

The Street

(Nearly) Anything by Subscription Now

BY [Kathryn Tuggle](#) | 07/26/13 - 10:00 AM EDT

NEW YORK ([TheStreet](#)) -- Whether you're a dog lover, a make-up addict or a wine connoisseur, these days your passions can be delivered to your doorstep in the form of a monthly "subscription box."

For \$10 a month, women can sample a variety of beauty and grooming products from **Birchbox**, and for \$22.95 parents can get a monthly selection of toys sent right to their child's doorstep from **Spark Box Toys**. Subscribers to monthly perfume box **Olfactif** can enjoy three fragrances for \$18, and the list goes on.

"The trend started in part as a sample program," says Amy Marks-McGee, founder of **Trendincite**, a trend forecasting consultancy. "Companies wanted to get their samples into consumers' hands, and consumers have always wanted to try before they buy."

With subscription boxes, companies can show off their products in small quantities, and consumers have an opportunity to sample without the commitment of a full purchase, Marks-McGee says. The boxes are affordable for both company and consumer because the products offered are not full-size -- it's a win-win all around.

"Many consumers can't afford an entire \$40 bottle of serum or beauty cream," Marks-McGee says. "The beauty of the subscription box is that you can try several products for around \$10 or \$20, and if you don't like them, you don't have a huge inventory on your hands. It's economical because it's such a low commitment."

If customers really like a particular item, most subscription box retailers offer a chance to buy a full-size version via their website. For example, through Birchbox's online store, customers can shop full-sized products from more than 400 previously sampled brands including Lancome, Kiehl's, Laura Mercier, Benefit and L'Occitane, says Birchbox co-founder and co-CEO Katia Beauchamp.

"Before Birchbox, consumers were buying full-sized products before knowing whether or not they're actually the right fit for them," Beauchamp says. "By sampling products before purchasing, we help consumers buy the products and brands they know are the best fit for their needs, with confidence."

Another reason consumers love subscription box services is the idea of a personalized "curation," Marks-McGee says.

"It's the 'Hey, they choose it for you,' concept, and the fact that you know the research on the products has been done before you get them," she says. "When consumers receive their product, they may see a brand they've never heard of before, and suddenly they're in the know. Being a member of a service like Birchbox is like being part of the party."

For the past 23 years, **The California Wine Club** has been delighting subscribers with a box of two unique wines a month, and founder Bruce Boring says the excitement of knowing the wines he selects are so rare that they have not been sampled by his clients is what keeps customers coming back for more.

"Each month, the club features a small family winery from California. This winery will probably only produce 5,000 to 10,000 cases each year, and with the majority of its wine being sold only in the area in which it's produced, our customers will almost certainly not have seen it before," Boring says.

Although Boring will be the first to tell you that this "trend" of subscription products is nothing new, he says the industry still has room for growth as long as the quality of the products stays high.

At \$38.95 per month plus \$13 for shipping and handling costs, membership in The California Wine Club isn't cheap, but Boring says that his 15,000 customers are busy people that simply don't have time to spend in stores selecting a wine, then lugging bottles back home.

"No question there is a time savings, and the convenience factor is what we hear the most from our customers when they call," Boring says.

At **NatureBox**, a subscription-based provider of all-natural gourmet snacks such as chipotle maple almonds and cherry ganache granola, CEO and co-founder Gautam Gupta says that the majority of his customers are moms, and many of them live in suburban or rural areas with limited access to health food stores.

"NatureBox gives them a way to provide their kids with healthy, convenient snack options without having to drive to the nearest natural foods store," Gupta says, adding that his company will ship more than 1 million boxes this year.

It may seem like you can subscribe to just about everything these days, but new companies are launching every day. On Aug. 5, New York City craft emporium **M&J Trimming** will launch a DIY subscription box called "Project DIY." The \$30 box will contain everything needed to create two or three accessory items, including materials and trims and step-by-step instructions.

David Cohen, senior vice president for M&J Trimming, says Project DIY will cater to all crafty fashion designers, and there's an added benefit to fashionistas on a budget.

"Subscribers will receive exactly what is needed to create each accessory," Cohen says. "They will not have to worry about store minimums such as having to purchase a yard of leather rope when you only need a foot, or being required to purchase 30 small jump rings when you only need one. So not only are you saving money, but you are also not left with excess materials."

Marks-McGee says that if you're dying to find a box on your doorstep, but you can't find what you're looking for today, just keep an eye out.

"There will be 10,000 others on the market in a few years that offer vegan food, chemical-free hair products, gluten free snacks and more," she says. "This is just the beginning."