

How the new Economist App impacts the daily life of its users.

An interview with Richard Holden, Deputy Head of Product at The Economist

Richard Holden is currently responsible for building the application(s) at The Economist and in his new role, he is to contribute to implement the new digital strategy and success stories from previous new products / apps launch through the portfolio of The Economist. Richard visited Kosice in June and told us a bit more on the cooperation and how GlobalLogic and The Economist together are setting the trends and change the way media work today.

How was the cooperation with GlobalLogic?

It was and still is quite intense, mainly through frequent Slack and Hangout communication on daily basis. We very much try to treat it like a partnership, rather than a client relationship, by all of us being a part of an agile team and in touch all the time. In May, a new app of The Economist was launched. The Economist made some major changes in his apps after almost 8 years. The whole idea behind it was to accommodate the content to its customers and so to essentially change problems we know our subscribers have on daily basis, which may also result on giving up on their subscription. With this app we help them to find relevant content in forms appealing to them. Simply said it helps them to get the Economist into their daily life.

The project started in April 2017 and the app itself was released in May 2018.

How was the cooperation different from the standard setup?

One of the biggest challenges from the tech part was that the app was re-written in React Native, in which almost nobody at the team has coded in before. Going from zero knowledge to releasing something that is production quality, approved by senior stakeholders at The Economist, in such a short period of time was a great success. This is a great success.

But what is the most important thing when building an app is to always remember what you are building it for. It was very important to remember the mission of the new app – help to solve several particular problems for our subscribers – and to keep focus on those things. Therefore, we had to tackle some challenges, where new opinions and ideas came into place during the process and keep the focus on our mission. Moreover, I am proud of the fact we mastered this challenge. As we evaluated the outcome, it was quite close to what we have set in the beginning.

Was the process of the app development a standard one?

To us it was different. A big part of this project was user research – we hired a user researcher, who worked with us in London. So in comparison to the past, where we have built things from the top down and after launch we made adjustments, now we first talked to the subscribers and started from them. So based on the findings we developed the app. We tested the prototypes to see if they are usable and provided value to our subscribers at the same time, before the team had developed it in code and definitely before the release to the app store. So yes, this approach was new to The Economist.

The launch has been quite soft and the Marketing is to start in a few weeks, so we cannot wait to see the results. The classic app {the original app} is however still on the app store, as some of our still prefer the

classic features, as we found out within the research. But we already have seen feedback from new users and the feedback is quite good.

Coming from the user research, but also from the experience at The Economist, what do you think the trends in content distribution will be in the close future?

It is becoming clear for media companies over the past years, that relying on digital advertising revenues is becoming more and more difficult if not being Google or Facebook. So companies like us we need to make shift from digital advertising to subscribers. So I personally expect this to happen for majority of the media companies in the future. I also think that as a result of that you will see more media companies doing what we are doing – focusing on their own digital products, worrying less about FB, LN, etc. and distributing their content more via their own platforms – apps, webs, newsletters, etc.

With our app, we are currently building in some more features and we will continue to focus on things that deliver value to our subscribers and to our business. We will carry on the process of the user research, continue to focus on the important things and goals set and my main task is to make sure we do not lose this now that we are past that launch.

GlobalLogic details

Currently we have 10 people in the mobile team - 6 developers, 3 testers and 1 designer.

The cooperation is unique, mainly in the development part. Development is quick – we deliver new features almost every two weeks, all need to pass the user testing, where real users do test and evaluate the prototypes. Based on their feedback we fine-tune the final version of the new feature and continuously improve the product.

The overall cooperation and communication between GlobalLogic and The Economist is very open and this reflects the entire cooperation. We do address problems and solve them right away, the cooperation is based on partnership.

If you are interested to shape the world of media and content distribution, join our [team](#).