

# Springwise newsletter | 26 August 2009

Another batch of smart new B2C ideas for you this week: tailor-made farm gardens for city dwellers, a writer (Alain de Botton) in residence at Heathrow Airport, crowdfunding for creative endeavours, and more. Our next edition is due on 26 August 2009. In the meantime, check out our daily postings on [www.springwise.com](http://www.springwise.com) and don't forget to [tell your friends](#) and colleagues about us. Thank you!



## Hand-sketched maps feature drawings and local advice

Travellers looking for city maps and advice face an overwhelming array of alternatives, all competing with a slightly different approach. Whereas recent entrants such as [Tripwolf](#), [Offbeat Guides](#) and [TriplT](#) all strive to provide some tailored package representing the best of what's on the web, however, a new Swiss startup aims to focus instead on what a local friend might say, presented artistically with hand-drawn notes.

Launched earlier this month, [A la Carte Maps](#) are designed to combine guidebook, tourist map and original art in one. Currently available for six cities—Barcelona, Munich, Zurich, Shanghai, Tokyo and Washington, DC—A la Carte Maps present an array of each city's best-kept insider tips on a beautiful, 70-by-42-cm, hand-drawn map. An accompanying welcome letter provides key information about the city in question, such as where to exchange money, how to get around, what to do on a rainy day, etc., while access to a comprehensive city database—provided with each purchase—adds even more insider information as well as the ability to create a customised itinerary. In addition to its curated "My City à la Carte" maps, A la Carte also allows seasoned travellers to create their own, customised maps of a city with their own notes and artwork. Both types of map are ad-free and matt-laminated, and are priced at EUR 8.90; A la Carte donates 10 percent of the profits from each map to a social project in the city it represents.

Maps have always been an essential tool for travellers of every kind, but in this era of technology-enabled [mapmania](#), they are the focus of perhaps more attention than ever before. With its unconventionally personal and hand-crafted approach, A la Carte could stand out amid the sea of web-focused competitors. Where else could a low-tech and artistic approach provide a compelling alternative...?

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

Contact: [www.alacartemaps.com/index.php?id=121](http://www.alacartemaps.com/index.php?id=121)

Spotted by: Yuan

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Go to [www.springwise.com](http://www.springwise.com) for more smart new business concepts from around the world.



# Bedtime story events for grownups in pajamas

Regular Springwise readers may remember the [reader-in-residence program](#) London's Andaz Liverpool Street hotel ran last year during the London Book Fair. Picking up on a similar idea, renowned interior designer David Carter recently hosted a series of "[Bedtime Stories](#)" events for grownups at his townhouse-turned-boutique-hotel in East London.

Carter opened up the two guest bedrooms in his restored 1717 townhouse—known as [40 WINKS](#)—this past spring, primarily for the use of photographers, designers, models and others in the creative and fashion industries. In part to mark the launch, he teamed up with audio fiction retailer [Spoken Ink](#) to conduct four storytelling nights featuring performances by Spoken Ink actors. The events took place on four Wednesdays in June and July, and each focused on a different theme: "stories to make you smile," for example, or "love and longing." Guests at the candlelit events—which cost GBP 20—were asked to wear pajamas or other nighttime attire; between-performance drinks and appetizers were provided. Concluding each event was a live musical performance.

"It goes right back to when people were sitting around in their caves, talking about buffalo hunts, or coming home and saying they ran into their pterodactyl that day," Carter [told the Wall Street Journal](#).

Indeed, whether it's a buffalo hunt or a unique nocturnal event at a flamboyant boutique hotel, consumers crave experiences they can turn into [status stories](#) of their own, impressing their friends and family with what they've seen and done. Provide such fodder in an engaging and memorable way, and you'll be able to write your own happy ending! ;-) (Related: [Heathrow Airport installs writer in residence](#).)

Website: [www.40winks.org](http://www.40winks.org)

Contact: [www.40winks.org/reservations.html](http://www.40winks.org/reservations.html)

Spotted by: [WSJ](#) via Judy McRae



# Crowdfunding for creative endeavours

Crowdfunding has already received considerable ink on our virtual pages thanks to all the innovators out there who have applied it to [bands](#), [software projects](#) and [public schools](#), to name just a few. Now Brooklyn-based [Kickstarter](#) has picked up the concept and created a new site where artists, journalists, entrepreneurs, explorers and others can raise the funds for their next big idea.

Anyone with an idea for a new endeavour can post a description of their project on Kickstarter along with a deadline, a funding goal and incentives to encourage others to pledge financial support—a free T-shirt for pledging USD 25, for example. They also create an account with Amazon Payments, which will process backers' pledges. After browsing the available projects on the site, visitors can then make pledges towards the projects they like. If—and only if—a project's funding goal is reached or exceeded by the funding deadline, funds are collected from supporters' pledges and transferred to the project creator's Amazon account, from which they can access the cash—less the fees Amazon charges. Supporters, meanwhile, get the promised rewards along with access to project updates along the way. If, on the other hand, the goal isn't reached in time, all pledges are immediately cancelled automatically. In addition to raising funds for new projects, current Kickstarter members have used the free site for sales and to test out new concepts—a pop-up wedding chapel is one example.

Kickstarter is currently for use by invitation only, and because of Amazon Payments' policy, projects can only be started by those with a US address and bank account. One to emulate in your neck of the idea-filled woods...? (Related: [Activism site ensures participation](#).)

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

Contact: [kickstarter.zendesk.com/home](http://kickstarter.zendesk.com/home)

Spotted by: Andrew Sargent



## Design-them-yourself trousers for men

Despite covering plenty of design-it-online sartorial services for women, such as [Studio 28's dresses](#) and [Elemental Threads' handbags](#), there's been a comparative dearth of men's DIY design services. Aiming to remedy that, LA-based clothiers [Franklin + Gower](#) let style-savvy men customise their trousers with an eye-catching (or subtle) trim in a fabric of their choice.

Visitors to Franklin + Gower's website select a fabric base in relaxed or slim fit and then pick seams in designer fabrics, retro prints or a classic piping of their choice. Alternatively, a selection of tried and tested styles are also on offer. The pants are manufactured in Los Angeles and, regardless of pattern or fabric, cost USD 185. Bermuda shorts are available for USD 145. The business principally operates online (although appointments can be made at its LA location) and products are entirely made-to-order, which eliminates overstocking. While currently focused on men, the brand will soon reach out to women, too: Franklin + Gower have plans to expand their inventory to include bags, glasses and women's wear. (Related: [ShirtsMyWay's custom dress shirts](#).)

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

Contact: [service@franklinandgower.com](mailto:service@franklinandgower.com)



**HEY DUMB-ASS!**

**GREEN UP!**

## Angry green girl targets eco-laggardly lads

As many incentives as there are for consumers to go green these days, 'hot girls' strikes us as fairly novel. A new eco-site called [Angry Green Girl](http://www.angrygreengirl.com) is celebrating its launch with a car wash featuring five models sporting teeny green bikinis, who'll sud up eco-friendly cars for free using waterless cleaners. When it launches, the site will provide earthsaving tips, product reviews, home makeovers and green networking. The official line is that the green girl will exploit everything she's got to save the planet. Sure, it's superficial, but that's the point: it's refreshing to see that the green movement is finding new ways to engage people and to reach new audiences. One to rinse and repeat elsewhere?

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

(The car wash will be operating on the southeast corner of Highland and Franklin Avenues in Hollywood, CA on Tuesday, August 25th, from 10 am until midday.)

Spotted by: [Mother Nature Network](http://www.mothernaturenetwork.com) via Judy McRae



# Referral program helps landlords find tenants on Facebook

Housing referrals are a tried and tested way of connecting landlords and tenants by inviting current residents to refer people in exchange for a finders fee. Aiming to leverage the strength of social media, [RentMineOnline](http://RentMineOnline.com) took the next natural step and added Facebook to the mix. The venture is effectively an online affiliate program for real-world house rental. Through RentMineOnline, property managers send bulk messages to their tenants informing them of a new campaign. Tenants can then send notifications via their social network of choice: Facebook, Plaxo, Twitter or email, and property managers can monitor the reach of each referral campaign in real time.

It's a win-win service on all sides. Current residents have the opportunity to help out friends and earn some extra cash (typically from USD 50 to USD 1500). Referred tenants have the security of signing with a vouched-for landlord, and possibly moving in next door to a friend. RentMineOnline takes a sales fee for each campaign from property managers, while the managers themselves benefit from a massive catchment pool of potential tenants, most of whom will be related by both demographic and location to current tenants.

The last point is key. As the presence of social media continues to grow, the question is increasingly becoming not whether, but how companies are going to harness it. For entrepreneurs, RentMineOnline looks to have created a model that should work equally well in other parts of the world. (Related: [Crowdsourcing the sales force](#) — [Referral community for domestic help](#) — [Tapping into the referral economy](#).)

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

Contact: [sales@rentmineonline.com](mailto:sales@rentmineonline.com)

Spotted by: John Greene



## Remote farming: tailor-made, no-fuss vegetable gardens

"Have you forgotten where the vegetables on your table come from?" It's a question agricultural firm Azienda Agricola Giacomo Ferraris asks potential customers. Offering Italians the opportunity to reconnect with the origins of their food, the company's innovative online offering—[Le Verdure Del Mio Orto](#) ('The Vegetables from my Garden')—lets anyone build an organic garden right from their web browser.

How it works? Users first select a garden size based on the number of people they'd like to feed; 30m<sup>2</sup> is sufficient for 1–2 people and costs EUR 850 per year. The virtual gardener can then choose from 40 different types of vegetables, using a highly intuitive interface that includes information on expected yields and harvest times. Optional extras include a photo album of the garden's progress (EUR 49), herb and fruit beds (EUR 50/75), and even a scarecrow with a picture of the customer's own face (EUR 39). Once the garden has been designed and fees paid, planting begins on the farm, which is located between Milan and Turin in northern Italy. As the organic produce grows, it's picked and delivered to the customer's door within 24 hours. Weekly deliveries are part of the package.

A souped up version of community supported agriculture, Le Verdure del Mio Orto capitalizes on consumers' hunger for locally grown food and—in a wider sense—for anything that's faithful to its roots. As our sister site trendwatching.com would say, it's [\(still\) made here](#). The time seems ripe for farmers of all varieties to consider setting aside a few lots, adding branding and logistics, and serving it all up for city-dwellers with an enticing online presence. Of course, there's also an opportunity here for smart companies willing to take care of the non-agricultural elements on a farmer's behalf. Better yet, contact Azienda Agricola Giacomo Ferraris and ask if they're willing to license their system. (Related: [Innovative olive farmers](#) — [Adopt a Maine lobster trap](#) — [More homegrown vegetables, without the sweat.](#))

Website: [www.leverduredelmioorto.it](http://www.leverduredelmioorto.it)

Contact: [info@leverduredelmioorto.it](mailto:info@leverduredelmioorto.it)

Spotted by: Giulia Cuccolini



# Free medical insurance for Mexico City tourists

In an effort to defibrillate its tourist industry after the shock of the swine flu outbreak, [Mexico City](#) is reaching out by being [generous](#). Under a scheme launched late July, the city's tourism office is offering free medical insurance and tourist assistance worth an estimated USD 30 per person to every tourist that visits the city.

"Of all the world's largest cities, Mexico City is the first to try this," said Mayor Marcelo Ebrard at a ceremony unveiling the service. Since average hotel occupancy rates dropped to a record low in April/May of this year, the tourist department has been quick to introduce an incentive for both national and international guests. It's no surprise that "medical assistance in case of influenza AH1N1" heads up the list of services on the official website. Medical assistance for any other ailment, as well as emergency hospital accommodation and dental care are also included in the policies, which are underwritten by insurance provider [MAPFRE](#).

The insurance isn't limited to medical issues; a 24-hour call centre will also provide legal assistance in case of robbery, and will help tourists whose flight is cancelled or delayed. The centre is staffed by attendants who are fluent in English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish, who will even book tickets for events in the city. Whether or not this initiative will bring back the tourists remains to be seen. But it's an innovative move by Mexico City, tackling a major issue with wide-sweeping generosity.

Website: [www.mexicocity.gob.mx](http://www.mexicocity.gob.mx)

Contact: [servicios@mexicocity.gob.mx](mailto:servicios@mexicocity.gob.mx)

Spotted by: Murtaza Ali Patel



## Design-your-own bicycle in rainbow colours

Where British [Specialbike](#) creates unique bicycles by refurbishing old ones with custom components and a colourful flair, Florida-based [Republic Bike](#) achieves a similar end with new bikes by allowing customers to design their own in a rainbow of hues. Now, through a partnership with Republic Bike, global retailer Urban Outfitters is bringing design-your-own capabilities to its customers as well at the online [Urban Outfitters Bike Shop](#).

Working with the Aristotle v.1.5, a single-speed bike with a flip-flop hub, Republic Bike begins by asking users to select from among three frame sizes for the bike they'd like built for them. They are then asked to choose the colours they'd like for nine separate components on the bike: frame, saddle, grips, chain, crank, and front and rear tires and rims. Five popular styles are available for those having difficulty choosing among the 500 or so possible colour combinations, as is a random option for alternative ideas. Once the selections are made, Republic Bike builds the bike in its South Florida facility within days of receiving the order. It's then packed for shipment, arriving at the consumer's door 90 percent assembled.

Given the recent renaissance in pedal power, the arrival of personalization capabilities comes not a moment too soon. Republic Bike ships only within North America, however, while Urban Outfitters limits its orders to the continental US. One to bring to two-wheeled enthusiasts on the bike lanes near you...? It's not just the customized rides that interest us here, though—it's the partnership between a large retailer and a smaller firm that focuses on letting customers design the products they want. We've covered dozens of "design-your-own" ventures, so retailers: dig into the archives and find out who you can partner with to add tailor-made products to your virtual shelves. To get you started, customizable [lingerie](#), [handbags](#), [socks](#), [duvets](#), [chocolate bars](#) and [fabric](#).

Website: [bikes.urbanoutfitters.com](http://bikes.urbanoutfitters.com)

Contact: [customerservice@republicbike.com](mailto:customerservice@republicbike.com)

Spotted by: Miriam Brafman



# Heathrow Airport installs writer in residence

Airports in August are generally heaving with tourists, delayed flights and the occasional strike. London's Heathrow Airport, however, seems to be focused on moving forward, judging from two innovative services it launched this month: first its [new driverless personal transport pods](#), and now a [writer in residence](#). And not just any writer: residing in Heathrow's Terminal 5 is Alain de Botton.

Focusing both on the people who work at the airport and those that pass through it, De Botton's weeklong layover at Heathrow seems to combine elements of his recent "The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work" and his earlier "Art of Travel". The author won't be idling away his time in Terminal 5's lounges or champagne bars; seated at a desk, he's writing a book that will be published late September. As he types, the work-in-progress is projected on a screen behind him. An excerpt published by [The Faster Times](#):

*"In the cloudless dawn, a sequence of planes, each visible as a single diamond, had lined up at different heights, like pupils in a school photo, on their final approach to the north runway. Their wings unfolded themselves into elaborate and unlikely arrangements of irregularly sized steel gray panels. Having avoided the earth for so long, wheels that had last touched the ground in San Francisco or Mumbai hesitated and slowed almost to a standstill as they arched and prepared to greet the rubber-stained English tarmac with a burst of smoke that made manifest their planes' speed and weight."*

Besides publishing at the speed of light and providing Heathrow with some lovely literary publicity, the endeavour taps into two ongoing consumer trends. First off, the [status stories](#) element: passengers and staff members are invited to share their stories with De Botton, and have a chance of being immortalized in [A Week at the Airport](#). Secondly, a generous dose of [free love](#): Heathrow will be handing out 10,000 copies of De Botton's diary to passengers travelling through the airport. Smart marketing move by Heathrow, and one for any other brand to be inspired by: be delightful, be relevant, be generous. (Related: [Hotel offers 'reader in residence'](#) — [Airline alliance offers free audiobook downloads at airports](#) — [Personalized inflight mags at Heathrow's Terminal 1](#).)

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

Spotted by: Raymond Kollau



## Morphed photos help dieters visualize a thinner self

Dieters seeking extra motivation can already [pay a professional nag](#) to keep them in line, but those who prefer a less in-your-face approach now have a new alternative: a service that helps them visualize how they'll look if they stick to their fitness plan.

Launched in late May, [ThinnerView](#) is a service that aims to help dieters keep their eye on the prize, as the saying goes, by showing them how they'll look if they achieve their goals for losing weight. Customers begin by uploading a photo of themselves at their current weight. From there, ThinnerView hand-alters the image based on the customer's requirements, bone structure and body shape to render the most realistic results possible—it does not use simple, generic slimming software, the company stresses. Within two to three working days, the customer can download their "after" image, share it with others or post it on their Facebook page. ThinnerView is best-suited for showing weight losses of between five and 105 pounds; for more than that, the company encourages customers to order a mid-point photo along the way. Pricing is USD 14.99 for the first image, with reduced prices for subsequent ones.

With a way to visualize their goals in a concrete way, dieters' success rates can increase by as much as 75 percent, Virginia-based ThinnerView says. Fitness clubs around the world: one to partner with and offer as an extra service or even [as a perk](#) for your premium members...?

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

Contact: [contact@thinnerview.com](mailto:contact@thinnerview.com)

Spotted by: Cecilia Biemann



## Functional bracelets feature map of NYC subway

Jewelry is all about self-expression, and that can include highlighting what makes us unique—[such as the little scars we've come to bear](#)—as well as our lifestyle and affiliations. A new bracelet from Design Hype now targets über-urbanites by featuring a map of the New York subway.

Design Hype's [NYC Metro Cuff](#) is a matte metal bracelet embossed with the subway lines, numbers and streets of Manhattan. Priced at USD 25 including shipping, the cuffs are available online for both domestic and international retail and wholesale orders. Pennsylvania-based Design Hype says that similar cuffs for other cities are also on the way.

Whether it's true New York urbanites who end up being the primary market for the Metro Cuff, or consumers who wish they were, there's no doubt that the charm of such items derives not just from their [mapmania](#)-minded functionality but also from a strong element of highly localized, [\(still\) made here](#) appeal. One to partner with and localize for urban commuters and tourists in your part of the world?

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

Contact: [tiffany@designhypeinc.com](mailto:tiffany@designhypeinc.com)

Spotted by: Karile Grineviciute via [coroflot](#)