Don't worry, be 'appy

By Byron Russell

When I was at the Frankfurt book fair a few weeks ago, the word apps was on everyone's lips. Hardly surprising - the term "app" has become so popular that in 2010 it was listed as "Word of the Year" by the American Dialect Society. Now it seems as though the app is to publishers what the website and CDROM were to publishers a few years back – it is this decade's absolute must-have, the Jimmy Choos of software.

An app – or mobile application, to give it its full monicker and distinguish it from *application software*, which just enables your PC or Mac to run specific tasks – is a little self-contained programme that sits on a smartphone or tablet. They really came into their own with the Apple range of mobile devices, but are available for other operating systems such as Android and popular smartphones like Blackberry.

There are two main types – native apps and web apps. The main distinguishing feature of the latter is that you have to be connected to the internet to use all the features. A typical example might be a news site, which has to be regularly updated; one frustrating example I came across recently was for MOMA, the New York Museum of Modern Art. A native app on the other hand is stored in your mobile device, like a song or video, and so can be used anywhere, anytime. Probably the best known example is the utterly compelling Angry Birds.

Many are apparently free, but you'll find that there's often no such thing as a free lunch – the free versions are only part of the whole, a kind of taster, and for the full meal you'll be invited to get out your credit card – a process known as in-app purchasing, or IAP.

App facts

You download apps from an app store, depending on which mobile device you have. The main ones are Blackberry App world, Android Market, Windows Phone Marketplace and the Amazon App store. Android apps are pretty wide-ranging, with over 200,000 available. But that pales into insignificance when compared to the grandaddy of them all, Apple's App Store. This vast market place opened on July 10, 2008, and as of January 2011 reported over 10 billion downloads. Yes – 10 billion. Today there are 425,000 third-party apps available, with roughly 10,000 new ones being added every week. Yes – every week. Many of these vanish like rain into a river, but a few stand out and can be really useful for language learning. They range from complete courses, such as busuu, to exam prep apps, like Allen IELTS and XuVi's Prepare for TOEIC. There are some great publisher apps like CUP's English in Use Tests and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Here are the ten best sellers so far:

Title	Age range	Price	Total Downloads
Grammar Up (TOEIC)	adult	free+in app	536000
Busuu English	adult	free+in app	142000
Flashcards (E/F/G/It)	five to eight	free+in app	104000
Hello Teddy	pre-school	free	79000
English Grammar in Use (CUP)	adult	$4.99	56000
Hello Word	young adult	$5.50	38500
IELTS Words	adult	free+in app	33500
Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary	adult	$9.99	31000
English Audio Flashcard	young adult	free	24200
TOEIC Master	adult	$5.99	11700

(stats from xylogic.com)

 Finding the app you want simply means entering the appropriate keyword in the search box on the app store. Unless you know the full title, chances are you may not find exactly what you're looking for though – there are half a million apps out there, and publishers in particular are surprisingly poor at actually marketing the apps they create. Before you commit – even to a free download, which may later entrap you with an IAP - a good guide comes from comments and reviews on the app stores themselves.

And what about if YOU have a great idea, and feel that an app will turn you into an overnight "appilionaire"? There is nothing to stop you going ahead, of course, but an app is <u>not</u> a website – unless you're a techie you'll need to hire developers and designers, and will wave goodbye to at least £10K before the app is even submitted for judgement to the app store (which then takes 30% of the proceeds). There are much easier, cheaper and more lucrative ways to publish yourself....