Tracking Minnesota-connected apps isn't easy. The iTunes Store doesn't break them down by region. And even if it did, not all apps are independently developed.

Lookup the Public Radio app, for example, and it's credited to the Public Radio Exchange, the Boston-based entity that hired CodeMorphic to do the actual development. CodeMorphic also has done work for clients as diverse as NBC Universal, General Mills and the Mayo Clinic, all of which distributed the resulting apps under their brands and names.

"The Twin Cities has a remarkably deep tech talent pool that's almost invisible," Grigs-bysaid.

He pointed to a Bloomington-based company called Nerdery Interactive Labs, a veritable factory of 70 developers who pair with clients who have an idea for an app but lack the technical know-how to create one. Its un-credited work includes apps for Delta Faucet and J.G. Penney.

"We get credit by having creative agencies come back to us for more business," said Mark Malmberg, the Nerdery's communication manager.

Grisgby is well placed to know the Twin Cities apps scene through Mobile Orchard (www.mobileorchard.com), which offers training and other resources to would-be app developers. But even he was unaware of some of the new apps spawned here.

One of them is the fun time-waster Younicorn, which transforms people from users' photos into unicorns. That's right — humans with horns. Created by Minneapolis-based creative agency Mono, the 99-cent app has been downloaded 10,000 times in just two months and has become a hit on Facebook. "We think it's probably struck a chord because it's fun and just odd enough to capture people's attention," the agency said by e-mail. "Plus it's super simple, something we believe in at Mono."

Pricing an app can be tricky. A developer gets 70 percent of the take from the iTunes Stole, so a popular app can bring in decent money.

"You can earn a sustainable middle-class living doing iPhone apps that have some real substance to them," Qrigsby said.

But independent developers also want to be noticed. Mike Howard of Woodbury-based Midnight Martian says the free version of his additive game Moonlight Mahjong has been downloaded more than 1 million times since its July 2008 release, adding only that the paid version has sold "obviously a fraction of that."

Pricing is "partly about getting people's attention, and partly about letting them try something before they buy," Howard said. "So it's a combination economic and altruistic motive. If it's done right, everybody wins. I can testify that it's pretty challenging to get it exactly right, though."

One of his apps, Moon Globe, which allows users to explore the lunar surface in detail, is free because he has "a strong educational motive." It gets more than 1,000 downloads a day.

"Because it's free, thousands of people are downloading the Moon Globe app and may learn something about our moon, which probably wouldn't be happening if I charged for the app," he said.

Other cool homegrown apps are in the works.

Michael Koppelman of Minneapolis-based Clockwork has been working for a while on Rocket Hunter, an app "for people crazy enough to put their iPhone in a model rocket." It measures real-time flight data and uses GPS to post the location of the spent missile. He's shooting for a fall release.

And Matt Bauer is toiling in his St. Paul basement toward the international spring release of Pedal Brain. The free app will work in conjunction with a bike' accessory ($130 to $199) that connects to an iPhone to create "kind of a Formula 1 computer for cycling."

"We can record everything from heart rate to cadence of

speed that you're going on a bike to the actual power that you're producing and transferring to the bike, GPS location, elevation, grade," he said.

All of the information is transmitted in real time to a website, where it's stored free for 14 days (unlimited in a paid version) for easy access by riders, coaches and even fans of competitive cyclists. Bauer said that Pedal Brain could have 20,000 users in its first year and that he plans to move on to other activities, such as running and swimming.

Grigsby, whose Mobile Orchard starts a two-day apps-training class Wednesday, expects even bigger things from the Twin Cities development scene, especially with the much-talked-about, apps-driv-en iPad on the horizon. After all, he said, "This is an industry whose entire lifetime has been a year and a half."

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