

1.00% APYA HIGH-YIELD SAVINGS
ACCOUNT FROM
AMERICAN EXPRESS

LEARN MORE NOW

PERSONAL SAVINGS
from American Express

Accounts offered by American Express Bank, FSB. MEMBER FDIC

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit www.djreprints.com

See a sample reprint in PDF format.

Order a reprint of this article now

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

CAREERS | APRIL 28, 2009

Jobless Tap Power of Merchandising

By ALINA DIZIK

Stephanie Aucoin got a job offer the same day she was stopped in an elevator by an executive who noticed her new yellow wristband with "Laid Off Need a Job.com" embossed with black letters.

The executive, who was a chief financial officer at an alternative energy company, was looking for an assistant and told her to stop in to meet with him. "I did," says Ms. Aucoin, 48 years old, who started the new job in March after being laid off from an executive-assistant position at a local accounting firm last September.

The silicone bracelet -- think of Lance Armstrong's Livestrong original version -- was an idea Ms. Aucoin, of Sarasota, Fla., developed with Barbara Bourn, 59, a former colleague.



Courtesy LaidOffNeedAJob.com

Spotlight on Jobless Plight

Hopeful entrepreneurs, most of whom have lost their jobs, are capitalizing on layoffs while also highlighting the plight of the jobless. They are dreaming up layoff-related merchandise, offering wristbands, mugs, T-shirts, board games and more to the recently unemployed -- whose ranks are growing. More than 5.1 million jobs have been lost since December 2007, and more cuts are expected in the coming months.

Padding dwindling bank accounts is what originally motivated Ms. Aucoin and Ms. Bourn. "We needed to find a gimmick" to earn money, says Ms. Bourn, who was forced to sell her house after her hours in an interior-design sales position were cut back.

The idea of the bracelets came after Ms. Aucoin had depleted her entire savings and still hadn't had a job interview. The two women thought starting their own business might be the only way to earn a living, so they began to brainstorm ideas until the wristband came up. "We researched the cost and decided it was doable for our budget," says Ms. Bourn.

Ms. Bourn used \$1,000 of her savings to invest in the business, and Ms. Aucoin built a Web site for the product. The pair found a manufacturer that would customize the bracelets and ordered 500 Laid Off bracelets. Within weeks, the pair launched the Web site laidoffneedajob.com and began hawking the

wristbands for \$3 each. They used Ms. Bourn's apartment as a makeshift mail depot while spreading the word about their venture via social-networking site Twitter, which helped spark sales. Last week, their Web site averaged 500 visitors a day. After about five weeks in business, the pair has sold 4,500 bracelets, broken even on their investment and pocketed \$8,900.

Jim Hart, a former sales manager for a pharmaceutical-equipment company in Arlington, Texas, ordered three bracelets after seeing someone with one at an airport. So far, it has stirred interest. "Just by seeing this, people start asking me questions," he says. And one of his bracelet-wearing friends already has landed an interview.



Courtesy Traci Sanders

Offbeat Ideas

Other entrepreneurs have been stepping in with their own offbeat ideas for the laid off. Daniel Brabson, 38, launched RecessionJunction.com after seeing his freelance contracts as a benefit coordinator for insurance companies disappear. The site sells beer mugs, T-shirts and bumper stickers with humorous sayings about the economy and layoffs. Bestsellers include a coffee mug with "Alms for the Poor" on it, and a pint glass that says "This Beer is Going Down Like the Stock Market."

"I just hope [people] are able to kind of laugh at themselves -- it's tough for a lot of people," say Mr. Brabson, who took out a \$3,000 bank loan to start the business and launched the site in February. He uses several local vendors to customize designs for each product. Mr. Branson so far has sold 150 items, which are priced between \$4 and \$14 each, and hopes to break even in the next two months.

Cover Letter Tee

After his own layoff in 2005, Larry Dinsmore, an information-technology professional, started a Web site called [Damn I Need a Job](http://DamnINeedaJob.com), which offers T-shirts with a customer's cover letter printed on it. Each customized T-shirt costs \$25. Mr. Dinsmore, who is now employed, says Web-site traffic has increased by about 30% in the past few months, but that sales are steady. "The target audience doesn't have a lot of money to blow," he says.



Courtesy Aaron Gell

Aaron Gell, a magazine editor who started an organization for laid-off media professionals, is selling this t-shirt for \$25.

Job Search: The Game

Some layoff-related products take a little more work. Stay-at-home mom Traci Sanders revived a homemade idea she'd dreamt up in the last recession. Back then she made a poster resembling a job-search-themed game inspired by Candyland as a Christmas present for her unemployed husband. Ms. Sanders, 42, has since taken the game idea back out and will start selling it on her site, jobsearchagameoffrustration.com next month.

She is in talks with two local bookstores that are interested in offering the game, titled "Job Search! A Game of Frustration." (The poster that inspired the game is on sale on the Web and in a local bookstore.)

Players draw cards with messages like "Unemployment rate drops -- first time in three months, move ahead two spaces" and "Wonder when friend will get job so he can hire you, lose one turn."

Ms. Sanders hopes the game will cheer up job seekers. "Even if you move one step forward and two steps back, it shows that there's actually a path," says Ms. Sanders.

As for the bracelet venture, Ms. Aucoin and Ms. Bourn are focused on their business and have even handed out free bracelets at the local unemployment office. Ms. Bourn says they're negotiating with a district manager from a retail chain who is interested in stocking the bracelets in 37 locations. Right now, neither are banking on an economic upturn and, even when that comes, the pair don't have plans to change the bracelet's message.

"We just want to get everyone to wear one," says Ms. Bourn.

Write to Alina Dizik at alina.dizik@dowjones.com

Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page D4

Copyright 2011 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com

