

7 Ways to Have More by Owning Less

by Maria Popova

Inconspicuous consumption, or what lunching ladies have to do with social web karma.

Stuff. We all accumulate it and eventually form all kinds of emotional attachments to it. (Arguably, because the marketing machine of the 20th century has conditioned us to do so.) But digital platforms and cloud-based tools are making it increasingly easy to have all the things we want without actually owning them. Because, as Wired founder and notable futurist Kevin Kelly once put it, “access is better than ownership.” Here are seven services that help shrink your carbon footprint, lighten your economic load and generally liberate you from the shackles of stuff through the power of sharing.

NEIGHBORGOODS

The age of keeping up with the Joneses is over. The time of linking up with them has begun. NeighborGoods is a new platform that allows you to do just that, allowing you to borrow and lend from and to your neighbors rather than buying new stuff. (Remind us please, what happened to that fancy blender you bought and used only twice?) From lawnmowers to bikes to DVD's, the LA-based startup dubs itself “the Craigslist for borrowing,” allowing you to both save and earn money.

Transparent user ratings, transaction histories and privacy controls make the sharing process simple and safe, while automated calendars and reminders ensure the safe return of loaned items.

Give NeighborGoods a shot by creating a sharing group for your apartment building, campus, office, or reading group — both your wallet and your social life will thank you.

UPDATE: Per the co-founder's kind comment below, we should clarify that NeighborGoods also allows you to import your Twitter and Facebook friends from the get-go, so you have an instant group to share with.

SNAPGOODS

Similarly to Neighborgoods, SnapGoods allows you to rent, borrow and lend within your community. SnapGoods takes things step further by expanding the notion of “community” not only to your local group — neighborhood, office or apartment building — but to your social graph across the web's trusted corners. The site features full Facebook and Meetup integration, extending your social circle to the cloud.

You can browse the goods people in your area are lending or take a look at what they need and lend a hand (or a sewing machine, as may be the case) if you've got the goods.

LANDSHARE

Growing one's own produce is every hipster-urbanite's pipe dream. But the trouble with it is that you have to actually have a place to grow it. And while a pot of cherry tomatoes on in your fire escape is better than nothing, it's hardly anything. Enter Landshare, a simple yet brilliant platform for connecting aspiring growers with landowners who have the space but don't use it.

Though currently only available in the U.K., we do hope to see Landshare itself, or at least the concept behind it, spread worldwide soon.

SWAPTREE

swaptree is a simple yet brilliant platform for swapping your media possessions — from books to DVD's to vinyl — once they've run its course in your life as you hunt for the next great thing. Since we first covered swaptree nearly three years ago, the site has facilitated some 1.6 million swaps, saving its users an estimated \$10.3 million while reducing their collective carbon footprint by 9.3 million tons.

Inspired by the founders' moms, whose lunch dates with girlfriends turned into book-swap clubs, swaptree makes sure that the only thing between you and the latest season of 24 is the price of postage.

GIFTFLOW

Most of us are familiar with the concept of regifting. (No disrespect, but the disconnect between good friends and good taste is sometimes astounding.) Luckily, GiftFlow allows you to swap gifts you don't want for ones other people don't want but you do. The platform is based on a system of karmic reputation, where your profile shows all you've given and taken, building an implicit system of trust through transparency.

So go ahead, grandma. Hit us with your latest sweet but misguided gift. Chances are, there's someone out there who'd kill for that kitschy music box.

ZIPCAR

We're big proponents of bikesharing but, to this point, the concept has failed to transcend local implementations. While some cities like Paris, Amsterdam and Denver are fortunate enough to have thriving bikesharing programs, we're yet to see a single service available

across different locations. Until then, we'd have to settle for the next best sharing-based transportation solution: Zipcar, a 24/7, on-demand carsharing service that gives its members flexible access to thousands of cars across the U.S., U.K. and Canada. Zipcar has been around for quite some time years and most people are already familiar with it, so we won't overelaborate, but suffice it to say the service is the most promising solution to reducing both traffic congestion and pollution in cities without reducing the actual number of drivers.

SHARE SOME SUGAR

Lend me some sugar, I am your neighbor. More than an Outkast lyric line, this is the inspiration behind share some sugar — a celebration of neighborliness through the sharing of goods and resources. Much like SnapGoods and NeighborGoods, the service lets you borrow, rent and share stuff within your neighborhood or group of friends

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For more on the culture of shared resources, do watch Rachel Botsman's excellent TEDxSydney talk. Her forthcoming book, What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption, hits bookstores in two weeks and is an absolute must-read.

UPDATE: Botsman's book, What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption, is now out and landed promptly on our best books in business, life and mind shortlist for 2010.