

Springwise newsletter | 10 June 2009

Innovative new business ideas keep pouring in from around the world (thank you, [Springspotters!](#)). Included in this week's newsletter: photography workshops in national parks, free audiobooks at airports, pay-what-you-want applied to an ad agency and an Austrian tourist destination, and more. Our next edition is due on 17 June 2009. In the meantime, check out our daily postings on www.springwise.com, or follow us on [Twitter](#).



Austrian village asks tourists to set their price

Längenfeld, an idyllic village in Austria's Alps, is inviting 200 people to visit for three days during the first week of July. Visitors will perform a [Live Quality Check](#), testing the village's hotels, restaurants and leisure facilities. When it's time to leave, they'll fill out a survey and pay what they think their stay was worth.

When signing up for the Live Quality Check, people were asked to select their preferred type of accommodation, as well indicate the holiday activities they enjoy—rafting, hiking, climbing, swimming, biking, culture and a spa are on offer. Sixteen accommodation providers, four restaurants and seven leisure facilities are participating in the endeavour, and over 400 people applied for a testing slot. According to Martin Santer, the project's initiator, "Längenfeld is a place of energy, both for locals and our guests, and it has become a thriving tourist resort; a place we're very proud of. With Live Quality Check, we're showing our pride by letting guests determine how much they pay."

More than just a PR gimmick at the start of the summer season, the test should help uncover whether tourists feel they're getting value for money in Längenfeld. By combining pay-as-you-wish with an extensive survey, the local tourist industry gains valuable information about the quality of their services, and useful feedback on their pricing strategy. Now, if they really want to go the full mile, they'll add [transparency](#) to the mix and put all those reviews online... (Related: [Pay-what-you-want hotel in Singapore](#) — [London diners pay what they want at Little Bay](#).)

Website: www.live-qualitycheck.com

Contact: info@live-qualitycheck.com

Spotted by: M.M.



Online marketplace for help with errands

It's been a couple of years since we wrote about California-based DoMyStuff.com, but now the emergence of a like-minded contender in Boston suggests the concept is continuing to gain ground.

RunMyErrand is a web and mobile marketplace that gives individuals and businesses an easy way to get everyday tasks done. Members in need of help with errands begin by prepaying into an account of credits that will be used to pay the people who run them; 10 credits cost USD 13, and most errands range from 7 to 10 credits—equivalent to the same number of dollars—paid to the "runner." They then post an errand they need to get done—picking up dry cleaning, for example, or dropping off a donation to Goodwill—along with the number of credits they're willing to pay; additional amounts for tabs that need to be paid during the errand can also be included. RunMyErrand's network of pre-qualified "runners" is then alerted immediately via email and text message. Generally within 10 minutes a runner accepts the errand, proceeding from there to coordinate with the "sender" and complete the errand within the specified timeframe. When the errand is complete, the sender confirms online; RunMyErrand then transfers payment into the runner's account. To ensure quality, ratings, reviews, profiles and background checks for selected runners are all available. In addition to serving individuals, RunMyErrand also acts as an outsourcing delivery partner for locally owned retail businesses.

Besides simply helping busy people get things done, RunMyErrand promises environmental benefits by aggregating errands more efficiently and also offers sellsumers a flexible way to earn a little extra money as runners. Founded in early 2008, RunMyErrand was recently named by Facebook as a winner in its fbFund REV incubation program. It currently serves only the Boston area, however; one to help bring to a city near you...? (Related: PAs for the rest of us — Job marketplace for quick online tasks.)

Website: www.runmyerrand.com

Contact: www.runmyerrand.com/main/contact

Spotted by: Ozgur Alaz



Zipcar's iPhone app will find and unlock cars

If ever there's been a company we've enjoyed watching evolve over time, it's fast-moving [Zipcar](#), whose frequent innovations since we first covered it back in 2003 have warranted fresh coverage on our pages on numerous occasions. The latest? Just announced on Monday, Zipcar now has its very own iPhone application.

Created through a partnership between Apple and Zipcar, the new application will allow users of Zipcar's car-sharing service to use their iPhones to find, reserve and unlock vehicles. Specifically, the application puts the iPhone's GPS to work in locating the closest Zipcars, indicating them with coloured pushpins on a map; users can then use it to reserve the vehicle they want. Once they're close to their vehicle, the technology will even beep the horn of the reserved Zipcar and unlock it. A [video on CNET](#) from the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference, where the technology was announced, demonstrates the application in action. The software will be available as a free download from the Apple App Store later this summer, Zipcar says. (Back in 2007, Zipcar launched a less fully-featured [application for GPS-enabled cellphones](#) that helps members pinpoint the nearest available car.)

More than 25 percent of Zipcar members say their "life is on their iPhone," according to Zipcar CTO Luke Schneider, so tapping the brand clearly makes good sense from a practical perspective. In addition, however, it's also a prime example of what our sister site would call a [brand butler offering](#)—something extended by a familiar name, that helps to make consumers' lives easier and more enjoyable. How can *your* brand "drive" customers to new heights of satisfaction...? ;-)

Website: www.zipcar.com/iphone

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Spotted by: Ruben Feith



Airline alliance offers free audiobook downloads

Air passengers everywhere may soon be getting a literary boost, thanks to a new offer from the [Oneworld](#) alliance. As of June 2009, travellers passing through Brussels, Milan Malpensa and Rome Fiumicino airports can download three audiobooks for free.

Oneworld, which includes American Airlines, British Airways, JAL and 7 other airlines, offers the service over wifi at the aforementioned airports. Consumers can download audiobooks to their laptops, smartphones and PDAs—any device that connects to the airports' wifi networks. They can pick from forty titles, covering fiction, business, society and travel; available in English, Dutch, French and Italian. And for customers who always get in a forgetful flap at the airport, an email reminder can be requested for the day before the flight, reminding them of the freebies on offer.

The initiative complements Oneworld's Travel Stations, which enable users to download travel advice and information onto mobile devices, and its Charging Stations, which give gadgets a bit of extra juice. In an unusually inclusive move, all travellers, whether Oneworld customers or not, are invited to make the most of the perks—as Oneworld hopes to be the alliance of choice for the user's next journey.

It's a relatively cost-effective way of treating customers, requiring little infrastructure or installation to get up and running. And a great example of what our sister-site trendwatching.com calls [free love](#), or the art of (relevantly) giving away stuff to build your brand. (Related: [Personalized in-flight magazines at Heathrow's Terminal 1](#).)

Website: library.oneworld.com

Contact: www.oneworld.com/ow/contact

Spotted by: Raymond Kollau



Tracking (informal) online sales

We've written about a few different sites focused on helping friends share expenses, including general-purpose [BillMonk](#) and [Wigadoo](#) for outings. Now a new contender out of Finland has come to the table with a novel e-commerce twist.

[Scred](#)—short for "street credit"—allows friends, groups and communities to manage their collective money. Its Pools feature, first of all, is designed to help friends keep track of who owes what during a joint excursion, for example. Friends all sign up for the same pool when they know they'll need to track expenses together, and then they input each cost incurred as they go along. The system will track debts between people, balance debts and shared expenses and then calculate who owes what in the end—even using multiple currencies. The Pools function is free to use, and is also available via mobile phone.

Perhaps even more interesting, however, is Scred's MiniCorps feature—now in beta—which can be used to take in money and have it automatically accounted by Scred. Aimed at users such as associations, trip organisers, charity groups and artists, MiniCorps serve much like virtual companies as they allow groups to sell items or collect fees and donations through a Scred shop, track both income and expenses, and calculate profits and losses. MiniCorps are free to use during the feature's beta period; all money is handled via PayPal.

With the growing number of [sellsumers](#) out there, eager to earn some extra cash during these tough economic times, we'd bet Scred's MiniCorps feature will be met with a particularly warm reception. What else could help sales-oriented consumers make the most of their bottom line...?

Website: www.scred.com
Contact: scred@scred.com

Spotted by: John Greene



Self-service sole scanning for custom footbeds

Hot on the heels of [vending machines selling after-party shoes](#), comes an interactive kiosk that speeds up the process of buying custom footbeds. The [eSoles Foot Imaging Kiosk System](#) is a self-service kiosk that takes a complex 3D scan of the customer's foot, helping create an eFit footbed within minutes. Customers can also use the scan to order a bespoke ePro footbed, which is shipped within days.

The process is easy enough for customers to carry out without sales assistance, using a touchscreen to lead them through standing, walking and jogging on a pressure mat in order to take a measurement. The mat maps out the customer's pressure points using 160 sensors, displaying the resulting personalised 3D image on the kiosk's screen. The kiosk then prints a ticket, providing the retailer with information to construct a USD 75 template-based footpad that's customized to the user's requirements. Alternately, customers can wait a little longer for a fully customised footbeds from the eSoles plant for USD 249. Their data can be stored permanently in the eSoles database, letting them order additional footbeds without repeated analysis.

After launching at The Cycle Loft in Boston, the eSoles Kiosk will be available to other footwear retailers this summer. By combining interactive customisation with self-service, eSoles offer an engaging, practical and scalable add-on for stores looking to offer their customers the benefits of custom insoles.

The innovation doesn't stop there: eSoles has also developed insoles that relay pressure information to a nearby cellphone. An application on the phone can tell the wearer how much pressure he or she is applying in 11 different zones. The system has been trialled by the US Olympic BMX team, helping them figure out how to apply maximum power to bicycle pedals, and it can also help analyze a golf swing or skiing posture. The insoles will be available in a limited trial version in July, and the sensors will initially be priced around USD 300.

Website: www.esoles.com

Contact: www.esoles.com/contact

Spotted by: Judy McRae and Roberta Steinberg



Canon hosts workshops in national parks

Letting photography buffs try its latest cameras in undeniably photogenic settings, Canon has paired up with national parks and conservationists for Canon Photography in the Parks. The programme combines a competition with a series of free photography workshops at four national parks.

Sessions are hosted outdoors twice daily by professional photographers, giving participants the opportunity to try a variety of Canon cameras and lenses. There are also indoor evening workshops that focus on technical aspects of the equipment. Sessions will run at Yosemite in June, the Grand Canyon in July and Yellowstone and Acadia in August. The workshops are designed to be useful both to amateurs and more advanced photographers, and the idea is that those participating in the sessions will submit their photographs to the competition.

By letting potential customers try out cameras in the most relevant setting and helping them build their photography skills, Canon combines two of our favourite, enduring consumer trends: [tryvertising](#) and [status skills](#).

Website: www.usa.canon.com/parks

Contact: www.usa.canon.com/dlc/controller?act=ContactUsAct



Fast food chain goes local

Fast food restaurants have long been domains of guilty indulgence, something that [Burgerville](#) is set to change. Although it's been around in the Pacific Northwest since the 1960s, Burgerville is committed to supplying its patrons with local, seasonal and organic food options.

Beef and cheese are purchased from hormone-free farms in Oregon, and all of Burgerville's produce is locally sourced—meaning customers won't find a strawberry shake in December. They will, however, find sweet potato fries and pumpkin shakes in autumn and Walla Walla onion rings in the summer. In addition to its focus on sustainable ingredients, Burgerville runs its 39 restaurants as greenly as possible. Its canola oil is recycled into biodiesel fuel after its cooking life has ended, it has a wind-generated electricity investment programme, and there is a staff-initiated composting and recycling scheme. Food is priced marginally above other chains (for instance, a Yukon & White Bean Burger costs USD 5.29 and rosemary shoestring potatoes USD 2.99), but can be justified by the extra effort involved.

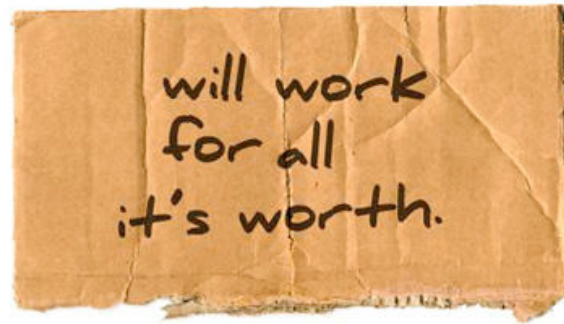
Although Burgerville certainly isn't the only fast food joint to source locally and act sustainably, it's one of the biggest chains that have gone that direction. If fast food chains, so recently the antithesis of all that's eco-friendly, healthy and democratic, can do a 180 with their business—can't anyone? (Related: [Meatless fastfood chains.](#))

Website: www.burgerville.com

Contact: www.burgerville.com/about-us/contact-us

Spotted by: Raymond Kollau

Pay-what-you-want ad agency



If [magazines](#), [restaurants](#) and [hotels](#) can turn to pay-as-you-want pricing schemes to help them survive the recession, why not an ad agency? Sure enough, [Agency Nil](#) offers a variety of freelance branding, media and advertising services without any set price, leaving it instead up to clients to decide how much to pay.

Clients begin by submitting a work request form with Agency Nil. Drawing from its pool of recent grads and between-jobs business and advertising professionals, the agency gets the work done by the deadline requested. It's then up to the client to decide how much the work is worth—the only charges required to be paid are those agreed upon ahead of time for travel, proprietary research tools and production. If a client decides not to pay anything, "it's not likely that we will do work for you in the future," Agency Nil explains; then again, "we've yet to have that happen, ever." Revisions and further work are arranged once a client has valued and agreed to pay for the first assignment.

Some industry professionals may protest that starting with a price of zero is sure to devalue the work ad agencies provide—much the way some designers have balked at [efforts to crowdsource graphic design](#). But Hank Leber, the recent Virginia Commonwealth University Brandcenter grad who founded Agency Nil, begs to differ: "This isn't about undercutting anyone. It's about supply and demand—honestly, I think this should've happened a long time ago," he explains in the [AdFreak blog](#).

"The system has been terribly lopsided for a while now, and I hope this can be the start of a breaking point in the industry on some level. It won't depress the market—the price will still come up and down, and work will get done just the same. Except now, it won't be based on a set amount of hours to fill or stay under, and work can get done for work's sake. For quality's sake. For the client's sake."

How Leber's model evolves over time remains to be seen. Meanwhile, it may just be what it takes to survive—and help countless out-of-work professionals survive—the current economic mess. One to watch, try out or emulate in your own neck of the woods...?

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Spotted by: Chris Rollason



Self-cooling canopy bed for tropical hotels

In tropical climates, roughly 80 percent of the energy used in an average hotel room is for air conditioning. Aiming to provide a more sustainable alternative, the [Evening Breeze](#) bed is a canopy bed with built-in air conditioner that uses only a fraction of that energy.

In the Evening Breeze bed, air is filtered and cooled to a set temperature and humidity level and then gently directed over the sleeper via an upholstered canopy ceiling. A built-in mosquito net protects the sleeper from uninvited visitors while also helping to contain the cooled air, meaning that no airtight insulation is necessary—rather, the room can be left to its natural state, with windows open for fresh air. The eco-minded bed is crafted from FSC-approved wood, and it uses only environmentally friendly R410A coolant. Perhaps best of all, however, is that whereas conventional air conditioners use between 1,200 and 2,000 Watts, the average energy use for the Evening Breeze bed is only 400 Watts, creating a reduction in energy use of 60 percent per room. That, in turn, results in a potential yearly savings of 4 MWh, equivalent to USD 1,000 or 2.5 tons of CO₂ pollution, the bed's maker says. Earlier this year the Evening Breeze bed was awarded Honourable Mention in the Design and Build category of the 2008 Green Dot Awards. Priced at EUR 1,800, each Evening Breeze system sold gets combined with a locally made mattress and box spring when it arrives at its destination.

Five resorts in the Caribbean and South Africa are now equipped with the beds, and Mozambique's Coral Lodge—due to open in September—will be the first to use them hotelwide. Dutch Evening Breeze is currently developing its sales and service network in the Caribbean and Africa; one to get in on early? (Related: [Eco-mattress in a box](#) — [Buy the bed you just slept in.](#))

Website: www.evening-breeze.com

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Spotted by: Robin Benjamin