

IPHONE DEVELOPERS GO FROM RAGS TO RICHES

The iPhone is a revolutionary handset. But it is also the key to a virtual gold mine — the iTunes App Store, where independent developers can become multimillionaires in just a year.

Since its launch in July, the [App Store has grown](#) to become an indie developer's dream come true. Steve Demeter, developer of the vastly popular \$5 iPhone game *Trism*, announced he [made \\$250,000 in profit in just two months](#). His team? Himself, mainly, with a little bit of help from a friend and a contracted designer (whom he paid \$500). If his profits continue at this rate, Demeter will earn nearly \$2 million by July 2009.



"I really didn't think about the money," Demeter said in a phone interview with [Wired.com](#). "I got an e-mail from a lady who's like, a 50-year-old woman who says, 'I do not play games, but I love *Trism*.' That's what I did it for."

What's more, Demeter initially released *Trism* as a free native application in the [Jailbreak community](#) — meaning it was a game that users could play only if they hacked their iPhones. The prospects of making money were uncertain, but Demeter had a vision: He knew iPhone apps would get big once Apple released a software developer kit to allow third-party apps on the handset, and he wanted to get in on the platform early.

Though Demeter's success was fortuitous, he said he expects other applications to see similar numbers. He said the factors that made *Trism* stand out were unique gameplay (*Trism* is essentially a version of Bejeweled using the iPhone's accelerometer), high replay value and an online leaderboard that creates community. He said applications with great content will sell themselves, and that's ultimately what other developers need to focus on, too.

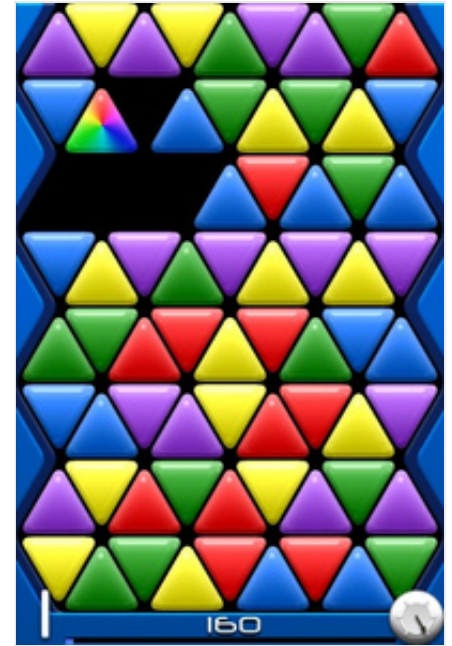
In a sense, the App Store, despite its corporate ties, has created an open market where

developers can strike it rich with minimal resources — even out of a garage — so long as they possess the talent and the time.

Bart Decrem, CEO of Tapulous, would agree. His company's free application *Tap Tap Revenge*, a music-rhythm game that utilizes the iPhone's touch screen and accelerometer, [hit a milestone of 1,000,000 downloads](#) just two weeks after its launch. As of this writing there are 1.75

million users who have downloaded *Tap Tap Revenge*, according to Decrem, and the company expects that number to grow to 2,000,000 by next week.

As for profits, Tapulous just recently began inserting advertisements in the game, and the company also has plans to release a premium version that will cost money.



Decrem was mum to disclose profit numbers, but Demeter estimates that any top iPhone app is making its company roughly \$5,000 to \$10,000 a day.

Decrem's recipe for success with *Tap Tap* is similar to *Trism*'s: Paying attention to detail; keeping the app engaging and alive with various forms of gameplay; and relying on those two factors to spread popularity with an old-fashioned marketing method — word of mouth. Similar to *Trism*, *Tap*

Tap Revenge was also an app that initially emerged in the Jailbreak community, and it spawned a loyal following there before breaking out into the broader market with the launch of the App Store.

Decrem, whose initial team was only four people including himself, said he views the App Store as an exciting new landscape, as opposed to today's overcrowded world of dot-coms.

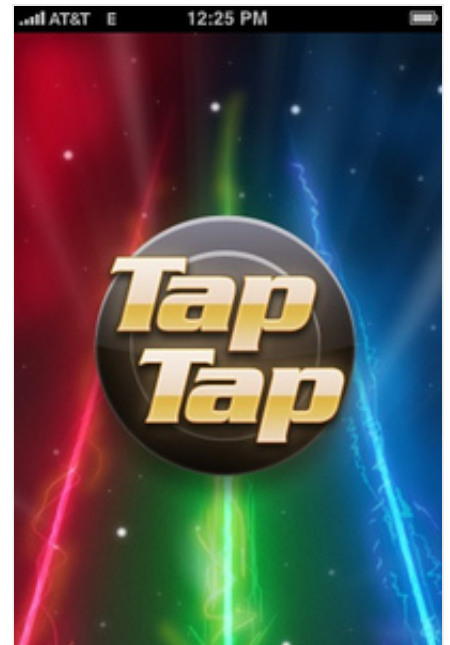
"I think it's a very interesting space, and it's very reminiscent of the early days of the web in terms of the amount of green fields and opportunity," Decrem said in a phone interview. "You really don't need a huge amount of capital. You need attention to detail and product, and that's going to keep increasing."

Not all App Store success stories started out with the iPhone in mind. [Design by a Knife CEO Austin Sarner's](#) story is a bit different from Demeter's and Decrem's. Sarner built his reputation as a coder who had developed popular Mac applications in the past: App Zapper and Disco. He didn't even think about developing an iPhone app until much later in the game, he says.

Good thing he did: Sarner's [\\$3 application, Pennies](#), a budgeting tool, was the 12th most popular in the App Store at one point.

Sarner echoes the idea that great content — not marketing — is what drives App Store success.

"You can come up with a generic idea, but implement it properly and you really are going to stand out," Sarner said in a phone interview. "Basically everybody's on the same level once they submit an iPhone app. Unlike traditional marketing, there's no ad campaign: A user just sees what he sees in the iPhone store, and the applications kind of have to sell themselves to some extent."



All three of these developers — big fish in a small pond, if you will — have plans for future iPhone applications as well.

"I have a sense of a bigger picture," Demeter said. "The community that has spread within *Trism* — the amount of people that use forum accounts and create a sense of community — I want to keep making great games, games people want to play."



Updated: 11 a.m., Sept. 23: Demeter provided documentation to Wired.com confirming his earnings.

Also see:

- [App Store is a Goldmine: Indie Developer Makes \\$250,000 in Two Months](#)

(Photo courtesy Steve Demeter)

(Screenshot credit: Wired.com, [nwistheone/Flickr](#), [Sigalkos/Flickr](#))

Go Back to Top. Skip To: Start of Article.