



OCP Director's Letter to the Editor in response to the Washington Post's article, "[Uber pressures regulators by mobilizing riders and hiring vast lobbying network.](#)"

Is our new “sharing economy” taking the consumer protection movement full circle by returning us to a buyer-beware marketplace?

Taxi rides are regulated; Uber and Lyft claim not to be in the taxi business. Hotels are built to code and inspected; Airbnb claims not to be renting rooms. Charities are required to register and disclose financial information; crowdfunding sites such as GoFundMe collect thousands of dollars in “donations” minutes after a tragedy strikes.

Smartphones, the Internet and new technologies are changing our marketplace and may create efficiencies, convenience and improved service. However, have the regulatory protections and avenues of redress that became commonplace in the 1970s been able to keep pace with these changes? Do consumers still have a place to turn when disputes and deception pop up in our daily transactions?

Local governments' consumer-protection agencies have ensured integrity in the marketplace by investigating and resolving complaints. These agencies have been the foot soldiers in protecting consumers and businesses from unscrupulous practices. Deception in the marketplace hurts consumers and reputable merchants. Fairness encourages consumers to purchase and promotes business development.

The transition of our marketplace to a sharing economy appears to be creating a world of “independent contractors” who claim not to be in the business for which they would otherwise be subject to regulation and accountability.

The challenge may be finding the balance between innovation and creativity in the marketplace with the need for the protection and redress that we have come to expect.

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