

The Curator: How to Thrive as a Middleman

Being a middleman (or woman) has become a risky business.

When was the last time you used a travel agent? Agencies have largely become irrelevant given the rise of online travel booking companies.

How about a record/CD store? iTunes and online music subscription services have gotten rid of the middleman between you and your music.

Think back to the last time you rented a movie – did you get in your car to visit the local movie rental store?

Travel agents, record/CD stores and movie rental businesses have all fallen victim to the curse of the middleman. When all you do is move other people's product, the only value you have is your location. But in a world where content can be streamed and containers can be shipped overnight, being the local guy or gal is becoming irrelevant. Even if you have a protected geographic territory, near perfect pricing information available to your customers through the Internet will eventually grind down your margins.

Dragging down your value

If you're reliant on a *single* supplier who provides the goods you resell, you could be in trouble. Having *one or two* suppliers' means you could be at risk of an industry change (like the one that hit record stores a few years ago) or at risk of your supplier choosing to build his own sales force and start competing directly with you.

If you're a middleman, the solution is to rethink the value you provide your customers. Consider yourself a curator of great products for your customers. Your job is no longer to be the local guy or gal but to be the person who sifts through all the noise, tests and evaluates what's available, and supplies just the very best for customers who value – and are willing to pay for – your services as a curator.

Remember, first you have to market your services before you can deliver your services. Seize every marketing opportunity that increases your value above that of being just the middleman.

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