



# Small Business Appreciation



# Small Business Week

It's a chance to recognize critical contributions from entrepreneurs

This annual event was established more than 50 years ago, following a presidential proclamation.

Held each May, National Small Business Week reminds all of us how important these hometown businesses really are. In fact, more than half of all Americans own or work for a small business. They create roughly two out of every three U.S. jobs annually.

You probably shop at many of them, and have met some of your neighbors who are small business owners. You may be an entrepreneur yourself. Celebrate National Small Business Week through these important initiatives:

## SHARE STORIES

Most people start a small business to pursue a personal passion, while seeking economic and personal freedom. Share your stories with customers, and they'll develop a closer bond. Discuss your dream of owning your own business, the challenges of getting it going and maintaining momentum, and how much it means to share in those goals with the community. It's another way to help your small business stand out among the big-box competition.

At the same time, customers should take a moment not just to patronize local places during National Small Business



© ADOBE STOCK

Week, but also to tell your own stories about what they mean to you, your neighborhood and the city. These small gestures help make it all worth while.

## SAY THANK YOU

Few do these kind of things alone. Most small businesses have a inner circle of people who help get the day going,

making sure customers have access to personalized, one-of-a-kind goods and services. Owners should take a moment during National Small Business Week to thank the staff and other related employees who help keep things running smoothly. Customers can join in too, with a personal thank you. Go the extra mile and post

a kind review on social media, where potential new customers might see it and continue to grow their business.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

The week is sponsored by the Small Business Administration, an outreach program that's available to assist entrepreneurs year round. The SBA

offers free webinars on its website covering critical topics like financial management and marketing, among other things. Small business owners can also connect with others through local networking get-togethers or online groups. There may be exciting opportunities to expand your customer base through collaborations.



# How To Find Small Businesses

A little research can help bolster your area's financial health

Small businesses are the lifeblood of any town, but they don't have huge advertising budgets.

As a result, national chains and big-box stores likely dominate your social-media feed, junk mail and local TV and radio ad segments. It can be harder to find these hometown shops, stores and service providers.

Do a little searching, however, and you'll discover a wealth of nearby choices offering a personal touch and quality services:

## GET OUT THERE

Set aside an afternoon to explore. If you're behind the wheel, make several stops along the way – or better yet get out there on bike or on foot. You'll likely learn more about small businesses in your community with these first-person interactions than you would online. Connecting on a personal level provides needed shopper information then continues to enrich the business relationship. Local chambers of commerce often provide maps and shopping guides to guide your way.

## ONLINE HELP

If you can't find printed maps, there are a number of online options that will lead you to new local shopping



© ADOBE STOCK

experiences. Basic searches often provide initial details like addresses, phone numbers, operating hours, the latest customer reviews and website addresses. In some cases, that's all you'll need if you know exactly which service you're looking for. Those looking for a more general idea about what area small businesses have to offer should connect with the Whitepages, Yelp, Google

Maps, TripAdvisor, Nextdoor and Facebook.

An option like Google Maps won't sort local from national choices, but it provides one-click directions. Local downtown and small business organizations often have info-packed Facebook pages or groups. Nextdoor offers your neighbors a chance to post reviews; once you've found a great new spot, add your own. There's also a local business

area to find still more local deals and information. Apps like Yelp boast a larger database of reviews, with maps, comments and more details about products and services.

## OTHER RESOURCES

Many libraries provide free access to online business databases. They'll even highlight newly opened companies. Check widely available

resources like Reference USA or BrandNewBusinesses.com, though there may be a fee associated with some sites. The secretary of state offices in every state requires almost all businesses to register with their corporation division. Most also host searchable directories of these registered companies. A few states even allow users to organize the results by the date of incorporation.



# How To Build A Small Business

You're past the early stages, now it's time to create sustainable growth.

The Small Business Administration shares consistently impressive numbers when it comes to startups. The most difficult part sometimes comes next.

There's a tendency to simply work harder, but often-times small businesses have to innovate beyond their initial ideas in order to move past the middle-market stage.

Sustainable-business consulting firm experts have developed a checklist to help guide companies into the future, with a focus on growth capability, discipline, consistency, stakeholder retention and creating value. Here's a look:

## **POSITIONING AND DISCIPLINE**

The timeline for a small business begins at the emerging stage, transitions to a remodeling phase and then, if all goes well, ends as a benchmark. The first question asked is whether this business model is capable of growth? If not, you probably need a better idea. But the same question defines the second stage, when ideas are updated in order to adapt to a changing market and extend the life of your business. Growth is also related to performance, and so discipline comes into play. An ability to focus will have a



© ADOBE STOCK

huge initial impact.

## **PREDICTABILITY AND VALUE**

Can your small business scale up? In some cases, the question is answered early on by how consistent you are. As you continually learn, you'll have to keep an eye on your core product and core values. Those things can't change, even as you tweak your approach. Improved deci-

sion-making is often linked to learning from past mistakes – but also past successes.

Initially, many owners may struggle to grasp the larger value of what they're doing. These businesses do more than provide goods and services, while pouring money back into the economy through salaries. They become integral elements of the neighborhood, as meeting places, school and sports club

sponsors, and non-profit partners. Ultimately, that strengthens the brand.

## **ENDURANCE AND SUCCESS**

As your business develops, you'll have to strengthen relationships with stakeholders – both on staff and in the community. Consider how changing what you do and how you do it might impact them. If you can carry them along on

your growth journey, you have a better chance at reaching benchmark status. That arrives when your small business is classified as one of the best, or even one of a kind. The sky is the limit at that point. Estimates show that if even 10 percent of companies in the emerging and remodeling stages moved to this coveted benchmark status, tens of millions of new jobs would be created.



# Why You Should Shop Local

Discover unique finds and terrific service, while growing the local economy

Local companies create and innovate in ways that larger operations typically can't.

That's because a smaller operating footprint means they're more nimble. Those benefits are passed along to those who frequent their businesses, and the money spent then feeds back into your community. National chains and big-box stores may hire plenty of people, but the profits quickly funnel out of town.

Shopping local also helps strengthen a sense of community, since you get to know one another while creating these business relationships. There's a human connection that typically can't be replicated elsewhere:

## COMMUNITY BUILDING

Small business owners create unique shopping experiences, and return money to the local economy in the form of regular paychecks to their employees. They also support your local municipality through sales taxes, which help fund a broad range of needed services. They're typically used to ensure fire and police protection, while also supporting parks and recreation, local roads, education and other publicly funded programs. When it's all added up, studies show that as much as 75 cents of every dollar spent at a small



© ADOBE STOCK

business is then reinvested in everything that surrounds them.

## GROWING THE ECONOMY

Not only do small businesses account for the vast majority of employment opportunities in the U.S., they also provide most of the new jobs. So supporting these businesses helps grow our economy. That's in the best interest of everyone

since so many things are connected to the market's leading indicators – including interest rates.

## PRODUCTS AND SERVICE

Tired of mass produced items that you can find in any place? Frustrated after dealing with faceless phone-bank operators while trying to solve a needed service issue? Small

businesses offer every-day innovation, unique products and one-on-one relationships that can rarely be found elsewhere. Their attention to detail and level of quality is different, because they're your neighbors – not a faraway corporate executive.

## GETTING INSPIRED

Shops, cafes and pubs provide an opportunity for cus-

tomers and stakeholders with like interests to gather, deepening community ties. At the same time, small businesses are a shining beacon for anyone who wants to dream big. They've seized on an idea – and followed it to fruition. When you shop local, you become part of that dream. And who knows? You might be inspired to have one of your own.



# Small Business Marketing

It's difficult to budget, but a critical element for growth

Advertising your goods and services is even more important when competing against corporate behemoths.

Small business owners, and particularly those still in the startup phase, may struggle to direct funds toward advertising. But smart budgeting and consistent ad buys can help quickly raise your company profile.

## CREATING A BUDGET

The U.S. Small Business Administration recommends dedicating 7 to 8 percent of profits to marketing your company. These funds should be directed to sharing descriptive promotions explaining your products and goals, news about introductory sales, and imaging ads to raise your general profile. If you can't dedicate that much to marketing, either because of startup costs or other budget pressures, spend what you can and then seek out other approaches in the meantime. There are actually plenty of free or low-cost options that can be taken advantage of while you build toward a creating a regular marketing budget.

## ONLINE AND EMAILS

Creating a dedicated website for your business is a great way to tell your story through mission statements, photographs,



© ADOBE STOCK

and other information about your every-day operations. “About Us” sections on these sites offer an opportunity to talk about what brought you to this passion, list the services and products offered, and share information about office hours and other ways to connect.

Link to social media accounts, which are also free to launch. Stay up to date

across all of them with fun promotions, details about sales, new-product promotions, and staff-focused introductory posts. Once the website is up and running, link to a regularly shared newsletters to increase engagement with your customers. You can use the newsletter to round up information shared on social media, answer customer questions and pass along special

coupons or sale codes.

## OTHER PROMO OPTIONS

Contests with cool giveaways are a great way to attract new eyeballs. It's easiest to have people sign up online, either through your social-media accounts or on the website, but try to develop a strategy that brings people to your place of business. In-person contes-

tants could be given more chances to win, or perhaps earn a more valuable award. Then get involved in the community, sponsoring local projects, schools or teams and playing host to meetings or non-profit events. Take part in street clean-ups and other service projects. You'll be upping your community profile while making a big difference in the community.



# Small Businesses Face Big Obstacles

Shopping trends aren't the only pressures they have to deal with every day

A smart business plan, strong local support, and a great service or product might not be enough.

Taking a chance on a small business means competing against larger corporations, dealing with government red tape and juggling increased budget pressures. The big obstacles that small businesses face make focusing on shopping local all the more important.

You could be the difference between a vibrant business community with lots of choices, and a landscape where only the biggest companies survive. These are just a few of the uphill battles small business owners face on an every-day basis:

## REGULATORY PRESSURES

The laws governing small business ownership are a constant source of pressure, and a constantly changing issue. Take healthcare, where owners must keep up with shifting regulations and rising costs. As many as a quarter of small business owners report that health care is their biggest budget challenge. Slim profit margins associated with mom-and-pop stores also make it harder when tax laws or other



© ADOBE STOCK

regulatory changes are announced.

## BUDGET ISSUES

Small business owners are often returning almost all of the profits back into the operation, in particular in early years. That can make it difficult to innovate beyond original product ideas, to make needed facility repairs or to

hire an advertising firm to get the word out. Loyal customers can help by utilizing one of the most powerful promotional tools available: Word of mouth. As many as half of respondents in one study said they always check online reviews, or check them most of the time. Positive online reviews can fill a marketing gap so those funds can be

used in other needed areas.

## STAFFING UP

More than half of the respondents to one CNBC survey said the quality of staffing was their most significant challenge. New businesses don't have a reputation with applicants, and getting the word out as a small business can be difficult. Then there

are the inherent costs, since onboarding can cost thousands depending on the industry. Hire with a long-term mindset, waiting for the best candidates. Focus on people who fit the company culture you're trying to build, then determine if they have the needed skillset. Those who possess both can help your small business grow.



# Often-Overlooked Businesses

So many startups fail, and that's even more true with these unique projects

Make a difference with your dollars by shopping mom-and-pop operations founded by underserved community members.

Nearly 95 percent of new small businesses fail within five years, according to the Better Business Bureau. Those numbers are even more exaggerated with Black-owned businesses, which the Federal Reserve Bank reports closed at twice the rate of other businesses during the pandemic.

Women have traditionally owned fewer of their own businesses, as have Latin and Asian Americans, among others. The numbers are on the uptick, however, and some of the most exciting ideas and innovations are emerging from this small business segment.

They simply can't survive by exclusively relying on business from their own community. For instance, 14 percent of the U.S. population identifies as Black, but Black-owned businesses only earn around 2 percent of all retail spending, according to one study.

Together, they offer a world of new shopping alternatives. Businesses owned by traditionally underserved members of our communities provide fun twists on shop-worn gift ideas, solid service and important new perspectives



© ADOBE STOCK

on commerce of every sort:

## SHOPPING A DIFFERENT WAY

These up-and-coming shops and stores offer us all a chance to help close wealth gaps that stretch back to another era when these community members weren't allowed to open and operate their own small business. Even today, Black startups are

still half as likely to receive seed-money bank loans as their white counterparts. You'll be fostering the creation of jobs in areas that were among the hardest hit by the pandemic while promoting a more inclusive world. As with white owned businesses, these companies end up sending the vast majority of the money you spend back into the wider community in the form of sal-

aries and taxes. Helping them helps everyone.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

If your heart is in the right place but you are having trouble following through, Small Business Trends suggests setting aside a portion of your shopping budget specifically for minority-owned small businesses. Seek out companies through online searches

at Yelp, on Facebook groups or through the local chamber of commerce. Once you've discovered one of these gems, chip in by telling friends and family about your experience, then share it with interested new customers through online reviews. Small businesses of every kind rely on this free marketing strategy, and that's even more true for companies founded by the underserved.