Tip #18-WonderSilk Skins: Those Elusive Buttons

I have received several inquiries asking how various buttons get assigned and defined in the WonderSilk app. The explanation, while definatly not intuitive, is actually rather simple.

The main difficulty with WonderSilk Skin development is that there are no set "rules" as to what or how things are defined, specifically with regard to buttons that launch other apps. Unfortunatly, many of the skins I developed were just evolutions or modifications of prior skins, so they may not all be consistent in design. I may go back and tweak them to make them more consistent, but after reading this tip, it may not be necessary.

Buttons in WonderSilk generally fall into one of three categories: "WonderSilk Action Buttons", "Silk Buttons" and "User-definable Launcher Buttons"

The first kind, "WonderSilk Action Buttons", are buttons that perform WonderSilk-specific actions or actions that don't launch other programs. For example, there is a "keyboard" button, a Backlight button, a Hide/Show Graffiti Area button, Cut, Paste, MP3 controls, etc. These buttons are defined at development time and are limited to the functions included in the WonderMaker program. They are more "gadget-like" and typically perform specific functions within the WonderSilk skin itself.

The second button type, the "Silk Buttons" mimic the function of the StandardInput Silk area (typically, the Home, Menu, Calc, and Search buttons.) These buttons have pre-defined standard functions except for one button: the Calc button. By default, the Calc button will launch the standard Calc app, but this can be changed. To change the definition of the Calc button, launch the standard Prefs app and select "Buttons" from the drop-down. The button on the lower right defines the Calc button. Just tap on the DropDown and select whatever app you want the Calc button to launch. This is the standard method of assigning apps to the "Hard" buttons as well (DateBook, Address, Memo, ToDo), but is also used to re-define the Calc button. The app you assign could be Calc, powerOne Finance, QuickSheet, whatever. It doesn't have to be a calculator app either–it could be any favorite app, but I recommend to keep it a mathematical or number-related app because the button graphic typically assigned is "Calc-related", and isn't the point of most of these skins to make things easy to remember and intuitive?

The third button type is a user-definable button to launch a user-defined app. This is defined in the Kinu-Maru app included in the WonderSilk distribution. This is where things can get a bit tricky because there are no hard and fast rules to determine which on-screen button corresponds to which numbered function. And, I admit that I wasn't always consistent in my button assignments. I tried to lay them out logically, but it didn't always happen. That said, there are two specific ways to define these buttons:

1. Through the Kinu-Maru app
This method lets the user define apps to buttons in one nice screen. Launch the Kinu-Maru app, open the menu, and select "Launcher Info. Manage…" This is where you define your specific buttons. Just tap on an entry and select an app from the drop-down list. The only difficulty with this method is that the the button definitions are numbered 1-8 in the Kinu-Maru app, but there is no way for the user to intuitivly know the specific button on the Skin. To further complicate matters, not all buttons may be included in a particular Skin, and they may or may not be layed out in a logical order. This may take some trial-and-error, but you should be able to get it.

2. "On-the-fly"
This is actually the easier method that almost guarantees that you will get apps defined to the proper buttons the first time. First, we want to clear out all button definitions. Launch the Kinu-Maru app, open the menu, and select "Launcher Info. Manage…" as above. Check the checkboxes for all entries that have an app assigned. Next, tap on the "Delete Info" button and tap "OK". This erases the button definitions. Tap "Done" and open your favorite program Launcher.

No comes the fun part. Launch an app that you want to assign to a button. Once launched, display the Virtual Silk area if it is not already visible. Next, tap on the button that you with to assign to the running app. The message "Save App Info !!" will briefly display and then disappear. The running app is now assigned to the button you tapped! The next time you tap the button, the assigned app will launch. Simple! If you make a mistake, just re-launch the Kinu-Maru app and delete the entry and try it again.

WonderSilk is a powerfull app, and though it is free, it does come at a cost: To use it well, you have to spend some time to understand all it can do. Unfortunatly, there is no way to pre-defin buttons "out of the box", but then again, part of its power is its flexibility and customizability.

If you like WonderSilk, please email the author and tell him. If you like the WonderSilk Skins that I have developed, simply enjoy them.

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