

Springwise newsletter | 9 April 2008

This week's cluster of clever new business ideas includes a virtual library, a pop-up city park, mini-franchises for kids, and more. Our next edition is due on 16 April 2008. In the meantime, check out our daily postings on www.springwise.com, send us your [tips](#), and please don't forget to [tell your friends and colleagues](#) about us. Much appreciated!



Over the past few years, landlocked cities across Europe have been setting up temporary beaches to offer their residents a summer's day on the sand. From Paris to Budapest, these urban beaches have been quite a hit with the locals.

Now, a new project by Rotterdam-based HUNK-design in cooperation with IDEddy is offering cities an alternative to moving large amounts of sand. [The Flying Grass Carpet](#), which will debut in Amsterdam on May 10th, is a grass carpet of adjustable size, measuring at most 58 by 32 meters (or 190 by 105 feet). It's a movable meadow made of various colours and types of artificial and natural grasses, from golf green to tennis red, arranged to resemble an Oriental rug. The designers' aim is to create a temporary patch of green in Europe's concrete jungles, giving city dwellers a place to hang out, play Frisbee or have a picnic.

After its week-long residency in Amsterdam, the pop-up pasture will land in Aachen, Germany before moving to Rotterdam, and its owners are happy to schedule in other cities, too. This one should inspire urban planners and event organizers worldwide, as well as artful entrepreneurs who can no doubt come up with variations on this theme. And, although we're not in favour of blanketing the world with ads, we can't help but notice that a grass carpet would be a great canvas for advertisers ;-)

Website: www.flyinggrasscarpet.org

Email: info@flyinggrasscarpet.org



Mini-franchises for kids

Back in 2006 we wrote about Dutch Postbank's [campaign](#) to facilitate the efforts of kidpreneurs, and now a Florida-based company is taking the notion a step further by offering mini-franchises for kids.

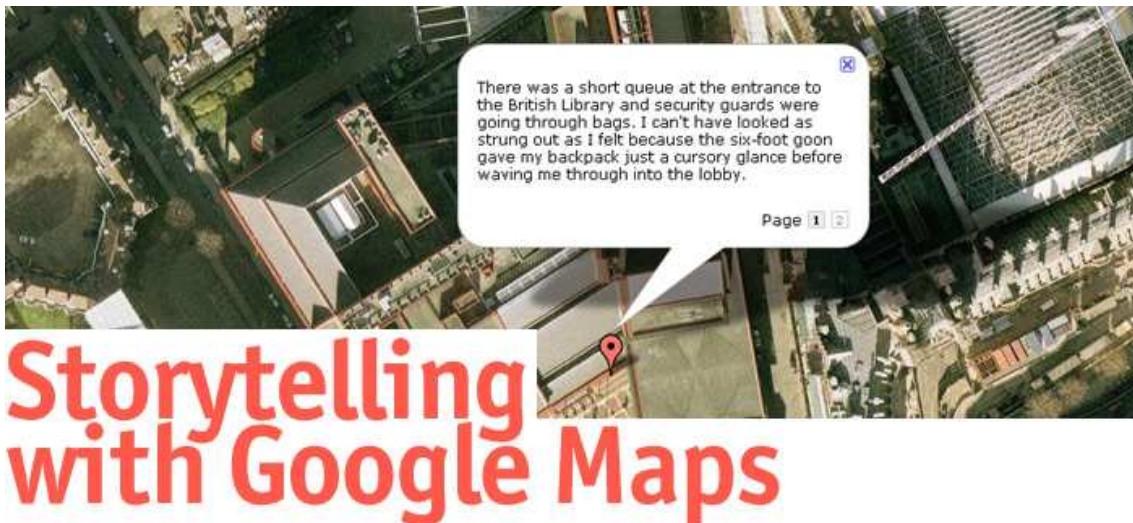
Founded last year, Florida-based [FranChild](#) enables kids ages 5 to 15 to go way beyond lemonade stands and operate a "grownup-style" business instead. Parents and kids begin by picking a product to sell: beeswax candles, organic soap, jewellery or apparel. The initial startup cost is just USD 25, which gets the child a FranChild Company Certificate to acknowledge his or her business launch; business cards ready to print from FranChild's ready-made templates; how-to instructions for marketing and selling products; access to the My First Franchise Resource Center, a USD 75,000 marketing system for creating customized packaging products; discount pricing on inventory and supplies; and access to newsletters, updates and a members-only forum. For an extra USD 2 per month, kids can also get their own business webpage. Kids then order their inventory and create their business cards and packaging, and they're ready to start selling. In addition to extra spending money (which can be considerable, according to the testimonials), FranChild gives kids valuable business and life lessons, and it provides an educational context in which parents and kids can spend time together.

FranChild's founders stress that the time commitment is small for both kids and parents, though overscheduled families may still want to think twice before stretching those schedules even further. Nor should earnings be the primary motivation, FranChild warns. Far be it from us to promote child labour; on the other hand, could be a fun way to while away the time during those long summer months! FranChild operates only in the US—one to bring to a country near you?

Website: www.franchild.com

Contact: info@franchild.com

Spotted by: Bill McMahon



It seems a fair statement to say that the art of storytelling has not yet caught up with the internet's capabilities, at least not in the mainstream. A new project from UK-based Penguin Books' digital fiction group, however, is using the power of the internet to tell stories in new and surprising ways.

In mid-March Penguin—along with alternative reality gaming firm Six to Start—launched the [We Tell Stories](#) initiative through which consumers can enjoy six digital novels by six different authors over the course of six weeks for free. The first story, which launched March 18, was "The 21 Steps" by renowned thriller author Charles Cumming. "He was the wrong man, in the wrong place, at the wrong time," the story begins, and readers follow the protagonist's adventures step by step across the world using Google Maps, with text presented in the technology's information bubbles at each point along the way.

The second story, "Slice" by Toby Litt, chronicles a teen's fears about the old house she and her family just moved into. Told over the course of four days, the story invites readers to follow Slice's story on her own blog as well as that of her parents. Those who want can even email the characters and follow them through text messages on Twitter.

Week 3's story was Kevin Brooks' "Fairy Tales," an interactive story in which readers name the characters, choose their qualities and make other decisions that shape the story's direction. This week it's "Your Place or Mine," the story of a relationship told by the bestselling author duo who work under the name Nicci French. Each evening this week beginning at 6:30 pm London time, readers can witness the authors writing an episode of the story live and in real time. Still to come are two more weekly stories along with a mysterious seventh one that will reportedly emerge through clues online and in the real world.

As Penguin notes on its site, "these stories could not have been written 200, 20 or even 2 years ago." It's a whole new world for storytellers—one to watch, whether you're in media or not!

Website: www.wetellstories.co.uk

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Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen



Bespoke baby blankets

When it comes to baby blankets, personalization usually means embroidering the baby's name and birth date on the blanket—or possibly a lengthier passage of text, as in the case of [Fill in the Blankie](#), which we covered last year. Scottish [Studio Roam](#), however, has upgraded the notion another notch or two by offering bespoke baby blankets with the personalization knit right in.

Launched last year, Studio Roam offers four baby blanket designs, each available in a choice of four colours in the softest Scottish cashmere. Blankets are 80 cm by 120 cm, and space is available for up to 18 characters of text, whether it's the baby's name and birthday or a personalized message. Each blanket is designed and produced to order in Studio Roam's Galashiels micro factory, and pricing is GBP 275 each. Target delivery times are within 10 days of processing the order.

Few things thrill us more than seeing upgrades get upgraded, particularly when there's a healthy dose of premiumization and gravanity thrown in. Repeat this mantra: upgrade, upgrade, upgrade! Then stand back and watch the orders come in... ;)

Website: www.studioRoam.co.uk

Contact: info@studioRoam.co.uk

Spotted by: Tim Leighton-Boyce



Video game helps players name that tune

In much the same way that movie studios market soundtracks, video game producers have published game soundtracks for years now. With the release of [Grand Theft Auto IV](#) later this month, in-game music marketing is being taken to a new level. Whenever they hear a song they like on one of the game's fictional radio stations, players can call a dedicated number from their cell phones. Within seconds, they'll receive a text message with information on the song and artist. The game's publisher, Rockstar Games, is also developing a community site around GTA IV, and members will be able to receive emailed links to the songs for easy downloading from Amazon.com's MP3 store.

Besides songs, GTA IV's radio stations—which include international funk hosted by Femi Kuti, and disco tunes courtesy of DJ Karl Lagerfeld—also feature commercials and DJ banter. Music has always been an important part of Grand Theft Auto's virtual world, serving as a background to the gritty action in the same way songs helped define the '80s TV series Miami Vice. So it makes perfect sense for Rockstar to create an additional revenue stream around music downloads. Smart way to cater to consumers' [infolust](#) while promoting music sales. (Related: [Online database can name that tune.](#))

Website: www.rockstargames.com/IV

Contact: www.take2games.com/index.php?p=global_contacts

Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen

A virtual vault for information-age valuables



Slated to launch this summer, [Wells Fargo's vSafe](#) is a secure online location where customers can upload and store copies of everything from the deeds to their homes to precious family photos. The bank also uploads each customer's bank statements to the vault, which can be accessed by logging on to customers' regular internet banking accounts.

Reported fees of USD 4.95 for 1 gigabyte to up to 14.95 for 6 gigabytes might seem high when you consider that webmail accounts like Gmail and Yahoo offer multiple gigabytes of storage space at no cost. But Wells Fargo adds layers of security and throws in a dedicated phone help line. Plus it provides a single, central location for an individual's or family important documents. Wells Fargo claims it is the first large financial services company to offer virtual storage of vital documents. In the Netherlands, ABN Amro Bank offers a similar service: [Digitale Kluis](#) (digital safe). ABN Amro's safe stores a maximum of 500 MB of storage for EUR 14 per month, and is accessible to anyone who has access to an account holder's online banking—including authorized accountants or family members.

The focused service is an order removed from the general purpose online storage services that have been available for years. Whether or not the US bank can make the service pay, imitators are sure to enter the space. Besides competition from other financial service providers, look for online storage firms to bundle-in virtual vaults as part of their regular offerings.

Website: www.wellsfargo.com — www.abnamro.nl

Contact: www.wellsfargo.com/help

Spotted by: Bill McMahon



One-of-a-kind shoe art

We've already written about companies that let consumers customize their own [dresses](#), [lingerie](#) and [duvets](#), and now Toronto-based design firm [Ndeur](#) offers customized, hand-painted shoes.

Unlike similar offerings by such companies as Nike and Converse, however, which essentially offer a limited set of choices in style and colour, Ndeur decorates vintage leather pumps and sneakers with unique designs and patterns in oil-based paint. More than 50 standard designs are available from the company, which was founded in May 2007 by Parisian artist Mathieu Missiaen; alternatively, customers can also just ask Missiaen to paint what he likes. Ndeur's shoes are available through retailers around the world as well as [Etsy](#), the online marketplace for handmade goods we've written about on several occasions. Each pair comes in its own box with a card of authenticity bearing the artist's signature. Wholesale costs are CDN 110 plus shipping for shoes with one of Ndeur's standard designs, or CDN 160 for an original design; if a customer supplies the shoes, the wholesale cost is CDN 100. Delivery takes three to six weeks.

As we've said before, there's nothing like customization to make consumers feel unique. What other wearable items can be hand-decorated for an exclusive touch.... and price? ;-)

Website: www.ndeur.com

Contact: ndeurshoe@gmail.com

Spotted by: Ana Bucur

Narrow Product Search

	Price
Heineken - 6 pack	\$10.99
Heineken - Single	\$1.99
Molson Canadian - 6 pack	\$10.98
Molson Golden - 6 pack	\$10.98
O'Doul's - 6 pack	\$9.98
Rolling Rock - 6 pack	\$7.98
Rolling Rock - Single	\$1.50
Adams Light - 6 pack	\$10.99
Stella Artois - 6 pack	\$11.49

TOTAL: \$32.64

Food/Bev. Total: \$27.35
 Sales Tax: \$2.29
 Delivery Fee: \$0.00
 Tip Amount:

CHECKOUT

Qty.	Name	Price
1	Fage Total	\$2.39
1	Lysol Disinfectant	\$5.99
1	Organic Valley - Whole mi	\$5.59
1	Club Soda - 1 Liter Bottle	\$1.89
1	Stella Artois - 6 pack	\$11.49

Quick delivery e-commerce is back Update

Convenience-seeking city-dwellers have access to speedy delivery services for everything from Chinese food to legal documents. [Wakozi](#), a new service that delivers beverages and munchies throughout Manhattan, promises to be different in ways that start-up enthusiasts should take note of. The company itself carries no inventory. Instead it works with popular (convenience) stores throughout Manhattan. Wakozi doesn't hire delivery staff, either—delivery is handled by the stores, usually within an hour. Plus, Wakozi has its own niche: deli food along with wine and spirits. The clincher is the Wakozi website, which lets logged in users order items with just a mouse click or two, although product choice seems rather limited for some stores.

Wakozi's business model greatly minimizes the capital needed to launch, and neatly avoids the high staff and inventory costs that doomed other delivery services, most notably Kozmo, which we [wrote about](#) in 2006, noting that the company had burned through millions of US dollars in funding before collapsing shortly after the dot-com bust. Wakozi not only operates on a much leaner business model than Kozmo, but also enters a market where almost every consumer is online, and most feel comfortable ordering products online. Especially if it saves them time or money. One to copy to your neck of the (urban) woods!

Website: www.wakozi.com
 Contact: support@wakozi.com



We've written on several occasions about [Blurb](#), which offers the prolific content producers of [Generation C](#) high-quality book publishing. For those interested in creating a magazine, [Issuu](#) is a new site that converts users' documents into interactive, magazine-style online publications that can be viewed directly in a web browser.

Whereas most online publications today (other than websites and blogs) are still presented either as PDFs or other downloadable files, Issuu's viewer features full-screen mode and vector graphics to create the online equivalent of a print magazine right from within a web browser. In addition to uploading their own PDF documents for publication, users of the site can browse the works of others and create their own personal libraries; through its community features, they can discuss and share what they see. It's like a YouTube for magazines, and the result is what Issuu calls a "living library" of the best publications on the web—readers can gain access to zines that have a very limited reach, and micro-publishers gain access to a global readership. Which is what blogs already offer, of course. But some still prefer the look of a magazine. All content is hosted for free on Issuu, and once a document has been uploaded, it can also be posted in preview or full size on any website, blog or social network, including Facebook and MySpace.

Michael Hansen, Issuu's cofounder and CEO, explains: "We've been watching how B2B companies charge large amounts for putting documents online with less advanced technology than ours. We want to empower anyone, businesses as well as privates, to publish online using the best technology available. By making Issuu free and providing hosting and viral tools, we see no reason why great publications shouldn't find the worldwide audience they deserve."

California-based Issuu just launched in February, but it already has an interesting mix of users on the site, including designers, editors, agencies and artists. It was also named a finalist in the SXSW Interactive Web Awards. One to adapt on a localized or niche basis?

Website: www.issuu.com
Contact: contact@issuu.com

Spotted by: Heyk



Book lending made convenient

You know a model is a good one when it gets copied far and wide, and one of the best examples today is [Netflix](#). We've recently written about the Netflix model being applied to [toys](#) and [textbooks](#), and now a few new contenders are applying it to popular books.

Avid readers are no doubt familiar with what [Paperspine](#) calls BCS—Book Clutter Syndrome, in which stacks of already-read books collect dust and clutter up the house. In the hopes of reducing consumers' BCS, Paperspine offers a way for them to develop a list of books they want to read, keep each one as long as they want, and then return them in a postage-paid envelope and get the next one sent out. Monthly fees range from USD 9.95 with a shipping fee of USD 1.49 per book and a maximum of two books at a time, all the way up to USD 24.95 per month with free shipping and a maximum of five books at a time. Issaquah, Wash.-based Paperspine, which launched late last year and is still in beta, was cofounded by ex-Microsofter Dustin Hubbard. More than 150,000 titles are available through the service.

[Bookswim](#), meanwhile, launched about a year ago on much the same idea. Offering more than 200,000 titles, Aberdeen, N.J.-based Bookswim's monthly fees range from USD 14.99 for two books at a time all the way up to USD 35.99 for 11 books at a time. Bookswim hopes to rent out a million books by 2010, representing what it estimates would amount to USD 22,070,000 in subscriber savings over the cost of purchasing those books at list price. Recognizing that 20 million trees are felled each year for American book production, the company also has a partnership with [EcoLibris.net](#) to plant a tree for each gift card it sells.

Like book-swapping sites, which have been around for a while, these two start-ups are providing an alternative both to buying books, and to borrowing from a public library. Both are good examples of the [transumers](#) trend, catering to consumers who are more interested in using/experiencing than in owning. Paperspine and Bookswim cover just the US. One to roll out in the country of your choice!

Website: www.paperspine.com — www.bookswim.com

Contact: contactus@paperspine.com — www.bookswim.com/contact.html

Spotted by: Bill McMahon