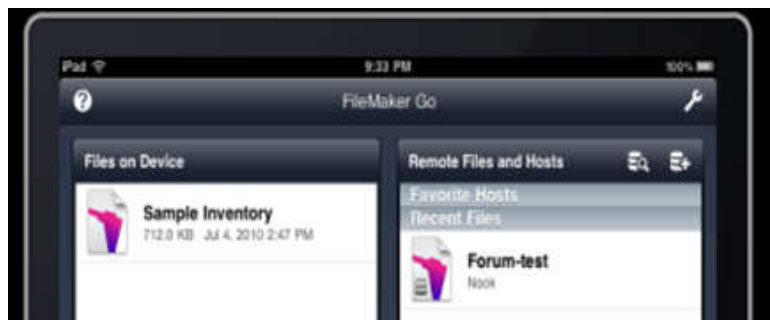


Figure 1: The FileMaker Go home screen on the iPad

On the iPhone, the user should launch FileMaker Go and click the 'Open File Browser' button in the home screen, to view or add local network hosts.

The iPhone FileMaker Go home screen and File Browser menu are shown in Figure 2.

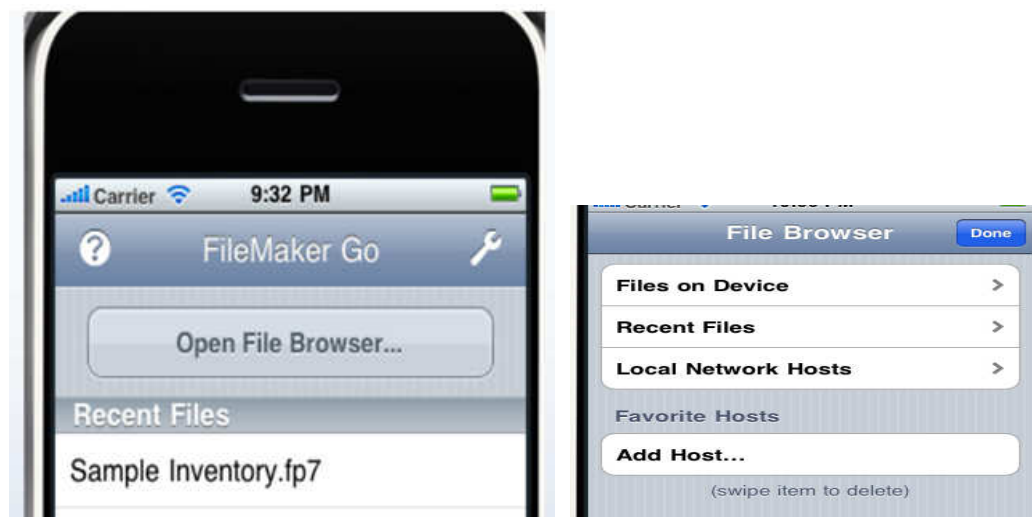


Figure 2: The FileMaker Go home screen and File Browser on the iPhone

Optimising a Hosted FileMaker Database for Device Users

FileMaker have done an amazing job in making it possible to run virtually any FileMaker file on the iPad or iPhone without modification. You can use iOS gestures such as ‘pinch’ and ‘swipe’ to zoom in and out, and scroll through a FileMaker layout. That said, there is some benefit in optimising layouts for colleagues who will be using a FileMaker file on a smaller screen with the mobile device.

A simple FileMaker script can be written by the database designer, so that when an iPad or iPhone guest connects to a file, the database can automatically detect this and switch to a layout which has been designed for the exact screen dimensions of the guest user’s device. The Script should run when the file is opened so that the user views a layout which has been optimised for the device screen.

The ‘Get (SystemPlatform)’ function can be used within an ‘If’ statement in the Script. This function returns 3 when performed on the iPad and 4 on the iPhone.

Alternatively, the ‘Get (ApplicationVersion)’ can be incorporated into an ‘If’ statement. As an example this function returns “Go 1.0.1” on the iPhone rather than “Pro 11.0v2” for a colleague using the latest version of FileMaker Pro 11 on a desktop or laptop.

A FileMaker Script using the Get (SystemPlatform) function in a series of ‘If’ statements, to identify what type of device is being used and present an optimised screen layout for each user, is shown below in Figure 3.

The database author can now select this script to run when the file is opened, by using the menu option *File > File Options > When opening this file perform script*.

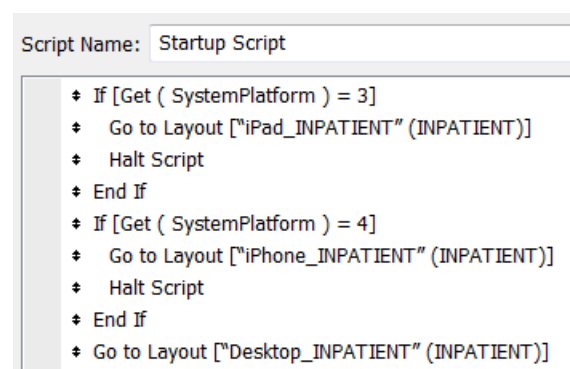


Figure 3: A simple Script which can be run when a database is opened to determine which layout appears for an iPad, iPhone or desktop client

Working with FileMaker on the Mobile Device Part II

Storing a FileMaker Database locally on the Device

FileMaker files can be transferred and used on an iPad or iPhone/iPad touch. FileMaker Go can be used to view, edit and search database records within a file. Files can be transferred onto the device using File Sharing on iTunes.

FileMaker files can also be copied to the device by sending the file as an email attachment, or via a file sharing site or the web. However it is not possible to transfer databases off the device by this method. Files can only be copied back off the device using iTunes.

With the first release of FileMaker Go there is no easy method for synchronising records which have been created or modified on the mobile device. However, these records can be imported into a main file, once the database has been copied off the mobile device. FileMaker's import rules can be used to determine how the two record sets can be synchronised or de-duplicated.

To transfer a FileMaker file onto the mobile device, connect the device to the desktop computer and launch iTunes. Now click on the Apps tab and scroll down to the File Sharing section, shown in Figure 4.

Highlight the app FileMaker Go and the Add button, to select a new FileMaker file on the desktop computer. Select the FileMaker file to be added to the device and click the Open button (note that the FileMaker file should not be open or in use).

The selected file will now appear in the FileMaker Go documents list.

If the Sync button is now selected, the file will be added to the mobile device.

To save a file from the device back to the desktop, the process is very similar. When the file document is selected, the 'Save to' button can be clicked on, and the user will be asked to select a location where the file can be copied off the device onto the desktop computer.

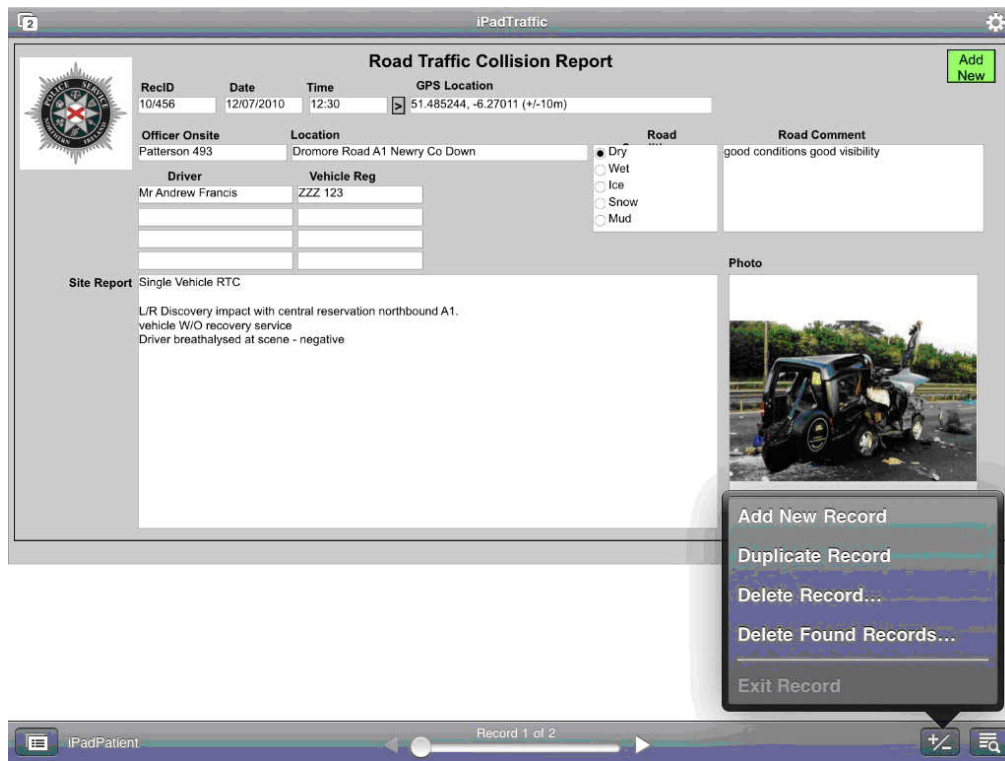



Figure 5: A FileMaker database optimised for the iPad screen with the



menu selected

The  button will open a menu that enables the user to show all records, show omitted records, omit or sort records, shown in Figure 6 for the , iPhone / iPod touch toolbar, which differs slightly from that on the iPad. On the iPhone the sliding bar is not always visible and can be opened by clicking on the circle icon, in between the next and previous record arrows.

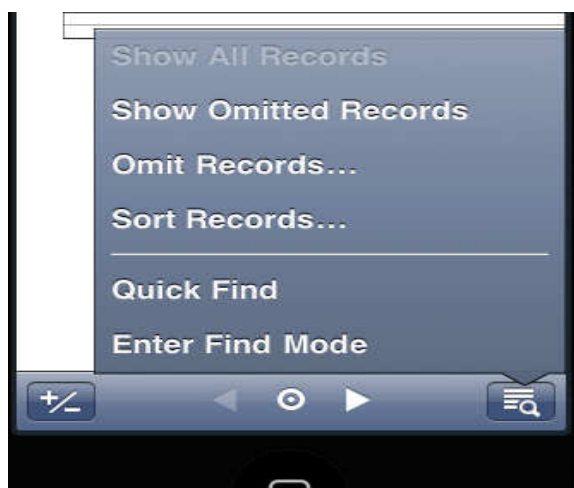



Figure 6: The  button menu

Value lists with drop down menus and pop up lists are handled very similarly with FileMaker Go.

For an iPad solution, developed for hospital doctors to update patient records during ward rounds and shown in Figure 7, a drop down list is displayed when the diagnosis field is selected.

The  button can be clicked on to show or hide the list, to make it easier to work with the rest of the form layout on the iPad screen. The keypad automatically appears when a text field is selected.

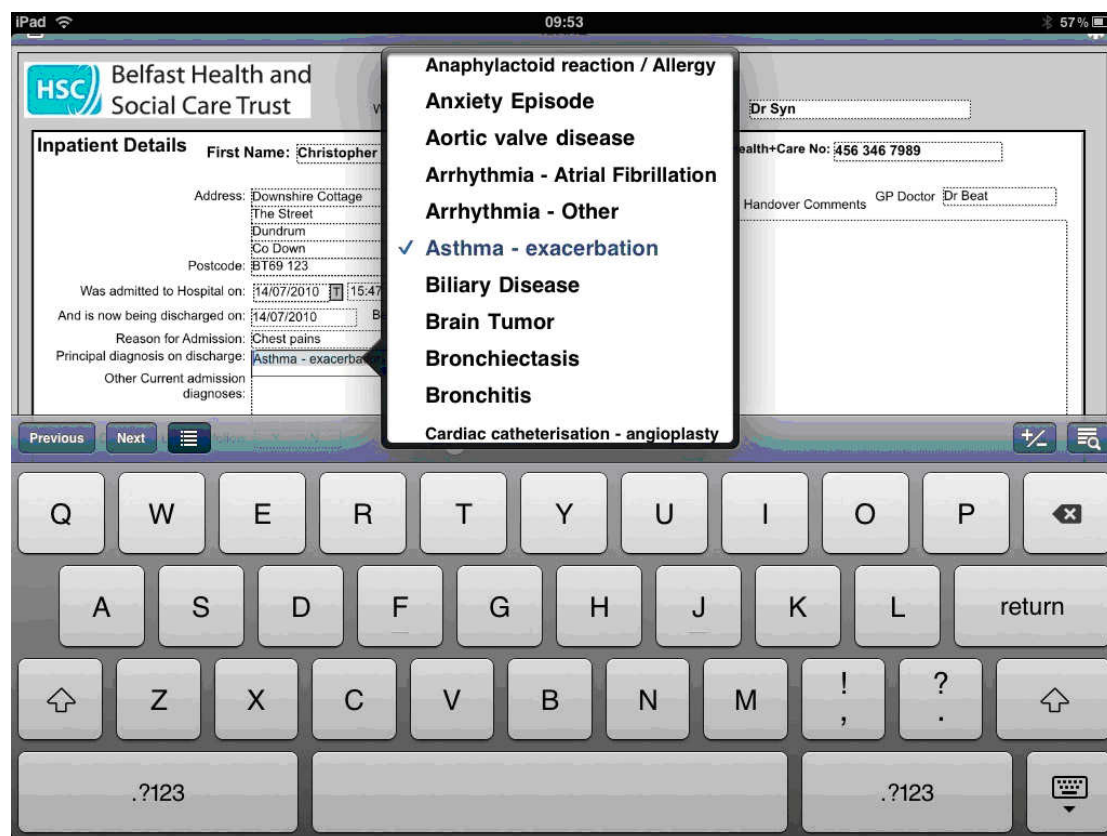


Figure 7: Drop down lists can be displayed or hidden with FileMaker Go

While there are some limitations using container fields with FileMaker Go (playback is not supported, and embedded files such as PDFs cannot be viewed), the vast majority of FileMaker Pro layout features are supported with FileMaker Go including portals, tab panels and the Web Viewer.

A layout containing related medicine records modified through a portal is shown for a patient management FileMaker Go example in Figure 8.

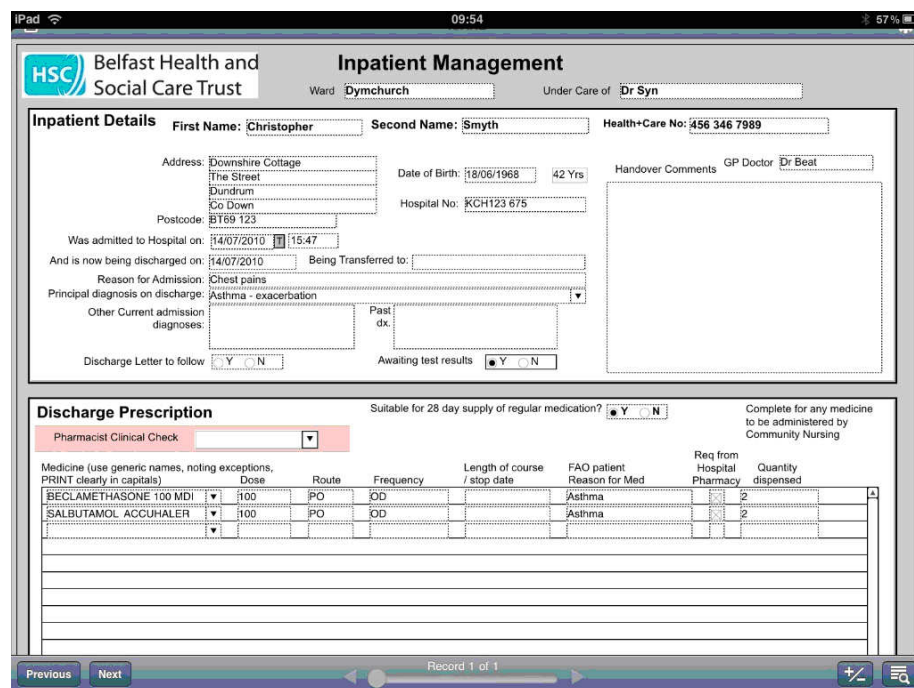


Figure 8: Layout objects such as portals, tab panels and the web viewer are supported with FileMaker Go

Conclusions

The extraordinary demand shown most recently for Apple's iPad, the widespread adoption of the iPhone by individuals and workgroups and the practical advantages of being able to retrieve, edit and add records to a FileMaker file when working remotely, will generate great interest for FileMaker Go.

Just as FileMaker dominates the database application market on the Apple OS platform, the release of FileMaker Go for Apple Mobile devices is highly likely to make it the database tool of choice for mobile users. Further with its built in capability to easily manage external SQL data sets on iPads and iPhones, FileMaker Go may be pivotal in making more IT departments deploy FileMaker in corporate environments.

Finally for FileMaker developers, FileMaker Go has created a new method by which FileMaker based solutions can be written specifically for the iPad or iPhone and distributed easily as an email attachment to recipients, without the need to learn the iOS SDK 4 development environment or the requirement to distribute a solution via the Apple App Store.

FileMaker Go for the iPhone and iPad are both available for download from the iTunes Store. FileMaker Go for the iPhone costs £11.99/€15.99 and FileMaker Go for the iPad, costs £23.99/€31.99.

About the Author

Arthur Evans is a FileMaker trainer, developer and author. His company AWE Consultancy (www.aweconsultancy.com) offers FileMaker training and development on site to organisations across the UK and Ireland.

The author is grateful to project clients who have given permission to reproduce the screen shots used in this article and would like to thank Kieran Saunders from FileMaker International for his assistance and input.

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