

# Springwise newsletter | 28 May 2008

Half of this week's spottings are all about crowds and communities, from books written by groups, to an initiative that helps communities reclaim and reuse building material. In addition, we covered a digital archive for children's artwork, free building plans for ecologically sound homes, and more. Enjoy! Our next edition is due on 4 June 2008. As always, you can stay up to date on a daily basis by visiting [www.springwise.com](http://www.springwise.com) or subscribing to our [RSS feed](#).



## Crowdfunded breweries

Earlier this year we wrote about [nvokh](#), a crowdfunded and crowdmanaged eco clothing company. Now [BeerBankroll](#) is taking a similar approach to the creation of a new, community-managed brewery.

The British company has only partially fleshed out its site, but BeerBankroll aims to start a brewery and pub in which many of the key decisions are made by members. It is currently recruiting a minimum of 50,000 members, each of whom will contribute USD 50 in exchange for voting rights on ideas such as the company name, logo, product design, product mix, marketing plan, advertising and sponsorship. Once BeerBankroll has raised USD 100,000 after administration and overhead costs, it plans to begin discussions with a consulting firm—chosen by members' votes—which will then play a guiding role for the community. Assuming the concept goes well, profits will be divided three ways: one part to members in the form of reward points redeemable for products from the Beer Bankroll store; one part back to the company; and one part to charity.

Meanwhile, beer lovers can also join [OurBrew](#), a very new start-up from New Zealand that has similar ambitions, but aims to work with existing breweries. Will it prove feasible for tens of thousands of people to jointly make key decisions for these two breweries-to-be? Only time will tell. However, we think there's also an opportunity here for an existing organization or financial institution that can vouch for new crowdfunded projects and safeguard pre-funding money until the minimum amount of funds have been collected, return it to members if the project doesn't come to fruition.

Website: [www.beerbankroll.com](http://www.beerbankroll.com) — [www.ourbrew.co.nz](http://www.ourbrew.co.nz)

Spotted by: Daniel Phillips & Mat

# Pedal-powered coffee retailer



Mobile coffee carts have been around for a while, including those from Dutch [MobiCcino](#), which we covered back in 2006. But whereas most such carts are motorised, UK-based [Bikecaffe](#) has come up with a pedal-powered and eco-friendly alternative.

Using pedal-powered cargo tricycles, Bikecaffe travels emission-free as it serves up a range of coffee blends from roasters Segafredo Zanetti and Integrity Fair Trade. The company's trikes use a gas-powered machine for brewing and can produce up to 500 cups per day—served in recyclable containers—along with chai, biscotti and other edibles. Best of all, Bikecaffe trikes can access pedestrian areas that their motorised competitors can't, making them ideal providers for pedestrian malls, historic venues, outdoor events, concerts and parties.

Just launched in March, Bikecaffe is recruiting franchisees to run carts across the UK and Europe; one to bring to your neck of the coffee-drinking woods? (Related: [Cargo bikes for greener business deliveries.](#))

Website: [www.bikecaffe.com](http://www.bikecaffe.com)

Contact: [info@bikecaffe.com](mailto:info@bikecaffe.com)

Spotted by: S.W.



# Wiki publisher for collaborative writing

We've already written about both [magazine](#) and [book](#) publishers for the content-producing masses, but now a wiki-like site aims to leverage the wisdom of the crowds to create, rate and elevate into publication the best community-sourced content.

Founded last year, Maryland-based [WEbook.com](#) is a free online publishing platform that allows writers, editors, reviewers, illustrators and others to join forces to create great works of fiction and non-fiction, thrillers and essays, short stories, children's books and more. Using a proprietary platform designed specifically for group authoring, users of the site can launch a new book or add a sentence, review or grammatical correction to a work already in progress—virtually anything they're inspired to do toward the creation of a new book. New works can be made private or public, or shared with a group of the user's choice. WEbook keeps all of a user's projects, submissions, reviews, groups and friends collected and updated on their personal WEbook profile and homepage, and a live feed sends an update whenever a project has a new submission or a contribution gets new feedback. Live forum and research tools, meanwhile, are available to foster interaction with other writers, contributors and readers.

Once a book's authors deem their work ready for public opinion, they can submit it for a voting cycle to determine if it's worthy of publishing. Users across the site cast their votes, and the WEbook team chooses from among those with the most support which will be published under the WEbook imprint as books, eBooks and audiobooks. (WEbook may first employ a copy editor, typesetter and other professional to ensure the final product is top-quality.) Publication costs nothing for authors and major contributors, but they receive 50 percent of all profits generated from the sale of WEbook titles, which get distributed at WEbook.com, Amazon.com and select booksellers.

WEbook published its first book—a thriller titled [Pandora](#)—in February, with plans to publish another 3 to 5 books this year, including Xanthippe, a literary tale about Socrates' wife; a children's book titled Ten Things You Absolutely Should Not do with a Baby; and a range of anthologies on provocative topics. Beginning July 4, the WEbook community will begin selecting the lead candidates for the next publication cycle.

In the traditional publishing industry, the odds of an unknown talent securing a publishing deal are 15,000 to 1, WEbook says. With its wiki-like platform, on the other hand, the site hopes to do for books what American Idol did for music and what Wikipedia did for information. While some types of writing are likely better off with a single voice (fiction, for example—see [A Million](#)

[Penguins](#) for more on that), others will benefit from a chorus of insights and opinions. One to watch and learn from!

Website: [www.webook.com](http://www.webook.com)

Contact: [info@webook.com](mailto:info@webook.com)



## Community-focused deconstruction & salvage

Vacant, run-down buildings are usually viewed as a community liability, with quick demolition seen as the only solution. A more eco-minded approach, however, is deconstruction, which allows for the salvage of the building's still-usable pieces. Buffalo [ReUse](#) is a New York-based non-profit organization that specializes in just that, providing deconstruction services, community education, jobs and a store for salvaged parts.

Established in 2006, Buffalo ReUse is a fully licensed and insured contractor with a full-time crew that can completely remove residential structures, barns and garages. Through deconstruction—in which buildings are carefully taken apart rather than demolished in one blow—building materials including lumber, fixtures and architectural detail can be saved. These are then sold through Buffalo ReUse's [ReSource store](#), which just opened last week as a local source for building materials and household items, DIY ideas, green education and community outreach. Proceeds from the sale of those items then get put back into the community, as Buffalo ReUse collaborates with block clubs and community associations to develop new neighbourhood assets. The organization offers myriad volunteer opportunities for such projects as community tree-planting, mural painting or other forms of neighbourhood revitalization, as well as paid work for local people. Ultimately, it hopes to use deconstruction as a springboard for job training and leadership development, providing men and women between 18 and 24 years old with a way to build related skills, interests and even small businesses.

Buffalo ReUse was recently selected by The Financial Times and the Urban Land Institute as one of 20 finalists for the 2008 [FT ULI Sustainable Cities Award](#) based on nominations received from around the world. New York State assemblyman Sam Hoyt, one of those who nominated the group, explains: "Buffalo ReUse should serve as a model for other communities to reduce

waste dumped in our landfills, to employ young adults from our inner city, and to work with community members to make neighbourhoods greener."

The lesson for eco and social entrepreneurs around the world: look no further than the abandoned buildings around you for a wealth of opportunity!

Website: [www.buffaloreuse.org](http://www.buffaloreuse.org)

Contact: [info@buffaloreuse.org](mailto:info@buffaloreuse.org)



## Archiving children's artwork

Every family has a pile somewhere of their children's drawings. Since culling out and saving the best works isn't easy, two moms/entrepreneurs from New Jersey devised a solution: [theART:archives](http://theartarchives.com). How it works? Parents send in their kids' drawings and theART:archives team professionally photographs each one and sends back a DVD catalogue that can be viewed on a computer screen or TV.

The start-up's founders suggest ordering a separate DVD for each school year to create a complete record of a child's accomplishments. theART:archives' prices range from USD 275 for 25 pieces of art up to USD 325 for 55 artworks. The company's business model loosely resembles that of other cottage ventures that employ digital technology to reduce clutter, among them small businesses that transfer home videos to DVD or digitize a CD collection for iPod use. While millions of families own scanners and are tech-savvy enough to create DVD artwork collections on their own, many are likely to appreciate the time-saving convenience of a service that will handle the process for them. One to start up locally, in areas with plenty of two-income families with young children. Easy add-on product? Use a publishing service like [Blurb](#) to transform the digital scans back into coffee table books featuring the budding artists' work.

Website: [www.theartarchives.com](http://www.theartarchives.com)

Contact: [www.theartarchives.com/contact.html](http://www.theartarchives.com/contact.html)

Spotted by K.M. Morano



# Product portal for independent retailers

Small retailers face the constant challenge of finding new and innovative products to sell as they compete with the big-box heavyweights. A new search portal from Initiate Commerce aims to make the process easier with a streamlined way to access the wares of more than 40,000 wholesale suppliers and distributors.

Launched about a year ago, Albany, NY-based [ProductBlazer](#) scours the web for qualified wholesale suppliers of interesting and innovative products. It then indexes the websites and product catalogues of these suppliers, filtering out blogs, articles and other content that can clutter up traditional search-engine results. Retail users of the free service who search on particular product terms get a list of relevant suppliers in return; they also get tools to manage saved lists of suppliers, allowing them to organize their research by category and keywords. Research is stored securely in the ProductBlazer portal itself, making it retrievable from anywhere on the internet. For suppliers, a basic listing in the portal is also free, but premium search placement and advertising services are available for a fee. For retailers of gift products, Initiate also operates [GiftSuppliers.us](#), which is powered by the ProductBlazer engine as well.

Erik Morton, Initiate's cofounder and COO, explains: "ProductBlazer allows small, local retailers to play to their strengths. They know their customers intimately, and know they want interesting and innovative products that you won't find at Target." We're not sure that ProductBlazer's approach of generating supplier lists—rather than specific product descriptions and images—is the right one, since it forces retailers to take the next step and investigate the suppliers' websites themselves, leaving them to do most of the work. But there's no doubt that opportunities exist for services that can connect independent, brick & mortar retailers with the massive new wave of creative people selling their unique wares on websites like [Etsy](#). Revenues through advertising or referral fees await those who can successfully find and curate the most interesting products out there; might that be you...?

Website: [www.productblazer.com](http://www.productblazer.com)

Contact: [help@productblazer.com](mailto:help@productblazer.com)

Spotted by: Cecilia Biemann



# Free plans for eco homes

Incorporating green design principles into new or existing homes is increasingly de rigueur among the growing masses of eco-minded consumers, but figuring out the logistics isn't always straightforward. Working on the belief that green design should be available to all, [FreeGreen](#) is a new site that offers free, downloadable green house plans.

Free Green's team of engineers and designers works with industry-leading product manufacturers to create home designs that incorporate different combinations of products, materials and vendors. It also provides 3-D images, energy simulations and written descriptions to help consumers find the right fit for their lifestyle. Two models are currently available on the site, with more coming soon. The first, called the Healthy Family model, combines comfortable contemporary living with superior indoor air quality and low energy bills. With functional options such as mudrooms, homework nooks and home offices, Healthy Family homes are intended for young, three- to five-person families in cold to mixed climates. The modern Suburban Loft, on the other hand, features open floor plans and high ceiling loft spaces. Intended for first-time buyers or downsizing baby boomers, the Suburban Loft plan is designed to perform efficiently even in cold northern climates. Coming soon is the Smart Box, which FreeGreen aims to make a 1,200 to 1,400 sq. ft. home that can be built for less than USD 100 per square foot.

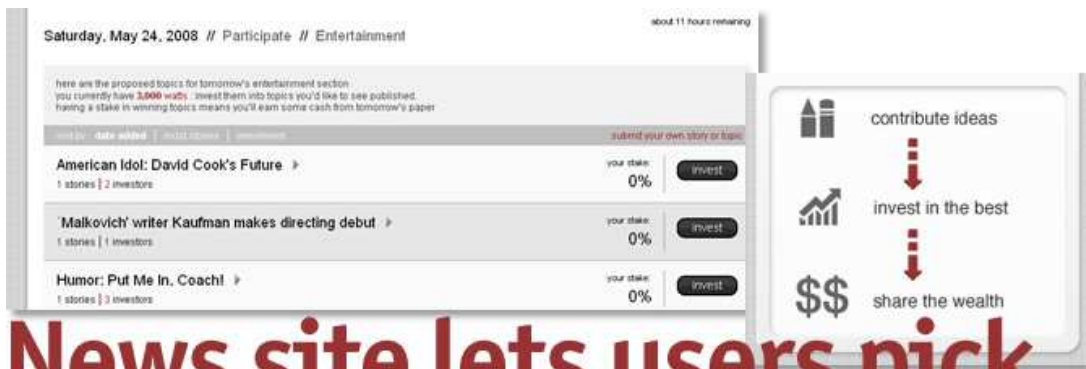
Consumers who download FreeGreen's plans get not just the very detailed plan set, but also an energy report specific to the town or city they select and a welcome packet with additional information, tools and resources. FreeGreen's team can also modify or customize any of its plans. Launched just a few weeks ago, FreeGreen relies on paid placement from product manufacturers, but it takes pains to be transparent about the products it displays, offering users ratings from established third-party green certification programs such as LEED and NAHB and research performance data through its own energy modelling reports.

With the clean, eco-friendly look of FreeGreen's designs, there's no doubt they'll fit nicely into what our sister site trendwatching.com would call the new, [eco-iconic](#) world of consumers eager to flaunt their greenness. Besides the obvious advertising opportunity for green product manufacturers, the next logical step is to focus on implementation. Builders around the globe: Who will be first to align with FreeGreen as your town's local green building expert...?

Website: [www.freegreen.com](http://www.freegreen.com)

Contact: [info@freegreen.com](mailto:info@freegreen.com)

Spotted by: Cecilia Biemann



# News site lets users pick stories & share in revenues

Earlier this year we wrote about [Kluster](#), the crowdsourcing platform designed to help crowds develop new concepts. As proof of its own concept, the Vermont-based site has just launched [Knewsroom](#), a community-directed news publication where readers not only have a voice, but they get paid to use it.

Now in beta, Knewsroom publishes the "Knews" every morning, featuring the previous day's top stories in politics, business, technology, design, sports and entertainment. Which stories rank as most important is decided by the audience of readers, in [Digg](#)-like fashion. Going far beyond Digg, though, Knewsroom rewards contributors with a portion of 20 percent of every dollar it earns in advertising revenue. Members of the Knewsroom community can participate by proposing topics for the next day, submitting syndicated or original stories, and voting on favourites. As with Kluster, active members earn "watts"—the official community currency—for their contributions, and they can invest them to varying degrees in the stories they think have the most merit. Investing watts in topics is like investing in mutual funds on Wall Street, Knewsroom explains, offering a lower risk but lower rate of return; betting on stories, on the other hand, is more like investing in individual stocks, with a higher risk but a higher potential return. Whichever way they choose to invest, readers get rewarded each day at deadline, when Knewsroom runs its matrix algorithm to determine the Top 5 topics and the Top 5 stories in each section. Contributors who bet on a winner get a share of all the watts that were invested in that winner along with a cut of the ad revenue generated that day, which gets credited to their Knewsroom MasterCard. Contributors of original content can earn an extra USD 150 for their submissions as well.

There seems to be no doubt that citizen journalism is here to stay, but how it will reshape the news landscape is still being decided. Between Digg, Reddit, Newsvine and others, the race is on to decide what tomorrow's newspaper will look like. Will Knewsroom take hold? Only time will tell. In the meantime, one to test out!

Website: [www.knewsroom.com](http://www.knewsroom.com)

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Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen