

Springwise newsletter | 16 April 2008

This week's smart new business ideas include fire protection with a designer twist, see-saws that can power schools, a website that predicts flight delays, and more. Our next edition is due on 23 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!



Wine by the trial-sized tube

Wine may be enjoying new popularity, but that doesn't mean the average consumer isn't still daunted by the knowledge it takes to pick a bottle they'll like. We've written about [several efforts](#) to simplify the process, and now [WineSide](#) is taking a novel approach by offering wines packaged in sample-sized tubes.

WineSide offers both sweet and classic wines in patented, flat-base glass tubes with screw tops carefully engineered to protect the wines' flavour. The sweet wines—which include Sauternes and Muscat, for example—are available in 6cl tubes, while the Pomerol, Chateau Neuf du Pape and other classic wines can be purchased in 6cl or 10cl sizes. WineSide's collection represents a range of appellations and producers; tubes are available individually or by the box, which can be chosen to provide an introduction to a variety, year or region. Kicking off retail sales, the products are available exclusively at [Colette](#) in Paris this month.

In addition to giving consumers a new way to sample and discover wines, WineSide's tube format also promises to give vintners new [tryvertising](#) capabilities at relatively low cost. The French company's website is still under construction, but it says it is looking for distributors. One to get in on early!

Website: www.wineside.net

Contact: vincent@wineside.fr

Spotted by: Jean Friesewinkel



Predicting flight delays

Consumers travelling by plane are increasingly faced with flight delays and cancellations, which is why a new start-up aims to help them spot potential delays. Much the way [Farecast](#) predicts whether ticket prices are tending up or down, [Delaycast](#) can now tell travellers the chance of encountering delays on a particular trip.

Delaycast was established to provide information about possible difficulties in flight itineraries and to give travellers realistic expectations about their travel plans. Unlike the historical flight performance statistics found on many travel sites, Delaycast uses predictive modelling technologies that model historical patterns in flight delays and project them into the future. Its Delay Profiles tool provides broad overviews of the best days, times and airlines to choose for a trip, based on selected airports, while its Delay Predictions tool provides information about delays and cancellations for specific airports, airlines, dates and times. The site does pretty well, too, with accuracy within 15 minutes of actual performance between 80 and 90 percent of the time, it says. The ad-supported site features direct links to travel planning tools like Travelocity and Priceline, and is free to use for consumers.

Delaycast launched into beta early this year, and currently includes just the top 60 US airports and 11 key airlines. It also makes predictions for trips only about four or five months into the future. Looking forward, however, it hopes to expand its coverage of airports and airlines, as well as adding predictions for security checkpoint wait times and updating predictions within 24 hours of a flight based on real-time conditions. Delaycast currently covers only the United States; who will bring this to the rest of the travel-weary world?

Website: www.delaycast.com

Contact: contact01@delaycast.com

Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen



Grocery service for skiers

Last November, we featured [Picnics on the Piste](#), a high-end catering firm that organizes gourmet meals for skiers right on the mountainsides of plush winter resorts in Austria, France and Switzerland. While affluent travellers increasingly seek out memorable experiences of the kind Picnics on the Piste offers, an even larger market exists for companies that can make it faster and easier for vacationers to buy everyday foods and household supplies for their holiday abode.

A new UK firm, [Snowman's Larder](#), is helping pioneer that niche in two neighbouring French ski resorts: Val d'Isère and Tignes. Customers can order online before they leave home, select a delivery time, then wait for their order upon reaching their apartment or chalet. To be sure, provisioning services have been around for a long time. Whether you're vacationing in a time-share unit, motor home or sailing yacht, companies can set you up with food and supplies in just about any major resort area. But Snowman's Larder is unique in several respects: the company says it can save travellers money by shopping in resort-area supermarkets instead of the higher-priced convenience stores at the resorts themselves, which shows how it has taken a business model skewed toward the affluent and adapted it to average vacationers. Snowman's Larder's also caters specifically to UK travellers, providing them with foods they're familiar with.

Plenty of variations could work with this model, of course. If British food works in the French Alps, for example, kosher meals might just as easily work in the Colorado Rockies. The trick, in either case, is finding potential customers without spending much on marketing. Solve that issue and you might find yourself running a profitable company in the kind of location others can only dream of. (Related: [Helping parents travel lighter](#).)

Website: www.snowmans-larder.com

Contact: info@snowmans-larder.net

Spotted by: Katie Rowen



Rare delicacies for brave foodies

Viewers of Andrew Zimmern's [Bizarre Foods](#) television show know that some foods are not for the faint of heart. Catering to consumers who would like to experience such curiosities first-hand, online purveyor [Edible](#) offers an introduction to delicacies that may shock less adventurous eaters. Giant toasted leaf-cutter ants, mopani worms, reindeer pate and Thai green crocodile curry are among Edible's offerings, along with Lizard Wine, Civet Coffee and Monkey-Picked Tea Wash. A range of unusual or downright alarming products are available in six categories: Insectivore, Herbs & Spices, Aphrodisiac, Carnivore, Herbivore and Apothecary. Edible, which is based in the UK, provides detailed information about the origin of each product, including species and geographic data. Prices are as exclusive as the products themselves—GBP 12 for a tin of green crocodile curry, for example, or GBP 10.95 for a small bag of mopani worms.

Eating insects and other unusual foods promises not just a new experience for gourmet adventurers sick of the usual fare, but also a way to pick up some [status stories](#) that can be used to impress friends, family and the world at large. As consumers increasingly look for the newest, the rarest and superlatives of every kind, these types of offerings could really catch on both online and off. One to "hop" into in the gourmet world near you? Just be sure to follow Edible's lead in the branding department—chocolate-covered ants in bulk bins don't have quite the same appeal ;-)

Websites: www.edible.com/shop
Contact: info@edible.com

Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen



Sneaker vending machine

We know that many of our readers like a good vending machine story. In the past, we've featured machines that vend everything from [umbrellas](#) to [hair straighteners](#), but we feel we've let you down on the vending front lately.

Which is why we were happy to spot a new automated selling device in London: [Onitsuka Tiger](#), the Japanese sports brand, launched a sneaker vending machine on Carnaby Street today. Sneaker vending isn't entirely new—it's been done in Japan, of course, and Reebok sold shoes from a vendomat back in 2004. Reebok's machine, however, was a bit of a let-down: the sneakers were packed into a seemingly standard, drab box. Onitsuka Tiger, on the other hand, put some effort into custom-building their machine, which can sell 24 pairs of shoes at a time, in 6 sizes.

Following its London debut, the machine will travel across the UK to bring convenience-buying to the rest of Britain's sneakerheads. Fun bit of brand promotion (this marks a UK first for sneaker vending) and consumers should enjoy the concept, too. "What, these shoes? I just got them from a vending machine down the street." To us, that sounds like a [status story](#) ;-)

Website: www.onitsukatiger.co.uk

Contact: info@onitsukatiger.co.uk



See-saw power

We've already [written](#) about the use of playground equipment as a means of pumping fresh water for African villages, and now a British student at Coventry University has come up with a way to use see-saws to generate power.

[Daniel Sheridan](#), a student in consumer product design, won three separate awards amounting to GBP 5,500 earlier this year for his see-saw design, which can create enough electricity to power a classroom by capturing the energy generated when children play on it. It would take just five to 10 minutes of play on the see-saw to light a classroom for a few hours, [BBC News](#) reported, though the energy gets transferred to an electrical storage unit via underground cable, so it would be up to the school to decide how the power is used. Sheridan was inspired by a volunteer project he worked on in Kenya last summer that included building a school. "The current need for electricity in Sub-Saharan Africa is staggering," he explains. "Without power, development is extremely difficult. The potential market for this product is huge and the design could be of benefit to numerous communities in Africa and beyond."

Sheridan's plan includes recruiting the local community to build part of the device and also install it, thereby creating involvement and reducing logistical costs. Late last month he reportedly left for a village near Jinja, Uganda, to test and finalize the prototype using locally derived parts. Alternative energy entrepreneurs: what are you waiting for? This one's for you! ;-) (Related: [Playing for water](#) and [Hippo water roller](#).)

Website: www.coventry.ac.uk/cu/d/199/a/6110

Contact: danielsheridan@yahoo.co.uk

Spotted by: RK



Stylish fire protection kits

Back in 2005 we wrote about the [Snap Alarm](#), an award-winning optical smoke detector from FireInvent, and now the same Swedish company is taking fire protection a step further with its all-in-one [Safety Box](#).

The Safety Box is designed to provide complete fire protection in a single package, and it comes in six different versions tailored to different usage contexts. But the fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, fire blankets and torchlights included aren't just ordinary versions of those items. Rather, they have been revamped for a modern, attractive look. The Safety Box Design, for example, includes fire extinguisher and Snap Alarm in black or white; black-and-white fire blanket in a modern, botanical design; plus an extra wall-mountable optical smoke detector. The Safety Box Exclusive, meanwhile, includes a chrome option for the fire extinguisher, while the Safety Box Kid includes a Snap Alarm in pink or blue and a fire blanket suitable for children. Pricing begins at SEK 1095 (USD 185 / EUR 115); versions for cars and boats are also available.

There will always be a need for functional products like fire protection devices, but there's nothing to say they can't be upgraded with a splash of colour and design and sold at a similarly upgraded price. FireInvent is interested in signing up retailers—one to bring to a market near you?

Website: www.fireinvent.com

Contact: info@fireinvent.com

Spotted by: Jessica Axberg



Social tryvertising for busy mothers

Put yourself in your consumer's shoes: you're walking down the supermarket aisles, kids are screaming, time is tight and you've got a long list to get through—is it any wonder you just stick to buying the same things week after week? Now imagine instead that you've had a chance to sample some of the new products out there in a relaxed setting, without any pressure to buy. Chances are, you'll make some new finds that will improve your weekly menu.

Australian [Word of Mouth](#) was launched in 2005 in the hopes of helping busy mothers make that second scenario a reality. The company is paid by participating consumer product companies to stimulate conversations about their brands and systematically collect feedback once consumers have tried their products. To do that, it makes presentations by invitation into established social and community groups—churches, school committees, etc.—with information about new products on the supermarket shelves. The presentations are given at no charge, and participants get a chance to try the products out themselves in a relaxed environment. Afterwards, Word of Mouth follows up with a survey to collect their feedback. It also invites participants to continue the conversation online by joining the Word of Mouth Club, which offers competitions, recipes and forums as well as product news; a classified section is coming soon. The result? Word of Mouth meets and stimulates product conversation among more than 200,000 Australian women each year; since the October launch of its Word of Mouth Club, more than 20,000 members have joined.

Word of Mouth currently offers its social [tryvertising](#) services just in Australia, but it hopes to expand in the near future, Foster says. The concept isn't entirely new, of course—other buzz marketing agencies have been working this field for years—but as traditional advertising continues to make room for other types of promotion, there's still plenty of room for innovative niche players. (Related: [The perks of product testing](#) and [Nationwide tryvertising parties.](#))

Website: www.wordofmouthco.com.au

Contact: presentation@wordofmouthco.com.au

Spotted by: Emma Crameri



Late last year [we wrote](#) about genome-mapping services, one of which—[Navigenics](#)—hadn't actually launched yet. Well, it just launched this week, and to kick off the event, it's holding a pop-up demonstration and showcase in the heart of New York City.

California-based Navigenics' Health Compass is a USD 2,500 service that combines a genetic health assessment with genetic counseling and information about the latest discoveries in science and medicine. Using just a sample of saliva, the service gives individuals information on their chances of developing up to 18 common conditions, including Alzheimer's Disease, heart attack, multiple sclerosis and a variety of cancers. Results are analyzed and encrypted before being made available to the consumer online through a password-protected website, along with suggestions and strategies for preventing or delaying illness. Navigenics also provides access to a personal Certified Genetic Counselor who can help users understand their individual results and create a plan for optimal health.

Now, beginning this past Wednesday and extending through April 17, Navigenics is introducing the service through a pop-up health and wellness showcase in Manhattan's SoHo district, at 76 Greene Street (which has hosted a number of pop-up ventures over the past few years). Members of the public are invited to learn about personalized medicine, genetics and prevention through seminars, panel discussions and other events designed to bring the power of genetics from the laboratory into real life. They can also speak with genetic counselors, physicians and company representatives to learn more about Navigenics' service.

Marketing any new service is a challenge, but that's doubly true when it involves unfamiliar, cutting-edge technology, requires expert interpretation and is fraught with emotional and ethical issues. In a case like this, taking to the (monied) streets and demonstrating it directly to the people most likely to be interested and able to afford the service makes a lot of sense. The [pop-up trend](#) lives on!

Website: www.navigenics.com

Contact: tellmemore@navigenics.com

Spotted by: [Luxist](#) via RK



Maps for new-energy entrepreneurs

The quest for alternative energy is the gold rush of our era. And as with any gold rush, the companies that sell miners their picks and shovels have a good chance of success. [FirstLook](#) is that kind of company. Instead of digging tools, it sells detailed reports to new-energy entrepreneurs. Those reports show just how much wind or sunshine an area is likely to receive, based on years' worth of meteorological data.

The company advertises its reports via a free interactive map, which uses Google Maps. Preliminary information from the map helps entrepreneurs determine whether a windmill or solar-panel installation at a chosen location would make good financial sense. Registered users simply log in and click a location on the interactive map. Immediately, they receive a brief run-down on the area's potential. Wind reports, for example, show the area's average wind speed at different heights, which correspond to the possible heights of a windmill tower. Solar maps give the average daily illumination the same spot receives at differing angles. That information on sunlight angles is critical, unless the project employs solar panels that track the sun's movement across the sky.

Websites run by the Department of Energy and other government and environmental organizations already provide similar information, though maybe with a less easy-to-use interface. But energy entrepreneurs will need something far more detailed if they hope to convince bankers or investors to fund their projects. A simple mouse click takes them to FirstLook's reports page, where they can buy a detailed report USD 1,000 and up.

For now FirstLook's data appears limited to US locations. But the company has plans to expand to other nations, a move it hopes to help finance with country-based sponsorships. Meanwhile, worldwide demand for wind and solar energy is growing, aptly insuring FirstLook's potential for growth. At the same time, the alternative energy gold rush will no doubt present other opportunities for pick-and-shovel start-ups.

Website: www.3tiergroup.com

Contact: firstlook@3tiergroup.com

Spotted by: Ryan Flynn



Still made in Quebec

American Apparel has become a veritable epitome of what our sister site trendwatching.com calls the [\(still\) made here trend](#)—consumers' growing preference for things produced locally, ethically, authentically. Along similar lines, there's [Blank](#), a Canadian company that sells blank T-shirts and clothing made entirely in Quebec. Unbranded and sweatshop-free, just like American Apparel.

Founded in 2005, Blank sells a range of clothing items and accessories for men, women and children with the goal of creating Quebec jobs and promoting local talent. Everything from fabric manufacture to dyeing, cutting and sewing is performed in Quebec, and through Blank's wholesale services retailers can even customize items with the colours, fabrics and formats of their choice. The company operates two Montreal stores, both of which also serve as production sites—large windows at the back allow customers to see the clothes being made.

Whereas almost 18,000 garment jobs were lost between 2003 and 2004 in Quebec, according to the province's Institut de la Statistique, Blank's sales doubled in 2006, allowing it to open its second store (source: the McGill Daily). Which just goes to show that the opportunities still abound for locally made goods. It's not just still made here—it's also still profitable!

Website: www.portezblank.com

Contact: info@wearblank.com

Spotted by: Alexandre Renaud