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THE DIGITAL DECADE: APPS

PHONES AREN'T JUST FOR CALLS

By WILLIAM SMITH
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Cure Computer Solutions owner Sam Boyer fondly remembers his first cell phone as a "Motorola brick." The kind of ancient technology that makes good fodder for comedy skits.

"I got my first cell phone in 1996. It was a big flip phone. That's back when you would hear static," Boyer said with a grin. "All it really did was dial out. Back then, you would have your phone and Palm Pilot. And all it did was take notes."

Nowadays, most phones are no longer phones. They could best be described as mobile computing devices with limited processing power. Thanks to improved Internet connections, almost any piece of information floating around the world is a button press away.

The quickest growing cell phone technology are computer applications commonly known among iPhone users as "apps." The useful and often whimsical applications go a step beyond what can be accomplished by endless Internet searching.

Apps do all the heavy lifting for you.

"If I wanted the best steakhouse in town, it (the phone) would know that," Boyer said.

Boyer was referring to an app called Urbanspoon, which immediately provides reviews for all the restaurants in the area with a simple shake of the iPhone. He's also fond of a Google Maps application that utilizes the phone's GPS tracking to provide a street level, photographic view of the street one is on.

Boyer said the feature was particularly useful in Chicago, and he noted that about 20 percent of Burlington's streets have been mapped into the system.

"I was looking for a restaurant (in Chicago), and I didn't

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John Gaines/The Hawk Eye

Above, Sam Boyer, president of C.U.R.E. Solutions, stays connected with the latest smart phone, his laptop and desktop computers at the Burlington office. Boyer started his business 15 years ago, and the tech explosion keeps his business expanding with storefronts in Fairfield, Fort Madison and Mount Pleasant.

John Gaines/The Hawk Eye

At left, people have found the way to stay connected with the latest smart phones. The phones are, from left, iPhone, HTC Touch Pro 2 and Droid.



Jobless workers deciding to call off the search

By CHRISTOPHER LEONARD
The Associated Press

Many jobless people have reached a conclusion that captures the depth of the unemployment crisis: Looking for a job is a waste of time.

The economy is growing. Yet it's creating few jobs. That's why in the past eight months, 1.8 million people without jobs left the labor market. Many had grown so frustrated by their failure to find a job that they threw up their hands and quit looking for one.

And it's why Barbara Bishop sat down at her kitchen table in suburban Atlanta last month and joined their ranks. Her decision came seven months after she quit a PR job that seemed about to be axed. Sending out resumes got her nowhere. So Bishop made a list of her skills and decided to launch her own business.

"I don't want to look any more," she said of the job hunt. "It's become very discouraging."

The nation's unemployment rate is 9.7 percent. But so many jobless people have quit looking that if they're combined with the number of part-time workers who'd prefer to work full time, the so-called "underemployment" rate is 16.5 percent.

Their outsized numbers

See Jobless page 6A

Palin tells 'tea party' it's time for revolution

By LIZ SIDOTI
The Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Sarah Palin declared "America is ready for another revolution" and repeatedly assailed President Barack Obama on Saturday before adoring "tea party" activists, a seemingly natural constituency should she run for president.

"This movement is about the people," the 2008 GOP vice presidential nominee said as the crowd roared. "Government is supposed to be working for the people."

Noting Democrats' recent electoral losses just a year after Obama was elected on promises of hope and change, she asked: "How's that hope-y, change-y stuff workin' out for you?"

Her audience waved flags and erupted in cheers during multiple standing ovations as Palin gave the keynote address at the first national convention of the "tea party" coalition, an anti-establishment, grass-roots network motivated by anger over the growth of government, budget-busting spending and Obama's policies.

Filled with her trademark

See Palin page 6A

Duck-calling winner blew it, but didn't blow it

By WILLIAM SMITH
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After a disappointing first-round performance, Mitch Downs figured there was no way he would be allowed to continue competing in the Iowa State Duck Calling Contest Saturday morning.

"It was one of the worst rounds I've blown," the Webster City man said. "I was really nervous, and it showed. I didn't blow as hard or as powerful as I usually can."

The contest kicked off the 12th annual Mississippi Valley Callers Association Classic, which attracted bird talkers from across the United States.

Downs, who has been a competitive duck caller for five years, was surprised to learn he qualified for the second round. Not long after that, he made it into the third and final round.

But he never expected to take home the championship

plaque and the \$500 that went with it.

"I'm very excited," he said minutes after winning the contest. "My dad used to make duck calls, and he stuck one in my mouth when I was little. I've been blowing ever since I can remember."

Downs wasn't the only one who came away with a trophy. The Iowa State Duck Calling Contest was followed by the Mississippi Valley Youth Duck Calling, a goose calling contest and the Mississippi Valley Regional Duck Calling Contest.

"We like to think we have a couple of thousand people come through the doors," said event organizer Chris Jochims. "We've got people from Arkansas to Canada to the Midwestern states. We are pretty well represented."

A good number of those callers spent the day honking away on duck and goose calls

See Contest page 6A



Matt Ryerson/The Hawk Eye

Representatives from Vought Custom Calls sell brands of fowl calls during the 12th annual Mississippi Valley Callers Association Calling Classic Saturday at Pzazz Convention and Event Center in Burlington.



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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Top apps

Considering there are more than 50,000 iPhone apps to choose from, there's no way to determine which apps are truly the best. But here's a few of the more popular ones.

• 9 Tool Box

One of the most useful apps you'll find on your iPhone, the 9-Tool Box actually has 10 useful applications, including a currency convertor, a date calculator, a unit measurement convertor and a tip calculator. The program also includes an app that keeps track of a woman's menstrual cycle, just in case you want to know when that time of the month is due.

• A Special Phone — Adaptive Keyboard

You may call a lot of people over the course of the workday, but everyone has a list of acquaintances they chat with the most. With this app, you'll never have to look up their number again.

The app enables users to set up a list of six contacts that can be called simply by shaking the phone. When you shake the phone, it announces the contact name and waits two seconds before placing the call. Shake once for your first contact, twice for your second contact and so on.

• Urbanspoon

The ultimate app when you're looking for a place to dine in a strange city. This application not only provides reviews for every restaurant around you, but does it in a creative manner.

Urbanspoon uses the iPhones's GPS capability to determine your current location. Using a slot machine-like interface, the app doles out suggestions based on the type of food you want to eat and how much you're willing to spend. Depending on the restaurant, you may even get to peruse the menu.

• Twitterfon

If you're a twitter maniac, this one is a no-brainer. There's nothing that fancy here. Just the ability to tweet and read tweets from wherever you please.

• The World Factbook '09

Providing detailed information on more than 250 countries and territories, this app includes political information, military issues and up-to-date details on volatile areas of the world such as the Middle East.

Even cooler is the ability to view satellite images of any country in the world by linking directly with Google Maps.

• Pandora

Have you listened to "Freebird" 3,000 times too many? Pandora addresses the problem by supplying a constant stream of new, free music. You start by listing some of your favorite songs and artists. Pandora then finds patterns in your preferences and creates customized radio stations.

• Midomi

This is an app most people wish they would have had their entire lives. Midomi can identify just about any song ever released when you hold your iPhone up to a speaker. The service even points you to the iTunes store to buy the track, as well as related YouTube videos.

• Stanza

Reading the latest Stephen King book is a lot of fun, but almost everyone could stand up to catch up on the classics. This app provides a large library of public domain works such as "The Sorrows of Young Werther" and "The Waste Land." And it's all free.

••••

Not everyone iPhone apps needs to be useful. Here are a few of the more of unusual apps.

• iFart

The creator of this application supposedly earned a million dollars from iFart, a fantastically puerile app which transforms your iPhone or iPod touch in to a virtual fart machine.

• Baby Shaker

This controversial application was withdrawn from the iTunes store shortly after release. The app, which encouraged you to shake your iPhone to silence a crying baby, was heavily criticized by Web users and children's groups.

• BulletFlight

A must for every self-respecting marksman, this app helps gunmen line up a clean shot at their target by calculating factors such as prevailing wind conditions, ammunition type, and distance to the target.

• iBeer

This app, which was at the centre of a legal battle, turns the iPhone or iPod touch in to a virtual pint glass. Tip the device to your lips to mimick gulping down the foamy suds.

• Dog whistler

Wannabe shepherds will love this app, which emits a whistling sound to call your dog to heel. The only problem is, some of the frequencies are beyond the range of human hearing, so you'll have to take the developer's word for it.

• LOL Maker: Lolcats

Pictures of cats overlaid with hilarious captions is an internet institution. Now you can make your own Lolcat on the go.

• Influenza

Get H1N1 alerts from the Center for Disease Control pushed straight to your iPhone, and you'll have advanced warning of when to bed down in your nuclear bunker.

• Star Wars Sound Board

App aimed at die-hard Star Wars fans. Simply click on a picture of your favourite character to hear them say a famous catchphrase.

• iFlipFlow Lite

Remember those novelty pens that had a picture of a lady inside the barrel who would magically "undress" when you tipped the pen? Well, this is the 21st-century version, in which tilt the iPhone or iPod touch to reveal the lady in her undergarments.

Source: Telegraph.co.uk

Apps

Continued from page 1A

know what the facade looked like. I found out I was two blocks away," he said.

A self-professed technology junkie, Boyer has purchased about 15 cell phones over the last 14 years.

"When something new comes out, I go to Davenport," he said.

But for those not in the know, trying to decide between a smart phone connected to the Internet and a dumb phone that does little beyond dialing can be confusing. Though Cure Computer Solutions doesn't sell phones, many cell phone users come to the store with their questions.

"A lot of our clients are using iPhones," Boyer said.

Understanding the origins

Phone apps are the cutting edge of technology now, but the idea of the cell phone has been around since Lars Magnus Ericsson installed a telephone in his car in 1910. To use it, he had to stop near accessible telephone lines and connect a pair of long electric wires to the national telephone network.

Sixty-three years later, first generation (or 1G) cell phone technology was introduced by AT&T's Bell Labs when a Motorola employee placed a cell phone call in 1973. Modern-day cell phones utilize a 3G (third generation) network that provides Internet speed comparable to a DSL connection.

1G networks, which were prominent during the 1980s when car phones were all the rage, used analog telecommunications that were gradually replaced by 2G digital signals during the 90s. 2G networks still provide Internet connections today, though the network runs slower than a traditional dial-up connection.

Text messaging, which is the preferred method of communication among teenagers, was introduced through 2G networks during the early '90s.

"There are two types of Internet. There's 3G and then there's traditional (2G)," Boyer said.

Windows Mobile vs. Apple's iPhone

PC technician Josh Pickering has fallen in love with his iPhone. He loves the touch-screen interface and the applications, which can be downloaded to his phone with the simple touch of a button.

But he doesn't love the spotty cell phone coverage he gets through AT&T, which is currently the only option if one wants an iPhone. The phone also suffers from a very sluggish Internet connection, since the nearest AT&T 3G network is in Davenport.

"If you're in Burlington, you still get good coverage, but you don't get the best coverage in rural areas," Pickering said.

Boyer, who owns an HTC Touch Pro2 phone, isn't restricted to AT&T. His phone receives coverage from the much more expansive Verizon network, which is ideal for the rural areas surrounding Burlington.

The only drawback is functionality. While the phone utilizes a touch-screen interface similar to the iPhone, Boyer is reliant on the Windows Mobile software program for phone applications similar to what is offered on the iPhone.

"You don't just turn it (the phone) on and find applications. You have to plug it into the computer and use ActiveSync. It's very cumbersome," he said.

Boyer said the Windows Mobile program also has a fairly limited selection of applications compared to the iPhone, which offers more than 50,000 apps. About 25 percent of available apps are completely free, and most cost \$10 or less.



John Lovretta/The Hawk Eye

Mariah Cary of Burlington, a student at Southeastern Community College, uses her LG Versa phone at the West Burlington campus. Cary was using the phone to look up some information for an Intro to Computers class.

"... I don't think you can replace the richness of you and I talking together."

Ron Perry, SCC sociology professor

Many of those apps are quite useful. Jott, for example, transcribes voice memos.

Other apps, such as iFart, serve a more whimsical purpose. Pickering was quite pleased with an app that made his phone sound like a lightsaber when he swung it around.

"My kids got a kick out of that," he said.

Texting vs. apps

There's one modern axiom that never fails. A teenager and her cell phone shall never be parted.

"I text more than I talk on the phone. I'm sure everyone is like that these days," said 18-year-old Southeastern Community College student Season Fraker.

Fraker owns an LG Triton touch-screen phone, which gives her access to basic apps that let her check the weather and browse the Internet through Google. She got her first phone at the tender age of 13, which was a common story among the college students interviewed.

"I wanted to be the first one who got it (the LG Triton) in Fort Madison, and I paid \$410 for it," she said. "Now you can get it for \$125."

For many college students, unlimited texting is much more important than fancy applications. Emily Rudolph, 19, once received a cell phone bill that identified 1,700 text messages she sent out over the course of the month. Like many of her classmates, Rudolph can average between 70 and 100 text messages in a day. She said sending a text usually takes her about two seconds.

"I hate to talk on the phone verbally," she said. "I would rather send a text message."

Rudolph wasn't allowed to have a cell phone until she was 16, a family rule that has changed in recent years. Now that her parents no longer keep a landline in the house, her 9- and 10-year-old brothers already have cell phones of their own.

What was once a fancy toy is now a lifeline for the Rudolph family — a lifeline that is sorely missed when taken away.

"I got into trouble one time and lost my cell phone for the whole summer," she said. "It was pretty hard. I felt really annoying, because I had to ask everyone 'Can I use your phone?'"

Of course, not every college student keeps their fingers on the keyboard. Mathew White, a 30-year-old Mount Pleasant student pursuing a psychology degree at SCC, sends out less than half-a-dozen texts a day.

"I might text my wife two or three times a day, but that's about it. I mostly use it to talk," he said.

White uses his BlackBerry to make use of more in-depth apps that let him check the news from CNN. He's also a big fan of eBooks.

"It just gives you easier access," he said. "You have various ways to talk to family members. I have a cousin who is getting ready to go to Afghanistan, and I keep in touch with him through Facebook."

All the students except for White admitted to regular cell phone usage during class.

Cell phones in the classroom

SCC sociology professor Ron Perry has one simple rule when it comes to using cell phones in class.

"I tell them this is a cell phone-free zone," he said.

He treats cell phone usage in class like soccer penalties. The first offense results in a yellow card, and the second offense earns the student a red card.

"I had to make that rule within the last five years," he said.

Perry had a much simpler way of handling classroom cell phone usage 10 years ago. Anyone who answered their cell phone in class had to let Perry use the phone to call his relatives in Chicago. Roaming and long distance fees made that a scary prospect.

"That was enough then. Now, it doesn't matter," he said.

Most cell phone plans offer long distance calls anywhere in the country at no extra charge, and the software program Skype allows users to call anywhere in the world through the Internet. Most of the calls are either free or have a minimal charge, which is good news for Perry. His daughter is traveling the world, so Skype is a prime mode of communication for them — even if his cell phone is a little out of date.

"I got one for emergencies, like most people my age," he said.

Perry doesn't have any class activities that make use of cell phone applications, and doesn't know of any classes that do. But the apps have come in handy in the past. During a classroom discussion that touched on India, one student remarked that the country was famous for burning its brides. Another

student quickly looked on his phone and discovered that the illegal practice is only performed by .002 percent of the population.

"Is that a fair statement about India?" Perry asked.

The future

Perry likes to joke about how technology is passing him by, but he's excited to see how cell phone apps and social media are changing the way people live and communicate.

"I think it's just different. Privacy is out the window. People are communicating this way instead of face-to-face," he said. "But I don't think you can replace the richness of you and I talking together."

Boyer sees even bigger things ahead for phone apps, though it might be a while before smaller cities like Burlington can take advantage of them. One of the newer apps scans bar-codes on restaurant doors and instantly delivers a menu and reviews, though the app is only useful in larger cities right now.

"I don't think we're there yet," he said.

Pickering said the biggest struggle for new phone applications is price. More advanced programs cost more money, and most phone users are used to paying no more than \$10 for an app.

"When everything was free, it (apps) kind of started out at the bottom. They started out free, so there's that drive to keep it free," Pickering said.

Since the iPhone is a much easier way to access apps, the real breakthrough will happen if Apple and Verizon make a deal that lets the iPhone access Verizon's 3G network. The two companies entered into talks last year, but so far, there is no deal.

"I got AT&T so I could get an iPhone, but they had really bad service," Rudolph said.

She is patiently awaiting some kind of deal between Verizon and Apple. As soon as it happens, she will have an iPhone in her hand.

"They're sweet!" she said.

Right now, iPhone apps have advanced almost to the point of being able to drive your car. The Viper SmartStart app can start your car, unlock the doors and change the temperature in the cabins.

A perfect app for Iowa residents.

"They make an app for everything," Boyer said.

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