



Life & Style

In association with **es magazine**

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Need a car for the weekend? No problem. Rent one. But what if you'd like to try out an iPad for a few days? Or your Rolf Harris tribute band is short of a didgeridoo for the evening? Or if you're trying to work out whether your art deco living room really can entertain a gold Laughing Buddha statue?

Not content with persuading us to share our photos, location and innermost thoughts with the world, entrepreneurs are now asking us to post our possessions on the internet and hire them out to neighbours.

It's not just penny-pinching that's driving this trend, either. According to WIRED magazine editor David Rowan, "The way we measure our status is changing - increasingly it's as important to us how much influence we have on the social networks as what car we drive or which watch we own."

"Meanwhile, digital services such as Spotify and Netflix are teaching us that we don't need to own physical goods to be fully plugged into the culture. So we'll be more willing to pay to access goods and services in 2011 than to own them outright - whether through a car-sharing scheme or a toy rental business."

At one website, Zilok.com, tools, cars and audio equipment are all readily available - but users have posted more unexpected items too. Goods on offer include an iPhone 4 (£5 a day), a "relaxing" gold Buddha statue (£10 a day) and a rare copy of photographer Martin Parr's book Home and Abroad - a snip at just £17 a day.

Even in the case of the private jet, the ultimate calling card of the high flier, the ease of rental by the hour is overtaking the cachet of ownership. Blue Star Jets is one jet brokerage company that has seen London business take off, says partner Kale Leaman, because it offers "better value" and "convenience".

Of course, renting has always been possible one way or another, but what has changed is the ease of access, range of goods available and community focus. Roo Rogers, co-author of What's Mine Is Yours: How Collaborative Consumption Is Changing the Way We Live, thinks that the internet has helped to shift consumer attitudes. He says: "Social networks have reminded us of the importance of community. In the end collaborative consumption is a very sociable model. We barter or trade from people we either know or know something about."

Entrepreneurs inspired by the collaborative spirit of sites such as Facebook and Twitter are using the connections forged by social networks to encourage people to share more than just their photos. SnapGoods.com, launching here in the spring, is one US site that has found success by teaming a renting marketplace with social networking elements, aiming to help people meet and share goods. It launched in New York last July and has seen more than 1,000 items posted online. "We talk to you about your friends and network because that is the starting place for asking favours in the real world," explains CEO Ron Williams.

Paying your neighbour a small fee to borrow his iPad, rather than forking out a small fortune only to find you prefer your laptop, has obvious advantages. In the world of collaborative consumption, hiring is the new buying. Just don't forget to give it back.



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