

The Ecopreneurs out to

From ethical jewellery and bamboo bikes to recycled baby gear, eco-friendly companies are springing up all over London. Here, **Connie Alfrey** puts the green credentials of these six fledgling businesses to the test

THE BABY GEAR RECYCLER



JOANNA PEARCE
34, founder of
www.NappyValley.co.uk

What's the big idea?
An online

marketplace for parents to buy and sell good quality used baby gear. By uniting local buyers and sellers, car use and postage is minimised.

Eureka moment: "My son, Sam, was nine months old and I wanted to return to working, ideally from home. Northcote Road in Battersea, where I live, is nicknamed Nappy Valley and I realised there was a potential market."

Seed money: Joanna set aside £10,000 of her own and concentrated on the design of the website. "It had to be stylish and easy to use." Joanna did market research among mums she knew and came up with a dummy website. She employed a professional web designer and launched Nappy Valley in September 2006.

How it grew: By May 2007, when Joanna's second son, Joshua, was born, the business was growing slowly. "It took about a year for parents to trust it but now our traffic is five times what it was a year ago." It costs £500 a month to run and at the moment returns are low — if a visitor buys something from an affiliate website, Joanna earns five per cent commission.

Where it's going: The business was endorsed on television by mother-to-be Tamsin Outhwaite, who intends to use the service. Joanna plans to expand the business nationwide and has already appointed agents around the country to introduce the service.

Eco rating: 9/10 Couldn't be greener. The proximity of buyers to sellers means that they can walk round the corner to collect their goods, and all Joanna needs is a computer.

Business rating: 8/10 There are millions of pounds' worth of baby equipment changing hands in London alone and Joanna stands to rake in a large commission from it — eventually.

The next Anita Roddick? It looks like Joanna has hit on a great business idea which, while it might not make her a millionaire, could bring her riches.



Growing market: Joanna Pearce's used baby gear site has great potential



Celebrity supporter: model Lily Cole wearing an Urth gold leaf pendant

THE ETHICAL JEWELLER



SHARON WALKER
42, co-director
of Urth Jewellery
(www.urthjewellery.com)

What's the big idea?

To make jewellery using ethically assured precious metals and gemstones. Walker, a former Harper's Bazaar editor, had wanted to set up a business before being approached by British actor James Scott. "I knew there were problems with diamonds but I had no idea of the environmental destruction and human costs associated with gold mining."

Eureka moment: "At a conference in India last January, one speaker explained the tiny percentage of charitable donations that reach the people they're meant for. I thought: 'Yes, I can make money and make a difference.'"

Seed money: Scott invested £75,000 and launched Urth with Walker last year.

How it grew: Bureaucratic red tape in mining countries has been a problem. But talented jewellery designer Pippa Small signed up to the cause in July, while Emma Thompson and Lily Cole have been photographed wearing the Urth gold leaf pendant.

Where it's going: Management consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton has shown interest in their business plan.

Eco-rating: 8/10 Urth works with NGOs in Madagascar and Bolivia to improve working conditions. Money from the sale of Urth goods supports programmes in both countries.

Business rating: 6/10 The business is still funded mainly by Scott but collections can now be found in Pippa Small's Notting Hill boutique, The Cross, Felt in Chelsea and Stephen Webster's Mayfair boutique.

The next Anita Roddick? There is a gap in the market for ethical jewellery, particularly wedding and engagement rings. Walker harbours aspirations to turn it into a serious eco-luxe brand.

THE CONSCIENCE CLEARER



BRIONY GREENHILL
29, creator of
www.TheNag.net
(020 7841 8930)

What's the big idea?
A website which

sends a monthly "nag" email, encouraging members to, for example, bank ethically or reduce their carbon footprint when booking holidays.

Eureka moment: Briony was advising companies and government agencies on green issues when she met members of the campaigning group, Anti-Apathy. "It was 2005 and there was a lot of focus on green issues. My experience had shown me that people wanted to do something but didn't know how. So we came up with the idea of the monthly 'nag' which would draw people into a website that offered quick, easy advice."

Seed money: With Anti-Apathy's help, Briony raised £5,000. Some money funded a water-saving campaign during the droughts of 2006 and the rest went on a pilot website which developed into TheNag.

How it grew: Slowly at first. The breakthrough came when Briony, a singer with the band Honeyroot, performed live on Radio 2 and gave TheNag a hefty plug. The website got 1,000 hits the following night.

Where it's going: Briony and her team of 12 plan to take TheNag international.

Eco rating: 8/10 Briony claims to have reduced her carbon footprint to two tonnes a year — the recommended personal level if climate change is to be halted by 80 per cent by 2050.

Business rating: 6/10 TheNag is a non-profit organisation. Briony pays herself £1,000 a month so she isn't likely to become a green millionaire.

The next Anita Roddick? TheNag has 6,500 members and was voted best ethical website 2007 by Yahoo.

THE GREEN JEANIE



SARA SIMMONDS
29, founder
of Sharkah
Chakra (www.sharkachakra.com)

What's the big idea? Sharkah Chakra, the first jeans label to be certified by the Fairtrade Foundation.

Eureka moment: Sara was a denim buyer at Harvey Nichols. "I walked out armed only with an idea, and started on a quest to make luxury jeans using traditional methods."

Seed money: She spent £100,000 assembling a team of weavers in Tamil Nadu, India, Fairtrade cotton in Mali and tailors in Italy. Sharkah Chakra (which means "hand-make life") was formed in 2006 and Sara took the first samples to buyers last May.

How it grew: With Sara's contacts,



Rebecca Reid

she got her jeans into Harvey Nichols, Liberty and Matches.

Where it's going: Word of Sara's jeans spread and Bamford & Sons approached her to ask if they could stock them. So far 2,000 pairs have been sold and Sara expects to reach her first year turnover target of £200,000.

Eco rating: 8/10 Sea transport is used between Africa and India and Italy, from where the jeans are trucked to Britain. The 30 weavers Sara employs — and houses — use hand-operated looms.

Business rating: 8/10 Her jeans sell for £195-£220 a pair. She has no overheads, selling online and in stores. No profit so far but on current sales she is likely to do well.

The next Anita Roddick? "I'd like to think I could become a millionaire — anything is possible," she says.

Blue heaven: Sharkah Chakra jeans are already selling well

