Single Page Applications

Mendel Rosenblum
Web Apps and Browsers

- Web apps run in browsers (by definition)
- Users are use to browsing in browsers
  - Browser maintains a history of URLs visited
    - Back button - Go back in history to previous URL
    - Forward button - Go forward in history to next URL
  - Can move to a different page
    - Typing into location bar or forward/back buttons
    - Selecting a bookmarked URL
    - Page refresh operation
- Browser tosses the current JavaScript environment when navigating to a different page
  - Problematic for JavaScript frameworks: URL (and cookies) are the only information preserved
Problem with some web apps

- **Initial**: pages served from web server
  - Each page had a URL and app switched between pages served by web server

- **Early JavaScript apps**: Website a single page/URL with the JavaScript
  
  Problem: Restart web app on navigation (Can lose a lot of work!)
  
  ```javascript
  window.onbeforeunload = function(e) { return 'All will be lost!'; }
  ```

- **Users expect app in browser to do the right thing**: 
  
  - Navigate with forward and back buttons, browser page history
  
  - Navigate away and come back to the app
  
  - Bookmark a place in the app
  
  - Copy the URL from the location bar and share it with someone
  
  - Push the page refresh button on the browser
Changing URL without page refresh

- Can change hash fragment in URL without reload
  
  http://example.com
  http://example.com#fragment
  http://example.com?id=3535
  http://example.com?id=3535#fragment

- HTML5 give JavaScript control of page reload
  - Browser History API - window.history - Change URL without reloading page
Deep linking

- Concept: the URL should capture the web app's context so that directing the browser to the URL will result the app's execution to that context
  - Bookmarks
  - Sharing

- Context is defined by the user interface designer!
  Consider: Viewing information of entity and have an edit dialog open

  Should the link point to the entity view or to the entity & dialog?

  Does it matter if I'm bookmarking for self or sharing with others?

  How about navigating away and back or browser refresh?
Deep linking in Single Page Apps

Two approaches:

1. Maintain the app's context state in the URL
   + Works for browser navigation and refresh
   + User can copy URL from location bar

2. Provide a share button to generate deep linking URL
   + Allows user to explicitly fetch a URL based on need
   + Can keep URL in location bar pretty

Either way web app needs to be able to initialize self from deep linked URL
Ugly URLs

http://www.example.org/dirmo?sid=789AB8&type=gen&mod=Core+Pages&gid=A6CD4967199

versus

http://www.example.org/show/A6CD4967199

What is that ugly thing in the location bar above my beautiful web application?

https://www.flickr.com/photos/jarnasen/24593000826/in/explore-2016-01-26/
ReactJS support for SPA

- ReactJS has no opinion! Need 3rd party module.

- Example: React Router Version 5 [https://v5.reactrouter.com/](https://v5.reactrouter.com/)
  - Idea: Use URL to control conditional rendering
  - Newer version 6 is available using same concepts as v5 but slightly different syntax

- Various ways of encoding information in URL
  - In fragment part of the URL: HashRouter
  - Use HTML5 URL handler: BrowserRouter

- Import as a module:

```javascript
import {HashRouter, Route, Link, Redirect} from 'react-router-dom';
```
Example React Router V5

```
<HashRouter>
  <div>
    ...
    <Route path="/states" component={States} />
    ...
    <Link to="/states">States</Link>
    ...
  </div>
</HashRouter>
```

- JSX block controlled by URL enclosed in HashRouter
- Route will render the component if URL matches.
- Use Link component to generated hyperlink:
```
  <a href="#/states">States</a>
```

Passing parameters with React Router

- Parameter passing in URL
  ```
  <Route
      path="/Book/:book/ch/:chapter"
      component={BookChapterComponent}
  />
  ```

- Parameters put in prop.match of the component
  ```
  function BookChapterComponent({ match }) {
    return ( <div>
      <h3>Book: {match.params.book}</h3>
      <h3>Chapter: {match.params.chapter}</h3>
    </div> );
  }
  ```

```javascript
<Link to="/Book/Moby/ch/1">Moby</Link>
```
Route: component=, render=, children=

- **component={BookChapterComponent}**
  - Mounts components on match (unmounts on URL change)
  - Passes match object with: params, url, history

- **render={props => <BookChapterComponent book={props.match.params.book} chapter={props.match.params.chapter} />}**
  - Calls function with props having match object from above.
  - Doesn't mount/unmount component (does update it)

- **children=** - Like render= except is called regardless of the match
  - match will be null if URL doesn't match
  - Useful if you want to have something always render but only active on matching URL.

Multiple route matches have precedence order: component, render, children

*Switch is useful with multiple Route - Renders the first matching one*
Example

What to keep in URL: table length, viewport in table, search box, sort column, etc. Is it different for bookmark or share? Nav away and back?
Example: Not everything goes in URL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Expire Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/25" alt="icon" /></td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Sunday, October 5, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/25" alt="icon" /></td>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>Sunday, October 5, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/25" alt="icon" /></td>
<td>Steak</td>
<td>Saturday, September 20, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/25" alt="icon" /></td>
<td>Oranges</td>
<td>2x 400g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>