



BUYING LOCAL DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on small, locally-owned businesses. This year, and especially this holiday season, we must do what we can to support the unique shops, restaurants, barbershops, gyms that provide our communities with a welcoming atmosphere, high-quality small-batch products, and personalized services. With growing government restrictions, it will not be easy, but it is possible.

If you are running a local small business, here are some ideas to implement to encourage shopping local:

SHOP LOCAL CANADA

1. Sell gift cards for services.

Service-based businesses are perhaps the most affected by the pandemic, and asking customers to purchase vouchers they can use later is a way to keep the cash flow coming in.

2. Invest in an online presence.

Going digital is not just a way of the future but a necessary tool to communicate your offer to your prospective customers. Depending on your business model, it could also be a place to generate sales 24/7. Regardless of how you use it, having a website with a clear, concise, and impactful message and excellent ease is essential, especially during these uncertain times.

3. Offer convenient payment and curbside pick-up options.

Easy and convenient payment options and curbside pick-up is key to getting more sales this season. Customers want the security of online payment and no-contact delivery while supporting your brand, which is a win-win scenario.

4. Consider video conferencing to deliver your service.

At-home workouts gain a community component when you add video conferencing. It is not a substitute for being in a studio, but a close second and a way to support your neighbourhood gym.

5. Host outdoor pop-up shops.

Among other creative ideas that small businesses are coming up with, outdoor pop-up shops are a great concept for supporting local while limiting the spread of COVID-19.

6. Ask your customers for testimonials.

There is nothing like positive reviews and testimonials to get the word out for your business. And it doesn't cost anything, yet most loyal customers are happy to do it and share with their circle of influence.

Entrepreneurs are, time and time again, proving to be the most resilient. Not only that, small business is the driver of growth in most of our communities and therefore we owe it to support them not just this holiday season, but beyond.

HOW TO GET READY FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

"The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today." -- H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

The Holiday Season is the most exciting, most highly anticipated time of the year for businesses because it's a time of increased consumer spending. Parallel to increased spending is the competition for consumer attention as we all get bombarded with messages and offers at every corner. Standing out in the eyes of the customer is a real challenge. But don't fret -- there are things you can start doing today to get better prepared, especially in the face of the current pandemic.

In this month's InfoPays, we go over several simple strategies that you can employ in your business:

1. Review last year for lessons learned.

Before starting any holiday prep work, look at last year's experience. What worked? What didn't work so well? Define and focus your efforts on successful strategies and apply them to this year's efforts as best as you can.

2. Track and control your inventory.

What kinds of items or services are your customers looking for? Look at the trends from last year if they are available. Choose the products that will lead your promotions and order early to leave a buffer for potential delays.

3. Minimize the amount of back-office work.

It pays to be efficient any day of the year, but wisely utilizing your time is crucial during the Holiday Season. A small business should focus all their efforts on their customers instead of back-office work. Technology and automated tasks can become a lifesaver during the holidays. And it doesn't have to be anything significant. Setting up email reminders or maintaining a calendar of activities can be sufficient to increase your efficiency.



4. Stay current on income and expenses.

The pace during the Holidays is more hectic than regular day-to-day business. This usually means bigger workloads and more time required to manage cash flow. Stay organized as much as possible. In line with using technology to automate your processes, look for tools and apps that will allow you to snapshot receipts and last-minute expenses that may otherwise end up in the trash.

5. Stand out of the crowd.

Have a strategy on how you are going to promote your holiday specials and offers. Are you going to use traditional media like TV, radio, and newspapers? Or perhaps you want to be more cost-effective and target a smaller group through your social media presence. Will you provide incentives to your existing clients? Will you send out holiday cards and "thank you" notes? Holidays are when we can all pause from everyday business and appreciate those who make your business possible.

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