

Let's support local SMEs in 2020

With the arrival of a new decade, there is renewed hope for a prosperous South Africa with jobs and opportunities a-plenty. And, with the right support, local small, medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMEs) could help the country out of its rut and breathe a little life back into the economy.



Source: www.gettyimages.com

The economic potential of SMEs is expressed as part of the National Development Plan, which aims to empower the sector to create 90% of all jobs by 2030. However, with only ten years left on the clock, SMEs will need a helping hand if they are to meet this expectation.

“SMEs have the potential to fire up economic growth in South Africa, but at the moment they are struggling with financially stressed consumers and rising operating costs. Luckily, the South African public can help set local entrepreneurs on a stronger footing,” says Bridgit Evans, director of the SAB Foundation – an independent trust focused on promoting entrepreneurship in South Africa.

Evans urges South Africans to make supporting small businesses their top resolution this year and lays out a few tips for those that want to lend a hand.

- **Shop small**

Instead of heading to your nearest supermarket, shopping mall or restaurant chain, try something new. Explore local markets and independent stores, restaurants or coffee houses.

Small businesses offer unique character and charm that are often missing in larger chains. They are also more dependent on your individual contribution which is expressed in better customer service and a personal touch, as business owners try to form connections and win customer loyalty.

- **Spread the word**

Whether it's the corner food truck with the mouthwatering burritos, the mechanic who can be relied upon for a fair quote and a speedy turnaround or the hairdresser who makes you feel at home and look fantastic – we all know a great little place where we love to go.

When this is the case, make sure you spread the word. Tell your friends, family, colleagues, neighbours and the guy sitting next to you at the bus stop. Remember, these recommendations could help ensure that you're greeted by the smell of freshly baked bread rather than a 'TO LET' sign the next time you visit your favourite local bakery.

- **Sharing is caring**

Social media is a simple and extremely effective mechanism for endorsing a business and recommending it to your network. Be sure to follow your favourite small businesses and like or share their posts.

If you're at your favourite artisanal coffee shop, upload a picture and be sure to tag the venue as well as using hashtags to increase their searchability. You can also post a review on their Facebook page or give them a glowing endorsement on a business review website like TripAdvisor or Hellopeter.

- **Pay timeously**

Small businesses often have limited cash reserves and are reliant on a regular, predictable income to pay their operational costs. These businesses have a tendency to overextend themselves in order to service valuable new clients. Failure to pay invoices on time could result in them being unable to pay staff salaries, utility bills, rent and other essential costs.

If you deal with small businesses, make a point of always paying swiftly because your money is what keeps them going from one month to the next.

So, while you are contentiously upholding your usual new year's resolutions, you should also give a little thought to how you can support local SMEs. That way you are helping South Africa while you're working on yourself.