

4 unique ways to help small businesses grow

The role small businesses play in thriving local communities cannot be overstated. Vibrant downtown areas that feature independently owned shopping, dining and entertainment options help distinguish communities from surrounding towns and generate tax revenue that is ultimately funneled back into the community.

Many small business owners are active members in their communities, which made it even more heartbreaking to see so many locally owned establishments struggle during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as the world gradually began to emerge from the pandemic, more than half of small business owners expected their struggles to continue. In late 2020, the Small Business Pulse Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau found that 53 percent of small business owners expected it would be at least six

months before they could return to pre-COVID operations. That survey was conducted months before the Delta variant of the virus began to spread. When the Delta variant began to spread, three effective COVID-19 vaccines had already become widely available, but scientists warned that Delta could be one of the most transmissible respiratory viruses in the world. That prompted many consumers, even those who were fully vaccinated, to wonder if it was still safe to spend time in public. Such fears once again put small businesses in the financial crosshairs.

Only time will tell if the Delta variant puts more small businesses in jeopardy. In the meantime, local residents and professionals can make a concerted effort to shop local. In addition to offering their financial support to the small businesses that make their



communities special, residents can embrace four unique strategies to help locally owned establishments stay afloat.

1. Offer pro bono professional expertise.

Successful professionals can help small business owners by offering their services free of charge. Financial planners can pitch in and help secure small business loans, while attorneys can provide pro bono legal advice.



2. Help small businesses strengthen their digital presence.

Individuals with web design and e-commerce experience can help small businesses revamp their websites and improve their online shopping offerings. This can be a vital way for small business owners to attract new business and generate revenue should consumers express concerns about in person shopping in the months ahead.

3. Support legislation that benefits small businesses.

Many small businesses would not have survived the pandemic without government assistance programs like the Small Business Administration's Paycheck

Protection Program. Voters should carefully consider programs and proposals before voicing any support, but they should not hesitate to promote programs they believe in that are designed to help local businesses. Write to local elected officials to encourage their support, and share news about proposals with fellow voters when given the chance.

4. Spread the word.

Take to social media to spread the word about a local business. Share stories about positive interactions with a given business and use social media platforms to share news about sales or special events they're hosting.

There's much individuals can do to support small businesses as they continue to recover from and confront the COVID-19 pandemic.

