



# Niche Envy: Marketing Discrimination in the Digital Age (MIT Press)

*Joseph Turow*

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We have all been to Web sites that welcome us by name, offering us discounts, deals, or special access to content. For the most part, it feels good to be wanted--to be valued as a customer. But if we thought about it, we might realize that we've paid for this special status by turning over personal information to a company's database. And we might wonder whether other customers get the same deals we get, or something even better. We might even feel stirrings of resentment toward customers more valued than we are. In *Niche Envy*, Joseph Turow examines the emergence of databases as marketing tools and the implications this may have for media, advertising, and society. If the new goal of marketing is to customize commercial announcements according to a buyer's preferences and spending history--or even by race, gender, and political opinions--what does this mean for the twentieth-century tradition of equal access to product information, and how does it affect civic life? Turow shows that these marketing techniques are not wholly new; they have roots in direct marketing and product placement, widely used decades ago and recently revived and reimaged by advertisers as part of "customer relationship management" (known popularly as CRM). He traces the transformation of marketing techniques online, on television, and in retail stores. And he describes public reaction against database marketing--pop-up blockers, spam filters, commercial-skipping video recorders, and other ad-evasion methods. Polls show that the public is nervous about giving up personal data. Meanwhile, companies try to persuade the most desirable customers to trust them with their information in return for benefits. *Niche Envy* tracks the marketing logic that got us to this uneasy impasse.

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