

Dreams? There's apps for them, too

January 29 2010, By Andrew Kenney

The handiwork of a cast of code monkeys could soon have your new phone doing tricks your old cell would never have imagined.

Harmonist Inc., a band of four North Carolina State students, has a fresh set of incorporation papers -- proudly displayed above the students' Nintendo 64 -- and big dreams of cashing in on the mania for new [mobile phone](#) technology. Night after night, they whiteboard their ideas of what a high-powered phone with a cadre of sensors could do.

"We have all these smart phones that can do amazing things," said Kenan Simpson, a 21-year-old economics major. "We can actually integrate these (capabilities) through software."

Their first set of "apps," which are pending approval by Apple, will enable your [iPhone](#) to time your car's 0-to-60 capability, set your sleep schedule, predict a sunset and even guess your intestinal output. They'll charge a buck or two for each "app," short for application, and 30 percent of the revenue will go to Apple.

The apps are pretty basic, but a low price and simple idea could make the homegrown apps potential sellers, according to an industry expert.

"It's entirely an impulse purchase, cheaper than a cup of coffee," said Carl Howe, director of consumer research at Yankee Group, which specializes in analyzing technology. "People don't have this big purchasing process associated with these apps -- (they) can be very successful."

As the guys at Harmonist see it, they and a handful of other Triangle [software developers](#) have jumped into a technological revolution whose scale could rival the rise of the personal computer.

The booming popularity of Apple iPhones, Motorola Droids, RIM BlackBerrys and other "app phones" has created a \$343 million mobile phone software market, according Yankee Group estimates. By 2013, the research firm predicts, developers could be competing for a \$4.2 billion pie.

"Basically, that's where the future's going to be, period," said Pradeep Palreddy, whose Raleigh, N.C.-based company is creating a business-to-business app. "Everything should happen from your hand."

THE NEW MODEL

But competition is fierce. Other apps can do the same thing as the Harmonist product that can measure your car's 0-to-60 mph time with a single touch of the screen. That's the problem with the app boom, but the students hope their software's simple design and cheaper price will give it a sales boost.

The Harmonist quartet has big dreams. All 21 or younger and all recent transfers to N.C. State, they hope to increase revenue with one-off applications and stock investment as they work on "the big one."

In addition to Simpson, the company includes Jack Zapple, Addison Hardy and Charles Gras.

They won't divulge too much about their prime app, still in the coding, but they say it will stream information between networked devices such as phones and personal computers in a brand-new way.

New technology could mean profits for a host of new startups, just as it did when the Silicon Valley bubble stretched to bursting a decade ago. And this time, digital distribution could help even more new ventures take root.

Why? Because apps are changing the business of coding the same way that social networks, blogs and iTunes rewired the rules of print and music publishing.

Apple, Google and Blackberry-maker RIM all run Internet-powered app stores where tiny companies like Harmonist can run with big dogs like ESPN and Electronic Arts.

Now, programmers can get their code to consumers without boxing it or finding shelf space in stores -- and the 100,000-plus apps in Apple's virtual store show just how easy the process is.

Plus, developers say Apple provides a well-thought out toolkit for iPhone programmers. But with ease of use comes more competitors, and millions of forlorn blogs and dusty iTunes tracks point to the fact that easy distribution doesn't guarantee customers.

Still, slashed overhead and a greater emphasis on single-trick utilities could give local developers a fighting chance.

SEEKING FRESH NOTIONS

Most important, new devices' features, from Internet connections to accelerometers and GPS hardware, have started a race to push out never-before-seen concepts. Local firms like Harmonist hope that one fresh idea will take them to the top.

Already, apps enable phones to scan a product's barcode and instantly

compare prices with other stores.

Howe, of Yankee Group, said, "The thing that has captured people's imaginations is that ... they can tailor their mobile phone to do the things they want to do."

Not every idea needs to be gloriously innovative, either. Last December, a breaking-wind-simulator app made \$40,000 in two days, its creator claimed.

Harmonist hopes too to cash in on consumers' baser instincts with iPoop, an [app](#) that will log the food you eat and use statistics to estimate the weight of your fecal output.

Kind of gross, they say, but financially sound.

(c) 2010, The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.).
Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

Citation: Dreams? There's apps for them, too (2010, January 29) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-01-apps.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
