

# Planet-Friendly and Profitable

## The Rise of Ecopreneurs

by Avery Mack



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**W**hether it's a side-line or full time, flourishing small businesses stimulate the economy. The U.S. Small Business Association found that between 2009 and 2013, companies with fewer than 500 employees accounted for 60 percent of net new jobs. Technology allows new commercial ventures to be launched from home, yielding huge savings in startup costs. Owners have found ways to fulfill needs by leveraging their past job experiences and personal interests.

### House and Garden

When the economy faltered in 2008, Dave Marciniak, owner and lead designer at Revolutionary Gardens, in Culpeper, Virginia, offered eco-friendly services. "I focus on a few key points and design to make the outdoors a place where people want to be," he says.

Even for urbanites, fresh garden herbs are available thanks to ecopreneurs like Andy Avramenko, who created TrendyThing, in New York City. "The edible plants our bike messengers distribute come from local farmers," he explains. Basil, parsley, dill, lettuce and other herbs

and greens are available for all five boroughs; potted plants arrive fresh weekly via subscription.

In addition to cleaning homes, Debbie Sardone, owner of Speed Cleaning, in Lewisville, Texas, saw an opportunity to manufacture her own green cleaning products. They're part of a full-line online catalog.

Ryan Riley and his wife, Ashley Spitz, of Los Angeles, own and operate Biz Bagz, dog waste bags made in America from bio-based resins and recycled plastics. He notes the genesis of their idea: "Landfills are anaerobic, so biodegradable bags don't get the oxygen required

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to break down. Compostable bags are available, but few places provide composting services. We offer a cleaner alternative.”

Another pet-inspired idea was spawned when Kevin Li, of Manhattan, New York, left his puppy home alone for the first time. He invented an app-operated remote control ball with a camera called PlayDate ([Tinyurl.com/RemoteBallApp](http://Tinyurl.com/RemoteBallApp)).

## Personal Care

People- and planet-friendly personal care products address other ongoing customer needs. Nitya Gulati, founder of Sugarloom Cosmetics, in Ashburn, Virginia, specializes in American-made, vegan, cruelty- and toxin-free nail polish. She advises, “Look for ‘five-free’ on the label, which means no formaldehyde, dibutyl phthalate, toluene and allergens camphor and formaldehyde resin. Watch out for guanine, made from fish scales, found in glittery polishes. Oleic acid, a thickener, is animal fat. Vibrant reds may contain carmine, made from boiled, crushed beetles.” She warns that products tested by a third party can obscure animal testing during product development.

Amelia Swaggert and Elizabeth

Ripps, co-founders of California Scrub Company, in Los Angeles, upcycle coffee grounds into a natural facial scrub. They’ve eliminated plastic at every step of production from sourcing to packaging. They’re also helping to keep the world’s oceans from becoming plastic soup by supporting the Beat the Microbead campaign. ([BeatTheMicrobead.org/en](http://BeatTheMicrobead.org/en)).

Maintaining a professional look while living green can be a challenge. *OneSavvyMother.com* found a stylish, eco-friendly, lightweight and durable tote bag designed by Natalie Therése. The vegan cork tote is made in Boxford, Massachusetts. Shavings from the bark of the cork oak tree grown in Portugal are transformed into ultrathin sheets to produce cork fabric; the certified organic cotton lining is produced in Korea and China in certified Global Organic Textile Standard and fair trade facilities.

## Out and About

Mya Zeronis saw a need for healthy food and stepped out of her comfort zone to fulfill it through her extra VEG-ANza Pgh restaurant and its catering arm, Lean Chef en Route, recognized by Sustainable Pittsburgh. “We source locally, compost produce scraps, serve meat- and dairy-free menu options,

practice food waste management with root-to-stem preparation and maintain energy conservation,” she says. Customers are encouraged to bike to the restaurant; there’s even a bicycle air pump and flat tire repair kit on the premises if emergencies arise.

Shared bikes are a welcome addition at colleges for budget-minded and time-strapped students. Rented by the hour or day, they’re a convenient, healthy and non-polluting way to get around campus. New York University at Buffalo students can remotely locate, rent and unlock GPS-enabled bikes. At Williams College, in Williamstown, Massachusetts, the Purple Bike Coalition provides free use of bikes and a staffed repair station; a cargo bike helps transport larger objects.

Entrepreneurs are creative by nature; seeing a need and asking, “What if?” Eco-friendly, green-minded entrepreneurs take ideas a step farther, working to ensure the health of consumers and the planet. They succeed as they serve and inspire us all.

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