

Sizzling mobile-application industry ready to hire

November 23 2012, by Rob Hotakainen

Ross Waycaster designed the first of his four mobile applications as a high school senior in Tupelo, Miss., a game called "Super Marrio Jump" that's been downloaded from the Apple store more than 20,000 times, earning him more than \$16,000.

"I have an entrepreneurial spirit, so we'll see where that takes me," said Waycaster, 21, who's now a junior at Mississippi State University in Starkville.

It could lead him to a top-paying job in a sizzling new industry, one that might provide the [United States](#) with a big opportunity to increase its exports in coming years.

While the overall economy still lags, the "app economy" has created nearly 500,000 jobs in the U.S. since 2007, when there were none.

Companies even worry that the nation isn't moving fast enough to produce new talent for thousands of unfilled jobs as consumers demand more and more gizmos and gadgets for their smartphones.

As a result, [salaries](#) are rising quickly: Mobile apps developers can expect pay increases of 9 percent next year, among the highest of any jobs, putting them in the range of \$92,750 to \$133,500 a year, according to a survey that the staffing and [consulting firm](#) Robert Half International released last month.

If the United States can maintain its dominance in the industry, many say the app economy could make a big dent in the country's federal trade deficit. Last year, for example, more than 20 percent of the apps downloaded in China were made by U.S. developers.

"There is unprecedented opportunity for America to capitalize on exploding [international markets](#)," Peter Farago, the vice president of marketing for Flurry, a high-tech [startup company](#) in San Francisco, testified in September before the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade.

Farago said his company had more than 100 employees and 50 open positions and that "we literally cannot find the talent we need fast enough." He told members of the subcommittee that the app economy would become increasingly international and that the United States should do more to improve education and retraining programs and to make it easier for companies to bring and keep more talent from foreign countries.

"We're in a human capital crunch," added Rey Ramsey, the president and chief executive officer of TechNet, a network of technology executives that promotes the industry.

According to a TechNet study released earlier this year, the United States had created 460,000 jobs in the app economy since the iPhone was introduced. Those include programmers, designers, marketers, managers and support staff.

The TechNet study found California is by far the most dominant player in the industry, accounting for nearly one of every four jobs. New York ranks second, followed by Washington state, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Georgia, Virginia and Florida.

Among metropolitan regions, New York ranked first, followed by San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif.; San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, Calif.; and Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, Wash.

Some universities have begun retooling their curricula. At Mississippi State, students are enrolled in such popular courses as Field Studies in iPhone Entrepreneurship.

Rodney Pearson, the head of the information systems department at Mississippi State, said most of the graduates from the business program made starting salaries of \$45,000 to \$50,000.

"But we have had six get jobs as app developers at \$80,000," he said.

He said students had created all kinds of apps, including a game called "Poke the Pig," another that counted pitches during baseball games and one that aided in swimming pool maintenance. He predicted that Waycaster will become "a serial entrepreneur, for sure."

Waycaster, who plans to graduate in May 2014, said he'd enrolled in the iPhone course after teaching himself how to create an app just by Googling and reading about them online.

"It really did help me out," said Waycaster, who is the technology chairman of his fraternity. "When you teach yourself something, you have other ways of thinking, and so when you actually go through a class in a structured way, things connected."

Besides "Super Marrio" - that's with two R's to distinguish it from the registered trademark of Nintendo's popular "Super Mario Bros." game - Waycaster has created apps called "Dye Birds," "Football Cannon" and New Earth Symbol. He described the latter as an app "that illustrates God's promise of a new heaven and new earth" as described in the

biblical Book of Revelation.

At Washington State University-Vancouver, Kerri Lingo managed a team that created an app for local business Dick Hannah Dealerships, allowing the auto dealer's customers to schedule appointments or to make quick contact when they're stranded on the road, using GPS - the Global Positioning System - to show their locations. After graduating last year with a degree in creative media and digital culture, Lingo went to work for the dealership in its marketing department.

"It was very fast. In 12 weeks, we went from not knowing anything about mobile apps to having one completed," said Lingo, 34, of Vancouver.

Dene Grigar, an associate professor who's the director of the creative media and digital culture program at WSU-Vancouver, said students enjoyed the hands-on approach of designing apps, noting that "practice and theory are inseparable."

She said the university began updating its curriculum as soon as the iPhone was released.

"You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out where the future's headed," she said. "In 2007, we get the iPhone, and it's kind of a no-brainer to say, 'OK, well, there's our new medium.' ... Every company is realizing they need a social media specialist. Instead of hiring a communications specialist, they want someone that can work in digital media, everything from mobile environments to making a video."

The industry's rapid growth is raising some tough questions for Congress, with some saying that much more should be done to protect Americans' privacy as they post more and more of their personal data on apps owned by private developers.

"The reality is that many online users have a false sense of privacy because they don't understand the lengthy and complex privacy policies they are compelled to agree to in order to use the service," North Carolina Rep. Mel Watt, the top-ranked Democrat on the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Intellectual Property, Competition and the Internet, said at a hearing in June.

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