

Top 20 business ideas & opportunities for 2011



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We've selected 20 business and marketing ideas that we believe will provide entrepreneurs with plenty of opportunities in 2011. We hope that you'll find these concepts as inspiring as we do, and that you'll be able to apply them to your own company, brand or work in the coming year!



1. Pop-up 'MedCottage' enables senior care at home

As the massive baby-boomer generation enters its senior years, a strain on long-term care facilities seems inevitable. Aiming to offer an alternative mode of senior care, Virginia-based N2Care has come up with the MedCottage, a pop-up, medically equipped suite that families can use on their property to care for seniors at home. The MedCottage is already authorized for use in Virginia and is designed to comply with local zoning ordinances throughout the US.

[Read more about MedCottage](#) □

2. Vegetarian butcher serves up lupin-based meat substitutes

De Vegetarische Slager — the vegetarian butcher — opened a store in The Hague that's dedicated to meat substitutes in the same way a butcher is dedicated to meat. The company's main innovation is its own line of lupin-based, protein-rich products, developed by a Dutch team of scientists and chefs. De Vegetarische Slager is targeting the higher end of the market — consumers willing to pay as much for a meat substitute as they would for the real thing. As more people opt for meatless Mondays or cut out meat altogether, we wouldn't be surprised to see vegetarian butchers pop up on main streets around the world.

[Read more about De Vegetarische Slager](#) □

3. On a bet, party people fill KLM flight to Miami using Twitter

DJs, promoters, label reps and ‘professional party people’ from the Netherlands have persuaded Dutch airline KLM to add an extra flight to its roster. In a new twist on crowd-buying, the initiators of Fly2Miami made a bet with KLM on Twitter to organize a non-stop flight from Amsterdam to Miami. Crowd clout and group buying — turbo-charged by social media — provide companies across industries with new opportunities to empower consumers while improving their bottom line or, at the very least, their brand image.

[Read more about Fly2Miami](#) □

4. Indian courier service hires only deaf workers

India has one of the largest deaf populations in the world, but social stigmas have eliminated many job opportunities for the roughly 6 percent of the population that is affected. Aiming to empower this isolated group economically while tapping into a growth market, Mirakle Couriers is a messenger service that hires only deaf workers. The company puts a heavy emphasis on the training of employees — right down to the finer points of personal grooming.

[Read more about Mirakle Couriers](#) □

5. Luxury women’s panties by curated subscription

Panty by Post is a Canadian venture that offers a selection of women’s underwear by monthly subscription. Customers can order panties individually, or they can sign up for subscriptions lasting two, three, six or 12 months. A different panty is then sent every month, each wrapped in an attractive mailing package. It’s a great example of subscription-based retail, offering curation alongside convenience. One to apply to a category you’re passionate about.

[Read more about Panty By Post](#) □



6. Buy-one-give-one indie eyewear sells for \$99 per pair

The market for prescription eyewear has traditionally been dominated by high prices, little innovation and a few large competitors. That’s why we’ve seen online discounters emerge, and it’s also why Warby Parker has set its sights on the industry — so to speak — with a paradigm-busting model that aims to combine independent design, “buy one, give one” generosity and some long-overdue pricing transparency.

[Read more about Warby Parker](#) 

7. Fiat offers electric bikes as loaner vehicles

Showing smart thinking from a major brand, and tapping into the desires of eco-conscious consumers, Fiat now offers Spanish owners of its Fiat 500 an electric bike option while their car is in the shop. The service is available in various cities in Spain through a partnership with bicycle maker Trek. There's no charge for borrowing the electric bikes, which have a 70 km range and recharge during braking as well as through plug-in power. Fiat hopes the loaner bikes will demonstrate its commitment to sustainable mobility. Since this is a relevant and appealing way to let consumers try out a product that's still unfamiliar to most, electric bicycle brands would do well to seize the opportunity and initiate similar partnerships in other countries.

[Read more about Fiat's electric loaner bikes](#) 

8. Tapping professional skills of micro-volunteers via iPhone & web

San Francisco-based Sparked by The Extraordinaries is an online platform that seeks to make it easy for altruistic consumers to support an organization or cause. It enlists both individuals and groups of company employees to contribute their expertise to a nonprofit in even the smallest chunks of time. Requests by nonprofits might include translating a page of a document into Spanish, for instance, or helping to choose a new logo. The organization neatly combines people's desire to give back to society with another prevalent trend: their need for convenience.

[Read more about Sparked](#) 

9. Cleaning product sold in cartridges, diluted at home from the tap

Forward-thinking manufacturers are working to decrease the amount of packaging used for their products. Some offer concentrated formulas, others sell refills in bags instead of containers. Now, a Canadian startup has come up with an innovative solution: refill cartridges that consumers dilute at home. Developed by Planet People, the iQ line of household cleaning products features small cartridges of plant-based concentrate. Consumers fill a spray bottle with ordinary tap water and pop in a cartridge. The coloured concentrate visibly mixes with the water, and voila: a full bottle of cleaner.

[Read more about iQ](#) 

10. A fresh take on online memorials

1000Memories provides a place for friends and family to gather and remember deceased loved ones. While the field of online memorial services is a crowded one, many of those sites were clearly created in the early days of the web. With its fresh design and more current feature set, 1000Memories sets itself apart and could attract a sizeable audience. (One to launch in other countries!) The concept is part of a wider trend in web publishing, whereby it's becoming increasingly simple for non-geeks to build beautiful websites, often in 10 minutes or less. Other examples include Flavors.me and Tumblr.

[Read more about 1000Memories](#) □



11. Trial gear and showers for runners at Tokyo Adidas store

Located near the Imperial Palace, the Adidas Runbase store is a far cry from your average sporting goods purveyor. Included in the space are 16 shower cubicles and 248 lockers for rent. Also available are a broad array of cutting-edge Adidas shoes and clothing available for the borrowing. Expert staff are on hand to offer tips and recommendations, so runners could presumably try a different combination of goods each time they run, giving them the ultimate in try-before-you-buy purchasing confidence. This is brand-as-butler thinking that's well worth considering for your own marketing and sales strategies.

[Read more about the Adidas Runbase store](#) □

12. Mobile app for group texting and on-the-fly conference calls

Available for both iPhone and Android, GroupMe is a free tool from New York-based Mindless Dribble that gives groups of friends private text messaging and instant conference calls. As many as 25 people can be included in a group at any one time, but users can create as many groups as they want — one for their basketball team, one for coordinating a surprise party, one for the PTA, one for updating family members while travelling, etc.

[Read more about GroupMe](#) □

13. Books by gift subscription, hand-picked for the reader

The march of the subscription models continues! We've already seen a wide variety of products offered by subscription over the past year or so, however, Just the Right Book adds a slightly different twist by adding hand-picked customization. This is where smaller retailers have a chance to shine and to set themselves apart from the (online) behemoths.

[Read more about Just the Right Book](#) □

14. Mobile garage makes any car greener

Colorado-based Green Garage specializes in "green-tuning" cars to run cleaner, greener and cheaper through sustainable, energy-saving automotive maintenance and repair products. The full-service company begins by bringing the garage to the customer's front door with a valet service whereby it picks up the car, green-tunes it and then drops it off again. Given where the automotive industry

began on the sustainability spectrum, it seems safe to say there's plenty of room for improvement, and that's just what we're beginning to see.

[Read more about Green Garage](#) □

15. Funding service targets eBay merchants

Online vendors begin with Kabbage by entering their eBay marketplace ID. Using that, Kabbage checks their activity and history on the marketplace; if both are sufficient, it asks the retailer to complete an application. That application is far briefer than most because Kabbage learns much of what it needs about the retailer — including sales and credit history, customer traffic and reviews, and competitive information — via online data that it can access in seconds with the applicant's permission. Kabbage then makes an immediate decision; if approved, the borrower can access funds immediately via PayPal. Interesting niche, and potentially a new style of lending to businesses, with decisions based on real-time, readily available data.

[Read more about Kabbage](#) □



16. Waiting-room service lets patients pass the time elsewhere

TechnowaiT's 1-2-3-Go! service is designed to allow patients to leave the waiting room and go somewhere else to pass the time until it's their turn to be seen. Patients begin by registering at the doctor's office and taking a number. They can then go anywhere they're reachable by phone; by calling in regularly to an interactive system, they can find out via an automated message how many people are still ahead of them, and how much waiting time still remains. As their turn approaches, they can then return to the clinic just in time.

[Read more about TechnowaiT](#) □

17. High-end clothing brand only sells on tour dates

Over the past few years, we've seen nearly every major clothing brand — from the Gap to Louis Vuitton — set up one or more pop-up stores, drawing attention to their product lines and to their regular retail outlets. In contrast, a Munich-based brand isn't attempting to supplement its fixed-store bread and butter; Clemens en August's only offline sales are through temporary outlets, twice a year. Avoiding the pop-up moniker, the brand describes itself as being 'on tour'. A lesson in scarcity that other retailers might learn from?

[Read more about Clemens en August](#) □

18. Fair-trade lemonade supports grassroots projects

LemonAid is an organic drink made entirely of a few organic, fair-trade ingredients. The company's organic juice, for example, comes from a small farming cooperative in Brazil; its sugar cane, meanwhile, is derived from a cooperative in Paraguay. Not only does LemonAid pay its suppliers higher prices on account of their fair-trade practices, but it also donates a major share of its yearly revenue to further support small, locally based grassroots projects in the developing world. For every bottle of LemonAid sold, a share of the proceeds is donated back to the countries from which its ingredients derive.

[Read more about LemonAid](#) 

19. Targeting travellers, beauty retailer finds a niche in 3 fluid ounces

Ever since authorities placed rigorous limits on liquids allowed on flights, travellers have had to figure out how to both pack their favourite toiletries and comply with those regulations. Helping consumers avoid bag-check charges or confiscation of their toiletries and cosmetics, 3floz sells beauty and grooming products in TSA-approved sizes only.

[Read more about 3floz](#) 

20. Village rainwater harvesting system stores enough for a year

Akash Ganga, or River from the Sky, is a sustainable system that channels rooftop rainwater from every house in a village through gutters, and then pipes it to a network of multitier, underground reservoirs. Currently implemented in six drought-prone villages in the Churu District of Rajasthan, the system captures enough rainwater to meet the drinking needs of an entire village for 12 months. Akash Ganga currently supplies some 10,000 people with fresh water.

[Read more about Akash Ganga](#) 