

Springwise newsletter | 27 January 2010

Spotted for you this week: a dating site where women call the shots, low-cost bicycles with global appeal, an online retailer selling made-to-order jeans, and more. Our next edition is due on 3 February 2010. 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!



Edible decals turn cakes into works of art

Professionally made desserts are all very well, but for true bake-it-yourself types, there's nothing like a homemade confection. Much the way [Sprinkles Cupcakes](#) mixes aim to give baking enthusiasts a way to emulate professional results in their own kitchens, so [Ticings](#) allow them to add a dash of photographic-quality art.

Ticings are edible images that can be applied to cakes, cookies, brownies and cupcakes. Users need only peel them from their paper backing and then press them onto a baked confection. Whereas some baking embellishments drag when cut, Ticings merge with soft frosting to create edible art that creates no resistance for the knife. Launched last month, the US-made decorations—which are FDA approved, kosher certified and gluten free—are available from LA-based Ticings in sheets of 12 2.25-inch images for USD 15.95 or 35 1.25-inch images for USD 22.95. Themes include birthdays, weddings and seasonal motifs; shipping is available only within the continental US. Coming soon from the company are gourmet artisan sprinkles.

Giving crafty consumers yet another way to make it themselves—upgraded to help them compete with the professionals—Ticings will soon also be available through a bakery in northern California. Other gourmet retailers around the world: time to add yourself to that list? (Related: [Upscale takeaway meets onsite cooking school](#) — [Shirt sold out? Make it yourself](#) — [DIY wedding rings](#).)

Website: www.ticings.com

Contact: hello@ticings.com

Spotted by: Lara McCulloch



Low-cost bicycles for (not only) the rural poor

We've written about a few different efforts to help disadvantaged people in Africa by providing refurbished second-hand bikes from the developed world. Unlike such initiatives from [Baisikeli](#) and [Bikes for Africa](#), however, [Worldbike](#) designs and distributes brand-new bicycles that are inexpensive and built specifically to withstand harsh rural conditions.

California-based Worldbike's bicycles are designed to handle large loads, rough terrain and inclement weather. They're configured to be not only affordable, but also maintained and repaired locally. Through partnerships with international and local agencies, private companies, foundations and NGOs, Worldbike even helps arrange microcredit financing for bike purchases and supplement sales with support from funders and private donors. Its bikes have already been brought to Cuba, Mexico, Rwanda, Senegal and Thailand, among other areas. However, as the company also notes, "the same cargo bike we deliver to rural Africa also turns heads on the streets of Seattle." An official US version of the bike is now being configured, and proceeds from all purchases will help support bike distribution efforts in Kenya.

A shining example of what our sister site calls the [functionall](#) trend, Worldbike has already attracted funding and partnerships with companies and foundations around the world—time to add your brand to that list? Alternatively, how about brainstorming some functionall offerings of your own...? (Related: [Single-use toilet bag turns human waste into fertilizer](#) — [Water bottle's plunger-style filter purifies instantly](#).)

Website: www.worldbike.org

Contact: info@worldbike.org

Spotted by: [trendwatching.com's monthly trend briefing](#)



Retailer recycles customers' old sex toys

Convincing consumers to recycle their old electronics is challenging enough in its own right, but when it comes to sex toys, the potential embarrassment could be virtually prohibitive. Aiming to keep the devices it sells out of landfills, UK retailer [LoveHoney](#) encourages customers to send them back for recycling at the end of their useful life in exchange for a generous discount on a new, updated version.

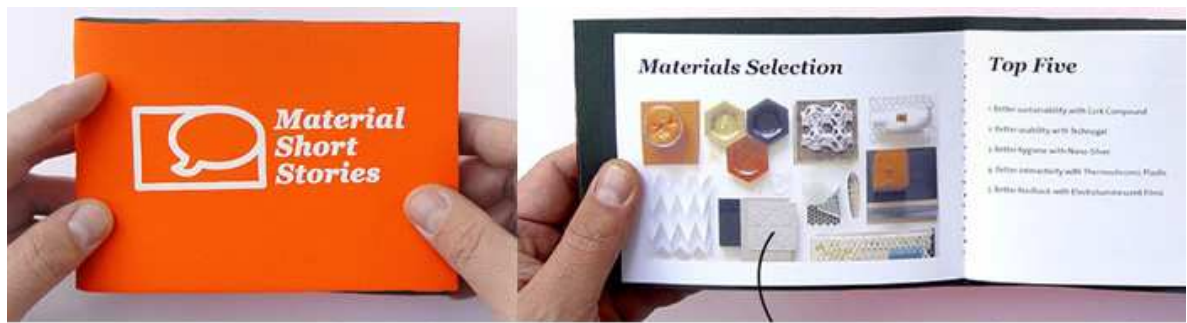
Back in 2007 the EU began requiring that consumers dispose of waste electrical equipment properly. Soon afterwards, LoveHoney launched [Rabbit Amnesty](#), its own program for recycling its popular Rabbit vibrators. Now, owners of the devices can send their outdated or overused vibrators to the company and receive a half-price Rabbit vibrator from the LoveHoney range. The second-hand toys are then delivered to a designated collection facility, where they are recycled and treated in an ecologically sound manner. LoveHoney also donates GBP 1 to The World Land Trust for each Rabbit that gets sent back.

How to turn lemons into lemonade? Use them to create a competitive advantage that increases future sales and sets your company apart. Then take a long, slow sip of sweet success! ;-)
(Related: [An ATM for recycling consumer electronics](#) — [Retailers recycle customers' used clothes](#) — ['Sex map' reveals erotic-spending trends by city.](#))

Website: www.lovehoney.co.uk/rabbit-amnesty

Contact: www.lovehoney.co.uk/help/contact-us

Spotted by: Susan Johnston



Service helps designers find sustainable new materials

With so many innovative new materials being launched every year — take [Ecovative's sustainable styrofoam substitute](#), for example—it would be difficult for any product designer or manufacturer to be aware of them all as they create their own new products. That's where [Material Short Stories](#) comes in. The company offers a service-cum-publication geared toward manufacturers, agencies and designers that suggests five new materials that could be incorporated in any new product design.

Clients begin by sending German Material Short Stories a visual of their product or concept via e-mail. The company then brainstorms on the concept and its user experience, factoring in branding and sustainability issues, and comes up with a list of new materials that could make sense. From there, it zeroes in on five innovative materials that could best be used to improve the product concept, and it sketches and summarizes those—including references and design recommendations—in a neat little booklet. Within a few days, clients get that booklet sent to them along with a 1-gigabyte USB card including a digital summary for use in presentations. The cost is EUR 600 plus VAT and shipping.

Given all the sustainability-related innovation these days, there will clearly be increasing need for someone to help connect those on the product side with the fast-changing world of materials. One to emulate on a niche basis—or, to tap for help with your own next design? (Related: [Library of green building materials](#).)

Website: www.material-short-stories.com

Contact: info@material-short-stories.com

Spotted by: Cagla Pikel



More consumer-directed community giving

The crowdsourced, corporate-sponsored community improvement projects are coming fast and furious. Last month we wrote about the USD 20 million [Pepsi Refresh Project](#)—which itself is reminiscent of Google's Project 10 to the 100th—when one of our spotters alerted us to a like-minded effort from insurance provider Aviva Canada.

The [Aviva Community Fund](#) competition was created to give Canadians a voice in bringing lasting change to their local communities. With a total of CDN 500,000 set aside, the company first invited Canadian consumers to submit their community improvement ideas to the effort's website. There, ideas competed for a spot in the semifinals over three rounds of voting between mid-October and late November. Winners were announced yesterday, and include a lodge for a P.E.I. residential camp for families of the chronically ill, and a new playground for a school in Brantford, Ontario.

As the world suffers through the results of the corporate excesses that helped bring this recession on, there's nothing like some well-placed corporate [generosity](#) to help win back the disgusted masses. Add to that a way for consumers to direct the giving, and you just may have the beginnings of a confidence recovery plan. (Related: [Canadian credit union gives people ten-dollar bills to give away](#) — [Crowdsourcing economic solutions for Ireland](#) — [Waitrose lets customers direct its community giving.](#))

Website: www.avivacommunityfund.org

Spotted by: Patrick Glinski



Butter brand facilitates bake clubs

Back in 2008 we wrote about MakeTheTea.com, a online tool created by dairy brand Cravendale to facilitate the tea-making process among groups. Now, Danish butter brand Lurpak is similarly encouraging online conversation about their brand via a new website called Bake Club.

Targetting consumers in the UK, Bake Club is an interactive baking club that allows amateur bakers to connect and have bake-offs. Bakers create a group, invite people to join and set up a baking schedule. Members are called to task via an e-mail alert with a date for baking. Members then share, rate and comment on each other's bakes. Pictures of people's cakes, cookies and pies are displayed both on the website and on Flickr.

Blending one part viral marketing, one part life hack, one part social network and a generous dollop of the most vital ingredient — consumers — Lurpak obviously hopes to build name recognition and sell more butter. With tea-making and baking covered, will we see other brands join the club?

Website: www.bakeclub.co.uk

Contact: www.bakeclub.co.uk/contact

Spotted by: Ant Cauchi



Dating site lets women call the shots

There are almost infinite variations on the online dating theme, but one we hadn't seen until recently was a site that puts women in charge. Sure enough, that's just what [Bookioo](#) does, giving women complete control as they browse through the profiles of eligible men.

Now in beta, Spanish Bookioo does not give men any way to learn about or contact the female members of the site. Men can join for free, if they have been invited—and if a current Bookioo member can vouch for their information. They can then post a profile for the perusal of the female—and paying—members of the site. It's those paying women, however, who get to call the shots. Female members see all the details in men's profiles—including ratings and comments from other Bookioo members—and it's also up to them to initiate contact with the ones they find interesting. They can request double-dates for added security, if they wish; also available is the option of connecting with other women on the site. Female members are charged EUR 35.90 for three months or EUR 59.90 for six months to keep their profiles private; if, after a free seven-day trial, they decide not to join, they can keep using the site with a public profile.

Bookioo is currently available in Barcelona, Madrid, Seville and Valencia. Time to spread [female fever](#) and bring a like-minded offering to the lonely hearts in your neck of the woods? (Related: [DNA-driven dating service](#) — [Best Buy launches store for and by women](#) — [Work spaces for female entrepreneurs](#).)

Website: www.bookioo.com

Contact: soporte@bookioo.com

Spotted by: Leticia Pérez Prieto



Swathes of customization: fabric printed on demand

Customization continues to gain ground as a business model, as witnessed by another design-your-own fabric venture. [Fabric on Demand](#) is a digital textile printing company that allows consumers to create personalized fabrics online. Buyers can upload their design, choose from 8 different fabrics to print on and specify the amount of fabric they require. Fabric on Demand then emails the customer a proof, and once approved, the custom fabric is printed and delivered within 7 days. Prices range from USD 16.25 – 34.20 per yard and customers can order unlimited continuous yardage.

Expansion plans for the site include providing customers the opportunity to customize and order specialty printed items such as blankets, pillows, tote bags, banners and tablecloths; using the same design tools. Clearly, there's still plenty of room for growth in this area, so keep the design-your-own innovations coming! (Related: [More design-your-own fabric.](#))

Website: www.fabricondemand.com

Contact: info@fabricondemand.com

Spotted by: Susanna Haynie



Pedestrian footsteps, converted into energy

If the energy people expend [dancing](#) and [working out](#) can power cellphones, lights and other electrical appliances, why not apply the same concept to all the energy spent by millions of people every day simply walking along city sidewalks? That's exactly the premise behind [Pavegen](#) slabs, which can be inserted among regular sidewalk sections to capture the kinetic energy people spend just walking.

Each rubber slab from UK-based Pavegen Systems gets depressed by about 5 mm each time it gets stepped on. Using just that small movement, it can convert the kinetic energy used into electricity, which is then stored in the slab. Specifically, 5 percent of the energy harvested is used to make the slab's LED glow, making it clear to users that their energy has been captured. The rest can be used to power pedestrian lighting, information displays and many other applications. Pavegen's patent-protected technology has also been used to harvest energy from users' footsteps on stairs; custom branding is available.

Following recent tests in East London, Pavegen is now seeking both investors and additional testing sites for its [eco-iconic](#) innovation. One to get in on early...?

Website: www.pavegensystems.com

Contact: hello@pavegen.co.uk

Spotted by: James Graemer



Board game stimulates sustainable (re)thinking

Games have long been used as an educational tool, and not just for kids. Canadian [Akoha](#), for example, encourages players to be more kind. Now, along similar lines, [Play Rethink](#) invites users to redesign everyday objects to make them more sustainable.

Play Rethink ("The Eco-Design Game") is an effort from London-based Rethink Games to help people think—or rethink—how to make everyday objects and services more socially and environmentally friendly. Each game includes a multicoloured wheel and 98 drawing cards along with an eco-strategies key card and an instruction sheet with activities. With each spin of the wheel, players get a card asking them to rethink a particular everyday object, such as a chair or a vacuum cleaner. They then describe their idea for a more sustainable approach by drawing it on the card. Ideas players are particularly proud of can be uploaded onto the Play Rethink website, where others can rate, comment and be inspired by them. What's more, each month Rethink Games selects one idea to serve as the project of the month, and it's currently working on setting up partnerships with organizations that can help develop those ideas further. Play Rethink is sold online and through select London retailers. Pricing is GBP 24.95, with refill card packs available for GBP 5.95 each. Corporate workshops to help promote innovation are also available.

Facilitating the idea generation process is all very good and well, of course; what will make this really interesting, however, is a way to turn the best ideas into reality. [RedesignMe](#) found a way to do that through partnerships with manufacturers, and it also took the critical step of paying the [Generation C\(ash\)](#) consumers whose ideas got used. Play Rethink may be a game, but it's also another way to tap into the global brain. Who will help pave the way toward some real results? (Related: [iPhone game gets kids into the \(hidden\) park.](#))

Website: www.playrethink.com

Contact: info@rethinkgames.com

Spotted by: Estee Chaikin

Sale Activity		Show Map	
Homes Sold (13)			
1	3 Bedroom House 5947 NW 55th St Coconut Creek, FL	Jul 08 \$269k	\$220k
2	3 Bedroom House 3415 NW 32nd Ct Fort Lauderdale, FL	Jul 08 \$134k	\$110k
3	3 Bedroom House 505 E 9 Ln Hialeah, FL	Feb 09 \$149k	\$125k
4	4 Bedroom House 7650 W 12 Ave Hialeah, FL	Jun 08 \$269k	\$240k
Currently Selling (156)			
1	3 bedroom house 2020 NW 38th Ave Coconut Creek, FL	Sell	\$138k
2	4 bedroom house 122E San Miguel Ave Coral Gables, FL	Sell	\$345k
3	4 bedroom house 721 SW 2nd St Dania, FL	Sell	\$139k
4	3 bedroom house 4011 SW 54th Tr Dania, FL	Sell	\$193k

Transparency comes to real estate agents

When companies search for a new salesperson, you know they scrutinize each candidate's track record before making an offer. When consumers hire a real estate agent to sell their home, however—probably the biggest asset they own—the choice is often made by chance. Enter [Homethinking](#), a site that aims to bring transparency to U.S. real estate agents so as to help homeowners pick the best one for them.

New York-based Homethinking puts agents under a spotlight so consumers can quickly identify the ones that shine. Toward that end, it crawls the web to find out what each agent has accomplished in the past, including how many houses they've sold, in what areas and for what prices, and how the actual sale price compared with the one that was advertised. Homethinking also interviews the people whose houses the agent sold for information such as how well he or she interacted with prospective customers, how they set expectations around the sales price and how responsive they were when questions arose. It then presents all the resulting data for consumers' perusal, in an easy to use form that's browsable and searchable by city, state and ZIP code. When they've found one who looks promising, consumers can contact him or her at their own initiative.

Of course, it's not just consumers who stand to benefit from this new [transparency](#). Realtors themselves can claim and edit their profiles, contribute neighbourhood reviews and otherwise showcase their talents; they can also upload their listings and have them syndicated for free to Craigslist, Trulia and Zillow. And that, in turn, is where the transparency tyranny becomes transparency triumph. Embrace the new openness and make it your own, and you too will share in the glory. One to partner with or emulate in other parts of the world...?

Website: www.homethinking.com

Contact: feedback@homethinking.com

Spotted by: Susanna Haynie



Design your own jeans, custom-made for \$145

We've covered numerous design-your-own clothing opportunities over the years, but it seems fair to say that jeans are perhaps the category where such capabilities are needed most. After all, "most of us wear jeans every day, yet finding jeans that actually fit and flatter is still a struggle," as [indiDenim](#) puts it. "Muffin tops, gaping waists, baggy thighs, bunching fabric, camel toe, highwaters, dragging hems, and inappropriate butt exposure abound. Something must be done to stop the madness!" Enter indiDenim, which offers a way for consumers to design their own custom-fit jeans.

Customers of indiDenim—whose [parent company](#) runs a like-minded site for custom-made [dress shirts](#)—begin by selecting from among several jeans cuts, including slim and relaxed fits. They then choose the fabric, rise and styles they'd like for the pants' fly, leg, hem, pocket and overall treatment. Women's options at indiDenim include super-low to high-rises, multiple leg styles and more than 30 different back pocket options; men can make their jean a basic five-pocket or add carpenter styling. Both sexes, meanwhile, can select sanding and distressing treatments. Next, customers answer a series of straightforward questions about their body—including their height, weight, inseam and descriptions of their overall shape—and indiDenim's proprietary algorithms spit out sizing specs that are used to create completely customized patterns. Without any human intervention, those patterns are sent to the company's manufacturing partners, where the fabric is cut by computerized cutters and sewn in highly specialized sewing lines.

From there, indiDenim washes, quality-checks, packages and ships the garment directly to the customer in about four weeks. Perhaps most interesting of all, indiDenim allows customers to return custom items for any reason, and makes adjustments at no extra charge. In the site's Design Vault, meanwhile, consumers can buy, browse, rate and comment on jeans designed by other members of the indiDenim community. Pricing from California-based indiDenim begins at USD 145, including free shipping worldwide. Given the prevalence of jeans, seems to us there's room for more than one contender in this market. One to emulate on a localized or niche basis?

Website: www.indidenim.com

Contact: service@indicustom.com

Spotted by: Susanna Haynie



Vermont school builds net-zero field house

If ever there was a compelling reason for a school to build sustainably, it's the one faced by Vermont's [Putney School](#) not long ago. Namely, warmer winters resulting from global climate change had reduced the cold-weather sports opportunities the private boarding school traditionally relied on, leaving it with a sudden need for gym space for the first time. Its solution? A net-zero field house that's on track to be one of only five platinum LEED-certified school buildings in the nation.

By definition, net-zero energy buildings generate as much energy as they consume over the course of a year, and that's at the heart of the Putney School's 16,800-square-foot athletics building, which opened its doors last fall. Designed by [Maclay Architects](#), the super-insulated, super-energy-efficient building uses the sun for its heating and electricity needs. Specifically, 16 sun-tracking photovoltaic solar panels power the building, feeding excess energy during sunny months back into the grid and earning the school 6 cents per kilowatt-hour as they do. In the winter, the building draws energy out again, but in an average year, it's expected to do better than break even on its energy use. Other green features of the USD 6 million field house, include low-water fixtures and composting toilets, a white reflective roof and local materials such as site-harvested wood.

"We want to show the world that net-zero energy technology for public buildings exists right now," explains Putney School Director Emily Jones. "It's time to move net-zero energy buildings from the theoretical realm into reality." Indeed, we couldn't have said it better ourselves. An [eco-iconic](#) innovation to emulate at the earliest opportunity—particularly for schools with sustainability on the curriculum. (Related: [Green school with an entrepreneurial bent.](#))

Website: www.putneyfieldhouse.org

Contact: info@putneyschool.org

Spotted by: Rick Noyes



Auto-snapping camera documents wearer's life

It's been a while since we've reported on the [life caching trend](#), but a new innovation recently caught our eye: a wearable digital camera that automatically takes photos throughout the day as a way of recording the wearer's life.

Based on Microsoft Research SenseCam technology, [Vicon Revue](#) was originally intended as a research tool aimed at helping people with Alzheimer's disease. Users typically wear the 6.5-by-7-by-1.7-cm camera on a cord around their neck, but it can also be clipped to clothing. Among its features are an accelerometer, a compass and a fish-eye lens to ensure that nearly everything in the wearer's view is captured. The device can operate either on a timer—taking photos every 30 seconds—or it can be set to take photos automatically when triggered by internal sensors, which can detect body heat as well as changes in temperature, light and motion. Along with images, the camera also stores a time-stamped log file that can be enriched with GPS traces. Its 1GB of flash memory can typically hold around 30,000 images, or approximately 6 days' worth of capture.

The Revue will soon be available online from Vicon, its UK-based maker, for research purposes; pricing will be GBP 500. Eventually, however, Vicon hopes to sell a version designed for use by consumers. One to partner with and help make that happen? (Related: [Camera-bikes broadcast offline life to Flickr](#) — [More paparazzi for the masses](#) — [Wearable device tracks fitness data 24/7.](#))

Website: www.viconrevue.com

Contact: info@viconrevue.com

Spotted by: Cecilia Biemann