

SHOW SMES SOME LOVE

Five ways to reciprocate support for the local businesses that support us.



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We all know small businesses are doing it tough. Given the sector is often described as the engine room of the Australian economy – over two million enterprises account for as much as 35 per cent of the total economy – it's important we play our role to help nurture it back to health.

For many small businesses the challenge of COVID-19 comes at a time when they were perhaps already feeling the pinch due to the nature of the digital age. Competition had, in many industries, crept in quickly without having to go through the pains of building up such things we'd ideally want, like credibility or experience. Marketing

dollars well spent or a "fake it till you make it" bravado has meant the great pretenders can feed hungry algorithms with fake reviews or falsifications simply to gain visibility or market share.

If there was ever a time to be a loyal consumer, to infuse a little hope back into quality local businesses, now is that time. There are a few simple ways to do

so, and the time to do it is, well, right now!

CASHFLOW, AND RESPECT, ARE KING

First, buy from them, obviously. Then remember that deliberately slow or non-payment for goods or services rendered piles on additional strain. It's a basic sign of respect to pay promptly, and small businesses have more important things to focus on right now than dedicating critical resources to something so fundamental to their basic survival.

PRICE COMPARISON IS COOL; BEGRUDGING FEES FOR SERVICE IS NOT

The digital age has seen astronomically increased consumer expectations, which is cool given the innovations at hand. But there are times when behaviours and demands cross unfair lines.

Checking price points as a comparison is one thing. Consciously pillaging expertise, skills and knowledge, with absolutely no intent to buy is something quite different altogether, as is looking for ways to finalise payments for free online once you've got what you need.

Not every business is geared up for open source. And even where we are swamped with information we can research ourselves, we don't know (due to the nature of the wild west digital age) whether the information is up to date and not fake. Plus it's still time invested. We don't want to waste our own precious time so why begrudge a fee for service from others?

So many consumers gladly drop thousands of dollars on every latest iteration of smartphone (even when their

current one still works fine) yet they'll consciously rip off an accomplished professional who has spent a lifetime harnessing their skills. Why not, instead, support them. They've earned it.

THE STRUGGLING ARTIST IS AN OUTDATED CONCEPT

Higher expectations of service standards is one thing; but asking, demanding or expecting stuff for free (or heavily discounted) is poor form.

This type of behaviour is often attributed to wannabe influencers, yet it's a far bigger problem than that. For the longest time there's been a noble notion of the struggling artist. Talented, passionate people who'll do anything, including working for free, to ply their trade. However, visibility doesn't pay the bills.

And if someone is constantly willing to give their all for free, it might be a clue to the actual "expertise" they're claiming. J-Lo wouldn't be saying yes to every invite to sing at bars for free. Well, the same is true for your local rock stars, no matter their trade.

Bartering for bundled value in services is pretty normal. Aside from that, let businesses surprise you with comp or other value on their own terms. It's more respectful, especially right now, than assuming or adding pressure in the style

of a spoilt brat or over-entitled influencer.

VOLUNTARILY GIVE CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Testimonials and reviews amplify visibility and feed those viciously demanding

algorithms. But there's a strange phenomenon: when people have nine out of 10 things going great, they'll somehow still focus on the one thing out of whack! The same is often true of feedback.

A small business may deliver an exceptional, above-and-beyond experience, yet people won't take a minute to write a review

even when they've promised to do so or have been asked several times. You don't need to wait three weeks, or three months, to write a 30-second, candid, from the heart comment.

Conversely, when one thing goes wrong (okay sometimes it's bad, yet more often than not it's a typical human error) complaints in this cancel-culture world flow more speedily than a tsunami.

Remember that corporate gig where you got a certificate that garnered a hundred thumbs ups and pages of lovely comments – felt pretty good, hey? Well, I can promise there are plenty of small-business owners who've put their life savings into services that make a real difference, yet their efforts frequently go unnoticed or barely get a thank you.

It's also strange how we'll support or share for popular strangers yet somehow neglect those in our circle or the local champions of small business doing it tough on our own doorstep.

EMBRACE THE BUDDHIST KOAN

Small businesses play a vital role in our economy. They often provide a quality, passion and diligence in service and experience that's hard to match.

There's a Buddhist philosophy relevant to us as consumers, that of a koan (a paradoxical anecdote, statement or riddle designed to provoke both logical reasoning and enlightenment):

"You've got to do it by yourself. And you can't do it alone."

This surmises well the daily grind of small businesses, who may well be feeling a little lost or alone right now. It really doesn't take much to show a little respect or infuse a little hope in kind. ■

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