Clarington Opinion Panel

Topic 2: “How *Clarington* will your holiday season be?”

December 2009

Produced by:

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Clarington Opinion Panel

December 2009 Topic
How Clarington will your holiday season be?

Background:

The Clarington Opinion Panel topic for December 2009 focused on our panelist's thoughts on their gift buying and shopping experience during this holiday season. The five question online survey was distributed to panelists (345 Clarington residents) on Monday December 14th and access to the survey remained open until Saturday December 19th. A reminder email was sent out to all panel members on Thursday December 17th. As a way to encourage participation in this month's topic, participants could enter into a draw for one of two $50 gift certificates from *Romancing the Home* and *Gathering*.

Collis & Reed Research has lent its services free of charge to create and administer The Clarington Opinion Panel. As a community initiative, it is designed to help draw public attention and awareness to local issues that directly affect residents and encourage debate and discussion on ways we can enhance our community.

To become a Clarington Opinion Panelist and take part the monthly surveys, sign up at: www.collis-reed.com/signup

Survey Results

Number of respondents: 109
Number of people sent request to participate in this survey: 345
Response rate: 32%

Will you be spending more, less or the same amount on gifts during the holiday season as compared to last year?

Response	Percentage (frequency)
Less	38% (41)
Same	52% (57)
More	10% (11)

What proportion of your holiday shopping is done at independent retailers in Clarington?

Response	Percentage (frequency)
None	16% (17)
Up to 20%	41% (44)
21 to 50%	22% (23)
51 to 80%	10% (11)
Over 80%	10% (11)
All	1% (1)

What encourages you to shop at local independent stores?

Response	Percentage* (frequency)
Help the local economy	34% (37)
Can purchase unique items	33% (36)
Good/friendly service	27% (29)
Convenient	11% (12)
Good prices	8% (9)
Good selection/variety	7% (8)
Opportunity to buy locally made/Canadian made items	4% (4)

**Due to a variety of comments per response, percentages do not sum to 100%*

Notable Comments:

- A well-established local economy is imperative to the success of a community and the general happiness of its citizens. It decentralizes the flow of currency (as opposed to big-box economy models), therefore preventing stagnant money.
- Most of these stores sell high quality products that are competitively priced and are complemented with knowledgeable staff to serve you. These stores would thrive if people in and outside of our community actually knew and respected them. Instead the emphasis is placed on *shop local* which sends the message that you're doing a charitable act because these stores cannot compete on their own merit. Though well intended, this is absolutely the wrong message that needs to be communicated.
- Most independent stores offer great customer service, in most cases they will go the extra mile to assist, and get product if it is not readily available.*Most people have the misconception that independents have higher prices, and this is not true. Some independent stores belong to large buying groups, and can compete with the "big box" mind set, because they can use their volume store front locations across Canada by making their purchases as one big corporation.*The people who usually operate the stores are the owners, you can sort of deal with the "boss".*A lot of independent stores give back to the communities through their various sponsorships of teams and social functions etc.

What discourages you from shopping at local independent stores?

Response	Percentage* (frequency)
Limited selection	43% (47)
Higher prices	27% (29)
Inconvenient parking	19% (21)
Limited store hours	14% (15)
Accessibility challenges	12% (13)
Unfriendly staff	6% (7)

**Due to a variety of comments per response, percentages do not sum to 100%*

Notable Comments:

- 1. Sometimes not good selection 2. Sometimes the store owners make me feel like I am intruding 3. Often closed when I like to shop, like on Sunday afternoon
- I am a one-stop shopper- not convenient for me.
- No parking.*Too much traffic.*High snow piles on the edge of the roads.*Prices are too high on things I could get cheaper elsewhere.

What kinds of charitable/volunteer activities are you and/or your family planning in the coming months to help make our community a better place for all?

- 87% of participants indicate they donate to charities and/or volunteer in their community
    - 55% donate to charities
    - 53% are involved in volunteer activities

Of those who are involved in volunteer activities:

Response	Percentage* (frequency)
Volunteer for community agencies/organizations	29% (17)
Work with young people	26% (15)
Volunteer at religious places of worship	24% (14)
Serve on community committees	22% (13)
Members of service clubs	16% (9)
Assist the homeless/people in need	14% (8)
Assist seniors	14% (8)

**Due to a variety of comments per response, percentages do not sum to 100%*

Summary and Concluding Remarks:

The Clarington Opinion Panel topic for December 2009 focused on our panelist's thoughts on their gift buying and shopping experience during this holiday season. The five question online survey was distributed to panelists (345 residents of Clarington) on Monday December 14th and access to the survey remained open until Saturday December 19th. One hundred and nine panelists took part in this survey (32% of all panel members).

<u>Holiday Spending:</u>

Despite the fact that there are indications that the economy is beginning to show signs of improving, it appears that people are demonstrating restraint this holiday season. Slightly over half of the participants responded that they would be spending approximately the same amount as last year, while

38% reported they will be spending less. Only 10% answered that they would be spending more this season.

Gift Shopping In Clarington:

Panelists were asked what proportion of their gift buying is done at local independent retailers. Most frequently participants indicated they do up to 20% of their gift shopping at local independent stores. 80% of respondents indicate they do less than half of their shopping at these stores.

The main reasons people choose to shop at local independent stores is that it has a positive effect on the local economy, it is possible to purchase unique items and these stores provide good service and a friendly atmosphere.

The issues panelists identify as reasons that discourage people from shopping at these stores include, limited selection, higher prices and inconvenient parking.

Integrating these survey results highlights a possible approach for future promotional strategies. It is clear that the sale of unique items combined with personalized service is an important selling feature for many local stores. This can be inhibited by a perception of time pressure when shopping and respondents did not feel that they would be as successful finding what they are looking for. As such, people are opting to shop at malls and big box stores to enhance their chances for success.

Promotional materials need to provide people with a clear indication of the types of unique items they can purchase and, in addition, communicate the superior quality of these products, the competitive pricing and the personal shopping experience they can expect during their visits.

A Caring Community

The holiday season is also a time where people often try to do good for others. 87% percent of respondents indicated that they donate to charities and/or volunteer in their community (55% donate to charities, 53% are involved in volunteer activities).