

A Mobile Story

The light illuminating our faces, the look of amazement and astonishment; this is the exact experience of three different people that was a pivotal moment and arguably a key point in time that led to the creation of Red Piston.

This was our first experience with the iPhone and it's one of the few moments where a product exceeded all expectations. We all knew we wanted in, not sure how, but somehow, we wanted to be part of this future.

All three partners made the trip in the following week to individually buy an iPhone from the states. We couldn't bear to wait for the official Canadian release and risked wasting hundreds of dollars on the promise that a nerdy kid somewhere found a way to jailbreak the iPhone (essentially allowing it to be used in any region, with any sim card and provider).

At the time, all three founders of Red Piston had a great thing going with very stable jobs at the third largest advertisement agency in the world, working on all marketing and digital for Daimler Chrysler. This was exciting enough to want to squeeze some free time out of an already busy schedule to really explore what this thing can do.

After the initial introduction of the iPhone and a year of living with it, Apple ushered in another revolution, the concept of the "App". People would argue they weren't the first, but as with many Apple endeavours, they were the first to make it mainstream and actually change the way we interact with not only phones but any device. They were the first to create a viable ecosystem where some kid can create an app and give Apple a reasonable 30% cut in return of the chance to reach millions with said app.

This was the heyday of apps. The ecosystem, although viable and ripe with opportunity due to a huge installed base (keep in mind Android wouldn't come out till years later, there literally was no competition), was not overly saturated and even simple apps that simulate fart noises were making people millionaires overnight.

Individually, the three co-founders decided to open up their own developers account and start creating apps. Also pushing for app development at the agency they worked for, they released arguably one of the first apps for an automotive company. It was a fun app for the Dodge Caliber launch.

As fate would have it, unfortunately with the economic crash of 2008, all three founders and 100 other people lost their jobs. They were faced with a decision: apply for new jobs or figure out a way to keep making apps and a living.

Reaching out to Warner Brothers on a whim and with an actual response of interest, it became clear this might be worth the risk. There was a growing demand for app developers and a supply problem. Even big companies didn't have the staff or agencies who can produce quality apps.

Red Piston was born from that concept of providing quality apps and games for clients and to produce their own quality games and products.

At the inception the app store saw a few games a day released, and the store app count numbered in the thousands only. This meant releasing a decent game could make quite a bit of

money. One of the first clients was for a motorcycle apparel company called Speed and Strength and the game was pitched.

The game was a simple game of balance, a motorcycle with a driver wearing apparel from the catalogue you picked would drag race down a road and the challenge was keeping the phone straight and level.

It was simple, but with such a low catalogue of free great games (especially 3D) it became a huge hit.

Traffic to the site increased 400% and whole new markets opened up where the app was popular such as Japan.

We started early enough with enough knowledge to create a viable company. People ask us how difficult it would be to start a mobile company in today's climate. The answer is it would have been much more difficult, as there are tons of agencies that specialize now in mobile, and hundreds of apps and games daily added to the store.

Mobile has come a long way. We now have more powerful phones, different phones, and even a whole new ecosystem with Google Play and Android.

As time passed and things changed in this fast-moving industry the only way to survive was to learn new tools and explore new technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality.

With a small team such as ours, even just creating mobile experiences for all the different devices became a challenge, one we had to solve with cross platform tools where you write once and deploy to iOS and Android.

With mobile itself becoming more commoditized and easier to produce to some degree of quality with free tools, as a company we learned to not focus on just creating apps but a focus on creating experiences that are fun, practical, and have value. The days of gimmicky apps (did someone mention the fart app) are over. Companies are looking for mobile apps to create efficiencies internally and to convert users externally.

Where we are headed is admittedly more exciting as we move through the twilight era of mobile into the era of wearables. Red Piston is excited for this next mobile revolution, and we've experienced this new technology that's mind blowing even in its infancy with the Microsoft Hololens. We will soon (at least at work) be wearing special glasses that will put us within the computer, where we can pop up a hundred virtual screens in our environment while our desks are cluttered with personal holograms, where we can finally play out our Star Wars fantasy and talk to people physically halfway around the world in our boardroom as a hologram.

Mobile has changed our world, some say for better, some for worse, but like with any huge technological advancement, there is a bit from both columns. We would like to think it helped humanity more than hindered much as all huge innovations have.