**Description: A funeral event planning firm**Think of Gail Rubin as a modern-day Maude (from the cult film Harold & Maude). A breast-cancer survivor and former PR professional/event planner (as well as a part-time Pilates instructor), Rubin decided to give a light touch to a dark subject -- death. Her startup venture, is billed as a funeral planning business for those who don't plan to die. Her target markets are "baby boomers and their parents, people who are recognizing their mortality, people in hospice, people who do HR for retirees, geriatric care managers and geriatric doctors."

While her approach may be light-hearted, her message is timely. Advance funeral planning can save families hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars; reduce stress and possible family discord during a time of grief; and allow for a memorable and meaningful celebration of life service.

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**Description: A test franchise for a geese management company**Mike Cardella's family and friends have been in the dog business for more than 30 years, doing shows, training and selling border collies, as well as teaching other people how to work their dogs and getting them ready to participate in shows and trials.

In 2006, Cardella started working for [Goose Masters](http://www.goose-masters.com/), where he learned everything about training border collies for geese control from Kent Kuykendall, the founder. Their services (using specially-trained border collies who frighten away the pesky birds without hurting them) help reduce or eliminate the multiple negative byproducts (i.e., poop pollution, traffic annoyances/dangers, environmental issues) of too many geese in any high-use space.The firm's positive performance record in Greensboro led to new business opportunities in the Raleigh area, so Cardella jumped at the chance to run his own Goose Masters operation. Since he has little competition, one would think his new geese management venture would be a slam dunk, because his target market is pretty much anyone who has a goose control problem. Realistically, his best clients are bigger enterprises including office parks, corporate headquarters, golf courses, hospitals, colleges and schools. So, like any other business owner, Cardella's niche business requires work to feed the sales channel.

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**Description: A toilet training system for cats**It took a lot of time for people to take Jo Lapidge and her husband and business partner Terence seriously. But this former business development maven and her in-house marketing expert (who had worked for blue chip companies in Australia and the U.K.) knew that her kitty toilet training system, had legs. Lapidge had her eureka moment after seeing the movie Meet the Parents while dealing with the "litter box misery" of a new kitten. The couple started to do research. Terence looked into possible target markets in the United Kingdom, Japan and America and Jo focused on sales, looking into government grants that would help them commercialize the idea. She won an opportunity to be a part of a Fresh Innovators program, during which she wrote her own press release.

In a Cinderella scenario, Reuters picked it up and her  story was soon going global, which led to a feature piece on CNN. That media exposure led to a California manufacturing connection, with operations based in China. Forty-five test cats, 15 protypes and nine months later, Lapidge was fulfilling orders in the U.K., the first market the couple decided to focus on. Five years later the Lapidges have sold more than 500,000 units and their products are now carried in Petco, Petsmart and other major online and brick- and-mortar pet retailers across the U.S.

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**Description: A company for all your chicken rental needs.**

In a nutshell, you call me up and rent two chickens.  For $250, we bring you everything you need for the summer—a 4x8 coop with an attached run that can be moved around in your yard, food, a feeder, roost, nesting box and two Buff Orpington chickens—and then we return to get everything in the fall.  If you want, you can buy your hens and keep them at your house.  We also will tag them for the winter so that you can get your chickens back the next summer, if you just want to rent again.

Families are our number one customers.  Having chickens is very much a whole family experience.  I have four kids, and my 6-and-a-half year old just announced that from now on, it is his job to gather eggs in the morning.  We can come right inside and cook them. How great is that?  Children can learn about where food comes from and also, how to care for animals that provide us with food.  There are lessons in local eating and leaving minimal carbon footprints and cooking and just having fun.

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**Description: An unconventional gear store**

This outdoor gear supply store has never taken the conventional route since it opened in 1971. For one thing, it operates as a co-operative, with 3 million members across the country. It's got a major morale-boosting culture, with parental leave top-up benefits of up to 75 per cent of an employee's salary for 11 weeks, 2 days off per year to do volunteer work, and on-site yoga classes and shower facilities for staff who ride their bikes to work. Oh, and they helped form the Big Wild, a movement dedicated to protecting Canada's natural habitat.

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**Description: puppy paradise while you’re away from home**

This three-year-old company goes way beyond any traditional dog kennel. The 10,000 sq. ft. doggy hotel offers a luxurious decor of exposed brick, floor-to-ceiling glass windows, individual lounging beds, a computerized water park and TV lounges for the pups — who are allowed to roam freely. If a romp through the fountain doesn't do it, they can watch a little Oprah before dinner. Business is booming.

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**Description: a catering company that doesn't "cook" anything on their menu**

There are thousands of caterers across Canada, but few choose a niche market as narrow as the raw food movement. Following the raw foods script, pizza crusts are made out of flax and sunflower seeds and foods are scattered with hemp seed oil and sprouted legumes. "I started the raw vegan healthy lifestyle four years ago for health reasons," says owner Francesco Comito. "I decided to quit my job as a chef and start the journey with the raw vegan cuisine. So back then it was a bit of a risk getting involved in something like that, but today people are really into healthy living and looking for alternative foods and gluten free and dairy free foods."

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**Description: Golf ball marking stencils**
This company makes a stainless steel ball marker that places customizable stencils on golf balls. A golfer simply traces a chosen logo or design onto the ball with a fine-point Sharpie pen. What seems like such a simple idea has become a multi-million dollar business for two golf lovers who turned their passion into profit.

Based on U.S. Golf Association rules, players must be able to identify their ball during play. Apparently up until a few years ago, no one had thought to capitalize on ways to help players comply with the rule. This company was launched in the spring of 2009 by Jim Millar and Cabell Fooshe and now has roughly 100 designs in its repertoire. The marker sells for $19.95 and can be found online, at retail stores and in pro shops across the U.S.

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**Description: This company caters exactly to who you think it would cater to: bacon lovers.**

The site offers a full range of gourmet bacon flavors, bacon club subscriptions and bacon-related novelties. (Bacon soda? This company has it.)

"We like the subscription model [because] being a small business, it's great for cash flow," Loosbrock says. "People pre-pay you for an item. In the first few years we would have never survived. I needed the cash."

Loosbrock emphasizes that his bacon is no ordinary supermarket bacon. "We don't add water to our product," he says, which many manufacturers do to up the weight count of the meat. "We hand cut, we hand cure, we rub spices [instead of a machine]."

"We're taking the time to make an artisan product," he adds.

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**Description:**  **Everyone** **knows that ugly Christmas sweaters are always the hit of the party.** People even have themed "ugly sweater" parties just for the fun of it. But if you're attending one of these said parties and haven't kept your mothball-ridden tacky sweater circa 1984, where the heck can you buy one?

Self-titled tacky sweater aficionado John Kaplar took his love of these sweaters to a new level --

Kaplar began designing his own sweaters when he came to the conclusion that what was already out there was "boring." He started with over-the-top holiday sweaters like the Lighted Fireplace Sweater with 3-D Stockings and the Santa Princess Sweater.

Kaplar's holiday gear has earned notable mentions and he was recently featured in Jimmy Fallon's "12 Days of Christmas Sweaters."

"Our Christmas sweater store is overflowing with the tackiest, ugliest, most festive and obnoxious Christmas sweaters around. And everything is brand new," the company's website states.

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Self-titled tacky sweater aficionado John Kaplar took his love of these sweaters to a new level --

Kaplar began designing his own sweaters when he came to the conclusion that what was already out there was "boring." He started with over-the-top holiday sweaters like the Lighted Fireplace Sweater with 3-D Stockings and the Santa Princess Sweater.

Kaplar's holiday gear has earned notable mentions and he was recently featured in Jimmy Fallon's "12 Days of Christmas Sweaters."

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