

Future of independent stationery shops - Survive or not?

Believe it or not, independent stationery shops are a part of our childhood memories. Walking through narrow pathways, picking a beautiful notebook among many others, staring at attractive toys, and buying the latest game cards – all of these played an irreplaceable role in our childhood. Unfortunately, these memories are fading and may no longer be familiar to the younger generation as more and more small independent stationery shops have gone out of business in recent years.

The continuous decline in the number of small independent stationery shops in Hong Kong can be attributed to several reasons, with the major one being the skyrocketing rent. In previous times, we could always find small stationery shops everywhere, but nowadays it seems like we can only find them near old public housing estates, such as in Sham Shui Po and Kwai Tsing. Unlike other chained stationery stores owned by large enterprises, which have abundant capital to afford the high rents and run the business, these more independent stationery shops are usually family-owned and have limited capital. Hence, the drastic surge in the rent has become a huge challenge to their survival. They have no choice but to move to more remote places where the rent is relatively low or to close down.

Not only are small stationery shops facing high rent problems, but they are also facing strong competition from chain stores opened by enterprises, such as Wonderland Superstore. These enterprises usually collaborate with many famous stationery brands, such as Zebra, Kokuyo, and Pentel. They are offered a stable supply of goods at lower prices due to bulk purchase. These popular brands release new products every season, and some are even limited editions that become viral trends among teenagers and stationery lovers. However, it is unlikely for small, independent stationery shops to be able to collaborate with famous stationery brands. Furthermore, the owners of tiny stationery shops must take sales into account due to their limited capital, making it nearly impossible for them to purchase the huge diversity of latest products. As a result, these small, independent stationery shops are labeled as outdated and become less attractive to consumers.

Apart from enterprises, online stores are also big competitors thanks to globalization. Online shopping and online payment have become prevalent, and the rise of online stores like Amazon and Rakuten offer various options to people. With just a few simple clicks on your mouse, consumers can find and purchase different goods from all over the world. Moreover, online stores offer discounts regularly, which attract plenty more customers, for instance, Black Friday sales and free delivery. Many consumers prefer shopping online to shopping in a stationery shop because it is much more convenient and timesaving. Since shopping online has many benefits, it is no wonder why the number of small independent stationery shops has fallen.

Under the aforementioned circumstances, the future of small independent stationery shops is gloomy. Although the owners can consider moving to a place with lower rent to save costs, it is not a long-term solution. They must find a way to increase their incomes. In light of the well-liked trend of online shopping, perhaps they can try to run an online business and promote themselves on social media like Instagram and Facebook to attract potential customers. But still, it may not help a lot as many enterprises have been doing the same thing. What is crucial to the survival of local independent stationery shops is support from the public and subsidies from the government. If none of us makes a move, it would not be an overstatement to say that small, independent stationery shops will go extinct in the near future.