

Springwise newsletter | 30 April 2008

New business ideas we found for you this week: South African espresso made from red tea, a San Francisco garage for hybrid owners, a two-wheeled tow 'truck' from Sweden, and more!



Twist-and-release vitamin water

Last year we wrote about [VIZcap](#), a bottling innovation that lets consumers release vitamins and other supplements into bottled water just before they drink it, and now a new line of health drinks has launched based on much the same idea.

Los Angeles-based [Activate Drinks](#), which debuted earlier this spring, is a line of vitamin-enhanced waters that don't get mixed until the consumer is ready to drink them. Working on the premise that vitamins deteriorate in water over time, Activate Drinks are packaged in bottles featuring a special top, similar to the VIZcap, in which the vitamins and other supplements are stored separately in order to protect their freshness. When the consumer twists the cap on an Activate bottle, a small plastic blade within cuts the seal in the cap's waterproof chamber. Simultaneously, a small armature opens the chamber, allowing the ingredients to drop into the water below. (There's even a [video](#) on YouTube to demonstrate.) Four varieties currently make up the Activate Drinks line, including a Fruit Punch flavour packed with vitamins, an Orange flavour with supplements for immunity, an antioxidant-enriched Berry version and a Lemon Lime energy drink. No preservatives or sugar are included, and each drink contains 5 calories per bottle.

With a suggested retail price of USD 2.29 per bottle, Activate Drinks are currently available in a variety of stores throughout Southern California—meaning distribution opportunities likely abound throughout the rest of the world. Alternatively, we still love the idea of using caps like this for ready-to-mix bottles of baby formula; how about bringing the twist-and-release concept to other types of drinks? It's a thirsty world out there—no shortage of opportunities!

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Spotted by: Jamie Reedy

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Eco-mattress in a box

Whereas many mattresses today include polyurethane, formaldehyde and other materials with questionable effects on the environment and human health, [Keetsa](#) is an eco-bedding company that takes a thoroughly green approach to mattresses and other sleep products.

Keetsa mattresses are built with sustainable components including recycled steel, scrap memory foam bits, bamboo fabrics and unbleached natural cotton, while odor control and anti-bacterial properties are delivered using EPA-approved technologies based on silver and green tea. Since different Keetsa mattress styles use varying degrees of such sustainable components, the company uses a composite score called the Keetsa Quotient to summarize the overall greenness of each one. So far, so good, but maybe not entirely unique (other companies, like Greek [Coco-Mat](#), also tout the benefits of sleep on natural materials.)

What we liked about Keetsa is that, going beyond their component materials, they've also developed a way to compress their large mattresses so they fit into convenient wheeled boxes (made from recycled cardboard, of course). Not only does that make them maneuverable by one person, but it also reduces transportation expenses and the products' resulting carbon footprint, and gives consumers savings of between 50 and 75 percent, Keetsa says. Which makes for a very integrated eco-approach. Once the customer unpacks the mattress at home, it will resume its full, normal shape within one to three days.

Keetsa's mattress prices begin at USD 385, and shipping is free. Pillows, protectors, foundations and mattress toppers are available as well, both through the company's two California showrooms and at a few select retailers nationwide. Keetsa is hoping to sign up more retailers soon; one to bring to eco-conscious consumers near you? (Related: [Eco-friendly pack and move solution](#).)

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Spotted by: Frank Marquardt



Espresso made from red tea

Lattes and cappuccinos may have achieved near-cult status around much of the world, but health benefits are not typically among their virtues. A new contender fresh out of South Africa is now proposing a healthier alternative: espresso made from red tea.

Back in 2005, South African Cape farmer and espresso junkie Carl Pretorius walked into his kitchen for a quick fix. Worrying about the caffeine, though, he opened up Rooibos red tea instead and poured it into the handle of his espresso machine. [red espresso](#) was born, featuring a strong, slightly nutty flavour and a clean finish. The Rooibos used for red espresso is grown wild and hand-harvested from a single farm at the highest altitudes in South Africa's Cedarberg Mountains. A patented cut and method of preparation give red espresso richer flavour, colour and health properties than regular Rooibos, yet it is still naturally caffeine-free and is claimed to contain five times more antioxidants than green tea—a full 10 times more than regular Rooibos tea itself. Like coffee-based espresso, it can also be made into lattes and cappuccino-style drinks.

red espresso launched into the South African market in November 2005, and won a Product of the Year award just a year later in an important South African food and beverage innovation competition. By the end of 2006 it made its way around the globe, and last fall it earned a spot on the shelves at Whole Foods markets around the US. Those in food and beverage: one to serve up to the rest of the world.

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Spotted by: Marijke Krabbenbos



Zero cents per minute: 100,000 takers so far

We covered mobile virtual network operator [Blyk](#) both [before](#) and just [after](#) its launch last year. For those who have been wondering how the company is doing, last week it reported that it had reached 100,000 members in Britain in just six months.

Blyk targets 16- to 24-year-olds with its free mobile phone service, which includes 217 texts and 43 minutes every month. In exchange, of course, they get advertising—up to 6 messages sent to their phones each day. Britain's youth don't seem to mind, though—Blyk reached that 100,000-member target six months ahead of schedule. Response rates to the ads in question have also achieved a whopping average of 29 percent—far surpassing the norm, which tends to hover in the single digits.

Shaun Gregory, Blyk's UK CEO, explains: "Reaching 100,000 members is significant for advertisers because it gives them the opportunity to engage with a mass youth audience in a highly efficient and cost-effective way. In six months we have built up a deep knowledge of our member base, which now exceeds many established youth media players, and with over 7 million 16- to-24-year-old phone owners in the UK, there is huge potential for growth."

Blyk will launch in the Netherlands in the second half of 2008, followed by other European markets after that. Meanwhile, Goldman Sachs and Industrial and Financial Investments Company (IFIC) recently joined the company's list of investors, which also includes Sofinnova Partners and a number of others. [Free love](#), you're on a roll!

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Spotted by: RK



Matching program doubles Kiva loans

Longtime Springwise readers may remember Kiva, the venture [we wrote](#) about back in 2006 that facilitates charitable microloans to entrepreneurs in the developing world. Now the organization has found a way to make loans go even further through a partnership with credit card issuer Advanta.

Earlier this month Advanta and Kiva announced the [KivaB4B Project](#), an initiative through which Advanta will match the loans made by holders of its business credit card with up to USD 200 per month per card. Card holders simply select a business owner to sponsor through Kiva and make a grant using their Advanta BusinessCard. Advanta matches that grant, dollar for dollar, and Kiva distributes the total resulting funds. As the funds are repaid, they get deposited back into the card holder's Kiva account, while the match funds go back to Advanta. In the meantime, donors get materials to publicize their support, such as a KivaB4B button to put on their website, stickers for their storefront and postcards to send to customers.

Started in 1951 with USD 30 in seed money, [Advanta](#) is now one of the largest credit card issuers in the US small business market. Ami Kassir, Advanta's Chief Innovation Officer, explains: "In our years of working with small business owners, we've found that many of them remember the moment someone gave them inspiration, some good advice, or a little cash to get things going. Now, through KivaB4B, American small business owners can offer that same ray of hope to entrepreneurs in developing countries."

San Francisco-based Kiva has already opened a whole new world of opportunity to entrepreneurs in developing countries—it's facilitated more than USD 27 million in loans since its inception in 2005. With the power of a major bank behind it—and a little cause-related marketing incentive for donors—there's no telling how far its effects might go.

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Spotted by: Susanna Haynie



Tuned-in garage for hybrid vehicles

We've already written about [premium](#) and [female-friendly](#) auto shops and dealers, and now a San Francisco-based company has created an upscale, hybrid-focused garage with a thoroughly green approach.

Founded last year, [Luscious Garage](#) is situated in a historic warehouse on San Francisco's Clementina Street, complete with original brick frontage, a cozy mezzanine with arched windows, and a clean workshop filled with natural light. Specializing in hybrid vehicle technology, the woman-owned garage features an open workshop where customers are encouraged to look around while their cars undergo maintenance or repairs; there are books to read, art on the walls and a developmentally appropriate children's play area mingled into the space, which also features plants and carefully purified air. Luscious Garage uses no service advisors; rather, customers communicate directly with the technicians who work on their cars. Pricing is clearly spelled out on the garage's website, and just as hybrid vehicles are designed to be green, so the shop itself strives to be sustainable. Using San Francisco's Clean and Green Certification as a baseline, Luscious Garage aims to follow a strict sustainability plan based on The Natural Step. All administration is done online to eliminate paper and toner, while other office products come from a green supplier. Shop tools are electric, appliances are energy-efficient and furniture is second hand. Recycling is continuous, and zero waste is the shop's goal. A variety of green-focused community events are also hosted at the garage.

Luscious Garage is only open four days a week—a testament to the rewards and flexibility that follow when you are green with an appreciative clientèle. A model to follow in wealthy urban settings around the globe!

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Spotted by: Frank Marquardt



Short-term mobile internet for travellers

Travellers who need internet access on the road typically have two choices: either limit their use to the confines of hotel or café wifi—which can be pricey—or subscribe to long-term and expensive broadband data card services. New York-based [RovAir](#) now offers a third option with its day-pass wireless mobile broadband service.

Founded last fall, RovAir provides wireless mobile broadband aircards, data cards and evdo cards for internet access without an extended contract. To do that, the company itself maintains the necessary long-term subscriptions for data services with Verizon, Sprint and AT&T. It then offers those services in a day-pass format for those who need short-term but continuous access on the road. Coverage extends anywhere the provider's cellular range goes, which can be searched on RovAir's site. RovAir will ship the data card to the consumer express or by courier, and also provide return packaging. Costs depend on the number of days of use, beginning at USD 5.95 per day. There is a three-day minimum.

Until wireless access is universally available and universally free, there will clearly be demand for a variety of plans like RovAir's. More choice is always a good thing—who will bring it to mobile warriors in the rest of the world?

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Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen



Two-wheeled tow 'truck'

The Retriever is a two-wheeled towing vehicle based on a Honda Goldwing motorcycle that can worm its way through city gridlock and congested highways like no four-wheeled towing vehicle could ever dream of. The Retriever is the ingenious invention of the aptly named Swedish firm [Coming Through](#). According to the company, it takes a little over a minute to convert from a nimble motorcycle to a towing device powerful enough to haul most passenger cars. The Retriever's driver simply extracts a folded bracket stored behind the motorcycle's high back seat and then hitches the car's front end to the bracket.

As a business venture, a towing service based on the Retriever could take a little more time to set up, however. Throughout the world, towing firms compete under various schemes for the right to rescue cars stalled on public roads. Police are often the authorities who order a tow truck on the scene, and they would need to be sold on the Retriever's ability to handle the job. And some accident-damaged cars might require a heftier vehicle to haul them away. That said, the Retriever's ability to rescue a vehicle and quickly unsnarl traffic could make it a hit. So the real opportunity might be for distributors who could sell Retrievers either to private companies or public road authorities. (Related: [Motorcycle taxis rescue stranded business travellers.](#))

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Spotted by: Lilia Parra Ledesma



Earlier this year we wrote about [Walkit](#), an advanced route planner for UK pedestrians, and now [Simpatigo](#) has launched a similar service in the US that adds a wealth of information about local attractions.

Simpatigo creates personalized tour guides complete with directions and markers for attractions along the way. Users select beginning and ending points for the trip they'd like to take, along with which categories of attractions they're interested in—historical, budget, kid-oriented or restaurants, for example. Simpatigo then returns map-based driving or walking instructions along with descriptions of the relevant points of interest along the route. Not only can users search for and get travel routes, but—in [Wikitravel](#) fashion—they can also input local attractions of their own, which then get added to those Simpatigo includes on its routes. So, a user seeking to get directions from point A to point B in San Francisco, for example, will see not just a standard list of mainstream attractions described by sources like the New York Times and TripAdvisor.com, but also others that have been input and described by users.

Simpatigo is still rough around the edges, with attractions listed mostly just for select, well-populated areas in the United States, but its premise is a good one, promising to give users focused, relevant information along with a way to shape what others see. As the site gains traction, advertisers and local businesses will surely be clamouring to add their own locations as points of interest. After all, the restaurateur who skips an opportunity to reach users who have specifically said they're interested in local restaurants may not be a restaurateur for long...! ;-)

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