

“MINIPRENEURS”



Introduction

Increasingly, consumers are participants instead of passive audience members, and this mega-trend manifests itself in a variety of ways. In fact, the more we hear about [GENERATION C](#) making money from its creations, and the more we focus on the financial rewards consumers are reaping from participating in [CUSTOMER MADE](#) projects, the more the myriad of other entrepreneurial undertakings by ordinary consumers makes sense.

We have dubbed this trend '[MINIPRENEURS](#)': a vast army of consumers turning entrepreneurs; including small and micro businesses, freelancers, side-businesses, weekend entrepreneurs, web-driven entrepreneurs, part-timers, free agents, cottage businesses, seniorpreneurs, co-creators, mompreneurs, pro-ams, solopreneurs, eBay traders, advertising-sponsored bloggers and so on.



Want numbers?

- According to a July 2005 survey conducted by eBay, more than 724,000 Americans report that eBay is their primary or secondary source of income. In addition to these professional eBay sellers, another 1.5 million individuals say they supplement their income by selling on eBay.
- Over 50,000 people in the UK draw a significant portion of their income from selling goods online. A study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) shows that the average household boosts its earnings by GBP 3,000 through online trading.
- And Mastercard and Warillow International published a research study on a new class of small business: the 'Web-Driven Entrepreneur', estimating that there are 5 million of these businesses in the United States, representing 25% of all small businesses.

So what are the drivers behind the [MINIPRENEURS](#) trend, and what does the ecosystem sustaining it look like?

Drivers

1. Multinationals of one

(Re)sources once exclusively available (and exclusively affordable) to multinational firms, from access to marketplaces to partnering with top talent, are now at the fingertips of experienced, entrepreneurial individuals. Consumers are discovering that besides being the buyer in the capitalist equation, they can now also make a buck (or yen or pound or euro or dinar) by doing a bit of manufacturing, enterprising, venturing, selling, trading, or auctioning themselves.

2. Being in control of one's destiny

Building on the above: human beings forever fantasize about control, independence and being in charge. Let's face it, being one's own boss, even if it's only for three hours a week, is just too tempting to forego, as is the extra income. As we've discussed before, trends are often manifestations of something that unlocks existing needs and wants in a new way. The [MINIPRENEURS](#) trend certainly fits that mold.



3. Enterprising is chic

Gone are the days when 'entrepreneur' equaled running a small store, or conducting shady 'import and export' transactions. From [Jones Organics](#) to 21st century barbershop [Sharps](#) to German [Sparschwein](#) to Danish [TrioBike](#) to the slew of online success stories like [Flickr](#) and [Weblogs, Inc.](#): there's an explosion of hip, admired ventures, online and offline, around the world (accelerated by the tech revolution, and the truly exceptional entrepreneurs with vision and skills that started it; a far cry from the Old Boys networks in the past). It's Traditional Big Business that's now often seen as unsophisticated, at best. **MINIPRENEURIALISM** can actually be chic, allowing one to think big while implementing small.

4. Experience rules, and so does less risk

For decades, consumers in mature consumer societies have been training to become experts in business, marketing and advertising (read: seeing right through it, and understanding the workings beneath it). The business of business is something that now interests producers and consumers alike. No wonder **MINIPRENEURS** are confident enough to try their hand at businesses of their own. Added benefit: the risks they'll take as **MINIPRENEURS** are in no way comparable to the gut wrenching stress that comes with managing listed corporations. And neither is the cost structure! (More on that below.)



5. A need for the unusual

MINIPRENEURS, including commerce-minded members of **GENERATION C**, are providing other consumers with more choice and variety (which *is* the holy grail in a **NOUVEAU NICHE** world). They're offering something that's different, that's special, that's vintage, that's quirky, that's customized if not beyond personalized, that's fringe, or that's just not profitable enough to be developed by big corporations instead of well-meaning enthusiasts. The **long tail** depends as much on **GENERATION C** as it does on **MINIPRENEURS**.

The MINIPRENEURS ecosystem

Today's aspiring and established **MINIPRENEURS** truly have a highly-developed network of intermediaries, tools, resources, and processes at their disposal. It's an ecosystem on a much more elaborate scale than anyone foresaw even five years ago when entrepreneurialism was all the rage during the .com boom. **MINIPRENEURS** have access, for peanuts, if not for free, to:

- A. Hardware, software, ICT and skills
- B. Design, production and manufacturing
- C. Monetizing existing assets
- D. Marketplaces
- E. Advertising
- F. Travel
- G. Talent, finance, payment, logistics

A. Hardware, software, ICT and skills on the cheap



In the same way that **GENERATION C** has access to affordable yet professional-grade software, cameras and other creative gadgets, **MINIPRENEURS** can get their business up and running instantly, relying on everything from rock-bottom priced laptops, printers and open source software, to broadband connections and free telephony (with tech giants like [Skype/eBay](#), [Google Talk](#) and [MSN](#) battling it out who can bring the free-est of the free to savvy consumers and **MINIPRENEURS**).

The same goes for information, knowledge and acquiring skills: there are more courses, classes, forums, sites, and informational blogs dedicated to the art of **MINIPRENEURISM** than you can

shake a stick at. Don't even click on this one:

www.google.com/search?q=selling+ebay+making+money+from+home. Or this one: [Springwise New Business Ideas](#) ;-) It's basically a free-for-all, where the barriers to entry have virtually disappeared, and the rules of the game are known to all participants. See our related [HYGIENIA](#) trend for more.

B. Design, production and manufacturing



GENERATION C may have its [lulu.com](#), [purevolume.com](#) and [deviantart.com](#) to flaunt and flog its digital wares, but what about **MINIPRENEURS** who want to develop, create and sell physical products? Look no further than sites like [Zazzle.com](#), [Qoop.com](#), and 800 pound gorilla [Cafepress.com](#). The latter has a network of over 2 million members who have created more than 8 million designs on 70+ customizable products ranging from apparel and home and office accessories to music and data CDs and books to prints, posters and cards. Every day, roughly 14,000 new items are added, and approximately 1,000 new, independent shops join the CafePress.com network.



Taking it one step further is US-based [eMachineshop.com](#), which lets ordinary consumers download free, easy-to-use software which they can use to design objects like car parts, door knobs, in metal or plastic. They can then get a quote, order the product online and eMachineshop will forward the design to a 'real world' machine shop for manufacturing. Suddenly, **MINIPRENEURS** have injection molding, milling, turning, laser cutting, waterjet cutting, wired EDM, tapping, bending, blanking, punching, plastic extrusion, thermoforming, and casting at their fingertips. Who's going to set up local competitors to service **MINIPRENEURS** in Asia, Europe, South America?

C. Monetizing existing assets

Some **MINIPRENEURS** don't produce or create; they simply make money from assets or experience they already possess. Random spottings:



Zopa

UK-based **Zopa**, a place where creditworthy borrowers who'd like to borrow money can get together with other consumers who are happy to lend it to them. Cutting out the middleman, lenders (read: **MINIPRENEURS**) set their own rate of return and choose which borrowers they want to lend to. Zopa manages various 'markets', matching lenders with borrowers' various risk profiles. The start-up, after four months of operations, now has more 26,000 members (source: FT). 35 per cent of members are lenders, who between them have GBP 3 million in capital waiting to be handed out. Average loans have been between GBP 2,000 and GBP 5,000, with lenders so far seeing average returns of 7.6 percent. Consumers turning into bankers: how's that for **MINIPRENEURISM**?



Scoop

UK-based **Scoop**, a 'civic media press agency' helps members of the public sell photographs and videos of newsworthy events to the press. In their own words: "we bridge the gap between amateur photographer and picture desk - and by 'amateur', we mean anybody with a digital camera or a cameraphone who just happens to be in the right place at the right time. When you send Scoopt a photo, you automatically grant us an exclusive worldwide license to market that photo for a period of six months. During this six-month period, you agree not to publish the photo anywhere

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else. When the six months are up, the license becomes non-exclusive. Scoopt also accepts video footage for distribution. All licensing and assignment fees will be split equally between you and Scoopt."

So far, more than 1,500 members have signed up, in 35 countries worldwide. Whether the model will eventually work or not (with so many citizen journalists now crowding major events, a lot of footage will be duplicated many times over. The real money will likely come from snapping secretive scandals, sunbathing celebrities, and happenings in remote areas), it certainly is the kind of thinking that turns bystanders into **MINIPRENEURS**.



Liberty Drive

In France, 'carvertiser' **Liberty Drive** offers a long-term rental service, offering Smart cars for EUR 150 per month. But they also have a program that rewards *existing* Smart car owners for participating in carvertising campaigns, paying these **MINIPRENEURS** up to EUR 100 per month if they turn their cars into driving billboards. Easy money!

YorZ



There's money to be made by individuals who refer a qualified job candidate at job site **YorZ**, where many listings include a bounty for HR-savvy **MINIPRENEURS**. At last count, YorZ listed 874 jobs, and a total of USD 143,310 in bounties.



Yahoo Publisher Network, Google Adwords, Blogads

Any blogger participating in programs like **Blogads** (classified ads that appear in blogs and other independent websites), **Google Adwords** and the still invitation-only, beta **Yahoo Publisher Net-**

[work](#) becomes an instant **MINIPRENEUR**: these services allow bloggers and publishers, whether they're tiny or big, to display ads on their sites, typically earning a few cents if a visitor clicks on one of the ads. There's serious money to be made: through its Ad-Sense programs, Google's partner sites generated USD 630 million in the second quarter of 2005.

CUSTOMER-MADE

Want more context? Check out the many examples that illustrated our [CUSTOMER-MADE](#) trend: knowledgeable consumers and dialogue-minded corporations co-creating new strategies, goods, services, experiences or advertising campaigns. With their input being rewarded with anything from an iPod Nano to cold hard cash, co-creating turns these consumers into yet another part of the **MINIPRENEURIAL** diaspora.

D. Marketplaces



Once products are ready to be traded, most **MINIPRENEURS** will of course head for [eBay](#), which now boasts more than 64 million active users worldwide, and is hosting more than 260,000 stores worldwide, of which about 158,000 on the US site. The sheer size of eBay has spawned so many small businesses and **MINIPRENEURS** catering in turn to fellow **MINIPRENEURS**, that we're not even going to try to list them here. Suffice to say that everything from drop-off stores to eBay seminars to [Trading Assistants](#) is thriving. More at [FEEDER BUSINESSES!](#)

And let's not forget Amazon.com's [Marketplace](#) and [zShops](#), where **MINIPRENEURS** can showcase their products alongside Amazon.com's own selection. Secure payments and shipping solutions included, as well as access to millions of Amazon.com customers.



Meanwhile, **MINIPRENEURS** are getting smarter and more professional about presenting and selling their wares. In The Netherlands, [speurders.nl](#), a classifieds site, lets **MINIPRENEURS** add videos of what they're selling. More than 1,700 videos have been added so far.



Other signs of the times are the [Photoflex LiteRoom](#) and the [Ezcube](#): photographic light tents which make it easy for **MINIPRENEURS** to take appetizing photos of small and medium size objects for the web or for print. Why do we suspect this is only the beginning of yet another cottage business supporting **MINIPRENEURS** to sell like the best of the best?

E. Advertising

In only a few years time, [Google AdWords](#) managed to sign up 150,000 advertisers, from Fortune 500 companies to **MINIPRENEURS**, introducing a fully automated, global and pretty sophisticated ad system at the disposal of even the smallest of small businesses. Bartering is thriving as well: [Link Market](#) for example, which lets webmasters exchange banners, has more than 25,000 members, with more than 1 million banners exchanged since it started in 2003. Here too, thousands of businesses now help fellow **MINIPRENEURS** to make the best of their (limited) advertising budgets, while in this Free Agent era, top creative talent from established advertising agencies can easily be found to help out with local mini-campaigns, bartering with clients instead of sending USD 50,000 invoices.

Need even more input and inspiration?
[trendwatching.com's 2008 Trend Report](#)
 covers 12 themes, 24 trends
 & over 200 examples.

(Download now to start using it within minutes.)



More at www.trendwatching.com/trendreport

F. Travel



Business is global. Talent is global. Customers are global. Regardless of the infinite number of bits and pixels now traversing the world, **MINIPRENEURS** will have to travel, and will *want* to travel. Luckily, just like the virtual world, the offline world is now connected in ways previously unimaginable: a web of low cost airlines, low cost hotels, low cost rental cars, low cost *everything* has sprung up over the last few years.

And we really mean EVERYWHERE, not just Boston-NY or London--Amsterdam. Think **NO-FRILLS CHIC** champion **JetBlue** in the US, **MINIPRENEUR**-cheerleaders **easyJet** and **Ryanair** in Europe, **Air Asia** and **SpiceJet** in Asia, **Kulula** in South Africa, **Gol** in South America. Or consider **easyHotel.com** in the UK, **Car Puz** in Turkey, **Liberty Drive** in France... It's all about enabling **MINIPRENEURS** and/or their products to travel to the farthest corners of the world, to meet with partners, suppliers, clients, outsourcers and factory owners -- something that not too long ago was the privilege of the Shell Oils and GEs of this world.

G. And it just goes on and on...

Logistics | **FedEx** delivers to 220 countries, actively targeting **MINIPRENEURS** with their Kinko/FedEx centers, while in the US, eBay and the US Postal Service (USPS) recently launched the traveling eBay **Sell-It-Ship-It** workshop (on a bus), answering general questions about selling on eBay and shipping with the USPS.



Financing and global payments | For the new world of payments, look no further than **MINIPRENEURS** poster-child **PayPal**, which allows the transfer of money between email users and merchants, and performs payment processing for e-commerce vendors, auction sites, and other corporate users, operates in 57 countries and manages over 78.9 million accounts, many of them belonging to **MINIPRENEURS**.

Talent | Whether **MINIPRENEURS** want to sell their talents or need to hire others: sites like **GetAFreelancer.com**, **eLancer.co.kr**, **Contracted Work**, and **Freelance Work Exchange** will connect them to other professionals in a heartbeat.

Connecting | Finding likeminded **MINIPRENEURS**, potential partners and other independent minds has never been easier thanks to networking sites like **LinkedIn**, **OpenBC**, and **Ryze**.

Anyway, you get the picture. By itself most of the above examples may not be spanking new to you, but when you connect the dots, it's clear that everything *is* now in place to allow **MINIPRENEURIALISM** to blossom on an even bigger scale, which brings us to...

Opportunities

No doubt you've already spotted other drivers and ecosystem categories to be added to our findings. So how to profit from them? One word: FACILITATE! Ask yourself how you can help consumers become **MINIPRENEURS**; help them to make money by facilitating their admin, their production, their advertising, their insurance, their travel, their networking, their selling, their tech needs, their learning, their payments, their suggestions, their hosting, their new business ideas. Don't ask them to consume; help them to create, to produce.



Context

Do re-read the [GENERATION C](#), [CUSTOMER-MADE](#) and [NOU-VEAU NICHE](#) trend descriptions: they complete the overall picture of consumers becoming more enterprising and creative, resulting in an avalanche of new (and often inspiring, surprising) content, new ideas and new products. When will things get really interesting from a consumer behavioral point of view? How about millions of consumers-turned, tried and tested **MINIPRENEURS** having even less tolerance for mishaps and bad service from 'fellow' entrepreneurs (read: YOU)?

Next?

We may not have seen anything yet. With more **MINIPRENEURS** springing up every hour (keep an extra keen eye on the 50+ crowd), 'new' business models will continue to emerge: from aggregation models (if **MINIPRENEURS** unite, they can demand discounts just like large corporations do; there's definitely an opportunity to resurrect letsbuyit.com) to more sophisticated bartering, to new style incubators helping **MINIPRENEURS** get their ideas and inventions to market. No rest for the wicked...