How Our Shopping Habits Help Predict the Future of Our Community

Diane C. Vigna, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Extension Specialist;
Rita C. Kean, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Textiles, Merchandising & Fashion Design

Total time needed: 60 minutes

Introduction
Time needed — 5 minutes
Supplies needed — The Participant Guide and PowerPoint® presentation (optional)

Introduce the topic by asking the following:

- Do you make it a point to shop in your local community whenever possible?
- Do you value the ability to make most of your purchases at home?
- Do you personally know the retailers in your community?
- Can you remember a time when your community was better able to provide the goods and services you needed on a daily basis?
- What would your ideal community look like today?
- What would you most like your community to offer residents in the future?
- Do you think your ideal community would fit most age groups?

These questions and more will be considered in this lesson, as we discover how our personal shopping habits help determine what the future of our communities will look like.

Shopping Spree
Time needed — 10 minutes
Supplies needed — One Shopping Spree list and a pencil for each participant

In advance: Fold the Shopping Spree list along the dotted line so the far right-hand column titled “Could it be purchased in my community?” is facing the back.

At the meeting: Give each participant a pencil and a copy of the Shopping Spree list with the list of items facing up. In the column to the right of the items, have participants write down where they would go to purchase that item.

Tell them to answer honestly, without thinking too hard. You want to determine where most in the room would automatically go to make those purchases. When finished, have participants share the results with each other. You could use a tally sheet to make it easier to spot trends (such as how many shop outside of town for each item listed).

Ask the group to analyze how the trends they have identified for their community make them feel about the potential for the future of the community. Are they hopeful that the local situation will continue, or do they want something different?

Community Business Scan
Time needed — 10 minutes
Supplies needed — Shopping Spree list and pencils used in previous activity

Have participants unfold the paper to reveal the “Could it be purchased in my community?” column. Have each person note which items on the list could be purchased in the local community and where. Have the group discuss which items could be purchased in their community. Have them consider whether the majority chose to make most of their purchases at home, or whether price or some other consideration causes most shoppers to go outside of their community for the purchase?

In groups of three or so, make a list of businesses that provide goods or services in the community. Think really hard. Don’t forget to list the paper carrier and other businesses that don’t have a presence on Main Street.

Come back together as a group, and share the lists. Ask participants:

- What is the total number of businesses you identified?
- Did most of the businesses show up as places you shop when you did the shopping spree exercise?
- If the answer is “yes,” congratulations — your community’s businesses are being supported by local shoppers. If the answer is “no,” consider why that might be.

Without getting negative, discuss conditions that might make shoppers consider shopping locally instead of going outside of town to make purchases.
You Are Important to Local Merchants
Time needed — 5 minutes
Supplies needed — Participant manual

Have participants read the following paragraph, then ask what happens when a dollar is spent out of town. Does it ever come back to the community?

I’m shopping out of town because …
Time needed — 5 minutes
Supplies needed — None

Ask participants to consider the reasons why they shop outside of town. The following might get them started.

- I’m looking for the best price.
- I want greater variety of merchandise.
- I like the convenience of store hours.
- I have a desire to be “different.”
- I like to get away with friends.
- Other?

For every reason they think of that causes them to shop out of town, encourage them to consider an alternative that would encourage them to shop in their community.

Have participants do their own calculation for one item purchased out of town. After they have made the calculation, tell them to add the trip cost to the price of the product or service they purchased. They should then subtract the total from the price of the same or similar goods or services available in the community.

Ask them if they found that they saved anything by driving out of town to get things they could have purchased at home? Have them ask themselves the following:

- Does it really pay to get a lower price if it costs more to drive the distance to get the savings?
- How much is it costing our community if we take our dollars out of town?
- Does my out-of-town shopping behavior reflect a trend in my community?
- If I continue to shop out of town, will I have any options to shop locally in the future?

Can’t Find It? Just Ask —
Time needed — 5 minutes
Supplies needed — None

Go through each reason given for shopping out of town. Are there any situations where a frank discussion with your local merchant might help influence your decision to shop elsewhere? How can your local merchant know you prefer a certain brand or product if you don’t tell him/her? Remember that your local merchants depend on your business to be successful. They want to please you, their customer. They aren’t able to read your mind, so you need to communicate with them if you want to see the types of goods and services you would like to purchase.

Take a look at the list of businesses you compiled earlier in this lesson. Consider the types of goods and services you typically purchase outside of town. Is there a reasonable expectation that if you asked local merchants to carry a certain type of merchandise, they might do so? Don’t be reluctant to suggest things to your local merchants that you like to purchase. For example, if you like a certain brand of peanut butter, there’s a good chance others will like it, too. Your local grocer might be very happy to purchase a case of the new peanut butter so that you and others might enjoy it.

Trends in Retailing Today
Time needed — 5 minutes
Supplies needed — None

Have the group read the national trends for retailers, and consider implications for retail in their community.

Build Your Dream Community
Time needed — 10 minutes
Supplies needed — None

Have the group answer the following questions:

- If you had the ability to make your community perfect, what might you change?
- Would you add more retailers, more entertainment venues, more restaurants?
- What, if anything, do you feel your community is missing?
- Do you need more people?
- Is housing stock adequate to attract young families?

Ask the group to list all the best features of the community, and discuss ways to build on those features to create the perfect community for the future.

Summary
Time needed — 5 minutes
Supplies needed — None

We have considered the importance of shopping locally to ensure the healthy future of your community. We have answered some provocative questions:

- Do you make it a point to shop in your local community whenever possible?
- Do you value the ability to make most of your purchases at home?
- Do you personally know the retailers in your community?
- Can you remember a time when your community was better able to provide the goods and services you needed on a daily basis?
- What would your ideal community look like today?
- What would you most like your community to offer residents in the future?
- Do you think your ideal community would fit most age groups?

If you had to admit that you do a lot of your shopping for goods and services outside your hometown, now is the time to make a change to help your local merchants grow and prosper. You can make a difference by changing your shopping habits and shopping locally as a routine. You can also encourage others by your strong example.

End with this challenge for the group: You have thought about your dream community; now let’s make those dreams a reality!