



SHOP LOCAL



Down the Street

Once you look beyond the big box retailers, it can sometimes be amazing to discover the unique, local businesses that have been your neighbors for years.

From looking beyond the major coffee chain for the local place off Main Street to hitting the downtown boutiques instead of the major department stores, shopping local is a great way to support your community — and maybe even track down some unique deals.

But, where do you start?

GET TO KNOW THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Most communities — even small and mid-size cities — have a Chamber of Commerce. Take advantage of them. A good Chamber of Commerce should be at the heart of the local business climate in your community, and many publish directories and brochures designed to spotlight the local businesses in your area. Drop by one day when you're in town, or just pull up a business directory online. Flip through the categories and see just how many businesses you don't recognize — but might want to check out.

KEEP UP WITH THE LOCAL NEWS

From local newspapers to social media, there are more than a few ways to stay plugged in to your community. Many local businesses advertise in local papers, so pick up a copy and see what stands out. Many local papers also provide coverage of unique businesses, so keeping an eye on the happenings in your hometown is an excellent way to discover some new, local businesses. Social media also is an excellent tool for discovery. Like or follow one local business and it stands to reason you'll get recommendations to check out a few more. Also, see which businesses your friends follow.

JUST START EXPLORING

Though all those routes are a great way to get primed on your local shopping landscape, nothing beats just getting out and strolling the streets to see what's available. The best approach: Devote an afternoon to your own walking tour, paying attention to the businesses you probably drive by every day without a second thought. It's amazing what you might find.

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Help Your Community

Shopping local is the easiest way to help your community thrive. When you shop at local stores, it creates and sustains local jobs and helps provide unique shopping options for your community.

Plus, supporting local merchants over major retailers is proven to keep substantially more money in your own community.

HOW MUCH DOES IT HELP?

According to the research firm Civic Economics, for every \$100 you spend in a local business, approximately \$68 stays in your community. When shopping at a local branch of a chain store, just \$43 remains in the community. Yes, both purchases certainly help by keeping tax revenue in your town, so the local government can do everything from pave roads to keeping the sewer functioning properly. But for maximum bang for your buck, it's hard to beat the local corner store.

HELPING AVOID 'GHOST TOWNS'

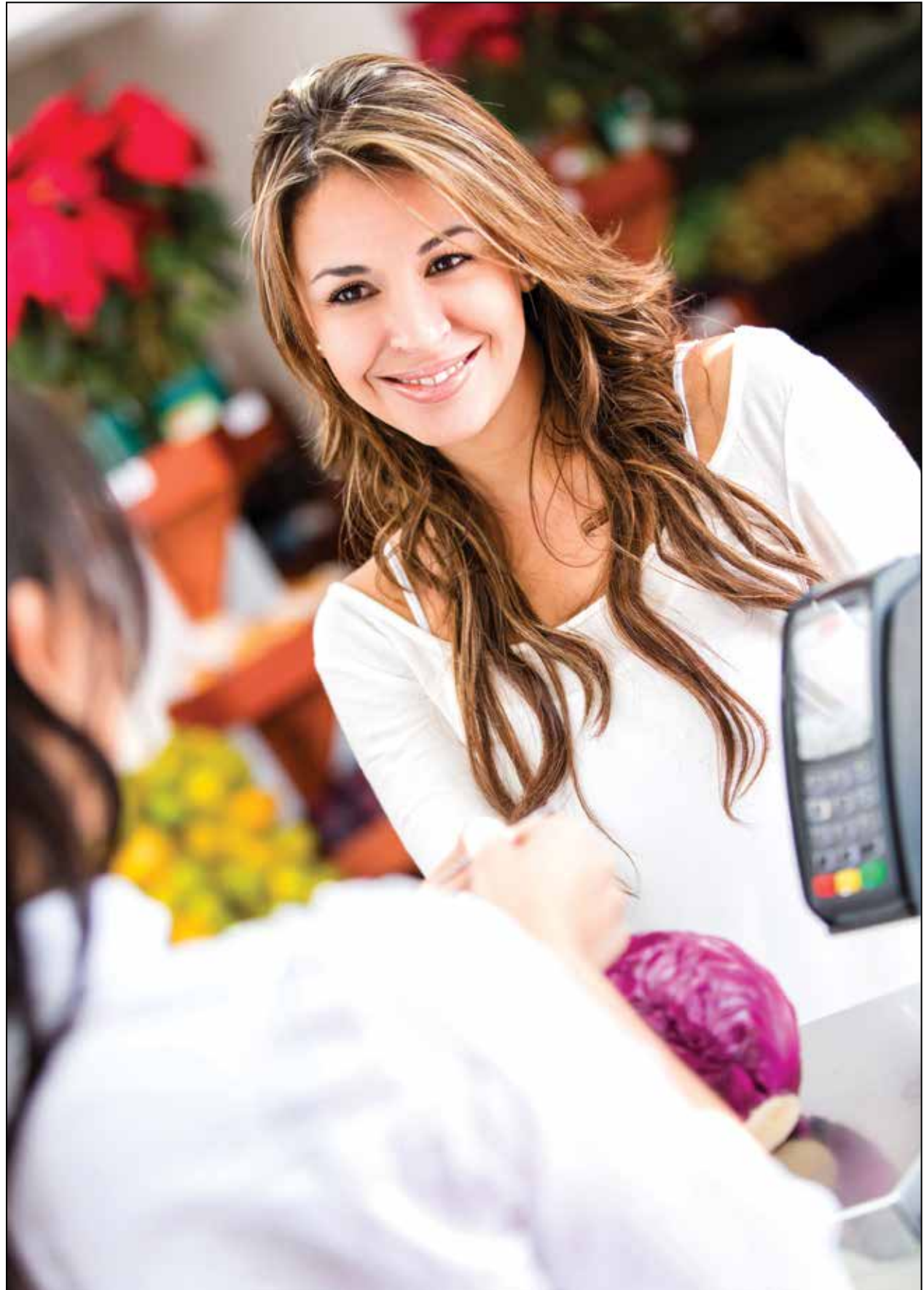
A shift has occurred over the past several decades, as the main shopping focus shifted away from the downtown core of most towns and into larger shopping centers built on the outskirts (largely due to the available space needed to build large developments). That's not a bad thing, when done in balance, but the New Economics Foundation notes it can sometimes result in downtowns becoming "ghost towns" over time, as shoppers stop supporting local stores and they eventually have to shutter.

NEF researcher David Boyle said via TIME that "Money is like blood. It needs to keep moving around to keep the economy going. It flows out, like a wound."

IT'S WORTH THE TRADEOFF

Yes, the product at the big box retailer might be a bit cheaper, but NEF researcher David Boyle told TIME that supporting local businesses can be a way to "shift the balance" to keep both local and national options available. Everyone likes variety, right?

Though it might cost a bit more on the front end, Boyle noted that buying local can have those massive community benefits on the back end, from tax support to keeping a downtown viable for future business growth.



Eat Local, Too

The phrase “Shop Local” typically evokes images of strolling down Main Street with boxes and bags in hand. But shopping local doesn’t just mean hitting the local boutiques and antique shops; it also means eating local.

SOME OF THE BEST RESTAURANTS, RIGHT UNDER YOUR NOSE

Sure, most people like the comfort and stability of major restaurant chains. You know the menu, you know what to expect, and they’re typically easily accessible right off the highway. Look a bit closer and you could have a whole lot more variety in your own backyard than you’d ever dreamed. The easiest way to eat local is to be adventurous and pop into new and different restaurants around your hometown. From the mom-and-pop diner to the downtown bistro, you will rarely go wrong by taking a few chances. Supporting new restaurants can be a great way to expand your palate, while also helping sustain local jobs.

HIT UP THE FARMER’S MARKET

This is arguably one of the biggest, and often most forgotten, ways to eat local. Definitely try out the cuisine at local restaurants, but, when it comes to fruits and veggies (and even honey and canned goods), it’s hard to beat the freshness of the stuff from your own county and state.

Local farmers fill up farmers markets every week, selling goods grown right in your hometown. Sure, it might cost a bit more, but it’s almost guaranteed to be fresher than what you might pick up at the grocery store — and that purchase will help ensure there are local veggies available in the years to come.

LOCAL FOOD IS BETTER FOR YOU

According to a Michigan state report, local food has a shorter time between harvest and your table, and it is less likely that the nutrient value has decreased. Food imported from far-away states and countries is often older from having traveled a great distance and sits in a distribution center before it gets to your store.



Spurring Growth

Shopping local can help retain jobs and keep local businesses open. It's also an investment. Without community support, the local business landscape could be drastically altered — and smaller — in the decades to come.

SHOPPING LOCAL KEEPS THAT MONEY WORKING

A Civic Economics study analyzed data from 15 independent retailers and seven independent restaurants in the Salt Lake City area, and compared their local economic impact with four national retail chains and three national restaurant chains.

The study found that local retailers return a total of 52 percent of their revenue to the local economy, compared to just 14 percent for the national chain retailers. Similarly, local restaurants recirculate an average of 79 percent of their revenue locally, compared to 30 percent for chain eateries.

Why the drastic difference? The report notes independent businesses spend more on local labor, goods procured locally for resale and services from local providers. This means a much larger share of the money spent at a locally owned store stays in the local economy, supporting a variety of other businesses and jobs.

KEEP YOUR COMMUNITY UNIQUE

Entrepreneur Magazine notes that local businesses give a community its flavor.

“Towns across America have similar chain restaurants, grocery and department stores but that diner down the street where you have breakfast every Saturday morning is one-of-a-kind,” the magazine notes. “The combined presence of your town’s many local businesses makes it different from every other city in the world. By supporting



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those businesses instead of chains, you ensure that uniqueness is preserved as a part of your community.”

LOCAL TIES

Plenty of major chains make a true effort to immerse themselves in their

local communities, supporting charities and local schools — but so do local businesses, and many of them have been doing it for decades.

The American Independent Business Alliance notes local owners, typically having invested much of their life sav-

ings in their businesses, have a natural interest in the community’s long-term health. The Alliance adds that community-based businesses are essential to charitable endeavors. One example is that their owners frequently serve on local boards and support local causes.

Unique Local Finds

The big box retailers might have more stuff, but you can almost guarantee they won't have everything you'll find at a local shop.

THE BEST PLACE TO FIND LOCAL STUFF

As The Guardian notes, independent shops often stock items made locally that might not be available elsewhere. They make the example: "Buy a dress by a fledgling designer and there is little chance of turning up to the office Christmas party wearing the same as someone else."

Along with clothing, the report also notes local business can be the best place to find one-of-a-kind items, such as toys and jewelry. Local entrepreneurs often team up with local stores to show off their wares, and it could make for an exciting and unique find.

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR LOCAL BOOKS AND ART

Since local bookstores and shops are less beholden to corporate stocking issues, they often branch out and carry everything from books by local artists to the new album from a local band. It might be below the surface, but many communities have their own burgeoning art communities. Local businesses are typically where they shine through. These are things directly connected to



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your local area, with its own unique flavors and charms — things you won't find anywhere else, other than your local community. Supporting those things can keep you plugged in to the world around you.

YOU CAN EVEN MEET NEW FRIENDS

All kinds of groups are almost certainly already meeting up weekly and monthly at your local cafes and coffee houses — and your new best friend could be

there waiting for you. Local restaurants often host local groups and clubs, so make a point to check out your local newspaper's event listings, or the bulletin board (or Facebook page) at the coffee house, to see what they have

coming up. Most shops host meet-ups for everything from book clubs to cycling enthusiasts. If it matches up with your hobbies (or if you're looking for a new one) local businesses are the perfect conduit to getting plugged in.

Save Time

Not only can shopping local help keep your community vibrant and ensure more varied shopping options for the future, but, it can also save you time.

TRAVEL TIME INCREASING

As an article in U.S. News and World Report notes, you must account for energy costs associated with shopping at major retail complexes or big box stores. Jeff Milchen, co-founder and outreach director at the American Independent Business Alliance, noted Americans have been “increasing our driving significantly over the past several decades, and it’s due almost entirely to shopping. Plus, time is money.”

CONSIDER THE LOCAL OPTIONS BEFORE HEADING OUT OF TOWN

Each community is different, but finding out what’s down the road can certainly help save you some time. From a corner hardware store to a boutique in downtown, local shopping options can often help fill the gap that could be pushing you to drive outside your community to shop. Perhaps the item you’re looking for at a big box store in another town could be found locally? Even if it costs a few dollars more, you’d almost certainly make up that difference in gas and time once it all evens out. Taking the time to learn a bit more about the business community in your own town can save you a lot of time in the future.

You might be able to get most of your shopping done at a specific big box store in a neighboring city, but look into how much of that you could get done in your own hometown. Even if it involves a few extra stops, you could still cut down your driving time quite a bit. Plus, that money stays in

your local community.

IT ALL GOES AROUND

Milchen also noted how local businesses tend to source and support other local businesses, meaning your

patronage at one typically goes a whole lot further than you might think. In the report, Milchen said he prefers to look at it this way: “Shopping at locally owned establishments can leverage community funds times three, on aver-

age. For example, by supporting a local clothing boutique, a consumer is also supporting a local attorney, tax preparer and printer. Local businesses tend to source small manufacturing and banking needs closer to home, as well.”



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Local vs. Online, Big Box

Big box and online retailers may seem convenient, but it's important to see the impact these shopping methods have on your local community.

STAY CLOSE TO HOME

Though statistics show locally owned businesses typically reinvest more in the local community, shopping at big box retailers in your hometown still keeps those tax dollars flowing back into the area. When you shop in different towns, those taxes go to pave roads and operate parks in those communities. When you shop at home, no matter the type of store, that tax money stays local. Those funds are vital to keeping your town up and running.

CONVENIENCE VS. COMMUNITY

It's hard to argue against the utter convenience of online shopping. Services such as Amazon Prime can have just about anything delivered to you in two days or less (often with free shipping). In many cases, that can be a great way to go, but it's important to realize the detrimental effect online shopping is having on local retailers.

Online sales are only getting stronger by the year, with ComScore reporting year-to-year increases of around 10 percent in online spending during the holiday shopping season. Many retailers are reporting strong growth on their sites, according to Forbes.



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ARE THE SAVINGS WORTH IT?

Online retailers are able to keep prices low because they cut out much of the brick-and-mortar overhead required for a storefront. Plus, some

online sellers aren't required to add taxes to your purchase in some states, which also can help keep prices low. But like most things, finding balance between what you buy online and locally could be the best

approach.

The Retail Alliance notes: "This situation is stifling local business growth and threatening small businesses nationwide. While public opinion continues to move in

favor of equity through sales tax collection, some in Congress continue to fight against sound policy based on simple fairness, good economics and common decency."