

ENTREPRENEUR



Ramy Azer of Papyrus Australia with some of the products made from banana plant paper. 4558

Ramy bends bananas to making paper

IT is little wonder Ramy Azer is closely guarding the secrets of his success. They could one day be worth big bananas.

His business, Papyrus Australia, has developed the technology to create paper from banana plants.

It is done not by creating pulp from felled trees, but returning to the methods of Ancient Egypt.

"Paper is produced as pulp paper. You get a large amount of fibres, you mulch them down, make pulp, spread it out, dry it and you've got paper," Ramy explains. "We went back to the origins of paper with the idea of using the full length of the fibre."

Ramy, a graduate in mechanical engineering and business management, formed his company with the help of an Adelaide University Business Incentives from Graduates (BIG) sponsorship which covered

his running costs for a year.

He has since won a half-million-dollar Federal Government research and development grant through AusIndustry.

Ramy's company produces papyrus-like paper with long, stronger fibres which make it ideal for packaging. It could even be refined for other uses, such as writing paper.

After some research and testing, Ramy decided banana plants — with their long fibres — were his best option. The plants are usually discarded once the fruit has been removed and growers are happy to get rid of their plants.

"From 60kg of bananas, you have about 250kg a waste you need to get rid of," Ramy says.

While taking on the big paper producers may not be possible, Ramy believes there is a "niche" market for his brand of paper.