

## History and Evolution of Mass Customization

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Mass customization is what makes Chocomize so unique. **With over 10 billion possible combinations, almost every chocolate bar we produce is a distinct and new combination.** Chocomize is proud to say that we are the first US company to specialize in mass customization of chocolate bars (i.e. allowing customers to choose their own ingredients) but we did not invent the term, far from it. This blog post explores the evolution of mass customization and its importance in everyday life.

Mass production, or the ability to produce large amounts of uniform products, first became popular around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Henry Ford used the concept to produce high quality and inexpensive vehicles starting as far back as 1910. One of the flaws of mass production, however, was that the final product was always the same, and any deviation or customization was minimal. **It wasn't until midway through**

**the 1980's that the term 'mass customization' was first used and became in vogue.**

Stanly Davis is credited with first using the term in 1987. **The basic idea of mass customization is the ability for custom products to be produced on a scale, as well as price, similar to mass production.**

Although this concept seems almost obvious and inevitable in today's world, true mass customization would never have been possible without the internet, computerization, as well as other technologies that would have been inconceivable almost fifty years ago.

Mass customization is thought of having four types: adaptive, collaborative, cosmetic, and transparent.

**-Adaptive customization** refers to manufactures mass producing a standardized product that can be altered, or customized, once it was in the hands of the consumer. An example of this would be an office chair where many of the settings such as seat back, seat height, etc., can be altered by the user.

**-Collaborative customization** occurs when customers have explicit input on the final product being offered. Our custom chocolate bars are an example of this type of customization. Our customers can visit our website and design a chocolate bar to fit their specific desires. The final product, which we hand make, is a direct result of collaboration with the consumer (and would

be impossible on a large scale without the advent of such technologies as the internet.)

-**Cosmetic customization** occurs when manufactures produce a single product but market it to different consumers in different ways. For instance a cell phone company might market their phone to teenagers by saying that it's perfect for instant messaging with their friends, while market the same phone to professionals by saying that it is great for downloading business files. Although the cell phone company is only producing one type of phone, by marketing it in different ways it is attempting to personalize the phone to different groups of people, and this is thought of as a form of customization.

-**Transparent customization** occurs when manufactures provide consumers with a unique product without the collaboration of the customer. The customer's preference is assessed by a service worker, and the product is adjusted to fit their needs without their knowledge.

These four types of mass customization are all different and unique ways that firms can meet the constant fluctuation of consumer's desires.

In the years since technology has made mass customization available, **companies have been able to use the theory to their benefit while others have used it to their detriment.** Successful examples include Dell's 'build to order' program where consumers can go to their website and choose the different components for their computer. Another example is the tourist industry and the rise of travel agents. Although these businesses do not provide a tangible

product, customers can design their own unique custom trip that is tailored to their specific needs and desires.

**Not all companies have been successful into the forays of mass customization.**

Cannondale is a perfect example. In the early part of the decade they claimed that consumers could customize their own bikes by choosing different frames, colors, etc. Although in theory this might be a good idea, the technology did not exist to make it cost efficient for the company, and this foray into mass customization was ultimately one of the reasons it ended up filing for bankruptcy.

In a lot of ways, mass customization for food has existed for many years without modern technologies. Ordering a sandwich at the local deli, for instance, is an example of where the customer can choose the components to create a unique product (i.e. choosing turkey instead of roast beef, mayonnaise instead of ketchup.) It seems obvious why mass customization for food is so desirable. **Beyond the fact that everyone has their own unique tastes and palate, mass customization is becoming increasingly important as nutritional science becomes more developed.**

As people become increasingly conscious about their health and specific dietary needs, mass customization of food becomes almost a necessity. People suffering from Celiac's disease, for instance, need to be able to customize their diet to exclude foods with any trace of gluten.

So where does Chocomize fit into all of this? If you go back to the four different types of mass customization, Chocomize participates in collaborative customization. **Whether it is through our website, e-mail, or phone, we work directly with the customer to customize a chocolate bar that fits their specific needs.**

We can customize a chocolate bar in many different ways. The first is allowing people to choose the type of Belgian chocolate they want, milk, dark, or white. The second way is giving people the choice of over 100 different ingredients. And although this makes for over 10 billion possible

combinations (talk about unique) we like to think the possibilities are unlimited. Why? Customers can suggest ingredients that aren't even on the menu. This makes almost anything possible...

Another way Chocomize is a form of collaborative customization (which we think is the best and most important type) is that we can create custom images and logos for both our packaging and chocolate bar itself. Whether it is a wedding favor, corporate gift, or any other special event, this option is popular for larger bulk orders.

We like to think that we are on the forefront of not just mass customization for food, but mass customization in general. **We find the evolution of mass production and mass customization fascinating and can't wait to see what the future holds!**

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