■ **INNOVATION**

# Apps spark creative talents of developers

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■ **INTO THE FUTURE:** The new Asus Padfone 2, which combines smartphone and tablet PC functions, is presented at a media launch in Taipei. The rise of the smartphone and tablet has brought about the phenomenal apps world, which has transformed technology PICTURE: REUTERS

THERE is hardly anything you won't find an app for these days: from counting the amount of calories you consume to managing a job search while you're on the go.

Over the years, apps have become more than just a source of entertainment; they have become serious business.

According to a research report by Technet.org, an organisation of CEOs and senior executives of leading technology companies in the US, the app economy added roughly 466 000 jobs in the US, up from zero in 2007, when the iPhone was introduced.

"Nothing illustrates the job-creating power of innovation better than the app economy. The incredibly rapid rise of smartphones, tablets and social media, and the applications (apps) that run on them, is perhaps the biggest economic and technological phenomenon today. Almost a million apps have been created for the iPhone, iPad and Android alone, greatly augmenting the usefulness of mobile devices," the report said.

"On an economic level, each app represents jobs — for programmers, for user interface designers, for marketers, for managers, for support staff."

In South Africa, strides are being made to unearth our own home-grown app talents.

One of these shining stars is Glenn Stein, a 23-year-old programming student who

## But SA still has some way to go

developed PhraZapp, an app that allows one to translate words and phrases. It has five languages, English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Tswana and Xhosa, and has won numerous technology and innovation awards.

Stein said the inspiration came about when he was hitchhiking in the Eastern Cape and met up with some guys who were travelling in the same direction and found they couldn't communicate because they couldn't understand each other's languages.

"I just thought it was so weird that we're all South Africans, but we can't talk to each other," he said.

After brainstorming and using an online tutorial to learn about app development, he loaded phrases onto a database and began programming the app.

"The response to the app has been amazing, and so far there have been about 20 000 downloads, and I'm working on expanding it to all 11 languages," Stein said.

He said he was currently not making money from it, because downloads were free, but was hoping to monetise the next version by bringing in some advertising.

Mobiraba is another app that is uniquely South African and is based on an African game called Morabaraba.

David Vannucci, the

developer of the app, said he was tired of not being able to play the game with people around him because they had no idea how it was played.

"Studying telecommunications, my natural instinct was to create a mobile application with all the advantages of the most modern PC games, like chatting, ranking, tournaments, leader boards and artificial intelligence," said Vannucci.

*'We still need to grow people's understanding of the app dev space'*

"In January, we launched Mobiraba on Mxit. It has grown substantially over the past year and currently has about 150 000 players. We are rewriting the Mobiraba server to handle over 10 000 games a day, as we were unprepared for the demand."

But Vannucci admitted that making money out of app development was still out of reach for many developers.

"We have found that

monetisation of applications in the South African market is not the same as overseas and requires a creative approach that is tailored to the South African environment. Application developers in South Africa are a very small community, and there are very few who have the luxury of designing their own creative applications. Most developers need to consult to sustain themselves."

Kishyr Ramdial, an app developer from Durban, said though app development was making its mark globally, the South African app development pool was still underdeveloped.

"Because it is still relatively new, it can sometimes be difficult to find local forums where we can share knowledge and learn from local developers who understand the intricacies and nuances involved in developing an app appropriate for a local audience. This would allow us to network with fellow app developers, build on communal knowledge and review each other's code, enhancing the quality and profile of local apps," Ramdial said.

"While we aim to establish

South Africa as an app development superpower, we still need to grow people's understanding of the app dev space and the future of mobile."

Ramdial has developed an award-winning app called Radiopod, which changes the way users experience podcasts.

"The app has custom-designed features and an intuitive interface, allowing users to search, stream and categorise their favourite local podcasts."

The app was inspired by his love for radio. "What I love about app development is that every day brings new challenges, with each ecosystem constantly evolving, inspiring new development and new approaches to finding a solution most appropriate for your audience.

"App development is a creative and multifaceted profession which requires nothing short of pure passion to create an awesome product. For me, what makes this career even more rewarding is knowing that something I helped create in a studio in Durban has made the life of someone, somewhere else in the world, a little bit easier."