

Springwise newsletter | 4 April 2008

Another week, another selection of smart new business and marketing concepts from around the world. Uncovered by our spotters this week: cell phone coaching by teenagers, paparazzi for the unfamous, a career sampling service, and more. Our next edition is due on 9 April 2008. 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!



A status story for spinach

We've written about product life stories before—identifiers that link a commodity to its origin. The two examples we previously featured were for organic [bananas](#) and fair-trade [coffee](#). Which makes sense, since consumers who pay a premium for organic or fair-trade products are often more interested in background information about the products they consume.

Which is why we were pleased to spot Iglo's [Woher kommt Ihr Spinat](#) program. Iglo, a European market leader in the frozen foods segment, recently added tracking codes to their packages of ordinary, non-premium spinach. Consumers can type in the code on Iglo's website and see exactly which farm their creamed spinach came from. Details displayed online include a family photo and a blurb about the farmer (Claus Bernsmann, for example, is 39 years old, has three children and has been farming for Iglo since 1990). Which provides consumers with a story they're likely to share with family and friends.

Since Iglo and other F&B brands already keep track of this type of data, it's a fairly easy way to add a sense of transparency and authenticity to mainstream products. The brands only need to give consumers access to part of an existing database, and display the resulting information in an appealing way. For many more examples of how smart brands are tapping into consumers' increasing demand for transparency and authenticity, check out trendwatching.com's current briefing about the shift from brands telling a story, to brands helping consumers share [status stories](#).

Website: www.iglo.de

Spotted by: RK



Cellphone workshops by teenage teachers

While you may never be too old to learn, when it comes to gadgets, you can never be too young to teach. A Dutch initiative is taking advantage of kids' innate cell phone proficiency by training them as 'phone coaches' and getting them to transfer their skills to older users.

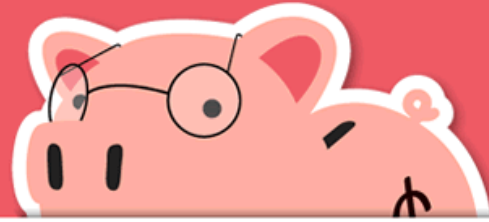
[Bellendoejezo](#)—which roughly translates to “this is how you make a call”—organizes cell phone workshops that cover topics such as using predictive text, creating contact groups, enabling Bluetooth and exploring mobile internet. Not all of the students' students are equally advanced, though, so sometimes they'll stick to the basics, like locking a phone's keyboard, sending a text message and using voicemail.

A group of VMBO students (preparatory middle-level vocational education for students aged 12–16) was trained to work as phone coaches. The program's goal is to improve their social skills and self-esteem, and give them access to corporate environments they might otherwise not be exposed to. Bellendoejezo is aimed at the corporate market, and charges up to EUR 50 per person for 60-minute workshops. Clients so far have included law firms, banks and an energy company. (Related: [Teaching people to use their feature-rich phones.](#))

Seems like a relatively easy to launch (non-profit) project that benefits everyone involved. One to copy to other parts of the world? Students with an entrepreneurial bent, meanwhile—those that have already been charging their parents for computer and phone tutorials—will no doubt spot the business opportunity here and start up their own coaching services ;-)

Website: www.bellendoejezo.com

Contact: bellendoejezo@live.nl



Saving with a social twist

Consumer credit is ubiquitous and the notion of saving up for something is almost foreign. But it's an essential step toward regaining control over spending, and [SmartyPig](#) wants to help.

Iowa-based SmartyPig offers a safe, secure way for consumers to save towards a specific goal—a wedding, remodeling project or vacation, for example—and it adds a dash of social networking and added incentives to speed up the process. Users begin using the free service by creating a profile on SmartyPig and establishing a savings account and goal amount—anywhere between USD 250 and USD 100,000. (SmartyPig's banking partner is 115-year-old, FDIC-insured West Bank, which has assets of more than USD 1.3 billion.) SmartyPig, in turn, suggests a monthly contribution in order to meet the savings goal by the time it's needed, and each month it deducts whatever amount the user chooses from their existing checking account or other funding source and puts it into the SmartyPig account.

To enlist the help of family and friends, users can choose to make their account public, enabling those they know to help them meet their goal; they can also put a SmartyPig widget on their MySpace or Facebook page to enlist the whole world's help. SmartyPig members can contribute to each other's accounts for free; to contribute via credit card, the fee is 2.9 percent. Once users reach their goal, they can receive their savings plus 4.30 percent (APY) interest on the SmartyPig MasterCard debit card, or they can get it plus interest and additional savings of up to 5 percent on a gift card from some of the country's top retailers, including Amazon.com, Best Buy, Staples and Marriott.

SmartyPig just launched in February, with plans for a major publicity campaign to begin this month, but it was already awarded "Best of the Web" by NetBanker in March. It's open just to US consumers, however. Time to bring this concept to the credit-laden community near you!

(Related: [Layaway is back.](#))

Website: www.smartypig.com

Contact: support@smartypig.com

Spotted by: Sarah Johnson

Customizing IKEA



While [ikeahacker](#) has been around for a few years, offering IKEA fans a platform to share their home-made hacks to the Swedish giant's products, not every consumer wants to go the DIY route.

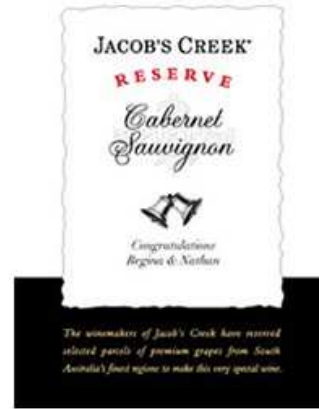
A new Swedish company calculated that out of IKEA's millions of customers, more than a few are willing to plunk down some cash to order smart, ready-made additions to their flat-pack furniture. [Parts of Sweden](#) currently offers add-ons to six of IKEA's most popular product lines, from various doors for Expedit units to wine racks for Ivar shelving. (Both shown above.)

Two years ago, we featured a similar company—[Bemz](#), which is still going strong—that sells removable, washable slipcovers for IKEA's sofas and armchairs. What we remarked about Bemz also applies to Parts of Sweden: while mass class products definitely have their advantages, most customers are eager to add a personal touch to their living quarters. There's money to be made by feeding, and feeding off of, behemoths like IKEA.

Website: www.partsosweden.se

Contact: service@partsosweden.se

Spotted by: Frida Berglund



Free, personalized bottle labels

The personalization trend shows no sign of abating, and companies far and wide continue to step up with ever-new ways to let consumers customize their [tea](#), their [cereal](#) and their [Fruit Roll-Ups](#)—among many others. Now spirits maker [Pernod Ricard](#) has come up with an interesting twist on the idea by giving consumers the ability to order customized product labels alone.

Pernod Ricard's customized label program, which has actually been around for a few years, allows US residents (over 21, of course) to order personalized labels for Chivas Regal, The Glenlivet, Jacob's Creek, Kahlua, Mumm Napa and Wild Turkey Russell's Reserve. What's interesting is that rather than offering custom label options as part of a larger product order for the drinks themselves, such as what [myJones](#) does, Pernod Ricard lets customers order just labels, and at no charge. An assortment of styles are available for each brand, including holiday, wedding and sailing themes, with room for up to seven lines of text. Consumers can then affix the labels over the original ones on bottles they obtained elsewhere; up to 5 labels can be ordered per e-mail address.

By separating the label offering from orders for the core product, Pernod Ricard achieves a number of desirable ends in one easy step. Not only does it reduce the associated shipping costs and broaden the audience that will be interested in engaging with the brand, it also gains the tremendous goodwill associated with giving away something for free. [Free love](#) is attractive enough, but when it's personalized? It doesn't get much better than that!

Website: www.yourgiftlabel.com

Contact: www.yourgiftlabel.com/contact.php

Spotted by: Lyuba Stevasarova



Academic credit for McDonald's employees

It's long been known that job experience can rival (or even surpass) formal education for imparting important skills, and recently the UK officially recognized that fact by allowing McDonald's to grant its own qualification to employees.

The fast-food giant is one of just three employers given such power by the UK's Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in January—the others were Flybe and Network Rail—and that month it began piloting a Level 3 'Basic Shift Managers' course for employees that can count toward A-levels or advanced diplomas. The programme, which will be broken into credits, covers everything McDonald's managers need to know for the day-to-day running of a McDonald's restaurant, from basic operational requirements to finance, marketing and HR.

University admissions tutors have reportedly balked at the new program, but ultimately the hope is that courses like it will create a better-skilled workforce. "It is going to be a tough course, but once you have got a qualification in management you can probably go anywhere," Prime Minister Gordon Brown told GMTV. "I think that is the important thing, companies prepared to train people up which they weren't doing before, in the way that we want them to do, in a far greater number, so that people have the qualifications for the future." The government hopes other employers will follow suit. One for other chains to emulate?

Website: www.mcdcareers.co.uk

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Spotted by: Junaid Kazi



Mass customization is more than a choice of skins for an iPod or a personalized logo for a Toyota Scion. In a bid to create an active community around [OpenMoko](#), the mobile phone's Taiwanese manufacturer first published its software. This allowed developers to tweak it as they wished. Releasing open-source software is fairly common these days. However, OpenMoko broke new ground when it published the 3D drafting files for the phone's case. The latter move lets anyone who knows how to work with CAD alter the case's design.

By releasing the software and case design files, OpenMoko hopes to generate a passionate community of developers who will create a lengthy list of add-on applications for the phone, as well as innovative designs for its housing. The result will be features and design options that no phone manufacturer could hope to create on its own. By going well beyond the norms of mass customization, the company will also jump start a cottage industry of independent customizers for its phones.

The takeaway here is threefold. Firstly, if you're so inclined, here's a ripe opportunity to enter the mobile phone manufacturing business on the cheap. Secondly, OpenMoko's business model—namely open-sourcing software and hardware files—is one that other start-ups and established manufacturers might well emulate. The products might just as easily be alarm clocks or toaster ovens. And, finally, the ease with which phone cases can be created using 3D printers heralds a day when many products will be produced on the spot, tailored inside and out to a customer's preferences. Someday a printer vending machine might even let consumers choose a product design and have it built within minutes. When that happens, we'll be sure to let you know ;-)
(Related: [Build your own mobile phone](#) — [New phone company, made in Silicon Valley](#) — [Affordable phones, made to order.](#))

Website: www.openmoko.com

Contact: contact@openmoko.com

Spotted by RK



Paparazzi for the rest of us

Being photographed by the paparazzi was once an (often dubious) honour bestowed only on the rich and famous, but today a new service is bringing the possibility to every consumer.

Upon request, New York City-based [Methodlazz](#) will send an anonymous photographer to surreptitiously capture select moments in a consumer's life and immortalize them with a portfolio of professionally produced photos. To arrange the service, the consumer provides a self photograph ahead of time along with details of their schedule and any specific emotion, mood or theme they hope to capture. Methodlazz's photographer will then show up at some undisclosed point during the day and photograph the subject walking through the streets or going about their daily business, without posing or artifice. For customers, the final result is a new perspective on how they appear to others as well as tangible documentation of how they lived their lives at that point in time—in short, the ultimate in [gravanity](#)-stroking. Pricing is based on Methodlazz's time to travel, photograph, edit and produce the photographs, ranging from USD 300 to USD 400 per hour.

Founded late last year, Methodlazz already accepts assignments worldwide, but it also hopes to expand its presence accordingly. There are consumers around the globe waiting for their taste of fame and immortality—one to partner with and bring to an area near you?

Website: www.methodlazz.com

Spotted by: Giulia Cuccolini



When it comes to choosing a career path, it's one thing to think about the job from the outside, but quite another to experience it day to day. Back in 2006 we wrote about [Vocation Vacations](#), which helps career-changers test out different waters, and now UK-based [Figuring Out](#) offers a combination of career coaching and trial work experience to achieve a similar end.

Launched earlier this month by the team behind Striding Out, a support network for entrepreneurs, UK-based Figuring Out aims to help people at all stages of their work life figure out what they want for their next career move. The coaching part of Figuring Out's service focuses on clarifying career goals, mastering interview techniques and learning new job search strategies, among other objectives. Such career coaching programmes can come in packages of three or more one-hour sessions in person or by phone or e-mail, and are priced on average between GBP 80 and GBP 100 per hour. The work experience portion of Figuring Out's services, however, is where clients can begin testing out their options. Tapping into its Striding Out network of businesses, Figuring Out identifies and connects clients with flexible, part-time work placement opportunities that can provide the right type of work experience for their needs. The work experience service is charged at an additional fee, depending on the range and type of placements required. The result, however, is a realistic, hands-on feel for what each career possibility would really be like.

Figuring Out currently operates just in London, but it's in the process of signing up licensee coaches across the UK to take on the brand in their local area. The company also plans to develop its work experience brokerage service into a short-term recruitment agency, Managing Director Heather Wilkinson says, and is already forming partnerships with full-time recruitment agencies to help secure full-time employment when clients are ready to take that step. One to partner with in an area near you?

Website: www.figuringout.co.uk

Contact: info@stridingout.co.uk



Cufflinked gravanity

As our regular readers know, we've covered quite a few examples of gravanity,* from [children's books](#) to [personal requiems](#). So when one of our spotters presented yet another example of a business that's using customization to stand out, we couldn't resist. What's getting the gravanity treatment this time? Cuff links. Created by [Eleven Forty Co.](#), the links are individually modelled on photographs of a child, a loved one, a pet or a famous role model. They're available in a range of precious metals and are priced from GBP 225. When they're not holding a shirt cuff together, the two halves cleverly snap together to create a miniature bust.

This isn't the studio's first foray into high-end personalization. A few years ago, Eleven Forty Co. introduced [Opus](#), an uber-premium football table that's made to order. Customers pick their teams, which can feature friends, family, celebrities or real football players. Each player's head is cast in 3D from a photograph supplied by the customer. One to keep an eye on if you're looking for inspiration for a customized product to bring to market!

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Spotted by: Flemming Birch