

small business saturday

You know that cohesive, industry-wide consumer campaign we always talk about? It's the one discussed at trade show town halls, networking luncheons and even in a passing guest column or two. The one where you can set your watch to someone referencing the "Got Milk? campaign" at least once.

Well, for the time being, it looks like the closest IGCs are going to get to that is Small Business Saturday — the day after Black Friday. (Too bad it couldn't be in the spring, right?) And thanks to American Express' robust advertising campaign leading up to this very day it created, all you really have to do is show up.

Were you ready to impress those small business supporters once they walked through your door on that special Saturday?

Who am I kidding — you were made for a day like this. According to American Express and the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), consumers "spent \$5.7 billion with independent merchants" this past Small Business Saturday ... up from 2012's \$5.5 billion. Did you get in on any of that action?

an exception to the rule

Like I said, thanks to its timing, it's hard to fully realize the potential of this day for locally-owned garden centers. But as a small business owner or manager, I hope you'd agree that this day is an important one. Generally speaking, it would be a day that's fully staffed — everyone on their best behavior.

I had quite the opposite experience on my Small Business Saturday. My father-in-law and I made a "quick" stop at a local consignment shop, which sold, exclusively, the goods

of Cleveland artists and vendors. We were actually there to exchange five or six T-shirts for different sizes. My wife's grandma had gotten the family these locally made tees as gifts for Hanukkah.

An easy exchange. Something you and your staff have done a thousand times. Unfortunately at this small business, only two employees were on hand — a seasonal hire at the register and the owner, who happened to be leading a children's craft class in the back corner of the shop (at 11 a.m. on Small Business Saturday!).

The cashier informed us she was new and unclear of the exchange process and then called the store owner over for assistance. In somewhat of an outdoor voice, the owner asked us to look around or come back in 10 minutes to complete the exchange. She was "in the middle of a class."

Oh, the small business horror: a poorly trained/prepared employee, not enough people on staff, the ill-advised timing of a children's art class, an owner's blatant void of customer service, the list goes on.

I'm calling this an exception to the rule, because I know (first hand) small businesses are generally not run this way, especially on potential high-dollar days.

At the same time, this isn't necessarily an isolated incident. Swap this local-centric consignment shop with your local-centric garden center on an off day. Just saying.

Not everyday is Small Business Saturday, but maybe it's worth acting like it is. **LGR**




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