

Melanie Perkins



Melanie Perkins was a 19-year-old university student when she started her first company

- 1 Melanie Perkins, from Perth, Australia, wasn't even studying graphic design at university but she fell in love with it during a first-year subject in digital media in 2005. She learned quickly, and worked so hard in class assessments, that she was invited to teach graphic design workshops to students in other faculties. The software she was teaching was so complicated Melanie Perkins found most people struggled to pick it up. But instead of getting frustrated, she got a business idea. 'It was really complex and difficult, and it would take the entire semester to just learn where the buttons were on the software,' Melanie told *Daily Mail Australia*. 'At the same time Facebook was taking off, and it was so easy to use and everyone was on it. And I just had this belief that in the future it wasn't going to be as complex to do design work.'
- 2 In 2007, Melanie Perkins came up with the idea to create easy-to-use graphic design software which allows schools and students to make their own yearbooks. She had no business or marketing experience but Melanie says her inexperience gave her confidence that it wouldn't be too difficult to start a business from scratch. 'My boyfriend became my co-founder and we started in my mum's living room,' she said. 'Our naivety in some ways helped us... If I knew at the time all the things I didn't know it would have been intimidating.'
- 3 They started with a bank loan which they used to advertise online and send sample yearbooks to schools. Their first sale was to a French school in Sydney the following year. 'When we got our first \$100 cheque, it was the most exciting moment ever, knowing people were prepared to pay for what we had built,' Melanie Perkins said. 'We never took on any external

financing after that but we kept putting every cent back into the business.’ They sold to 15 schools in their first year, 30 in their second and 80 in their third.

- 4 One year, Melanie Perkins went to the Innovator of the Year awards in Perth to present her company Fusion Yearbooks. There she had a short but fateful conversation with MaiTai founder and famous San Francisco investor Bill Tai. ‘He was the first investor I’d met who had insights into the whole world of technology and venture capital. He said if I ever came to San Francisco he would meet with me,’ she said. Meanwhile, she had been having ideas about expanding the Fusion model beyond school yearbooks. The following year she travelled to the U.S. to meet with Mr Tai and Google Maps co-founder Lars Rasmussen. She pitched them the idea for her second company Canva, a free online tool that allows people to design everything from web graphics to posters. A two-week trip turned into a three-month trip as Melanie met with as many investors and software engineers as she could.
- 5 Canva closed its first funding round of \$3 million in early 2013, and after more than a year of development launched in August of the same year. By October 30 2014 Canva had reached one million users, and now the company has reached four million users and raised \$12.6 million in investment. The company employs 70 people in Sydney and the Philippines, and their jobs come with a range of perks including an in-house chef, and an office bar. ‘We have a masseuse come in now and again and we have yoga. The chef comes in every day and cooks lunch and breakfast. It’s just a fun place – it’s a very casual place people enjoy hanging out in.’
- 6 Melanie Perkins said other starting entrepreneurs should identify a problem they can solve with a product or service. ‘Find a problem you believe passionately about, something you really want to solve,’ she said. ‘Once you’ve done that just literally get started. You don’t need to know all the things you need to know in advance of starting.’

dailymail.co.uk, 2015