

**Whole Foods Magazine
December 2018 – Tip of the Month**

BRINGING SALES HOME WITH “BUY LOCAL”

(Part I of a series exploring the buy-local movement)

By Jay Jacobowitz

As a small, independent natural products retailer, there's a lot you can't do. You can't carry the broad assortment of natural and organic perishable foods your competitors do. You can't offer 2-hour delivery, and you can't compete on price, to name a few.

What you can do—and what every health and natural food store owner has done for nearly a century—is educate customers about nutrition and health. We are in the education business. And with new forms of competition attracting the next generation of consumers away from our stores, our education mission just got larger and more urgent.

To stay relevant—and in business—today we must educate consumers not only about nutrition, but about economics. The “Buy Local” movement began as a response to so-called “big-box” and “category killer” stores that emerged in the 1980s, knocking off small, local retailers with their superior buying power.

Because the millennial, and even younger Gen Z generations are interested in fairness and are extremely curious about how and where the products they buy are made, they are naturally open to the idea that spending their money with big national chains drains resources from the local economy.

One of the pioneers of the Buy Local movement is also a pioneer of the natural products industry: Michael Kanter, co-owner and founder in 1974, along with his wife Elizabeth Stagl, of Cambridge Naturals, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Michael launched a buy-local effort in Cambridge over a decade ago. Today, Cambridge Naturals enjoys robust sales, even surrounded by more supernatural and conventional competition than perhaps anywhere else in the country. At least some of this success comes from educating Cambridge residents about the benefits of buying local. Here are excerpts from my conversation with Michael.

Jay Jacobowitz: What is the first thing an independent retailer should do to start a Buy Local movement in their community?

Michael Kanter: Educate themselves on why it is important to their community and their own business; that buying local is the first, significant step in promoting and building strong local communities. We can't always do things that effect big changes nationally, but we can affect our local communities.

JJ: What are some of the first steps to take?

MK: Finding and aligning with other locally owned businesses to create a loose network of likeminded entrepreneurs. Not everyone needs to be heavily involved all the time, but you do need one or two “Pied Pipers” who are passionate and who can motivate people.

JJ: What are some of the lessons learned?

MK: To make the distinction between spending money locally with locally owned businesses, and not national chains that happen to be located locally. To redirect customers' thinking that you are a benefit to your local community, and to local non-profits, for example, where the national chains are not.

There is much more to my interview with Michael, and we'll hear from other voices around the country in the next installment. Please email editor@wfcinc.com with any of your experiences with buy-local in your community. **JJ**