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AppFury takes off in Syracuse

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SYRACUSE — Eric Hinman and his business partner Steven VonDeak were walking around SoHo in New York City one summer night in 2009 talking about apps.

They were chatting about ideas for apps of their own while at the same time looking at a map to try to find some stores around the hip neighborhood. Like so many business ideas, theirs hit them not in a board room with a whiteboard full of brainstorming notes, but in real life, with a real problem.

They wondered — why not put that map on a phone?

So Hinman and VonDeak, both Syracuse-area natives, launched a company, AppFury, LLC, and based it in the Syracuse Technology Garden. They developed the first location-based app for New York's SoHo neighborhood, called SOHOinmypocket.

The app is a guide to all the restaurants, shops, and other attractions in the area. AppFury later teamed with businesses in SoHo to run advertising and discounts through the app.

Their work eventually got them noticed by Apple, and SOHOinmypocket was featured as a "New and Noteworthy" app about a year ago.

"At that time, we started getting calls from others to develop apps for them," Hinman says.

AppFury now employs 12 — Hinman, VonDeak, and 10 programmers.

The company has strong expertise in location-based apps, like the one for SoHo, and in mapping, Hinman says. But the firm is capable of doing just about any type of app work and has clients in business, government, and the nonprofit sector.

AppFury has also started developing apps for Google's Android operating system and BlackBerry.

Hinman and VonDeak both have business backgrounds. Hinman is president of Hinman & Associates, LLC, an insurance brokerage firm based in Syracuse.

VonDeak, who grew up in DeWitt, was educated as an attorney.

"I think coming from the business side was definitely an advantage," says Hinman, who grew up in Pulaski. "We made a lot of connections. It certainly helped lead us to people who would be interested in mobile apps."

A business background helped with financial planning and cash-flow management as well, he adds. And VonDeak's background as a lawyer was a major aid in dealing with the legal issues of launching a new business.

Many founders of tech startups like AppFury come with the technical expertise and then learn the business side later.

AppFury has no plans to leave Syracuse, Hinman says. Much of the company's work was initially focused on larger cities, but local projects have started to pick up in the last six months.

The company is working with CenterState CEO to develop a location-based business guide for all the major mobile platforms. CenterState plans to launch the app, which will cover the organization's 12-county region, at its business show on March 24.

The app will allow users to find restaurants, shops, and other businesses based on where they are, create lists of favorites, and more, says Elle Stasz, CenterState director of marketing. The organization worked with students at Syracuse University during the fall semester on a proof of concept for the app.

The school referred CenterState toward AppFury when the organization decided to move forward with the project.

"AppFury has done this," Stasz says. "They're right here in the Tech Garden. It just made so much sense."

CenterState plans to deploy iPads at its visitor center downtown during the United States Bowling Congress Women's Championships. The event begins in Syracuse in April.

About 30,000 competitors are expected. Visitors will be able to use the new app through the iPads and create to-do lists of

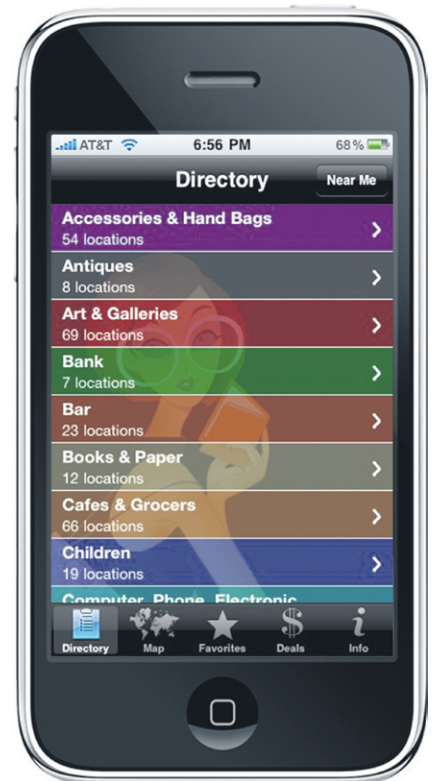


IMAGE COURTESY OF APPFURY

area attractions they can e-mail to themselves or print out.

So far, AppFury is completely self-financed. Hinman declined to disclose the firm's financial information.

Most of the company's work to date has come from mid-sized to large businesses. That's mainly because there aren't many app developers in the market yet and so the service is expensive for smaller firms, Hinman says.

But as more app developers emerge, prices will drop, just as they did with website development, he adds.

"We're certainly going to have to watch the scene and see how it plays out and how prices go, but so far supply and demand is in our favor," he says. "Mobile is growing so fast. A tremendous amount of Internet traffic is going mobile. This is just the tip of the iceberg." □

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