

# AppsArabia hopes for triple score in first effort

## Game for iPhone similar to Scrabble

Launch of Kalimat next month paves the way for three more applications early next year

David George-Cosh

AppsArabia hopes the name Kalimat will become well enough known not to cause a scrabble for the dictionary to challenge when it is laid on the board, even if it does use all seven letters on the rack.

The mobile phone applications fund backed by the Abu Dhabi media free zone twofour54 is about to release Kalimat, an iPhone game similar to Scrabble, as its first app. AppsArabia developed the game, which can be played in Arabic and English, with the Dubai entrepreneur Fares Fayad, who successfully pitched the idea to the fund.

Piranha Bytes, a software company based in Dubai Silicon Oasis, programmed the application.

"Up until that point we had only been working on our own games," said Ali Hamidi, the founder of Piranha Bytes. "Working with someone else was a new experience for us.

"Our tagline is 'pixel-perfect design' so we tried to go out of our way to focus on the details and get everything right. I think it really shows in the application."

Kalimat allows gamers to play words on a board using a seven-letter tile rack similar to Scrabble but with variations on rules and the point system.

It is due to be available on Apple's iTunes App Store next month, pending approval, and will cost US\$1.99.

David Ashford, the general manager of AppsArabia, hopes the game will sell 50,000 copies over the next six months to help recoup the fund's investment and generate a revenue stream for the developer.

Mr Ashford was speaking on the sidelines of the Dubai World Game Expo where he formally announced the pending release of Kalimat, which means "word" in Arabic.

"It's Scrabble with a difference," he said. "We are also doing a feasi-



David Ashford, the managing director of AppsArabia, demonstrates an iPhone app at the Dubai Games Expo yesterday. Galen Clarke / The National

bility study about migrating it for Nokia and BlackBerry devices.

"Our marketing will focus on the MENA region but we will be extending that to the global audience because it has appeal to Arabic speakers around the world."

Although there is no definite figure for the number of Arabic applications on mobile devices, most of them are developed outside the region.

But with about 167 million devices being shipped in the region next year, according to Research and Markets, there is a unique opportunity for developers to create localised content.

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managing director, AppsArabia

The global market for apps development is now valued at US\$6.2 billion (Dh22.77bn) this year and is expected to grow to \$22.1bn in 2013, figures from the technology research company Gartner show.

"We want to build a sustainable Arabic apps industry," said Wayne Borg, the chief operating officer of twofour54. "We want to bring the developers and entrepreneurs together and be the matchmaker to commercialise those apps."

AppsArabia is also about to release another three apps in January to help meet the demand for Arabic mobile content. They include Fin-

Jan, an Arabic cultural app, a musical instrument game and a word game for children.

The fund is also co-ordinating the development of an Arabic news app for a "global media company" that will be announced shortly.

Mr Ashford said that when AppsArabia was formally launched, it received about 40 investment applications from across the region.

Of those applications, 10 were chosen as viable projects, with the first four apps set to be released and the remaining still in development.

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