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## The digital dozen: Our next wave of entrepreneurs

Monday, 05 November 2007 23:19

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## Martin Wells, founder at Tangler

Martin Wells' career took him from computer programming to founding one of Australia's first internet service providers and on to software development (including writing a book on building computer games) before he launched his current company, Tangler, in 2005. Tangler creates software for managing real-time discussion forums on websites, enabling people to

participate in multiple conversations across sites. Wells recently relocated to Silicon Valley to grow the business. He has since raised \$US2 million in seed funding and began cutting deals with more than 100 companies to get Tangler's software deployed on their sites.

### **Michael Malone, founder and managing director at iiNet**

Michael Malone founded the internet service provider iiNet with a group of friends in his Perth garage in 1993. Since then it has grown into a publicly-listed company with revenues of more than \$200 million. Through aggressive pricing and a string of acquisitions, including industry stalwart OzEmail in February 2005, iiNet is now the third largest ISP in Australia. Malone has been a strong contributor to the internet industry, having been the president of the WA Internet Association and chairman of the .au Domain Administration, and a founder of Electronic Frontiers Australia, a not-for-profit group representing internet users concerned with rights and freedoms.



### **Con Nikolouzakis, co-founder and chief executive officer of Exinda Networks**

It was during his lengthy career working as a chief architect in network security and infrastructure at Goldman Sachs JBWere and Verizon Business that led Con Nikolouzakis to the idea of forming Exinda Networks, a company that develops technology for the acceleration of software applications across wide area networks. At 32 he is already regarded as one of the world's leading experts on data traffic management and performance, and with Exinda has raised \$US6 million in funding from US venture investors in March of this year.

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### **Steven Goh, chief executive officer and co-founder, and Mei Lin Ng, co-founder and VP of special projects at mig33**

Steven Goh's first online venture came in 1996 when he founded Sanford Securities, Australia's first online stockbroking company. That company went public in 2000 and was subsequently acquired in 2003. Mei Lin Ng was marketing manager for much of that time. Now they are back, with mig33, which provides mobile phone users with instant communications tools such as instant messaging, chat rooms, photo sharing and e-mail. To date mig33 has attracted over six million users in more than 200 countries. In 2007 Goh relocated the company to Silicon Valley, and this year raised \$US10 million from US-based investors.



### **Jason Ashton, founder and chief executive officer at BigAir Group**

Like several others on this list, Jason Ashton is not a first-time web entrepreneur, having being one of the brains behind pioneering internet service provider Magna Data back in 1993. Now his focus is on wireless broadband internet delivery through the publicly-listed BigAir Group, with its own network of base stations covering most of Sydney and parts of Melbourne. BigAir made headlines earlier this year when it announced it had become the first company to deploy a commercial wireless data network based on a technology called WiMAX, which is considered to the next generation beyond existing WiFi networks.



### **Adam Dunne, founder and sales and marketing director at AURA Interactive**

Few people's vision of the mobile phone as a marketing tool would extend back as far as Adam Dunne's. One of the original promoters of phones as a means of distributing electronic coupons and tickets, Dunne has built a national network of Bluetooth-equipped outdoor advertisements in more than 250 locations, effectively bringing interactivity to outdoor display advertising. Dunne has helped grow AURA to be one of the world's leading mobile technology service providers, with an emphasis on always reaching consumers through their mobile phone. Among his many awards, in 2005 he picked up the Mobile Marketer of the Year award at the ADMA Australian Mobile Marketing & Advertising Awards.

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### **Nik Cubrilovic, founder and chief executive officer at Omnidrive**

A web security and application expert, in 2001 Nik Cubrilovic created the world's first online trade finance platform for a company in London for LTP Trade. He returned to Australia in 2005 and founded Omnidrive, a web-based service that lets users store information as easily online as you would on your hard drive. The company has raised capital from a range of sources including some of Google's earliest employees, and hopes to emerge from beta testing by the end of the year. Cubrilovic himself is an active blogger and is an adviser and contributor to Techcrunch, one of the world's most popular blog sites.



### **Billy Chong and Robert Fong, co-founders at MOR(F) Dynamics**

MOR(F) Dynamics is combining advanced techniques in language and artificial intelligence technologies with three-dimensional design to create the Moji Intelligent Messenger (Moji IM), which is the first instant messenger application to dynamically interpret and respond to human language. The Moji IM uses a range of cute and intelligent virtual pets that respond to the emotion in language – something like an advanced tamagotchi on the web. Founders Billy Chong and Robert Fong came together in 2005 with the idea of fusing language and images

together online, and have since been courted by large Asian telecommunications companies that are keen to take on the concept.

### **Ben Keighran, founder and chief executive officer at bluepulse**

When everyone was talking about the internet on mobile phones, Ben Keighran set about building it. Keighran started with hacking the software on his mobile phone while still in college, and has subsequently created a software technology for building mobile web-based applications that can work across all phones, and is the basis for phone-based social networking. Now living in the US, this year Keighran raised \$US6 million from VantagePoint Venture Partners. At just 25 years of age, he was recently chosen as a finalist in *BusinessWeek's* list of America's Best Young Entrepreneurs of 2007.



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### **Gary Munitz, founder and general manager at Menulog**

As a younger man, Gary Munitz worked in restaurants as a waiter and manager. Now he runs a web-based booking service that takes services close to 30,000 restaurants in nine countries. Munitz came to Australia from South Africa at the age of 21 and almost immediately started his first internet company, which is the powerhouse behind Menulog. Munitz says the restaurant industry has been slow to adopt the web, but consumers are more comfortable with it, creating a niche for him to exploit, and the business is now expanding rapidly internationally.

### **Liesl Capper and John Zakos, co-founders at MyCyberTwin**

Liesl Capper (pictured) and John Zakos founded MyCyberTwin with a vision to create an artificial intelligence software application that can exist on social networks, within websites or inside virtual worlds such as Second Life. A CyberTwin can be trained to respond in a similar way to how you might respond in person, or be trained by a company to be its virtual representative in cyberspace. MyCyberTwin has received more than 26 million hits, with businesses making up 3% of users. Both Capper and Zakos were heavily involved in web advertising company Mooter Media, which raised \$8 million through an IPO on the ASX in late 2005.



### **Clay Cook, founder at Minti and Vibe Capital**

A true Web 2.0 entrepreneur, US-based Australian Clay Cook has already founded a fistful of web companies, including the parenting information site Minti and the renovation site Refurber, and has been recognised as a contributor to some of Australia's fastest growing

technology companies. He is also the chairman and chief executive officer of the investment group Vibe Capital, and has acted as an angel investor in web businesses including Omnidrive, mig33 and Tangler.

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