

Finding Business Success in Small Communities is Possible

Many people dream of owning their own business. Yet because they live in a small community, they perceive that developing a successful business just can't be achieved.

"Such a viewpoint is one of the small-business myths that exist among the public," says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). "Certainly, we don't want to imply that success is easy in small communities, but it is possible."

Being a successful business owner in a small community takes perseverance and insight.

"Research has found a variety of reasons why a business owner becomes successful in a small town," says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service's rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. "This entrepreneur often shows great creativity and ingenuity in starting and operating the business. It also is not unusual to see that he or she set the definition of success."

The traditional measure of success typically is based on one of three measures: dollars and cents, number of employees or growth.

The small-town business owner may take a slightly different view of these three measures. He or she may include subjective measures as well.

Some of the measures of success found among small-business owners are:

- Being good at what you do and respected for your skill. That respect can be local or may come from others living some distance away.
- Living where you want to live
- Becoming a portfolio entrepreneur, or someone who puts two, three or even more businesses together to reach his or her level of success
- Needing to work only part time, whether he or she works a certain number of hours per week or weeks per year. The person may be retired or have other means of income or is needed to help support another business in the family. This happens extensively in an area experiencing an economic downturn, such as the '80s farm crisis.
- Being good at bootstrapping and bartering, thus lowering the income side of the equation
- Supporting the community through needed goods and services as well as general participation in community growth

The business owner may look at financial success as meeting his or her financial needs. He or she wants some of the things in life, but research has found that many small-business owners also include other measures; they are not governed by dollars alone.

"Yet just having your business in a small town does not mean that financial success cannot be achieved in traditional terms," says Muske. "There are examples all around of people reaching financial success while maintaining a small-town business."

This is easier to do today because of the technology. First, the Internet allows that owner to reach out, not only to the next county, but across the U.S. and the globe, with products and services. Technology such as the Internet allows small businesses not only to sell worldwide but to market their products or services globally, too. . People can find you, read your reviews and know all about your business without ever stepping foot in the store.

“Those people who are doing Internet sales often comment how surprised they are at where some of the orders originate,” says <Insert last name>.

Technology also allows the small-business owner to be indistinguishable from his or her larger competitor. It allows an owner to focus on a niche market that the larger competitor does not feel is worth the time and effort to pursue. But that niche market can result in significant returns and growth for perhaps just one individual meeting the need.

When surveyed, business owners who are successful in small communities say they feel as successful as owners in much larger locations, whether that success is based on traditional terms or other measures.

So yes, you can start and operate a successful business in a small community. Muske suggests you remember this statement from Christopher Morely, an American journalist, novelist, essayist and poet who also produced stage productions for a few years and gave college lectures: “There is only one success - to be able to spend your life in your own way.”

For more information on small-business development, contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske. Another online resource is www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

You also can get help from your local chamber of commerce, as well as the Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives. Another resource is USDA Rural Development.

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For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.