

#ShopLocalYR campaign aimed to boost business, consumer confidence

As businesses continue to re-open under the rules of Ontario's Step 3, more and more customers are rediscovering their favourite shops.

But as much as revenue begins to roll in once again, local small businesses need our help more than ever before ? and the Region of York is aiming to drum up both commerce and consumer confidence through the Shop Local YR Challenge.

?Many businesses have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 and small businesses primarily so,? says Jonathan Wheatle, Director of Economic Strategy at the Region of York. ?Our local small businesses have been there for the community over the years, so this is a great way to show them some love.?

Spreading the love is simple: purchase a good or service from a local small business, share your images on your social media channels using the hashtag #ShopLocalYR, and tag both the business and your municipality.

Local businesses can also participate in the challenge by posting four or five images showcasing products and services to social media with the hashtag #smallbusinesschallenge in addition to #ShopLocalYR, tagging their home municipality as well.

?Small businesses make up about 84 per cent of businesses in York Region,? says Wheatle. ?This challenge is about engaging groups of stakeholders ? the residents themselves and the business community. From the residents' perspective, we're encouraging them to get out into the local business communities, purchase the goods and the services, but don't just stop there; share your support on social media and talk about your experiences so it is really engaging. From a business perspective, we want [them] to pull in those community enthusiasts that might be looking for more to be a part of it.

?Research not just by our team but research done by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has shown that small businesses, primarily those in accommodation, food services and entertainment are the ones that have been hardest hit. [According to the Federation], when business leaders are asked what worried them about COVID-19, two of the top four responses were consumer spending being slow to return to pre-COVID levels and cash flow tied to that. It really shows the importance of initiatives like the Shop Local campaign is really helping with consumer confidence and in businesses [such as] food services, accommodations and entertainment, consumer confidence drives participation in those businesses.?

York Region's Economic Development team has been working diligently since the start of the pandemic through the Business Recovery Support Partnership, an initiative that has brought together not only their efforts, but also the Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade in York's nine municipalities, along with York University and Seneca College.

?As economic development stakeholders across the Region, we're truly committed to supporting the recovery of our business community,? says Wheatle. ?We're here for them and the community is here as well to support our businesses, so we're truly encouraging everyone to get out there, shop local, get out into the community and show them some love ? of course, being mindful of the existing restrictions that are still in place. But, we're in Stage 3, so there is a lot more that can be done and that is a big thing!?

For more on the campaign, visit York.ca/shoplocal.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter