

# STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL IN AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

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One of the newest Internet sensations is Social Networking. Suddenly, everyone is Twittering, Blogging, getting a FaceBook page or becoming Linked-in. My initial reaction to all of this was that I was already spending too much time on my computer and I certainly couldn't afford to devote any more time to socially chatting with my friends. However, enough of my business associates invited me to join Linked-In that I eventually gave in. This also gave me the immediate advantage of forcing my adult children to stop calling me a dinosaur. I still don't send text messages, however, and I hope to avoid twittering forever.

After looking over the landscape in Linked In, I discovered that it is really an enormous series of groups of associates with common interests. I eventually found a group called "SBDC Think Tank", which is comprised of other Small Business Development Center Directors all over the country who discuss ideas and share problems of mutual concern. I immediately joined the group and am now convinced there is value to social networking after all.

All of this brings me to the survival strategy for small businesses that I want to discuss today. One of the members of our think tank group is Cinda Baxter, a retail consultant and blogger. She has initiated a program to assist small businesses in these difficult economic times. It is called "The 3/50 Project", and it works like this: You select three small independent brick and mortar businesses in your community that you would hate to see go out of business. You then agree to spend at least \$50 each month in each of these businesses. This is not an attack on Wal-Mart or any other big box retailer. You do not have to stop shopping the big boxes, but the program is designed to spread your spending around your community a little better. Statistics show that 68% of the money you spend in an independent local retailer stays in your community versus 43% in the national chains.

You may wonder how your small contribution can help save small businesses. The answer to that demonstrates the power of social networking. In the few short months since this plan was conceived, it has spread to over 100 communities and over 10,000 businesses are participating. The program has been showcased in the Wall Street Journal, CNN Money, Fox Business News and Consumer Reports. The more publicity it gets, the more it will help small businesses, so talk it up in your community. I believe this is a great grass roots movement, and it can really help small businesses in your community to survive the recession.