

Small-business Savvy: Small is Not an Excuse

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As a small-business owner, how often have you said to customers, in conversations with colleagues or in your local chamber meeting that you cannot compete with the big stores?

How often has a customer been told you can't do something because this is just a small business?

Stop it!

That sounds harsh, but your words just made you your worst competition.

Instead, offer the customer information on what you can offer: local service; setup help; great returns; more often than not, competitive pricing; and a biggie, you're part of the local community.

Take advantage of being small. Call customers by name, carry the products they buy or ask for, and help them find what they want.

But the mindset of not being able to match the big store goes deeper. I often hear that small businesses don't have the skills to do financial reports, the time to do planning, the budget for marketing or the need for technology, especially websites and a social media presence.

I agree you can't do all of this at once. But it's possible to get it all done. How?

* Get help. You don't have to hire people, though. Lots of people willing to work as a contractor. You also may be able to find volunteers.

* Think about the youth in the community. You probably can find young people who are tech wizards, great designers for marketing campaigns and logos, or writers for ad copy and content.

* Check out the myriad marketing books that offer hints on marketing for next to nothing.

* Barter for services.

* Take advantage of overnight delivery. Ship directly to clients.

* Look outside your local area. This goes against what I hope would happen, but sometimes it's necessary.

The list goes on. Small-business owners are great at bootstrapping. You have a number of chances to put those skills to work.

Granted, doing everything that needs to be done to compete against the big competitor is hard. But remember, you don't need to do it by yourself. For example, give your staff authority and responsibility. Let them help.

You may respond that you have no paid staff, just family and friends. That's OK. They may love the challenge of solving a problem or two.

Don't let being small be your excuse. Look at it as the asset it can be in some instances or nothing worse than a small challenge to work around.

Small is the new big.

And don't forget, lots of places out there can help you. They include our website, <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness>. Be sure to sign up for the monthly newsletter.

More information is available at your local Extension office, as well as at <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives, along with many other state agencies, also can be valuable resources.

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NDSU Agriculture Communication

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