

Manifesto Thrive

WHO AND WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

PROFILE THRIVE

system on which prospective users base their choices. That's all well and good, but unlike hotels, the apartments and houses listed on Airbnb are not governed by any independent health and safety standards. The same thing applies for sites like Feastly, which allows people to turn their homes into makeshift restaurants, with an open invitation to anybody content to pay for a meal at the host's dining-room table. There are no health inspectors to gauge the state of the kitchen, the food or, for that matter, the safety of the building.

It's a regulatory nightmare and one that's making waves. Traditional companies are pushing for regulation, while the start-ups are fighting tooth and nail to keep things

THANKS FOR SHARING

A business model that is built on the ability to trust thy neighbour seems freakishly outdated and more than a little risky. But the new buzzwords from Hollywood to Houghton are 'share economy'. And it's not only thriving, but cutting into traditional hospitality and transport industries, with companies such as Airbnb, Lyft, Uber and Getaround leading the way.

Also known as collaborative sharing or peer economy, the share economy refers to the rental of an unused commodity to a total stranger using a peer-to-peer service provider. Be it a spare room, a car or even Dad's tools, share economy companies cut

out the corporate middlemen to provide a more cost-effective service to their client base.

MORE THAN JUST A B&B

Having already taken off in the US and Europe, Airbnb is undoubtedly the poster child for the model. The San Francisco-based community marketplace connects customers from 190 different countries, putting them in touch with people who'd like to monetise their extra space, whether

A NEW ECONOMY HAS ENTERED THE WORLD STAGE ... BUT HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? AND CAN WE TRUST IT?

it's a spare room or a fully furnished villa. And it's doing so much business, the hotel industry has become decidedly nervous.

The numbers vary, but as many as 11 million people are thought to have by now bypassed the closest Holiday Inn in favour of renting a guest room, flat or house using Airbnb. It's less expensive, more personable, the properties are more diverse and users of the service say it's easier to use than the more traditional means of accommodation, which can be a bit of a pain to work with.

'I have only rented places through real estate agents and Airbnb, and much prefer to do it through Airbnb,' says Ana Kuni, who has used Airbnb in Barcelona, London and Paris. 'It's fast, safe and you know who you are dealing with. I judge the place by the reviews most of the time, picking one based on reliable comments from active users.'

But share economy is far more than just accommodation and transportation. People are dropping their dogs at strangers' houses (DogVacay), having them run their errands (TaskRabbit), eating dinner at their tables (Feastly) and even giving out loans (Prosper). Maybe trust isn't so rare after all.

RULES? WHAT RULES?

But there are concerns. For one, it's not regulated – not by authorities at least. Most share economy businesses work on a rating

THE GOOD WITH THE BAD

At its core, Airbnb relies on trust, so it's not difficult to believe that there are one or two horror stories out there.

■ In July 2011, Troy Dayton rented out his home in California to a woman who turned out to be a meth addict. She ransacked his home, making off with his birth certificate. Another host, EJ, came home to find that her apartment had been cleaned out. Her guests stole jewellery, her hard drive, passport and credit card, wore her clothes and left behind a 'pungent odour'.

THE SHARE ECONOMY IS THE RENTAL OF AN UNUSED COMMODITY TO A TOTAL STRANGER

the way they are. And while the battle is only just beginning, there are already some cities clamping down by barring companies from operating within their limits. What the end result will be is anybody's guess, but it's difficult to imagine that the share economy companies will come out unscathed.

Back in South Africa, however, it's been slow to take off, in spite of Airbnb having listings in all our major cities. Perhaps the reluctance stems from a nation grappling with a high crime rate and the paranoia that comes with it. South Africans, on the whole, just don't seem comfortable listing their rooms on a public forum.

Despite the new challenges, the share economy continues to grow, and it'll likely do so in SA at some point too. Regardless of what changes occur, in an age when security has become paramount to us all, the huge popularity of this new economy is proving that people are ready to embrace a concept based on something many of us thought was a thing of the past – trust. **Man**



■ In March 2014, New York comedian Ari Teman unwittingly hosted a sex party in his Manhattan apartment. Now his landlord wants him out, his neighbours hate him, his place is trashed and he's been left with a hefty bill. Oops.