

# BENJAMIN COHEN

The 18-year-old millionaire (on paper, at least) talks about money, the internet and living with his parents By Philip Watson Photograph by James Cant



**B**enjamin Cohen is Britain's youngest e-commerce millionaire. At 16, he launched Jewishnet (<http://jewishnet.net>), a Jewish community website, from his Middlesex bedroom with a £150 loan from his father. Offering such services as a cyber-rabbi, a Jewish agony aunt and a dating service called KosherSex, the site was valued at £5 million. Last October, he sold Jewishnet to concentrate on the development of CyberBritain ([www.cyberbritain.co.uk](http://www.cyberbritain.co.uk)), a network which uses hermia, an intelligent search engine devised by Cohen, to categorise web content. The site features a subscription-only facility called hunt4porn. Cohen, now 18, recently licensed hermia in a deal that could earn his company £12 million a year.

**As a young child, what did you want to be when you grew up?**  
Oh God, lots of things. I used to say I wanted to be prime minister.  
**Did you think you would be successful at whatever you decided to do?**

**Virtual millionaire**  
'Come on girls, my parents won't be back for ages...'

**WHAT I'VE LEARNT**  
**ALWAYS** believe in yourself  
**NEVER** be afraid to bullshit

I don't want to appear overly confident, but I have a lot of self-belief, so whatever I want to do I know I can do it.

**What was your first business venture?**  
When I was six, I set up a stall outside my parents' house and sold ice lollies for double the price I bought them.

**Who or what inspired you?**  
My dad and grandad. My dad was a solicitor and entrepreneur and a bit of a wheeler-dealer, and my grandad was MD of Ladbrokes. I was always hearing about financial matters and I wanted to join in.

**Has your success created any tension with your father?**

Yes, because I'm getting more press than him. I used to get introduced at business functions as his son; now he gets introduced as my father and doesn't like it.

**You got ME when you were 13. How did that affect you?**

When I was really ill, a lot of people I was friendly with just couldn't be bothered. For two years I was mostly by myself and that makes you in touch with yourself and aware of how important you are to yourself. It also made me determined to achieve something. That was when I realised how powerful the internet is. It was a way of keeping in touch and meeting new people. I also realised that, for not much money, I could create a website with the potential to reach millions of people.

**When you started Jewishnet did you think it would make you wealthy?**

No, it was just a hobby; a bit of fun for the community.

**Did you buy yourself anything special when you first came into money?**

No, because I haven't. While Jewishnet was valued at £1.8 million, I received £310,000 of shares. They are now worth £70,000 and I could get as little as £50,000 by the time I can sell them in October. It's not bad, but it's nowhere near £5 million. We raised £250,000 for CyberBritain, so now I get some wages, but I still live with my parents – and pay them rent.

**How much are you worth now?**

Values of £10-20 million have been touted for CyberBritain and I own 70 per cent. So apparently I'm worth £7-14 million.

**What would you have done if e-commerce hadn't worked out?**

I'd have gone to university, which is what I still want to do. I'd like to do something more creative, like writing or the media.

**Is failure important to success?**

I don't know. I haven't failed yet.

**Any idea why you've been successful?**

No. I think a lot of it's luck. And being first.

**Would you be able to run, say, a soft-drinks company as successfully as you have your own business?**

Probably, but I like running my own business. I've been offered serious money – £250,000 a year – to work for someone else, but it's not money that's important, it's the achievement.

**What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?**

There's two. One is anticipation, which I was told when I was learning to drive, but is important for everything – anticipating what others are doing. The other is a good piece of advice my grandad gave me, which is always to ask for advice.

**And the worst?**

It's okay to mix wine and spirits.

**Is it necessary to be ruthless?**

I never wanted to be ruthless or a control freak. But I've had to be – not sinisterly ruthless or a complete bastard – because there is an element of self-preservation.

**Do you ever worry about some of the people who may be using hunt4porn?**

I don't think it's my responsibility. If they weren't using my search engine they'd be using someone else's. In fact, our filters keep out the porn sites that can appear by accident as much as possible.

**Is it possible to be successful and scrupulously honest at all times?**

No. You have to have something up your sleeve at all times.

**How important are financial rewards?**

Quite important – that's what I've done it for. But I don't want to be a billionaire; I just want to be comfortable and not worry about money.

**You don't want to be the next Bill Gates, then?**

Definitely not. I don't want to be that sad or boring.

**Does success equal sex appeal?**

I've received fanmail from girls, and dinner invites from Jewish grandmothers wanting me to meet their granddaughters. I've also received some very explicit emails, from girls and guys, which were a bit shocking.

**When do you want to retire?**

Next year. If I got the right deal, I would sell the business and just do things that are fun.

**Can you sum up your business philosophy in one sentence?**

Know you're right but never believe it. ☹