

Dutch duo peddle old bikes as fashion, furniture

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Industrial design student Lodewijk Bosman (right) and Hidde van der Straaten work on items made from recycled bicycle, May 17, 2013 in Delft. Two Dutch entrepreneurs have found a novel way to make money out of the thousands of bicycles abandoned in the Netherlands each year, by turning them into designer fashion items and furniture.

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Industrial design student Lodewijk Bosman, 25, and Hidde van der Straaten, 28, founded "The Upcycle" in university city Delft in January 2012 to exploit a typically Dutch problem.

The Netherlands has more bikes—18 million—than its 17 million population, and around a million new bikes are bought every year.

But with so many bikes come parking problems, and if they are left in the wrong place, or simply abandoned, the authorities pick them up and take them to the pound.

This happens to tens of thousands of bikes a year, and while owners can get their bikes back by paying a fine of around 20 euros (25 dollars), few do.

Unclaimed bikes are sold to bike shops that sell them on second-hand, either in the Netherlands or abroad.

Lodewijk and Hidde also buy the abandoned bikes and parts, but with something different in mind.

Take for example an Upcycle bedside lamp, price 88 euros. It consists of a bike light with a new LED bulb fitted to a stem made of a few chain links and intertwined spokes—all standing on a wooden base wrapped in plaited inner tubes.

Other products include a bracelet made from bike chain links for 10 euros, a belt made from a tyre with a buckle fitted costs 30 euros.

The Dutch duo has also come up with a dark and rubbery cubic stool made from waste wood covered in plaited inner tubes.



A pair of lamps made with bicycle parts are on show at the workshop of Upcycle on May 17, 2013 in Delft. Two Dutch entrepreneurs have found a novel way to make money out of the thousands of bicycles abandoned in the Netherlands each year, by turning them into designer fashion items and furniture.

The name of their company, set up after winning a 10,000-euro prize for their innovative idea, is a pun on bicycle and upcycling, a process one step beyond recycling that consists of turning something to be thrown away into something of higher worth.

The company began selling products through their website in February and quickly attracted customers around the world.

"I'd say half our customers are in the Netherlands, the other half abroad," said Hidde.

They hope to strike distribution deals with shops, including the

Netherlands' many souvenir boutiques.

"The bicycle is something typically Dutch, so why not turn them into souvenirs?" he said.

"The supply is practically never ending because the Netherlands is 'The' country for [bicycles](#)," said Lodewijk, his trousers held up by a belt made from a slashed bike tyre.

His business partner shows off a wallet made from a piece of old bike saddle and a small piece of [tyre](#).

"We try to use bike parts as much as we can, but that's not always possible, like with the belt's buckle or the lamp's switch," said Hidde

The Upcycle also sells renovated [bikes](#), made from recovered frames with new parts added where necessary, including Upcycle touches such as mudguards made from cut-up tyres.

"Getting around by bike is making use of a sustainable, environmentally friendly form of transport," said Saskia Kluit, deputy director of the Dutch Cyclists' Federation.

"This business is taking the idea of sustainability a step further."

The company works with the "Stunt" foundation, that helps retrain the unemployed for new jobs, giving the business a social aspect.

"In a way we're recycling people," said Stunt supervisor Hein Laakes.

"It's very gratifying to see what we've made being sold in Australia, for example."

Lodewijk says that his motto is "People, Planet, Profit,"—also known as "the triple bottom line."

"In the end we're a business that has to function, and with which we hope to turn a profit, but the social aspect is important for our business," he said.

Orders are picking up, and the company has yet to start making money, but when cash does come in, half will go to Stunt.

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