



Easy ways to support small businesses

It's easy to overlook how integral small businesses are to local, national and even global economies. The Small Business Administration and the U.S Census Bureau indicate small businesses account for 99.7 percent of all American businesses, employing 56.8 million people. Similarly, according to Statistics Canada, local businesses classified as micro or small businesses made up 98.1 percent of all the employers in Canada in 2021.

Since small businesses are the economic engine of many neighborhoods and communities, it's in everyone's best interest to pitch in and ensure such firms' success. Thankfully, it's easy for anyone to support the small businesses that make their communities unique.

- Shop locally and online from small businesses as much as possible. If you cannot shop right away, consider purchasing gift cards to the retailer or service provider and share them as gifts to others.
- Before you immediately go with a well-known chain or e-commerce giant, find out if a local retailer offers the same items you need and shop there.
- Actively discover new brands, check them out, and then spread the word about your findings to others.
- Share posts from small businesses on social media. It's good exposure for them and can help to widen their customer base.
- Attend special events or promotions hosted by local businesses. Well-attended events may spark others' curiosity.
- Share a quick photo of something you bought at a small business or of a service they provided. For example, if a local landscaping company did a wonderful job



putting in a new patio or pavers, share the before and after with those you know. Communities can embrace various strategies to support the small businesses that make Main Street unique.

How businesses can make the most of Small Business Saturday



Sales and consumer holidays compete for shoppers' attentions every year between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. Such events save consumers billions of dollars every year, but small business owners know it's no small feat getting holiday shoppers to part with their hard-earned money.

Competing for holiday shoppers is hard work, but those efforts can provide a big payoff. According to Finder's Black Friday Statistics 2022, 55 percent of men and 52 percent of women planned to shop Black Friday sales in 2022, when men planned to spend \$465 and women intended to spend \$300. If small business owners are concerned they can't compete on Black Friday, they can always look to Small Business Saturday, which encourages holiday shoppers to patronize brick and mortar businesses that are small and local. Competition can still be steep on Small Business Saturday, but the following are some strategies business owners can employ to make the most of this unique event on the holiday season calendar.

- **Update your website.** The Small Business Administration recommends that small business owners consider a digital makeover for their websites. Even though Small Business Saturday encourages individuals to shop in person, modern consumers typically peruse online offerings first. Updating an outdated website or simply reviewing all information, including product details, on the website to ensure it's up-to-date can help small businesses make a strong first impression with holiday shoppers.
- **Promote Small Business Saturday.** Though it's been around for more than a decade, Small Business Saturday is not yet the household name that Black Friday has become. Small business owners can drum up interest in Small Business Saturday by promoting the day on their social media channels. The SBA recommends business

owners encourage shoppers to snap selfies and tag their businesses on their own social media accounts, which can increase engagement and potentially attract new customers.

- **Sell and promote gift cards.** Gift cards help national retailers generate substantial revenue each year, and there's no reason why small businesses can't get their piece of the gift card pie. Gift cards remain wildly popular; as a recent survey from the National Retail Federation found that 54 percent of participants identified gift cards as the most-wanted gift of the 2022 holiday season. Small businesses can offer discounted gift cards on Small Business Saturday and promote those efforts on their websites and via social media.
- **Open early and close late.** Small Business Saturday, which occurs on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, is a great opportunity for small businesses to start the potentially lucrative holiday season off on the right foot. The SBA urges small businesses to open early and close late on Small Business Saturday so they can capitalize as much as possible on this popular retail holiday.

Small business owners can embrace various strategies to make the most of Small Business Saturday.



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Shop at local holiday events

Holiday shopping doesn't have to be a chore. In fact, depending on where you go, it can be an exciting experience that creates memories or becomes part of your family's traditions.

Check out local shopping events ranging from fairs to festivals to traditional Christmas markets featuring the work of local artisans.

Arts and craft fairs

Creative crafters and fine artists in your community have likely spent the year creating items that they offer at art shows and craft fairs in the months leading up to the holiday season. It's a great way to purchase unique gifts while supporting individuals in your community.

Check out sites like FairsandFestivals.net, where you can search for art fairs and craft shows within a certain mile radius of your home or browse by state.

Before you go, check out the fair's website and see what vendors will be there. Many will have Instagram pages and you can plan your shopping and pick out gifts. If you want to go when it is a little slower and you can talk to vendors and perhaps discuss custom work, the afternoons are usually less crammed.

Take both cash and credit cards. While most vendors will take credit cards, sometimes a venue has limited WiFi access that can make processing those cards slow.

Also, this isn't the place to haggle. Think



of them as more of a pop-up retail store than a garage sale.

Holiday festivals

Holiday festivals — either indoor or outdoor — often combine many elements of the season. They may incorporate parades, lights, family activities, music and, of course, shopping. It's the sort of shopping that can be a fun activity for the whole family as you can include such things as a visit to Santa or a chance to ice skate.

Yes, you might have to get sneaky about some of your purchases and hide them from the intended recipient, but it can also be fun to see exactly what they are most interested in.

Christmas markets

Christmas markets started out as a

German tradition during the Middle Ages, according to National Geographic.

Downtown squares get turned into holiday extravaganzas with lights, bunting and vendors selling holiday decor such as ornaments or Nativity scene figurines. Holiday treats and drinks are sold in the streets and carolers or piped-in music keeps things festive.

In non-pandemic years, Germany alone has 2,500 to 3,000 Christmas markets, says National Geographic.

Thankfully for the rest of us, the tradition has spread not only throughout Europe but to the United States.

If there is a Christmas market near you, it is a great way to shop local and purchase your holiday decor and gifts while enjoying an old, cultural tradition.

Organizations and nonprofits

It's a time for giving, sharing and spreading joy.

This time of year, many people make end-of-year donations either for a tax break or in the spirit of the season. While there are many national and international charities that do great work, there are also local charities and nonprofits in every community that work tirelessly to make a difference.

There are many ways this time of year that you can support their meaningful work through either donations or volunteering.

Making a difference

Local charities and nonprofits address various social issues and provide essential services to those less fortunate. Others are devoted to making the community a better place to live for everyone through cultural enrichment or taking care of the environment. During the holiday season, the efforts of many of these groups become even more critical, as they work to ensure everyone can experience the warmth and joy of the festivities.

By supporting these organizations, you can make the holidays better for your neighbors and the people in your community, helping them navigate challenging times and creating positive change.

Tell others about the local charitable organizations and nonprofits that make your community a better place to live. By raising awareness about these organizations, you can inspire others to get involved and support their noble causes.

Contributing

One of the most common ways to support local charities and nonprofits is through monetary donations. Consider allocating a portion of your holiday budget towards charitable giving. Even a small donation can make a difference. There are many organizations that depend on numerous small donations. Some will ask for people to donate the price of a single cup



of coffee.

Find out the ways that the charities of your choice accept donations. Some will take money through online platforms; others through in-person drop-offs. Some will invite you to participate in fundraising events. Consider attending fundraising galas, holiday dinners or going to markets that raise money for charitable causes.

Volunteering is another excellent way to help the local non-profits in your community. Donate your time and skills in ways that make sense for you. Perhaps you can serve meals at a community kitchen or participate in gift-wrapping drives or organize charity events. Find how what sort of volunteer activities are needed and you or your family or a group of friends can get involved and spread holiday cheer.

Supporting local charities and nonprofits benefits those in need, but it also strengthens the sense of community. Engage with the organizations you care about, the organizations that are enriching your community and helping those in need in ways beyond financial or time donations.

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One-of-a-kind gifts

Embrace the spirit of giving by supporting local artisans and businesses when doing your holiday shopping.

In a world dominated by mass-produced goods, shopping local allows you to find unique items and contributes to the growth and vitality of your community. The holidays can be an excellent time to explore the wealth of local talent and craftsmanship.

Decorations

Shopping local can lead to the discovery of unique and handmade decorations that can brighten your home and give it a personalized feel. Local artisans and crafters offer a wide range of exquisite creations, from intricately crafted ornaments to stunning wreaths and festive home décor.

Supporting the creative talents of individuals in your community provides you with the opportunity to adorn your home with beautiful pieces. Often, these pieces come with stories that you can learn directly from the creator and then share with those who are guests in your home.

Custom-made gifts

Shopping local often lets you purchase directly from an item's creator and develop a relationship with them. Doing so means you might be able to put in custom orders or ask for gifts that are personalized.

Many local businesses specialize in providing personalized items such as monogrammed products, engraved jewelry or custom artwork. These gifts carry a personal touch, allowing you to show your loved ones just how much you care.

Some artists will accept commissions and you can have pieces created that will fill the person you are giving the gift to with delight. Just be sure to order well in advance and observe the artists' policies for commissions. In most cases, this is not the place to barter as you are not only paying for the gift, but for the artist's time and creativity.

Finding gifts

Many communities organize local holiday markets and fairs, transforming their



streets into vibrant hubs of festive cheer. These events bring together a diverse range of local vendors, artisans and food producers, offering a treasure trove of unique gifts and delectable treats.

Attending these markets and fairs serves the dual purpose of checking items off your gift list with an array of local offerings and providing you with an enjoyable holiday activity that you can do with friends

and family.

Local boutiques and galleries are hidden delights brimming with unique gift options. These establishments showcase the work of local artists, designers and creators, filled with exceptional items not found in mainstream retail stores.

Whether it is handcrafted jewelry, original artwork or artisanal clothing, these local businesses offer creative shopping

experiences filled with individuality.

Let your holiday shopping journey lead you through the path of local stores where you can support your neighbors who are artisans, crafters and business owners. Doing so lets you shower your loved ones with unique and meaningful gifts while contributing to the vibrancy and resilience of your community.

Shop small businesses to improve the holiday experience

It's the time of year when newspapers thicken with sales circulars and holiday advertisements. Consumers looking to beat the hustle and bustle and steer clear of the crowds this year may want to pay attention to local businesses in lieu of trekking to nearby shopping malls.

Every time consumers visit local coffee shops to grab a latte, pick up a dress at a nearby boutique or patronize a farmer's market down the street, they are supporting a small business. The Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving are some of the busiest shopping days of the season, and they also can be some of the friendliest to small businesses.

Plaid Friday was conceptualized in Oakland. It may have been born in the Golden State, but the movement soon spread across

the country. Plaid Friday is an alternative to big box stores' Black Friday bonanzas. It is designed to promote both local and independently-owned businesses during the holiday season. The name Plaid Friday was used to help people visualize the various threads of small businesses coming together to create a strong community fabric that was diverse and creativity.

Shoppers can continue their small business patronage with Small Business Saturday. This, too, is a counterpart to Black Friday and Cyber Monday. The first event was created by American Express in conjunction with the nonprofit National Trust for Historic Preservation. Since its inception, many small business groups, merchants and politicians have touted the event and the Shop Small® mantra. The idea is that

when small businesses thrive, communities and individuals thrive along with them.

The Small Business Administration says that, since 1995, small businesses have generated 66 percent of all new jobs in the United States. There are a number of big reasons to shop small. One can start around the holidays and then continue all year long.

- Shopping small businesses helps give back to the community directly. According to Civic Economics, a strategic planning business, on average 48 percent of each purchase made at independent businesses is recirculated locally through tax money and other support.
- Small business owners often strive to provide personalized, hands-on customer service. Repeat business is key to their

survival, so they want to ensure shoppers are happy.

- Small businesses, since they are not beholden to corporate oversight in terms of what they sell, have greater flexibility. That allows them to offer a diverse product selection.
- Small business owners often live nearby, and they're the people you see in town, schools and elsewhere in the local community. Many consumers are comforted to know they're supporting their neighbors, especially during the holiday season.

Supporting local businesses is easy. And shoppers who like what they see can share the good news with others on social media.

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The benefits of shopping local during the holiday season

Millions of people enjoy shopping for gifts and loved ones each holiday season. The spirit of giving is alive and well each December, and that can extend to giving back to one's own community.

In addition to supporting local charities when making donations during the holiday season, shoppers can patronize small local businesses over big box retailers and national chains. The decision to do so can benefit communities in myriad ways.

- Small businesses inspire young entrepreneurs. The United States Department of Commerce reports that nearly half of all small business owners in the U.S. in 2018 were 54 or younger. Six percent of those owners were 34 and under. Young entrepreneurs at the helm of thriving local businesses provide inspiration to the next generation of innovators.
- Thriving small business owners can send a positive message to traditionally underrepresented groups. The National Women's Business Council Annual Report for 2022 indicated women-owned employer firms increased by nearly 17 percent between 2012 and 2019. Similarly, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 Annual Business Survey found that there were more Hispanic-owned and minority-owned businesses in various sectors than a decade earlier. The success of women- and minority-owned businesses sends a positive message to young entrepreneurs and locals who are part of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in business. That can help to create a more diverse and inclusive Main Street, the success of which depends heavily on locals' willingness to patronize locally-owned businesses.
- Shopping local supports many small business owners. Family meals and social gatherings with friends and coworkers are a big part of the holiday season, and it's not uncommon to break bread and share a few drinks during a night on the town. Choosing to gather at a locally owned



restaurant or tavern instead of a chain restaurant can have a ripple effect on an assortment of local businesses. Local restaurants often source their ingredients from local farms. A family meal at such a restaurant benefits both the restaurant owner and the hardworking local suppliers of the food that ends up on the plate. Local restaurants also are more likely to list locally produced wines and craft beers on their menus than national chains. That adds to the ripple effect of celebrating the holidays at a locally owned restaurant.

A thriving small business sector is vital to a strong local economy. Shoppers can keep that in mind and patronize local businesses during the holiday season.

Food and beverages

Local producers can flavor your feasts with goods that have a small carbon footprint.

Supporting local food and beverage producers during this festive time allows you to indulge in delightful treats while contributing to the growth and vitality of your community.

Offerings

Local food producers, bakeries, wineries and breweries often take advantage of the holiday season to showcase their finest creations. From artisanal chocolates and gourmet treats to locally sourced wines and craft beers, these offerings are ways to impress your guests and please your own palate.

Seeking out these local delicacies enhances your holiday experience and supports the passion and dedication of small businesses in your community.

Finding the perfect gift for loved ones who already have everything or for whom space is a premium can be a challenge. Why not consider the gift of locally crafted food and beverages? These offerings can make for excellent presents, showcasing the flavors and specialties of your region. From gift baskets featuring artisanal goods to customized wine or beer selections, these gifts are sure to be cherished by recipients.

By choosing local, you can delight your friends and family with something special and unique and contribute to the sustainability and growth of local businesses.

Community connection

Supporting local food and beverage producers fosters a sense of community around food and drink. When you choose local products, you are directly supporting the hard work and creativity of people in your community. By building relationships with local producers, you can learn more about their craft, their stories and the values they uphold.

This connection adds a personal touch to your holiday festivities and deepens your appreciation for the rich tapestry of flavors



and traditions within your community.

Many local food and beverage producers have a deep-rooted connection to their region's culinary heritage. By choosing their products, you can savor the taste of tradition. Whether it's an age-old family recipe passed down through generations or a technique that reflects the unique geography of the region, these local offerings carry a sense of history and cultural significance. It gives you an opportunity to honor the culinary heritage of your community during your holiday meals and celebrations.

Green advantage

Supporting local food and beverage producers has a positive economic effect on your community. By choosing local products, you contribute to the growth of small businesses, job creation and the overall economic vitality of your region.

Purchasing locally sourced food and beverages often reduces the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation. By supporting local, you play a role in fostering a more sustainable and resilient food system.

The Michigan State University Extension lists several advantages to eating locally produced food including that the food has more flavor and nutrients because it arrives on your plate close to when it was harvested and it was picked at the height of its ripeness. Local food also promotes a safer food supply — since the food doesn't travel as far, there are fewer opportunities for contaminants to be introduced.

Make this holiday season a time to appreciate and support the local flavors that make your community special.

Did you know?

Retail sales during the 2022 holiday season inched ever closer to crossing the trillion dollar mark. Though total retail sales during the November-December holiday season fell short of National Retail Federation forecasts, the group still reported that sales totaled \$936.3 billion in that period in 2022. Though a host of variables, including inflation, affect how much consumers spend during a given holiday season, it's not outside the realm of possibility that 2023 could be the year shoppers cross the trillion dollar threshold. That would require an increase of a little less than \$64 billion in spending compared to 2022. Such an increase is not unheard of, even in a single year, as NRF calculations based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate holiday season spending between 2020 and 2021 increased by just under \$106 billion.

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