

You'll Want to Read this Column – Trust Us.

THE LEAD | February 18, 2015

From prehistoric times until 2003, human beings cumulatively created five exobytes of data. That's five billion gigabytes. We now produce that much information *every 48 hours*. We send out 100 million emails *every minute*. Bombarded by this blizzard of bytes, we can't possibly manage it coherently. What to do?

Welcome to the era of content curation. Like museum curators, custodians of wisdom and taste guide you to smart decisions about what to read, what to wear and what to buy – all saving you time and money. Just trust our judgment, they tell us.

For consumers, curation is the Google antidote. Rather than zillions of results generated from a black box algorithm, personal shoppers mail you boxes of customized goodies via monthly subscription services.

Here are some samples:

Birchbox – This “discovery commerce platform” ships you fragrances, lotions, body sprays, and hair products.

Blissmobox – Offers organic and green products. Like non-toxic office snacks.

Babbabox – Children's' activity boxes and “super cute” parenting tips.

Barkbox – Yup, for pets.

And those are just the B's.

Shoedazzle – Shoes, bags and accessories just for you. From that doyenne of discrimination, Kim Kardashian.

T-Pain Fancy Box – \$39 per month gets you “cool gadgets and outrageous gifts” selected by the rapper himself. Sign us up!

Mystery Tackle Box – Our favorite. Reel in lures and bait “trusted by the pros.” Great gift for that special someone who'll treasure a unique package of worms every month.

In the pre-web world of bricks and mortar, retailers had limited curated lifestyle offerings (think Martha and Ralph). Even progressive mail-order houses, like Fruit-of-the-Month Club, were guessing which 27 varieties of grapefruits and pears you'd savor mid-winter.

Today, the box is the new black. Make me smart, sexy, and rich, and I'll hand over my buying power. The great promise of the internet was eliminating the middle man; curated consumption restores him, adding good judgment.

As Steve Powell, senior advisor with Roark Capital, puts it, “First we wanted ‘Do It Yourself.’ Then we demanded ‘Do It For Me.’ Now curation answers our plea, ‘Do It With Me.’ ”

For middle market consumer companies, curation highlights trends. For retailers, it allows a clearer path to consumers. Any community of social media and bloggers who “follow” and “like” a brand enhances its credibility. Manufacturers can then measure brand strength.

And what a community! The average millennial has 250 friends and spends almost 18 hours a day consuming media. They all want to follow the herd, yet be distinctive. Curated consumption not only tells you what to buy, it tells your *friends* to tell you what to buy.

From caveman to crowdsourcing: the community has become the curator.

This column first appeared in [Middle Market Growth](#), the official publication of ACG. Randy Schwimmer's column, MidPoints, is a regular feature there. You can read MMG by clicking on [this link](#).