

# Local app developers unsure of iPad's niche

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Apple's new iPad tablet computer may create a broad new market for Twin Cities companies that write applications, or apps, for the iPhone.

But local app developers, who are among the thousands of firms nationwide spawned from the iPhone's popularity, remain a bit unsure of what that opportunity is.

"It looks like a great device," said Keith Pichelman, chief executive officer of Concrete Software Inc., a 20-employee developer in Eden Prairie that has about 25 iPhone apps. "But who is going to buy it and what is that person going to use it for?"

Others agree.

"No one has a clue what's going to happen with the iPad," said Justin Grammens, co-founder of Recursive Awesome, a Minneapolis firm that writes iPhone apps for clients such as Best Buy. "Some people say it's the next greatest thing in computing, but I don't believe that. However, I do believe that having more Apple devices out there will help companies like us that are developing apps."

The best news for local app developers Wednesday was Apple's claim that nearly all existing iPhone apps would run on the iPad "virtually unmodified" — which means it will cost developers little or nothing to offer their apps to iPad users. Their companies operate a high volume, low-cost business, typically selling apps for \$1 to \$2.

Apple also offered developers new software tools to make

it easy to tweak iPhone app graphics so they'll look better on the iPad's larger screen.

"I'm going to download it and check it out," Grammens said.

Others plan to take a different route.

"I'm going to buy an iPad and see how my existing iPhone apps work on it," said John Muchow, founder of 3 Sixty Software in Deephaven, a one-man operation that hires contract programmers. "I want to see if my apps look good, and whether it makes sense for me to take advantage of things that make the iPad different from the iPhone," such as an optional plug-in keyboard.

Muchow's firm has about 20 apps, including one that plays old TV cartoons and several that play audio clips ranging from movie screams to Snoop Dogg quotes. Only one thing worries him about providing apps for the new iPad.

"I'm sure the iPad will be well-designed, but I'm not sure what the market for it is," he said. "It's not a laptop or an iPhone, and I can't figure out what its niche is. But we'll know in a few months if it will be successful."

Pichelman agrees.

"I'm curious about who will use the iPad and why," he said. "Will people want short entertainment apps, or is the iPad for longer periods of use as an e-book reader or for surfing the Net? Will iPad users want apps such as a to-do list or a currency-exchange rate calculator, or are those better suited to an iPhone that you have with you all the time?"

In the meantime, developers know their potential market has gotten bigger, but they don't know by how much.