

SHOP LOCAL

for the holidays



Local Shopping Challenge

Let's cut to the chase. By now you've heard the statistics. Almost \$75 of every \$100 you spend locally stays in your community. Local businesses employ millions of people across the country.

Local entrepreneurs spend exponentially more money on community programs than their larger counterparts.

All impressive, indeed. So then why are millions of Americans driving away or logging on to their computers for their Christmas shopping this holiday season? Some cite convenience or busy schedules without realizing just how much impact they can have on their local community by spending a few dollars locally.

BUY EVERY OTHER PRODUCT LOCALLY

Breaking the habit can be tough, so start small. Challenge yourself to buy one locally sold product for every other gift you purchase. And try to make the prices comparable so about half of your total holiday budget is spent locally.

Encourage your friends to do the same and you could be making a monumental difference in your community. If 10 of you spend \$300 on local gifts this year, about \$2,250 of that \$3,000 would be pumped right back into your local community. Comparably, your community will see \$0 of your online spending at retail giants.

BUY ALL GIFTS CARDS LOCALLY

Gift cards are becoming an increasingly massive portion of holiday spending. More than 80 percent of holiday shoppers will buy at least one. More than \$28 billion will be shelled out on gift cards this year, according to the National Retail Federation.

Many people will spend their gift cards on food or everyday items if you buy them for traditional retailers. Don't you want your present to be more meaningful? A gift card to a local specialty shop or boutique will ensure that your gift card is spent on exactly what it is intended to – a gift.

Try to personalize each gift card by choosing a local business that has special meaning to the recipient, or maybe one that you have shopped at before with that person.



Share Your Local Spirit

One of the main disadvantages small businesses have when advertising their services is a limited marketing budget. Instead of spending millions of dollars on television, radio and print ads, local businesses may be able to allocate only a few thousand dollars to getting their name into the public view.

But with the advent of social media marketing and digital strategies, you can help spread the word on local businesses this holiday season – without spending a dollar.

Local shops depend on grassroots-type advertising for much of their promotional strategies. Spending huge amounts on marketing isn't possible for many mom-and-pop retailers simply because of their small size.

Do your part this holiday season by serving as an advocate for your favorite local businesses.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

The holidays are a great time to give back to your small-business community not only by shopping, but by jumping onto their mission. Community-focused organizations such as Independent We Stand or the Small Business Administration are continually seeking volunteers to help get the word out on their efforts.

The Independent We Stand website (IndependentWeStand.org)



features an option to recommend a local business for promotion within its program. This is a great way to support your favorite local shop while giving it a little extra attention.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter offer the perfect forum to speak your mind on the importance of shopping locally. Use your platform to send out educational statistics or ideas for great local gifts. Your hundreds of friends and

followers will be a collection of mean, lean local shopping machines by the time the holidays come around.

Even indirect messaging can work wonders on promoting local businesses. Use Facebook's Check-In feature to let your legion of loyalists know exactly when you're perusing the aisles of your favorite local establishment.

You can also post photos of your recent purchases with information on where you purchased it, what you spent and how much you love it.



Seeing a certain item may trigger a gift idea, producing more business for local owners.

Great for Procrastinators

Ever get to the morning of Dec. 23 empty-handed? No gifts for your friends and family members and less than 48 hours to cross them off your list?

Instead of paying an exorbitant price to have your gifts shipped overnight, consider taking a stroll down to your friendly local establishment for some at-the-buzzer shopping.

FIND FRIENDLY SERVICE

Small-business owners are ready to welcome you with open arms and help you through the challenge of finding that perfect gift under not-so-perfect time constraints. Even in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, you are likely to find friendly service on your local business scene.

If you have a positive experience, then owners know they increase their chances of you returning as a customer throughout the year or for next Christmas. Additionally, they depend on your referrals to friends and family members to help grow their business.

FIND BETTER DEALS

Some local retailers will offer marked-down items as Christmas approaches, especially holiday-related decorations or foods they will be unlikely to sell afterward. Check the discount walls to add a little thriftiness to your shopping strategy.

Many local shops also offer loyalty programs for both long-time and first-time customers. Ask if there are any such opportunities, and you may walk out of the store with both time and a few dollars to spare.



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A BETTER SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

If you haven't experienced the holiday shopping rush at a large retailer, then consider yourself lucky. Crowded

aisles and long lines are just a couple of guaranteed sights during the waning days of the shopping season.

Procrastinators are better off opting for the local shopping experience instead. Because while busy, local

shops will be exponentially less crowded than their larger counterparts. This will allow you to leisurely shop for the last few remaining items on your wish list without the hassle.

Hidden Savings

Shopping locally can save you more than holiday cash. Stress, body weight and environmental harm are at risk of increasing during the holiday season. Implement a little bit of local shopping into your routine and watch those negative implications melt away. Here's how:

SAVE STRESS

'Tis the season to be jolly, not stressed, frenzied, or road-raged. Trade in the hustle and bustle of long car rides and over-packed malls for a relaxing stroll through your favorite downtown business.

The benefits of slowing things down over the holidays can improve your health, well-being and overall mood, especially when schedules are at their fullest.

The less time you spend traveling great distances and drudging through hoards of shoppers, the more time you will be able to enjoy with your family around the fireplace. So maybe it's time to focus less on leaving the area, and take advantage of the calming convenience of shopping local.

SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

Staying local obviously cuts down on travel for both you and delivery drivers, a twofold benefit that means less carbon, pollution and traffic congestion. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, trucks and locomotives are responsible for 25 percent of smog-causing pollution and the majority of the cancer threat posed by air pollution in some areas.

Local businesses help the environment by stocking local produce and food, and using less packaging than larger chain establishments. This



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helps make our local communities more sustainable and keeps hard-to-break-down plastics out of our landfills.

Local businesses depend less on packaging because their food is fresh and their products are locally produced, reducing the distance and packaging required to maintain quality.

SAVE CALORIES

Staying in the area for your Christmas shopping could be good for both your wallet and your waistline. If you live close enough to local businesses – and if you don't mind the chilly winter weather – walk or ride your bike to the store.

The central locations of downtown businesses provide a hub of shopping

activity that requires only a short stroll down the sidewalk to shop door-to-door. Mixing in a little physical activity as opposed to spending hours in your car or extended periods of time on escalators, will aid in burning calories and improving your overall health.

And better health is a gift we all deserve.

The 'Already-Has-Everything' Recipient

We all know them. We may even be one. Shopping for some people is just plain difficult. They either have one of everything or don't seem to want anything in particular.

"I already have everything I need" or "Don't feel like you need to get me anything" are common responses from them.

The simple solution to pleasing these friends and family members is to find a gift card to one of their favorite local stores. But if you're looking for a more unique approach for that hard-to-please recipient, you should be able to find a special gift downtown.

GET THEM LESSONS

Many local businesses, including art galleries, music shops and woodworking studios, offer year-round lessons to help community members hone their skills. A lessons package to such an establishment is a unique and thoughtful idea for a Christmas gift that keeps on giving.

Not only will your recipient gain professional-level instruction, but he or she may be able to rediscover a hobby they haven't had time for lately. Dance, cooking or art classes could be a romantic idea for your special someone.

EVENT EXPERIENCES

Tickets to a concert, sporting event or movie offer a



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once-in-a-lifetime experience that will live on forever.

Maybe your wife's favorite band is coming to your area next year. Order the tickets early to make sure they are here for Christmas and have them waiting under the tree.

You could also pre-order tickets for the big upcoming

movie sequel or a touring Broadway show coming to the major city closest to you.

Even the people most difficult to buy for on your list will be surprised and excited by the chance to experience a live show, so look for ways to treat them with events, not just "things."

HANDYMAN (AND WOMAN) GIFTS

What if you could find a gift that will provide years of enjoyment, as well as a fixed sink or door? Double-win, right? Well, browse the aisles of your local hardware store and you will be in luck.

Quality-built tool kits or do-it-yourself woodworking sets will have your handy friend or family member ready for the fixer-upper season. Practical gifts like snow blowers, scarves or waterproof boots could be put to great use while they anxiously wait for spring to come around.

Don't Forget Non-Profits

Some local organizations are focused not on selling products, but on improving the lives of disadvantaged community members. Non-profit groups, soup kitchens and children advocacy organizations are all seeking help this holiday season.

And what they're asking for is simply a hand. They need more manpower to achieve their goals and spread the word on their efforts.

LENDING YOUR SKILL SET

Can you spare a few hours every weekend in December? You may be asked to run errands or visit with people. Maybe deliver food or products to clients across town.

Professionals in the creative services field can offer their skills free of charge as a holiday contribution. Developing a website, creating brochures or writing a mission statement for free can help your local group promote its missions.

An accounting firm could offer to waive their preparation fees for the organization's upcoming tax needs. A local radio station could provide a free advertising spot to a non-profit. Locals helping locals will strengthen the community this holiday season.

FOOD DONATIONS

Why not spend your Christmas spreading some holiday cheer – and delicious food? You can spend Christmas Eve cooking your favorite dish or baking some special cookies, then bring them to your local shelter on Christmas morning.

Your gesture will surely be appreciated by the hungry, as well as by the shelter staff. And it is a simple act of kindness that can be turned into a tradition, passed on to children or replicated by your friends and family members.

CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

You may find yourself short on time this holiday season, but maybe you have a few dollars to donate to a local organization. Your contribution could go a long way toward furthering the cause of a group near and dear to your heart.

You can conveniently make online donations or in-person cash contributions. Either way, donating funds is a simple way to show your support while making a difference in the lives of those who need it.





Not just for the Holiday Season

Sure, Christmas is a great time to shower your loved ones with locally bought gifts. But what about the other major holidays throughout the year?

Extend your yuletide joy to Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays and anniversaries for maximum impact on your local community and business owners.

Your effort in doing so may make more of a difference than you realize. A recent collaborative study by the Small Business Administration, United States Department of Labor and other major organizations found that small businesses employ about 77 million Americans and account for 65 percent of all new jobs over the past 17 years.

So by spending your money locally, you are helping keep your friends and neighbors employed during the holiday season and beyond!

Here are some of the other notable findings from the study:

- Eighty-nine percent of consumers agree that independent businesses contribute positively to local economies.
- Residential neighborhoods served by a successful independent business district gained, on average, 50 percent more in home values than their citywide markets.
- Independent retailers return more than three times as much money per dollar of sales than chain competitors. Independent restaurants return more than two times as much money per dollar of sales than national restaurant chains.
- If independent businesses regained their 1990 market shares, it would create 200,000 new small businesses, generate nearly \$300 billion in revenues and employ more than 1.6 million American workers.
- If just half of the United States employed population spent \$50 each month at locally owned independent businesses, it would generate more than \$42.6 billion in revenue.
- For every square foot a local firm occupies, the local economy gains \$179, vs. \$105 for a chain store.