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eBuddy gets growth message

NOVEMBER 07, 2006

WITH recently acquired venture capital of several million euros, a hi-tech new office and about 75,000 new users daily, 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 using MSN, Yahoo or AOL without having to install any software.

"For young people, chatting is a preferred way of communicating. When I go to advertisers they say they don't know eBuddy, but when I tell them to ask their children they call me back and say their son knows our website," Mr Rueb said.

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

In July, IT magazine *Red Herring* tipped eBuddy as the next big thing on the internet.

It is already a leader in web-based instant messaging with 35 million clients, more than four million of whom log on every month.

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

EBuddy is the typical internet startup story, opening in a stuffy attic two years ago and eventually shifting to a swank new office on the canals of Amsterdam's old town, with 30 people on the payroll.

Mr Rueb and Mr Bakker, both 30-something, dressed casually in slacks and sweaters, were caught up in the first round of dotcom hype, but they say things are different this time around.

"Then you would just have an idea and people put money into it, now they wait until you show that you can make money," Mr Bakker said.

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