Illustration 1.1

Apple Watch app designers scramble ahead of launch

Apple has invited small groups of developers to its Silicon Valley offices to help them prepare their apps for its Watch, as it gears up for the launch at the end of this month.
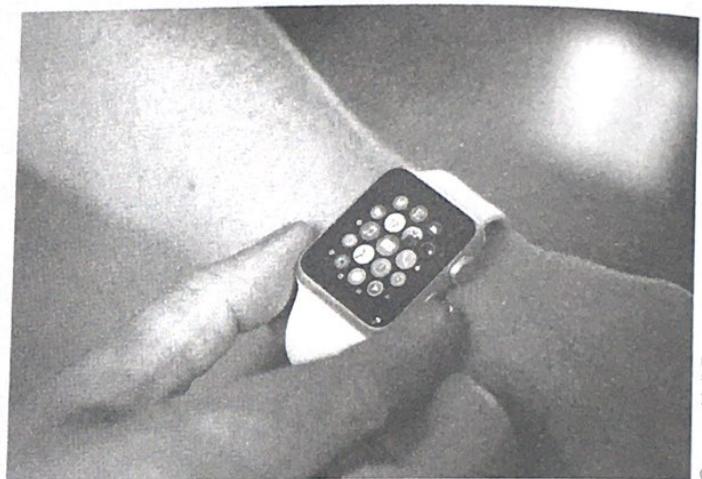
Their creations range from exercise trackers and car-hailing services such as Uber, to a digital version of a painter's palette board and an app for sending a tweet to astronauts passing overhead on the International Space Station, all from a user's wrist.

In addition to its own messaging and fitness services, Apple is hoping a vibrant App Store will help persuade customers to spend between $350 and $17,000 on the Watch, its first new device since the iPad.

Developers say the technical and creative challenge is greater than when they had to rejig their iPhone apps for the iPad five years ago, due to the Watch's tiny screen and control scheme.

Some developers are able to draw on their experience with other smartwatches, such as the

Source: Neil Fraser/Alamy Images

pioneering Pebble or Google's Android Wear. Many are using much more rudimentary techniques, such as taping paper mock-ups to their arms, to figure out what might work best on the Watch's 38–42mm screen.

Before March's press event, only top-ranking iPhone developers such as Uber and Facebook were invited to Apple's offices to test their Watch apps. In the weeks since then, however, it has opened to more, with about 20 developers a day visiting its labs, according to those who have been there.

App makers are betting that Apple will succeed where other smartwatch makers have failed to sell in the many millions.