

Baby company set for a growth spurt

BABIES and pets have eased the growing pains of an eco-friendly start-up. Through their company Becothings, young entrepreneurs Toby Massey and George Bramble are designing and producing biodegradable goods, such as potties, dog bowls and clothes hangers.

Made from rice husks, a farm by-product, or recycled cardboard, the products are competitively priced, from £3 to £8, so they can hold their own with conventional alternatives.

New parents and pet-owners are known to be more reluctant than others to tighten their purse-strings. That's created a £900 million nursery products market in the UK, and a £3 billion pet market. Then there's the matter of the 17 million plastic and ceramic potties that are sent to the world's landfills each year.

"It was figures such as those that convinced us we had a

Parents go potty for greener products. By **Maisha Frost**

viable proposition when we started. These are customers keen to go green if the price is right," explains Massey, 27, the products' designer.

Becothings expects turnover to grow to £215,000 in 2010. It has deals in place to supply John Lewis with its children's cardboard hangers, and other store chains for its potties and pet bowls.

The company's innovative and green approach distinguished it at last year's HSBC Start-Up Stars Awards — the competition, backed by the Government and the Daily Express, that recognises the talents of the UK's brightest young firms.

Becothings scooped the green award, winning £10,000,

plus mentoring and marketing support from Google.

Bramble, formerly an accounts manager, and Massey, the London-based firm's only full-time employees, have already shown the flexibility that successful entrepreneurship requires. They originally had a fledgling advertising display business. "But the credit crunch did for that. So we had to think of a new direction quickly," says Bramble, also 27.

"We saw the opportunity for products in the nursery and pet markets, but had no specific experience of those. Launching new products at the right price from scratch and in that situation has been our biggest hurdle. We've done it through trade shows, online

marketing and just picking up the phone to retailers with open minds."

The two have spent £50,000 of their own funds, plus extra input from three other smaller shareholders. The investment has gone mainly on developing prototypes and tooling.

Now Massey and Bramble are looking for an equity investor with £100,000 or more to take the business to the next stage. "We want to add a further five products this year," they explain.

"As the recession recedes, we have to work even harder. That is why winning the HSBC Start-Up Stars green award means so much. We have already had calls from potential investors because of the prize and the credibility — 2010 should be our year."

● *Becothings: 020 7193 2582, www.becothings.com.*

For more advice about business and the HSBC Start-Up Stars awards, visit www.network.hsbc.co.uk.



SITTING PRETTY: George Bramble, left, and Toby Massey