



7 Innovative Small Businesses You May Have Overlooked in 2010

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What are some of the most innovative small businesses of 2010?

I wasn't looking for the iPad or other well-known brands. Instead I wanted to find the often-overlooked businesses who have been innovative in their marketing, PR or products – so I asked [HARO](#).

I got hundreds of responses – most from companies I'd never heard of. Reading the submissions filled my holidays with cheer because there's nothing like the combination of creativity and success to put me in a good mood.

One of the first things I learned when I asked for suggestions is that almost everyone thinks their business is innovative. Few actually are.

I picked a sampling of the responses I got along with some of my favorites. Here's what made my list:

1. [Quora](#): a social network to ask questions and get answers

Sites like Yahoo Answers! have done well and I'm a fan of LinkedIn Answers as well. Facebook recently announced they're adding questions. Quora combines features from Twitter, Facebook (note: you can log on with and post to your Facebook account) and Digg.

On Twitter, Robert Scoble says this mashup is the [most innovative change in blogging in years](#). I would argue it's not a blog, but it is my new favorite answers site. You ask questions and the answers come in a newsfeed. People can vote on the best ones. You can follow people, questions or topics. And like blogs, Quora is showing up well in Google results.

2. [Angel Professional Padfolio](#) – helps you prepare for job interviews

Job losses have made headlines and people are looking for an edge in the interview process. People who were used to getting jobs easily now have more competition. The interview process is key to getting a job. If you're rusty, this binder helps you prepare.

3. [Agent Anything](#)

Here's another job search tool, but this one is aimed at students who need experience in their field or a little extra pocket change.

The service allows anyone to post any kind of job and students can accept it. For example, if someone needs their dry cleaning picked up or a delivery made they can post it on Agent Anything and a student can perform the task and get paid.

One student said he designed financial analysis that led to more jobs from the same company. He said, “it really helped increase the amount of experience on my resume and gave me more topics to talk about in interviews.”

4. [*Zoom Room*](#): a gym for dogs that uses iPads to check in

This small business is using technology in an innovative way for the pet industry. It's a franchise called Dog Agility. They're entire business is run by an iPad. “Each dog has a unique bar code and is scanned into their system (like an actual gym) using the iPad.”

The business teaches obedience classes as well as dog training and therapy. Both the owners and dogs get a workout. If that's a little exhausting you can plan a dog birthday party, play date or special event. I'm not sure if they have dog photography, but that's also a trend I've seen a lot of recently.

5. [*RhythmTraffic.com*](#): earth friendly device that turns traffic lights into smart lights

No need to buy an expensive hybrid or electric car to save the earth or gas. It's a small device that plugs into traffic signals to make them into smart traffic signals. They see cars and make the light green according to traffic demand. The results are up to 90 percent fewer vehicle stops and about 30 percent less fuel consumption and emissions.

6. [*Orabrush*](#): YouTube ads both entertain and sell this bad breath eliminator

This company invented a uniquely designed tongue scraper to prevent bad breath. Last year after wasting thousands on an Infomercial, founder Robert Wagstaff turned to a student marketing class for help. Student Jeff Harmon jumped on board and recruited some friends who created YouTube commercials for the product. The commercials were so entertaining people didn't realize they were being sold to. Now Orabrush consults with YouTube and has over a million in sales.

The videos also helped the company get into Walmart and other retail stores (their display at Walmart plays their proven video and is one of the few that was given, not paid for). They are one of the top commercial channels on YouTube and were recently [featured in the New York Times](#), which led to a storm of additional local and national coverage.

7. [*DropBox*](#)

I just started using DropBox. One reason it's popular is because it doesn't try to change the way people work. Instead it works in a way that is familiar. DropBox is a free online file-sharing tool that a whole team can use. It updates in real time. While I prefer Google Docs, a lot of people still prefer using Word. This service eliminates email attachments. You can buy extra storage space but the company rewards sharing by giving you credit for space each time you refer someone who signs up. I signed up several months after I got an invite from one of my followers on Twitter. It notified him that I accepted and he thanked me for the extra space credit within hours after I signed up.