

# Shop Local for the Holidays

## Benefits for You and Your Town

By Charlene Pierce

**Buying local during the holiday season (and beyond) supports the community in many ways, and shopping at locally owned stores is just plain fun!** At locally owned boutiques or gift shops, you will find items that are not available anywhere else...and that's just where you'll find a gift as wonderfully unique as the person receiving it. Think about the most thoughtful gift you ever received. Did it come in the mail directly from a national chain store, or was it something that you knew immediately was hand-selected for you at a local shop? Finding creative gifts is just one of the many benefits of shopping locally.

We are investing in our community when we shop locally. Over 65% of what you spend at a locally owned business stays in town. When you spend \$100 at a national chain, only \$43 remains in your community. The rest goes out of state to the national chain's corporate office.

Local businesses are "sticky," meaning they stick through down cycles by changing their products and services to meet the community's needs. When you find something you love at a local business, be sure to tell them! It will help them know which areas might be ready for growth. National companies are also beneficial to our community and our economy for the jobs they provide and for many other reasons. The tricky issue for national chains is that they need to follow the same business model for all their locations, so they cannot adapt to hyper-local consumer needs.

Customers of locally owned businesses tend to feel they receive better service because the business can adapt to their needs. The company's local connection with its customers is usually evident; sometimes, the customer knows the owner or key employees by name. In fact, they may be friends or neighbors! It makes a difference when you feel recognized and known at your favorite stores. Often, locally owned businesses have a leg up on their big-box counterparts when it comes to customer service because it comes to us naturally to give great service to people we already know.

Online shopping is indeed tempting. It's convenient to have things delivered, never requiring us to leave our homes. However, relying exclusively on factory shipping hubs means that local stores will eventually wither and disappear. Shopping online poses another potentially time-squandering risk—never seeing items in person may result in purchases of questionable quality or inaccurate size and color.

There is another perspective to consider when weighing the benefits of shopping locally. Let's say you are an entrepreneur looking to open a new restaurant with a new concept. Are you more likely to open it in a city where your

primary competition is large national chains? Or would you prefer to open it in a community whose support of locally owned restaurants is evidenced by the vibrance and success of other locally owned restaurants?

In other words, your support of locally owned businesses and entrepreneurship can actually attract top talent to your city, and the whole community gets to enjoy the benefits. Would you like to live somewhere than only has big-box

stores and national restaurant chains, or would you prefer unique stores, five-star restaurants, and diverse career opportunities? A wide variety of goods and services creates a vibrant and active business community. Simply put: The more we shop locally, the stronger our local shopping community will become.

If you love the idea of shopping local but don't have time to browse from store to store, you can still make a positive impact on your community. Since the pandemic began, many local

stores have increased their online presence and offer online purchasing with free pickup, delivery, or even shipping. In addition, gift cards from local restaurants or tickets to a local performing arts venue can be great gifts. Experience gifts are great for those who are hard to shop for or don't have the space for more stuff. Dance, art, and music classes enrich children more than any toy (though any child will tell you toys are fun, too!).

Gift cards to service providers like hair and nail salons, day spas, or cleaning services are all options that provide pampering for your special someone. Shopping in a retail district with lots of local shops is a fun experience because each has different stores and restaurants to enjoy. Start shopping now so you have time to visit them all! If you do find yourself looking for a gift at the last minute, there is no sweeter solution than having a local bakery or chocolatier tie up a box to go! **WE**

Sources for this article included: [sustainableconnections.org](https://sustainableconnections.org), [foodandwine.com](https://foodandwine.com), [money.cnn.com](https://money.cnn.com), and [news.crunchbase.com](https://news.crunchbase.com).

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