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## App Mania

### Programmers see dollar signs in mini-applications for high-tech phones

By Matthew L. Brown

Face it. You've had your iPhone or other so-called smart phone out and thought: "You know what I'd really like to do with my phone right now? Play tennis."

And these days, you can. As Apple says in its ads for the iPhone, "There's an app for that."

Many of these applications are just gimmicks, frivolous time wasters that don't cost anything and might be fun a couple of times. Others are more practical. And it seems as if there's no shortage of people trying to jump on the app creation bandwagon.

From software programmers who create apps in their living rooms after work to career professionals that find an entirely new opportunity in the app universe, it seems anyone can get in on the action.

Want your teenager to be safer behind the wheel? There's an app for that. Want to keep tabs on rock band REM? There's an app for that, too. And those apps are made by businesses based in the Bay State.

#### Distraction

For Darcy Ahl, co-founder of Illume Software in Concord, the app her company created was the result of what she calls an "ah-ha moment." She was riding in a car driven by her teenage son when both their cell phones rang. The distraction was so great that her son nearly crashed the car.

Back at her office, the former executive recruiter "wished there was a way to keep teenagers off the phone while they drive."

As Ahl puzzled over the best way to accomplish the task, she considered a chip for the cell phone, but then settled on a smart phone app because of its flexibility.

Unlike a programmer who creates apps by the dozen in his or her spare time, Ahl turned to her considerable network to garner support for what would become the **iZup** application.

Illume's advisory board includes former U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle, former U.S. Sen. Bob Kerry and former Major League Baseball commissioner Faye Vincent, for example.

The company did extensive research into the legality of the iZup app, patented it, approached insurance companies and wireless companies and put a management team in place to roll iZup out around the country.

"Legislation, technology and education have to work together," Ahl said.

iZup users carry what is essentially a GPS enabled smart phone. The GPS system detects when the phone is in a vehicle traveling at more than 5 miles per hour. When that is the case, the phone is told to

remain silent and is unable to make calls to all but three pre-programmed numbers of the user's choice. Incoming calls are automatically and silently forwarded for storage.

911 always works, and if 911 is called, iZup sends a Google map of the phone's exact location to emergency personnel.

"You don't lose anything. Your stuff is there waiting for you and waiting quietly," Ahl said.

### **The Giveaway**

Over in Cambridge, Paul Govereau and Kelly Heffner founded Peerium as a serverless platform technology firm, not necessarily a smart phone application creator. The company was a "beta tester" for the iPhone, however.

"Apple started offering the ability to program on the iPhone and even though that wasn't the business we were in, we thought it might be a nice and easy thing to do on the side," Govereau said.

According to Heffner, creating an app can be easy, and for professionals can take less than two months. The app Peerium created for REM "took a lot longer," she said.

"The first thing we do is sit down and imagine people using it. We write scenarios of people interacting with it. We make sketches of each of the different screens and pages," she said.

The band "was really interested in pursuing the technology," Govereau said, and works with many web companies directly, rather than through its record label.

The Peerium REM app brings news, tour dates, fan-to-fan interaction and other features right to users' smart phones. It even features a tour of Athens, Ga., the band's home, and fans can upload their own photos through the iPhone to the band's Flickr page.

Govereau said the app creating game presents a good opportunity for many individuals and companies because smart phone makers have so far been very flexible.

"Apple was trying to make it so that a guy can write the programming from his living room in the evening. He can do this or that and he can sell it for \$0.99, or there are a lot of free ones with ads, there's also link sharing. So, they can get a small portion of the revenue. Then there are companies like ours that can be contracted to develop the app even though they want to give it away."

### **Location Critical**

Ahl left her job as an executive recruiter to start Illume with only the iZup app. She lives in Darien, Conn. and commutes a few days a week all the way to Concord. It seems like a lot for a product that may or may not provide revenue well into the future.

But Ahl is determined to make something of Illume beyond iZup.

"We're not a one-app wonder. We have other stuff up our sleeve," she said. The company is working on other "location critical technology" for smart phones, including an app that replaces emergency phones on college campuses.