

Shopping Small Matters

What started as a marketing campaign during the depths of the Great Recession has evolved into a cultural phenomenon that generates billions in revenue for independent businesses across America.

According to American Express, which founded the initiative, Small Business Saturday launched in 2010 at a time when local retailers were struggling to survive. The idea was simple: create a shopping holiday between Black Friday and Cyber Monday that would drive customers to local stores.

The timing proved perfect. As communities grappled with economic uncertainty, the message of supporting local businesses resonated deeply with consumers looking to make a difference in their neighborhoods.

RAPID GROWTH AND RECOGNITION

The initiative gained official recognition in 2011 when the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution supporting Small Business Saturday. That same year, President Barack Obama and his daughters made headlines by visiting Washington D.C.'s independent Kramerbooks



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during the event, according to White House press coverage at the time.

Consumer support has grown substantially over the years. According to the 2023 Small Business Saturday Consumer Insights Survey, commissioned by American Express, projected spending among U.S. consumers who shopped at independent retailers and restaurants on Small Business Saturday reached an estimated record high of \$17.9 billion.

EVOLUTION AND ADAPTATION

As shopping habits have changed, Small Business Saturday has evolved. According to the National Retail Federation's 2023 holiday survey, 55% of small businesses now offer both in-store and online shopping options, with many providing curbside pickup services.

The U.S. Small Business Administration reports that there are 33.2 million small businesses in America as of 2023, representing 99.9% of all

businesses in the country. These enterprises create jobs for 61.7 million employees, according to the SBA's Office of Advocacy.

The impact has spread internationally as well. Small Business Saturday UK launched in 2013, according to the Federation of Small Businesses, which reports that the program now supports millions of independent retailers across Britain.

As Small Business Saturday enters its second decade, its influence continues to grow.

What began as a response to economic hardship has become a permanent fixture of the holiday shopping season — one that reminds consumers that where they spend their money truly matters.

For the millions of small business owners across America, the day represents more than just sales.

It's an annual reminder of their vital role in creating vibrant, sustainable communities where both commerce and connection can thrive.

Money Stays Here

The \$20 bill you spend at a neighborhood coffee shop today might help pay for a youth sports sponsorship tomorrow, a fresh coat of paint from the hardware store next week, and a local accountant's services next month.

This ripple effect of local spending — where dollars recirculate through a community rather than immediately leaving for corporate headquarters — demonstrates why economists and community leaders emphasize the importance of shopping locally.

A 2023 study by American Express found that for every dollar spent at small businesses, approximately 68 cents stays in the local community, funding everything from employee wages to local suppliers.

BEYOND THE PURCHASE

When customers choose local businesses, they're actually making several investments at once. The most obvious is the purchase itself — whether it's a book, a meal or a haircut. But that same transaction also helps fund local jobs, supports regional suppliers and generates tax revenue that pays for essen-



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tial community services.

Local retailers and restaurants tend to source more goods and services from nearby businesses than their chain counterparts do. They're more likely to hire local accountants, attorneys, designers and contractors. They typically bank with community institutions and advertise through local media.

These business-to-business transactions create a secondary wave of economic activity. The local printer who produces menus for an independent restaurant might

hire additional staff to handle increased demand. The regional farm supplying produce to neighborhood cafes might expand its operations.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Communities with strong independent business sectors show remarkable resilience. During economic downturns, these interconnected networks of local businesses help stabilize neighborhoods and maintain employment.

Consider a typical Main Street. A bookstore brings foot traffic that benefits the café next door. The café's

customers browse the boutique across the street. The boutique's employees grab lunch at the local deli. Each transaction strengthens the entire business district.

This pattern repeats itself across America's communities. The U.S. Small Business Administration reports that small businesses create two out of every three new jobs nationally and employ nearly half of all private sector workers.

But perhaps most importantly, local business owners tend to live in the communities they serve. Their children

attend local schools. They vote in local elections. They have a personal stake in their community's success.

When customers choose to shop small, they're not just making a purchase — they're making an investment in their community's future. Each transaction becomes part of a larger cycle that helps build stronger, more prosperous neighborhoods where both commerce and connection can thrive.

Those dollars spent at local businesses today help ensure vibrant, healthy communities tomorrow.

Small Business, Big Heart

Behind every Little League team photo, winter coat drive and neighborhood festival, you're likely to find a small business owner who helped make it happen.

These everyday contributions, multiplied across thousands of communities, reveal how local businesses weave the fabric of community life.

While national retailers often make headlines with large corporate donations, small businesses quietly support their communities in more personal, direct ways throughout the year. Their contributions extend far beyond Small Business Saturday or the holiday shopping season.

DAILY ACTS OF SERVICE

Walk into most small businesses, and you'll spot evidence of their community involvement: donation jars for local families in need, flyers for upcoming school events, or sign-up sheets for neighborhood clean-up days. These grassroots efforts address immediate community needs in ways that larger corporations often cannot.

According to Main Street America's 2023 Small Business Impact Report, 67% of independent business owners actively participate in local charitable causes, with most supporting multiple organizations throughout the year.

The support takes many forms. Local restaurants provide meals for school events and homeless shelters. Hardware stores donate supplies to community gardens. Bookstores host literacy programs. Auto repair shops offer free basic maintenance for



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elderly residents. These contributions often go unrecognized but create lasting impact.

RESPONSIVE TO LOCAL NEEDS

When communities face challenges, small businesses typically respond first. During recent natural disasters, local business owners often transformed their shops into emergency resource centers, providing supplies, internet access and gathering spaces for displaced residents.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted this dedication. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation reported that despite facing their own financial pressures, 86% of small businesses surveyed in 2020 took action to help their communities weather the crisis.

High school coaches know they can count on the corner deli to provide post-game meals. Teachers know the

local bookstore will donate supplies for reading programs. Food banks know neighborhood grocers will help fill their shelves.

This predictable, sustained support creates stability for community organizations that might otherwise struggle to fulfill their missions.

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Unlike corporate giving programs managed from distant headquarters, small business owners make donation decisions based on direct community knowledge. They see firsthand where help is needed and how to deliver it effectively.

These personal connections strengthen social bonds. When business owners know their customers as neighbors, PTA members and youth sports coaches, their charitable giving becomes more targeted and meaningful.

The impact extends beyond monetary donations. Small business owners often serve on nonprofit boards, volunteer at community events and mentor young entrepreneurs. They offer their expertise, time and business spaces to support causes they care about.

This involvement creates a virtuous cycle: businesses support communities that in turn support local businesses. The result is more than economic – it's the creation of more connected, resilient neighborhoods where residents look out for one another.

As Small Business Saturday approaches, it's worth remembering that local shops do more than drive the economy. They help sustain the countless community initiatives that improve daily life for all residents, making every dollar spent locally an investment in community well-being.