

Supporting Small Businesses through Collaborative Online Platforms:
Experimentation in Crowdsourcing for Marketing and Publicizing
(Technical Report)

The Crowd in Control: Web-based Backing of Small Businesses in the
United States
(STS Research Paper)

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by

Alexander White

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Preface

How can local businesses compete in an economy that favors large markets? In competition with big corporations, small businesses are at a disadvantage.

Websites featuring user-generated content can help small businesses to compete with larger enterprises. Consumers discover local businesses online, but many businesses take insufficient advantage of this opportunity. Well designed online presences can boost brand recognition and customer engagement. In three phases—requirements elicitation, design and implementation, and testing—the project team developed a cost-effective and scalable web application with which users can crowdsource information about local businesses in Charlottesville, Virginia. This or similar websites could serve small businesses elsewhere, including areas larger than Charlottesville.

In the United States, how are small businesses seeking to use the web to promote their markets? During the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses generally struggled financially, while many large corporations earned record profits. Small businesses are now seeking digital strategies to contend with larger enterprises. On community websites that invite active participation, small business owners, their patrons, advocacies, and government agencies can collaborate to promote local businesses. By connecting local consumers to global retailers enjoying enormous economies of scale, the internet has generally worked to the disadvantage of local businesses. Some local businesses have responded to such pressures, however, by developing successful web-based means of building relationships with local consumers, appealing to customers who value local commerce and communities.