

# Selling a well-read baby to Clinton and beyond



READING MASTERS . . . Denise and Grant Ford with mascot parrot Raybo

PHIL DOYLE

**I**F you can teach a parrot to talk, then why not a child to read well before the usual age of five?

Having survived dirty nappies and midnight feeds, young couple Denise and Grant Ford asked themselves that question almost a decade ago after their new baby clocked up his first year.

They soon found out.

They tried some accelerated learning ideas from leading educators on Michael and carefully monitored what happened.

The result: Michael read his first book (565 words) at age 23 months. His sister Magdalen, born two years later in 1992, read her first word at 17 months.

Their third "child" arrived on July 4, 1993. Born in the dining room of their Auckland suburban home with a computer as a plaything, it was named The Parent Company.

The Fords' firm has expanded internationally by marketing its own early reading programme created from experiments with Michael and Magdalen.

Last month, The Parent Company began selling its products, including its now successful Reading Master programme, on the Internet on a website designed by Grant.

By selling its own intellectual property and riding on the first wave of this country's knowledge economy, The Parent Company managed two coups.

The first was as joint winners with the TAB of the e-commerce export section of the 1999 New Zealand Export Awards this month.

The company's vision and determination clearly set it apart, the judges said.

Its other coup was an Apec spinoff.

Noting US President Bill Clinton's

willingness to do his bit for enterprising Kiwi business people, the Fords sent an e-mail with their website address to the White House.

Back came an e-mail from Clinton's educational adviser Carol Rasco, who said the president was impressed with the site and its educational services.

And so was Rasco. So much so she sent it on to 20 educational authorities in the US.

Grant Ford said establishing the business had been a trial.

With Denise at home with the children till they were five, they would not have got by had he not done consulting work in business systems for some of New Zealand's largest corporates.

"But during the last nine months I have been able to work fulltime in the business in preparation for the e-commerce launch and the development of a maths programme," he said.

With tertiary training in education, psychology and sociology, Denise has written the 27 educational books which comprise the Reading Master programme, as well as co-authoring with Gordon Dryden a book titled *The Reading Revolution*.

Educational authorities have not always been enamoured with early reading programmes, which can provide headaches for teachers when advanced readers are in a class with children their own age just starting out with books.

But Grant Ford won't stop now. "Selling on the Net opens a whole new and exciting ball game for us."

It's also proof not just the biggest names are leading the way.

— GARRY SHEERAN