

Springwise newsletter | 22 May 2008

Spotted for you this week: a crowdsourcing platform for graphic design, a British feeder business for eBay, a South African vintner who asked his best customers to price a new product, and more. Our next edition is due on 28 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!



District turns its own banners into bags

Recycling advertising banners to make shopping bags isn't new, as Swiss Freitag and UK-based Banner Bags—among others—have been doing for some time. What's interesting about a new effort from Vancouver's [Commercial Drive Business Society](#), however, is that the district's advertisers themselves are the ones doing the recycling.

Each year the Commercial Drive Business Society prints nearly 400 32" x 60" nylon street banners to decorate its shopping neighbourhood. Rather than retiring the banners at the end of their season—and sending them to landfills—the group has begun turning them into reusable nylon shopping bags instead. Available in 10 different colours, the long-handled bags are available in 2 sizes—priced at CDN 9.95 and CDN 14.95, respectively. Remanufacturing is done by Dream Designs, a housewares and clothing manufacturer that originated on Commercial Drive.

By recycling its banners into bags, the society figures it has avoided 7,059 pounds, or 3.53 tons, of CO2 emissions; kept 128 kg (281.6 lb) of nylon out of landfills; saved 25,456,640 BTUs of energy—enough to provide electricity to an average Vancouver home for over 10 months; and freed up 543 trees to capture and store CO2 from other sources for a full year. In addition, proceeds from the bags go toward the development of new green spaces in the neighbourhood. Perhaps best of all, though, is that the goodwill from all this goes straight back to the advertisers themselves. A win-win for everyone involved, and one to emulate in commercial districts around the world!

Website: www.thedrive.ca/bags.shtm

Contact: info@thedrive.ca

Spotted by: Penny Watson



Retailer unboxes DIY flat-pack homes

Plenty of companies sell log cabin kits. But [Argos](#) seems to be the first major retailer to market an attractive and affordable model that [reportedly](#) can be built in two days by just two people. The British retailer's basic five-room cabin, measuring roughly 32x17 feet or 8x5 meters, costs GBP 10,999. An upgraded model, with amenities such as laminate floors with in-floor heating, costs GBP 13,099. Both models are suitable for year-round living and are made by Finnish forestry company Finnforest using wood from sustainable forests.

Argos' cabins open up several new-business opportunities. For starters, there's likely a much larger market for ready-to-move-in cabins than for cabins that must first be put together, however easy their assembly might be. Thus, one option would be to buy the kits, assemble them and then resell the homes. The cabins' low price coupled with their short assembly time would make the potential profit margin a lot greater than would be the case with conventionally built homes that require weeks to build. And the second opportunity: buy a dozen or so cabins and create a turnkey resort. That's what another low-cost home manufacturer [Bamboo Living](#) suggests. The Hawaii-based company's kit homes are manufactured in Vietnam out of fast-growing eco-friendly bamboo and shipped worldwide. Bamboo Living has already spearheaded resorts in Bali, Belize, the Cook Islands, Hawaii and Vietnam. (IKEA's fast-selling [BoKlok](#) prefabs, on the other hand, aren't DIY—the homes are assembled by local builders.)

Two things to remember before launching into any venture involving prefab dwellings. First, check local building codes carefully, as kit homes employ non-traditional construction methods. Likewise, be sure to factor in the kinds of costs associated with any building project, such as site surveys, utility hook-ups and permitting.

Website: www.argos.co.uk

Contact: www.argos.co.uk/static/StaticDisplay/includeName/ContactUs.htm

Spotted by: Maria Dahl Jørgensen



Nagging service for dieters

Anyone who's ever tried to lose weight or improve their fitness knows that it can sometimes be tough to get motivated. For those who need a little extra help getting going, a new service called [WeightNags](#) will nag customers mercilessly until they get off the couch and get some exercise.

WeightNags, which was just launched by Texas-based ConnectWorks Media, needs nothing more than a customer's email address to get started. In exchange, it will hound that customer once a week for free in the hopes of motivating him or her to exercise and lose some weight. Of course, we all know that emails can easily be ignored and deleted in the blink of an eye. Customers who don't trust themselves to take WeightNag's emails seriously can also request weekly nags by phone. All they need to provide is their phone number and first name; the cost is USD 4.95 per month.

Without a way to tell WeightNags when you do get some exercise in or have resisted every single calorie-laden temptation—and thereby win a respite from the nagging—it seems to us the effectiveness of the negative feedback could soon wear off. Nevertheless, it's an interesting concept that could be a nice micro-business opportunity for anyone with a Skype account and a talent for nagging. ;-) (Related: [Sell what you say.](#))

Website: www.weightnags.com

Contact: tgraysonboyd@sbcglobal.net



Winery asks customers to set prices

What works for alternative rock music, might also work for wine. You may remember how Radiohead got the world's attention when it let listeners download its album *In Rainbows*, asking them to pay whatever price they thought the music was worth. Sales of the album reached USD 10 million. Since then others have tried the pay-what-you-like marketing technique, including [Paste magazine](#), which we featured in October.

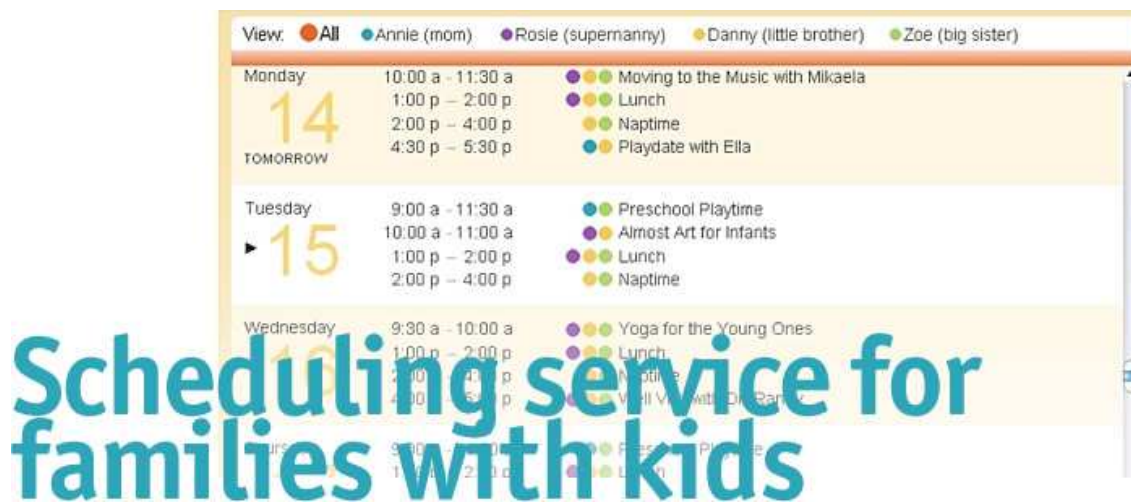
South African [BLANKbottle](#) has gone a step further. The boutique winemaker's founder, Pieter Walsler, sent 20 cases of its latest premium white wine *Moment of Silence* to loyal customers on consignment, asking them to evaluate the wine and then pay him what they thought it was worth. They paid up to ZAR 90 per bottle (USD 11.80 / EUR 7.50), and the average price came to ZAR 50. Since BLANKbottle aims to exceed customers' quality vs. price expectations, the wine went on sale to the public at a price of ZAR 40.

Walsler, for his part, got a high return on the wine he risked in the venture. In addition to the publicity he garnered, he determined a new product's price point based on the actual purchasing decisions made by the winery's best customers. Feedback that's likely to be more valuable than the opinions volunteered by focus groups or market research experts. And by involving them in such a fundamental business decision, he no doubt increased brand loyalty among the winery's core customer base. One to try out with your own best customers!

Website: www.blankbottle.co.za

Contact: thebestwines@blankbottle.co.za

Spotted by: Bruce Gourley



There are few things more gratifying to us here at Springwise than seeing an idea we write about get picked up and used to create other new businesses. But that's exactly what has happened to [Cozi Central](#), the online weekly planner for families that we wrote about late last year.

[BusyBeesNYC](#) is a new service that uses Cozi Central technology to offer busy New York City parents a fully customized calendar service to schedule their kids' activities. For an annual membership of USD 499, BusyBeesNYC will create a schedule of classes and activities for a family's children that combines free, paid, scheduled, drop-in and sometimes lesser-known events while accommodating the kids' eating and sleeping routines. Run by two parents, BusyBeesNYC has scoured the area spanning Murray Hill, Kips Bay and Gramercy Park for the best kid activities available, and can recommend a wide variety of things to keep kids busy and learning. Four starter packages are available focused on music, sports, crafts or languages, but BusyBeesNYC can also mix and match as necessary to suit a family's needs. Once the parents approve the schedule, all they need do is actually sign up for the relevant activities (BusyBeesNYC always makes sure there is room first). Thanks to the Cozi technology, the plan for each day is viewable online from anywhere, with color-coded indications of where everyone needs to be. It can also be printed out for distribution to babysitters, nannies and others.

So that's New York City covered; who will bring a Cozi-based service to busy families in the rest of the country—and the world?

Website: www.busybeesnyc.com

Contact: info@busybeesnyc.com

Spotted by: Jay



Parties help guests sell their gold

As the weakening economy causes purse strings to tighten in many parts of the world, consumers are increasingly looking for new ways to earn some extra money. Enter [My Gold Party](#), which facilitates Tupperware-style parties that help guests sell their unused trinkets, cashing in on record gold prices.

Launched earlier this year, My Gold Party sells all the equipment minipreneurs need to host parties in which guests can sell their gold, including a scale, karat tester and book of instructions. Party hosts then invite guests to bring gold coins, watches and jewelry to their party, where they assay and weigh each item to determine its current market worth. The party host pays guests for the items with cash or a cheque, then ships the gold to a refinery, which in turn pays the host—at a rate the host hopes will be higher than paid to the party guests. The gold is then melted down and reused. My Gold Party's kit for hosts is priced at USD 699.50. (Obviously, scales and karat testers can also be bought from many other suppliers.)

Consumers in hard times have always been able to sell their spare jewelry in pawn shops, but by bringing the process out of the back alley and into the living room, My Gold Party legitimises and updates it with a social and entrepreneurial twist. As the saying goes, there's gold in them thar hills—both for the consumers who have it and for the minipreneurs who help them sell it. One to bring to cash-strapped hills near you?

Website: www.mygoldparty.com

Contact: info@mygoldparty.com

Spotted by: Bill McMahan



More crowdsourced graphic design

There are numerous sites out there for crowdsourcing graphic design, including [SitePoint](#), which we featured last year. A new entrant into the space, however, is adding a slightly different twist by having bidding designers submit completed concepts rather than just proposals in the competitive process.

Launched earlier this year, Chicago-based [crowdSPRING](#) is an online marketplace for buyers and sellers of all creative services. Buyers that need a new logo, website, marketing materials or other creative content post what they need, when they need it and how much they'd like to pay. They also deposit their payment up front into an escrow account with crowdSPRING, where it will remain until an artist is chosen. Designers, illustrators, writers or photographers around the world can then work on the project and submit their creations for review. Buyers can sort, rate and give feedback on the designs they like until they find the right one. Once that happens, rights to the work are transferred, crowdSPRING takes a 15 percent fee and payment is made. crowdSPRING offers a money-back guarantee so that if buyers don't get at least 25 entries, they can walk away with a full refund; creatives, meanwhile, are assured that their projects won't get cancelled or abandoned for no good reason. Every transaction is protected by a free, customized legal contract with digital watermarking, as well as being automatically filed away in an intellectual property vault with IP Registry at no extra cost. Community tools available on the site include public profiles with feedback, ratings and stats; private messaging; portfolios; and creative community forums.

Some designers may [balk](#) at the idea of creating a full-fledged work before having a guaranteed buyer. On the other hand, by allowing both established creative professionals and talented newcomers to compete based solely on their creativity and the quality of their ideas—rather than bids, proposals or portfolios—crowdSPRING could also level the competitive playing field for creative people worldwide. To wit: when the site launched into beta in March, it posted just a stark website and asked the crowd to redesign it for a winning prize of USD 5,000. A few weeks later, a student in the Netherlands beat out 80 creatives and 337 other entries with a winning design. Lesson: never underestimate the power of the crowds!

Website: www.crowdspring.com

Contact: www.crowdspring.com/help/contact_us

Spotted by: Pete Burgeson



eBay feeder business for 'pickup only' items

We've written about eBay feeder businesses before, such as [Zippi](#), which we featured last year. Now, another example has popped up in the UK focusing on the collection and delivery of 'pickup only' furniture and antique items.

For prices beginning at GBP 40, [Lots2](#) will collect and deliver items bought on eBay or other auction platforms from or to anywhere in London, the South East and East Anglia. Large and awkward items that cannot be posted via a conventional courier are the company's specialty, such as sofas, antiques and furniture. Lots2 offers both economy and express delivery, depending on the flexibility of the customer's timeframe. Express service is typically for delivery on a particular day with a short lead time, whereas with economy service, Lots2 will collect the item within a week of receiving the order and deliver it within 10 days after that. Lots2 offers pack and protect service to keep items safe during delivery as well. Launched in February 2007, the company has since maintained an on-time delivery record of 99.6 percent.

Lots2 operates just within a portion of the UK, so the opportunities are plentiful around the globe to offer like services. Finding sellers to work with is relatively easy—just use eBay's search engine to find sellers within a set distance from your zipcode or postal code that sell large items. Movers, delivery companies or minipreneurs with a van—this one's for you!

Website: www.lots2.co.uk
Contact: hello@lots2.co.uk

Spotted by: Naomi Healy

More ultra premium grape juice



Not long ago we wrote about high-end grape juices by [First Blush](#), and recently one of our spotters came across [MonaVie](#), another ultra premium line of alcohol-free juices that could easily be confused with wine.

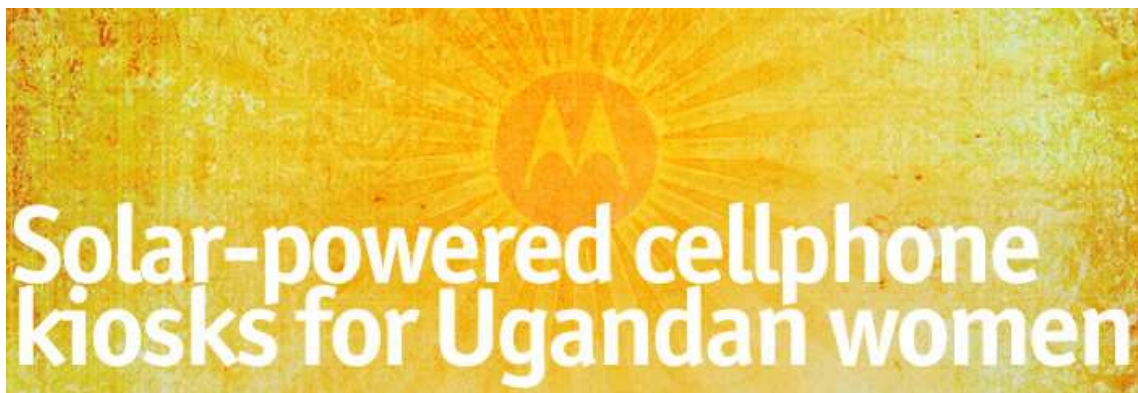
Utah-based MonaVie offers both juices and concentrated gels made from 19 different fruits, all chosen for their healthful properties. First among them is the Brazilian acai berry—widely considered a health-promoting superfood—accompanied by apricot, aronia, acerola, lychee, wolfberry, bilberry and of course grape, to name just a few. Pricing is very high-end, indeed, at about USD 40 per 750 ml bottle of juice.

MonaVie is currently sold on a person-to-person basis in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Japan, with plans to expand further around the globe through its multi-level marketing business model. While joining a potentially restrictive MLM network isn't something we'd necessarily recommend, the ultra premium presentation of juice is one to look into if you're in food and beverage. For more inspiration, check out [Wild Bunch & Co.'s organic juices](#).

Website: www.monavie.com

Contact: distributorsupport@monavie.com

Spotted by: Theresa Duffy



Solar-powered cellphone kiosks for Ugandan women

Mobile phones are connecting people around the globe like never before, but the simple fact remains that they don't work without electricity. In Uganda, which has one of the lowest levels of electricity in Africa, Motorola has launched an initiative to provide solar recharging stations that can be run by local, entrepreneurial women.

Launched last year, Motorola's [Motopower](#) project has brought 55 solar-powered kiosks to Uganda that offer free mobile phone charging to local consumers. Each kiosk is charged by a 55-watt inverted solar panel and can charge up to 20 phones at a time. The women who run the kiosks, meanwhile, are also equipped to sell handsets and operator SIM cards and to provide repair services. For local people without their own phones, the kiosks effectively function as a local "phone booth" for making occasional calls as well.

The initiative was designed to empower entrepreneurial women by providing them with the foundations to manage their own sustainable businesses. As part of a start-up package, each entrepreneur is given four Motorola handsets and a business skills training course. Nikesh Patel, senior sales director for Motorola Africa's mobile devices business, explains: "The Motopower initiative is the first of its kind to exist for women in Africa. Through this program, we are giving women the opportunity to run their own business, learn valuable entrepreneurial skills and generate a positive income."

Of course, besides empowering women and helping Ugandans stay connected, the project will likely increase Motorola's share of the local market as well. It's a win-win-win, and one for other global corporate citizens to emulate as often as they can!

Website: www.motorola.com/responsibility

Contact: responsibility@motorola.com

Spotted by: [Treehugger](#) via RK