Boulder Independent Business Alliance™

Supporting locally owned independent businesses.™

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The Reality behind Locally-Owned and Operated

By Nate Luce

A new trend in the Boulder business community is to promote ones venture as "Locally owned and operated." The philosophy behind the statement is noble: the locally owned and operated stores provide a slice of community spirit in a McWorld of multinational corporations and brand name inundation. It puts a face behind the opaque corporate name, with the hopes of instilling comfort into the consumer.

In the realm of reality, however, the statement clinging to the front door of the neighborhood chain has few implications for the community, if any at all. "Locally owned and operated" is not a guarantee that your money will stay where your house is. In fact, oft-times businesses claiming to as such don't keep their money in town at all.

Over the past four years, we at the Boulder Independent Business Alliance have raised this issue; our feeling is that the term "locally owned" is now being used as a marketing service for organizations that have defined it in narrow terms for their own benefit. As promoters of locally owned and *independent* business, we've decided to illuminate the dichotomy of the operated and the independent, and how it impacts community-purchasing patterns.

The "Locally owned and operated" business is good for the owner, in the sense that he has ownership, he is contributing to the entrepreneurial essence of America, and he creates jobs and success on his own volition. Taking another angle, when he started the venture, he purchased ready-made brand recognition, products, national resources and supplies (menu's, graphic design, merchandise, etc…). By achieving all of his means through the formulaic purchase of a pre-packaged business, he turns his back on local contractors that could have provided him materials and designs needed to create an original company. The impact on the community he boasts being a part of? The local economy is not being exercised by the "locally owned and operated" since the community web of suppliers, designers and providers is not being tapped.

So what about the "locally owned and independent business?" Yes, the efforts taken to maintain her establishment are more difficult, but that challenge prompts her to bury deep roots into the community for the sake of her success. She builds relationships with local service providers, artists and merchants to accomplish her aims. As a result, an original design is produced, applicable to only her business. The design reflects and enhances the population she places such a large stake in, all because she decided to get involved in the community web. Along similar lines, a symbiotic relationship forms between the business and the local independent media publications and services. The

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publications rely on her business for advertising, while she relies on the publications to create her customer base.

Aside from dismissing the aforementioned community web, the "locally owned and operated" cannot add an original concept to the community. While they may act under the premise of convenience and supposed savings, they don't offer an uncontrived atmosphere and philosophy. Rather, they create a sense of uniformity and community, draining towns and cities of individual aesthetic vibrancy. What local owner would want to see that?

The same stores also put a damper on the possibility of more locally owned and independent stores to enter a community. They don't want to work within the community web—they simply want to assume the position within the community web. Over time, however, the local independent business will begin to contribute to the web that helped her during the developing years. She will sponsor community improvement projects, make donations to local charitable organizations, and provide services to new independent ventures. The cycle continues; all the while, the character of the community improves. The independent inherently maintains the community, while the locally operated benefits from its collapse.

So the next time you see the "locally owned and operated" at a store, think twice about how much good the store is doing for your community. Locally owned doesn't necessarily mean locally minded. The locally owned and independent business benefits from the community, and as a result the community benefits from the business. We at BIBA thank you for the opportunity to separate the operated from the independent.