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Media contact: Cinda Baxter, (612) 435-0423
press_inquiries@the350project.net

The 3/50 Project Goes Viral

Small business owners unite behind a simple concept, creating a nationwide wildfire

Minneapolis, MN, April 6, 2009 — What began as an off-the-cuff blog comment may well be one of the fastest spreading promotions in small business history.

Three weeks ago, retail consultant and blogger, Cinda Baxter, tossed out a suggestion that consumers actively support three locally owned businesses, then asked that they commit \$50 per month to them. “Let’s call it the 3/50 Project,” she quipped, before hitting the send key and filing the idea away.

A few days later, the idea bubbled up again, this time in the form of a free flyer business owners could download, print, then hand their customer while thanking them for patronizing their establishments.

A week after that, a 2-page website went live, “to control the amount of email I was receiving, asking what the next step was,” according to Baxter. “There really wasn’t a lot of forward planning involved...yet.” In its first 24 hours, the miniscule site had attracted the attention of 350 visitors, according to Google Analytics.

Based on the interest, she spent two days creating a full-blown, multi-page site. One week after it went live, the number of “absolute unique visitors” hitting the350project.net had ballooned to more than 7,500. “8,600-plus if you count repeat visits,” reports the Project’s founder. “When Twitter and Facebook users found us, well...it was a done deal. We went viral.”

The movement’s success is attributed to the simplicity of the message, and the form in which it’s delivered. While most Buy Local campaigns rely on terminology about “local living economies” and “sustainable micro-economics,” The 3/50 Project answers questions consumers are likely to ask in the language they speak at the dinner table: What’s it going to cost, and how will this help?

This plain English approach appears to have worked, given the passion with which both business owners and consumers have embraced it. Baxter explains “There’s no telling how many people out there are actively behind this. The fire began to spread early on when business owners started emailing the flyer to everyone they knew.”

Thus far, several hundred supporters have registered with the Project, but she adds “It’s not inconceivable that for every supporter we know about there are ten or fifteen more.”

About The 3/50 Project:

Created to build loyalty and increased revenue for independent, locally owned businesses, The 3/50 project relies on a simple message: “Pick 3. Spend 50. Save your local economy.”

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- Pick three locally owned businesses you'd hate to see disappear, then return to them.
- Spend \$50 per month in locally owned businesses. If half the employed U.S. population did so, it would generate more than \$42.6 billion in revenue.
- For every \$100 spent in locally owned businesses, \$68 returns to the local community. When spent in a big box, chain, or franchise, \$43 remains. Purchases made online return nothing.

Supporters have access to free materials that publicize the message, including a downloadable flyer that can be printed on any color printer, then handed to customers while thanking them for their patronage. Additional items include a window banner, a countertop sign, member badges for websites, graphics for newsletters and blogs, a movie screen panel for theaters, and window clings bearing The 3/50 Project logo, donated by The Chicago Market—one of the movement's most proactive fans.

The 3/50 Project can be found online at <http://www.the350project.net>

About Cinda Baxter:

Cinda Baxter understands retail from the inside out. Recipient of two national Retailer Excellence Awards and frequent press coverage ranging from Minnesota Monthly to Modern Bride, she now “pays it forward” to retailers and vendors through her consulting company Always Upward, as a Contributing Editor for Gifts and Decorative Accessories Magazine, and as founder of The 3/50 Project.

Widely recognized as an expert in the gift and stationery industry, Cinda's resumé includes seats on distinguished boards: AmericasMart Atlanta, the National Stationery Show, Retailer Networks Incorporated, and the Gift and Home Trade Association (GHTA), where she also served on the Board of Directors. Her most recent appointment to the Gift for Life Board of Directors is of particular note. She's been a featured speaker at numerous trade shows, including the Hong Kong Gift and Premium Show, the New York International Gift Show, the Los Angeles Gift Show, and the National Stationery Show—and at several regional marts, including Dallas, Chicago, Seattle, and Boston.

As founder of acclaimed online communities RetailSpeaks (independent gift and stationery retailers) and Brilliant Ink (professional stationers dedicated to original design), Cinda is considered a pioneer of social networking in the retail industry—a reflection of her passion to help community based business survive and thrive for years to come.

Graphics

Available by request; contact press_inquiries@the350project.net

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