



Community Engagement through Shop Local, Shop Small Campaigns

Article by Roxanne Hawn

Increasingly, consumers want to express their values through their spending decisions and the businesses they support:

- 25 percent always/often shop for products or services based on a brand's values
- Another 67 percent make decisions based on a brand's values some of the time
- 65 percent of consumers feel influenced by the words, actions, values and beliefs of a brand's employees, not simply its CEO or spokesperson
- 78 percent would tell others to use purpose-driven businesses
- 68 percent report being more willing to share content with their social networks with purpose-driven companies
- 37 percent of survey respondents feel social media posts that encourage followers to take specific steps to support causes are more effective

These stats reflect purchases of products and services broadly, but 'cause Digital Marketing found similar results when it surveyed pet lovers in 2018. That survey found that 89.1 percent of respondents are more likely to stay with and recommend a veterinary practice that shares their values and actively volunteers to help causes they support. The survey of 525 people, 469 of whom self-identified as the "primary caretaker of pets," also revealed several pet-related causes that people support and like when their veterinary practices do too.

Value-based spending is particularly strong among Millennial consumers (now between the ages of 25 and 39) as well as Gen Z consumers (now between the ages of 13 and 24). Packaged Fact's "Gen Z and Millennials as Pet Market Consumers: Dogs, Cats and Other Pets," says, "The future of the pet industry in America lies in the hands of Millennial pet owners, now in their late 20s and 30s, and their younger counterparts in Gen Z, who are just entering adulthood. These younger generations of pet market consumers are critical to the bottom line of pet product and service marketers because the vanguard of the Boomer generation is reaching the age when pet ownership declines sharply. Moreover, Boomers will be succeeded by members of Gen X, who spend heavily on pet products and services but are a relatively small population cohort."

Shifting community culture and spending

Expressing your core values is good for business. As much as the internet helps forge global awareness, ultra-local efforts also matter to many consumers—especially as big businesses in retailing, restaurants, and, yes, veterinary medicine, gain more footing in communities of all sizes. Feelings of connection and community can help drive a town's renewal or survivability amid pressures from big businesses. That's where so-called "shop local" or "shop small" campaigns come into play. Unlike other kinds of social change, supporting local businesses is often seen as non-partisan.

"It's no longer good enough, in the view of many consumers, to be good at your job. They expect brands, including yours, to stand for something too."

The "Small Business Saturday" efforts from American Express encourage people to shop with small, local businesses on the Saturday after Black Friday each year. In 2018, that campaign reported an estimated \$17.8 million spent at independent retailers and restaurants on that one day. The company also reports that 96 percent of consumers who take part feel encouraged to shop at small businesses all the time, not just over the holiday season.

Communities that instituted campaigns to support small, local, independent businesses tend to see greater income growth year to year. The Institute for Local Self Reliance commissioned several national surveys to look at year-over-year sales in 201. They found:

- A 7.4 percent increase in communities with sustained grassroots "buy independent/buy local" campaigns
- A 4.2 percent increase in communities without such campaigns

Getting involved

Veterinary practices can participate or even lead local campaigns designed to shift a community's culture and spending to keep more money in the local economy and help local businesses of all kinds do better. Think of it as taking a broader view of the local economic ecosystem:

- Check with your chamber of commerce, business development organizations, and fellow business owners about what efforts may already be underway.
- Use existing resources like those available from the American Independent Business Alliance, which offers a "buy local" guide available for free download.
- Look for ways to customize existing ideas for your unique community vibe.
- Remember that successful local campaigns require sustained efforts that include stakeholders from local government as well. This isn't something you can do once a year or over a short period and expect results.

Messaging and methods

Let people know that your mission as a veterinary business includes supporting the local community. Local messages provide a value-based overlay to the quality veterinary products and services offered.

It's no longer good enough, in the view of many consumers, to be good at your job. They expect brands, including yours, to stand for something too. It's almost like getting bonus points or even merit badges from veterinary consumers for supporting the economic importance of having hometown pride, so to speak.

In your messaging, talk about how long you've been in the community, how many team members you employ, how your team is active in local organizations, and why using local businesses matters to the community at large.

Across your branding, marketing and client communication methods, find ways to work local messaging into things you already do:

Family photos. Use photos of your team members and their families, for those who feel comfortable having their loved ones shown, for key holidays. Even better if those photos have local landmarks as backdrops, showing how you live and work in the community. Tip: Always refer to them as teammates or team members, not employees or staff.

Videos. Tell your small business story in a short video. Share videos from other local businesses as well.

Hashtags. Use hashtags on social media such as #shoplocal #shopsmall #supportsmallbusiness.

Post scripts. Add local campaign messaging to the bottom of invoices, emails and other client communications.

Bling. Create visual reminders to talk about your team's local efforts and values. Wear "shop local" buttons or pins

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

and include the messaging in lobby artwork, bulletin boards or digital screens throughout client areas of the practice.

Bios. Make sure team biographies on your website focus on each person's local involvement and longevity in the community.

Good Reasons to Support Local Businesses

Livelihood Nearly 8 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 64 currently own or manage a local business and rely on it for their livelihood and to support their families.

Loyalty 56 percent of employees at local businesses have high commitment scores compared to 38.7 percent for workers at other companies not locally owned. Loyal employees keep companies going and communities alive.

Economy \$68 of every \$100 spent with a locally-owned business stays in the community, compared to just \$43 of every \$100 spent at businesses not owned locally.

Local businesses generate 70 percent more local economic activity per square foot than big box retailers.

Environment 50 percent of U.S. pollution comes from industrial sources. Using local businesses can help reduce processing, packaging and transportation waste and pollution.

\$10 If every family spent \$10 from their existing monthly budget at a local, independent business, more than \$9.3 billion would be returned to local economies in the United States.

Sources:
Gem Consortium Report
LocalFirst.com
Anderson Study of Retail Economics
Research Gate
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
U.S. Census

Call to action. Include information on how clients can take part.

Let us help!

Veterinary clients may need some help understanding what "local" really means in your community and why it matters that they spend their hard-earned money with your practice and other local businesses. In most cases, local or small businesses are defined as privately held companies, typically with at least five years of history in a community and often with fewer than 50 employees.

References:

¹2018 Survey of Young People and Social Change

²2018 Survey of Young People and Social Change

³Accenture's 2018 Global Consumer Pulse Research

⁴2018 Cone / Porter Novelli Purpose Study

⁵2018 Cone / Porter Novelli Purpose Study

⁶Sprout Social's "Championing Change in the Age of Social Media" 2018

⁷"Gen Z and Millennials as Pet Market Consumers: Dogs, Cats and Other Pets," Packaged Facts, February 2018

⁸This spend statistic is an aggregate of the average spend as reported by consumers in surveys commissioned by American Express reporting spend habits on Small Business Saturday of consumers who were aware of the day. It does not reflect actual receipts or sales. Each such survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. The surveys had an overall margin of error of between +/- 2.0percent and +/- 5.47percent, at the 95percent level of confidence. The data was projected from the samples based on then-current U.S. Census estimates of the U.S. adult population (18+).

⁹The 2018 Small Business Saturday Consumer Insights Survey was conducted by Teneo on behalf of American Express and the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB). The study is a nationally representative sample of 2,410 U.S. adults 18 years of age or older. The sample was collected using an email invitation and an online survey. The study gathered self-reported data and does not reflect actual receipts or sales. It was conducted anonymously on November 25, 2018. The survey has an overall margin of error of +/- 2.0percent, at the 95percent level of confidence. Projections are based on the current U.S. Census estimates of the U.S. adult population, age 18 years and over.



Roxanne Hawn is a professional writer and award-winning blogger based in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. A former writer/editor for the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Humane Association, she has written about veterinary medicine and pet topics for nearly 20 years. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, Reader's Digest, Natural Home, Bankrate.com, WebMD, The Bark, Modern Dog, and many high-profile outlets. Her first book is called *Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate*.