How to Avoid Economic Ruin:

A Survival Guide

Creating Your Own Software

eBook by Dana Brown

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Introduction

The economy is in the toilet and it probably won't get better any time soon. So let's be honest: We are all stressed and we are all worried that we're going to walk into work tomorrow and get laid off. It's just the reality of the world we live in today. Times are tough and we have to figure out how to get through this economic downturn as easily as possible. These past few months everyone I know, myself included, has been working three times as hard, just to prove how valuable they are to their company.

We are all pinching pennies. I am monitoring my bank account and credit cards so closely these days that I spent $82 online, saw the charge come in on my credit card, realized that it was a frivolous spend, and called 15 minutes later to cancel the order. That was the only nonessential thing I have attempted to purchase in months. Sad.

Amidst all of the darkness surrounding the economy there is a beacon of light, something at the end of the tunnel that can help you turn your personal financial situation around. I'm not suggesting a "get rich quick" scheme, nor am I suggesting you should contact that guy in Nigeria that sent you the email about your $10 million birthright. What I am suggesting is something that, over time, could actually become a great, solid career.

Why not start a software company?

I know you are probably thinking, "I'm not technical enough," or "I don't know how to program." But there is a way to make it easy. This eBook explains how you can create your own software, market and sell it. All you need to get started is an idea. Some of the most popular software products started out as an idea in the mind of someone who wasn't a programmer. Scott Cook, a marketer from Proctor & Gamble and the founder of Intuit, came up with the idea for Quicken while watching his wife balance their checkbook. Observe your surroundings, see what daily problems you can solve, and an idea will come to you.

This idea probably won't make you a ton of money-- not right away at least. But in the meantime it *will* be a great way to generate some supplemental income. It could earn you enough for your monthly mortgage payment, or even help you build your nest egg. Whether you have lost your job or are just nervous and want to save up as much money as you can, creating your own software is easy to do, fun, and can definitely help pad your bank account. You can do it in your spare time or on the weekends, as a hobby or a full-time endeavor.

Creating your own software company is a relatively easy process. No, really. It's a lot easier than you think. The hardest part is getting started. Give it some thought, and with a simple idea you could make a dramatic change in your life.

Chapter 1: The Idea

What makes a good idea for a software application? This is the age old question. Well, not THE age old question, but it's a big one for *this* age. Coming up with the idea for your application, deciding what you are going to make, is the hardest part of starting your own software company. You need to develop something that:

- **will make life easier for other people**
- **will fill a gap that is evident in the market today**
- **will sell**

A great way to start is by listening to the things other people complain about. This will help you identify the voids your application could potentially fill or the problems it could solve.

For example: With increasing frequency, the headlines in the news report yet another company making massive layoffs. Well, all of these layoffs have to put some strain on the remaining employees; if half of a team has been laid off, the remaining workers are doing multiple people's work. These employees could definitely benefit from learning to write software! They could create a simple software application to automate or manage some of the new processes or tasks they have taken over.

Another benefit of knowing how to write software is that it will make you more valuable at your current job by giving you a new skill set and increasing your productivity. For example, every Monday when I get to work, a simple application shows me two valuable reports about my company's website traffic and sales conversion rate. I could look up that information manually, and waste the better part of my morning, but with a simple application I am able to view that information quickly and easily, making me a much more efficient employee. Another application I use at work breaks down our sales numbers by geography and displays them in a nice little report that I use frequently. It saves me from having to do a bunch of calculations by hand.

One developer I know, Markus Winter, was trying to make his own life easier. In the new version of Safari, Apple's web browser, some settings are difficult to change. Markus was annoyed at having to spend a lot of time to get to these settings, so he quickly wrote an application that opens a dialog box displaying them. It allows him to easily adjust his preferences. He suspected that other people might have a similar frustration, so he put his application on Version Tracker (http://www.versiontracker.com), a website that offers

software of all kinds for download. He had an astronomical number of downloads -- *on the first day*.

Your application does not need to be "cutting edge" to sell. You just need an application that will do something you otherwise could not do, will solve a problem, or will make people's lives a bit easier (or more fun). Some examples of these types of applications include:

- Rondo: A MIDI player and Piano Keyboard practice tool. (http://www.fracturedsoftware.com/rondo/)
- Simple Cataloger (http://www.oatmealandcoffee.com/software/simplecataloger/), an application that logs every file in a folder and saves it in an easy to read and use file. This is great for people who produce a variety of CDs that are shipped to various destinations -- to keep a record of what information has been burned onto each CD.
- iWatermark: Puts your watermark on your images. (http://www.scriptsoftware.com/iwatermark/)
- Volleyball Ace: This developer got the idea from his daughter's high school volleyball team. They needed an application to record and manipulate their team statistics. He created this application for his own personal use, but the team coach really liked it and its now sold to volleyball coaches across the United States. (http://www.ace4vb.com/)
- Coachstat: A baseball statistics program. (http://www.coachstat.com/)
- MyBlood: An application that allows you to track and manage your ancestry.
- iPod Access: A great music and video transfer application for the Mac that I've used quite a bit. (http://www.findleydesigns.com/ipodaccess/index.html)
- Movie Montage: An application that gives users quick access to all the Quicktime movies on their computer in one window so they can view and export them. (http://www.findleydesigns.com/moviemontage/index.html)
- SpamX: A Windows email spam tracking and reporting application.
- A police detective wanted to add improvements to an application he already used in his job, and he now sells his application across the country.
- PACES: An exam simulator for anesthesia students.
- Inspeed: A wind speed and direction tracking application. (http://www.inspeed.com)
- Animated Knots: An application that explains how to tie different kinds of knots - whether you are looking for the Blood Knot, the Crown Sinnet or the Monkey's Fist - this has it all. (http://www.animatedknots.com/)

- Serial Cloner: An application made by a cancer researcher for molecular biologists that allows them to manipulate, modify, and prepare new DNA fragments via computer simulation. (http://serialbasics.free.fr/Serial_Cloner.html)

Consider the story of a maintenance manager at a power plant in Florida who created an application that made him more valuable in his job. When the power plant is in continuous operation, more than 5,000 alarms go off. Most of them are false alarms, or just alerts, nonetheless, they are all printed out and filed. This became a cumbersome chore for the manager - imagine all of the paper that was wasted! He created an application that would capture the necessary data and put it on a website instead of printing it out. His application saves his company time and resources. Think about ways you could do things differently, or what you could do to save your company money. It could lead to a future opportunity.

Another great example is the guy who worked at a printing company and saw the need to automate a process in his job. He had no programming experience, but he created an application that saved the company so much money they decided to sell the solution to other commercial printers. This spun off into a software division putting this employee in charge. He had no idea he was going to go from simply working at a printing company to being in charge of its new software division!

You can make an application to do almost anything. The software world is your oyster and the possibilities are endless. Developing software is no longer just for the super technical computer nerds. It's for everyone.

Here are some more suggestions to help you get started. Ask yourself, your friends, family, and coworkers these four questions:
1. **Have you ever searched for an application on the Internet and not found what you were looking for?**
2. **Is there a task you perform every day at work that you could automate?**
3. **What is a source of frustration for you?**
4. **What sort of tool would help make your job easier, your home life easier?**

Another suggestion is to observe how your co-workers, or others around you, work. Often people become so used to doing something in an inefficient way that they don't stop to think there might be a better way to do it. Sometimes it takes an outsider to see what is right in front of us.

I know a developer who asked himself these questions. A citizen of the United Kingdom but a resident in the United States, he realized that it was very difficult for him to get a passport photo at the local drugstore matched to the specifications of the UK passport. He created an application that allows you to create any number of passport photos for a variety of countries' specifications. His application is called Passport Photo Studio (http://passportphotostudio.com/) and he now sells it online for $8.95. Does he make all of his income from this helpful little application? Probably not. But it certainly helps!

Determining If There is a Market for your Idea

How do you know if your application will sell competitively? Talk to your potential customers! Explain to them what you are planning on doing and determine if there is an interest. Tell them the features you are planning to implement and see if they have any suggestions. It would also benefit you to identify any competitors in your market space and understand what their product does and who their audience is. You might find there is already something out there that does what you were thinking of doing. On the other hand, you might find that an existing product does a bad job and that you could greatly improve upon its weaknesses and shortcomings. My point is: Take a look at the market before you start developing your application. You don't want to develop something that will flop against the competition, or that has already been developed. Do the research up front so you won't waste your time.

If you have an idea for an application, it's not difficult to make it a reality, and it doesn't cost a lot of money. Your idea doesn't have to be grandiose, like the next Microsoft Office or iTunes. It probably won't make you billions of dollars. But if it just put another $1,000 a month in your pocket, that would certainly be a nice start, wouldn't it? Start small, see what you can do, and as you hone your skills and ideas, tackle something larger.

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