

Shining lights clean up

By Paula Beauchamp

SIR Richard Branson says the next generation of self-made entrepreneurs will emerge from the recession -- and the Zervas brothers hope he's right.

Unlike many businesses that are slashing staff or planning to close, the Zervas brothers are tackling the downturn head on -- by starting their first business.

Zervas First -- Deluxe Car Cleaning, a mobile cleaning service, was launched in January and was officially registered last week.

``I think people are less likely to spend as much money on things like cleaning their cars now, unfortunately for us," part-owner Peter Zervas said.

``But we didn't think we should wait because of the economic crisis.

``Once we had the idea it was, 'Let's get the ball moving as soon as we can'.

``When times turn good and we've got the momentum behind us, we'll benefit even more."

It is, perhaps, a good time to reflect on the big-name brands that started amid a recession: Microsoft (1975), Burger King (1953) and FedEx (1998) to name a few.

In an increasingly environment-savvy market, Zervas First's owners say the company's imported trade-secret washing products, which require just half a bucket of water per car, are its major point of difference

``You have to see it to believe it," part-owner and car enthusiast Steven Zervas says. The boys say they ``try to make every nook and cranny spotless" at a cheaper price than their competitors.

And they have few risky overheads to contend with.

Their service is mobile and, as you would expect with three owners aged 14, 18 and 21, almost all of their marketing is free on sites such as Facebook and YouTube.

Small business coach **Dr Greg Chapman** says recession times are ripe with new opportunities for game entrepreneurs such as the Zervas brothers.

``Large businesses become risk-averse," he said.

``They are not as active in the marketplace, so they create opportunities for new ideas, which would be crowded out in normal times."

He said nimble, newer players had to look at new opportunities, perhaps repackaging a product for a cheaper price or making use of emerging technology.

He pinpointed maintenance service supply and equipment leasing as two markets likely to grow in a recession.

Dr Chapman said more entrepreneurs were likely to start businesses during this recession because of the ubiquity of the internet, which has reduced the barriers to entry.

``It is much more conducive to people who are willing to take piecemeal and provide a service using an internet connection from their back bedroom," he said.

``We might see an explosion of online marketing gurus."

A recent survey by Ovum concluded that small to medium enterprises in Australia would not stop spending on telecommunications during the downturn because they saw it as essential to support their businesses.

They were more likely, however, to adopt hosted services to avoid up-front capital investments and to spend money on solutions that had a clear return on investment.

Dr Chapman said it was important for all entrepreneurs to look at their basic skills and the things they knew before setting up a new business.

``Think how you can create a package with what you know," he said.

``Once you understand what you know and others want, think how you are going to market it.

``That's the really, really hard thing because if no one knows about you, you won't have a business."