

## Open for Business &gt; MyGiftster

**Owner:** Ron Reimann

**Type of business:** Online services

**Number of employees:** Four

**Location:** Arden Hills

**Contact information:** mygiftster.com; 612-235-4892

**Tell us what your business does.** It connects every family member, from kids to grandparents, with a free wish-list service on the Internet so everyone can give and get gifts that matter most. It can be accessed from computers, smart phones and iPads to check each other's wish lists before making a purchase. Items on someone's list can be reserved, avoiding duplicate gifts, without the list maker knowing the status.

Making a list of gift preferences is much like jotting a list on a piece of paper, except it is online, and you can include star rankings and one-click links to online retailers that carry the exact item. For privacy, to share lists, a member creates a "MyGiftster Group" and invites family to join. Those in the group can see each other's lists and mark items as reserved or purchased.

The MyGiftster.com service also has a blog containing gift-giving tips and ideas, an upcoming event calendar where you can post everyone's important dates, such as birthdays and anniversaries, and a feature to print out a shopping list containing just the items from everyone's lists that you have reserved to purchase. What it doesn't have is lots of flashing advertisements or extra bells and whistles that serve just to overwhelm the main task at hand.

**Why are you launching it now?** For the first time ever, all generations of family members can be connected online via the Internet. One of the opportunities this opens up is a family-friendly place where every family member can post and view gift-giving ideas. The steady move toward online shopping also makes an Internet wish list system even more practical and convenient, because items for purchase are just a click away. This is an independent system separate from any retailer or social network. For convenience, we offer Facebook users a way to sign into MyGiftster using their Facebook credentials, and a way to invite their Facebook friends to join MyGiftster.

**Where did you get the idea for your business?** A geeky family member who is an I.T. pro built a bare-bones system that we used in our extended family. When I first heard about it I was not at all enthusiastic. But I tried it, and when I saw how quickly the family came to rely on it, I realized there really is a need and a solution here. This home-brew version happened to have just the right approach to solving this problem, so we were careful to preserve our learning from this in the commercial version of MyGiftster.

**How did you develop your business plan?** It started with the back of a napkin, proceeded to a white board and then a 10-



PIONEER PRESS PHOTO: JOHN DOMAN

**Owner Ron Reimann** works from his home office in Arden Hills. MyGiftster is a website that helps families identify the right gifts for each other.

page document, just so we could say we had one. My experience from five previous businesses I've started helped me make a mental plan, so not too much of it is written down. The key element was seeing how "sticky" this family-based wish list service could be when a family tries it. Once you use it, you can't imagine being without it.

The key elements for success for MyGiftster are design, which requires that the site be simple and fun to use; marketing, something that is critical when, at first blush, this idea strikes people (like me!) as not needed; and technology, providing a great and reliable experience for members.

**How are you financing your business?** At the moment, from personal resources. The service is free to our members. We provide the professionally designed online system and they provide the content — lists, events and purchase status. By unique design, the system uses ads and product suggestions to enhance the experience, not distract from it. Ads are displayed only in one place and are relevant to the content on a list. So if you decide to buy a Nikon camera on someone's list, the ad displayed might be for a special sale going on for Nikon cameras. This adds value rather than detracting from the page. Google pays MyGiftster a small fee for each "click."

Additionally, you can click on a magnifying glass next to a list item and instantly a window slides out below the item, displaying up to five matches at Amazon.com, if available. Should the gift buyer decide to make a purchase at Amazon.com, MyGiftster receives a small commission.

If we succeed in making these relevant ads and convenient instant product results useful to the family, then clicks and purchases result in small commissions to MyGiftster. With about 100,000 active families, then it gets interesting.

**How do you see current economic conditions affecting your business?**

One of our themes on the site is "Money is tight — make your gifts right." Since MyGiftster leads to "efficient" gift buying and giving, it actually is an economic solution.

**What makes your business unique?**

Our dream is that MyGiftster becomes the "iPod" of the wish list/gift registry category of online services. We think it has the right features implemented with a sense of design that outshines competitors. It has "user-provided content" so we have to do a great

**What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome to get this business going?** This is one of those great ideas that no one is actually looking for. Which is a problem. In economics professor Joel Waldenfogel's book, "Scroogenomics: Why You Shouldn't Buy Presents for the Holidays," he says that during the holidays in the United States, the value placed on gifts received is about \$14 billion less than what the gift givers paid for them. Relying on thoughtfulness and last-minute shopping leads to this huge economic waste.

MyGiftster attacks the core of this problem — matching gift buying precisely with what the gift recipients would have chosen themselves. It takes the stress out of the process and allocates hard-earned dollars to gifts really needed or wanted.

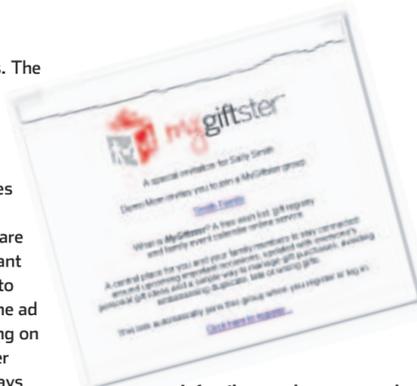
**How did you overcome the obstacle?**

We set our time horizon long, so we could give people time to experience this service. We had a beta version running before last Christmas so we could get some early learning on how people reacted. We think word of mouth will grow it from family to family.

**What will tell you the business is successful?** When "let me check 'Giftster'" becomes part of lexicon in families before any gift-giving occasion. We think once you experience giving and getting gifts based on specific needs and wants, you find you can't go back to the "old" way of flying blind.

And, when we prove that we can generate sustainable profits with this business model that provides the core services for free to members. We estimate that when we have 1 million members, MyGiftster can generate revenue of \$768,000 per year.

*Interested in taking part in Open for Business? If your business is less than one year old, e-mail us at [businessnews@pioneerpress.com](mailto:businessnews@pioneerpress.com).*



**A family member can send out an invitation, like the sample shown, to alert relatives to the opportunity to list their gift preferences or look for family gifts on MyGiftster.com**

job of providing the service and keeping it running smoothly as volume increases. We don't have any inventory to manage, no accounts receivable, no credit-card processing, no shipping department, no physical location. MyGiftster is a "virtual business" with all — customers and my staff working from home offices — connected via the Internet.

## REVISITING &gt; The Athlete Lab LLC

**Business:** The Athlete Lab

**Contact information:** [KateKlaers@TheAthleteLab.com](mailto:KateKlaers@TheAthleteLab.com), 612-770-4322

**Location:** Little Canada

**Owner:** Kate Klaers

**Originally featured in Open for Business:** Sept. 28, 2008



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARGO LAPANTA  
**Coach Beth Ziegler** gives instruction to Jack Paulson, left, and Zach Douglas as they flip a tire.

Olympic weightlifting, run faster and get leaner. We pride ourselves in harnessing your potential by teaching you to raise the bar on your fitness.

**What does your business do?** We are a CrossFit gym in the business of getting clients in the best shape of their lives, no matter what their level. We aim to provide coaching in an encouraging and inspirational environment. Our approach to fitness allows for average people to do things they never thought possible. Our gym is filled with all levels of people who have learned to do pull-ups, climb ropes, learn

**How's business?**

Business is great. We've experienced a steady increase in client base over the last two years. I believe this is due to the word of mouth of our clients and through the growing popularity of CrossFit training. Once potential clients come to our gym, they realize they have a professional coach by their side teaching skills they've never learned before and giving them accountability for making progress. Additionally, our retention rate is high because the gym is a community of people who become friends. We also provide workshops, hold fundraising events, join local races together, plan social events and much more. We'll continue to evolve based on our clients' needs and with the added help of five new trainers coming on board.

**What have been the biggest changes?** Since being featured in 2008, we've expanded our gym space, added adult class times, started a CrossFit Kids program and collaborated with Fawn Friday, a certified Kettlebell instructor ([visit fawnfriday.com](http://visit.fawnfriday.com)). After the new year, we plan on implementing a teen strength and conditioning program for high school athletes who want to maximize off-season training. Additionally, because we emphasize



**Ellen Clifford** does a push-up across the black bar.

eating high-quality food, we've become a drop-off site for Six Arrows Farm and Wild Run Salmon. They provide us with pastured meats, eggs and wild-caught salmon. We also started cow-sharing by ordering local farm-raised beef together. We have become more than just a gym; we are a community that wants to optimize all aspects of healthy living through movement, nutrition and education.

**Do you have any advice for others launching a business?** I found that talking to other business owners in the same field has helped tremendously. I've also used WomenVenture and SCORE several times for financial, marketing and business-plan advice. Do your best to start with low overhead, so you can be profitable right away. As an entrepreneur, your career becomes a labor of love, one that requires a true passion for what you are doing to make it successful.

Be willing to accept that there is a big learning curve involved and you can't know or do everything right away. What you CAN do is offer incredible service, care about your clients and give them something to feel good about.



**Zach Weir** rests the dumbbells on his shoulders before bringing them overhead.