

"Building Main Street, not Wall Street"

Know Your Competitors

There is a silent struggle being waged in nearly every non-urban community across this great land. It is a struggle that many Americans don't realize is being waged. It is a struggle that will forever change the rural landscape of America. Make no mistake; this is a life and death struggle with dire consequences for our local communities.

It is the struggle in which our Main Streets are locked in competition with Wall Street. It is a struggle over how you spend your pocketbook. It is a struggle, if lost, will leave your community desolate. If communities lose this struggle, they are left with an increased cycle of poverty and drug addiction. They are left with further deterioration of their roads, less safety due to fewer police and fire resources along with a crumbling infrastructure. Local media outlets will slowly be strangled as their local ad base evaporates leaving communities with less reliable regional or national media outlets to rely on. The community will be left solely dependent upon big boxes, chains and online options controlled by their owners, many of which are located on Wall Street and overseas.

There is a strategic art to every war; every commander understands this art; it is simply knowing your competition. To know your competition and the methods being used against these communities are not complex. In some cases they start coming into your community in slow and subtle ways. In other cases, they come being courted and offered monetary incentives by city governments unaware they are dancing with the devil if change is not balanced properly.

But come they do. The Trojan horse enters communities flooding them with Wal-Mart's, big boxes and chains along with Dollar Stores on nearly every front. Couple this with the rise of the Internet removing resources from the community and it is only a matter of time before the economic landscape changes. Local businesses are trapped by these trends being waged and can't compete due to the scale that the big boxes and chains bring to bear. They are swallowed up, forced to eventually wave a white flag and close their doors. To the victors go the spoils.

If it just ended there, some will say no big deal. Many will claim lower prices and increased choices are worth it. But don't be fooled, once choices are removed, prices will climb as well. Meanwhile, communities have lost their local business base along with watching their local sales tax base being eroded as the dollars spent at these competitors are worth far less than those dollars going to local businesses. Make no mistake; once the tipping point is reached, the uniqueness the community has known will then have undergone a slow and very drastic demise.

As the local community now relies on the victors of this struggle, they are forced to not only shop there, but also be employed by them, having low paying jobs with few benefits. Studies show the more big boxes, chains and out-of-town businesses dotting the landscape of your community, the more poverty and crime will increase as resources are stretched too thin. Local governments are forced to layoff, operating with less each passing year.

In most cases, the frontline participants on both sides of the struggle are simply pawns in a giant chess match being orchestrated by the executives behind the scenes. Those local managers and employees working for the big boxes and chains usually reside, shop, are friends of and live next door to those living in the community under siege. This blurs the lines further, but make no mistake, the stakes are as high as any your community has ever faced.

How does a community fight the current onslaught to their local way of life? While not simple, it is very straightforward. First, understand this is all about where and how you spend your dollars. Secondly, stop courting the Trojan horse and invest in your local business talent, both young and old. Thirdly, keep every possible government dollar local. Fourth, start educating the community that this struggle impacts us today as well as future generations. Fifth, invest in your local downtown and return that heart and soul to your community where it belongs. Lastly, find that uniqueness that sets you apart from other communities and build upon that foundation that can't be duplicated by the far off competitors bent upon forcing you to play by their rules. Your community's future is indeed, in your hands.

John A. Newby, author of the "***Building Main Street, Not Wall Street***" column dedicated to helping communities and local media companies combine synergies that allow them to not just survive, but thrive in a world where truly-local is lost to Amazon, Wall Street chains and others. His email at: john@360MediaAlliance.net.