

Features

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5 Strategies for Thriving in 2025

Ben Futa

I think many of us have been operating as “small” businesses for too long. I don’t know about you, but I get far more excited about identifying as “local and independent” than I do small. As our business, Botany, plans for an uncertain year in 2025, we’re leaning into who we are: local and independent.

Here’s the thing: Businesses like ours will rarely be able to compete when it comes to cost and convenience compared to the big box stores and mega online retailers. While I’m not advocating for ignoring those factors, I think we do ourselves a disservice if that’s the only place we focus. Botany is moving forward with the value proposition that we can compete when it comes to cultivating intentional community—something those big businesses can never hope to master.

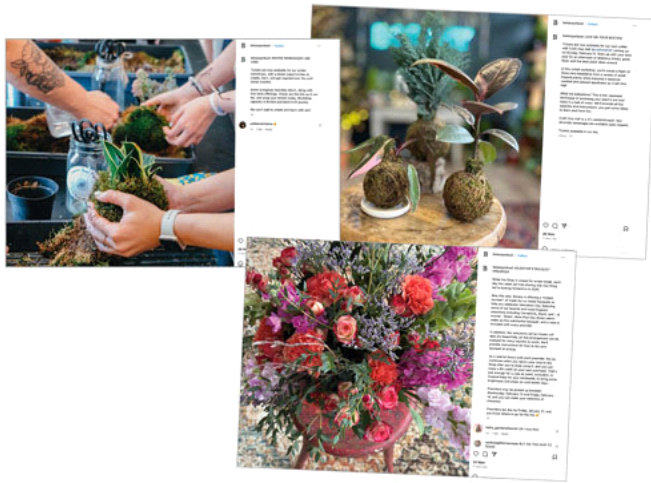
As locally owned, independent, brick-and-mortar businesses, we’re the places people gather, connect and create memories that last a lifetime. We build neighborhoods. We bring light, love and laughter to streets everywhere. We’re the places people go to learn, to laugh, to discover something new, and to find themselves and their people. We are of our places and our customers are our neighbors.

We are vital and we are needed.

Here are a few ways we’re planning to lean into community this year and I consider these the “easy wins.” They’ve already worked for us and I hope they’ll work for you, too.

Amp Up Customer Appreciation & Get Creative

Our success hinges on getting to know our neighbors and customers, and to know them well. We invest in fostering relationships, understanding people’s likes and dislikes, what they care about, what excites them, what they’re struggling with, and what they want to learn more about. I’ve also been thinking a lot about the show “Cheers”—don’t we all want a place to go where everyone knows our name?



These relationships are powerful, personal and authentic. This is our edge. Use it and stop feeling guilty about it. Our businesses cannot continue to exist and be everything we want them to be if we aren't able to keep the doors open. We need to remind people we're here, why we matter and why they matter to us.

Customer Appreciation Event(s): At Botany, we've had great success hosting a customer appreciation event once or twice each year, and we usually do this during slower months as a way to drum up foot traffic and move some stale inventory. This "one-size-fits-all" approach can certainly drum up some extra foot traffic, especially if you haven't done something like this in a

while. We've found success with things like mystery bags and store-wide sales.

Don't overprogram this—things like food vendors or live music could add to the experience, and they could also be added in the future. Start simple. Make it easy.

Customer(s) of the Month: There's also value in focusing on specific customers. Botany has begun recognizing "Customers of the Month" (COM) as a means to show our appreciation to people we see often and know well. This isn't about how much they spend, it's about relationships. COM enjoys 20% off all purchases for themselves and anyone they bring with them. We've been searching for a way to create a referral program that felt right for us and I think this is it.

Loyalty Rewards Program: Our year-round rewards program has been a mainstay since the beginning of Botany. It's free to join and we simply need a customer's phone number to sign up (and it's what they'll use to check in on a return visit.) It's a great feature from Square and absolutely worth the \$60-ish bucks a month. As customers shop, they earn rewards points that can later be redeemed for coupons.

This also allows us to send SMS text blasts to loyalty members, and we reserve those for big announcements and special events; in other words, messages and invitations that make people feel good about supporting us.

Find YOUR Community

I believe one of the greatest threats when it comes to the failure of local, independent businesses is loneliness. I think often as business owners we hold a bit too tight to the idea that "this is our burden to bear" when it comes to the stress and pressure of owning, growing and operating our companies. As our businesses grow, we have to practice letting go of that feeling because it won't do us any favors.

Find a Biz Buddy: I've found that surrounding myself with fellow business owners—people who share my values and commitment to community—has been essential. These folks are more than "just friends" or simple colleagues. They are siblings-in-arms, united in our quest to solve problems, build communities and, ultimately, create a place we're proud to call home along with our neighbors. They've been a resource, a lifeline, a mentor, a therapist, a life coach, a strategic thought partner, a dinner date and coffee buddy.

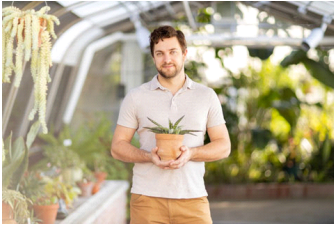
If there's someone in your community you admire and want to get to know and spend time with, what are you waiting for? Schedule that coffee date.

Host a Local Business Support Group: If you're not sure where or how to meet people, I suggest hosting your own Local Business Support Group. Make it easy the first time and host it in your space, or maybe set aside space

in a local coffee shop or library. Put out an open invitation on social media. Invite fellow local business owners to come together and just talk about what's on their mind. Don't script it, don't force it; all you need to do is provide the space and the invitation.

These are just a few of the things that worked for us in 2024 and we're planning to go even deeper in 2025. Want to follow along? Find us on

[Instagram@botanyorbust](#). **GP**



Ben Futa is the founder and CEO of Botany, a local and independent brick-and-mortar business in the heart of a South Bend, Indiana, neighborhood, including a plant and gift shop, an urban flower farm, and a new outdoor retail and events space. Ben is also a regular guest host of Cultivating Place, created and hosted by Jennifer Jewell. Before opening Botany in 2021, Ben worked for more than a decade in public gardens across the Midwest.