



## Child's play as canny consumers swap gifts that keep on giving

Melissa Singer  
October 23, 2010 - 3:00AM

IF SAVVY shoppers try before they buy, then forward-thinking consumers don't buy at all. They borrow, rent and share.

Advertisement

With the average household item used for just a fraction of its working life, renters are outstripping owners in a range of areas in a shift towards "collaborative consumption", where access equals power and ownership is a burdensome relic from last century.

In many industries, collaborative consumption is not new. Public libraries, video stores and car rental companies have been doing it for years. But new technologies mean sharing and trading goods is more efficient.

Whereas video stores are closing by the day, companies such as Netflix, which posts movies to members, are establishing a community of amateur film reviewers.

Rachel Botsman, the author of a book on collaborative consumption, *What's Mine Is Yours*, says the financial crisis was a catalyst for growth in share schemes but dismisses that they will die as the economy recovers.

"We saw how fragile the [traditional consumption] system is and it doesn't make us happy ... People [are] going back to the basics of life. They don't want the DVD, they want the movie it plays. We're getting used to not needing stuff, but the need or experience it fulfils."

Collaborative consumption is expressing itself in many ways. On Monday hundreds of women will pay \$25 to swap their unwanted threads and support charity for National Clothing Swap Day. The City of Sydney council has announced plans to boost car-sharing spaces for new housing developments.

In the US "garden dating" schemes are sprouting - homeowners with spare land are collaborating with green thumbs and sharing the spoils, from flowers to fruit and vegetables.

Ms Botsman said there are three models of collaborative consumption: product-service systems, such as car-sharing; redistribution markets; collaborative lifestyles, which include communal workspaces. While the first two depend on critical mass for success, collaborative lifestyles need what she calls a "belief in the commons" and trust between strangers.

"One principle is no more important than any other. In some instances one is at the heart of making the system work and in others it is less important."

Improving accountability and reducing fraud could lead to the emergence of "reputation banks" - ratings in searchable databases where owners and renters can check each other's credentials.

Retailers will also need to find ways of deepening their relationships with clients, she said.

"Their whole model is based on how many units are sold but they have to undergo a huge shift to units used. You have to cannibalise the old to make way for the new - you need brave, visionary leaders."

Emma Jamvold, a mother of two from Coogee, started a babywear swapping website, SwapItBaby, after her second child. "I liked the idea of forming a community ... and if it made money then that is fantastic."

The chief executive of the National Retailers Association, Margy Osmond, said renting and socially responsible

selling could become "adjuncts" to traditional businesses but "it would be wrong to suggest this is a replacement model".

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/shopping/childs-play-as-canny-consumers-swap-gifts-that-keep-on-giving-20101022-16xg.html>*