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MailOnline

How to be an App millionaire

By [Rob Waugh](#)

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Once the internet was the new Wild West. Then came the 'app' - and now anyone can have any idea for sale in the digital high street within days. Here, app entrepreneurs tell YOU how to do it (and Rob Waugh explains how not to...)



On any bus in Britain, it's obvious that apps have captured an entire market

The first thing you should know about making a fortune from computer programming is that computer programmers run on coffee. It's well-known. Which is why I began my first foray into creating a mobile-phone app by waking up VERY early – antisocial hours are also de rigeur – putting on a pot of filter Kenya Peaberry, and setting to work.

By 9am, I was sitting next to an empty filter coffee pot and in front of two brand-new apps ready for an airing on my Samsung Galaxy S, which uses Google Android software. I am now a paid-up member of the new digital gold rush sweeping Britain, the one that has swept up everyone from City lawyers to bin men, and made a few of them fortunes, many of them handy incomes in excess of £100,000 a year. And some very little indeed.

To be clear: an app – or application – is a piece of software built to perform one function, such as sending emails or playing a game, and is separate from ‘system software’, such as Windows or Android. The current ‘app revolution’ is built mostly on selling cheap, downloadable apps to iPhones and Android phones, but also to PCs. The app can be a one-touch route to a train timetable, or popular game like the No 1 app, Angry Birds, or a newspaper website, or a dating service. A typical cost is 59p, paid through an existing account such as the Apple store, though many are free or have free ‘lite’ versions.

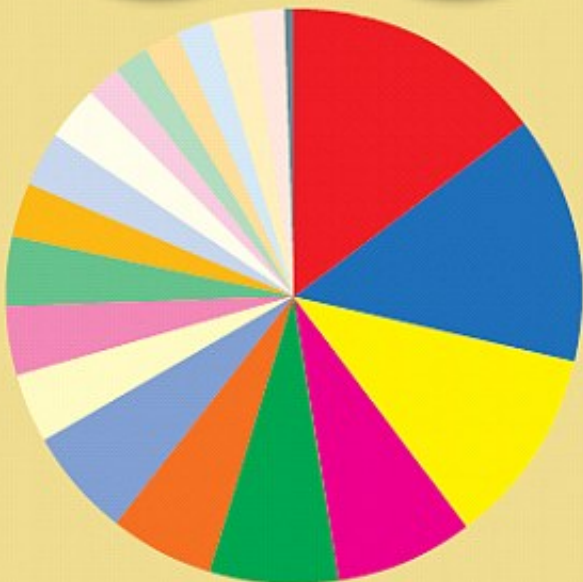
On any bus in Britain, it’s obvious that apps have captured an entire market. Instead of being buried in Stieg Larsson or JK Rowling, commuters hold iPhones and Android handsets horizontally – and people engrossed in the latest app have become a terrifying hazard on any city-centre pavement.

APPROVED APPS IN THE iTUNES APP STORE 500,000... AND COUNTING

85,569
unique developers

37%
OF ALL APPS ARE
free

£2.20
is the
average
price for
PAID
APPS



- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 15% games | 3% sports |
| 14% books | 3% news |
| 11% entertainment | 3% productivity |
| 8% education | 2% healthcare |
| 7% lifestyle | 2% navigation |
| 6% utilities | 2% photography |
| 6% travel | 2% finance |
| 4% music | 2% social networking |
| 4% reference | 1.7% medical |

4% business

0.3% weather

Most popular paid-for applications of all time based on the number of days at **NUMBER ONE** in the iTunes App Store

- 1 ANGRY BIRDS, 275 DAYS
- 2 THE MORON TEST, 38 DAYS
- 3 MOTO CHASER, 27 DAYS
- 4 FLIGHT CONTROL, 26 DAYS
- 5 iSHOOT, 26 DAYS
- 6 SKEE-BALL, 26 DAYS
- 7 TINY WINGS, 25 DAYS
- 8 WHERE'S WALDO? THE FANTASTIC JOURNEY, 23 DAYS
- 9 ANGRY BIRDS RIO, 23 DAYS
- 10 CAMERA ZOOM 3, 22 DAYS
- 11 SECURE APPBOX, 22 DAYS
- 12 iFART MOBILE, 21 DAYS
- 13 OCARINA, 20 DAYS
- 14 POCKET GOD, 20 DAYS

As an app creator, you don't need financial backers, venture capitalists or even a publisher

Some are all-conquering. Angry Birds has been downloaded a staggering 200 million times. The biggest selling album of all time, Michael Jackson's Thriller, only sold 110 million; the biggest cinema film by ticket sales, Gone With The Wind, managed 202 million. Angry Birds will overtake that within weeks, becoming the most popular entertainment product of all time. Gamers are playing Angry Birds in excess of three million hours a day, every day.

And crucially, anyone can join in with their own app. The fact that I am now part of the revolution shows how extraordinarily accessible it is. Launch my first coffee-fuelled app, created on a very simple and completely free design package called App Inventor, and a picture of my face appears, speckled in blue paint.

If you press on my face, it says, 'Hello, I'm Rob'. Using another application, Game Creator, I started to build a game where the same image is dotted around the screen, surrounded by bombs. Click my face, you win, click the bomb, you lose.

No, not exactly Angry Birds. But it's real, and it just about works. Most importantly, I could, if I wanted, put it on sale immediately – and start making money immediately, were anyone remotely interested. (I haven't actually released it yet – I'm not sure I could cope with the rejection...)

As an app creator, you don't need financial backers, venture capitalists or even a publisher. Apple's App Store and Android's Market offer you the way to sell. The handsets in people's pockets provide the demand. All you have to do is provide the idea.

To put my admittedly humble design achievement in context, I have not written a single line of computer code since using BBC Basic at school. App Inventor is like designing a digital jigsaw where you click together different buttons and screens to create objects that behave in different ways, the building blocks of games. It's a product from Google Labs, the company's 'mad scientist' division, and is designed to help people with no computer training join the app revolution. Sites such as GameSalad and Game Creator do the same.

If your idea is good enough, you can simply offer a programmer a share of the profits in exchange for working it up into a saleable format. The idea is the gold dust, though. Without it, one programming veteran says, an app creation kit such as App Inventor is 'like handing someone a video camera and expecting them to make Avatar'.

Celebrity fans can propel you to riches. Stephen Fry's adoption of the spoken-Twitter app Audioboo helped

its creators make £200,000 a year.

Simple ideas often work best: Awareness, an app that allows headphone users to hear 'through' music to prevent car accidents, earned more than £200,000 for its British creators. Other apps make as little as £200. On Android, it seems particularly brutal – recent research shows 80 per cent of their paid apps sell less than 100 copies. But with 500,000 on Apple's App Store, there are more apps available now than there have been games for every computer system in history – because all you need is a PC, an idea, and some time.

Some are calling this a rebirth of the DIY home-computing revolution that put Britain at the centre of the technological world in the Eighties, so it's no surprise that a generation of programmers – trained and untrained – are trying to cash in. We spoke to a dozen or so of these entrepreneurs to ask how they did it, from idea and design to sales and marketing, so you can too.

Perhaps the best bit of advice should come first though: what Tomb Raider creator Ian Livingstone, an industry legend who's now behind app advertising company Appatzyze, told me. 'For every Angry Birds,' he said, 'there are a whole lot of dead birds out there.'

STEP 1: THE IDEA

Time required From one 'eureka!' second upwards. The hugely successful Angry Birds was the 52nd game developed by Rovio. Most app developers fail several times before they succeed.



Developer Mark Rock

App Audioboo

Downloads 1.4 million

Format iPhone/iPad, Android, Nokia Ovi

Price Free

What it does Lets users record and publish 'Tweet'-style voice messages

'Audioboo became the germ of an idea when my mother died and I realised I'd never hear her voice again. The mobile app was designed to capture the narrative of people's lives in audio form. It was our first mobile app, first consumer proposition and first foray into audio. Our lack of knowledge about the area we were launching in was probably our biggest asset. Within three weeks journalists were using it to report from the protests at the G20 Summit in London and we've just grown from then.'



Developer Rob Shoesmith

App Problem Halved

Downloads 10,000

Format iPhone/iPad

Price £1.19

What it does Solve problems by social networking

'I was in a rut working as a bin man. I was browsing the App Store and came across an app called App Incubator by a company called MEDL Mobile that allows users to pitch ideas for iPhone apps. If the people at MEDL like your idea they pay full development costs and give you 25 per cent of any profits generated. Over a period of two weeks I must have sent in 30 ideas. I got an email back to say they were interested in Problem Halved. It was actually one of the first ideas I submitted.'



Developer Malcolm Barclay

App London Tube Deluxe

Downloads 380,000

Format iPhone/iPad

Price 59p

What it does Journey planner and provider of real-time updates about London Underground services.

'I first thought of tracking the status of London Underground trains after being caught at Camden Town Tube station. The Northern Line had gone down and I was stranded. It annoyed me so much that I didn't have a simple app on my then first-generation iPhone to tell me this. I thought, 'Surely someone has to write an app for this.' Then I thought, 'Hey, I am a programmer! Why don't I just write it?' I set about it the next day.'



Developer Robert Follis

App Awareness

Downloads 50,000

Format iPhone/iPad

Price £1.19

What it does Allows external sounds to come through the headphones while listening to music

'The idea of Awareness came from reading about runners and joggers being killed in traffic accidents while wearing headphones and lost in their music. We knew we could do something technological to help. We have two audio engineers who've been working in music since computers hit the recording studio – but it was iPhone 4, with its built-in mic and multi-tasking, that made Awareness possible.'



Developer Nick Kuh

App Tap To Chat 2

Downloads 500,000

Format iPhone/iPad

Price 59p

What it does Instant messaging app for Facebook and Google Talk contacts

'I met my business partner Chris Ross at the Brighton iPhone Creators group in November last year. The collaboration was agreed over a coffee. We took a good look at all the competition and realised they were all very similar. None met the main requirements of the average 'chatter': keep it simple and visual. This became the focus of Tap to Chat before a single line of code was written: create a powerful but very simple-to-use chat app.'

STEP 2: MAKING THE APP

Time required A few hours to several months.

Equipment PC/Mac, Android or iPhone handset

Subscription Developing Android apps is free, Apple apps charges a £59 a year developer licence.



Developer Oli Christie

App Flick Football

Downloads 3.7 million

Format iPhone/iPad

Price 59p

What it does Shooting game – swipe your finger over the screen to curve the ball around the wall

'We needed a variety of different people with different skills to make this game. I had none myself – just a sketch of an idea. I had been a copywriter in a previous life, so I wrote all the commentator's comments, all the copy that pops up when you share the app with a friend via Facebook or Twitter or email. The design of the Flick Football app was the part that took the longest to crack. I found a developer to programme it – but his 'pay' was that he became a partner. We then hired a designer, a 3D artist when we needed one, and got a friend to do the voiceovers. None of us worked in the same office – we all worked from home and stayed in touch via the net.'



Developer Phil Lethbridge

App Zombie Pong

Downloads None, pending release (July 7)

Format iPhone

Price 59p

What it does Cartoon zombie game

'I decided to see if I could write a game without learning a single line of computer code – and it's about 25 per cent finished already. I use a software package called GameSalad that lets you assemble a game almost like a jigsaw, without having to learn any computer code. I spend about three hours a night on it, and I've been working for months. Every time I touch it, I find something else I've forgotten – I wouldn't have been able to do it without internet forums. When I get stuck, I ask for help – and there's a lot of guys out there, working on apps with GameSalad, who've been a huge help.'



Developer Tom Hill

App Journeywatch

Downloads 13,000

Formats iPhone/iPad, Nokia Ovi

Price Free

What it does Network of support and advice for intrepid travellers

How long it would take to set up was worked out in meetings with the app developers – an Asian company I contacted. The process took about six weeks from start to finish. The costs were reduced by developing in Asia. It would have been difficult to develop on a start-up budget in the UK given the relatively high costs. The entire process – developing more than one app and creating a website (journeywatch.com) to back them up – has been a bit like climbing a mountain. Once you scale one peak you see higher peaks before you – and then you realise you are nowhere near the top.'



Developer Ben Tattersley

App Tumbibox

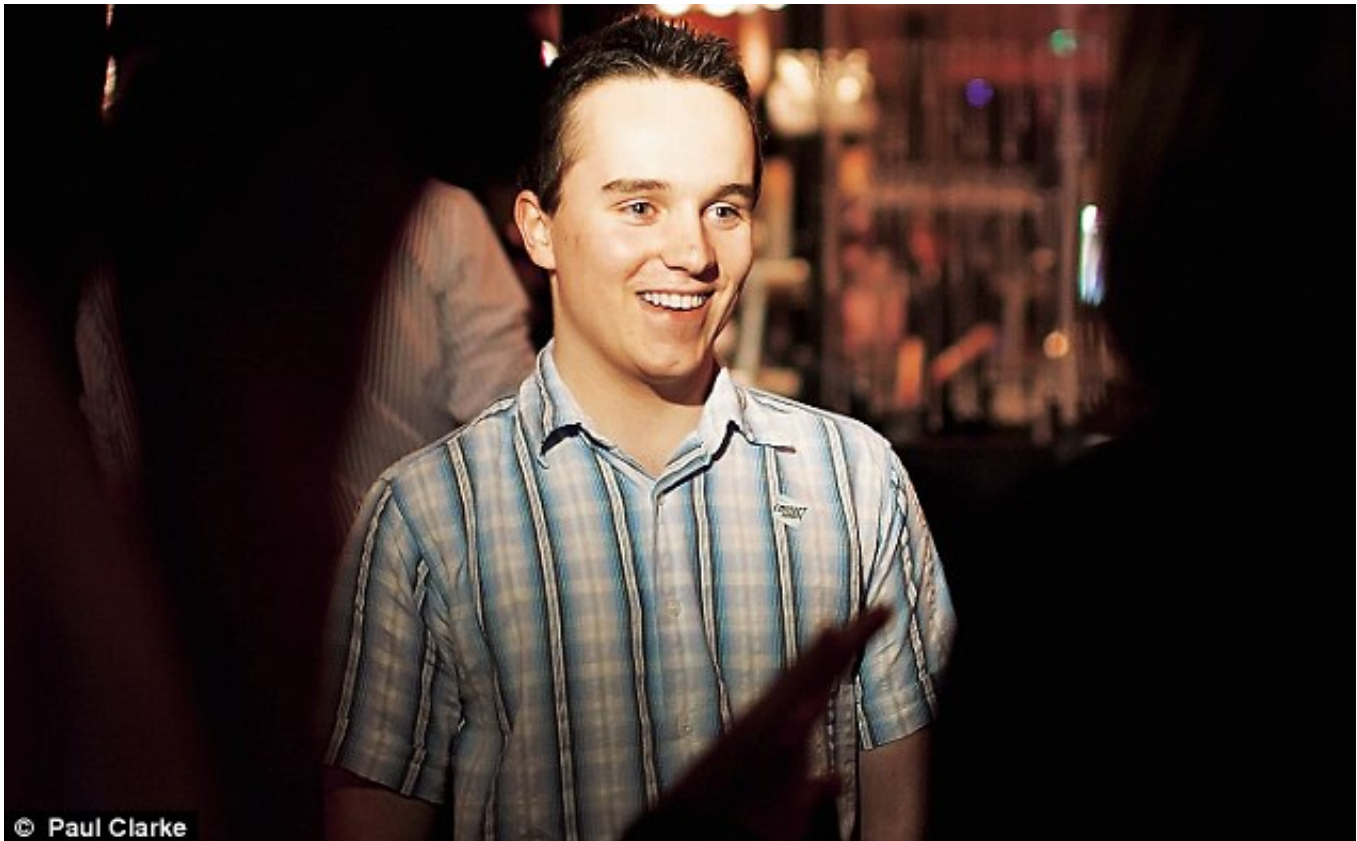
Downloads 1,000 +

Format WebOS

Price 70p

What it does Lets you update blogs on the move

I'm only 17, and Tumbibox was the first ever app I designed. Anyone can use existing web design or development skills to write apps for webOS. That's why I chose it. When I heard that they were releasing a software developer's kit I immediately joined the developer programme. It's free – you can submit apps at no charge. All you need is a text editor and you can start working. To anyone who wants to create their own application, I'd say give it a try. It costs nothing but your time and you will end up with a very useful and portable skill set.



'To anyone who wants to create their own app, I'd say give it a try. It costs nothing but your time,' said Ben Tattersley (Tumbibox)



Developer Charmain Ponnuthauri

App London On A Plate

Downloads None, app pending release

Format iPhone/iPad

Price £3.99

What it does Restaurant reviews/locator for of the capital, as well as recipes

'I first thought London On A Plate would work as a book idea. I spent 18 months trawling the doors of publishers and had no luck. Then after an agent suggested I make it an app, I tried to find online publishers, but then by chance a friend introduced me to a developer, and we exchanged his development skills for shares in the company, and then this led to a small seed loan from a friend. From there we made a partnership with the concierge company Quintessentially, who manage our shopping pages.'

STEP 3: SUBMIT YOUR APP

Time required Between one and two weeks.

Requirements For Apple, you must specify what devices the app is designed for and the lowest firmware requirement (ie, the earliest operating system it will run on). Obscene content will not be accepted. Because you can install apps to Android devices from websites, as well as Android Market, there is no strict submission process – although Google takes action against apps that damage or control Android devices.

Malcolm Barclay (London Tube Deluxe) 'Apple are very easy to work with once you know how the system works. They are generally very fair; if your app is rejected, they tell you why. The system is geared toward the customer; they think a lot about the end user and making things easy for them. It's key to their success.'



Developer Jon Hamblin

App Say What You See: The Collection

Downloads 500,000+

Format iPhone/iPad

Price 59p

What it does A visual puzzle game.

'The submission process is a quality-control mechanism that Apple has to ensure all apps are of a sufficient quality, although with several thousand apps going through the process every day, they can't possibly test for every eventuality. When you submit, you also have to set certain criteria: what devices you want the app to work on, the firmware requirement and, importantly, the release date. When we submitted our App to Apple, the programmer forgot to specify the release date, which meant it suddenly launched into the App

Store ahead of schedule. That was annoying, but not a disaster. What was a disaster was that he'd set the target firmware incorrectly, so people whose devices weren't technically capable of playing the game were allowed to download it, resulting in a lot of extremely cross customers. The fix took minutes. Then we had to submit it all over again...'

STEP 4: PR AND MARKETING

Methods Apple Store promotions, Twitter campaigns, Facebook sites, 'launch evenings'

Cost From free – to near-limitless amounts of champagne and canapes to journalists...

Mark Rock (Audioboo) 'We were lucky because we managed to have a Twitter chat with Stephen Fry during development and he became a beta [test] user. That's the kind of digital gold dust that money can't buy. He's currently posting audioboo messages from the set of QI most nights. We had no cash for marketing or PR, so social networks became our channels for getting the word out. And our users became quite passionate about the app, so it sold itself.'

Malcolm Barclay (London Tube Deluxe) 'The best thing Apple can do for you as a developer is promote your app in iTunes – it will send sales into the stratosphere. When my Tube app was promoted in the US store it went from well outside the top 100 in the travel section to number two, and this for an app that is only useful in London.'

Rob Shoemith (Problem Halved) 'Without editorial exposure it's very difficult for apps to get noticed. I knew that working as a bin man while developing an app was going to make for a good story so I spent three months researching suitable media to share my experience with. I spent roughly 30 hours a week for those three months planning the media campaign. You need a good app and a great marketing campaign.'



Minecraft has earned £20m in one year. 'I never expected it to do this well,' said Markus Persson

STEP 5: MAKING MONEY

Setting purchase price Paid or free? Many apps have a 'lite' free version, which allows users to upgrade to a 'full' paid-for version later.

In-app purchase Games such as Angry Birds allow you to pay 59p to skip levels.

Advertising In-game advertising can be a huge source of revenue, particularly in apps that work inside Facebook.



Developer Markus 'Notch' Persson

App Minecraft

Downloads Over nine million

Format PC/iPhone (upcoming) /Android (upcoming)

Price £14.99

What it does Game in which players create, then defend, a landscape out of blocks

'When I started work on Minecraft, I expected it to be about six to 12 months of work, and that it might hopefully earn enough money to fund development of the next game, whatever that would be. I never expected it to do this well (Minecraft has earned £20 million in one year) and I'm trying to learn as much as I can from the success. I had recently quit my job as a game developer to be able to focus more on indie game development during my free time, and I was looking for a new game to develop by myself. I built Minecraft as I went along – I make sure to play the game a lot, and I've built my share of towers, and flooded my share of caves. If something ever doesn't feel fun, I'll remove it. If it's no fun, I'll redesign it. Once sales start dying and a minimum time has passed, I will release the game source code for free so others can develop it further.'



Developers Barry Petrie and David Hamilton

App Bloons TD4

Downloads Over five million

Format iPhone/iPad

Price £1.79

What it does Balloon-popping game, with monkeys

'Our company spawned out of a university project called Babygrow – a Tamagotchi-style game nurturing a digital baby. We juggled day jobs for four years while designing our first games. It meant we worked around 70 hour weeks but we were finally able to go full time when we started getting into the iPhone, as we were no longer reliant on publishers to get us to market. As well as the hard work, don't think you're going to create one app or game then become rich overnight. It is a really competitive market and although the opportunities for becoming an overnight millionaire are still in existence, the odds are stacked against you. If you can create a quality product, though, then there is money to be made. And who knows, if you start to gather fans for your game then number two, three... ten may be the one that sets you up for life.'

Nick Kuh (Tap To chat) 'Once our original version of Tap To Chat was bringing in about £5,000 per month we both agreed to book in a two-week, intensive block of time to build the next version. The toughest part of the market is probably user-expectation. It's amazing and strange that you can pick up a mobile app that could potentially change the way you communicate with your friends for less than a can of lemonade. It can be hard when you have people demanding you justify why they should spend 59p on your software, when they are sending said demands from their email account on a £600 tablet. Tap To Chat has generated about £30,000 in the five months it has been in the App Store. We are aiming to at least double or triple our monthly revenue with Tap To Chat 2. The exciting thing about the current mobile climate is that the barrier of entry – especially for Apple – is the cost of a machine and a £59 developer licence. Combine that with a great idea and a great implementation, and suddenly you could be selling millions of copies all over the world and sailing off into the sunset on a shiny new yacht.'



Developer Matthew Rosenfeld

App Solo Synthesiser

Download More than 100,000

Format iPhone/iPad

Price Free (paid upgrades available)

What it does Create unique sounds and play music

'By putting money aside when I was an employee elsewhere, we started out self-funded. It meant there weren't publishers or investors wandering in and saying: 'We've been reading all about this "iMyFaceVille" thing, we think you should do stuff more like that.' Also, it turned out to be good practice for the economic downturn. Nowadays the company, Wooji Juice, is funded by people buying the stuff we already finished. I'm a big fan of this because it keeps us pointing in the same direction as the people who use/play our apps and games. With some developers, all they're really trying to do is build the company up to sell it. But then their 'customer' isn't the person buying their app, it's the stock market.'

'Our customers, the people we think about when we're designing new products, are people who use our apps or play our games. We do what I call 'stepping-stone' development. A lot of people quit their jobs because they have a magnum opus 'dream project' they never got to make at their day jobs. The whole company lives or dies by its success, so you're on for a hugely stressful six-year gamble. It's harder now for tiny developers like Wooji Juice to shine against giant corporations with big advertising budgets and a scorched-earth policy. So we're not in the same Lottery-winning category of success as Minecraft's Notch, but not starving either.'

Oli Christie (Flick Football) 'My company Neon Play was launched in June 2010 with the aim of becoming the No 1 independent mobile games studio in the UK. In under a year, we've launched over 32 iPhone and iPad games, with 18 million downloads of both free and paid apps. We have had six UK No 1 games, including Flick Football, Paper Glider and Traffic Panic. We are now starting to make games for Android, Nokia, Windows and BlackBerry devices. I privately financed the start-up of Neon Play from savings and this has now been paid back within a year. The temptation is to read about Angry Birds and Doodle Jump and think 'I could do that'. Of course, there are bedroom developers who have had that lucky break and a big hit, but it is very hard. Even hardened games companies are struggling to make an impression on Apple's App Store. Don't give up your day job yet.'

STEP 6: REFINING THE PRODUCT

Time required An update can take one minute, a complete rethink two months.



Developer Alex Fleetwood

App Boardgame Remix

Download 22,000

Format iPhone/iPad

Price £2.99

What it does Creates new games out of old classics

'Reach is vital, and a great game that's trying to build an audience from scratch is going to struggle. So let's say you conquer that, and you make a brilliant game that's immediately popular, that's still not enough. Even those apps that do have great success tend to have very short shelf-lives in terms of sales. If you look at app chart positions, most fall away very quickly. Engaging with your customers, releasing updates and new versions, and giving away content will mobilise your customer base and give you a shot at longevity.'



'Downloads were slow at first on the Monday... then by the following Tuesday we were at No 1,' said Jon Hamblin (Say What You See)

Jon Hamblin (Say What You See) 'A fan emailed to ask us why we'd created such a compromised app. It turned out that he was also a programmer. We got chatting, and he offered to fix the app for us, but on one condition – we rip the entire thing up and start again. It was a painful decision, but in the end we decided to do it. For two months, he and I worked on the app, slowly rebuilding it.

'We added some new features, tweaked the thing to within an inch of its life, and then tested, tested, tested. We released the app on a Monday, and downloads were slow at first. Then we started shooting up the charts.

'By the following Tuesday, we were the No 1 free app on the App Store, with over 50,000 downloads a day.

'By the following Tuesday, we'd broken 500,000 downloads and were making thousands of pounds a day from the paid-for version. We'd done it.'

Additional reporting by Rob Temple and Simon Munk

People:

[Michael Jackson](#),
[Stephen Fry](#)

Places:

[London](#),
[United Kingdom](#),
[Asia](#)

GAME REVIEWS

[Virtua Tennis 4 \(PS3\)](#)

[The reason you'll find Virtua Tennis 4 so familiar is the lack of any huge progression in the basic game- play. Nothing much seems to have changed since Virtua Tennis 2.](#)

[Portal 2 \(PS3\)](#)

[At its heart, Portal 2 is a simple game, being a series of rooms full of puzzles that become more fiendishly difficult as you progress.](#)

[Ben 10 - Cosmic Destruction \(PS3\)](#)

[This latest instalment in the franchise sees Ben travel round the world collecting artefacts in an attempt to fend off a mysterious 'cosmic storm'.](#)

[Crysis 2 \(PS3\)](#)

[The action in Crysis 2 takes place in the urban jungle. Once again, the stunning visuals remains one of the key features of this hugely impressive first person shooter.](#)

[Move Heroes \(PS3\)](#)

[With an innovative crossover of established stories and characters, Move Heroes is an action-based game featuring some of the PS3's best-loved characters.](#)

[Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12 - The Masters \(PS3\)](#)

[It's taken EA a long time to convince the worthy gentlemen of Augusta to allow them to map the Masters course, but it's finally been done, and it was worth the wait.](#)

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GADGET REVIEWS

[Magicbox Parabola](#)

[For years the radio has been the unloved child of the digital revolution – but once you've got one it is hard to see why.](#)

Memorex Dual Alarm Clock Radio

After failing to find a replacement that caters for all my needs, and trialling many 'new' alarm clocks over the years, I've finally found one.

Suunto M4 sports watch

Once you get over the feeling that you must be ill or at risk in some way to be monitoring your heart rate, the data supplied by this device offers some real surprises.

Google Nexus S smartphone

The Samsung Google Nexus S proved a rollercoaster of emotions for the first couple of weeks.

Review: Wireless TDK headphones

Straight out of the box and the TDK WR700 headset looks compact enough to wear on the Tube, with the cushioned earpieces offering a snug fit that.

Vogel iPad WallMount

Oh no, not another iPad accessory that I'll struggle to find a use for... Admittedly, that was my first thought when Vogel's iPad wall mount landed on my desk.

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