

## **This is not your big brother's online enterprise**

By Claude Solnik

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At age 26, Chris Lopinto has already started two companies.

The 2002 graduate of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute envisioned sweet success – Amazon meets Google meets MySpace – when he started a consulting firm and then ExpertFlyer, an e-company providing information about airline tickets and frequent flier perks. Emboldened by legendary e-triumphs such as YouTube and eBay, he quickly came to favor his online enterprise.

His were not yesterday's dot-com dreams, and this is not the early 1990s, when wild-eyed e-ideas were plentiful, and so were willing investors. In fact, the dot-com bust only makes it harder for today's online entrepreneurs to succeed.

Harder, but not impossible, and today's dot-commers do have one distinct advantage.

“Our generation grew up with technology, so we're more adapted to this,” Lopinto said. “It's easy to get a Web site and start developing. The barriers of entry are very small.”

Other young online entrepreneurs, many in their 20s, liken the Web to the Wild West – a largely unexplored frontier brimming with potential, and a natural place for the industrious to stake a claim.

“I've always had an entrepreneurial spark,” said Jerry Allocca, who in his 20s founded Bethpage-based Core Data Center Inc., which hosts, designs and markets Web sites and sells domain names through the Nametiger.com brand. “I've always had a vision of the future.”

Unlike their high-finance, high-stake predecessors from the Internet-happy 1990s, today's tech-savvy entrepreneurs take a much more traditional approach to launching their enterprises. They are especially keen on keeping expenses low.

“We really bootstrapped it,” said Gregory Galant, the 24-year-old founder and chief executive of Brooklyn-based RadioTail, which has additional offices in Huntington. “It didn't cost that much to get started. The main cost is your own time.”

Galant went out on his own after producing “new media initiatives” for CNN.com. He launched RadioTail, a podcast advertising network, in June 2005, envisioning a business that uses technology to help media companies get their podcast ads to the right audience. His clients now include Nikon and that mothership of all things cyber, Microsoft.

It wasn't the first time Galant as shown some e-initiative. In 1996, at age 14, he started Halenet Inc., an award-winning Internet strategy firm.

Twentysomething entrepreneurs face other challenges, including gaining credibility among their elders – critical, if they're to find the financial support they need. That's tough even in an age when attention is focused on computers and electronic information, something the younger set is more likely to grasp.

“We had to convince advertisers that it was a medium worth advertising in,” Galant said. “It's a double-edged sword. You can never show a 20-year history, (but) ... we've been doing [podcasting] as long as anybody. New technology often levels the playing field.”

Robert Lancer found another way to keep costs down: He moved his data management firm, Lanxer Corp., into his parents' Melville house. And that was after running successful Web ventures with high-profile clients including the Professional Golfers' Association of America.

“You don't have to worry about day-to-day expenses,” Lancer said. “You can focus on business. It lets you take more risks.”

And just as importantly, he added, “you're minimizing what will happen if things don't work out.”

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