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How partnering is helping small businesses WEATHER THE SOCIAL DISTANCING STORM

Social distancing guidelines implemented in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak posed unique challenges to small business owners. Many small businesses were forced to close their facilities to customers to prevent the spread of the virus, which various sources estimated had claimed the lives of more than 200,000 people by the end of April. Delivery and curbside pickup enabled many businesses to offer limited services to consumers, but low revenue still forced many businesses to seek new ways to generate sales. Partnering is one creative way many small businesses owners sought to generate more sales.

By partnering with other local businesses, small business owners can capi-

talize on the community-first attitude many consumers are embracing as they look to help local industries weather the storm created by social distancing. Restaurant owners can look into partnering with local grocers who can sell prepared meals in their stores, many of which are operating only under very limited, if any, restrictions. Such a partnership can fill the needs of consumers who have grown tired of making their own meals for weeks on end, while also giving grocery stores struggling with supply chain issues more items with which to stock their shelves. It also allows restaurant owners to generate revenue while ensuring food they purchased prior to the implementation of social distancing guidelines does not go to waste. Local auto body shops also can capitalize on



"Partnering is one creative way many small businesses owners sought to generate more sales."

partnering by working in conjunction with local automotive supply stores. By offering many of the items drivers need, such as windshield washer fluid, auto accessories and more, in their shops, auto body shops can attract customers who still need to maintain their vehicles but don't want to make too many shopping trips. When customers call to book oil change appointments, ask if there are any automotive supplies they need, then partner with a local supply store to deliver those items before customers arrive for their oil changes. Such partnerships benefit consumers and business owners alike, making them ideal ways to generate additional revenue during what has proven to be challenging economic times for many small businesses.

SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 30

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VIRTUAL

volunteering opportunities

Volunteerism is the life blood of charitable organizations. Many cannot function effectively without volunteers campaigning for their efforts, handling day-to-day activities and serving in many other essential capacities.

During the pandemic, nonprofit organizations have been affected by social distancing recommendations. It's challenging to lend a helping hand when those hands may inadvertently be passing on a potentially dangerous illness.

Social distancing and other restrictions instituted in response to the global pandemic do not have to stifle volunteer efforts. The internet can be a gateway to volunteer opportunities — many of which can be handled virtually from the safety of home.

Organizations like Goodwill, the United Nations and even AARP offer online volunteering opportunities. Resources such as Volunteer Match also can connect interested parties with organizations that have virtual volunteer options. The following are a few additional ways to become a virtual volunteer.

- Manage social media accounts. Charitable organizations recognize the importance of a social media presence, so prospective volunteers can offer to help nonprofits keep their social media accounts updated and viable.
- Assist those without sight. Volunteers with Be My Eyes can provide important assistance to blind or low-vision individuals. Virtual video calls



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The following are a few ways to become a virtual volunteer.

enable volunteers to communicate with people directly and provide help.

- Offer tutoring or teaching. Virtual learning has become the new norm in many different school districts. Parents who may need assistance with children adapting to remote learning can benefit from quality educators willing to lend their time and skill sets.

- Design and build websites. Organizations may have trouble finding time to keep their websites updated with

the latest information. Writers may be needed to keep blogs current, while coders can improve sites and make them more secure.

- Assist call centers. People may have various questions and needs in a time of crisis. Volunteers can be used in retail call centers, online therapy lifelines and even school offices. Remote technology enables calls to be parsed out and answered by volunteers working from home.

- Translate emails and phone calls. Translators are always in demand in an increasingly global society. Bilingual men and women can volunteer as translators so their favorite charitable organizations can effectively overcome any language barriers that may exist between their staffs and the people they're trying to help.

Staying close to home has become the norm during the pandemic, paving the way for virtual volunteers to make a difference in their communities.

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How to **SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES** *this holiday season*

The holiday season is an important one for small businesses every year, and it figures to take on heightened importance in 2020. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 in late 2019 and early 2020 hit small businesses especially hard, with many being forced to close their facilities to customers in an effort to prevent the virus from spreading.

Estimates regarding the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on small businesses varied, but many small business owners were forced to let go employees as they confronted steep declines in revenue. A ZenBusiness survey of more than 1,000 small business founders, senior managers and decision makers found that 37 percent of small businesses that employ between 11 and 25 people were considering laying off more than one-fifth of their workforce.

As small businesses face difficult

As small businesses face difficult challenges, it's no surprise that many consumers want to support locally owned small businesses this holiday season.

challenges, it's no surprise that many consumers want to support locally owned small businesses this holiday season. Such support not only can help small businesses, but also can help to revitalize local communities.

- **Shop online.** Online shopping has traditionally been dominated by big box retailers. However, many small businesses increased their e-commerce capabilities to generate revenue. Shoppers concerned about shopping in person this holiday season should explore the delivery and curbside pickup options available at locally owned small businesses.

Even businesses that have not traditionally been allowed to deliver, such as breweries and wineries, have been able to do so during the outbreak, giving consumers unlimited online shopping options.

- **Purchase gift cards.** Gift cards take the guesswork out of holiday shopping, and such cards are easily shipped or even emailed to loved ones. That's a significant benefit during the 2020 holiday season, when delivery times are expected to be lengthy. Gift cards to local businesses simplify holiday shopping, support small busi-

nesses and help shoppers avoid potential delivery delays.

- **Share your experience.** Word-of-mouth is vital to small businesses at any time, and can be especially valuable as these companies try to overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. Holiday shoppers can share their experiences with local businesses via social media. Share information about the lengths local small businesses have gone to in regard to safety measures, order fulfillment and their delivery and pickup efforts. Such sharing may compel neighbors and friends to follow your lead and provide vital support to local businesses in need this holiday season.

Small businesses are the backbone of many communities, and the holiday season provides a great opportunity to support such firms as they look to recover from a difficult year.

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How local businesses GIVE BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

Small businesses are booming. Information from the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Census Bureau's Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs says that small businesses, or firms with fewer than 500 workers, accounted for 99.7 of businesses in 2016, the most recent year for data. Firms with fewer than 100 workers accounted for 98.2 percent of companies. In Canada, 97.9 percent of businesses were small as of 2017, with more than half concentrated in the Ontario and Quebec provinces.

Thanks to their influence and reach, small businesses have the potential to impact local communities in numerous ways.

- Small businesses employ local residents. The Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey indicates companies with fewer than 100 employees employed 69.7 of the population in 2017. According to the SBA's Office of Advocacy, small businesses accounted for 61.8 percent of net new jobs in the United States between 1993 and 2016.

- Small businesses are innovative. The SBA notes that small businesses represent about 96 percent of employer firms in high-patenting manufacturing industries. That suggests that small businesses are full of new ideas.

- Small businesses support local charities. Many local businesses give to charity, particularly local charities. Some donate money while others may offer their professional services or event spaces, each of



METRO CREATIVE GRAPHICS

Thanks to their influence and reach, small businesses have the potential to impact local communities in numerous ways.

which can be particularly helpful to local communities.

- Small businesses contribute to community identity. Small businesses contribute to the charm and character of a town or city. Many local businesses make up the fabric of Main Street, and towns are known and loved for the businesses that have endured.

- Small businesses help the environment. Shopping locally means consumers do not have to travel far to get their goods and services. The United States Environmental Protection Agency's research report on walkable downtown centers found small businesses encourage walking and cycling, helping to reduce air pollution from vehicles.

- Small businesses keep money in

communities. Local businesses keep disposable income and tax money within their communities. Business tax money remains local and can support schools, roads and municipal services.

Local small businesses are the life force that keeps cities and towns prosperous and humming along. Such establishments help build a sense of community and forge lasting relationships.

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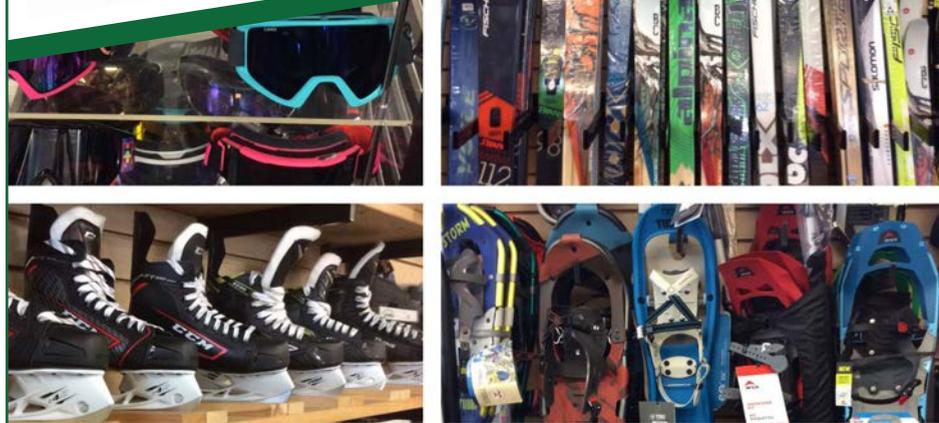
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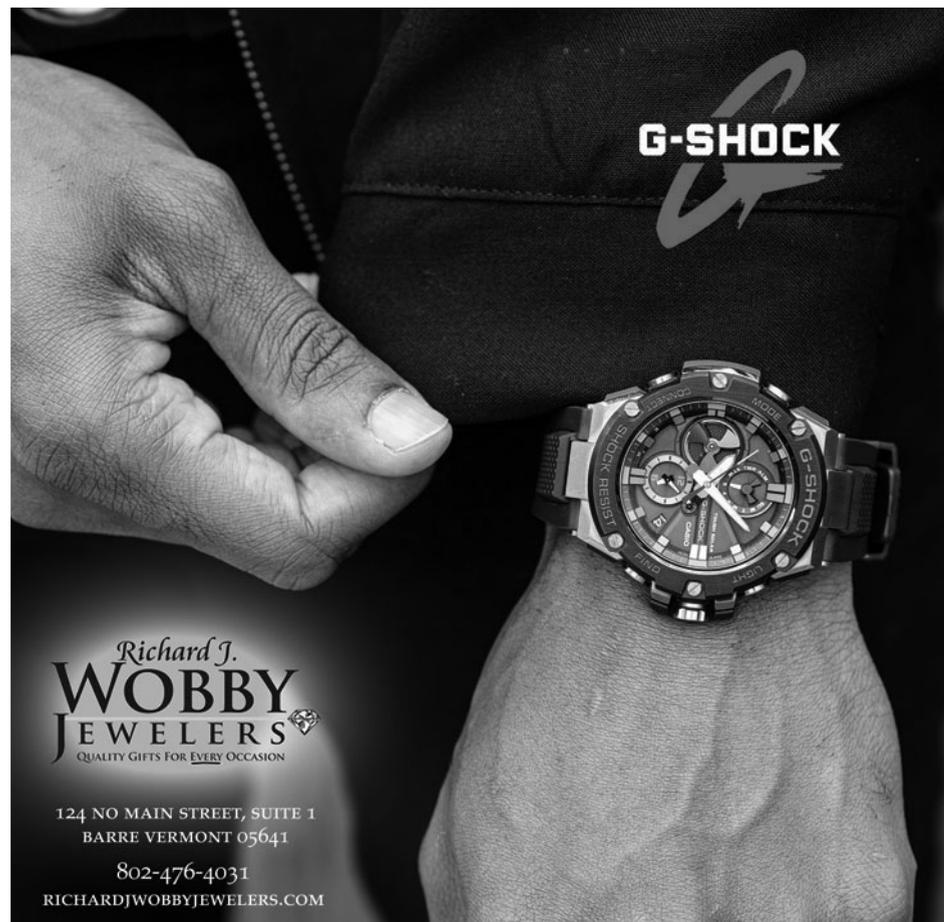
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“On Plaid Friday, customers are urged to shop locally and enjoy choosing gifts in a more leisurely fashion.”

The holiday season sometimes arrives with a frenetic pace. At the dawn of the holiday season, there seems to be so much to fit into a relatively short period of time, including planning celebrations and shopping. The rush often begins the Friday after American Thanksgiving on a day called Black Friday.

Plaid Friday was born out of a recognition that the frenzied nature of Black Friday may not be for everyone. The event was created in Oakland, Calif., to transform holiday shopping for family and friends into a more connected, pleasurable activity than Black Friday. Plaid Friday promotes the diversity and creativity of local and independent businesses. On Plaid Friday, customers are urged to shop locally and enjoy choosing gifts in a more leisurely fashion.

According to event organizers, the name “Plaid Friday” was chosen from the idea of weaving individual threads of small businesses together to create a strong fabric that celebrates indepen-

dent businesses. While Plaid Friday may have originated in California, it has now spread to local towns across the country. Plaid Friday precedes Small Business Saturday, meaning holiday shoppers can turn their two-day, post-Thanksgiving shopping excursions into 48 hours of opportunities to support small businesses.

Shoppers have many different ways to support the Plaid Friday movement.

- Look for signage or social media advertising regarding Plaid Friday. Many establishments may advertise Plaid Friday sales. Keep an eye out for signs or hashtags on social media, such as #plaidfriday, #shoplocal and #dinelocal.
- Let others know you’re supporting local businesses. Spread the word about Plaid Friday to others who may not be aware of the movement.
- Wear plaid clothing on Plaid Friday

to show local business solidarity.

- Search community blotters and other local websites to find out more about Plaid Friday efforts in your community.
- Certain shops may have scaled-back sales due to COVID-19 restrictions. Continue to support these businesses as much as possible, taking advantage of curbside pickup or delivery options that can further streamline holiday shopping.
- Explore new offerings. Some businesses you frequently shop with may have altered their services and products to fit the changing times. As a result, you may be able to purchase a greater variety of items all in one store.

Local shopping is at the heart of Plaid Friday. Shoppers who want to avoid the typical rush of Black Friday shopping can visit small local businesses.

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