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The Reporter

Rupert Jones takes a sideways look at the news

There's snow business like ... The big freeze has kept insurance company call centre staff busy this week, with cars sliding into trees and lampposts, a flood of burst pipes, and thousands of people missing flights because the snow prevented them from getting to the airport. Meanwhile, the Reporter was hit with a blizzard of weather-related press releases - some more desperate than others. **Young Group** - specialising in providing "property portfolio management services" to private investors - claims the Siberian conditions underline the benefits of city living. "It has been those lucky enough to live in city centres, close enough to walk to work, who have been left holding the economy together," insists the company, which took the opportunity to promote its developments in locations such as London's Canary Wharf.

... and warming to the theme Sticking with this, is it just me, or is there something slightly depressing about the fact that even this week's extreme weather wasn't enough to stop some people splashing the cash on stuff they probably don't need? Voucher code website, everydaysale.co.uk, reported that traffic was up 20% on Monday and Tuesday. "It seems a good proportion of the six million people who didn't go into work due to the weather, were using the time to shop online," it says.

Ticket to deride? Credit crunch ticket offers are everywhere. For example,



Cold comfort: Canary Wharf living

there's Frank Skinner's Credit Crunch Cabaret, a series of variety shows at London's Lyric Theatre where every ticket is a tenner. But promoters and agencies seem to think there are still plenty of people willing to fork out big backs to get close to their idols. Ticketmaster is flogging Beyonce "meet and greet" packages, where you get to say hello to the superstar (below), have your photo taken with her and watch the concert from a front row seat. The price? A snip at £1,265 per person.

Little or large If even two-for-one restaurant deals can't tempt you out, how about one where you pay what you like? The Little Bay in London's Farringdon is "tearing up its bills" for customers this month, and asking them to just pay what they think their food and service is worth. Owner Peter Ilic will not present a single food bill to diners during



February. "It's entirely up to each customer whether they give £100 or a penny," he says. The February menu - which includes foie gras, caviar and fillet steak - wouldn't be out of place at Michelin-starred establishments.

Credit where credit isn't due As the recession continues to bite, worryingly a third of Britons are relying on credit cards to make essential purchases such as food. It emerged this week that some 32% of people admitted they would be using their plastic to fund day-to-day purchases during the first part of the year, according to the Post Office. Around 45% did not plan to pay off their credit card bills in full each month - suggesting they will accumulate increasing levels of debt as the year goes on.

Windfall's fall There was bad news this week for a million customers of insurance giant Aviva (owner of the Norwich Union brand), which has backtracked on a pledge to hand them windfall payments averaging £1,000 each. Britain's largest insurer said sharp falls on the stockmarkets mean the original offer is no longer fair to shareholders. It was due to come from the firm's "inherited estate" - surplus money built up in its with-profits funds. "We are working closely with the policyholder advocate to see how we can restructure our offer," added the company.

Every £50 helps Tesco is giving a £50 gift card to all new life insurance customers who get a quote by 4 March and take out the policy. The offer is available on the supermarket giant's four cover options. The gift card can be spent in-store or at petrol stations.

r.jones@guardian.co.uk