

Shop Local



# Driving Communities

Small businesses typically have fewer than 500 employees, but their influence in local communities is much bigger than that.

In 2022, there were 5.52 million small businesses in the U.S., up from 5.38 million in 2021. Around half of those had fewer than five employees. And 42% of those businesses were owned by women.

## WHAT DO SMALL BUSINESSES DO?

Small businesses help their communities by generating tax revenue to pay for public services, creating jobs and protecting local culture and character. Around two thirds of small businesses are active in their local community, with owners volunteering time to local schools, sports teams and religious organizations.

And they're an important driver of U.S. job creation. More than half of net new American jobs over the past 25 years have come from small businesses. They were responsible for almost 90% of total net job growth from 2023 to 2024, according to federal statistics, and are especially strong in construction and the hospitality industries.

In recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses lead the way in hiring, ADP says, accounting for more than 52% of the job gains



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between 2021 and 2024.

## PAYROLL TRENDS

Small businesses account for about 40% of payroll in the U.S., with median 8.5% growth annually. Average hourly earnings at small businesses were \$34.06 in March 2026, payroll research shows. That's down

ever so slightly from post-pandemic highs, but is still an important figure given how many jobs small business accounts for in the economy.

Hourly earnings growth was flat in March, Paychex says, staying below 3% for the 17th consecutive month. In a rare occurrence, weekly hours

worked grew a smidge, 0.06%, marking only the third positive reading since 2021. In another first in quite some time, the Northeast led hourly earnings growth at 3.02% for the first time since the same year.

Service industries showed the most growth in terms of hourly earnings, Paychex says,

followed by manufacturing, leisure and hospitality, construction, and trade, transportation and utilities. In hours worked, construction was the leader, followed by construction, financial activities, manufacturing, professional and business services, and trade, transportation and utilities.

# Property Values: Footing the Bill

Small businesses do a lot for the local community. They pay taxes, create jobs and give generously to charities and organizations. But they also do something else: They can improve your property values.

“Employment is the engine that powers the economy and forms the bedrock of the housing market,” Graystone Investment Group says. “A robust job market directly corresponds to a bustling housing market. When employment levels are stable, it boosts consumer confidence, empowering potential buyers to invest in real estate.”

## HOW ARE PROPERTY VALUES CALCULATED?

There are a lot of variables that go into calculating property values. These include location, size and condition of the home, comparable sales and market trends. When an area has a variety of thriving small businesses, it's a more desirable place to live because it's evidence of economic stability, the Cumberland Area Economic Development Corporation says.

A study from American Express showed that, over 14 years, neighborhoods with an active small business community saw home values outper-



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form wider markets by 50%.

## SMALL BUSINESSES AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

Small businesses can improve commercial property values. Real estate company Bill Gladstone Group says investment in real estate can be a winner for small businesses just like it is for their larger brethren. It can provide a nest egg in the former of real estate

equity and leasing out parts of the building can provide a passive revenue stream. There may be tax benefits associated with investing in commercial property.

Commercial development, driven by investment from small and large businesses alike, can boost nearby residential property values by increasing the desirability of the area as a home. Small

businesses offering a range of convenient services and amenities can increase home values and having available and affordable commercial real estate is a part of that equation, too.

## SMALL BUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Small businesses boost local sustainability, reducing carbon footprints and making

a location more desirable for families that value that goal. Some ways small businesses make for a greener city include reducing the need for driving distances to get goods. Small businesses may be more inclined to shop local themselves, choosing local suppliers and materials to make goods, which helps protect the environment and, in turn, makes property values increase.

# Shop Locally to Stock the Bar

Small businesses can mean big flavor when it comes to stocking the fridge, pantry and bar.

That means getting familiar with local seasonal produce, particularly fruits and herbs, and with your local distilleries, breweries, vineyards and more. Ask the professionals at your favorite liquor store to point you in the right direction, then try your hand at these cocktails.

## PISO BEE'S KNEES

Honey is a popular local commodity no matter where you live.

Makes one drink. Recipe is from Difford's Guide for Discerning Drinkers.

### Ingredients

2 fluid ounces Bar Sol Mosto Verde Italia Pisco  
 3/4 fluid ounces lemon juice  
 1/2 fluid ounce honey syrup, three parts honey to one water, by weight

### Directions

1. Chill a coupe glass and make a garnish of lemon zest.
2. Shake all ingredients with ice. Strain into the chilled glass. Express the lemon zest over the cocktail and then use it for a garnish.

## APPLE BLOSSOM COCKTAIL

Makes one drink. Recipe is from Difford's Guide for Discerning Drinkers. If your area grows apples, consider this



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cocktail your new specialty.

### Ingredients

1 1/2 fluid ounces apple brandy or applejack  
 1 1/2 fluid ounces vermouth  
 Dash orange bitters

### Directions

1. Chill a coupe glass and prepare an apple slice.
2. Stir all ingredients with ice. Fine strain into the chilled glass. Garnish with the apple wedge.

## MAYAN MICHELADA

Makes one drink. While many cities may not have seasonally available local produce, most have a local brewery or two churning out

quality beer. Recipe is from Liquor.com.

### Ingredients

1/2 ounce joven mezcal  
 1/2 ounce lime juice  
 1/4 ounce agave nectar  
 5 dashes Cholula hot sauce  
 5 dashes Maggi seasoning sauce  
 1 bottle lager, chilled  
 Chipotle salt and a lime wedge for garnish

### Directions

1. Rim a pint glass with chipotle sauce and set aside.
2. Add all the ingredients except beer into a shaker with ice. Shake. Strain into the prepared glass over ice.
3. Top with the beer. Garnish with a lime wedge and serve.

## BOILER ROOM

Makes one drink. In addition to local breweries, local distilleries have sprung up in many locations, offering whiskeys, rums and vodkas as well as other spirits.

### Ingredients

1 ounce bourbon  
 1/2 ounce ginger liqueur  
 1 1/2 ounces marigold tea, brewed and chilled  
 1 ounce lemon juice  
 1/2 ounce honey syrup  
 3 ounces Belgian-style wheat beer, chilled

### Directions

1. Add the bourbon, ginger liqueur, marigold tea, lemon juice and honey syrup into a pint glass filled with ice.
2. Stir to combine.
3. Top with the beer. Stir again gently. Serve.

# More than Just Retail

There are tons of service providers in your local area in addition to great retailers.

Don't forget to include these unique small businesses in your shopping routine.

## SALONS

Most salons or barber shops are small businesses that are locally owned and operated. Start with location. Look for salons or barbers that are convenient to places you frequent. Maybe they're close to home or work. Then check in with their website and see whether their vibe matches yours.

Look for pictures of their stylists' work on the website or their social media sites. Spend some time with those pictures to judge whether this is a place that could give you the style you want. Bonus points if you find some inspiration pics in their galleries.

## CAR DETAILING

Get your ride looking brand new by booking a thorough car detail. It's important to find one that's convenient to you or even a mobile service that will detail your car in the parking lot at work or in your driveway. Look for reviews of their work online or ask friends and family for their recommendations. They might provide specialized services such as ceramic coatings



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or paint correction.

## LANDSCAPING AND YARD WORK

Landscapers are small businesses, and some even offer tiers of service from full maintenance to quarterly touch-ups. Research landscaping professionals in your area online or ask people in your neighborhood for recommendations. Keep an eye on yards you admire to see who does their work.

Once you identify a few companies, have them visit to discuss what services you want and which ones they recommend. Get quotes from three companies and ask for any contracts you'll need to sign. Read them carefully, looking for opt-out clauses and any extra fees. Ask each company for references and check them.

## CHILD CARE

These small businesses

offer child-care services while parents are at work or school or otherwise out for the day. They may provide all-day care for little ones not yet in school, before- and after-school care for older children, or even after-hours care for parents with unusual schedules.

Start your search either near home or near work. Check your state's licensing database for licensed providers and see whether you can

find their inspection records. Then, plan a visit. Tour the facility and ask questions. Meet the personnel. Pay attention to how comfortable you are in the surroundings and how comfortable the children are. Ask for references and follow up with them.

Lastly, you may need to get on the waiting list at several facilities to ensure your spot. Start your search as soon as you know you'll need care; some waitlists last years.

# Finding a Mechanic

Taking care of your car is, sometimes, just like taking care of a member of the family.

In most places, people are dependent on their cars to get them from home to work, school and other necessary activities. Even one or two days out of commission can through a serious wrench in a family's schedule. Here's how to find a local mechanic to keep your car — and your life — running smooth.

## ASK FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

“Gauging a repair shop's quality is tricky and its size and cleanliness can only tell you so much about it,” says John Ibbotson, chief mechanic at Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center. “The best way to tell if the shop is a good bet is by word of mouth from people who have used and been happy with its service.”

Online reviews are another good way to get an idea of a mechanic's reputation. Look at reviews through AAA, Yelp and other services.

Remember, though, that displeased customers are more likely to leave a review than happy ones. So, take what you find with a grain of salt.

## LOOK FOR CERTIFICATIONS

The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence



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(ASE) is the certifying body for general mechanics. To become certified, technicians must pass one or more ASE exams and be retested every five years.

Check to make sure the owner, manager or technicians hold one or more ASE certifications.

## TAKE A TRIAL RUN

Identify a shop before you need a major repair, because the time to establish a relationship is not in an emergency. Take your car in for smaller items, such as oil changes or tire rotations, and make sure the work is done well and as promised. Become familiar

with all the services a shop offers and that they have experience working on your car model or type. Some shops may not do diagnostic work or some may just be oil changes and regular maintenance. Make sure you have someone on hand for any kind of service your vehicle might need.

Ask about warranties. Any shop worth its salt will offer some kind of guarantee on its work; Consumer Reports says a good shop will offer a minimum one year or 12,000 mile warranty. Review the warranty carefully so you thoroughly understand what it does and does not cover before signing off on the work.

# Shop Local ... Sustainably

Not only do small businesses promote community culture and economic stability, they can also be more green than larger, national companies.

This is because small businesses are more likely to source their products from other, local small businesses, cutting down on the transportation required to stock their inventory. Because they live and work locally, they have a vested interest in keeping the community sustainable and thriving.

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Many small businesses switch to energy efficient practices to help the Earth and to improve their bottom lines. LED lighting, motion sensors and carefully managing waste can lower utility bills and paper costs. Small business owners tend to live closer to their work, meaning the commute isn't as long, and they hire locally, too. They can improve upon both employee morale and budgets by offering remote work options, encouraging carpooling or considering public transportation stipends.

## PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY

More and more consumers are voting for sustainability with their wallets, choosing to



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patronize businesses that choose recycling, energy efficiency and other green practices.

Once a small business adopts some of these guidelines, they should promote it so customers and potential customers know how much they care about their community.

Creating a business sustainability plan can help attract

customers and improve bottom lines across the board. Businesses with sustainability plans outperform competitors by 12% annually, Constellation, an energy and gas supplier, says. Start by learning about sustainability initiatives in your area, paying attention to those that worked and those that didn't. Learn about local laws--stay in compliance, then see if you can

surpass those standards. Along with your employees, look for opportunities to improve sustainability throughout your business. And don't forget to follow up. Regularly evaluate sustainability plans for effectiveness and enact changes when you need to.

## RESILIENCY

Sustainable business practi-

ces that keep supply chains close to home are less vulnerable to disruption from storms of all kinds. Because workforces tend to be local, too, small businesses may be able to reopen before larger companies and may have more flexibility in their payments and services than corporate counterparts with more rigid policies.

# Finding Local Experiences

Gift-giving experiences has grown in popularity in recent years.

U.S. News & World Report says nearly half (45%) of consumers plan to gift experiences over physical items. The trend is particularly noticeable among younger generations. The magazine says Gen Z (68%) and millennials (61%) prefer experiences over physical items.

Small businesses can help here, too. Kitchen stores, for instance, can offer cooking classes while bookstores may host author talks. Museums may offer guided tours or after-hours experiences. Get creative and find unique experiences in your hometown.

## CULINARY EXPERIENCES

For the foodies, look for unique dining or cooking opportunities. These may include cooking classes at a local grocery or kitchen shop; tastings at wineries, breweries or distilleries; farm tours; pick-your-own produce farm days; or even prix fixe menus at local restaurants.

You can visit local niche grocery stores, including ethnic groceries or small neighborhood stores to get a taste of what different people are eating.

## FESTIVALS

Get out there with tickets to



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local festivals you may not have experienced before. Many festivals are backed by community groups and organizations that depend on festival revenue and they often feature local small businesses selling wares, food or more. This is a great way to experience a host of small

businesses all in one place. Pick up the cards of the vendors you love or get their contact information.

## TRAVEL

If you're on the road, wander off the beaten path to find true local experiences and have

authentic encounters with small businesses along the way. Avoid the tourist attractions and don't be afraid to get into the local neighborhoods where people actually live, work and play. Patronize local art galleries or boutiques and pick up souvenirs you actually like and

not just another coffee mug. By doing this, you're injecting money straight back into the local economy. If you're still a little timid, talk to the locals themselves about where to go. The concierge at your hotel is a great place to start; it's their job to know the best places to go.