

Friends Reunited: an Internet phenomenon

Friends Reunited is one of the most successful websites in Britain. It allows you to look up the school you went to and to find out what the people you went to school with are doing now.

1 Complete the fact file.

£25 million	2000	46,000	nine million	up to ten million
practically unlimited		Steve & Julie Pankhurst		the UK

Friends Reunited fact file, May 2003	
Founders	Steve & Julie Pankhurst
Based in	
Launched in	
Number of registered users	
Number of schools on website	
Average number of hits per day	
Value of company	
Potential size of market	

2 Read the article to check your answers.

Friends Reunited is a school reunion craze which has swept through Britain. What is it? It is a website which allows you to look up your old school friends (and enemies) and find out what they are doing now. It was founded in 2000 by Steve and Julie Pankhurst from a spare bedroom in their London semi. Today, FR has close on nine million registered users: that's half of the online community. There are around 46,000 schools and colleges on the site, and since everyone went to school, the potential membership is practically unlimited. The number of hits per day is now between five and ten million. And FR has now launched in Italy, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands.

But is it all good? While it has brought back many memories and helped old school friends and even families reunite, it is also accused of causing unhappiness and broken marriages. What happens if someone leaves their partner and runs off with an old school flame?

In January this year, the founders tested the company's value on the open market. It was valued at £25 million. They decided not to sell, but instead doubled the management team, preferring to stay part of the company rather than cash in.

Friends Reunited is one of the most amazing success stories of the Internet age.

3 What do you think the following phrases mean?

a craze	to sweep through	an old flame	to cash in
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4 Discuss the following questions.

- Do you still keep in touch with people you knew at school?
- Is there anyone from your school you lost contact with and would like to know about?
- Do you think that Friends Reunited will/could work in your country?
- Would you have sold Friends Reunited or kept it? Why/why not?
- Do you know of any other Internet success stories? Or failures?