

Springwise newsletter | 2 September 2009

Spotted for you this week: a sampling cafe for women in Tokyo, a Twitter-sourced libretto for London's Royal Opera House, subscriptions to greeting cards hand-made in New York, and more. Our next edition is due on 9 September 2009.



Eco houses snap together using Lego-style blocks

Eco houses may not yet be the norm, but there's no doubt green-minded consumers have increasing options for making one their own. Last year we wrote about [FreeGreen's downloadable green house plans](#), and now a German company has come up with a modular design based on Lego-style blocks that consumers can put together themselves.

The [HIB-System](#) is an eco-friendly home design that's soundproof, insulated, energy-efficient and structurally sound without the use of any chemicals or toxins. Based on modular blocks created from naturally cut timber, local Black Forest pine and insulation materials including wood chips, clay, mussel shells and pea shingle gravel, HIB-System homes can be assembled quickly by consumers themselves or with limited help. The blocks, which weigh no more than 25 kg each, are easily handled without the need for expensive lifting devices and lock into each other in Lego fashion. The resulting construction is earthquake- and storm-proof even at three storeys tall, and a concrete floor can be added for even greater strength and stability. Interior and exterior walls can be finished in plaster, wood, brick or metal finishes; they are also mould-proof, and the insulation used achieves energy-efficiency levels 40 percent higher than those attained using standard insulation materials, HIB says. Consumers who use the HIB-System can either design their own houses or choose from an array of models pre-designed by professional architects. For construction, HIB can recommend local, certified partners to provide assistance, or consumers can do it themselves using HIB's pre-planned system whereby components are cut to size and numbered in the factory prior to delivery.

Meißenheim-based HIB is currently seeking partners for planning, building and sales throughout Germany. Alternatively, how about being the first to bring the concept to eco-minded consumers in your neck of the woods...?

Website: www.hib-system.com

Contact: info@hib-system.com

Spotted by: Alexander Maurer



Tokyo cafe puts samples on the menu

Two years ago, we wrote about Tokyo's [Sample Lab](#), which connected brands with consumers by letting them test and take away new products. The concept was quickly picked up in other parts of the world. Now, the original Sample Lab has reopened as one-of-a-kind marketing cafe targeting Japanese women in their 20s and 30s with free samples in exchange for their visits and views, in a relaxed and informal setting.

Located in Shibuya, [LCAFE](#) is well-placed to attract trendsetting shoppers. To take part, women register by mobile phone, supplying basic details about themselves such as their age, marital status and where they live. With every order of food or drinks, they receive an L Coin, which can be redeemed for free samples at the cafe's sample bar. In a true Tokyo touch, a bar-code on members' mobile phones allows Sample Lab to track who got which sample. After the visit, members are asked to share their views via an electronic survey, in exchange for more tokens.

Samples on offer range from food and drinks to skincare products. Besides letting brands test the waters by getting consumers to try new products, LCAFE also functions as a platform for experience-based marketing. Last month, as part of a promotion for Toshiba's new Biblio e-reader handset, the cafe printed promotional images on tables, napkins and staff uniforms. A Biblio was placed on every table, alongside a menu created specially for Toshiba.

The enterprise is proving popular. Since it opened its doors two months ago, LCAFE has already registered 2,000 customers (or, as our sister-site would say, [trysumers](#)). Operating a hybrid between a regular cafe and a sampling venue makes sense from a business point of view, since it creates two streams of income. The indirect approach is also likely to attract women who wouldn't want to be seen waiting in line for freebies. LCAFE has plans to expand into other Japanese cities and to eventually operate worldwide as a market research firm focused on young women. One to launch locally, or to reproduce for men? (Related: [Tryvertising lab expands globally](#) — [Vending machine dispenses free samples](#) — [Sampling salons for cosmetics](#).)

Website: www.lcafe.jp

Contact: contactlcafe@lcafe.jp

Spotted by: [WSJ](#) via Raymond Kollau



In Jakarta, healthy meals at food carts for kids

According to 2008 figures quoted by Mercy Corps, 11 million Indonesian children suffer from malnutrition. In the slums of Jakarta, many parents give their children a few rupiah for dinner, which they spend filling up on sweets and junk food from street vendors, leading to anaemia rates of over 50 percent in some areas of the city.

A new social enterprise by Mercy Corps is taking a pragmatic approach to improving children's food intake. The [Healthy Street Foods Project](#) has funded a fleet of food stalls and is providing them to selected street-vendors around the city. Worth USD 600 each, these are no ordinary food stalls. Known as Kedai Balitaku ('My Child's Cafe'), they serve nutritional food at low prices. Each cart comes equipped with a hand-washing station, and they have been designed by [Saatchi & Saatchi](#) to be both appealing and accessible to young children, displaying food at child's-eye-level and featuring colourful pictures of 'superkids'. Dishes served include bubur ayam, a rice, chicken and coconut milk porridge served with vegetables for IDR 2,000 (USD 0.20). One bowl satisfies one third of a child's daily calorific needs.

The scheme has already proved popular with children, some of whom are starting to text orders for delivery. But they're not the only ones to benefit. The hand-picked local vendors now own thriving micro-businesses which, according to Mercy Corps, started turning a profit in their second month. It shows the sustainable progress that can be made by empowering local entrepreneurs to combat problems in their own communities. (Related: [Food store for kids](#) — [Happy healthy meals.](#))

Website: www.mercycorps.org/countries/indonesia/15689

Contact: www.mercycorps.org/contact

Spotted by: Susanna Haynie



Opera house uses Twitter to crowdsource a libretto

Micro-blogging service [Twitter](#) and London's [Royal Opera House](#) may not be seen as birds of a feather. Founded hundreds of years apart, one represents a stronghold of traditional high culture, the other the fizzing surface of contemporary communication. But the tendency of culture to respond to new technology should never be underestimated—over the past three weeks the ROH has been using Twitter to crowdsource the libretto for a new "people's opera".

"The Twitter Opera" is to be performed as part of the ROH's [Deloitte Ignite Festival](#) at the beginning of September. The libretto will consist entirely of 140-character tweets that the ROH has received from members of the public since the project was launched. It will be set to original music composed by Helen Porter, along with some more familiar classics. Simply put, the goal is to help attract a wider audience. Alison Duthie of the ROH summed this up: "It's the people's opera and the perfect way for everyone to become involved with the inventiveness of opera as the ultimate form of storytelling." The plot, which is now complete, begins—fittingly—with a man being kidnapped by a flock of birds.

We've featured a number of Twitter-friendly endeavours on Springwise, from [package tracking](#) to [wine tasting](#). This pioneering effort by a cultural icon shows that there are equally novel opportunities in the arts. In the collective imagination, great ideas can take flight—and can also be a valuable feather in one's publicity cap. For more on how organisations are using Twitter to converse and create with their audience, check out [trendwatching.com's briefing on foreverism](#). (Related: [Wiki publisher for collaborative writing](#) — [Publisher hopes crowds will spot next bestseller](#) — [Live opera on the silver screen](#).)

Website: www.royaloperahouse.wordpress.com

Twitter: www.twitter.com/youropera

Contact: www.roh.org.uk/contact

Spotted by: Jim Stewart

TALENT



Tung Ly
Bachelors, Biomedical Engineering
Tulane University



Semmes Walmsley
Bachelors, Family And Consumer ...
University of Mississippi



Shira Teperow
Bachelors, History
University of Wisconsin - Madison

COMPANIES



Make It Right Foundation
Non Profit, Executive Office
New Orleans, LA



Compuware
Computer Software, Information ...
Detroit, MI



IDEO
Design, Consulting
Palo Alto, CA

OPPORTUNITIES



Application Consultant (Presal...
Cincom Systems, Inc.
Shanghai Shi (Shanghai Shi), Sha...



Public Safety Ranger
Downtown Development District
New Orleans, LA



Risk Analyst
Receivables Exchange
New Orleans, LA

Social recruiting site bridges Facebook & LinkedIn

Smart recruiters are increasingly recognizing that resumes just aren't enough to predict success in a job. Much the way [MedRecruit](#) incorporates lifestyle into the hiring picture and [CareerTours](#) uses video storytelling, [KODA](#) is a new site that aims to provide social recruiting capabilities that are "more professional than Facebook but more personal than LinkedIn."

Launched in late May, KODA allows emerging talent and smart companies to go beyond the resume or traditional job posting with employer and employee profiles that allow both sides of the hiring equation to get to know each other. Currently free to use during its beta period, the site allows users to post photos, PDFs and videos along with the information about their education, skills and experience that would normally be part of a hiring profile. Rather than providing long lists of opportunities, KODA focuses instead on matching talent with the right career and the right organization. Toward that end, it uses a recommendation engine to suggest connections that may be worth exploring. Specific opportunities get pulled from employers' internal career pages for highlighting on the site, and companies can also give prospective employees a "look inside" their organization. Illustrative "compatibility bars," meanwhile, indicate the compatibility between an individual and an opportunity or organization based on historical information, profile content and other criteria. As users look through KODA, they can send messages or bookmark profiles for future viewing. They can also "wave" at a particular organization that they would like to stay in contact with, causing a notification to be sent to that employer.

Based in San Francisco—but with another branch to serve the transformation currently going on in New Orleans—KODA is also planning to add more functionality in the near future, including additional ways to publish opportunities, advanced search capabilities and printable KODA profiles. One to partner with and bring to the hiring front near you...?

Website: www.koda.us

Contact: customerservice@koda.us

Spotted by: Cecilia Biemann



Personalised winning-goal commentary for soccer fans

Most sports fans have probably dreamt of scoring the winning goal for their national team. Now, thanks to a new UK enterprise, [Be A Football Hero](#), football / soccer fans have the chance to hear a true-to-life commentary of that dream game, with themselves in the starring role.

Designed as a gift experience, this product is reminiscent of the [personalised radio shows](#) we featured last year. A key difference, though, is that Be A Football Hero's commentaries can be previewed and ordered within moments. Choosing from a range of options, users select which competition they'd like to play in (World Cup, Champions League, FA Cup or Premiership title game), and then add their name, age, favourite team and the team they want to beat. The automatically generated commentary, featuring professional impressions of top British commentators John Motson, Alan Hansen and Mark Lawrenson, can then be streamed from the site. If they like what they hear, users can order the recording on CD with a personalised greeting card, plus an instant MP3 download, all for GBP 14.99. Commentaries recreate the climax of the game and are approximately two minutes long.

Be A Football Hero was developed by [Voice Express](#), which also sells talking ringtones. In addition to soccer, the company has plans for personalised cricket, snooker, F1, racing and tennis commentaries. Since creating a realistic faux commentary requires knowledge and attention to local details—commentators, teams, lingo—this seems like one to set up for sports fans in your part of the world.

Website: www.beafootballhero.com

Contact: help@beafootballhero.com

Spotted by: Paul Bisceglia



Firefox add-on helps plan trips and find travel deals

Travellers planning a trip can already tap a variety of sites for creating guides and itineraries, including [Triplt](#), [Offbeat Guides](#) and [Tripwolf](#)—to name just a few. Focusing more on travellers' own search process, however—specifically, the time they spend scouring the web for ideas—comes [Glider](#), a Firefox plug-in aimed at organizing all the best results in a single, online place.

Now in invitation-only beta, Brooklyn-based Glider is essentially a digital file that lets travellers keep track of all the interesting ideas they come across while researching and planning a trip. Users begin by downloading the application, causing the Glider icon to appear in their Firefox browser bar. (Currently, Glider works on Firefox 3, but support for Explorer, Safari and Chrome are coming soon, the company says.) When they're surfing the web and come across a hotel, restaurant or photo they want to remember as they make their plans, they need only click the icon and Glider drops down on the right-hand side of the browser. Into that window they can then simply drag and drop whatever it was they wanted to save, creating a neater, more organized alternative to a list of bookmarks. Users can share their trip files with up to four other users, and they can also create a summary travel document PDF for emailing and printing. Perhaps most interesting of all is that Glider tracks deals on hotels relevant to a specific trip and allows users to take advantage of them in a single click.

Through a partnership with [Expedia](#), Glider currently earns revenue from affiliate fees when users click on the deals it presents to book a hotel, according to [TechCrunch](#). Coming soon are deals on flights too, as well as an iPhone application and an “ask around” feature that taps Facebook. Hospitality entrepreneurs: one to get in on—or emulate—early...?

Website: www.glider.com

Contact: talk@glider.com

Spotted by: Carmen Magar



Handmade greeting cards by monthly subscription

For all but the most organized consumers, greeting cards are something that tend to get purchased in a hurry when a special occasion looms. [Jack Cards](#)—which we covered a couple of years ago—uses a prescheduled service to remove some of that haste and help customers get their cards out on time, and now [TOTA Press](#) takes a slightly different approach by offering unique, handmade cards by monthly subscription.

New York-based TOTA's subscription service is essentially a card-of-the-month program whereby subscribers get two copies of a one-time, handmade card sent to their door each month. Photos of each new letterpressed design are posted on TOTA's website on the first of the month along with a description of what inspired it; August's, for example, is based on an Asanoha pattern. The handmade cards are all standard sizes that can be used for any occasion with no extra postage required. Prices range from USD 13 for a trial subscription of one month to USD 140 for a 12-month subscription, amounting to 24 cards in all. Domestic shipping is included in the price of the subscription, but international orders cost an extra USD 2 per month.

In an era when greeting cards are increasingly combined with digital elements—such as in [CD-equipped Burney Cards](#), which we just covered last week—it's interesting to see an offering that takes what's almost the opposite approach, revelling instead in the physical richness and artistry of a handmade card. Reminds us, in fact, of the hand-drawn [A la Carte Maps](#) that we also just recently covered. The world may be digital, everyone may be online, but there's still plenty of room for the handmade, the unique, the personal, the [still-made-here](#) offline design. Combine that with the convenience of home delivery, and you may just cause some pangs of anxiety in the Hallmark boardroom! ;-)

Website: www.totapress.com

Contact: beintouch@totapress.com



Site matches motivation 'buddies' with shared goals

Fitness enthusiasts already know that goals can be much easier to achieve for those with a workout buddy to help them stay motivated. With that premise in mind, [Comotivate](#) aims to help users succeed in attaining a variety of goals by pairing them with motivation 'buddies' who share the same objectives.

Now in beta, Australian Comotivate focuses on collaboration as a route to success in achieving life goals. When users register with the social networking site, they provide information including a key objective they're hoping to achieve—losing weight, for example, or quitting smoking. Comotivate then uses its database to match user profiles, creating team buddies who resemble each other as closely as possible. Those buddies can then create personal pages and set deadlines for achieving their goals. They can also share video, images and encouragement to track their progress and help each other along the way. Inactive users on the free site are "benched" to minimize the number of lurkers and maximize the proportion of engaged, committed people. Users can always change their goals and buddy teams, but when they achieve a set objective—success is simply self-reported—they are awarded a certificate in PDF.

While it's not yet clear what Comotivate's business model will be, it is planning a relaunch at the end of this year, and we'd be surprised if some sort of targeted ad support isn't involved. Comotivate also hopes to translate its site into other languages in the near future, as well as optimizing it for mobile devices. One to try out, partner with, or otherwise get involved in...? (Related: [Community for tracking life experiences](#) — [A public incentive to stick to one's goals](#) — [Nagging service for dieters.](#))

Website: www.comotivate.com.au

Contact: listener@comotivate.com

Spotted by: Edward Baral



Connecting restaurants and bloggers for 'tastecasting'

If vintners can [conduct wine tastings via Twitter](#), it stands to reason that restaurants could do much the same thing to promote their foods. Which is just where [TasteCasting](#) comes in, facilitating the use of social media for taste tests and other promotional events to help restaurateurs get tongues wagging about them throughout the socially networked world.

Ohio-based TasteCasting draws upon teams of socially connected bloggers, Twitterers, Flickr users and YouTubers in cities across North America—there are currently 20 with active teams, and more are already forming. Restaurants, cafes and other food service establishments in any of the cities the company serves can host tasting events at which local team members will "taste, tweet, and then repeat," broadcasting their experience of the restaurant across their social media platforms.

Specifically, TasteCasting teams post stories, videos and pictures of each event to the TasteCasting site, and each team member adds comments and includes links to their blogs, photos and videos on the TasteCasting profile for that establishment. Grand openings, new menu items and special offers can all be publicized using TasteCasting in exchange for just a complimentary tasting and tour. Currently there is no charge to restaurants and no compensation for tasters, but TasteCasting says it may ultimately consider rolling out an advertising profit sharing opportunity for tasters interested in becoming independent agents.

TasteCasting is looking for sponsorship from major suppliers of food products, equipment, supplies and services. Alternatively, could be one to partner with in food-loving cities around the world—starting with, say, Paris...? ;-) (Related: [Foodie podcast highlights curbside cuisine](#) — [Food blogger turned intermediary and purveyor](#) — [Wine tastings via Twitter](#).)

Website: www.tastecasting.com

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Spotted by: Jim Stewart



Fighting poverty through microloan guarantees

We've written about a number of microfinance organizations in recent years, including not just oft-cited [Kiva](#) but also [Wokai](#) and [Jolkona](#). Whereas those ventures all strive to help entrepreneurs in the developing world by facilitating direct microloans and donations, however, California-based nonprofit [United Prosperity](#) is taking a different approach by focusing on providing loan guarantees instead.

A traditional microloan or donation of USD 100 delivers roughly that same amount to the entrepreneur in need, but providing a loan guarantee of the same amount can result in a much larger loan from a local bank, United Prosperity says—as much as USD 666, in this case. How it works: Potential guarantors browse the United Prosperity site, which features a number of prescreened entrepreneurs in developing countries. They then choose one to help, and contribute a loan guarantee of any amount through PayPal. United Prosperity then consolidates the guarantees on multiple loans for the microfinance partner involved and issues a guarantee, which is deposited as collateral with the local bank. With the assurance of that collateral, the bank is then willing to lend funds—the amount depending on the guarantee percentage it requires—to the microfinance institution, which in turn lends to the individual entrepreneur who was supported. The guarantor can track the entrepreneur's progress building their business, and when the entrepreneur repays the loan, the funds are returned to the guarantor's PayPal account. United Prosperity, meanwhile, earns interest on guarantee funds; it's also considering charging its partners a small fee for providing the guarantee.

Now in beta, United Prosperity cites many advantages to providing loan guarantees rather than simple p2p loans: the process allows recipients to develop a credit history, making future loans easier to obtain; it reduces the interest rates banks charge the microfinance institutions involved; and it better manages risk while providing a more scalable model. So far, 111 guarantors have used the site to help 105 entrepreneurs with more than USD 11,000 in guarantees. One to partner with, emulate, or otherwise get involved in...?

Website: www.unitedprosperity.org

Contact: contactus@unitedprosperity.org



All-in-one kits for style-sensitive knitting novices

For some knitwear enthusiasts, the best sweaters, socks and hats are those someone knits for you—perhaps even one of [Golden Hook](#)'s knitting grannies. For others, however, there's just nothing like the gratification of doing it yourself. Enter [Wool and the Gang](#), a Swiss venture that sells all-in-one kits complete with everything that's needed to make a particular knit design.

Fourteen kits comprise Wool and the Gang's do-it-yourself line, each complete with the necessary yarn, a pair of wooden knitting needles, a pattern, a sewing needle and patches. Sweaters, scarves, hats and bags are all among the designs represented, each labelled according to its difficulty level, and a series of video tutorials is even available on the site for those in need of some extra guidance. Peruvian wool and cotton yarn kits are both available in a choice of colours at prices ranging from EUR 55 to EUR 159. Wool and the Gang also sells yarn and ready-made knitwear; its kits are available at Net-a-Porter as well.

While knitting kits aren't new, Wool and the Gang is targeting a specific niche: style-sensitive people who are new to knitting. Its tone and aesthetics clearly play to a crowd that also buys from American Apparel. And there's something satisfying about a kit that includes everything in one convenient package. It's much the same premise that's behind the stylish [Safety Box](#), for example, as well as just about any starter kit under the sun. Pick your style, throw in a little video instruction, and you can tap into a whole new audience.

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Contact: info@woolandthegang.com

Spotted by: Karitas