

# Springwise newsletter | 10 January 2008

We're back—happy new year! In this first newsletter of 2008, we bring you a Bulgarian basketball seeking crowdfunding, books in bite-sized portions, a toy house that demonstrates sustainable technologies, the beginnings of a crowdmanaged clothing brand (yes, crowds are currently a fertile source of new business concepts), and more. Our next edition is due on 16 January 2008. In the meantime, check out our daily postings on [www.springwise.com](http://www.springwise.com), send us your [tips](#), and please don't forget to [tell your friends and colleagues](#) about us. Much appreciated!



## Your favourites (one last top 10)

Over the holidays, we spent some time looking back by picking our favourites from the new business ideas we covered last year—most of which are still highly relevant for 2008. Since any publication is as much about its readers as its writers and editors (especially if those readers also [contribute](#)), we didn't want to withhold your favourites. So, here we go, in order of most viewed in 2007:

1. [Pay-what-you-want restaurants](#) (Austria, Australia & United States)
2. [Craigslist meets YouTube—online video classifieds](#) (United States)
3. [Soft drinks for the undecided](#) (Singapore)
4. [A Blind Call—accidental charity](#) (Belgium)
5. [Customized daily vitamin packs](#) (United States)
6. [Motorcycle taxis rescue stranded business travelers](#) (The Netherlands)
7. [A bank run for and by street kids](#) (India)
8. [Free photocopies for students](#) (Japan)
9. [Chichi cupcake delivery](#) (United Kingdom)
10. [Fresh & frozen gourmet baby food](#) (United States & Sweden)

For the above and so much [more](#), many thanks to our talented writers—Katherine Noyes, Mark Ingebretsen and Anne Shelton—and our invaluable network of [Springspotters](#), who supply us with a neverending stream of smart & promising new business ideas!



# Steel-toes and tool belts for women

We've covered [products](#) for female DIY-ers before, as well as women-only construction [crews](#). [Tomboy Trades](#), a Canadian start-up, is tackling yet another aspect of the male-dominated construction industry: what to wear.

After leaving a corporate job at IBM, Tomboy Trades' founder Marissa McTasney enrolled in a skilled-trades course for women, with the aim of starting her own construction company. She spotted a gap in the market on her first day of school. When she and her classmates went out to buy work boots, she was surprised to find they only came in tan and black: men's shoes in female sizes. According to salespeople, McTasney wasn't the only one disappointed in the limited choice of working gear for women. Not one to pass up an entrepreneurial opportunity, she found a manufacturer in China and developed steel-toe boots in pink, green, blue and red. Matching tool belts, safety glasses and hard hats soon followed, as did retail partnerships with Home Depot and Zellers, a Canadian department store.

Tomboy Trades is now looking for retailers outside Canada, and also mentions that franchising plans are in the works. In a wider context, professional female construction workers and amateur handywomen are still an underserved market. Which means interesting opportunities for entrepreneurs who know how to cater to them. More on creating products and services for women in [trendwatching.com's Female Fever](#) briefing.

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

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

Spotted by: Anthony Pangalos



# Basketball team seeks crowdfunding

Undoubtedly inspired by British [MyFootballClub](#), which assembled 50,000 thousand football fans to buy a British club, a professional Bulgarian basketball team is now looking for sponsorship from a crowd of fans.

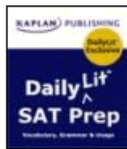
While MyFootballClub first collected enough money from its members and then selected a team to buy, ten-year-old [Start](#) is taking a pro-active approach by asking basketball fans to fund an existing team. Start is seeking a minimum of 10,000 people—in Bulgaria and elsewhere—who are willing sign up before May 1st, 2008, pledging to pay BGN 40 (EUR 20 / USD 30) each if enough other members register to do the same.

Once the money has been collected, the team will organize a basketball camp and try-outs. Training sessions will be filmed and broadcast on [nashiaotbor.com](#), allowing crowdfunders to help spot and vote for talented new players. Akin to MyFootballClub's setup, members will virtually manage the team, voting online on key decisions concerning players and coaches. Will be interesting to see how this one pans out, and how many other sports teams start looking for crowds of benefactors!

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

Contact: [pscstart@nashiaotbor.com](mailto:pscstart@nashiaotbor.com)

Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen

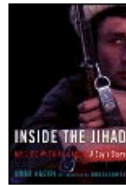


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# Books in bite-sized portions

It's a well-known fact that people today read far fewer books than they used to, drawn instead by other media that promise more interaction and immediate gratification. [DailyLit](#) aims to combine the best of both worlds by delivering great books in bite-sized chunks via email and RSS.

Launched in May, DailyLit offers more than 500 classic and contemporary works free of charge along with a smaller assortment of Pay-Per-Read titles, most of which are priced below USD 5. Books are sent by email or RSS in individual instalments on the days and times selected by the reader—for example: every weekday at 7:45 a.m.—and each instalment is small enough to be read in less than 5 minutes. Enthusiastic readers who finish an instalment and want to continue reading (imagine yourself on the slow train to work) can get the next one or more immediately. DailyLit's books can be read anywhere a reader receives email, including on a PDA, Blackberry or iPhone, and discussion forums are available. DailyLit is now adding titles in German, French, Italian and Spanish, and through a partnership with Berlitz, it offers bite-sized Spanish lessons as well. The company uses no advertising, basing its revenue model on fee-sharing instead. By August it had more than 100,000 readers.

Susan Danziger, cofounder of Mamaroneck, N.Y.-based DailyLit, explains: "We got the idea for DailyLit after the New York Times serialized several classic books in special supplements a few summers ago. We read books that we had always meant to read because each chapter became part of our daily routine of reading the newspaper. The only thing we do more consistently than read the paper is read email. And voila! We put together a first version and began reading the classics."

We've already covered [books written specifically for mobile phones](#) in Japan, as well as Swedish [Bokilur](#), which offers audiobooks in a similar fashion. Today, of course, there's also Amazon's [Kindle](#) device, along with [Mobifusion](#)'s content delivery to cell phones and [DearReader.com](#), which sends only the first few chapters of a book as an enticement to get the rest at a library or bookstore. But with its super simple delivery—no tech wizardry involved, no programs to install, no extra gadget to buy and carry—and growing range of content, DailyLit seems to be on to something, and could be well worth emulating or partnering with in niche and local markets. (More on serving up products and service in easy-to-digest, easy-to-afford morsels in trendwatching.com's 8 trends for 2008: [Snack Culture](#).)

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

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Spotted by: Emma Crameri



# Crowdf(o)unding an eco clothing brand

We've already highlighted many examples of the [customer-made](#) trend, in which consumers are given a chance to contribute to a product's design or features. Now [nvohk](#) (pronounced 'invoke') is taking the notion a step further to create a crowdfunded, eco-friendly clothing company that's directed in large part by consumers.

Launched just before the holidays, Los Angeles-based nvohk aims to create the first community-managed, environmentally conscious, surf-inspired clothing company. It is currently recruiting a minimum of 20,000 members (capped at 40,000), each of whom will contribute USD 50 in exchange for the chance to co-develop the nvohk brand. Members will make major business decisions including logo, web and product design along with advertising; they'll also receive 35 percent of nvohk's net profits in the form of points that can be redeemed to purchase products, as well as 25 percent off all nvohk goods. nvohk, meanwhile, will donate another 10 percent of its net profits to environmental organizations selected by its members.

Brendan Lynch, nvohk's president, explains: "Consumers are concerned with the environment and want to be associated with brands that are too. With nvohk, members have the opportunity to make critical decisions that not only affect the direction of the brand, but also make a positive impact on the world around them."

nvohk has just started to recruit members, with only 400 or so signed up by early January, so it's still too early to tell whether it will meet its target number. Assuming it does, however, this will test the power of the crowds on a new level. Joint corporate decision-making by tens of thousands of people should make for an interesting ride; on the other hand, with a common interest in surfing and a shared concern for the environment, they just may have what it takes to make it fly. One to watch!

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

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Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen



# Sustainable living, miniaturized

One day, many new full-sized homes may resemble the Power House. The USD 149.95 miniature model from science-kit distributor [Thames & Kosmos](http://www.thamesandkosmos.com) comes with a working green house, solar panels, a wind mill and a desalinization system. The kit's aim: teach children what it's like to live off the grid, and get them (and their parents) to "consider a life without fossil fuel." To make the experience more realistic, the user manual incorporates a storyline about high-tech pioneers inhabiting a small island who must make use of limited resources to survive. The 70 experiments and 20 building projects that form part of the kit mimic the tasks the kit's fictional pioneers must perform.

As environmental awareness becomes a dominant theme, it's no surprise that green-tech learning toys such as the Power House are emerging. One popular example: in 2006, Horizon Fuel Cell Technologies, a Singapore-based maker of hydrogen fuel cells for consumer products, debuted the USD 115 [H-racer](http://www.horizonfuelcell.com), a fuel-cell powered toy car that comes with a solar-powered hydrogen generating station and needs only water to run. The H-racer won kudos from Time and BusinessWeek, and spawned a number of competitors.

Does that mean there's a major entrepreneurial opportunity here? Science kits will always occupy a niche within the toy industry, and those demonstrating alternative fuels and other eco-friendly technologies could stake a place alongside the rockets, microscopes and chemistry sets that are the mainstay of that market. That said, designing and manufacturing kits like the Power House or H-racer requires considerable technical know-how, not to mention capital. Which makes wholesaling or online and mail-order retailing a faster and less costly alternative to profitability. Another opportunity: move away from the kits and focus on pre-fab (doll) houses that demonstrate green technology without requiring painstaking assembly by their junior owners. Case in point: Thames & Kosmos started selling a build-your-own fuel cell car kit in 2003, but it received just a fraction of the attention that was lavished on the H-racer. Get started now to prepare for Christmas 2008!

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

Contact: [products@thamesandkosmos.com](mailto:products@thamesandkosmos.com)



# Bungee jump for high-end thrill-seekers

It's a superlative world out there for premium-minded consumers, where nothing but the best, the most and the highest will do. Picking up on that last notion quite literally, the [Macau Tower](#) now offers the world's highest commercial bungee jump, sure to deliver a superlative dose of adrenalin to even the worldliest experience seeker.

The jump platform at Macau Tower is a full 233 meters high, placing the inaugural jump at its December 2006 launch into the Guinness World Records. Hardy jumpers who make the leap experience about 4 to 5 seconds of freefall—at speeds of up to 200 kilometres per hour—before stretching the 50 meter bungee cord nearly four times its unloaded length and rebounding at approximately 30 meters above the ground. The tower uses a guide cable system, allowing bungee jumpers to safely experience a few rebounds before slowly landing onto a specially designed airbag. Pricing is MOP 1,088 (USD 135 / EUR 92), which includes a certificate, membership card and souvenir T-shirt.

Jumping from Macau Tower is certainly not for the faint of heart, but it is tailor-made for thrill-seeking consumers who want to experience the ultimate versions of everything. It's also further evidence that "best," "most" and "highest" can always be done one better. Success, thy name this year is [premiumization!](#) ;-)

Website: [www.macautower.com.mo/eng/adventure](http://www.macautower.com.mo/eng/adventure)

Contact: [ajhackett@macautower.com.mo](mailto:ajhackett@macautower.com.mo)

Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen

# Gift card for healthcare expenses



Some 47 million Americans, or 16 percent of the population, do not have health insurance, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's last count, and that number is on the rise. Little wonder, then, that Pennsylvania insurer Highmark recently rolled out what appears to be the nation's first prepaid gift card designed specifically for healthcare expenses.

Launched in November, the [Healthcare Gift Card](#) can be stocked with anywhere between USD 25 and USD 5,000 and used to cover expenses including co-pays at doctor's offices and pharmacies; dental care, including braces and teeth whitening; vision care, including eye exams and prescription sunglasses; memberships at health clubs; and elective procedures such as Lasik and cosmetic surgery. Providers must simply accept Visa debit cards in order for the Healthcare Gift Card to work. The cost of the card is USD 4.95 plus shipping and handling, and a maintenance fee of USD 1.50 per month is imposed beginning in the ninth month after the card is purchased, for as long as a balance remains. Corporate orders are available as well.

It remains to be seen what changes, if any, the upcoming U.S. presidential election will bring for the nation's uninsured, but in the meantime, a prepaid card makes a great deal of sense. In addition to the obvious benefits for uninsured consumers, such cards could be a great branding opportunity for pharmacies and other health-related organizations, which could offer them under their own names much the way retailers already offer traditional gift cards today. Of course, the United States is not the only nation without universal healthcare—also one to bring to other parts of the world?

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Spotted by: Susanna Haynie