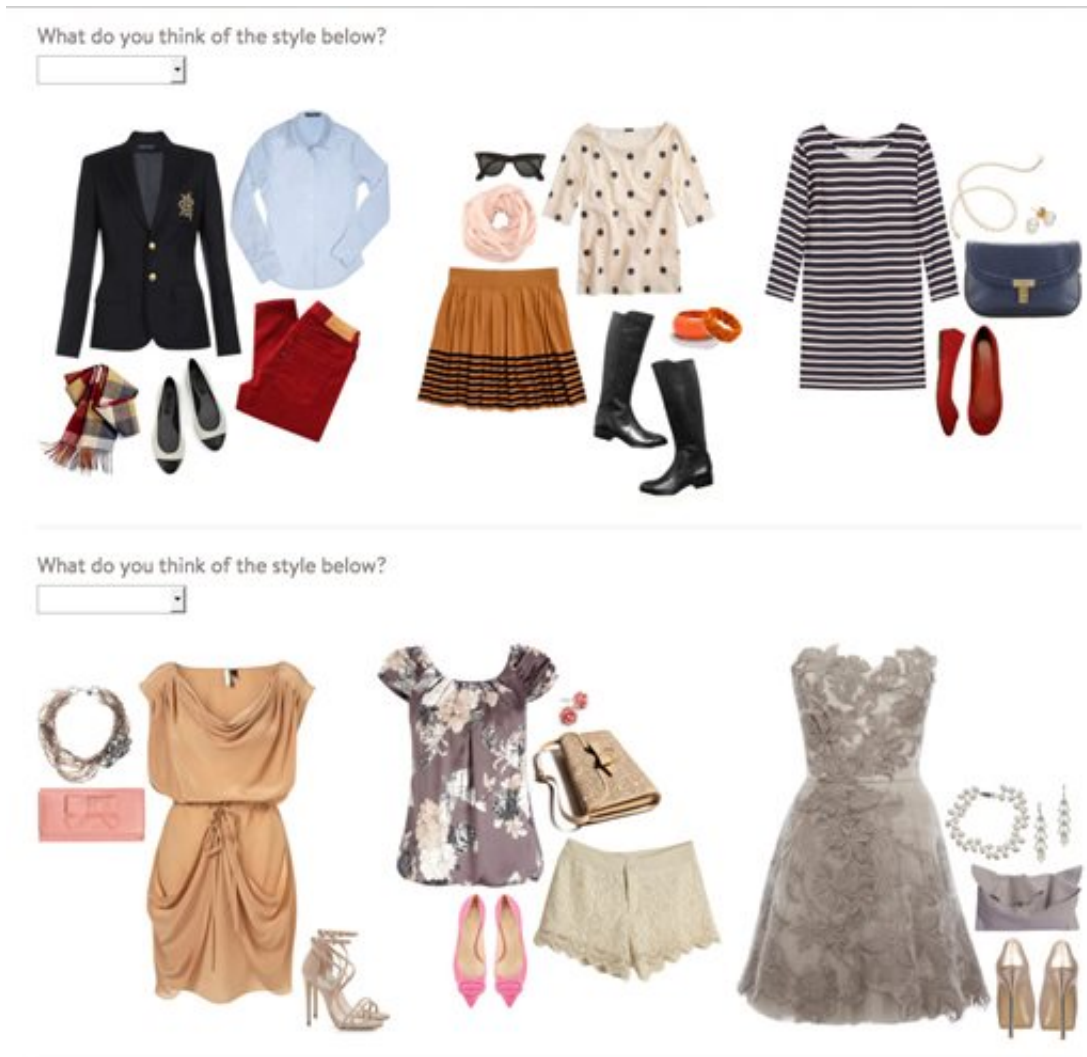


Review: Online stylists for the shopping-averse

May 27 2015, by Barbara Ortutay



This screen shot from StitchFix.com shows two of the seven collections of clothes used by Stitch Fix to determine a customers "style profile". After entering statistics such as size, body type, and preferred fit, customers rate the collections so Stitch Fit can get a sense of what the the customer likes. (AP

Photo/StitchFix.com)

Though my grandmother was a fashion designer, I hate buying clothes, and I still wear outfits from high school—in the last century.

Even so, I have long been intrigued with Stitch Fix, an online styling and clothing-delivery service that many friends recommend. This spring, it added maternity wear as an option, which gave me just the right excuse to give it a shot (I'm due in the fall). For comparison, I tried Keaton Row, an online service that pairs you up with a real-life stylist.

Both services are for women; men have their own such as Trunk Club. With Stitch Fix, you have no obligation to keep any [clothes](#) sent to you, though there's a \$20 "styling fee" for each delivery—which can be applied toward the first \$20 worth of clothing you buy. Unlike many other subscription services, Stitch Fix doesn't require a monthly delivery (that would be a lot of clothes). Instead, you schedule a "Fix" whenever you wish. Keaton Row is free, and the stylist gets a commission if you buy any of the recommended clothes.

WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

At Stitch Fix, you begin with a style profile. What's your size? What's your body type? What's your preferred fit—showing your figure, or mostly loose?

You then rate seven collections of clothes so Stitch Fit can get a sense of what you like. That part was easy, as I hated almost everything—let's just say I'm picky. The only collection I loved included worn jeans, a

mustard circle scarf and a brown leather purse that could easily pass for a guy's bag.

Next, Stitch Fix asked how often I dress for occasions such as work (most of the time), or "cocktail/wedding/special" (rarely). You're asked about your price range and various body parts—as in show them off, or keep them covered. The exercise was fun, as it's not something I think about a lot.

Keaton Row's initial questionnaire wasn't as extensive. Besides sizing, color preferences and body parts I want to highlight or camouflage, it asked me for "style goals." I didn't think "uhh, I hate shopping and want some new clothes and not spend a ton of money" was that helpful so I pulled the pregnancy card and said I don't like frilly, overly feminine stuff. I guess I don't have any style goals.

I was then shown five jackets and five dresses and had to pick my favorite of each. I was stumped again for the second question—"Which LBD would you feel most confident wearing?"—until I figured out that LBD stands for "little black dress."

If Stitch Fix is for the shopping-averse/busy/lazy lady, Keaton Row seems better suited for the woman who has an idea of what she wants.

UH-OH: HUMAN INTERACTION

Stitch Fix uses human stylists and computer programs to pick out your clothes.

On Keaton Row, you are assigned a freelance stylist. I chose an introductory phone call instead of an emailed questionnaire, figuring it

would go faster. Had I done the questionnaire, I would have had to say what my "style icons" are and what I would change about my current look, if anything.

During the call, I felt stumped by what I think would be basic stuff for many people. I don't have any favorite designers. Put on the spot, I couldn't even name a single designer. Versace something? I couldn't remember where I shopped. Thrift stores? Random places when I'm on vacation? This isn't really helping, is it?

Still in the denial phase of pregnancy, I think I also told her I don't want maternity clothes. I just want stuff that will fit me either way. Oh, and let's not forget, I don't have a lot of money to spend. Good luck with that.

THE RESULTS

My poor Keaton Row stylist offered recommendations with personalized notations and links to buy items online through such retailers as ShopBop and Nordstrom (again, the stylist gets a commission). To get the items, I had to go to each store's website separately, enter my payment info and pay for shipping besides the cost of the item. For someone who hates shopping, it felt an awful lot like shopping.

She recommended 11 maxi dresses, 15 tops and shorter dresses and six summer jackets, plus some necklaces. I bought just one dress for \$84, which is generally more than what I like to spend.

I felt guilty I couldn't buy more given all the work she put in. It was as though I was shopping in a boutique, where a nice sales rep spends an hour picking out things I couldn't afford. In other words, it was the exact

thing I was trying to avoid in the first place.

When it comes to fun, convenience and ease-of-use, Stitch Fix is the clear winner. I received a box of five carefully packaged items, as though Christmas came early. Each item looked like a slightly higher-quality version of what I might already have in my closet: a pair of stretchy skinny jeans with an elastic waist, a gold-toned necklace, a gray-black striped maternity top, a classy black cotton jersey top and a black printed pencil skirt, also not-obviously but definitely maternity.

Prices ranged from \$28 to \$78. I would have gotten a 25 percent discount had I kept all five, so my total would have been \$202.50. Exercising some self-control, I kept just three. I put the rest in the pre-addressed return pouch provided and dropped it off at the post office. I can't wait to sign up for another shipment—but I hope I don't accidentally become an avid shopper.

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