

The On-Demand Economy is Just a Phone Tap Away

BY SHERMAKAYE BASS

Today, it seems as if there is an app for everything. Are you looking for love, or maybe just a quickie partner who fits your profile and happens to be blocks away? There's an app for that (many, actually... Down, Pure, Skout, Tinder). Want a pizza delivered but don't want to speak with someone in person? Pizza Hut, Dominos and Papa John's are just a few companies that can accommodate with an app. Say you need to master the art of balloon animals in time for junior's birthday party tonight? LearnToMake might save the day. And although companies such as Lyft and Uber have drawn their share of controversy recently, many a late-night partier or over-scheduled executive has found a lifeline in those transport-app mega-players.

It's the On-Demand Economy, and it's knocking on your door. Like, now.

But what, exactly, is this new beast? When asked to define it, Lauren Sherman, Head of Marketing for the shipping and delivery service app Shyp, had a simple answer: "On-demand is anything you can access at the tap of your phone," explaining that platforms like Shyp fulfill a core desire among their customers: To save them time.

"The most valuable, scarcest resource people have is their time," she says. "We're giving our customers time back in their days to spend with family and friends and doing things they love."

Certainly, that is true of Shyp and other companies that cater to consumers needing an immediate service. But it is not the driving force behind on-demand entertainment. There are hordes of entities that provide instantaneous access to a near-infinite number of songs, films, videos and books: Spotify, iTunes, Pandora, Beats, NetFlix, Hulu, NowTV, Amazon Prime, Kindle. What these resources offer is sort of the opposite of time savings. We have all been down the rabbit hole of trying to decide what to watch or stream when the possibilities are, well, endless. But most arts lovers (if not the art makers themselves) think this is a good "problem" to have.

Audiam co-founder Jeff Price takes a pros-vs.-cons look at the music-streaming movement, which has had a questionable impact on professional musicians. They have never had it easy making a living, he says, but with the advent of Napster and other file-sharing entities in the late 1990s, their economic viability dropped dramatically.

Price, a founder of TuneCore and, many years ago, spinART Records, is a vociferous advocate for musicians and for ensuring that they get paid fairly by streaming services. But he likes the fact that streaming exists, and he gets a chuckle out of the philosophical debate engendered by the On-Demand Economy—that somehow, the ability to access services, commodities and other people's ideas with



Lauren Sherman



Jeff Price

the click of an icon might have some sort of dehumanizing effect on all parties involved.

"Why are we this way?" Price says with a laugh. "Human nature? I don't know! We have no patience, we want a combination of Jesus Christ and Santa Claus ... We want it, and we want it now? Just the idea of speaking to your phone and having a pizza show up is pretty cool to me. But are we losing our humanity? Dehumanization is

happening to music. It's become a commodity, like pork bellies ... The problem I'm having with these multibillion-dollar international corporations that use it to make money, is (they're not) compensating the entities that create the music appropriately. But what I love about the on-demand streaming culture is the ubiquity and availability of my music. I can take it everywhere at all times and listen to it on any different format, and I love that."

This is the essence of the On-Demand Economy. We can have access to almost anything, anywhere, all the time. Within the realm of economics and job creation, this has sparked massive, complex debates. Recent articles in *The Economist*, *Business Insider* and *New York* magazine have made comprehensive studies of just how revolutionary the on-demand model might be.

The use of apps and technology to match up freelancers (workers, creatives, contractors) with consumers is rocking the foundations of the old-school economy; these startups (Lyft, Uber, Shyp, Handy, HomeAway, Mediacast, SpoonRocket etc.) essentially become the intermediary arranging a barter. That, in turn, chips away at corporate structures, with all their built-in securities—pensions and benefit plans, in-house training opportunities, steady income sources. And yet, there are many workers/professionals who relish this new economy and the flexibility it brings; they welcome the onus to be self-starters and self-promoters.

As Sherman sees it, "we're seeing people's behaviors and habits change as services and activities get easier, cheaper and more convenient. For instance, with Shyp you can return online purchases so easily, without printing return labels or going to the post office, that people are changing how they shop for clothes ... We even changed how our app works to accommodate the demand for easier online returns—and are already seeing more online returns as a result."

This is true across all sectors. The way that people consume things today is changing the way those goods and services are delivered and packaged, and vice versa. ✕