

Growing app industry has developers racing to keep up

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Smartphone application developers say they are challenged by the glut of apps as well as the need to update their software to keep up with evolving phone technology, making creative pricing strategies essential to finding their niche.

"The coding is always changing, but awareness is one of our biggest challenges because there are so many apps out there," said Joel Holl, [chief operating officer](#) of Clifton, N.J.-based [app](#) developer Pervasive Group Inc. "There are a lot of people vying for customers' attention. So getting above all of the noise is a challenge, especially for a small business."

Some developers said tight advertising budgets make it difficult to lure customers who are deluged with millions of downloadable options at marketplaces such as Google Play or Apple's App Store.

According to AppBrain, a website that tracks the number of apps available on Android's Google Play store, there were more than 1 million apps available for download as of April 7. Apple Inc.'s chief executive officer, Tim Cook, said the company topped the 1 million level in 2013.

Pervasive Group's flagship app, MMGuardian, allows parents to monitor their children's use of smartphones. Once Pervasive Group's app is installed on a child's phone, a parent is able to limit the time certain apps can be used, can monitor text messages for inappropriate language and is able to block calls.

Holl said that since MMGuardian's launch in January 2013, the app had been listed in the "100,000 to 500,000 downloads" category of Google Play. To attract new customers, Holl said, MMGuardian had multiple payment options for parents with different levels of comfort or desire to monitor their children's smartphone use.

Lyndhurst, N.J.-based app developer SpeechTrans is experimenting with a similar model.

John Frei, the co-founder and CEO of SpeechTrans, said the company originally charged customers a one-time fee to download its apps, which are various speech-to-speech and speech-recognition apps that can translate into 44 languages. Frei said the suite of SpeechTrans apps has more than 1.1 million downloads on Apple's App Store and Google Play.

Frei said the company was shifting to a "freemium" model, where the application will be free to download, but after a predetermined amount of translations or days used, it will prompt the customer to buy a subscription to a premium application.

"We are always watching how the market is trending," Frei said. "Being the size we are, we can be nimble and make quick decisions."

Other developers said that while standing out is difficult, the need to be vigilant of changing software also presents a challenge.

Rod Gammon, owner of West Milford, N.J.-based Limitless Horizons LLC, has developed two \$1 apps focused on child education. In 2012 his company released Math in a Minute, a math exercise app that quizzes its user. This year he released Monster Tales, an app that allows children to create characters that can interact with each other using a voice recording. Both are available on Apple's iTunes [app store](#) and average 2,500 users a week, he said.

To keep ahead of the changes in the operating system, Gammon said, he receives an announcement from Apple that says when an update is scheduled. He said he attends events Apple hosts that explain the changes, so when he sits down to code, he knows what he may need to address in his app's coding.

"Every year there is an update to Apple's operating system, and then there are always little updates throughout the year," Gammon said. "A change in their software capabilities can force us to go down to our coding in the app and change things. Just to stay still in this market, you have to update the app constantly."

Gammon said updating [operating system](#) technology each year has limited his ability to allow the app to be used "across platforms," such as on an Android device.

"We would like to be a cross-platform app; it's really just a reality of how much time I have," Gammon said. "I do all of the coding for the games myself. I just can't do everything."

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