

Op-ed: Helping small businesses bridge the digital advertising divide

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Op-ed: How the city is helping small businesses bridge the digital advertising divide



Benny Polatseck/Mayoral Photography Office

New York City is home to nearly 200,000 small businesses — a record in our city's history. Locally-operated storefronts line our streets in every neighborhood of every borough. From the corner bodega to the coffee shop next door, or the dry cleaner down the street, these small businesses offer so much more to our city: they are job creators, culture keepers, and engines of local innovation.

Small businesses are also the foundation of New York City's diverse economy. Annually, they generate approximately \$250 billion in direct economic impact and employ about 1 million workers.

As commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services, every day I have the pleasure of meeting the owners of these neighborhood institutions. I get to hear their stories, their concerns, their needs, and at the top of the list is a question: in today's hyper-digital economy, where visibility is everything, how can my small business compete?

They can take advantage of LinkNYC, an advertising platform which operates more than 2,200 LinkNYC kiosks across New York City. While traditional advertising remains costly and out of reach for many entrepreneurs — especially those based in historically underserved neighborhoods — LinkNYC kiosks level the playing field, offering a free option — [LinkLocal](#) — for neighborhood small businesses to get the exposure they need to grow and expand.

In 2024 alone, LinkNYC's LinkLocal program delivered more than \$4 million in free, high-visibility advertising to over 1,300 small businesses and community-based organizations. Since 2017, LinkLocal ads have been seen nearly 800 million times across New York City — comparable to an ad campaign running on a Times Square jumbotron for 3.5 years. For many entrepreneurs, LinkNYC is the most impactful and affordable marketing tool they've ever had.

LinkNYC kiosks also offer free and secure Wi-Fi, local wayfinding, and charging ports, expanding access to the digital tools New Yorkers need.

Entrepreneurs in some of our most vulnerable communities rely on mobile devices and broadband to run their businesses, manage orders, and accept payments. Digital resources are more than conveniences — they're essential tools for a successful business. Technology can either widen the gap or close it. We're choosing the latter.

At SBS, we've seen firsthand how new technology and partnerships with organizations like LinkNYC can unlock opportunity. In 2023, we partnered with Mastercard's Center for Inclusive Growth and Goldman Sachs to launch the [NYC Small Business Opportunity Fund](#), which was the largest public-private partnership targeting small businesses in New York City history.

We also partnered with Next Street to launch the [NYC Funds Finder](#) online marketplace, which connects entrepreneurs and small businesses with public and private financial assistance, grants, and loans. The private sector plays a critical and complementary role in SBS's delivery of resources and services to small businesses, and together we can scale solutions and create blueprints for successful collaboration models nationwide.

We work with dozens of nonprofits and other small businesses to hold monthly trainings, webinars, and digital marketing workshops. And of course, we work closely with LinkNYC to offer free, effective advertising for community-based small businesses. We must keep building bridges between small businesses and the digital infrastructure they need to sustain and scale growth.

Technology-driven solutions like LinkNYC's kiosks, Link5G smart poles, and LinkLocal program highlight how cutting-edge digital infrastructure can support New York City's small businesses. But maintaining this progress requires continued investment and innovation. That's why SBS is focused on building new partnerships to expand digital access, boost visibility, and empower entrepreneurs — helping create a more resilient and inclusive small business ecosystem for all New Yorkers.

This Small Business Month, SBS wants New Yorkers and the world to know: New York City is the best place to run your business.