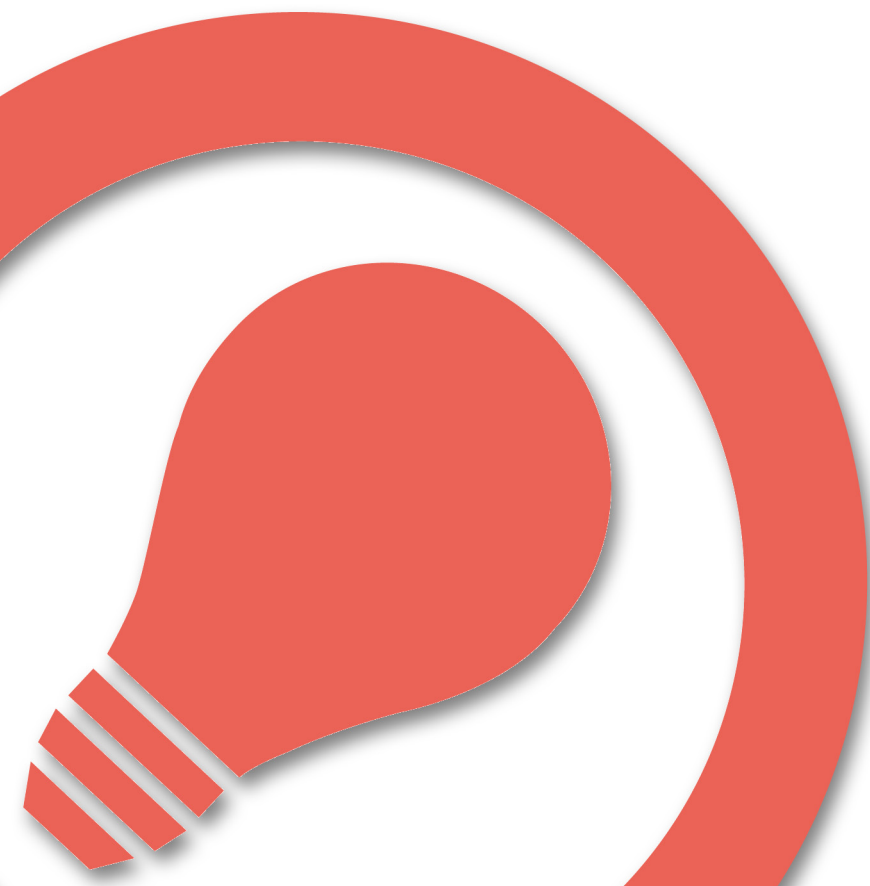




25 Start-up Ideas for 2011



Introduction

There is cause for cautious optimism for start-ups in 2011. While consumer confidence and interest rates are currently a concern, a slew of recent economic data suggests that the picture will gradually brighten in areas such as retail, franchising and employment.

However, the fate of Australia's economy is largely irrelevant to a budding entrepreneur unless he or she has a winning idea.

The starting point for any great business is the spark of inspiration that illuminates a previously-ignored niche or highlights failure in the delivery of a current product or service.

Ideas are fragile things, but they are increasingly travelling long distances. StartupSmart has compiled 25 of the best business ideas from around the world, as well as some relevant domestic trends, to give you food for thought if you're determined to quit your boss in 2011.

Some of these ideas may seem fairly straightforward, while others are a little more unconventional.

But then, when has great entrepreneurship ever been conventional? As Albert Einstein once said: "If, at first, the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it."

Here's to an inspired 2011 and the building of smart, sustainable businesses.

Oliver Milman, editor, StartupSmart.com.au



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1

Eternal Twitter memories

Many businesses use Twitter to market themselves, but what about creating a company based on the popular social networking site itself?

InvaderMedia in the US is selling something called a 'Twournal', in which people can have all of their Tweets, replies and Tweetpics made into a book.

You can choose a dedicated message in your book, with InvaderMedia giving consumers an option to sell their Twournal to others.

Quite how many people want their Tweets in print form, and exactly how you choose the start and end dates of your Tweets, remains to be seen.

So far, the most high-profile case of enthusiasm for archiving tweets is the Library of Congress in the US which, in April 2010, revealed that it will store every single public tweet since Twitter's launch in 2006. Given that Twitter generates around 50 million tweets a day, this is no mean feat.

If there is no market for listing Tweets in the format of a scrapbook of treasured memories, other Twitter opportunities could present themselves.

As with every evolving area, companies need advice on their Twitter strategy and may even think about outsourcing the creation of 'genuine' witty Tweets in order to boost their brand. After all, why would a large company make an effort to personable and social media savvy when it could pay someone else to do it for them?



2

Don't be caught short in summer

A Californian website, Shortomatic.com, allows consumers to customise their own board shorts.

Users can submit any kind of image, photo or artwork and it will be superimposed onto the board shorts. You can also include a personalised message, with the shorts also carrying an edition number.

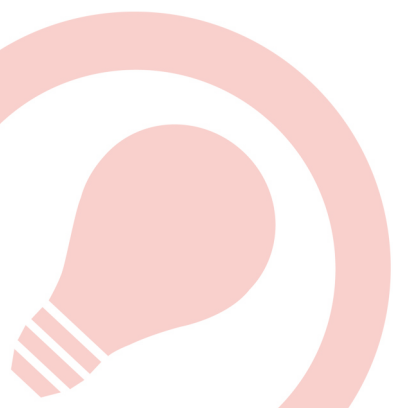
Shortomatic has been created by the founders of another US site called Yogamatic, which makes bespoke yoga mats for people to contort themselves upon.

The company uses a community of local artists to create the board shorts and claims that they can make shorts suitable for eight to 80-year-olds.

Unless Tony Abbott-style budgie smugglers suddenly become wildly popular on Australian beaches, there will be plenty of board shorts on display each summer, offering plenty of scope for a similar venture here.

Quiksilver has dipped its toe into this area, offering customised board shorts via its Japanese operation before finally offering Australian consumers the opportunity to choose their own colour scheme earlier this year.

However, Quiksilver only offers users the chance to choose from a range of block colours, rather than the elaborate designs on show at Shortomatic. Australian surfing website MeSurf has branded the Quiksilver effort “a bit of a let down.” Make sure your start-up isn't a similar flop and you could have a profitable business on your hands.



3

Price comparison sites gaining popularity

Shoppers may well be hindered by the reluctance of the likes of David Jones, Myer and Harvey Norman to offer comprehensive online stores, but that isn't stopping them from turning to the web when planning a purchase.

A recent study by Lasoo.com.au found that 90% of Australians are "likely" or "very likely" to research items online before buying them in bricks and mortar retail outlets.

While many retailers are struggling to match consumer demand in this area without grumbling about relocating to China, the desire for people to research products online provides a potential opportunity for third party businesses.

Online comparison sites such as MyShopping.com.au, Shopbot.com.au and Lasoo have emerged in recent years as consumers seek to analyse products across multiple retailers.

The trend isn't confined to retail either, with sites such as CreditCardFinder.com.au, RateCity and InfoChoice.com.au offering people the chance to measure up different financial products.

Opportunities abound for start-ups that can find a niche in this market and tap into a genuine consumer need.

The retail comparison site market is fairly saturated, but there are other areas you can fill.

Everything from holiday accommodation, car hire, nannies, takeaway food outlets and trades such plumbing and building could be covered by either a price comparison or user rating model.



4

Giving large brands the personal touch

If you can't get enough of Ikea and its fast-fashion approach to furniture, it's worth checking out the latest in its long line of feeder businesses: Mykea.

Joining the list of businesses focused on customising Ikea furniture, Dutch company Mykea lets consumers embellish items with their own photos.

In addition to offering adhesive coverings in a wide variety of designs, the company allows customers to upload a favourite photo to have it converted into a furniture sticker.

Mykea also offers a downloadable designer's kit that lets customers create their own cover designs for sale through Mykea's online shop. For every sticker sold, the creating artist receives 10%.

There are endless opportunities for those wanting to cash in on the customisation craze that has hit a vast array of products and services.

In addition to furniture, customised adhesive coverings could be applied to vehicles, stationery, surfboards and bikes – just to name a few.

The Mykea model can be applied to other large brands in different sectors. Start-ups can win out by making it personal. An official link-up with a large brand could help propel such a business, as well as get around any copyright or trademark issues.



5

Focus your energy on going green

The home insulation debacle may have given the sector a bad name, but it's clear that there's a growing consumer desire to conserve energy.

A recent Newspoll survey found that 58% of Australians are very concerned about their energy bills, with almost all wanting to take steps to reduce unnecessary use of heat, water and light.

Add in concerns about climate change and you have the basis for a business that could hopefully do a better job than some of the government-funded efforts of recent times.

Aside from home insulation providers and businesses that create energy saving appliances, there are the beginnings of a mini-industry around energy conservation.

In the US, there are several 'energy conservation consultancies' that provide help and advice to those who want to cut their bills. There are a handful of similar consultancies in Australia, but the market is very much in its infancy.

These consultancies not only provide guidance on the use of air conditioning, heating and water, they even explain how a well-placed tree in your garden can cool your house in summer and how you can change your driving and car maintenance to save you money.

With the ongoing march of new build homes in Australia, advice on how to keep energy bills down from the outset is increasingly valuable. Why not gain the knowledge, skills and business acumen to reap the rewards?



6

Move into mobile delivery

A UK business offers a new solution, with a familiar delivery concept, for the widespread dread parents feel whenever they have to buy shoes for their children.

To help combat drawn-out sagas in shoe shops, Hippity Hop Shoes brings a selection of casual, formal and school shoes to the homes of busy parents and their cherished offspring.

The service offers a shoe fitting service, as well as providing discounts to those who host children's 'shoe parties'.

Making your product mobile isn't exactly new – hairdressers, for example, have been on the road for years.

However, with the time pressures faced by many consumers, it's worth looking into other products or services that could be home-delivered.

It's likely that there is a sizeable bunch of consumers who would pay to have, for example, a suit fitted at home.

Mobile delivery isn't new, but the services you deliver can, with a bit of thought, be truly innovative.



7

An accessory to innovation

It's always heart-warming to see an Australian entrepreneur break into the US market, so best of luck to Raaj Menon, who is launching his PADACS iPad accessories range Stateside.

Menon's firm PCRange has an impressive range of cases, stands, in-car and anti-glare accessories for the iPad.

However, iPad accessories still have to come a long way to match the inventiveness, and bizarreness, of some of the iPhone add-ons that have been launched.

iPhone accessories range from the logical – water proof cases and speaker docks – to the highly unusual.

The more outlandish iPhone add-ons include 'funny phone fingers', which look suspiciously like condoms for the fingers but are, in fact, a way to reduce the untidy screen smudging familiar to all iPhone users.

Other iPhone accessories include a breathalyser to ensure you aren't drunk before you drive, a camera lens to get extreme close-ups from your iPhone camera and a detective-style holster to stop thieves picking your pocket.

Some of these iPhone accessories are clearly ridiculous, but that's not to say that the iPad, and rival devices, won't start to spawn a series of innovative bolt-ons. The window of opportunity into the iPad accessory market is closing, so why not offer something innovative?



8

The gift of giving

Charities may be increasingly sophisticated in their appeals for donations, but there is scope for improvement in how the money is actually collected.

Most charities, and aggregated donation sites in Australia have a simple point-and-click process that does little to show how far a single donation goes towards an overall goal.

Budding entrepreneurs, therefore, should ponder overseas examples that have provided a rich giving experience while providing the basis for a sustainable business.

US offering Nadanu, for example, runs eCharityBox, a site that displays an old-fashioned money tin that provides a satisfying gauge of how much cash has been raised for a cause.

Donors drop virtual coins into the box and watch it fill up. Once it reaches a pre-determined target, the box empties and donors' credit cards are charged. Donors can give money via the site, mobile and Facebook.

JustGiving in the UK, meanwhile, has developed the concept of setting up fundraising pages for individuals to incorporate video, blogs, news and an app. The result is a well-rounded charitable experience.

Take a look at the online charity sector in Australia and see where improvements can be made. Just be aware that banks and suppliers won't return the charitable ethos if you do decide to launch a site!



9

Get the combination right

The combination of board games and alcohol doesn't seem like a natural fit, but recent forays into the space have opened up an interesting market for budding entrepreneurs.

The recent Commander Business Grant competition awarded the \$10,000 top prize to a young couple that devised a business plan for a venue where people could play chess while enjoying a beer or three.

This quirky concept isn't confined to Australia, either. Toronto café Snakes & Lattes has dispensed with the WiFi to offer more than 1,500 board games to patrons. The café's barista's are trained in giving strategic tips for games ranging from Monopoly to Jumanji, with plans for themed nights and game hire.

The combination of games and drinks raises the question of other businesses that can be formed from merging two seemingly different pastimes.

A German-based company called Wash & Coffee has developed a variation of this theme by launching hybrids of cafes and Laundromats. Rather than sit staring at soap suds, customers can enjoy a coffee and a tasty muffin.

What other two business genres or hobbies could you bring together to create a new, dynamic start-up concept?



10

Think within the box

Start-up businesses can feel a bit intimidated by larger competitors, so strength in numbers is a strategy that should be explored by new businesses.

Sharing the load in terms of premises, stock and staffing can reduce costs and provide your business with more security. Like-minded businesses and those with complementary offerings often team up, with the consumer often benefiting from better price deals too.

This concept has been taken to an interesting new level in the US, where certain shops allow people to rent out a box and fill it with whatever they want to sell.

There are dozens of boxes in Shopping Box, a New York store that uses this method, showcasing products from a variety of artists, entrepreneurs and hobbyists.

Maybe you could provide the space for an Australian version of these box shops or perhaps you could find a shop to display your own goods. Either way, try thinking within the box.

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11

What women want

A little-known decision by the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board could provide budding entrepreneurs with the chance to capitalise upon consumers' gender preferences when buying.

Automotive group Trivett won an exemption from the Anti-Discrimination Act, allowing it to search for female-only car service and service providers.

The company said that it aims to help increase the proportion of female staff in the industry from 8% to 25% during the two-year exemption.

Trivett claims that many female buyers prefer dealing with other women and, with an estimated 60% of automotive decisions now made by women, the exemption could prove profitable.

Why not follow Trivett's lead and look into launching a female-friendly service in other traditionally male-dominated sectors? What about a women-only plumbing business or an IT advisory service devoid of males?



12

Your 15 minutes

With cutting-edge technology now within the grasp of the public and the buzz term ‘crowdsourcing’ providing some brands with actual results, the doors to previously closed industries are opening up.

One of the most previously unattainable sectors for a start-up to break into was TV. The huge capital cost, expertise and equipment needed was simply beyond new companies.

However, more reasonably priced technology is starting to provide start-ups with a slice of the TV market. In the US, the Novacut project has gained seed funding and provides a content platform for artists and aspiring TV creators.

Novacut hopes that it will generate a community that will provide knowledge and experience to those attempting to get their content into the mainstream. Other seemingly inaccessible sectors could be breached by entrepreneurs with the right idea and collaboration behind them.

UK start-up Myoo Create is blazing a trail in the monetisation of the sector by offering established businesses the chance to solve various challenges via crowdsourcing.

Businesses sign up to the site and post a problem they’d like to see solved. Myoo then puts the challenge to its community, which brainstorms ideas and submits solutions. Each suggestion is evaluated on the site, with a prize for the favourite idea.

Companies such as Levi Strauss and National Geographic have already signed up, with Myoo claiming money via a consulting fee. Community participation is free.

With increasing numbers of large businesses looking at crowdsourcing as a potential solution to problems, maybe an Australian start-up could capitalise in a similar way to Myoo.



13

Senior citizen start-up ideas

The number of Australians aged between 65 and 84 will double over the next 40 years, according to government figures. The challenge of increased health care and pension costs will have to be met by the government, but new businesses can also have a role to play.

Overseas, a string of new businesses have formed with senior citizens in mind. A start-up in Arizona recently set up call centres staffed by older people to target the baby boomer demographic, a UK business provides 'smart' design for retirees homes and Driving Miss Daisy, a Canadian firm, provides cab and companion service for seniors to help them to social events, shopping or doctor's appointments.

Traditionally, those aged over 65 have been dismissed by marketers as being irrelevant because they have no disposable income. But cashed-up baby boomers are growing in size and influence and businesses that take advantage of this will be well-set for the demographic change ahead of us.



14

Take a page out of this book

The rise of eBooks and the popularity of eReaders such as the iPad and Kindle have caused a minor revolution in the book world. The problem is the sheer amount of choice.

Established eBook platforms already offer free previews of well-known titles to tempt purchases. But unpublished writers are still largely barred from showing their wares electronically and helping them stand out from the plethora of titles on offer.

A US company has sought to remedy this by developing the well-worn trick of reading a single page in a bookstore to evaluate whether the title is worth buying.

Called Page 99, the website allows authors to upload page 99 of their published or unpublished books. Site visitors can then rate the single-page examples and indicate whether they'd buy the book. The site will monetise this by charging referral fees for published books.

The site promises to be influential in pushing unpublished works onto eReaders. With the upheaval in the book publishing and selling industry, a similar business that promotes, publishes or previews unsigned Australian authors could prove to be a winner.



15

Ahead of the curve

Starting up a gym used to involve offering a range of heavy weights to satisfy a muscle-bound customer base. But new fitness trends could open the way for a new kind of a business.

According to recent media reports, Australia is in the grip of a Zumba craze, with more than 3,000 instructors of the Latin-inspired dance workout now employed across the country.

Around 7.5 million people across 105 countries have embraced Zumba on a regular basis in an attempt to shed the kilos.

The popularity of the workout shows that Australians are open to new ways of working out and aren't stuck in the rut of treadmills and weights.

Why not exploit the Zumba craze by opening a dance-themed workout studio or, better still, try to predict the next big thing to hit gyms to ensure you are ahead of the curve? There is always a new, improved method to shed the kilos being pushed to consumers. If you can offer this, you could be onto a successful business.



16

Eco-friendly cleaning

The push towards more environmentally friendly products is moving beyond cars and food and into the household items that most people take for granted.

Calling itself the “world’s greenest dry cleaner”, Daisy Dry Cleaning is a chemical free and carbon neutral option that eliminates the toxic chemical that is a familiar smell during the dry cleaning process. The chemical has been linked to various cancers and other health conditions.

The concept is the basis of a new franchise chain that recently launched in Australia. The business hopes to take advantage of any Australian changes in rules that would ban certain chemicals in dry cleaning, as is the case in the US.

While eco-friendly dry cleaning is a niche that has been spotted by Daisy Dry Cleaning, there are other possibilities that can be mined. How about the rest of the white goods sector? Maybe look at the chemicals and other processes used by other household goods and launch a business that offers a greener, healthier option.



17

Star solar start-up idea

Savvy, or some would uncharitably call lucky, start-ups that offered solar panel installation in time for the government's rebate for the sector have prospered.

Since June, the government has offered increased financial incentives for houses that are 'off the grid' and generate their own solar power. Also, the Green Building Fund, which enables buildings to become more energy efficient via retrofitting, recently received a \$30 million boost in its funding.

Several solar panel installers have cashed in on this opportunity and the market is close to saturation. But there is still room for new businesses that can offer a point of difference.

Take the example of US business Seglet. The Californian company aims to link spare property space with businesses keen on renting or profit sharing rooftops.

Property owners list their roof or open land for free with Seglet then adding solar technology to the space. Membership packages are sold to businesses to gain access to the areas for projects.

With solar set to become an important part of Australia's energy infrastructure, a new business could implement a similar scheme to utilise under-developed space in urban areas.



18

What's yours is mine

Much emphasis is put on the importance of recycling unwanted goods, but there is business mileage in encouraging the re-using of items rather than simply turning to recycling.

Several businesses have cropped up in the area of waste management, such as FreeCycle and BoxCycle.

RecycleMatch, one of the latest entrants to the market, helps companies with unwanted waste find other businesses that need the items.

Users can list the items for free on the site, which accepts almost anything. Once a match is made, the owner and buyer pay RecycleMatch a small fee. Users can also post 'wanted' listings for a fee.

While recycling and hard rubbish days are effective, and green, methods of disposal for the Australian public, the B2B market may appreciate a start-up solution to their unwanted items.



19

Menu website a recipe for start-up success

Coles came under fire in 2010 for promoting meal ideas that the company claimed would “feed your family for under \$10”.

The campaign proved to be highly misleading, with key ingredients not included in the cost, earning Coles a Choice Shonky Award.

In this day and age, it can be hard to find food ideas to suit your family, budget and timeframe.

Imagine finding a recipe tailored to satisfy your taste buds that also takes into account any allergies and dislikes. It’s a novel concept, and it shouldn’t require your mum doing the cooking. An online recipe search site, Yummly, allows users to customise searches based on ingredients, dietary restrictions, allergies, price, cooking time and cuisine.

What makes Yummly so useful is its ability to intuit users’ tastes based on previous searches – it’s like having your very own chef who knows what you want.

The more details you provide, the more knowledge Yummly gains of your food preferences. Sure, you could enter ingredients into Google to search for a recipe, but Google isn’t going to know about that peanut allergy.

This is a perfect start-up idea for someone who loves food and values stress-free cooking. You could take the concept to various venues – such as schools, day care centres and retirement homes – and do the work for them for a competitive price.



20

Computer-generated culinary delights

Do you remember that scene from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory when Violet Beauregarde is introduced to a type of gum that allows you to taste whatever it is you're craving?

It seems fantasy has become reality, with the unveiling of a flavour-changing cookie at the SIGGRAPH computer graphics and animation conference in Los Angeles.

In the past, there has been little research into how computers can successfully simulate taste. Part of the problem is that taste is generated by a combination of factors working together, including vision, smell and memories.

Academics at The University of Tokyo decided to tackle this problem with a "display" that exploits several senses, using a cookie as their subject matter.

The device is worn over the user's head and can transform the taste of a plain cookie to any of seven flavours.

It combines augmented reality technology with smells released by a pump to trick the user's senses. If you're a tech-savvy entrepreneur with a taste for bold ideas, you could make a move into the rather futuristic world of generated food experiences.

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21

Online directory for home cooking

Start-ups keen to cash in on the post-GFC surge in 'dining in' should take a look at Dutch website Tweetjemee.

The food-focused site helps people sell their home-cooked meals and desserts to others who live nearby, ultimately serving as a platform for aspiring chefs to test their culinary skills on real customers.

After signing up with Tweetjemee, the neighbourhood chefs upload pictures and descriptions of the meals they're offering for sale. They list when the food will be available, their preferred pickup times and the item's price.

Customers select a meal in their neighbourhood, make a payment to the site and pick up the food at the agreed time.

Payments are transferred to the chefs each month, minus a 30% listing fee.

For parents who can't be bothered cooking but are loathed to buy takeaway, not to mention busy professionals, this kind of site offers a refreshing and more cost-effective alternative to professionally cooked meals in a restaurant.

Such a service could resonate with people here in Australia, if for no other reason than to save money from eating out.



22

Life Swap provides promising start-up opportunity

Ever wished you could escape your life for a little while and live someone else's? It might not be as hard as you think.

US business Luxe Home Swap brings new meaning to the term 'house sitter'. This is home exchange on a luxury level.

While the concept of home exchange has been around for a while, Luxe Home Swap is the first to create a website that caters for the more discerning house swapper.

The site is aimed at wealthy globetrotters who own beautiful homes around the world. Users post profiles of their homes and then select other users' homes in which they would like to stay while on holiday.

Users can tailor their searches to find something large and luxurious, small and stylish, or exclusive and private.

According to founder Debbie Woskow, Luxe Home Swap is the best way to holiday in style and blend in like a local, allowing you to save thousands on hotel bills and make maximum value of your home or holiday home.

What would such a service be like in Australia? You could trade your Sydney penthouse for a bungalow in Broome or a mansion in Melbourne's Toorak. For someone who has a passion for property, this could be the perfect start-up idea to buy into.



23

Luxurious lunchboxes lead to business

People often use work demands as an excuse for unhealthy eating, claiming they haven't got time to make fresh, nutritious meals.

Australian culture is increasingly geared towards eating on the run as we attempt to cram work, family and social commitments into a finite amount of time.

But those excuses may not be valid for much longer with the introduction of UpBox, a clever London-based business providing pre-packaged, gourmet meals-in-a-box featuring a rotating menu of global cuisine.

Each UpBox is filled with a gourmet entrée and dessert inspired by the cuisine of a particular country including Mexican, French and Lebanese.

Featuring the freshest, high-quality ingredients, UpBoxes are sold at various venues around London and can also be delivered.

This venture is crying out for emulation in other parts of the world, Australia included. A start-up could create its own gourmet lunchboxes containing cuisines suited to the tastes of the Australian public and distribute them via hotels, conference centres, airports or even airlines.

The concept doesn't have to stop at adults either. Parents would welcome having healthy lunchbox options available at schools.



24

An open source of inspiration

The concept of 'open source' is extending to new industries, which should ignite the interest of budding entrepreneurs in Australia.

There is already an open source restaurant in Amsterdam, where patrons design and prepare everything on the premise, from food to furniture. There is also a German fashion label that allows any designer to submit work and have it created.

Now the idea has been applied to the magazine industry. HIP2B is a South African magazine for teens that features entirely open source content.

Aimed at inspiring interest in maths and science, the title is distributed free to high schools across South Africa. Using the Creative Commons license, the content can be freely copied, shared and reused as long as the magazine is credited.

Also, by allowing anyone to contribute content to the title, HIP2B has been able to widen the amount of images it uses, rather than rely on stock pictures.

With consumers increasingly involved in the brands they love, why not explore other opportunities for the open source model? Entertainment, fashion and publishing sectors could be fertile ground for an Australian start-up with the right idea.



25

WeGoLook ventures into unseen territory

As more and more of us head online to do our shopping, we sacrifice the luxury of viewing items in person.

According to Colin McLeod, executive director at the Australian Centre for Retail Studies, consumers value the ability to touch items before they purchase them.

“Touch is probably the most informative of the senses because it tells you lots of different things,” says McLeod.

So when it comes to purchasing a product online, we’re rarely able to make a fully informed decision because we’re deprived of all our senses except sight – and even this is limited.

However, there are organisations emerging that promise to verify online purchases for you, including US site WeGoLook.

With a network of 7,000 “lookers” throughout the country, WeGoLook targets transactions conducted through eBay and Craigslist for big-ticket items including cars, boats and property.

WeGoLook can take current photos or videos, watch working demonstrations, and complete personalised reports for verification of a person, place or thing.

As more Australians move house, change jobs and travel on an increasingly regular basis, it becomes harder and harder to purchase every major item in person.

So there’s certainly an opportunity here to start a business like WeGoLook. You could start small – say cars in your local area – and gradually build up the items that you analyse. As confidence in online retail grows, so would your business.

WeGoLook recently told StartupSmart that it plans to expand to Australia, so if you are going to make your move, the time could be now.

