

How to Start a Buy Local Campaign



Think Local Portland
window decal
Portland, Oregon



American Independent
Business Alliance
storefront decal



Metro Independent
Business Alliance poster
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN

Many people give little consideration to the choice between a locally owned store and a chain when deciding where to shop. They do not know the benefits to their city's economy of choosing local businesses and are unaware of the many hidden costs of opting for the big boxes.

Broadening awareness of the consequences of our shopping choices is therefore an essential strategy in turning the tide of chain retail expansion and rebuilding our local economies.

Local Business Alliances

By far the most effective "buy local" campaigns are those that have been undertaken by local business alliances. These coalitions typically include hundreds of business owners and citizens working together to prevent the displacement of local stores by chains. The strategy was pioneered by the Boulder Independent Business Alliance in 1998. Since then, similar alliances have formed in more than 60 communities.

While a few of these alliances have fought big-box projects, their emphasis is primarily positive and proactive. They focus on:

- building support for locally owned businesses through highly visible educational campaigns that convey the many benefits these businesses bring to the community
- leveling the playing field by making "locally owned" a strong brand that can counter the advertising advantages the chains enjoy
- engaging citizens in actively shaping the future economic development of their city and region
- influencing city officials and helping to shape policies that support local enterprise
- stimulating more media coverage of the issue and providing a strong voice for independent businesses in local news stories
- working with banks, developers, community organizations, and others to create opportunities for local business development



SHOP LOCALLY OWNED Independents' Week

Austin Independent Business Alliance poster

Do these campaigns make a difference?

Yes! Both surveys and anecdotal evidence indicate that these campaigns are having a significant impact. Here are a few examples:

Austin Independent Business Alliance

Formed in 2002, AIBA has grown to nearly 400 locally owned businesses. Its buy local campaign—broadly visible in advertisements and on posters, banners, storefront decals, and other items that remind people of the value of independent businesses and urge them to "break the chain habit"—has changed the shopping behavior of many residents and influenced the decisions of city officials and even developers.

Thanks in part to AIBA's work, the city stipulated that a sizable amount of the leasable storefront space in a downtown redevelopment project be reserved for independent businesses. The city is also working with AIBA to develop policies to support Independent Business Investment Zones throughout the city.

With residents increasingly clamoring for local businesses, developers have partnered with AIBA to develop strategies to include more local entrepreneurs in their projects.



StayLocal! neighborhood business directory New Orleans, LA



Portland Buy Local tote bag Portland, Maine



BUILD St. Louis storefront decal St. Louis, MO

Sustainable Connections

This coalition of more than 500 locally owned businesses in Bellingham, WA, launched a campaign to encourage people to "Think Local First" in 2003. By 2006, the campaign had triggered significant changes in local shopping behavior, according to a survey conducted by Applied Research Northwest. The survey of 300 people found that 69 percent were familiar with Think Local First and 58 percent were making a more deliberate effort to patronize locally owned businesses than they did before the campaign.

"If 1 in 5 households claim familiarity with your program, and change their behavior because of it you would consider it a success," said Dr. Pamela Jull, the lead researcher. "To have nearly 3 in 5 households attributing a behavior change to this program shows an amazing impact."

A separate survey of the group's member businesses found that, when choosing vendors, more than two-thirds were giving more consideration to whether the supplier was locally owned and/or whether the product was locally produced than they were before the campaign.

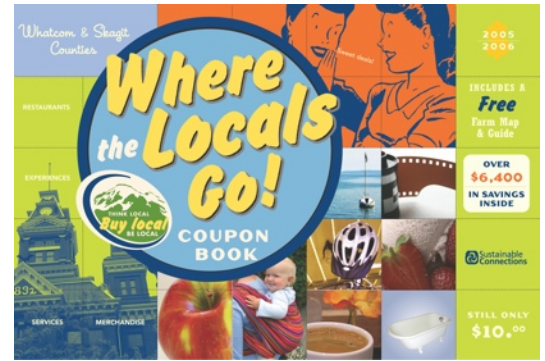
Portland Independent Business and Community Alliance

Just six months after launching a buy local campaign in Portland, ME, PIBCA surveyed its members and found that nearly two-thirds reported that the campaign had already had a positive impact on their businesses, generating increased sales and greater customer appreciation. So strong was the initial public response to the campaign that it was voted "Best Local Cause" in a poll conducted by a local newspaper.

Getting Started

1. Form a steering committee.

Begin by talking with key business owners about the benefits of launching a buy local campaign. Identify those who would like to be involved and ask them to join a steering committee. The committee should include 6-15 people, mostly local business owners, along with a few individuals and leaders of any relevant organizations, such as a downtown revitalization group. Ideally the committee



Sustainable Connections coupon book

should include at least a couple of long-standing, highly regarded local businesses.

2. Set a date for a kick-off event.

This will give the committee a concrete initial goal. The kick-off event might be a press conference to announce the campaign. This would give it immediate media visibility and help with your initial recruitment drive. Another possibility would be to hold a gathering for business owners, perhaps at a local restaurant or performance venue. Or you could invite AMIBA or BALLE (see sidebar) to visit your community and lead a workshop.

3. Devise a name, slogan, and logo.

Your group's name and slogan should be positive and proactive, and your logo professionally designed. Consider asking local designers if they might volunteer their services in exchange for free membership.

Examples of names include the Louisville Independent Business Alliance (Louisville, Kentucky), Cambridge Local First (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Homegrown El Paso (El Paso, Texas), and StayLocal (New Orleans).

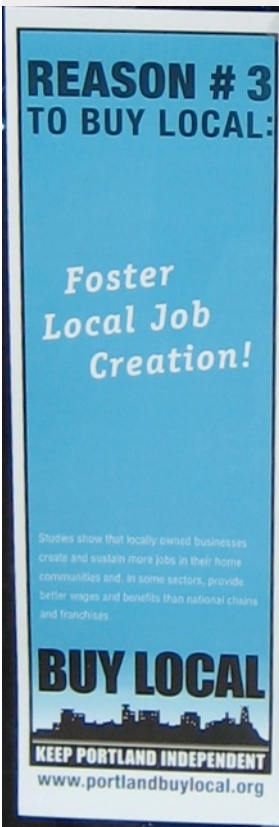
Slogan examples include "Local Spoken Here," "Keep Portland Independent," "Think Local First," and "Buy Close By—Preserve Community."

Your logo might incorporate a mountain, city skyline, or other recognizable and beloved feature of your community. (For examples, see the resources listed at the end of this document.)





Local First Chicago storefront decal
Chicago, Illinois



Portland Buy Local poster
Portland, Maine

4. Develop a campaign kit.

This is the packet of materials that businesses receive when they join. It might include a welcome letter, a window decal of the campaign logo for their storefront, tips for promoting the campaign, a "Top 10 Reasons to Support Locally Owned Businesses" flyer for distributing to customers, frequently asked questions about the campaign, a list of participating businesses, and a poster. You should also create a basic web site. (Again, consider asking local print shops and web developers to volunteer their services in exchange for free membership.)

5. Define membership.

You should determine which businesses are eligible to participate in the campaign. Contact AMIBA for examples of how other buy local efforts define "locally owned" and "independent." Also, you'll need to decide how much it will cost businesses to join. Some alliances start out with fairly substantial dues rates. Others opt for a modest initial membership fee (\$20-30)—just enough to cover the cost of producing start-up materials and organizing their first events—and raise it in subsequent years as the campaign expands and gains influence.

6. Hold your kick-off event.

If your kick-off event is a press conference, plan to hold it in a visually significant spot, such as a downtown square or in front of a landmark local business. Consider having a large poster made of your logo that you can unveil at the event. As many committee members who can attend should be there, ideally wearing campaign tee-shirts. Send out a media advisory a couple of days ahead and a press release the day before. A few committee members should speak briefly at the event about the importance of local businesses and the goals of the campaign.

The advantage of a press conference as a kick-off event is that having a few stories appear in the local news media will introduce the campaign to business owners and make it easier to recruit your first batch of members.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

There's no need to start from scratch. Your campaign can obtain detailed how-to guides and templates for virtually everything you'll need—from a campaign kit to organizational bylaws to posters—by joining one or both of these organizations:

American Independent Business Alliance (AMIBA)

Launched by the people who pioneered the first Independent Business Alliance in Boulder, Colorado, AMIBA has helped more than 40 similar initiatives start up and grow in cities and towns across the country. AMIBA offers on-site workshops, a detailed business plan, how-to guides, templates, and personal support for community organizers from staff with hands-on experience. Contact Jennifer Rockne at 406-582-1255 or info@amiba.net, or visit www.amiba.net.

Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE)

Founded in 2001, BALLE works to catalyze, strengthen, and connect local business networks dedicated to building strong Local Living Economies. BALLE, which has grown to more than 40 local business networks nationwide, offers how-to advice and templates, and hosts a large national conference every year. Contact Ann Bartz at 415-255-1108 or ann@liveingeconomies.org, or visit www.liveingeconomies.org

Another option for a kick-off event would be to host an informal breakfast or cocktail-hour gathering to introduce the campaign to business owners. Getting a good turnout would depend on the committee's ability to extend personal invitations and otherwise promote the event to local merchants.

7. Begin recruiting members.

You might start by sending out a letter, signed by one or more prominent members of your steering committee, inviting businesses to join the campaign. (Check with your city's economic development department or other business groups in town to





Local First Utah logo statewide



Austin Independent Business Alliance sticker Austin, Texas



Homegrown El Paso logo El Paso, Texas



Sustainable Business Network of Philadelphia

see if they have contact information for local business owners, including either an email or postal address.)

Many people will not respond to a mass solicitation, however. Your membership drive will be much more successful if you talk with business owners in person. Steering committee members should each take on the task of contacting a dozen business owners—perhaps those they know personally or whose businesses are located in the same part of town. Both AMIBA and BALLE (see sidebar) can provide materials to use when talking to business owners to explain what the campaign is about and what it will do.

Next Steps

Once you reach a critical mass of businesses, the campaign then needs to pursue the following two tracks simultaneously (you might form separate subcommittees to work on each of these tracks and report back to the full steering committee):

Organizational development

This involves incorporating the organization, forming a board, adopting bylaws, drafting a budget, and other tasks that will establish a firm foundation as the campaign grows and develops.

Spreading the campaign's message

The more people learn and the more they see and hear the buy local message, the greater the impact of your campaign and the more it will

influence people's choices. Ideas for getting the message out include:

- creating posters, advertisements, banners, tee-shirts, countertop thank-you cards, bumper stickers, flyers, and other items
- organizing events
- developing a more extensive and dynamic web site, perhaps with an online searchable directory of local business

After the first year or two, many local business alliances grow to the point that they can hire a part-time director and take on more complex projects, such as proposing changes to city policies or advocating for small business development initiatives.

Additional resources from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance

Slide Show

See examples of logos, posters, advertisements, bumper stickers and other items created by buy local campaigns. www.newrules.org/retail/slides/index.html

Why Support Locally Owned Businesses?

A concise one-page flyer detailing the top ten reasons to choose locally owned businesses. www.newrules.org/retail/whylocal.pdf

The Hometown Advantage Bulletin

A free monthly email newsletter reporting on successful community initiatives to strengthen independent businesses. www.newrules.org/retail/ebulletin.html

Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses

This book offers both a in-depth look at the consequences of the big-box economy as well as an invigorating account of how some communities have countered the spread of chains and rebuilt their local economies. www.bigboxswindle.com

