

SHOP LOCAL

Better for your community. Better for you.



It's a Charming Experience

When people think of an enjoyable shopping experience, they usually don't imagine cookie-cutter stores out of town. Shopping at locally owned businesses can be a lot more fun.

The ambiance of small, local shops is charming and quaint. The town storefronts and display windows each have a unique take on the holidays and special shopping events throughout the year, and it typically incorporates the distinct merchandise that the store sells. A trip inside the store is like being transported into another place.

Normally, locally owned shops are anything but ordinary. Unlike large chain stores out of town, the local shops are sometimes set inside historic buildings that have creaky wooden floors, ceilings with unique angles and enticing staircases leading to undiscovered treasures.

DEALING WITH THE 'BOSS'

Instead of being ambushed by a pushy salesperson, the shopper is instead greeted by the jovial owner and sometimes by their friendly dog or cat, as well.

The shopping experience itself can be a lot of fun. You get to interact more with the "boss" at small mom-and-pop shops, so you're treated like a real person, rather than cattle herded through a chute. They encourage the shopper to take their time and meander through the store. While they are in business to earn money, they generally will not pressure the shopper to buy a lot of extra stuff or try to force them to sign up for a store credit card.

Local shops also frequently go that extra mile for their customers by doing things like gift wrapping and providing coffee or donuts at no additional charge.

PASSION FOR BUSINESS

The owners of local shops are in business because they love it. It's a passion for them. It's not just a step on the career ladder, so you often find people who are experts at their particular type of store.

They buy the products that they feel will best represent their vision of the store, instead of having to answer to a corporation.

Because they work directly with the artisans and suppliers, the owners are usually very knowledgeable about the wares that they sell. They know how long it took the artisan to make an object, as well as all of the hard work they put forth. Items purchased in local shops can sometimes be a much higher quality than the mass produced items found at other stores. High-quality merchandise is not only distinct, but it will also last much longer.

Shopping in the local stores often provides an opportunity for people to run into old friends or neighbors that they have not seen in a while. They can mingle on the streets and catch up on the local gossip. The store owners get to know their customers, as well. It is a family atmosphere.

To encourage shoppers to patronize the local stores, many towns will make street parking free and put on events that are sure to draw a crowd. It's part of this unique feeling that makes shopping so enjoyable when you spend your time and money close to home.



Find the Most Unique Gifts

Although shopping can be fun for many people, for other folks it's the exact opposite. That is because of the stress associated with picking just the right gift to please a friend or loved one.

There is a way to make shopping for those gifts easier and less stressful. The solution is to shop local.

REWARDING GIFTS

The problem with many big chain stores is that they carry similar merchandise, much of which is actually manufactured and produced overseas. That does little to help the American economy.

It is also very unimaginative. People like getting real surprises for holidays, birthdays or anniversaries. If they get gifts that they see all the time on the shelves of a chain store, it can be a disappointment.

Anyone who needs a new sweater, blender or set of bath towels can certainly buy those items for themselves. Also, many people feel obligated to buy gifts for certain people, like a boss, coworker or friend, but that is no reason to be boring and unimaginative.

SPECIAL PRODUCTS

Small mom-and-pop stores often have products you can't find anywhere else. These type of stores are usually located in the downtown area of towns and cities, although they can also be found along the highway, on an obscure road or in a strip mall.

Local shops can be intensely focused on one particular gift, with good insight and advice about what to purchase. They have a niche market that they know exceptionally well.

Instead of trying to sell a little bit of everything, they typically concentrate on a special product or category such as candles, artwork or jewelry. This is because many small shops have products with

local connections that are made by local companies, local craftsmen and craftswomen or obtained by local suppliers. Large chain stores need to buy in bulk at a discounted price so they can stock their multitude of stores across the country.

Small mom-and-pop stores, on the other hand, require a smaller amount of goods. They tend to form relationships with local artisans and people skilled in various trades such as iron work, metal work, jewelry making, painting, sculpting and sewing.

Because these people work for themselves, rather than a large corporation, they can be very creative with their design ideas. The end result is a piece that is one-of-a-kind.

GOOD REPUTATION

Most mom-and-pop stores are a fixture in their community because they have been there for so long. Mom-and-pop stores build their reputation over many years. They can't stay in business unless they offer the very best products and customer service, including unique gifts that are popular in your particular area.

The proprietors of the shops have a special bond with the community. Many local artisans will produce works that reflect the noteworthy heritage and cultural traditions of the region. Another bonus to shopping in the local stores is that it helps to boost the local economy by keeping the money in the area.

Neighborhood stores also keep the towns vibrant and enable talented artisans to make a profit by doing what they love. Any time of the year is a great time to peruse local shops for unique gifts for others or even for yourself.



You'll Be Helping Your Neighbors

Supporting your community and local businesses can be as simple as choosing where you do your shopping.

We all like the low prices that major retailers sometimes entice customers with, particularly in tough economic times. One should remember that as enticing as they may be, supporting your local businesses can help the overall economic health of the area. Choosing to shop with a smaller, locally owned business helps to keep your dollars working in your community.

CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS

The individuals that run and own these businesses could be your friends, neighbors, or even a relative. This relationship allows the consumer to forge an actual friendship and respect with the proprietor of the business. Small business owners generally go the extra mile to ensure you find what you need and that your needs are taken care of while you shop with them.

That professional relationship can open other doors to you that you will not get at other retailers — a personalized experience catered to finding your best solutions. Many small business owners take great pride in serving their neighbors which lends them to being far more flexible than a corporate entity.

Most big-box retailers started off as small, local stores that offered exceptional service and quality to their customers. As they grew into the large corporations that speckle the economic landscape, many of them lost that small-business charm as their focus had to change with growth.

Those major retailers now worry about minimizing work hours to stay under the personnel budget, attracting customers in with low prices, and keeping those customers returning by offering just enough service to get by. The development of any sort of professional relationship with a big-box store's staff is extremely difficult due to the sheer number of people you and their employees end up dealing with.

We all want to get a good value on the products we want. But if the money you spend isn't going to help your friends and neighbors locally, how much of a value is it really?

Before you buy that television, MP3 player, bookcase — or any other product of the sort — call up your local small business. Ask them if they have any price matching programs. Many businesses do, but the information is often posted on signs in the store that are overlooked by shoppers. That means there is a good chance you can get your product at a competitive price and still support your local business community.

RECYCLING DOLLARS

Your dollars do much more than simply buy the items you need, want, or want to gift. They help to support and grow a community as they are circulated in the area.

Shopping with a local business means your dollars are going into local banks. Those banks are in turn, turning those dollars into a variety of things to help other members of your community. Loans are paid out and allow individuals the ability to pursue their dream of being a homeowner, purchase a new car, or even pursuing higher education.

In turn, their money goes back into the bank and continues to circulate out into the community as well. Though it may be difficult to see the impact this economic circle has on your local community at the moment, one's children may be able to see it clearly a decade down the road.

When you are going out shopping for gifts or even just going grocery shopping, your local businesses need your help. Help your friends, family and neighbors continue to pursue their dream and reap the benefits a small-business owner provides their customers.



Save Gas Money, Help the Planet

It's tempting to do all your shopping at out-of-town outlets and malls. But did you know that shopping at big, faraway retail outlets can actually be more troublesome and inconvenient than shopping at local stores?

Think of all the lines. The crowds. The sneaky prices that fluctuate depending on the whims of a faceless corporation.

Wouldn't it be better to shop locally?

When you stay in town for your shopping, you save not only gas, but time — more of those precious minutes that you never seem to have enough of.

Instead of battling crowds at an out-of-town store all morning, you could be browsing local businesses at your leisure. Instead of driving all that distance, you could be cruising your community for small, unique stores. Save yourself the gas money and add it into your shopping budget.

Gas isn't cheap. Time is money. And money is something we need all year round.

UNEXPECTED SURPRISES

This brings us to gifts - a major stressor for holidays and anniversaries.

Do you have trouble deciding on the right presents for your friends and family? Maybe it's because you're shopping at the same places every year. The same businesses, the same products, and ultimately the same result will occur — gifts that come prepackaged and are identical to ones being opened in a hundred other homes.

If you really want to show someone you care, try shopping locally and picking out something unique to them.

Small businesses and mom-and-pop stores are often treasure troves of unexpected gifts and goodies.

And by buying from them, you can be guaranteed that your gifts aren't the same ones being scooped up by a dozen other shoppers looking to save a buck during some blowout sale.

HELPING THE PLANET

Shopping locally can also be of great benefit to the Earth. Less travel means less car pollution — not to mention less strain on your wallet — and by forgoing out-of-town businesses, your money is supporting the people who have a vested interest in keeping your community clean and healthy.

If you or someone you know is concerned about living "green," wouldn't it be a great present to show them that you cared about the planet enough to shop locally?

Most people live a busy life, but that's no reason not to be savvy and smart about your shopping decisions. If you want to escape the grind, the stress, and the inconvenience of the average shopping experience, consider staying local.

You'll save time and gas. You won't have to worry about fighting the crowds. You'll even be supporting your community and saving the planet at no extra cost.

And who knows? By shopping locally and saving all this money, you may have even have a few dollars left over at the end of your shopping trip.



Preserve Your Unique Character

Every year, out-of-town stores bombard the public with announcements of big sales. These ads promise the lowest prices of the season on hot items that are sure to disappear from shelves at a rapid rate.

Some of these stores draw crowds out of small towns and into big stores that dwarf the small businesses that are found closer to home. When people go out of town to shop, local revenue is lost and the character and vitality of a place is threatened.

Local businesses are the heart of a community. In every town, there exists a street or group of streets lined with shops that cannot be found anywhere else. This unique collection of places to shop are part of what makes a town special.

Choosing out-of-town stores over these local treasures takes money out of the community and tells business owners that you prefer to spend your time in other areas.

HELPING THE TOWN

By doing your shopping locally, you bring both financial support and consumer faith back to area businesses. The money that you spend in your own backyard stays there rather than being funneled to a multi-national corporation. Simply put, when people support the businesses in a town, it benefits the town as a whole.

More revenue means that stores stay in business, which in turn preserves the vitality of a community. A bustling downtown shopping district will draw visitors as well as locals to experience the town's unique nature.

With continued support, local businesses can survive long enough to become legends in their own right. This enriches the history of the town and can aid in its growth by showing that there is a strong home town customer base.

The distinctive nature of small, local businesses means distinctive merchandise. A national chain may

be able to offer you the must-have toy or item for your home, but only a local establishment can bring items hand-crafted by artisans who live right in town. It would be hard for a chain store to match the quality of the cookies, pies, and cakes fresh from the local bakery.

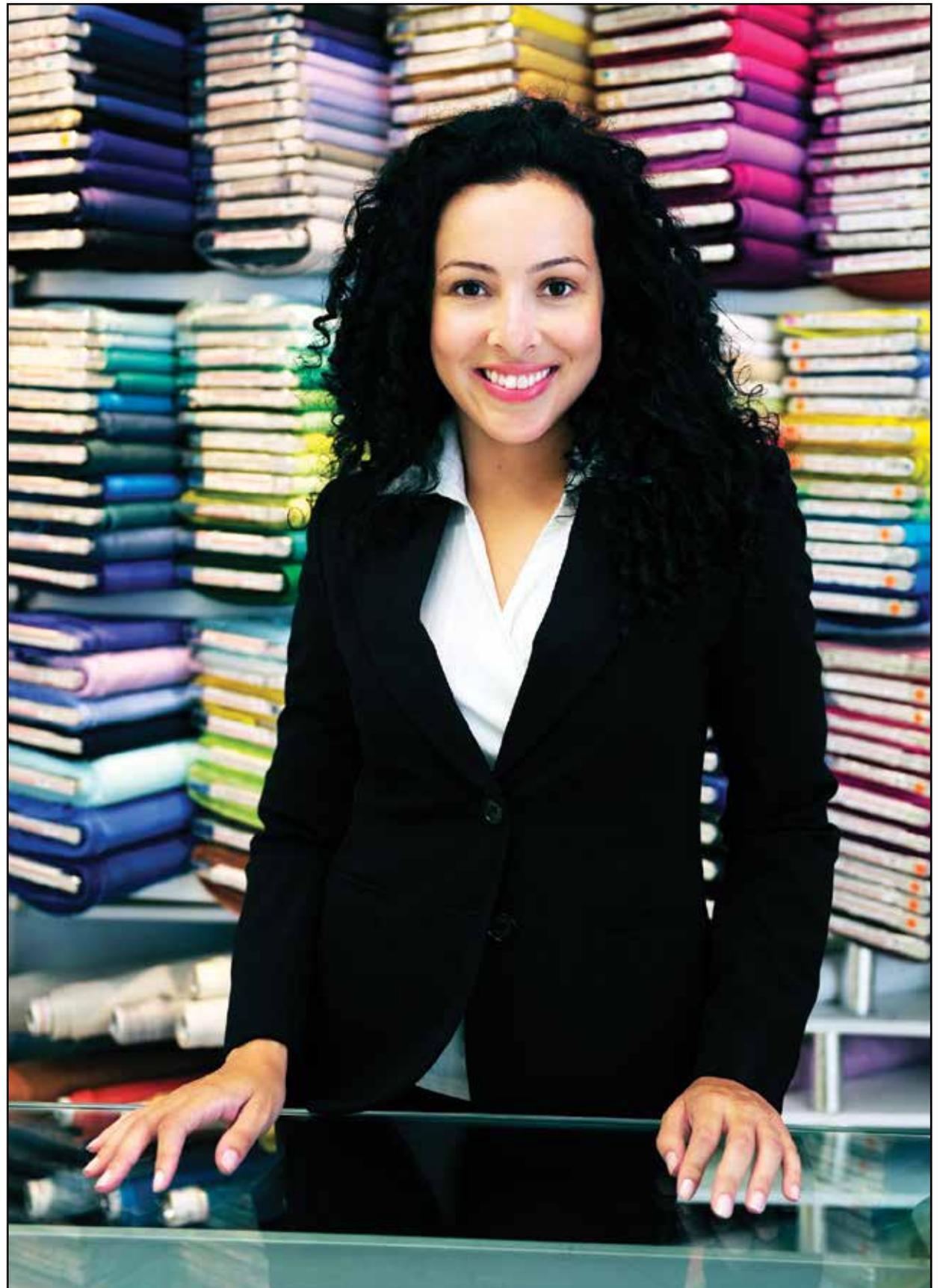
PEOPLE YOU KNOW

The greatest treasures of the small businesses who bring all of these things to a community are the owners. Unlike the rushed and harried seasonal workers at big chain stores, owners and employees of local shops are people you recognize from within the community.

This makes visiting their businesses more personal than a standard shopping trip. Staying local gives you an opportunity to establish relationships with shop owners who can come to know your preferences and will be able to help you more easily, leading to a relaxed, personal shopping experience.

Many local business owners are also active in the town and nearby areas. The man who helped you pick out the perfect present for your niece may be the same person who puts out a fire at a neighbor's house. The hairdresser could be the one overseeing the next big seasonal festival. By supporting the livelihoods of these people, you in turn support their ability to give back to the community.

Resisting the pull of out-of-town stores can be difficult, but the benefits of local shopping are worth staying close to home. Keeping money and consumer loyalty within the local economy helps to maintain the rich history and personality of a town and can help the community remain strong.



Keep Your Tax Dollars in Town

Consumers' purchasing decisions play a significant role in the wellbeing of the various local towns and communities across the United States. When you pick where to shop, you're also picking the city that will get the benefit of your tax dollars.

While most individuals are simply seeking the best possible deal, the unfortunate truth is that any savings achieved by buying outside of town is only going to result in greater costs down the road.

Tunnel vision is a characteristic of shoppers who only focus on the price tag, but it is necessary to consider the impact that every purchase is making on the local businesses and the community itself.

SUPPORTING LOCAL SERVICES

Money that is spent locally is going to support not only the local stores, but it is also going to result in an increase of sales taxes becoming available to the town.

Communities are struggling in many areas, and paying for the roads, schools, hospitals and other services has become difficult. Too many consumers fail to understand that if insufficient revenue is generated through retail sales tax, the only other alternative is a combination of raising property or income taxes and making budget cuts to already lacking programs.

Consumers should think twice about complaining about the quality of the roads, especially if they are not partnering with their local community vendors to make the town a better place to live.

LOCAL CONTROL

Every individual would love to have a say in how their tax dollars are spent, and the simple fact of the matter is that this is impossible if your money is being sent to other cities or towns.

The taxes that are generated will be spent by the government where the store is located. That means if you spend money out of town, not only are your taxes going to support a totally different area, but you don't have any voice in how those tax dollars will be spent.

Neighbors should be able to share their ideas with each other, and watching them become incorporated into a plan can be incredibly rewarding. An increase in tax revenue could make it possible to decrease property taxes or even use the excess funds to create ways to build the local economy.

LOCAL OWNERS

The mom-and-pop style shops that are so prevalent in small towns are run by individuals who are often highly respected in the community. Shopping elsewhere simply hurts these small businesses and causes a negative effect directly to neighbors, friends and loved ones.

A collaborative effort to support these companies will not only help the local economy, but it will also make a difference in the lives of the business owners.

In addition to the retail sales taxes that are generated for the benefit of the local community, few consumers realize that a more profitable business in town is also going to create more revenue for City Hall. The taxes and fees associated with businesses are heavily dependent on the amount of gross sales they take in, so shops that have received plenty of dollars are going to in turn pay an additional amount that can be used within the community.

Every resident would probably jump at the chance to support the building of a new park or recreational facility, and it is these extra dollars that can be generated that will allow these types of projects to begin.

Every consumer knows that paying sales tax is a necessary part of the buying process, but the concept becomes much easier to swallow when individuals realize that the money is supporting the services that they use on a daily basis.

Sending the funds elsewhere is simply providing support to other individuals that are going to enjoy the benefits, but shopping locally is an excellent way to keep the tax dollars in town.



Keep Profit in the Community

There are plenty of reasons to shop at stores in your hometown — the personal service, the unique selection, the charm of family owned shops — but one reason is even more important.

When you shop locally, your money stays in the community where it can have a big impact.

HELPING CHARITIES

Local mom-and-pop type stores do so much for the community. Small business owners give to local organizations and charities such as the school sports teams and booster clubs.

Typically, if a large chain store is approached about donating for a local cause, they need to get approval from the corporate headquarters, which can be a time-consuming process. Some studies have shown that companies with out-of-town headquarters are less likely to donate to local charities.

Because small business owners work in their shops on a daily basis, they get to know their customers and the people in the community on a more personal level — and that can make a big difference.

Shopping locally builds a stronger local economy, too. Locally owned businesses are less likely to leave town and have more invested in making sure your town remains vibrant over the long haul. Because they are not at the mercy of stockholders or company accountants, they will ride out the tough times instead of closing shop and moving on to the next town.

KEEP PROFITS IN TOWN

Also, if a company is headquartered out of town, that's where the profit is sent. You want to keep that profit in town. If the business owner makes a profit, they're more likely to spend it in town, too.

If that profit leaves town — goes to shareholders or out-of-town executives, for example — then that money won't likely find its way back into your own neighborhood. Instead, it is reinvested into the large conglomerates to

build more stores in other communities across the nation or world. That is why so many downtown areas across the country are suffering.

Patronizing small mom-and-pop shops is a great way to keep the money that is spent by customers and made by business owners in a community. This is because money is recycled through the community in several ways: buying products and services from local vendors, hiring local people, etc.

The money you spend locally is probably going to be re-spent right here in the community, which provides an even bigger boost than your dollars alone. When everyone in a town is gainfully employed, everyone benefits. Families purchase groceries in the local supermarkets, conduct their financial business in the local banks and they eat in the local restaurants.

The positive effects of shopping at neighborhood businesses have multiple benefits for everyone in the area.

TOURISM DRAW

Unique mom-and-pop stores can even draw people from neighboring communities into the town. This is because they often carry one-of-a-kind items that are made by local artisans.

Birthdays and anniversaries are an especially nice time to shop local stores. There is no reason to leave town for yet another boring gift when there is a plethora of exclusive items right here in your own community.

Another benefit is that local shopping is less stressful. Fighting for a parking spot at an overcrowded chain store, dealing with the mob of people and the pushy clerks is enough to drain anyone's enthusiasm.

Instead, shop local and keep the money in the community where it belongs.

