



Shop local & save!

Why it really pays to visit downtown
stores this holiday season



Small-town stores are back. For years they withered while malls, big-box stores, and national chains gobbled up shoppers. But things seem to be turning around for downtown America. Lots of us are looking to eat local, and handcrafted everything is hot now (We love you, Etsy!). Even some big-box stores are shrinking. Let's face it, supersized isn't as super as it used to be.

Bonuses to shopping local include saving time and gas, and sometimes money, too. In ShopSmart's new national survey on shopping locally, women said they liked supporting their neighborhood merchants, and they enjoyed browsing at local stores (see more reasons and other poll results on page 35). And who doesn't like personal service such as getting calls when your perfect dress goes on sale!

In the majority of our annual surveys on the best places to shop, readers have rated independent/local retailers among the top places to buy appliances, eyeglasses, electronics, and drugstore items, beating out national chains and big-box stores such as Home Depot, Sears, and Walmart. Shoppers praise them

for service, convenience, and product quality. Independent retailers can also be competitive on price, especially if you try to negotiate. (See page 33 for tips that make saving on local goods easy.)

A big plus to shopping locally is that small businesses funnel more money back into the local economy. One local purchasing study found that out of \$100 spent in an independent business, about \$68 goes back into the community. Spend that same \$100 at a chain store, and just \$43 stays local. And local businesses sponsor sports teams and host events such as wine tastings and DIY clinics.

In our new survey, women also pointed out that mom-and-pop stores made donations to community organizations, hosted special events, and offered bonus services such as free lessons, how-to expertise, repairs, free delivery, or personal shopping services. Almost 40 percent of respondents said they planned to shop locally this holiday season. If you'd like to join them, we've got plenty of tips and tools for buying great stuff in your backyard at great prices. Happy local shopping!



Find what you want fast

You probably already have a few go-to stores, but you can track down new local favorites using these sites and apps.

In addition to the sites listed below, many communities have sites that promote small businesses. Find them by searching “local first” plus your city or state. If nothing pops up, put in “shopping” and the area you want to shop. (Most of the sites here also have apps, so you can check while you’re on the go.)

ANGIE’S LIST angieslist.com

Best for Hiring service providers. You probably know this site for contractors, but it also lists local businesses such as spas and physicians, along with reviews. You’ll need to subscribe; it’s about \$3 per month to join (depending on where you live).

DEALIZE.COM

Best for Staying on top of daily deals. You get one e-mail a day with all the daily deal offers from Groupon, Living Social, and others, which often save you 50 percent or more on local eats, goods, and services.

INDEPENDENT WE STAND

independentwestand.org

Best for Finding independently owned businesses by ZIP code. The database isn’t totally complete yet, but it’s growing.

INDIE BOUND

indiebound.org

Best for Discovering local bookstores. You can also learn about author interviews and

recommendations from staffers who live and breathe this stuff.

YAHOO LOCAL

local.yahoo.com

Best for Scouting all the stores in your area. They aren’t exclusively independently owned, so you’ll have to weed out the Targets and Best Buys.

YELP

yelp.com

Best for User reviews of local stores. Yes, it’s known for restaurant reviews, but it also lists local shops so that you can see what people thought of retailers, service pros, and others. Click on the shopping tab; also see the app (below).



GOOGLE+ LOCAL

Best for

Finding neighborhood restaurants, cafés, and bars along with their Zagat ratings.

Works on Android, Apple.



VALPAK LOCAL SAVINGS

Best for Coupons for local services such as chimney cleaning and taxis.

Works on Android, Apple.



WHERE

Best for Beating boredom. Check under the “Things to Do” tab for local galleries, mini golf, and more.

Works on Android, Apple, BlackBerry.



YELLOW PAGES

Best for

Finding independent small businesses like pharmacies on the go.

Works on Android, Apple, BlackBerry.



YELP

Best for Getting a good meal,

thanks to tons of user ratings (get check-in discounts, too).

Works on Android, Apple, BlackBerry.

Shop local online

Locally owned retailers large and small are beefing up their websites and social-media pages, and some are already very well established. We dug up a list of sites to help you shop online in your community—and discover great local retailers in other towns across the country.

ABT ELECTRONICS

abt.com

This Chicago-based appliances and electronics retailer has been around since 1936, but its store isn’t the half of it. The site is massive but keeps the mom-and-pop feel with free tech support (except for computers).

Shipping Free for certain items; large appliances, \$78.

Returns 15 or 30 days depending on item.

AMAZON MARKETPLACE

Keep your eyes peeled for local stores on Amazon.com. Although you can’t specifically search by an item’s location, Amazon includes its Marketplace partners in the price listings for individual items. So next to the Amazon.com price, you might see a buying option from a local shop.

Shipping Varies by seller.

Returns Varies by seller.

ARCHIE MCPHEE

archiemcpheseattle.com

Lovers of the weird and wacky beat a path to Archie McPhee’s Seattle storefront and its website. Need bacon-themed gift wrap? Check. A collection of stick-on moustaches? Check. The site offers a monthly coupon good for in-store freebies, and its Facebook page announces the latest items.

Shipping Starts at \$6.

Returns 30 days from receipt.



7 SMART WAYS TO SAVE

You might expect to pay more at a locally owned store compared with a big national chain. When we asked more than 600 women who had a favorite local store about their experiences, about a third of them cited price as a complaint. Yes, it's tough to beat Walmart! But shopping local can pay off, so try these tips.

Become a regular. When store owners get to know your preferences, you could get perks such as discounts on bulk orders, a heads up when sales and promotions are coming, and special ordering.

Ask for a better price. Unlike managers at many chain stores, local shopkeepers usually are easy to find and willing to haggle, especially if you're buying multiple items. Just ask nicely (remember you're asking for a favor) and be discreet. Even if a store can't budge on price, you might get some extras thrown in such as free delivery or accessories. A local sewing-machine shop offered one of our staffers 15 percent off a floor

model, bringing the price down to what we found online. Plus the machine came with free service for a year; no need to mail it to a far-flung repair center.

Get advice before you buy. Small businesses rely on repeat business, so they want to make sure you get exactly what you need. And when you get it right the first time, you don't waste money on duds.

Like local businesses on Facebook. In a survey of 800 small businesses, 75 percent said they use social media to advertise products, services, and promotions. For example, Candles Off Main, based in Annapolis, Md., gives a \$25 gift certificate to one of its fans every month. Virginia-based TuTu Cute, which sells kids clothing and accessories, announces "Monday Madness" sales on Facebook.

Check in on Foursquare. If you're not in the habit of "checking in" to stores via Foursquare, give it

a try. Go to 4squareoffers.com to find merchants that offer discounts and perks like sample products. Checking in at Scottsdale's Salty Seniorita lets you buy a margarita for \$1. And Kansas City's Latteland gives you 20 percent off drinks if you check in.

Don't be shy about using coupons It's not just big chains that advertise in local newspapers. Check for "bring in this ad" and coupon discounts. And don't toss that "Valpak" envelope you keep getting in the mail. Also check out Valpak's app and website for local deals, and coupons.com's local coupons tab.

Remember your local franchise businesses. Ace Hardware, GNC, Petland, and Radio Shack are national brands, but they're franchises, so they're owned locally rather than by the company headquarters. And though the local store owners have to pay franchise fees, they have more flexibility than nationally owned chains when it comes to pricing and service.

BOULDER RUNNING COMPANY

Founded by two former world-class runners, the store prides itself on personalized service. Though online shoppers can't take advantage of that, the 30-day satisfaction guarantee means that you can return shoes, even if you've worn them a little. **Shipping** Starts at \$5; free for orders of \$75 or more. **Returns** 30 days from receipt.

EBAY

It isn't as easy to find local goods on eBay as it is on Etsy, but you can restrict your search on the site by location by using the "advanced" search. Many eBay sellers will let you pick up items in person, which can save you money on shipping costs.

Shipping Varies by seller. **Returns** Varies by seller.

ETSY.COM

Etsy, which features hundreds of local store sites, makes it easy to filter by location with a "Shop Local" link on the left side of the home page. We searched "Brooklyn" and found fennel cookies from WhimsyAndSpice, vintage duds from SecretLake, and pretty hand-painted lockets from Khara Ledonne.

Shipping Varies by seller. **Returns** Varies by seller.

FAT BRAIN TOYS

Looking to skip the lines at Toys "R" Us? Check out Omaha, Neb., toy store Fat Brain Toys. It has unique items that educate while they entertain. There's also a section of almost 600 American-made toys and suggestions for special-needs children and adults. It also sells unique toys under its own name.

Shipping Varies. **Returns** 90 days from receipt.



What's new downtown

If you shopped at Target this past fall, you may have seen unique items for sale as part of its The Shops at Target promotion. Customers could find items from independent shops such as San Francisco's The Curiosity Shoppe and Boston's PATCH NYC in stores and online. A representative told us that Target doesn't have plans for additional shops right now, but it's a good idea we'd love to see again. Other cool ideas that started small but are spreading:

■ Small Business Saturday

Now in its third year, Small Business Saturday takes place this year on Nov. 24, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. The event is sponsored by American Express, and its aim is to encourage cardholders to shop locally for the holidays. Cardholders can sign up on the Small Business Saturday Facebook

page (facebook.com/shopsmall) to get a \$25 credit on your AmEx statement if you spend \$25 or more at a participating business. You can also sign up for alerts on contests and special savings. Look for the map on ShopSmall.com to help you find stores in your area.

■ Cash mobs

You've probably heard of a flash mob: a one-time event promoted by social media where people show up in a public space to do something all together. Usually it's something silly, like doing dance moves in a mall or having a giant group pillow fight. But in a cash mob, individuals or civic groups choose a time and a business or business district as the place, promoting the event on Facebook and Twitter. Then on the designated day, "cash mobbers" show up to shop. Roanoke, Va., has been hosting a cash

mob about once per month. One store there reported more than 100 customers on the day of the event. At a cash mob in Portland, Maine, business owners Andy and Lisa-Marie Stewart saw about 60 people spend \$1,100 in 25 minutes in their shop, Lisa-Marie's Made in Maine. Check CashMob.com for events in your area or for info on hosting your own.

■ Local currency

Some communities are printing their own money—yes, literally!—to get you to spend locally. You can use it at local independent businesses. The BerkShares program is the largest, accepted by more than 400 businesses in western Massachusetts. You get the currency from local banks (\$95 buys you 100 BerkShares valued at \$100). Other cities with local currency programs include Baltimore and Ithaca, N.Y.

GOODIES FOR GIFTS

Flavored honeys from New York; pecan cookies from Chapel Hill, N.C.; and homemade marshmallows from San Jose, Calif.? Yes, please! This site connects you with small companies around the country for yummy gifts.

Shipping Varies by vendor.

Returns Varies by vendor.

J&R MUSIC AND COMPUTER WORLD

jr.com

This family business started selling music in 1971 and expanded to electronics and more. You can call and talk to a department-specific salesperson just as you would in the store.

Shipping Free on many items; otherwise starts at \$4.

Returns 30 days from receipt for online and mail order.

MOSS ENVY

Specializing in all things eco-friendly, including baby gear, home décor, and beauty, Minneapolis-based Moss Envy has an easy-to-use site that lets you filter by "Organic," "Made in USA," or even "Made in Minnesota." There's also an online gift registry, unusual for a small business.

Shipping Starts at \$5.50.

Returns 30 days from receipt.

MXYPZYK

For funky gift ideas, home décor, retro toys, and unique office items, New Yorkers head to Mxyplyzyk's Greenwich Village storefront, but you can find the same stuff on its well-organized website. It's also a great place to browse for inspiration if you want to perk up your home.

Shipping Starts at \$8.

Returns 10 days from receipt for exchange or credit only.

LOCAL FLAVORS

In our new ShopSmart national survey, we asked women about why and where they shop locally.

5 OF THE TOP REASONS WE LIKE TO SHOP LOCALLY:

- Fun to browse **40%**
- To support small-business owners **34%**
- Customer service **29%**
- Location **27%**
- Unique or specialty products **25%**



"I REGRET NOT SHOPPING MORE AT A CERTAIN INDEPENDENT STORE WHEN I LEARN IT'S SHUTTING DOWN."

- Agree **38%**
- Disagree **28%**
- Neutral **31%**



OUR TOP 5 FAVORITE INDEPENDENT STORES:

1. Thrift/consignment
2. Hobby or craft supplies
3. Clothing boutique
4. Bookstore
5. Antiques

"I DON'T MIND PAYING SLIGHTLY HIGHER PRICES TO SHOP AT A LOCALLY OWNED STORE."

- Agree **37%**
- Disagree **29%**
- Neutral **32%**

"I GO OUT OF MY WAY TO SHOP AT AN INDEPENDENT STORE."

- Agree **29%**
- Disagree **31%**
- Neutral **38%**

"I SHOP AT A LOCAL STORE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK."

- Shoppers in the ...
- West **17%**
- Northeast **11%**
- Midwest **10%**
- South **6%**

POWELL'S BOOKS powells.com

Since opening in 1971, this seller of new and used books now has five Portland, Ore., locations. There's a small-bookstore feel with staff recommendations, reviews, and theme sales, such as 30 percent off selected titles about the Pacific Northwest. **Shipping** Starts at \$4; free for orders of \$50 or more. **Returns** 30 days from receipt.

TRASHY DIVA

With five New Orleans stores, Trashy Diva is a 15-year-old boutique offering vintage-inspired clothing, lingerie, and accessories at reasonable prices. It's sort of a racier version of Anthropologie. The site's blog and social media pages offer tips and sneak peeks at new items. **Shipping** Starts at \$13; free for orders of \$200 or more. **Returns** 10 days from receipt.

VERMONT COUNTRY STORE

This quirky, actual Vermont country store, which has been around since 1946, has all kinds of stuff you probably won't see elsewhere, including gourmet maple goodies and old-fashioned bedspreads. The family-run business guarantees every order with a money-back return policy. **Shipping** Starts at \$4. **Returns** Anytime.

WITH LOVE FROM BROOKLYN

Whether you're a fan of NYC's coolest borough or simply love good food, you'll appreciate the yummy gift packages—with names such as Breakfast in Breukelen and Pig Island (think bacon!). Each order is festively packed. **Shipping** Varies; free for orders of \$50 or more. **Returns** None, unless damaged.