



Types of Android Applications

Most of the applications you create in Android will fall into one of the following categories:

- ❑ **Foreground Activity** An application that's only useful when it's in the foreground and is effectively suspended when it's not visible. Games and map mashups are common examples.
- ❑ **Background Service** An application with limited interaction that, apart from when being configured, spends most of its lifetime hidden. Examples of this include call screening applications or SMS auto-responders.
- ❑ **Intermittent Activity** Expects some interactivity but does most of its work in the background. Often these applications will be set up and then run silently, notifying users when appropriate. A common example would be a media player. Complex applications are difficult to pigeonhole into a single category and include elements of all three. When creating your application, you need to consider how it's likely to be used and then design

it accordingly. Let's look more closely at some of the design considerations for each application type described above.

Foreground Activities

When creating foreground applications, you need to consider the Activity life cycle (described in Chapter 3) carefully so that the Activity switches seamlessly between the foreground and the background. Applications have no control over their life cycles, and a backgrounded application, with no Services, is a prime candidate for cleanup by Android's resource management. This means that you need to save the state of the application when the Activity becomes invisible, and present the exact same state when it returns to the foreground.

It's also particularly important for foreground Activities to present a slick and intuitive user experience. You'll learn more about creating well-behaved and attractive foreground Activities in Chapter 3.

Background Services

These applications run silently in the background with very little user input. They often listen for messages or actions caused by the hardware, system, or other applications, rather than rely on user interaction.

It's possible to create completely invisible services, but in practice, it's better form to provide at least some sort of user control. At a minimum, you should let users confirm that the service is running and let them configure, pause, or terminate it as needed.

Services, the powerhouse of background applications, are covered in depth in Chapter 8.

Intermittent Activities

Often you'll want to create an application that reacts to user input but is still useful when it's not the active foreground Activity. These applications are generally a union of a visible controller Activity with an invisible background Service.

These applications need to be aware of their state when interacting with the user. This might mean updating the Activity UI when it's visible and sending notifications to keep the user updated when it's in the background, as seen in the section on Notifications and Services in Chapter 8.