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Technology Story

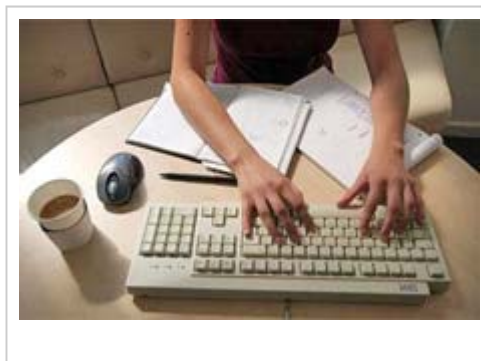
Latest web network no place for children

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By [Peter Griffin](#)

Facebook, Myspace and Bebo have become household names in the ever-expanding smorgasboard of social networking websites. And all going to plan, a new interactive site developed by a group of New Zealanders could be next.

lyomu.com is backed by New Zealand, Australian and British investors and has been in development for the past 18 months under the guidance of director and interactive design expert Frances Valintine. PR maestro Michelle Boag and Nicki Crauford, the chief executive of the Institute of Directors, are among lyomu's directors.



Valintine said lyomu, which stands for "I, you, me, us" would differ from established global social networking websites as it would be aimed at adults keen to share digital content with friends and family. A free service offers one gigabyte of storage in a "digital vault" as well as tools to network with other lyomu users and community groups for holding discussions.

While websites like Flickr.com allow people to share photos online and comment on them, Valintine said lyomu allowed all types of files to be shared and had sophisticated tools for discovering like-minded members.

lyomu plans to make money by upgrading members to an account that will allow them eight gigabytes of storage for their personal files, for which lyomu will charge somewhere in the range of US\$25-\$35 a month. It is a different type of business model to that of Myspace, Bebo and Facebook, which derive the bulk of their revenue from highly targeted advertising.

Bebo is the current leader in New Zealand with close to 20 per cent of net community and chat traffic, with MySpace a distant second at 7 per cent and Facebook third on 3 per cent.

Valintine said despite the proliferation of social networking websites, some of which boasted tens of millions of members, there were few options for adults seeking to share photos, and documents with friends and family.

She hoped to have 5000 lyomu members within a month of the website's launch on August 13.

lyomu is restricting the age of those signing up to 18 and above. Valintine said it would be impossible to stop teenagers from signing up, but they would find themselves in strange company with lyomu's members.

While lyomu has adults squarely in its sights, the heavyweights of the social networking world are youth-orientated. But with their rising popularity has come a string of social problems stemming from the anonymity and freedom of communication the web allows.

Martin Cocker, the executive director of internet safety awareness group Netsafe, said Bebo appeared to be the social networking website of choice for New Zealand school kids, with Facebook enjoying popularity among university students. The New Zealand Facebook network has about 33,000 members, according to the website, and Cocker says the service is increasingly being integrated into "normal communications channels" by tertiary institutions.

Netsafe was dealing with cases of "predator danger" on social networking websites, where young users were being bullied by fellow students.

"I believe that the nearly 2000 schools using Watchdog or SchoolZone filtering [software] have Bebo and MySpace blocked by default," said Cocker.

"Many young people are conducting their lives in this space, the ups and the downs, the good and the bad. The communities people create can be very supportive, but they can also be extremely vindictive."

He said adults and children alike needed to be careful not to divulge too much information about themselves on social networking websites.

"The idea is to create a pseudo anonymous identity on the site. Something that you can use to meet people and enjoy interactions, but something that enables you to maintain your privacy should you wish too."

The places to be

[LinkedIn.com](#) – Social networking for professionals. A contact network which can be used, for example, to gain an introduction to someone you wish to know through a mutual, trusted contact. It can be used to find jobs, people and business opportunities.

[Bebo.com](#) – Profiles include a whiteboard, in which other users can draw pictures, a comment section and a list of the user's friends, all publicly viewable, unless the user selects "Private Profile".

[Myspace.com](#) – Has over 100 million members and is the third most popular site in the US. Centres on profiles such as "About Me" and "Who I'd Like to Meet". Allows photos to be displayed publicly or to a network of friends.

[Facebook.com](#) – As of July 2007, the website had the largest number of registered users among college-focused sites with over 30 million members worldwide. In June 2007 it was the number one site for photos in the United States

[Flickr.com](#) – Flickr provides rapid access to images tagged with popular keywords. Because of its support for user-generated tags, has been cited as a prime example of effective use of "folksonomy".