

# thinkAbout

September 13 + 14, 2006 • Baltimore, Maryland

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## Take This Job and Sell It Charging customers to help stage events

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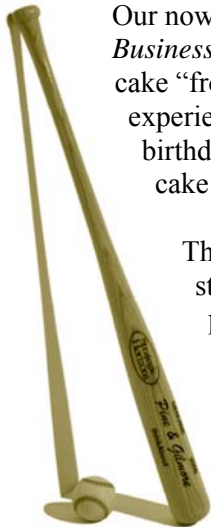
What's the highest price ever paid for an experience? The \$20 million Dennis Tito paid to go rocketing as an astronaut. His out-of-this-world purchase was replicated by a South African gentleman (a self-dubbed "Afronaut"), and others wait in the wings – make that *on* the wings – for their turn. All this has futurists speculating about Space Tourism in tomorrow's world of commerce.

Such conjecture misses the here-and-now trend that underlies these news stories, namely the new paradigm of *paying labor*. Of course, most people work as *paid labor*. Many generous souls put in hours as *unpaid volunteers*. But now we see signs of individuals actually paying cold hard cash to perform jobs previously worked only for a wage or for free. Tito and his emulators are actually paying a fee to toil in space; they don't just float around and watch their wage-earning peers do all the work.

Ever since the movie *Forrest Gump*, shrimp boat operators in the southern United States have been able to command fees approaching \$100 to have tourists work a morning of hard labor catching shrimp. When they return to shore, customers get T-shirts and have their pictures taken — and then the operator takes the fish to market! It's paying labor (with no employee turnover, no OSHA regulations, and no profit-sharing). Better dude ranches and other Agri-tourism venues similarly package jobs as paid-for experiences. So divorced are we from the Agrarian Economy that many people now willingly pay to extract commodities.

Our now infamous birthday cake illustration – from the July-August 1998 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, demonstrating the Progression of Economic Value from commodities (baking a cake "from scratch") to goods (using cake mixes) to services (having a bakery make it) to experiences (outsourcing the whole party to Chuck E. Cheese's) – has taken on new life. Some birthday-party venues now charge hundreds of dollars for parties where guests make their own cake!

Think also of Build-a-Bear Workshop. This wonderful experience takes place not in a retail store, but a retail *factory*, where people pay to make their own stuffed animals. (The place positions the only paid worker, along seven manufacturing stations, at the "Stitch Me" station.) So divorced are we from the Industrial Economy that many people now willingly pay to manufacture goods!



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As you look to stage ever more compelling events, consider the question we pose our clients: ***What one task, traditionally performed by paid labor or unpaid volunteers, would consumers be willing to pay to perform?***

Anyone sponsoring major golf tournaments, or even staging local golf outings, should consider the answer one golf pro gave us: Pin placement! Surely many people would pay to be escorted around the course in the early morn to select where each hole is placed and operate the digger.

Indeed, sports marketing events provide ample opportunities to offer paying labor as fee-based experiences. Why pay someone to perform a given task when a customer might be willing to perform the same work? The existence of sports, as well as rock-and-roll, fantasy camps bear witness to the pent-up demand for fifteen minutes of fame. So go beyond backstage passes (for passive experiences) and offer (active) back-stage work — for a fee!

All pre- and post-show activities represent possibilities for incorporating paying labor. So divorced are we from the Service Economy that many people would now willingly pay to deliver such services! We've seen cooking schools and other culinary events have a folks pay less (but still pay) to arrive early to prepare foodstuffs and stay late to clean-up. It may seem to buyers (and even readers here) as a discounted admission fee, but it's really paying labor.

Your guests might pay to document events as photographers, with their output sold as memorabilia. Others might work to create multiple webcast versions of various experiences — if hosted at the event's official website. Surely, mobile events, seasonal encounters, product launches, and other such genres each possess unique work activities available for packaging as paying labor experiences.

Insurance concerns? That's just an excuse to not be creative. Vans and ESPN would never have launched their skatepark experiences with such backpedaling. Hmm...Any parents care to pay to be a safety engineer?

