

[ENTREVESTOR: Vizwik aims for 1 million users](#)

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No one could accuse Simon Gauvin, the founder of **Agora Mobile**, of lacking ambition.

With the help of 200 early adopters, the Moncton startup is conducting closed beta tests of its own social network, which serves as a platform on which users can develop their own smartphone web apps. Gauvin hopes that one day the product, named Vizwik, will be used by millions of people, improve the functionality of cellphones and play a role in educating children and teens.

Gauvin is looking for more people for an open beta test in the autumn, and Agora has a [sign up page](#). He believes the full launch and the introduction of an enterprise product will take place early next year.

“It’s a social network for mobile web app discovery, development and distribution,” said Gauvin in an interview last week. “It’s for people who want to get more from their phones with the creation of intelligent apps. They can find interesting apps or content (through the social network) and use it on their phone.”

While taking his PhD in computer science at Dalhousie University, Gauvin developed his own programming language, which is more visual than standard languages. That means it’s more accessible because people tend to respond more positively to visual presentations than to letters, numbers and symbols.

The company has been financed so far through investment from individuals, though Gauvin declined to say how much money he’s received. He said the project has a “long runway” and he will need more angel and venture capital funding in the future.

The Agora Mobile team, which now numbers 11 members, including a team at Volta in Halifax, has developed Vizwik as a patented platform-as-a-service product, which serves as the foundation of the social network. It works across all smartphone platforms. People can sign up free, add friends like on Facebook or have followers like Twitter.

Users can design and develop their own apps right on the platform, and Gauvin envisages them doing so to meet their own needs so their phones become more functional. Because they are developing the apps on a social network, other people are following them and aware of what they’re developing.

That means there should be a ready market for the apps as soon as they’re finished. The social network becomes a market for apps, with no need to go on an app store.

Agora Mobile expects to earn money through enterprise applications, which will allow small, medium and even larger companies to use the platform to develop apps that can improve their own operational performance.

Given that only one-tenth of grade school students in North America are taught programming, Gauvin hopes that Vizwik will become an educational tool that can introduce young people to technology.

“We’ve been driving around the countryside, going school to school and giving workshops,” said Gauvin. “We would like students to use it. About 80 to 90 per cent of the students we’ve shown it to are excited about using it.”

He added that there are now 1.8 billion smartphones users in the world, so the goal of one million Vizwik users is realistic. And if only one per cent of them actually use the platform to develop their own apps, it means there will be 10,000 app developers coming up with new products on the platform.

“Ten thousand people building apps is a big number,” he said. “But we think that’s a realistic number.”