

Small Business, Big Impact: How WDT Elevates Local Flavor in Campus Culture

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Small businesses curate a unique user experience that aligns with and enhances the campus culture where they are located.

Small businesses comprise 99.9% of all U.S. businesses, according to the Small Business Administration. Moreover, on a college campus, they serve as the backbone of not only the American economy but college life.

86% of U.S. adults believe that small businesses positively impact the current state of the country. These establishments receive the highest praise among other establishments ranking higher than churches, a recent Pew Research Center Research showed.

They create local jobs for students and offer goods you couldn't find anywhere else. Located on State Street the heart of UW-Madison, you'll find the Wisconsin Design Team (WDT). This small-owned business embodies the spirit of UW-Madison. WDT serves as a vibrant hub where students and locals can have a piece of Madison to call their own. They are proactive in promoting their presence to both loyal and potential customers through advertising efforts.

Madelyn Lawrence is a senior at UW-Madison and helps manage the store. She recalls how the idea for this business started with three alums.

"There's three guys that started it, Josh, Briar and Sam," Madelyn said, "They are all from Wisconsin and wanted to have some sort of, Midwest niche-type brand because there is a gap in the market, in terms of apparel for the university and students that isn't just from the bookstore."

Not only has this small business provided her with the opportunity to be a student and work, but she has also experienced the heart of what small businesses like these bring to the community. The WDT is always looking for more exposure to bring in new customers. Online platforms such as Instagram and their website help bring up sales.

"It definitely helps us get noticed outside of Wisconsin. And that's really great. I'd say that's probably the biggest benefit, is that people can order from wherever they are." Madelyn said, "It's easier from our perspective because you don't have the physical stuff in store like having tracking inventory and stuff like that."

Although interaction online has driven up sales for the WDT, having in-store customers is unmatched.

"I think that if we didn't have a store obviously, we would never have had the opportunity to get to know these people but also I think it's great to have a storefront for things like the farmer's market," Madelyn said, "You would never be able to do that online."

The WDT continues to expand its presence both in-store and online, catering to its community of past, present, and future badgers.

Small-owned businesses might not always be as visible or known about. That's why advertising is key to receiving exposure. Shops like the WDT rely on other platforms to get the word out that they exist within the convenience of the student's proximity.

"That gives kind of a platform for small businesses that they wouldn't have otherwise and kind of gives them the reach to students that they might not have or might not know how to have right now," Madelyn said.