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## Dutch eBuddy tipped to be new Web giant

2006/10/30

By *Stephanie van den Berg* AMSTERDAM, AFP

With newly acquired venture capital of several million euros, a high-tech new office and an average of 75,000 new users a day, Dutch instant messaging site eBuddy is tipped as one of Europe's potential new Web giants.

The company's founders Jan-Joost Rueb, Onno Bakker and Paulo Taylor hit on a simple idea two years ago when they started a site that allowed people to chat through MSN, Yahoo or AOL without having to install any software on their computer.

"For young people chatting is one of the preferred ways of communicating. When I go to advertisers they don't know eBuddy but when I tell them to ask their children they call me back the next day and say: my son knows your website," Rueb said.

eBuddy.com is popular with students and employees who are on a special educational or corporate network that does not allow users to download instant messaging software.

In July, eBuddy was tipped as the next big thing on the Internet by IT magazine Red Herring. It is already a leader in web-based instant messaging with 35 million clients, over 4 million of whom log on every month.

Some 40 percent of their user base is in Europe, 35 percent in South America, 15 percent in the United States and Canada and 10 percent in Asia. Their users are very attractive to advertisers as more than 75 percent of eBuddy users are aged between 13 and 25.

eBuddy is the typical Internet start-up story that opens in a stuffy attic two years ago and eventually shifts to a recently opened swanky new office on the canals of Amsterdam old town, with 30 people on the pay roll. Rueb and Bakker, both thirty-something, dressed casually in slacks and sweaters, were part of the first dotcom hype. But they say things are different this time around.

"Then you would just have an idea and the people put money into it, now they wait until you show that you can



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**BILINGUAL**

make money," Bakker explained.

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Although the company has recently gotten 5.0 million euros (US\$6.3 million) in venture capital from Netherlands-based Lowland Capital Partners, eBuddy is already making a profit through advertising.

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"We're going to put the money in research and development and we are also finalizing the registration of some patents," Bakker said.

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Beside the web-based messaging, eBuddy also offers a service for chatting on mobile phones. "You and me we probably cannot text quickly enough to imagine chatting over the phone but kids are so quick, for them chatting is a way of life," Bakker said.

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**Career**

Worldwide, over four million people are already using eBuddy's mobile phone chat application. For now it's free, but that will probably change in the future.

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"People are much more used to paying for certain services on their phone than they are on the Internet," Rueb explained. For the future, eBuddy plans to expand with new features allowing users to have one single login to chat with contacts on different networks, save chat sessions and add social networking features like a dating zone similar to those of myspace.com.

**BACK ISSUE**

**Year:**

There are also talks with social networking sites that are looking to add webchat facilities to their sites provided by eBuddy.

**Month:**

**Day:**

British media analyst Bill Thompson thinks eBuddy now has a window of opportunity to grow but fears their success could be short-lived.

**SEARCH**

"They have a short period of time of a year to 18 months in which they could become a utility we all need to use," he said.

**Web**

In Thompson's mind, eBuddy's success could also lead to instant messaging services teaming up against it.

**chinapost**

"It is not in the interest of Google, MSN or AOL to allow a third party on their gateway that carries exclusively its own ads," he explained.

eBuddy should work on creating a solid client base that it can then take with it in other ventures, like social networking sites, he said.



Rueb replied that eBuddy actually adds users to the big networks instead of taking them away. eBuddy is also in talks with the most important chat providers but Rueb said he could not disclose the content of their