Ready, Get Set, It’s Small Business Season



Just in case you haven’t looked at a calendar recently, the holiday season is upon us and that means Small Business Season is at our door. Yes, we said, “Small Business Season,” because don’t our small businesses deserve more than a single day?

Before the holiday lists get longer and the calendars fill up, consider who will help make your celebrations happen. The neighborhood bakery. The restaurant hosting your team lunch. The cleaner getting your home ready for guests. Supporting these businesses helps sustain local jobs and the services we rely on throughout the year. Nationally, small businesses employ 45.9% of private-sector workers, according to the SBA’s Office of Advocacy. Those everyday spending decisions add up.

Small Business Season gives us eight to nine weeks to put those decisions into practice. This year’s theme, **“It’s the thought that counts,”** offers a simple place to start:

think about the person receiving your gift, the business earning your purchase, and the community you’re helping support.

There are many ways to support local such as a book suggested by the local bookstore employee, a cooking class for the friend who already owns every kitchen gadget, or housecleaning for a family whose greatest holiday wish is one less thing to do.

There's room for businesses across industries to participate. A few preparations this week can make the whole season easier.

1. Turn "Support Local" into Specific Suggestions

People can agree wholeheartedly with supporting local businesses and still struggle to think of what to buy. Help them connect the intention to a purchase.

Help buyers and other organizations that can help you get the word out by telling them what you offer that would make a thoughtful gift or help someone through the holidays?

Where appropriate, give them a photo, price or starting price, purchase link, and any booking or ordering deadline.

Tell customers and the chamber who you're perfect for such as:

- For the person who wants more time.
- For the family that loves doing things together.
- For the host preparing for a houseful.
- For the employee who deserves a meaningful thank-you.

Doing this can make it easy to include your business in a gift guide built around the recipient. That gives customers somewhere useful to begin.

2. Make Sure Customers Can Follow Through

A lovely photo won't help much if the purchase link is broken or nobody can find your hours.

Make sure your directory listing is updated and review links, contact information, and seasonal details. Review your website, social profiles, Google listing, booking instructions, and gift certificate information. If your chamber has a local currency program, check your information is correct. If you're not part of the program, consider joining it before the holiday rush. You will likely benefit from additional marketing opportunities.

Walk through the purchase as a customer would. Can someone quickly find the price? Do they know how to book? Is the ordering deadline obvious? Does a gift certificate require an in-person visit?

The SBA's holiday preparation guidance recommends checking websites, preparing marketing in advance, and communicating with customers. Don't forget people who have bought from you in the past. They're more likely to do it again. Reach out to them and offer them a reason to return early in the holiday season.

Make buying locally easy enough to fit into an already crowded day.

3. Plan for the Full Season

Small Business Season is both a marathon and a sprint. The sprint is getting ready now. The marathon is staying visible and top of mind throughout November and December (and even early January as people use their gift cards and money gifts).

Sketch a simple weekly calendar this week. Early messages might focus on custom orders and services that require advance booking. Later weeks can feature hosting help, employee appreciation, experiences, and gifts available close to the holiday. Last-minute customers are highly suggestable and they want help.

Each week needs a useful angle tailored to how you can help, rather than another version of "remember to support local."

Prepare a handful of photos and messages that fit those themes. If you're a pet sitter, you might remind people that holiday reservations fill up. Book early. This also creates a fear of missing out. No one wants to think they can't go to Grandma's because pup doesn't have a place to stay.

If you're a printer, you could share the deadline for personalized gifts. A restaurant could introduce take-home options for the evening everyone arrives. Think of how your business can fit into your customer's lives: gifts, ease, or even solutions you provide.

Schedule what you can now, leaving room for timely updates.

4. Put Thoughtful Partnerships to Work

A few well-matched businesses can make your customers' lives easier. A bookstore and coffee shop could suggest an afternoon of reading and relaxing. A cleaner and florist could help customers prepare for company. A photographer and framing business could introduce a gift customers might otherwise struggle to coordinate.

The chamber can make introductions. Just tell us who you want to meet.

5. Give Everyone a Way to Participate

Everyone can get involved in shopping local even if they don't have money to spend. Help them do so. Explain why reviews are so important and make it easy for customers to recommend your business to a friend, share an accurate event announcement, or leave an honest review of a purchase or service they've experienced.

You can also do your part to support local by considering local vendors for catering, printing, gifts, and year-end needs.

Thank customers for referrals and share posts about your business. Your customers will love the uptick in their audience views and feel appreciated.

It’s the Thought That Counts but Action Matters Too

“It’s the thought that counts” asks us to pause before we spend or recommend. Who could help us find something meaningful? Who nearby offers the service we need? Which local business have we been meaning to try?

Start with one name on your gift list or one task on your holiday calendar. Look locally for the answer. Then give that business a chance to earn the next purchase.

While you’re at it, give some thought to what you can give your customers: solutions, great gifts, a fun experience. And then tell them how you do it.