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Marc Willson has to say about remaining relevant to consumers in an era when online orders are replacing storefronts.

Jan. 14, 2013

People who own and operate small businesses in small towns may want to hear what Marc Willson has to say about remaining relevant to consumers in an era when online orders are replacing storefronts.

“I tell shop owners they have become the brand. I can get anything I want online, so I go someplace because I like the store or the owner or the employees,” Willson said Monday. “The goal should be to have the customer leave saying it was the best experience they could have and they can't wait to tell their friends about it.”

Willson will offer his insights and guide small-business owners and managers toward affordable resources and strategies during a series of workshops across Kentucky, including stops in Morehead and Grayson. Reflecting the different needs of different areas, the Kentucky Small Business Development Center's Small Town Merchant Program will bring customized retail and restaurant business audit services to shop owners in several smaller cities. The special business audits will assess everything from curb-size appeal, merchandising and pricing structure to long-term planning.

Willson said he will speak about the impact of the 2008 recession “and consumer habits as we crawl out of it.” Willson's presentation will also guide businesses toward low-cost strategies, including the use of social media. Ultimately, Willson said his advice boils down to “Get found and be open.”

The program will be conducted in two-hour sessions featuring Willson and his “staying relevant to a changed customer” presentation. Following each session,

several participants will be chosen to receive a special, “at-their-business audit” by

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“I worked closely with Pat Collier of the Grayson Area Chamber of Commerce to plan and coordinate the Jan. 16 Small Town Merchant Program. Although the event will take place in Grayson, we believe every small- town business owner can benefit from the seminar, regardless of their location.”

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