

guest author
Jennifer Maer

THE CURATION CURE

Turns out, you actually can have too much of a good thing

Walk into a mainstream supermarket these days and it's row upon row of products—an assault of color and screaming brand names—stacked floor to ceiling. Want cereal? You'll have up to 40 different varieties to choose from. Looking for soup? Step up to “the maximizer” (a gravity-fed, canned-goods torture rack) and just try to locate Tomato. The experience certainly isn't limited to the grocery store. Consider the wall of flat screen TVs at an electronics superstore. Or the seventeen

kinds of cough syrup at a pharmacy. Which one? Which one? Which one?

More and more, consumers are gravitating toward brands that deliver an edited experience. It's not a new idea, the whole “less is more” thing. (Barry Schwartz's book, *The Paradox of Choice*, is a great primer on the subject.) What's interesting, however, are the ways in which people and businesses are responding.

TAKE ACTION – *designing for Life's Changes*

1.

Be the authority

Don't be afraid to articulate a clear POV on what's best. Be bold. Take a stand.

2.

Guide the decision process

Some choices just can't be boiled down to a few top contenders. So make the process easier by offering expert guidance based on the consumer's preferences.

3.

Think smaller

From store footprints to serving sizes, small is special. Small is specific. Small is worth more. (Apologies to the NBA.)

4.

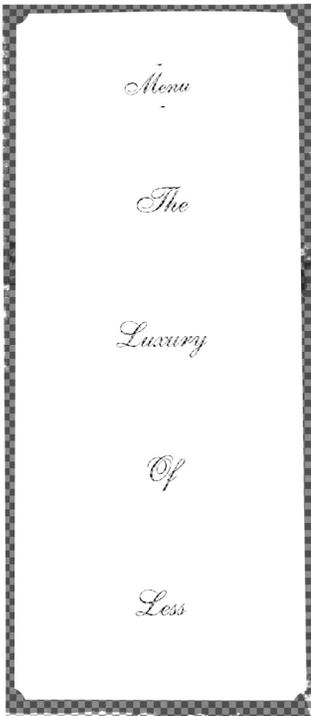
Select meaningful differences

It doesn't make much sense to offer three kinds of bottled still water. But still versus sparkling? That's another story.

5.

Get the timing right

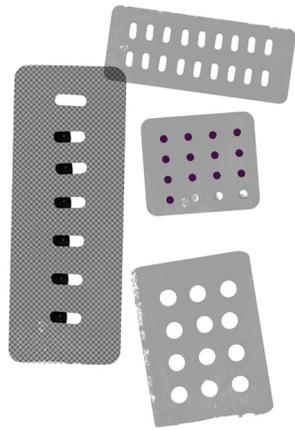
It's not just what you offer, it's when you offer it. Pick the appropriate moment in the consumer's journey to present your selection.



The luxury of less

Karen is a 34-year-old New York entrepreneur who lives the kind of jet-set life most of us can only dream about. (A half-million dollar salary, an East Village condo.) And what she wants, more than anything, is less.

Less fuss. Less stuff. Less to choose from, all around. “What I need,” she says, “is a well-edited selection.” Who wants to choose from five kinds of bottled water in a hotel mini bar? Or pore over a printed menu with six different types of pillows? For Karen, thoughtful editing provides an invaluable service that she calls “headspace.” Her life is full of important decisions—and which shampoo to buy simply isn’t one of them.



WHEN TOO MUCH CHOICE IS UNHEALTHY

Imagine you’ve just been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. You’re wondering, “Will I be able to see my kids graduate? Will I need a wheelchair? Can I still take that trip to Peru?” But the first question most doctors ask their patients is: “Which therapy do you want to try?”

Newly diagnosed patients are frequently handed two, three, or four starter kits for different MS therapies, then told to go home, review the kits, and pick one.

One patient named Diana was shocked. “He wants me to pick the drug? He’s the doctor!” Though the goal is to get patients involved in the decision-making process, the result is often the opposite—total paralysis from fear. In Diana’s case, she put the kits aside for months as her condition worsened. Finally, her fear of ending up in a wheelchair outweighed her fear of making the wrong decision, and she chose a treatment based on somewhat arbitrary reasoning. Still, she struggled to feel good about her choice, believing “The doctor should know which one is best.”

Easy as 1-2-3

24-year-old Akira is Japanese college student who wanted to buy two laptops—one for himself and one for his parents. But with so many brands, so many processors, and so many features, the number of options felt dizzying. Then he saw a sign featuring the top three laptops with Core 2 Duo processors at Yodobashi Camera (a big box electronics store in Japan). The sign helped him decide which laptops to focus on, and he took home informational pamphlets on each of the three suggestions.

Problem solved.



Ranking Ranqueen

The name says it all. The Japanese store Ranking Ranqueen has curation down pat. Their entire brand is based on the idea of limited selection: they only sell the top three, five, or ten items in a given category.



Fresh & Easy

British grocer Tesco opened its first 10,000-square-foot Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market stateside last fall. (Compare that to the average US grocery store at 47,500 square feet.) Just a year later, 72 more have been opened across Nevada, Arizona, and Southern California.



The Best Coffee in Copenhagen

As the founder of Monocle magazine, as well as a columnist for the Financial Times, New York Times, and International Herald Tribune, Tyler Brülé knows about living the good life. At a recent luxury conference in London, he recounted an anecdote about having a coffee in a small coffee bar in Copenhagen (a big coffee town). He asked the owner for a macchiato and was promptly told “We don’t make those, they’re American and not good.” After to-ing and fro-ing and trying to negotiate, the guy finally told him “I make the best coffee in Copenhagen. If you don’t like it, you don’t have to pay.” He gave Tyler a coffee and not only was it good, Tyler said it was the best he had ever tasted. “I realized something; that as someone used to luxury experiences, the biggest luxury of all was to be directed towards something by an expert.”

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you’ve been exposed to a few different examples, don’t be surprised if you start seeing *Life’s Changes* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it’s the next new pattern.

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