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Investor ready

Papyrus, paper made from sliced reeds or other plants, is an ancient Egyptian innovation. It is also a superb alternative to wood-based paper in many applications.

Papyrus Australia founder Ramy Azer, Egyptian by birth, sold papyrus in Europe when he was younger and knew demand for the environmentally-friendly product was greater than supply. He foresaw increasingly stringent environmental constraints facing the paper industry.

After completing a Mechanical Engineering degree at the University of South Australia, Ramy began investigating alternative fibre sources in Australia and processes which could make them viable. Banana trunks were identified as an ideal material.

Globally, some 1.5 billion tonnes of banana trunks go to waste every year. A banana plant can grow a new trunk every six to 12 months depending on plant type and location - an abundant and easily renewed fibre source.

In 2007, after 13 years of development, Papyrus Australia Limited fielded machinery and processes to use the trunks commercially.

"Papyrus involves a machine and a process enabling banana plant trunks to be converted into usable products, such as veneer, chips and fibre as an attractive, high utility, environmentally positive alternative to wood," says Papyrus Australia Limited Chairman, Ted Byrt.

Papyrus Australia now makes commercial quantities of veneers at its commercial manufacturing facility at Walkamin in Far North Queensland. Other fibre products such as chipboard, particle board, MDF, cardboard and paper will follow.

Europe has been identified as the best market and Papyrus has an export agreement with veneer company 3W Tout Bois.