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## Rags to riches: Upcycling trend spawns an industry

Boston Business Journal - by [Jesse Noyes](#) Boston Business Journal

The old adage about one person's trash being another's treasure is becoming increasingly true as a growing number of artists and merchants in the Boston area are using yesterday's goods to craft the latest fashions.

The practice is called 'upcycling.' And as consumer demand grows for green products, making and selling upcycled items is turning into a cottage industry of artists, designers and boutique stores.

That's good news for people like Anthony Ferrario, who started out with the hobby of making ties out of materials like old military garments. Now the Cambridge-based clothing designer makes customized hooded sweatshirts and jackets stitched out of old clothes he digs up in thrift stores for about \$100 a pop.

"When I started out I didn't know anyone who did anything like that," he said. "Now it seems like there's a lot of people doing the same type of thing."

Katrina Majkut, an artist in Brookline, said she's sold "hundreds and hundreds" of the beer caps she turns into pin-on buttons and sells for between \$1 and \$5 apiece. "My friends thought it was a little weird at first," she said, but "people love them."

It's difficult to pin down how many upcycled pieces are selling. For one, the craft is often associated with handmade clothing and accessories. And at a number of craft marketplaces - such as the upcoming Boston Handmade market in Somerville, scheduled for June 28 -- upcycled products are everywhere. Last year Somerville-based boutique store **Magpie Industries** LLC held a "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle ... Recraft" festival that featured recycled crafts by 25 vendors.

But there are clear signs upcycling is taking off. **Etsy.com**, an online selling site for handmade products, including upcycled items, has grown exponentially since its founding in 2005. That year, about \$166,000 worth of sales was made through the site, which is based in New York City. So far this year about \$29.5 million in sales have been made over



W. Marc Bernsau  
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the site. And about 12,700 items for sale on **Esty.com** earlier this week were labeled upcycled products, said Adam Brown, a marketing staff member for Etsy.

At shops that specialize in handmade or green goods, upcycled items are popular sellers. Cardholders made out of old computer parts and can openers fashioned from bike chains do well at Magpie, said co-owner Dave Sakowski. Similarly, handbags made of bicycle tire inner tubes are hot items at Cambridge-based Greenward LLC, said Scott Walker, a co-owner of the shop.

Customers like the feeling of purchasing something that might otherwise have ended up in a landfill, he said. "Now that people have this awareness, I think they tend to look more at all aspects of their life in terms of an environmental impact," Walker added.

But there are extra costs. Often, upcycled goods sell at a premium compared with mass-manufactured counterparts. Ferrario, for example, sells his recycled sweatshirts for about \$100 each. A similar article would cost about \$35 at the Gap.

Customers are willing to pay that premium for something that is unique and environmentally friendly, sellers of upcycled items said. As the economy slumps, however, consumers might be less willing to shell out extra cash for greener goods.

"The economy the way it is, it's a little bit harder," said Lisa O'Neill, an artist in Roslindale who makes and sells jewelry from recycled accessories. Yet, she said her sales have been increasing.

"When people do have to buy something, they really appreciate something that is local and handmade," she added.

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