Four mates have turned their love of hi-tech gadgetry into a burgeoning business, writes **Mark Worley**

Cyber students hunt big game

B EFORE the dot-com era, these young men would have attracted unfair criticism for their intense love of computers.

But as millions of everyday consumers line up across the world to buy the latest computer games and electronic gadgets, the "computer geeks" tag has quickly changed to "whiz kids".

And there is another moniker being thrown about for these 22-year-olds — multi-millionaires in the making.

Welcome to Secret Lab, a new software development company run by University of Tasmania students Paris Buttfield-Addison, Jon Manning, Andrew Bennett and Josh Deprez.

Secret Lab became operational just two months ago but has already made the big time by being chosen to sell its new game *Culture* online at the new iPhone Application Store.

About 2000 applications are available online and *Culture* has been ranked in the top 100 sellers regularly since the online store opened two weeks ago.

Mr Buttfield-Addison says the game is a cross between chess and chequers, played to a soundtrack constructed by Mr Deprez.

"We are very excited about

LOGGING ON TO SUCCESS: Online entrepreneurs, from left, Josh Deprez, Andrew Bennett, Jon Manning and Paris Buttfield-Addison.

how the game has gone so far," Mr Buttfield-Addison said.

"It took us about six weeks to make the game and I think we have just about made back enough money to cover the hours we worked on the project."

The Secret Lab foursome, who are all close to completing their computer honours degrees, have been friends since studying at The Hutchins School.

They are developing a range of software including military-grade document protection.

"We are making encryption easier for normal people," Mr Buttfield-Addison said.

He is one of just three Australian recipients of the 2008-2009

Apple University Consortium Student Developer Scholarships.

His scholarship allows him to travel to the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference, held each year in San Francisco.

"I only got back from it a few weeks ago and can say it was absolutely brilliant," he said.

But despite his participation, he was not able to secure an iPhone ahead of its Australian release earlier this month.

This week is National Information Communications Technology Week and the University of Tasmania is running several public events. Details are at www.cis.utas.edu.au/cisview/news.jsp.