

Growing locally

Doing business with nearby companies keeps money in community, group says

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In the more than a year and a half since its founding, the midstate's Buy Local Coalition has grown rapidly as a way to increase the opportunities for local firms to network with each other to keep money circulating in the community.



Mike Dalton, direct marketing consultant, feeds envelopes into a high-speed ink jet machine at A+ Mailing Solutions. The Dauphin County-based small business will present the next best-practices event for the midstate's Buy Local Coalition. Photo/Stuart Leask

From several founders, the [coalition](#) has grown to about 300 members with about 50 applications awaiting processing, said Crystal Davis, the group's vice president and sales representative with York County-based [KBS Inc.](#)

The transportation firm was one of the founding members, she said.

It and others already did business with each other and thought it would be good to grow the concept the way other communities around the country have spearheaded buy-local initiatives, Davis said.

The group's tagline is "Spend it here — keep it here," and the initiative asks consumers and businesses alike to first think about where a good could come from locally before they go out to the Internet or national chain, she said.

At a time when some might feel helpless to make the economic climate better, Buy Local and similar initiatives provide an outlet to do something about it, Davis said.

More of a dollar spent with a local business stays in the local community, and local firms are more likely to support the community's nonprofits and other initiatives, she said.

"The money they spend stays here and is recirculated," Davis said.

Encouraging doing business with local firms instead of national players helps to keep the community and its offerings unique, establishing a selling point, she said.

"When people go out, they want to try new and different things," Davis said.

The growth has been surprising, with advertising mostly based on word of mouth and by existing members inviting new ones, Davis said. Each time the coalition holds an event, a cluster of membership applications come in, she said.

The group's monthly events alternate between an evening mixer hosted by a member and a morning best-practices series focused on issues affecting small businesses in general, Davis said.

Small businesses might not otherwise have the budget or time for learning about issues and practices

that can help them, she said.

Dauphin County-based [A+ Mailing Solutions](#) will present the next best practices event — on successful direct marketing by Mike Dalton, direct marketing consultant with the company, and president Julie Wilson.

A+ Mailing Solutions began as a one-person business in 2001 and it believes in working with fellow small businesses whenever possible, Dalton said. Money stays in the local community, and it's also good for the bottom line, he said.

The business recently worked with the York County-based [Signs by Tomorrow](#), a Buy Local member, to produce expo signs, Dalton said.

It specifically sought out a member because the status shows a firm's commitment to local business relationships, he said.

In a fast-paced industry where things can change quickly, it helps to have a business partner close by, he said. Partners can discuss and explain changes face to face and can drop in at each other's operations to check on progress, Dalton said.

The same can't be said if a vendor is on the other side of the country, he said.

York County-based Life Source Water Service joined the coalition about a year ago, and the group is a natural fit for its strategy of marketing the advantages of a local firm compared with a national company, owner Travis Jones said.

The company offers next-day service and has grown its private-label water bottle service through networking with coalition members, he said.

The company also practices what it preaches by using local vendors for its own needs, Jones said.

Launching the group

The founding active members of the midstate's [Buy Local Coalition](#) are based in York County:

- [KBS Inc.](#)
- Keystruct Construction Inc.
- On-Site Lube Services Inc., also doing business as On-Site Auto Sales
- Penn Waste Inc.
- Quality Digital Office Technology
- Ream Printing Co. Inc.
- Rohrbaugh Insurance Agency
- York Traditions Bank