

Young Hippo pulls its weight

A start-up website matching young people and jobs looks like paying off, writes **Damien Lynch**.

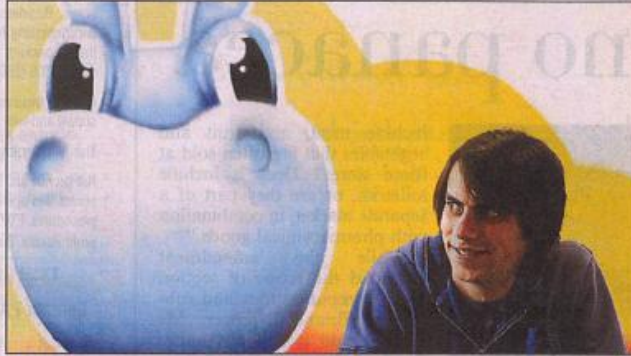
A website created less than two years ago to offer part-time and casual jobs for young people is already valued at about \$5 million, based on early stage investment from some high-profile private investors.

Investors in the Hippo jobs website include Janine and Jeff Allis (the founders of Boost Juice), Peter Jordan (a senior partner with Deloitte), Mark Besen (Sussan Group) and Sean Pickwell (a director of Waterfront Entertainment Marketing).

They will all be sitting pretty if, as Goldman Sachs JBWere analyst George Batsakis predicted last week, the internet advertising market continues to grow at a fast pace. Batsakis said in a note to clients the internet advertising market increased in value by 60 per cent to \$1 billion in 2006. His firm expects internet advertising will continue to grow at a double-digit rate.

Hippo is a website specifically aimed at finding part-time and casual work for young Australians and visitors. It allows young people to post YouTube-like video job applications.

According to the Australian



James Masini's site features YouTube-like job applications.

Photo: JESSICA SHAPIRO

Bureau of Statistics, there are 2.8 million Australians aged 15 to 24 (1.8 million of them are employed) and more than 100,000 international visitors who register for a work and holiday visa each year.

Hippo is the brainchild of 24-year-old James Masini of Melbourne, who developed it as part of a business management entrepreneurship undergraduate degree course at RMIT.

"Looking at successful recruitment sites, I realised that there was no job site that specifically targeted people like me, university students who want a job that pays well and fits in with the lecture and study timetable," he says.

"While some of the other sites have part-time and casual jobs

listed, their real focus is on full-time and career positions."

Although Masini still has three subjects to do as part of the business management entrepreneurship course, he expects to transfer some credits earned while studying previously at another university (where he didn't get to finish the degree course) to meet the degree requirements at RMIT.

Masini was sidetracked from his studies when he decided to test the Hippo concept by looking for seed capital about 18 months ago.

He made a presentation to venture capitalists and large private investors but they were all apprehensive about the risk of investing in a start-up.

But Masini persisted and

succeeded in October in landing seed capital from a number of private individuals, including the Allis family and Jordan, Besen and Pickwell.

Although Jeff and Janine Allis receive a lot of invitations to invest in start-ups, they were happy to get involved with Hippo because they liked the company strategy.

"If the strategy is right then the start-up has a good chance," Jeff Allis says.

The seed capital allowed Masini to develop his business concept further with Areeba, a Melbourne-based web design and development company that was also involved in the development of the online job ads company Seek. He hired staff to develop the youth-targeted marketing strategies.

Masini completed a second round of capital raising earlier this year, at which time Hippo was valued at \$5 million.

"This is an ambivalent figure based on the investments in the business to date," he says.

Hippo was officially launched in mid-April, advertising more than 7000 jobs across the nation, and in its first week had 4500 registered profiles from young people. It now advertises about 5000 jobs and has 30,000 registered profiles.

The cost a job advertisement is \$90. Discounts are offered for bulk advertising.

Hippo, which has 12 staff, is close to naming its first chief executive.