

# THE Sun

## Virtual world ... Michael Acton Smith with his creation, the Moshi Monsters

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Published: 25 Mar 2010

**IT'S the internet sensation that has got 15million children hooked - even Prime Minister Gordon Brown's two sons.**

British website Moshi Monsters - an online world populated by cute virtual monsters that kids can adopt, dress-up and feed - is one of the fastest-growing anywhere.



With educational puzzles and a closely monitored forum for children worldwide to talk safely to each other, it's like a Facebook for kids and has the backing of many parents.



Child friendly ... Zommer

One of them is PM's wife Sarah Brown, who recently revealed she has to stop her sons John, six, and Fraser, three, playing the game during family Sundays together.

The man behind Moshi Monsters - which last night celebrated its 15millionth registered user - is another great British success story.

After setting up online store Firebox when he left university, Michael Acton Smith was looking for a new challenge. Now 35, he laughs: "It sounds ridiculous but I had a pet rock when I was

young, and a Tamagotchi. It made me realise there was a big opportunity to create a virtual pet game on the internet."

In 2007 Michael sketched some pictures in a coffee shop and recruited four friends to help develop the free-to-use site, which launched in April 2008.

He says: "We felt if we could make a site that was safe, with some educational elements, parents would be supportive. In the first year it grew to a million registered users, but last summer it exploded and now we're at 15 million users."

Michael puts this down to marketing and making it easier for kids to communicate safely with each other.

There is now a subscription service where parents can pay a small monthly fee for their children to access new parts of the site. Michael, who will soon employ 45 staff, says moshimonsters.com is now generating millions in revenue.

The site, aimed at seven to 11-year-olds, makes child safety top priority. Parents are asked for their consent for their children to register and Michael says users cannot send private messages or post photos.

A third of users are from the UK. Dr Ambreen Malik, 40, from Manchester - whose daughter Zainab, 12, and son Omar, ten, use the site - is a big fan, saying: "It's a very safe environment for the kids."

But another parent, David Knox, 34, from Motherwell, warned: "It's great but I'm not mad about my son social networking at the age of six - you must be vigilant."