



MainStreetNews

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL of THE NATIONAL TRUST MAIN STREET CENTER

in this issue

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In this month's installment of our series on retail management issues, author Tom Shay discusses how business success comes from listening to customers say what they want, from when they want to shop to what they want to buy.

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Is your community a "Great American Main Street"? Find out more about this prestigious national award and see whether your community is eligible to compete.



NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION®

INDIE POWER:

BUY LOCAL & BUY INDEPENDENT CAMPAIGNS

By Jeff Milchen,
American Independent Business Alliance

Taking the initiative to support your thriving local communities.

After 10 years of helping more than 60 communities organize “buy independent/buy local” (BIBL) campaigns and observing the results from dozens more, I’ve learned two equally important lessons. First, BIBL campaigns can be powerful tools to help sustain independent businesses and commercial districts. Secondly, most campaigns fail to make any substantial impact.

The good news is those failures are not due to financial or time constraints, but to avoidable errors in strategy and execution. Meanwhile, the number of effective tools and templates available to BIBL campaigns is expanding rapidly as these efforts spread, accelerated by the recession and increased interest in creating more stable and sustainable local economies.

AS YE PUT -- SO SHALL YE TAKE

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO GET HERE?

“Whatever a man sows that shall he also reap.” And this particularly applies to all of you who look to the future to bring you profits from the activities you are scattering around this city. This is your chance and it is only natural that you should expect some kind of reward for your faithful services and remembrance.

Also— if the services rendered here been in the nature of a loan for the community by adhering to the principles of the Big “Buy-at-Home” movement, you can rest assured that you are contributing your bit. Your efforts will go a long way toward ensuring this city grows and prosper and in its prosperity you are certain to share.

Take on a Little Civic Pride and

BUY AT HOME

DOLLARS ARE LIKE SEED—YOU MUST PLANT THEM HERE IF YOU EXPECT TO REAP THE HARVEST IN THIS CITY—

The growth of a localization movement is inspiring, but it also creates new challenges. We now see global corporations engaging in “local-washing” — attempting to subvert the word “local” to mean any place where they have a presence. HSBC, for example, promotes itself as “the world’s local bank,” while Whole Foods Corporation proclaims “I’m Local” in its marketing.

When corporate giants attempt to co-opt your message, it’s a sure sign your work is effective. Marketing experts at these chain businesses recognize that many organizations are succeeding in building “pro-local” consciousness.

Surveys conducted by Stacy Mitchell of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance supports their view. As previously reported in *Main Street News* (May/June 2009), a January 2009 survey of 1,142 independent retailers from all 50 states found sales at independent stores declined an average of 5 percent from the 2007 holiday season to 2008. While that obviously wasn’t good news, the U.S. Department of Commerce reported that December retail sales overall were down a record 9.8 percent over 2007, suggesting independents fared far better than chains and online retailers on average.

Of particular note, the survey also found that local retailers in communities with organizations running sustained BIBL campaigns reported stronger holiday sales than those lacking such efforts. While these communities still saw a decrease in sales compared to the previous

This ad ran in the *Gazette-Virginian* in Halifax, Va., during the anti-chain movement of the 1920s-30s.

year, the drop was 3.2 percent — far less than the 5.6 percent decline reported in cities without BIBL organizations.

In an identical survey covering the same period in the previous year, the positive impact of sustained BIBL efforts was even greater. Though sales were weak all around as the downturn kicked in, indie retailers in BIBL communities reported a 2.1 percent sales increase — seven times the increase (0.3 percent) reported by indies in other locations.

“The choice between patronizing a local independent versus a chain or online business is becoming part of people’s consciousness in these places,” says Mitchell. She notes that individual communities, though lacking large-scale studies, report equally positive results.

In January, Mitchell designed a more subjective survey to gauge the impact of the “Portland Buy Local” campaign for which she volunteers in Maine, which yielded equally compelling results.

Nearly 80 percent of members said the campaign was benefiting their business and 68 percent said they had gained new customers because of it.

Portland’s downtown merchants offer glowing reviews of the campaign. Stuart Gersen of Longfellow Books, with its tagline “a fiercely independent bookstore,” says: “We had people we’d never seen before come in and buy gifts, some of whom said they used to shop at Amazon.com.”

Nancy Lawrence, owner of the clothing store Portmanteau, believes Portland’s campaign is not only influencing locals, but is also drawing people from outside the city. These shoppers now identify Portland as the place to find unique businesses. There is “a strong determination of many customers to do all of their holiday shopping with independents,” says Lawrence. She believes downtown Portland benefits from having an organization that works citywide,

citing additional referrals and increased attention to events like the city's recent Indie Biz Awards.

As with almost every successful BIBL campaign, Portland Buy Local is one facet of a broader community effort — in this case, the Portland Independent Business and Community Alliance.

Keys to Shifting Spending and Culture

The ultimate goal of a BIBL campaign is a cultural shift through which large numbers of citizens come to identify themselves as “the kind of person who supports local independents.” Similarly, a successful organization creates a perception of a community that supports its local entrepreneurs and makes doing business locally a point of pride. It makes patronizing independents a social norm among large portions of the population.

Creating this culture of support for local independents cannot be accomplished with mere marketing. It must be achieved through sustained, multi-faceted education employing these principles:

TELL STORIES. Educating your community about the many objective benefits of doing business locally is critical. Effective persuasion involves appealing to your audience's emotions as well as their intellect. Personalize the cause by showing the faces and stories of your local business owners and describing positive experiences people enjoy with them. “Local hero” stories are especially valuable.

This can be done through posters featuring individual businesses, ads spotlighting community events sustained by local businesses, letters to the editor, video clips on your website, and many other venues. *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath, is a great read on the power of storytelling.

THINK BIG. Leveraging the power of institutional buyers by helping them increase the amount of goods or services



Appeal to shoppers' emotions by telling the stories of your local business owners in ads and posters.

they get from local independents can create a powerful economic stimulus.

Build relationships with buyers and contractors in your local government, schools, colleges, and hospitals. Ask to review budgets and learn which purchases are sourced locally, which aren't, and the key criteria the decision maker must follow. If you can play matchmaker with even a few local providers, you'll not only have a loyal business member for life, you'll have a great story to advance your message in the media. The American Independent Business Alliance (AMIBA) has sample surveys.

CITIZENS VERSUS CONSUMERS. While shifting consumer decisions is a core goal of any buy local campaign, the most influential community organizations inspire residents to recognize their power and responsibility as *citizens* to guide the community's future.

We're battling against massive corporate communications campaigns that frame decisions properly made by citizens and democratic bodies as mere consumer choices (e.g. “consumers will decide whether the town supports a new big-box development five miles from downtown”). Decisions about how land should be developed are an important civic function and should not be narrowed down to a “consumer choice.”

Be deliberate in your choice of language and call out anti-democratic framing that proposes stripping citizens of their rights. Using themes like “vote with your dollars” is a double-edged sword because



This poster by the Gallatin Valley IBA in Montana promotes the farm-to-restaurant program that helps local farmers as well as restaurants.



Window decals, tote bags, and bag stuffers will keep your “buy local” campaign constantly in the minds of shoppers. Pictured above: AMIBA window decal.

it confuses consumer activity, where one's influence is correlated directly to wealth, with democracy, in which we all should have an equal voice.

BUILD A BROAD BASE.

While retailers, restaurants, and other businesses that compete directly against chains and online merchants are obvious prospects, seek out businesses from every business sector you can identify. The strongest efforts engage businesses of every size, type, demographic group, and location in your community. And don't neglect citizens and civic groups that share concerns about sustaining community character and entrepreneurial opportunities.

GET BUSINESS OWNERS TO WALK THE TALK.

Not only is business-to-business spending economically significant, it's critical to the integrity of your campaign for business owners to localize their spending where feasible. As with major institutions, ask your business members to analyze where their spending goes and determine whether your group can facilitate sourcing additional goods or services locally.

Remember the goal of getting locals to self-identify as supporters of local independents? It's especially important to create that mindset among business owners themselves. This can create a powerful positive feedback loop that drives further cooperation among local entrepreneurs.

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Coordinated Action

AMIBA coordinates two annual national campaigns featuring concurrent action in communities throughout North America. These campaigns are open to any group or business that wants to participate. Free downloadable templates from AMIBA.net for local production and instructions to guide local efforts are available, as well as media assistance.

Independents Week, conceived by the Tampa IBA, occurs during the first week of July and highlights the importance of entrepreneurial opportunities and the links between economic and political democracy. Local activities include securing mayoral proclamations, business promotions, and community-building activities such as picnics, film screenings, and bike rides. Some participants issue the Indie Challenge to local officials and celebrities in a friendly competition to see who can support their independents the most.

America Unchained, created by the Austin IBA, occurs the Saturday before Thanksgiving (November 21 this year). It emphasizes the economic benefits of independent businesses and promotes the message that where you buy a gift is just as important as what you buy. Many communities calculate the local economic boost that results from small shifts in consumer spending over the holidays.

Subscribe to AMIBA's free monthly e-mail bulletin for updates on this year's events.

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COMBINE IN-DEPTH EDUCATION WITH CONSTANT REMINDERS.

Tell your stories and offer thorough explanations of the economic, civic, and environmental importance of local business through feature stories, talk radio appearances, op-eds, and other channels. Consider bringing in an outside expert to give your campaign a strong launch with a public presentation and training to help your board and volunteers master messaging.

While you should generate a steady flow of opportunities for substantive discussion, also aim to make your BIBL campaign so visible that a day won't go by without residents being reminded of your message.

Window decals, posters, tote

One of a series of eight bag stuffers produced by AMIBA to promote the community benefits of independent businesses.

bags, bag stuffers, and other materials your organization can produce are one component. The other key is to convince member businesses that using the same logo and messaging in their ads, website, invoices, and elsewhere will boost the power of your campaign and ultimately benefit them. These everyday sightings will recall the deeper messages and help them sink in.

EMPHASIZE THE VIRTUES OF INDEPENDENTS. While some groups may wish to avoid offending chain businesses in their downtowns with direct critiques, emphasize local *independent* businesses in your messaging and be sure to make a distinction between a local presence and local decision-making authority.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.

Identify the various segments of your community and develop messages targeted toward each major group. Messaging that appeals to middle-aged homeowners, for example, might make little impact on young singles.

Your logo and primary tagline should have broad appeal, but most materials should be customized to a specific publication, website, or other medium, and to the demographics of its users. Learn from the best marketing campaigns: Nike will use its logo and slogan everywhere, but you'd never mistake one of its ads in *Golfer's Digest* for one running in *Skateboarder*.

Failure to identify and cater to the interests and values of specific groups may be the most common mistake of buy local efforts, yet countless campaigns still do it. Customize!

MASTER THE ARGUMENTS.

To communicate effectively to various individuals and groups on issues that best suit their concerns and interests, your core group should hone its message on a range of topics.

For example, draft a letter to a local environmental group and make your case for the ways sustaining local businesses helps protect open space and farmland and reduces traffic, storm runoff, long-distance

shipping, and fossil fuel consumption.

No individual or company does all its business locally, and it would be too burdensome to try. Wherever people are doing business today, your goal should be to get them to do a bit more with your independent local businesses, not to instill a sense of guilt. Focusing on the benefits to customers is the key. Everyone involved in your campaign should have their own sound bite – and an anecdote – that illustrates how independent businesses can deliver great value and demonstrates the importance of local independents to the community.

CHECK YOUR FACTS. Several compelling studies demonstrate the increased local economic multiplier that results when people spend at local independents, that independents give a greater percentage of sales to charities, and other economic arguments for supporting local business. Studies in Maine by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance and in Texas by Civic Economics, for example, both indicate that for each \$100 spent at local independents, \$45 is returned directly to the local economy — more than three times the return gained from dollars spent at a local outlet of a chain.

This is persuasive and solid data, but unfortunately, many groups have taken information out of context or used outlier studies to present exaggerated numbers. One article in June quoted a ludicrous assertion that 80 percent of dollars spent with local businesses are re-spent locally.

While well-intentioned, such careless claims undermine the credibility of a BIBL campaign and the broader localization movement. Because errant "facts" can spread like wildfire on the web, verify any factual claims with the New Rules Project (NewRules.org) or AMIBA websites or staff before publishing – that ludicrous claim I just mentioned was printed in *The New York Times*.





This T-shirt created by the Austin, Tex., Independent Business Alliance focuses on the city's unique character.

This "buy local" ad ran in the Halifax, Va., Gazette-Virginian back in 1966.

EDUCATION NEVER STOPS.

Effectively informing your community about the benefits of doing business locally and shifting local culture is not like teaching a lesson. Changing habits in your community takes time, and you will never be done. Even if your community has little population turnover, constant reinforcement is required. Campaigns that begin in autumn and go dormant in January will accomplish little.

The Message: Why Independents Matter

A BIBL campaign has two main messages: 1) patronizing local independents is the best choice for you personally, and 2) the presence of local businesses is vitally important for the community. Which message you decide to emphasize should be determined by your target audience and outreach vehicle. Material to be distributed at hotels or college dorms, for example, will focus almost entirely on value for customers. Op-eds in your local newspaper or fliers distributed to homeowners might place greater emphasis on community benefits.

The tone of the message will also vary with your audience. I co-founded and directed the first Independent Business Alliance (IBA) in Boulder, Colorado; it was a youth-oriented community with 30,000+ students. When the Boulder IBA designed ads for the *Boulder Weekly* and the University of Colorado newspaper, we wanted make indies the hip place to shop, dine, or visit, so we created the tagline "You're not a clone why shop at one?"SM – a far cry from the "Treat yourself to the best"

theme we used for ads in the upscale *Boulder Magazine*. Sophisticated, targeted messaging is one prime factor separating effective BIBL campaigns from the majority of campaigns that come and go with minimal impact.

Of course, most of us choose to do business where we perceive the best value for our time and money. But in an age where we're bombarded with hundreds of corporate advertisements daily, perceptions may differ widely from reality. Making the case that independents provide superior customer value requires defining value as more than merely the cheapest product or service. To make people wary of buying cheap,

"Unique independent businesses play a vital role in marketing a community's distinct character."

point out that product lifespan and customer service can make a slightly higher priced item from a local independent a better long-term value.

Kenyon Noble hardware in Bozeman, Montana, highlights the value of its expertise with ads saying "It's not only what you can buy from Kenyon Noble, it's what you can learn from them." The ads promote the ability of the store to save customers time and money through the staff's product knowledge and free advice on household projects.

Other key aspects of local independent businesses that you can promote, based on your target audience's interests, include:

Community Character. Unique independent businesses play a vital role in maintaining a community's distinct character. And as more and more cities and towns attract the same array of cookie-cutter businesses, those with unique offerings stand to gain business.

Job Creation and Entrepreneurial Opportunity. It's a truism that small businesses are the major engine of job creation. A chain "superstore" may crow about

creating 300 new jobs, but numerous studies indicate they displace as many jobs as they create. Without population growth, spending on typical big-box goods like hardware, basic clothing, or housewares is a relatively fixed pie. Though we might shift our shopping, we don't increase our consumption of socks or toasters just because a new venue is selling them. "New" jobs and sales tax proceeds simply displace jobs and revenue at existing area businesses.

When communities like Barnstable, Massachusetts, studied the local impact of chains, they concluded that it actually costs more taxpayer dollars to provide safety and

services for such development than the community would reap. In other words, when new big boxes come to town, expect to pay more taxes.

Local independents employ an array of supporting services that can include contractors, accountants, insurance brokers, computer consultants, attorneys, sign makers, and advertising agencies, among others. Local retailers, restaurants, and distributors also carry a higher percentage of locally produced goods than chains, which means more jobs for local producers.

These also tend to be higher-wage positions with greater career potential. Staples, for example, may be right when it says it pays clerks and cashiers as well as your local office supply store, but that's only part of the story. A chain store typically is a clone of other units, which eliminates the need for local planning and uses a minimum of local goods and services. A company-owned store's profits are promptly exported to corporate headquarters. This is one reason for the large multiplier effect of locally owned stores noted earlier.

Consumer Choice. Though a single local shop may carry a smaller selection of products than a big chain, having a number of independent retailers creates great diversity.

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LOCALISM ON MAIN

Many shoppers are also being lured into historic and traditional commercial districts thanks to “shop local” campaigns sponsored by Main Street programs. Dover, New Hampshire, for example, launched a “We Shop Dover” campaign that featured an online business directory, downtown gift certificates, window decals, business events, and a website (WeShopDover.com). Ever resourceful, the Main Street program worked with a Dover-based web development firm to get the website created for free and spent a few hundred dollars to print window decals for the businesses. Press releases, PSAs, and marketing by the Main Street program helped get the word out about shopping local in Dover.

Communities also use strong image-building marketing promotions to promote local businesses. Downtown Lee’s Summit, Missouri, worked to dazzle shoppers with its “Sparkle” campaign. After an 18-month streetscape project, Lee’s Summit’s commercial district looked sparkling new: 15,000 postcards, yard signs, promotional door tags, and holiday decorations with 100,000 sparkling lights helped point people to downtown businesses for sparkling gifts — residents within three zip codes couldn’t miss the holiday sparkle of Lee’s Summit’s downtown.

—Andrea L. Dono



As a percentage of their sales, local businesses give far more back to the community than chains.

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Environmental Impact. Independent businesses consume less land, generate less traffic and infrastructure demands, and create a lighter environmental footprint in many other ways as well. In this time of higher gas prices, the money spent driving to a regional big-box store not only drains personal finances — it represents an environmental impact as consumers drive longer distances to purchases goods they could have bought at home.

Accountability/Morality. Local owners consider their impact on the community’s quality of life and often take actions because they believe it’s the right thing to do, even if it does not maximize profit.

Quality of Life. Hopefully, your local independents offer more personal attention, service, character, and just plain fun than their competitors. We all spend a significant portion of our lives patronizing businesses: isn’t enjoying the time we spend doing it important? A strong commercial district in your community will also increase housing values because of the perceived enhanced quality of life.

Local Charities. Though some chains manage to generate favorable public relations for their charitable donations, locals give back far more as a percentage of sales. Get people to recognize the need to shop at businesses that support their child’s soccer team, favorite theater group, or animal shelter.

Democracy and Civic Life. As author Jane Jacobs said long ago: our independent businesses and the public spaces that surround them are key environments for supporting the casual relationships that create community cohesiveness and trust. When personal interactions are replaced by anonymous trips to a regional big-box store or shopping in online isolation, is it any wonder we face a decline in trust and increased cynicism in society?

Fire on All Cylinders

While a well-run BIBL campaign can create positive movement in your community, stopping there would be like using only one cylinder of a four-cylinder engine — you’ll move, but not very fast. As with Portland, a majority of the most influential BIBL campaigns are part of an Independent Business AllianceSM or similarly modeled organization that works in several realms to sustain local entrepreneurs.

Most of those groups are among more than 65 affiliates of the American Independent Business Alliance, a national coalition of community-driven groups that support independent businesses. They employ a multi-pronged strategy that complements the Main Street Four-Point Approach[®]:

1) Educating the public about the overall value local independents can provide and the vital economic, social, and cultural role these businesses play in the community.

© AMIBA

Why Buy Local?

REASON #1

Building Community!

The casual encounters you enjoy at neighborhood businesses and the public spaces around them build relationships and local cohesiveness. They’re the ultimate social networking sites!



Because Community Matters

American Independent Business Alliance AMIBA.net

Independent businesses and the public spaces surrounding them bring people together and help build a cohesive community. They’re the ultimate social networking sites!

2) Providing cooperative promotion, advertising, purchasing, and other activities to help local businesses gain economies of scale and compete effectively.

3) Creating a strong, uncompromising voice for local independents in the local government and media.

4) Inspiring citizens to play an active role in guiding the future of their community.

Main Street programs can easily integrate this strategy into their annual work plans, especially in the organizational and promotional goals.

Helping Your Indies Compete

The line between BIBL campaigns and facilitating collaborative efforts among your member businesses should get blurry if done right! For example, shortly before the Starbucks Corporation hit town, the Boulder Independent Business Alliance (IBA) designed and facilitated production of coffee cups jointly marketing 11 local cafés that had previously used generic cups.

Soon thousands of cups promoting all of these independent cafes were circulating in the city and saving the businesses money. The cups served the entire Alliance, as



This "buy local" coffee cup was produced by the Boulder IBA to jointly promote local cafés when Starbucks, Inc., entered the market.



The goal of a logo is to create brand recognition by having businesses display the graphic in their own ads, websites, brochures, and other ways.

GIVE A GIFT TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Every dollar you spend at an independent local business creates 3½ times more local economic benefit than dollars spent at a chain.

GO LOCAL!



This holiday gift ad promotes the economic benefits of local businesses bring to the community.



well by prominently featuring the Boulder IBA logo and its educational messages. Bookmarks, tote bags, restaurant table tents, and other items not only cut costs for members; they also educate the public while building recognition of your logo.

Though such activities can occur within existing Main Street programs, broader community participation in an IBA or similarly modeled group can open up additional opportunities. Creating a culture of mutual support among local businesses eventually will lead to joint purchasing and cross-promotion ideas that may not require your direct involvement at all. When you start seeing members do this without you, you're doing a great job of leading!

Engage Local Government

Proposing pro-local business policies can be a powerful educational tool as well as delivering concrete benefits to member businesses.

When I was working in Boulder, we decided early on to take some bold stands to advance our message. In 1999, we crafted the Community Vitality Act (CVA), a policy package that combined some proposals previously implemented in other cities, along with one unprecedented measure. In the former category was a requirement for the city

to give preference to locally owned businesses for purchases and contracts, as well as a size cap on new big-box stores. The most radical proposal was a citywide cap on formula businesses (though many communities have capped formula restaurants, none had addressed retail and other sectors).

The Boulder IBA lacked the resources to get the act passed, but the debate catapulted both the year-old organization and its messages to the forefront of public discussion. It seemed everyone knew about and had an opinion on the CVA. A record number of citizens contacted city council, and several public debates drew crowds in person and viewers on local television. "The CVA clearly struck a chord with the community," says former Boulder Mayor Will Toor.

Admittedly, the high-profile campaign alienated a few people who viewed it as an attack on "free markets," but the role it played in reaching the public and advancing our pro-indie message was enormous. The publicity also sparked interest in several other communities that soon passed similar laws. Pro-local policies are more familiar and easier to pass today and such initiatives can add substantial resources and authority to your campaign – just make sure your campaign is not identified too closely with any political party or faction. (See the sidebar "New Rules for a Vibrant Local Business District" for additional policy suggestions.)

Though relationship building is the preferred route with

local governments, sometimes wielding a stick to defend independents is necessary. When the City of Austin, Texas, prepared to give a \$2.1 million taxpayer subsidy to a development based on a proposed Borders Books and Music outlet – within a block of two established independents, Book People and Waterloo Records – the store owners and the Austin Independent Business Alliance sprang into action.

The Austin IBA first commissioned an economic impact study, which showed that each \$100 spent at Borders would generate \$13 in local economic activity, while that amount spent at the local stores generated \$45. The group then used the study results to rally public opposition and defeat the subsidy. Tellingly, without the subsidy, Borders declined to compete against the two well-run indies. According to Book People owner Steve Bercu, "the Austin IBA was pivotal in stopping the corporate welfare scheme and in shaping local culture to keep independents and downtown thriving."

Having demonstrated its power, the Austin IBA went on to team up with the city government on a program to identify and enhance unique business districts. It has also built relationships with developers to help them find local entrepreneurs to fill commercial space. The group now has a respected presence that allows it to influence policy decisions

affecting independent businesses *before* they're made.

As the localization movement grows, BIBL organizations increasingly are being welcomed and even financially supported by municipal governments. Tacoma, Washington; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Bozeman, Montana, all have provided five-figure grants to help develop new IBAs and/or host initial trainings.

BIBL organizations also are gaining influence over local economic development and government policy. In Flagstaff, Arizona, the city hired the founding director of the Flagstaff Independent Business Alliance as its first chief of business development and retention, which has helped institutionalize the culture of support for independent business.

Creating a Media Voice for Independents

Too often, we hear terms like "pro-business" or "business interests" on the news as if these terms had clear meaning, but such generic labels are inadequate. Increasingly, the interests of our independent businesses diverge from the policies advocated by large corporations and groups. It's common, for example, to see tax evasion schemes that give chains an anti-competitive advantage over independents referred to as "pro-business" policy.

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New Rules for a Vibrant Local Business District

By Stacy Mitchell

Building public support for locally owned businesses through a BIBL campaign is crucial, but the long-term health of local business districts also depends on having the right city policies in place. The New Rules Project recommends that cities adopt the following policies. For more details, including model ordinances, go to www.newrules.org/retail.

Designate Primary and Secondary Commercial Centers.

In the city's comprehensive plan and zoning code, designate the downtown as the primary commercial center and clearly delineate appropriate neighborhood business areas. Retail development outside of these areas should be prohibited.

Cap the Size of Stores. In new and redeveloped sites, limit the size of individual retail spaces to no more than about 20,000 square feet (and even less in dense urban areas and small towns). Small and midsize spaces are easier to reuse, afford more opportunities for local entrepreneurs, and create a more diverse and resilient business district.

Set Aside Space for Local Businesses. As a condition of approving new construction and major redevelopment, require that a percentage of the retail space be reserved for locally owned, independent businesses.

Conduct a Market Analysis. Periodically conduct a market analysis to identify unmet needs and opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

Establish a Mobile Incubator. Create a mentoring and incubation program, including rent assistance, that's not tied to a particular location but can be adapted to help new start-ups locate in available vacant spaces.

End Subsidies for Retail Development. Adopt a law barring the use of tax increment financing, tax abatements, and other incentives for development projects that have a significant retail component.

Share the Tax Base. Eliminate the destructive competition for retail by negotiating with neighboring municipalities to share new sales and property tax revenue.

Endorse Sales Tax Fairness. Pass a city resolution endorsing state and federal legislation that would require large online retailers to collect sales taxes, just as brick-and-mortar stores and businesses do.

Maintain Affordable Commercial Space. Create a Commercial Land Trust to maintain affordable space for basic-needs businesses, such as grocers and pharmacies.

Regulate Formula Businesses. Require a special permit or cap the number of formula restaurant and retail chains allowed in order to preserve the diversity and uniqueness of the community's business districts.

Buy Local on City Contracts. Adopt a purchasing policy that gives a 5 percent bid preference to local businesses on all city contracts and purchases.



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Local business owners who lack paid lobbyists or public relations firms often are not well represented in the media. Creating a strong, uncompromising voice for these businesses and making your group the "go to" source for local media to get the perspective of independent businesses can pay big dividends. The interests of all local entrepreneurs will not always be perfectly aligned with those located downtown, but the increased presence gained by working community-wide is well worth the occasional need for compromise.

Organizational Structure and Partnerships

Is a community better served by having an existing downtown organization host a BIBL campaign or by setting up a community-wide group solely focused on indies? There's no pat answer, but several communities in widely varying circumstances host both IBAs and Main Street programs that work side by side.

In <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/us/> New Orleans, four Main Street programs have partnered with Stay Local!, the local AMIBA affiliate and a prominent force in the post-Katrina recovery of neighborhood commercial districts. The Oak Street and Old Algiers Main Street programs co-sponsored colorful maps/business directories which Stay

Local! has produced for six commercial districts. In the French Quarter, Stay Local! maintains kiosks stocked with the directories to show visitors that there are many great neighborhoods in the rest of the city.

Another brochure guides people to authentic Po Boy sandwich shops, described on StayLocal.org as "Good-bye Quiznos and Subway! Hellooooo Po-boy, New Orleans' quintessential sandwich." The popularity of these guides helped the group obtain funding from the U.S. Office of Recovery Management to produce 10 more.

In addition to collaborating on programs, the groups have benefited organizationally from cooperating. Stay Local! served as a fiscal agent for the Oak Street Main Street Program for three years (until it gained its own 501c3 approval).

Jeff Schwartz, who directs the New Orleans Broad Street Main Street program, Broad Community Connections, values the IBA's role in helping the neighborhood programs create a unified message. "It can be difficult to articulate and put together all the ways a single area ties into the needs and culture of a community," says Schwartz. "Stay Local is able to see the whole picture."

Stay Local! Director Dana Eness is equally enthusiastic about the benefits of the partnership. "The Main Street programs are logical partners for an alliance like ours," says Eness. "With their focus on revitalizing historic commercial districts, and our focus on creating a strong local economy, we work hand in hand to promote and strengthen these culturally, architecturally, and economically important neighborhoods." The two groups

Recommended Resources

AMIBA is a nonprofit group of, by, and for the local organizations that comprise it. The organization offers assistance in setting up IBAs as well as providing dozens of templates and more in-depth information on every topic covered in this article. Strengthening your business district by adapting a proven model and identifying with a growing movement can persuade potential members they should give money or time to support your campaign. www.Amiba.net.

AMIBA also publishes a free monthly newsletter emphasizing new tools, ideas, and activities from BIBL campaigns around the country. Subscribe at www.AMIBA.net.

The Hometown Advantage Bulletin is an e-mail newsletter full of useful studies and news. Subscribe via www.NewRules.org/retail.

A buy local interest group was recently started on Linked In to provide a cross-organizational forum for sharing questions, answers, and ideas. www.Tinyurl.com/buylocalgroup.

Big Box Swindle by Stacy Mitchell focuses on today's challenges to independent business and community-level action to sustain them.

Going Local by Michael Shuman also is highly recommended.

The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) provides resources on localization and green business and building practices. www.LivingEconomies.org.

Civic Economics designs and executes economic impact studies to quantify the economics of various business types in an individual community. www.CivicEconomics.com.

AMIBA produces a series of "Why Buy Local?" posters and bag stuffers with concise messaging on each of these topics and others.

For more information on how land trusts can be used for commercial district revitalization, see the December 2004 issue of Main Street News.

While an athlete may garner useful tips from a manual on playing tennis, expert coaching is needed to become a great player. This article highlights just a few key elements for building an effective BIBL campaign (or broader alliance).

Most of you already have a long list of responsibilities and stretched resources, but this may be the most fertile time in generations to initiate a BIBL campaign that can give a major boost to your community. The current recession has created great problems, but also great opportunities.

Properly crafted, your campaign can harness the widespread resentment against corporate excess into positive

activity to strengthen your traditional business district, your community and your independent businesses. I hope to help you seize the opportunity!

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Four Main Street programs in New Orleans have teamed up with Stay Local!, an AMIBA affiliate, to produce colorful brochures for several commercial districts.

Get Started!

Start conversations with your neighbors, local business owners, and elected officials to gauge interest in launching a BIBL campaign. Once you've identified a diverse group of interested people, a few short-term steps include:

Learn from AMIBA whether others in your area have expressed interest — you may have ready allies!

Adapt a simple flier or brochure with a concise pitch for your vision and make sure everyone in your core group delivers a consistent message. This may seem obvious, but I've received calls from two or more members of the same group articulating widely differing visions. Don't assume, verify! Defining membership criteria is a key starting point.

Arrange a community presentation and training to launch your organization. With proper publicity, bringing in an outside expert can attract many potential allies who might not ordinarily attend meetings. Hearing about and seeing visual examples of successful BIBL campaigns while surrounded by dozens of other community members who share common interests invariably sparks participants' energy.

Equally important, a well-facilitated training can help you make key organizational decisions soundly and quickly so you avoid energy-draining meetings and move on to planning action. Choices of name, geographic scope, and mission, for example, should be made by your group, but informed by expert advice and facilitation. This also will lay a solid foundation of skills and knowledge for your steering committee. Many groups succeed in getting local universities, governments, or banks, among others, to cover the cost of these events.



Stay Local! brochures also guide visitors to authentic sandwich shops that sell Po Boys, New Orleans "quintessential sandwich."

work together to promote mixed-use development along the Lafitte Greenway and even share a large office space co-op.

In Las Vegas, New Mexico, a city of about 15,000 with a Latino majority, Main Street Executive Director Cindy Collins says partnering with the new IBA, Las Vegas First, has been a boon to both groups. Collins considers sales leakage to Santa Fe and Albuquerque a major problem for the community and, since most local businesses lie outside of downtown, believes the citywide BIBL campaign is essential.

Collins points out that downtown merchants already have reported increases in sales in the months since the campaign was launched. Nancy Colalillo, her counterpart at Las Vegas First and owner of Tome on the Range bookstore, adds, "having both groups delivering a consistent pro-local message benefits all our constituents."