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Part-time app designer makes serious cash

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Simon Lui likes to be self-sufficient. He says, "If I need it, I develop it." The 28-year old computer science instructor needed faster information about the MTR (Hong Kong's subway) so he simply designed an app for his iPod Touch.

The app - called ecMTR - gave him data on each stop, the fares and the arrival time of the next train. Turns out other commuters wanted the same information and downloaded his 99 cent app more than 35,000 times. (The MTR itself recently asked Lui to disable his app so it could launch its own official MTR app. Lui says he didn't fight the request and obliged – although he still thinks his app is better.

Before disabling that app, Lui managed to pocket US\$24,255 from all the downloads. (Apple has a 30/70 policy with app developers. Apple gets 30 percent of revenue while the developer pockets 70 percent.) In the past two years, Lui has designed six more paid apps from music games to war games netting him nearly US\$40,000.

According to the Financial Times, app downloads could become the principal income driver for cell phone providers in developed countries over the next three years. That may not come entirely as a surprise when you look at the burgeoning marketplace of the apps. At last count, Apple's app store has 250,000 offerings.

Lui is a full-time computer science instructor at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He creates apps in his free time. His most popular is TinHa War (roughly translated to "World in Peace.") It's a war game from the 1980's that kids used to play on paper. Lui spent six months designing TinHa War, writing code for a few hours every night after work. In the four months it's been available for downloads, Lui has made US\$12,500 on this app alone.

So can anyone be an app developer? Lui says you need a combination of persistence and skill. Here's his advice:

- 1) Have a clear idea of what you want to create
- 2) Learn Objective C code (this is the code needed for iPhone, iPod and iPad apps) Although Lui describes the code as difficult to learn he taught himself the language by using Stanford tutorials online. (<http://www.stanford.edu/class/cs193p/cgi-bin/drupal/downloads-2010-winter>)
- 3) Keep practicing the code. You'll get better by trial and error.

Posted by: **Pauline Chiou, CNN World Business Today Anchor**
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