



## SMALL BIZ SURVIVAL – 6 innovative small business models in small towns.

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You don't have to settle for a normal business. Rural businesses are exploring new shapes, new locations and new ways of doing business. Here are six innovative ways people are building businesses in small towns today:

- 1. Pop-ups** - These are temporary business that may last from just one day to several months. You've seen short-term vendors setting up tents and booths around special events, and this extends the idea to all kinds of businesses. You can experiment and gauge demand in a small town before committing to a more expensive permanent business.
  - Pop-ups can be as small as a booth for a day, or as big as a full-size building rented just for the holiday season, or anything in between.
  - Pop-ups are a good fit for: restaurants, retail stores, and artists.
- 2. Trucks and Trailers** - Food trucks are a hot trend in urban areas, and now all kinds of business from retail to service are going mobile. With a truck or trailer as a base, there's no need for a building. That's good, because there is often a problem finding usable buildings in small towns.
  - Mobile businesses can also build their market by taking advantage of neighboring small towns' special event crowds. Instead of having to set up and tear down a booth every time, the whole thing is ready to go in the trailer.
  - Trucks and Trailers are a good fit for: specialty foods and retail.
- 3. Business-in-a-business** - In a small town, there may not be enough demand for a single business to fill up an entire building, office or retail space. Rural innovators are now borrowing and sharing space with several different businesses under one roof. A restaurant may pop-up inside a retail space. A single retail store may include half a dozen different vendors or mini-shops inside. You can even make a business of subdividing your building, like an old-school antique mall or an upscale version with separate small spaces.
  - Business-in-a-business is a good fit for: small retailers.
- 4. Tiny business villages** - Groups of tiny houses or dressed-up sheds are popping up on empty lots and unused green spaces, filled with extra-small businesses. The smaller spaces encourage lower-risk experiments, and all the businesses together draw a critical mass of visitors to the village. The key factor is to bring a number of them together. One tiny business on its own is lonely; groups of tiny businesses are a draw.
  - Individual crafters or artisans who couldn't fill an entire store get a chance to fill a tiny space. Agri-tourism businesses like wineries or maple syrup who couldn't justify renting an entire downtown storefront, can easily support a tiny storefront.
  - Tiny businesses are a good fit for: super-specialty retail.
- 5. Rural-sourcing** - It's usually cheaper to live in a small town than an urban area. Now freelancers and specialist rural-sourcing companies use the small town cost of living as an advantage to compete for big-city contracts. Online marketplaces like Upwork let people work from anywhere and deliver services digitally.
  - Some professional services, including web designers, writers, programmers, creative artists, marketers, consultants and virtual assistants, may not be able to make their entire living from local customers, but can easily score work from out of town clients.
  - Rural-sourcing is a good fit for: service providers, creative professionals, online services.
- 6. Omni-local** - Instead of waiting for customers to walk in the front door, smart rural retailers are using the same omni-channel tactics as big retailers. The low cost of cloud-based tools allows them to reach local customers in multiple new ways. It's easier and more affordable than ever for small town business to use e-commerce to take orders online, mobile-friendly websites to connect with customers on the go, and subscription boxes to delight customers monthly.
  - Omni-local is a good fit for: existing small brick-and-mortar retailers looking to reach more customers.