

The case for supporting small businesses in your community

 By [Yael Geffen](#)

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As this year of unexpected challenges draws to a close and we begin to come to terms with the reality of a changed world, beyond the economic devastation of the global pandemic there is the glimmer of a silver lining: the restoration of community spirit and proof that together we are stronger.



During lockdown we were forced to renegotiate new relationships with our homes and our families and to discover the amenities and services available in our immediate vicinities, often exploring our neighbourhoods and meeting neighbours for the very first time.

And what has been a revelation is that once we start to feel we are part of a community, one where many of the local small businesses are owned by our neighbours, we begin to understand the far-reaching benefits of supporting that community and helping it to grow and prosper.

By supporting local businesses, we are in turn supporting the local economy and ensuring that significantly more money enters and stays within the community, which ultimately benefits every single resident.

7 benefits of supporting local

In addition to contributing to the growth of the local economy, there are also numerous other intangible benefits to staying local:

1. Personal service: Local business owners get to know their customers and will make every effort to meet their needs. And if a problem does arise, it will be much easier to resolve without spending hours on hold trying to get through to a customer service call centre.

2. Community identity: Every community has its own unique identity and a large part of that character is derived from the economic activities on offer. And, in addition to being a better place to live, a charming neighbourhood with successful businesses will always attract people from other areas which further boosts the local economy.

3. The green factor: Smaller businesses often have a smaller carbon footprint than larger companies and when a neighbourhood commercial centre offers enough variety and employs many locals, it reduces the need for driving, lowering traffic congestion and resulting in better air quality and less urban sprawl.

4. Social accountability: Local business owners tend to feel more accountable to their local communities and are therefore more inclined to donate more money to charities and sponsor local events.

5. Job creation: Small and medium businesses not only form the backbone of a strong economy, they also provide jobs for the local community. And, when a community has a vibrant commercial centre, it also provides ample opportunities for these workers to shop at other local businesses in the precinct.

6. Strengthen local influence: When local ownership is supported by a community, it allows important decisions to be made by the people who live in the neighbourhood and care about how those decisions will impact the community.

7. Resilient property market: When a neighbourhood has a strong sense of community and thriving commercial component, it not only attracts home buyers from other areas, but existing residents tend to buy within their neighbourhood when it's time to upgrade or downsize.

In a volatile economic environment, smaller businesses usually bear the brunt of the downturn and they rely heavily on local patronage in order to stay afloat; every client and each transaction is precious to them.



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Showing support

There are a number of things each of us can do to help them stay in business and continue to be contributing members of your community and local economy.

- **Shop at local, independently-owned businesses instead of chain stores:** It may necessitate a little more walking than a one-stop chain store, but where possible, shop at your local butchery, delicatessen, pharmacy, grocery store, boutique, etc.

- **Choose credits over refunds:** If you have to return something and are in a position to do so, opting for credit rather than cash could mean the difference between them making rent this month – or not.

- **Leave a review:** The five minutes it takes to leave positive online reviews of your favourite local businesses on Google,

Facebook, etc. will be time well spent. Not only could it drive new business their way, but the owners and staff will also appreciate the emotional support. Customers gravitate to stores and services loved by others.

When we shop locally, we are making a conscious choice to reinvest in the neighbourhoods in which we live, raise our families and, as a company, we are only realising the magnitude of this contribution.



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Inspired by our personal experiences during lockdown, Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty recently launched a national campaign called Love your Neighbourhood which encourages local communities and local businesses to actively support one another and every day we're hearing heart-warming reports from agents around the country.

The response in communities has been overwhelming and we can see from the online responses from followers on social media that the need for community strength and support right now is universal.

So, when deciding where to spend your hard-earned money on tonight's dinner or a birthday gift, consider the significant benefits of turning to local, independently-owned businesses within your community. Take the time to further explore your neighbourhood and pop into that little deli that you have always meant to but were always in too much of a rush to do. Chances are it may become your new favourite shop.

And with travel being curtailed by a resurgence of the virus and, for many, diminished disposable income, perhaps now is the perfect to get to know and love your neighbourhood.

ABOUT Yael GEFFEN

Yael Geffen is the CEO of Sotheby's International Realty South Africa and a member of the board. Geffen has a BA in Communications and Economics and a Master's Degree in Integrated Marketing and Communications Strategy.

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