

THE TELEGRAPH

Indies lead the way in luring shoppers back to the high street

By Matthew Caines

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All aboard the Small Business Saturday bus, which arrived in Brighton this weekend – stop number 26 of its 30-city, 3,000-mile tour of the UK.

The big blue coach hits the campaign trail every year, travelling from Scotland to Cornwall in a bid to encourage people to support local enterprises and raise awareness of the main event, which takes place on Dec 1.

The day sees customers spend with neighbourhood butchers, bakers and candle-makers, who host parties and offer discounts to get loungers off the sofa and into their stores. [...]

One retailer who's preparing for the crowds is Caroline Clifton, who owns Present in the Laine, a gifts and accessories boutique in Brighton's North Laine district, which is home to more than 400 independent traders.

Persuading the public to shop locally is hugely important, she says. "Not only does it keep me going, but also the suppliers from around here that I stock and the people that I employ from the community – it keeps more money in the city's economy."

Local firms are also worth supporting because they're ethical (short supply chains result in less packaging and air pollution). They also put on vital community projects and charity events.

It all helps to mitigate some of the longer-term challenges that small retailers face.

The rise of online shopping has also proved tricky. With e-commerce accounting for proportionately more of her revenues each year, the business owner is having to spend more on marketing and logistics. "I can't compete with the bigger brands on discounts, free delivery and returns, because I don't have the margins." [...]

Such difficulties have forced some local traders to shut, which presents another issue – less desirable town centres. [...] But there's no such forecast for Indies, who will buck that trend and increase in number by 0,3pc between 2017 and 2023, claims research by American Express and GlobalData.

Indie: indépendant