

Focusing on the holes, not the drill: the power of collaborative consumption



By [Sarah Britten](#)

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Do you have a power drill at home? How often do you use it? If it's anything like the average power drill, it will be used for 12 to 13 minutes in its entire lifetime.

The trouble is that people don't actually want the drill, they want the hole - and it's a shift in mindset that Sydney-based author and [TED speaker Rachel Botsman](#) has been evangelising around the world since her book with Roo Rogers *What's Mine is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* was released in 2010.

Botsman was a speaker at the 2012 Green Building Council of South Africa Conference held last month and she made some thought-provoking points about a phenomenon that she believes could have an impact as profound as the Industrial Revolution.

Sharing, swapping and bartering

Collaborative consumption, in many ways, is a new word for what people have been doing since forever: sharing, swapping and bartering - all of it with the aim of minimising waste or extracting maximum value out of a good. Collaborative consumption can also be seen in car-sharing services like [Zazcar](#), garden dating agencies like [SharedEarth](#), crowdfunding platforms like [Kickstarter](#).

What does collaborative consumption have to do with a green building conference? Well, commercial real estate is a massive green issue because it contributes over 60% of the planet's carbon footprint. The average office costs USD12 000 to USD15,000 a year to run, but is only used 30% of the time. With 1.3 billion mobile workers by 2015, that 70% represents a massive opportunity. Yet, Botsman points out: "You're more likely to find a person in a coffee shop or an airport lounge than in the cube their company is paying for."

There's lots of value in underutilised spaces and this has led to the share space industry. Sites like [LiquidSpace](#) offer a searchable database of meeting spaces, allowing you to define where and when you'd like to meet, as well as the type of space you're looking for (impressing a client might be different from being productive).

It's about connecting to others

Collaborative consumption isn't just about ways to save money or be more environmentally conscious, it's about connecting to others. "Co-working spaces make sense because it's less about the space and more about connections with others,"

says Botsman, while contributing to Kickstarter projects also leads to "the glow of being a part of something that creates connection and belonging".

It's interesting that sustainability or green benefits are not mentioned as part of the selling proposition of many services based on the principle of collaborative consumption. Instead, it tends to create "lots of happy accidental environmentalists".

If people don't want the drill, they want the hole that it makes, then this applies to other goods too. People don't want the DVD, they want the movie that it plays. People don't want cars, they want the ability to get from one place to another when it suits them. Essentially, says Botsman, this boils down to the idea that "I don't want stuff anymore, I want the needs or experiences it fulfils".

This might have more than a few businesses worried, especially if your future growth is predicated on being able to sell stuff rather than access it. But if Botsman is right, you'll need to get used to it. "I believe we're at the start of a collaborative revolution that will be as big as the industrial revolution," she says. "We can use technology from individual getting and spending towards a rediscovery of collective good."

ABOUT SARAH BRITTEN

Dr Sarah Britten has 21 years of experience across various clients and multiple strategic disciplines, including social media and shopper. Her client experience includes Nedbank, Investec, FNB, Botho Group, Sanofi, Colgate Palmolive, Aspen, Adcock Ingram, Kraft Heinz, Citroën and Land Rover.

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