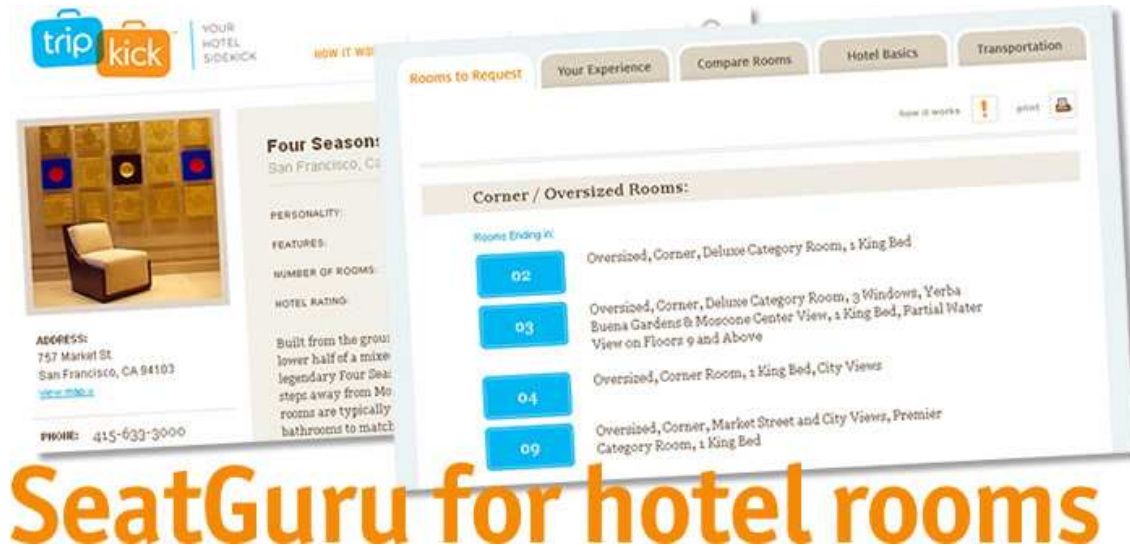


Springwise newsletter | 15 May 2008

Smart new business ideas we spotted for you this week: a website that lets travellers find the best hotel rooms, a combined work space and play care center for parents and kids, an online marketplace for hawking shiny gifts from past loves, and more. Our next edition is due on 21 May 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!



SeatGuru for hotel rooms

Mapping the best and worst seats in hundreds of airplanes, [SeatGuru](#) is one of our favourite examples of transparency tyranny—the power of detailed information to help consumers find the best of the best and leave the rest behind. So we were pleased to hear about [TripKick](#), a similar venture that's tackling another aspect of travel: hotel rooms. While TripAdvisor (which acquired SeatGuru in 2007) gives travellers access to detailed hotel reviews by other travellers, who occasionally include info on which rooms to book, there's definitely an opportunity in getting specific about individual rooms.

TripKick—"your hotel sidekick"—launched with about 250 hotels in 10 US cities, with more to follow. Coverage of each hotel includes detailed information on which rooms to request: which rooms are oversized (rooms ending in 03 and 04, for example), which have great bathrooms or are quieter than others. TripKick, which spent a year gathering all of this information, also points out which floors are better, and which to avoid. Guests are encouraged to add their own reviews and upload photos of rooms they've stayed in.

Given they chose a name that isn't specifically tied to hotels, we wouldn't be surprised to see TripKick branch out to other areas of travel, too. If you're in the hotel business, there's more reason than ever to ensure that each of your rooms has something special to offer. Run a restaurant? Time to make your best tables stand out and rule out any such thing as a [bad table](#). For more tips on how to turn transparency tyranny into transparency triumph, check out the [opportunities section](#) of trendwatching.com's briefing on the subject.

Website: www.tripkick.com

Contact: contact@tripkick.com



Crowd clout is a force that can be very effective in getting consumers what they want—such as cheaper prices, as we've [noted before](#). For helping to effect social change, though, it typically focuses on punishing bad corporate citizens through boycotts and other means. A new, San Francisco-based site called [Carrotmob](#), however, is turning that aspect of crowd clout on its head by using it to reward the companies that do the most good.

Very simply, Carrotmob aims to organize consumers to provide an economic incentive to companies for making positive environmental changes. The group hopes to begin by creating a broad network of consumers and forming partnerships with other larger advocacy groups, so as to tap into their research and infrastructure. Next, it plans to implement campaigns focusing on different industries, identifying for each specific opportunities to become more environmentally friendly. Carrotmob will then approach the companies in each industry with suggestions, and invite them to make the changes they have identified; interested companies, it hopes, will vie to do the most good. Competing offers will be evaluated by Carrotmob, and its network members will then reward the chosen company with "an unprecedented kind of shopping spree" to boost short-term company profits, as well as by proclaiming that company the most responsible in its industry. In short: the companies that do the most good get the most rewards.

The non-profit's founders explain: "The most exciting thing about Carrotmob may be that we can end the tradition of hostility between activists and business. Today we strive to make these important changes using a framework of positive cooperation. The best company wins, the consumer wins, and the planet wins."

For its first year, Carrotmob is seeking donations, and does not plan to generate any revenue; eventually, though, it hopes to become ad-supported, as members begin to display user-generated images and videos as ads on their Facebook profiles via a Carrotmob application. How it all plays out remains to be seen, but Carrotmob's reverse-boycott model is one to watch!

Website: www.carrotmob.org

Contact: carrotmob@gmail.com

Spotted by: Jono Hey



All-you-can-read digital magazines

Earlier this year we wrote about [idiomag](#), a digital music mag that's customized to subscribers' tastes. Picking up on the digital-delivery theme, French magazine distributor [Relay](#) and kiosk retailer now offers eco-minded consumers a way to receive issues of up to 400 magazines on their computers for one fixed, monthly rate.

Through a partnership with the [World Wildlife Fund](#) (WWF), Relay's fixed-price program—[Eco forfait](#)—lets consumers receive unlimited magazines of their choice (not including adult ones) for a price of EUR 17.90 per month. Subscribers begin by downloading Relay's special Delivery reader software. The magazines they choose are then automatically delivered to their computers in full multimedia format, complete with sound, video, games, wallpapers, integrated search engine and interactive links. Average download times are between 40 seconds and 4 minutes per magazine, Relay says. Consumers can then access and read their magazines anytime they want, online or off, and set up a digital library, add notes or create special issues. Content can be printed, or it can be transferred via a compatible USB key for perusal on any other Windows device, regardless of whether it has the Delivery software.

By receiving magazines digitally rather than in paper format, consumers help save the water, paper and energy associated with producing and transporting paper-based publications. In addition, EUR 1 of the subscription fee goes to the WWF each month to replenish and protect the forests of New Caledonia, which have been reduced to a mere 1 percent of their original area due to fires and other devastation.

Digital content delivery has long been held up as one of the most promising aspects of the computer age for eliminating paper and helping the environment. Will eco-consumers be willing to read magazines in digital format? Only time will tell. In the meantime, one to watch! (Related: [Online magazine publisher for the masses.](#))

Website: www.relay.fr

Contact: relay.presse-wl.com/Publications/Editorial/Contact.aspx

Spotted by: Florent Lesauvage



One-stop shopping for wellness

Health-food supermarkets are nothing new. But a South African newcomer is expanding the notion well beyond food and vitamins—and even spa services—to include products that support virtually every aspect of a healthy lifestyle.

Cape Town-based [Wellness Warehouse](http://www.wellnesswarehouse.com), which launched last fall, aims to provide South African consumers with a total solution for healthy shopping. With three stores in Cape Town, Claremont and Blackheath, Wellness Warehouse offers not just the usual assortment of natural and healthy foods, organics and related products. Also at its stores are a natural medicine dispensary and pharmacy; spa services including facials, body treatments and packages; a cafe serving up sandwiches, salads, smoothies and more; and fitness machines for sale, along with sleep products such as mattresses, pillows and massagers. All Wellness Warehouse stores emphasize eco-friendly, organic, biodegradable and ethical products and services, with an experience that's inviting, inspiring and informative. Targeting affluent, eco-minded consumers, Wellness Warehouse aims to provide one-stop shopping for everything a healthy lifestyle requires.

Last year we wrote about a Dallas Whole Foods' [expansion into spa and concierge services](#), and this takes the concept another step further, embellishing even more on such stores' experience-based retail. It may not be within the reach of every contender right now, but this could represent the next model for competition in the space. One to watch!

Website: www.wellnesswarehouse.com

Contact: info@wellnesswarehouse.com



DIY handbag design lets consumers create

In case there was any doubt the do-it-yourself design trend is here to stay, a new site for designing your own handbags has now joined the ones we've already written about for creating custom [dresses](#), [duvets](#) and [lingerie](#) (to name just a few).

Launched in Connecticut earlier this year, [Elemental Threads](#) (eThreads) gives consumers more than 60,000 ways to design their own custom-made handbags. The process begins when a customer chooses from among eight available handbag styles, including pouches, clutches and totes. They then select from among dozens of limited-quantity fabrics, previewing the look of their bag with each choice. Next they pick coordinating zippers, linings, and hardware, and the design is complete. All bags are then handcrafted by Emily, the company's founder, and delivered to the customer's door. Pricing ranges from USD 14 for a small pouch to USD 75 for a large tote bag. Both domestic and international shipping is available.

eThreads is the brainchild of longtime seamstress and MBA student Emily. Necklaces, belts and notebooks are also on the way. Another one to emulate in the category of your choice!

Website: www.elementalthreads.com

Contact: contact@elementalthreads.com

Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen



Local lessons, advertised & reviewed

Lifelong learners are always in search of new classes to take, but finding them isn't always easy. [TeachStreet](http://www.teachstreet.com) is a new website dedicated to helping teachers and students connect.

Seattle-based TeachStreet launched into beta a few weeks ago with more than 25,000 Seattle-area teachers, trainers, tutors, instructors, coaches and classes. Students can search for teachers across more than 500 subjects and filter the results according to map-based location, ratings from other students, teacher availability, promotional pricing and more. The free site can be searched by keyword, or visitors can scroll by subject through TeachStreet's extensive directory of classes. Classes and teachers currently available on TeachStreet cover popular subjects like tennis, piano and cooking, as well as less common ones like break dancing, surfing and Texas Hold 'em Poker. For teachers, TeachStreet provides a simple yet powerful way to promote themselves online and manage their learning business. Free online tools for teachers include an online profile builder, search engine optimization, and scheduling and management tools.

"We have heard time and again from adult learners and parents how difficult it is to find relevant and up-to-date information to evaluate teachers," explains TeachStreet founder and CEO Dave Schappell. "At the same time, teachers are craving easy-to-use tools to help market themselves on the Internet, manage their student rosters, and find more prospective students in their neighbourhoods. One of our goals with TeachStreet is to use the latest online technologies to facilitate real-world connections and provide anyone who wants to either learn or teach a new skill with a rich, geographically targeted website that features a city's best teaching resources."

TeachStreet is currently ad-supported, but ultimately it plans to roll out premium, fee-based services for teachers as well. It also aims to expand to other US cities in the coming months. One to partner with in a city near you...?

Website: www.teachstreet.com
Contact: www.teachstreet.com/contact-us

Spotted by: Cecilia Biemann



Marketplace for jewelry from ex-boyfriends

Most women have some: earrings, necklaces, rings or other jewelry given to them by an ex-boyfriend. Once treasured, the items become an irritating post-breakup reminder of a relationship gone bad. Fortunately, a new site offers a place to unload such relics from the past: ExBoyfriendJewelry.com.

Launched in February, ExBoyfriendJewelry.com facilitates the buying and selling of "ex" jewelry, as well as providing a place for users to share the stories behind it. Along with basic details such as description, condition and price for each item—including a "for good karma give away" option—users are asked to provide the story behind it, such as whether the breakup was a bad or amicable one. They are also asked to provide a rating, such as "Loved it but just can't stand to see it anymore," "Great gift, wrong guy" or "New boyfriend asking questions." ExBoyfriendJewelry.com's blog section currently features thoughts from the team behind the site—favourite "post-breakup activities," for example—but will soon be expanded to permit users to blog as well. Items for sale on the site range from a USD 20 beaded necklace to a USD 11,000 diamond engagement ring. For users who received something other than jewelry from their ex, there's also a category entitled "Gifts that should have been jewelry." Once they've sold their goods, users can even donate some of the proceeds to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation through a button on the site.

Los Angeles-based ExBoyfriendJewelry.com does not charge any fees or commissions, and it does not get involved in sales facilitated on the site (eventually, it aims to be ad-supported). By early May, the site had already reached almost 3,500 registered users. There are similar sites out there—Ex-cessories.com, for example, which does charge listing fees and commissions—but ExBoyfriendJewelry.com's emphasis on the stories behind the jewelry makes it less a pure marketplace and more a community. Purveyors of female-focused goods and services: this is an advertising opportunity you won't want to miss!

Website: www.exboyfriendjewelry.com
 Contact: exboyfriendjewelry@gmail.com

Spotted by: Maria Dahl Jørgensen and Philip Hoffman



We've covered a number of work space concepts in the past, including New York-based [TwoRooms](#), which lets parents work while their children play. Now [Cubes&Crayons](#) is offering a similar service to the hardworking parents of Silicon Valley.

Menlo Park, Calif.-based Cubes&Crayons offers flexible office space, community and child care for self-employed or freelance workers with young children between 3 months and 5 years old. A variety of work spaces are available at the site, including conference rooms and overstuffed chairs, and extra services such as printing, faxing and filing space are also available. The facility is open weekdays from 8 to 5, and parents can take advantage of its wireless-enabled office space and child care on a full-time, part-time or drop-in basis. Those who become members can make advance reservations by phone or online, as well as having priority for drop-in hours. Membership is USD 149 annually, with combined office and child-care rates starting at USD 13 per hour. Members are also required to donate three to four volunteer hours per month for up to 20 hours a week of use, or six to eight hours per month for up to 40 hours of use each week. Non-member rates for office and child care begin at USD 21 per hour. Cubes&Crayons also sponsors workshops and events focused on work and family topics.

As unconventional work schedules become increasingly common, demand for new, more flexible office and child-care options will only increase. It's no surprise initiatives like this popped up first in New York and Silicon Valley, but who will bring freedom and flexibility to self-employed parents in the rest of the world...?

Website: www.cubesandcrayons.com

Contact: contact@cubesandcrayons.com

Spotted by: [CityMama](#) via Leigh Carreira



Vacations that give back

More than just a time to renew body and spirit, vacations can also be opportunities to [learn something new](#) or [try out different careers](#), as we've noted before. For guests at Ritz-Carlton hotels worldwide, they can now also be a time to give back to the local community.

Last month Ritz-Carlton launched its [Give Back Getaways](#) program, which gives guests the opportunity to volunteer their time to improve and assist the local community in which they are vacationing. At The Ritz-Carlton in Cancun, for example, guests can join a biologist from the Cancun Department of Ecology for hands-on experience protecting mother sea turtles during nesting and helping them return safely to the sea. Through a program employees have already been participating in for more than a decade, guests will head out at night to search for nesting turtles, gather sea turtle eggs and bring them to a safer location. Visitors to Berlin, meanwhile, can roll up their sleeves and accompany hotel staff as they launch a spring clean-up of the SONNENHOF facilities for children with serious illnesses. Additional Give Back Getaways include cooking and serving meals at the North Texas Food Bank; restoring homes in the ancient water town of Wuzhen, China; planting native Cyprus trees in the dwindling wetland forests of the Florida Everglades; and building homes with Habitat for Humanity in Jakarta and New Orleans. Costs vary between roughly USD 50 and USD 150 per adult participant.

Simon F. Cooper, Ritz-Carlton's president and chief operating officer, explains: "We have come to recognize the interest many of our guests have in becoming more involved in the region where they are spending their vacation. Many of them are active volunteers in worthwhile activities at home, and want to continue this spirit of giving when they visit other parts of the world. We believe Give Back Getaways is a unique way for our hotels to partner with guests to provide an experience both memorable and personally enriching."

Experience, of course, is what it's all about, as the hotel goes beyond furnishing a purely functional place to stay to give guests a lasting, potentially transforming experience they'll remember forever. Long live the experience economy—and the companies that make it happen!

Website: www.givebackgetaways.com

Contact: www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Contact/InfoRequest.htm

Spotted by: RK



Kid-powered toys

Kids today often associate batteries with fun, thanks to the legions of battery-powered toys out there. The unfortunate result is not just a waste of power and an environmental hazard but also a danger to health, as thousands of kids each year end up swallowing the tiny devices. Michigan-based Zen Design Group aims to change all that with a new line of toys that's powered by kids' own energy instead.

Launched last fall, [SEE Toys](#) (short for "safety, ecology, economy") are electronic toys that never need batteries. Instead, they feature a hand crank that provides 15 minutes of fun in exchange for 60 seconds of cranking. Each toy makes its own, themed sounds to encourage kids to keep powering up—the Dynacar, for instance, makes engine sounds when its crank turns, while the Dynatiger makes a purring sound—and super-bright, colour-changing LEDs light up the action. Also included in the line are the Dynadolfin, the Dynashark and the Dynafly, a buzzing, giggling electronic bug that won Creative Child Magazine's Seal of Excellence Award last August. Pricing on the toys ranges from USD 14.99 to USD 19.99.

While it would be a stretch to call these plastic toys eco-friendly, there's no doubt the eco trend is building momentum (see [trendwatching.com's May briefing](#) for more on that), and bringing that green focus to kids' toys as well makes good sense. Besides the obvious environmental benefits, green products also tend to bring greenbacks for their makers—or the currency of their choice! ;-)

Website: www.zendesigngroup.com/seetoys

Contact: info@seetoys.com

Spotted by: Bill McMahon