

Focus Your Community Support Efforts

The fact that small businesses are at the core of our economic system probably does not come as a surprise.

Estimates on the number of small businesses suggest that they make up 90 percent or more of the total number of businesses in the U.S.

“In small communities, the number and importance of small businesses is even greater,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “These businesses provide the community with the goods and services they need.”

Small-business owners are not only a key in what might be considered the traditional economic system, but the owners often hold a similar role in the overall fabric of the community. They not only provide support for various community and charitable events, but they are members of various civic and charitable organizations, often taking a leadership position.

“Although no clear amounts exist in terms of the dollars or hours contributed to local communities, case studies of communities invariably point to the support provided by local business owners,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “Often the words used to describe that support indicate its importance and value, which extends far beyond the actual worth and gets into its intrinsic worth.”

As a result, small-business owners need to include donations of time and money into their planning strategy. Being a good citizen by showing community responsibility is crucial for a business, but at the same time, these small donations can mount up during the course of the year.

Often business owners may not realize just how much they provide in terms of dollars until tax time. In addition, the time lost from the business is rarely, if ever, tracked.

“Business owners need to have a visible presence in supporting the community,” says Muske. “Yet they also must plan how much and in what areas they want to support. They need to think in terms of strategic donations.”

“Admittedly, some donations are made just because an issue or a program is of personal interest to the owner,” Muske continued. “Yet for the majority of contributions, business owners need to include it in their yearly planning.”

Developing a yearly community support plan means taking a historical look at past requests. Then business owners need to prioritize which of these are more important to the business and them.

After ranking the list, the next step is to consider the amount of support and whether it will be in terms of cash, goods or services, time or some combination of all three.

“Business owners must focus their efforts on maximizing their return, whether extrinsic or intrinsic, from community support efforts,” says (Insert last name).

Businesses, like individuals, have a responsibility to the community in which they are located. Successful businesses understand and accept that responsibility. However, in doing so, their goal is a win-win-win situation for the community, their business and themselves.

“So as a small-business owner, step up and step out with your support,” Muske says. “Remember to do so, but with a focus on your business in mind.”

For more information on starting a small business, 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 SCORE.

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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.