Matt Wagner:

Welcome to the Main Street Business Insights Podcast. I'm your host, Matt Wagner, chief program officer at Main Street America, a nonprofit leading a collaborative movement dedicated to strengthening communities through place-based economic development and community preservation. Each week, join me as I travel the country and take a deep dive into the personal journeys of downtown and neighborhood entrepreneurs, the stories that far too often go unnoticed and unheard. Whether you're a small business owner who wants to learn from your peers or community leader looking to better support your local business base, Main Street Business Insights is here to provide you with the tools, strategies, and personal stories to help you and all of your mainstreet businesses thrive. So subscribe now and tune in every Wednesday to get inspired by the individuals driving our communities forward.

Welcome everyone to another episode of the Main Street Business Insights Podcast. So this week's episode finds me still in my home studio, which is a real bummer, especially since my guest is in Adelaide, South Australia, which not only has great mainstreets, but frankly some of the best vineyards around. And trust me, I've tasted them.

But enough of that. Despite my regrets for not being there in person to talk to our guests, it's so wonderful in this episode that we're going to be able to explore mainstreet and small business ownership really from an international perspective with my friend and colleague, David West, principal consultant, Premier Retail Marketing, a leading expert and author on commercial district management, and really one of the founders behind Australia's mainstreet movement.

Now, before we go into this, a little bit of background. David and I got introduced really a few years back when he was hosting one of the first conferences in mainstreet in South Australia, and I was honored to be an invitee and go out and talk about our mainstreet work here in the US. And not only was David a wonderful and gracious host, and touring all around, but has been really a foundational part of amazing efforts to support commercial district management and revitalization throughout not only South Australia, but really the world. And I'll get into that in a sec.

So we have a lot to explore on this week's episode and our first ever international podcast episode to learn more about perhaps similarities and differences in our work, and that of small businesses between our two mainstreet efforts. So welcome to the podcast, David. So good to have you here.

David West:

Thank you very much, Matt. Great to be here.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, and David's got a great background. I could use better, but David's much more professional than I am. You are in my eyes, one of the originators in the mainstreet management movement, with more than 30 years of experience in analyzing and managing and marketing mainstreets and shopping centers in the beautiful city of Adelaide, which just a tourism plug if you're going to go to Australia, Sydney great, Melbourne great, but go to Adelaide. As well as being one of the author of Mainstreet Management Successful Retail Strategies. And we're going to put a plug in the show notes for everyone. Get the book. It's great. Fantastic.

But we always like to start, David, the show really with folks just telling us about their journey, and you can relate so well to mainstreet directors and commercial district revitalization directors here in the US. Tell us a little bit about what it was like for you.

David West:

Thank you, Matt. I think in Australia the mainstreet movement sort of had two series. They were sort of going back to the '80s when they were very active and doing a lot of things. And then I think it went a little bit quiet, but then Mainstreet Australia came through and started to revitalize things and I made sure that I tapped in with Mainstreet Australia after I got involved.

But really my background was in the shopping center industry and managing large Westfield shopping centers. And after I've been with them for around 10 years and knowing how they run the centers very detailed, and retailers, details is so important. You've got to present yourself to the customer and you've got to make sure that the welcome mat is out every morning and you're welcoming those customers.

So I moved to Rundle Mall, which is a pedestrian precinct, pedestrian only precinct and in CBD had around 25 million customers. And of course with 25 million customers, things are changing all the time and that's 25 million a year, changing all the time.

And so I knew that I had to have some sort of management control and looking at the details, so how do you make sure that the customer has a great experience when they come? And so that sort of got me involved in from what I know about shopping centers in detail, and how to look after a customer space, how do I take that to a mainstreet or a pedestrian area, like Rundle Mall. And that really got me started, and I certainly was looking at Main Street America as a resource and also the Association of Town Centre Management back then. And I was looking at the language that you use, and I was really impressed with looking at the organization and management part. And that's really been my passion.

Matt Wagner:

It's fascinating. One of the big things that I had to learn in our first meetings was something a little bit about language that we use. So when you say mall, I think instantly in America, we think of these big huge shopping centers, enclosed malls, and not necessarily a mainstreet in terms of it doesn't have maybe auto traffic or whatever. Is that the case in Australia, how people frame the language of malls?

David West:

Yeah, I mean I think if we say pedestrian-only mall, we generally talk about shopping centers as being shopping centers and pedestrian malls or a mall would be an outdoor mall. The Rundle Mall like 500 meters long, but it has 1,000 businesses in the precinct and it has department stores, five department stores, and lots of little specialties and arcades.

So it's really unique and it's right in the middle of the CBD. So you have a lot of university students, you have your city workers, you have a lot of tourists and visitors. Because the hotels are so close, it's a really busy hub of the city.

Matt Wagner:

The interesting thing is, I was able to walk through there, is that the scale is very much like a mainstreet scale. It's not a bunch of, even though there are certainly taller buildings in Adelaide, it truly fits a scale of what we think about mainstreet here in the US.

David West:

I think the first one that I linked in to try and find the similarities was Santa Monica was Third Street Promenade. And looking at how that's longer, of course that's longer than Rundle Mall. But the make-up and the scale is really magnificent, what they've done there.

And I was starting to try and pitch some of the comparisons with Rundle Mall and Adelaide and saying, now what could we do that could be the same or could improve Rundle Mall by using some of these methods? So that was one of my first entry points.

Matt Wagner:

Amongst many. So people may not be aware or be surprised that indeed, there's been a long-standing mainstreet movement throughout Australia and certainly obviously South Australia. I wonder if you could speak to those efforts, and where do you see mainstreet going as a network and a movement in Australia?

David West:

I think a lot of it has been based in Victoria, because Victoria has a population of around just under 5 million in Melbourne, and they've got a lot of mainstreets over there and I think that's been one of the basis of where things started because they had a commercial business group that we're looking after their mainstreets and then they converted back in 2007, they converted over to Mainstreet Australia.

And I'd always been a member of their group and we talked about what could we do something in the other states across Australia and where could we start? And they said, "Well, why don't we hold a Mainstreet Australia, like a national conference in Adelaide and then see if we can get enough interest from different people to come along and say, 'Okay, this is what it looks like and here's what we can learn and could we start something here?'"

So in 2011 we actually held a conference in Adelaide in the National Wine Centre and that started things, that actually brought people together. And from that we actually founded the group in late 2011. And then since then we've continued on with conferences and awards programs from that basis.

Matt Wagner:

Putting out a lot of great content. If you ever want to connect and see more of what's happening, they are on LinkedIn and you can actually follow a lot of the work that's happening in South Australia. So a little plug there for the team and you can also follow David of course.

David West:

Thank you. Yeah, I think I was going to say one thing that we try to do though is make sure that we're focusing on the mainstreets in the CBD but also in the suburbs and also in the country, making sure that they're included.

Matt Wagner:

Exactly. Could you tell us a little bit about how mainstreets are set up in South Australia? I wouldn't say we've got a formula here by any means in the US, but largely a lot of nonprofits, and they have boards and management. Could you tell us a little bit about how they're set up and the kind of programming that they would do?

David West:

A lot of them are set up using with council, the local councils and municipalities, you need them to be supporting generally the mainstreet to get programs running, and they sort of vary in their life cycles as to how they've progressed over time. And some have been really, really active, and the councils really got involved and put a lot of commitment into it and funding.

Others have sort of been going along with the property owners and the businesses trying to work at getting programs together and some are very successful and some of them are still working quite hard at it. And so there's various different models around that go all the way from committees of council which are within the council structure to subsidiaries that start to release a little bit of ownership and get the businesses involved. And then there's business associations, so they're fairly independent.

But some of them have funding and some don't. And I think the basis is making sure that you've got some good resources there so that they can deliver programs that they're talking about, because otherwise I think it gets a bit frustrating when they would love to do things and they're just not enough funding to actually deliver.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, I meant the same exists everywhere. Having enough funding to have the capacity to deliver the service, sort of like the chicken or the egg sometimes. I wonder in terms of how those programs are viewed by the municipality, by consumers, are they doing more promotional and marketing activities? Do you feel like they're viewed as economic developers or economic development groups spurring and supporting small business development, or has any of that positioning sort of shifted over the years in your mind?

David West:

Yeah, I think from an economic development point of view, that's really how the councils can link in, because some of them don't actually have a large department to just look after economic development. So they might have one person trying to link up and be the link person into council, but generally it's based like that. But marketing is a very important part of it I think, and they're trying to attract more customers. Because we have a very active shopping center market over here that has grown very good at attracting customers, very good at marketing themselves and promoting themselves. And to be competitive, a lot of the mainstreets need to work together to be able to put an offer out there to the customers to attract them.

So it's really important. They do have a really good, clear, unique brand, and that they have a marketing and promotional program that attracts customers and then through events and activities. So it's got to be organized and you've got to have resources behind it.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. I'm sort of curious David, because you are very well traveled of course. And I'm just wondering from a consumer perspective, are the districts viewed the same way perhaps here? Is there a sense of local identity that's connected to the districts or is there a lot of different shopping opportunities and so it's one of them, but it's not held as close about where we live or where I work or what have you?

David West:

Yeah, I was amazed at the similarities when I traveled America and the UK. And the similarities are definitely there as far as the importance of having a good business mix and having attractive stores, destination stores that people will come to. And of course, the whole shift over time towards hospitality being a really important category, because you need those cafes and outdoor restaurant areas out on the street where people enjoy the alfresco. I think that same across the world, it's definitely a really important part of what a mainstreet is about is having that social connection.

I think now we're moving into another phase, which of course is the importance of the services that we have on the street. A lot of the business mix is made up with different services who like being in their local area and having that great connection to the community, and it's a matter of how do we include those in the program. So it becomes a hospitality, your cafes, all your retail, and also all your service businesses. I think it's an important angle that we can promote.

Matt Wagner:

So certainly as it relates to the diversification of our malls or mainstreets here in the US, that's really key and I think it's one of, in some cases you even have civic institutions where your town hall, or city hall is, or libraries, or what-have-you. And I think that's part of the value add about coming to our districts is not like it's just for one thing only. But I'm also wondering, have you seen more uptick or desire around housing, more housing people, living there, sort of 24/7 kinds of districts?

David West:

Yes, I've just released more plans about looking at the importance of having high-rise buildings along the mainstreets. And that's sort of one of the government's plans is actually looking at those arterial roads that are coming into the CBD and making sure that the heights, starting to get more three-story, four-story, five-story along those main arterial roads so that they can increase the density.

And it's become a really important discussion here in Adelaide, particularly in the CBD, because the lord mayor is very keen to see the population in the CBD rise, the residential population rise in the square mile from around 25,000 to working up towards 50,000. And they've been looking lots of different ways to actually, how could that happen? How would they build those buildings, where are they going to build those buildings?

But the other Adelaide CBD population used to be around 50,000 going back in the '50s, in the 1950s. And it's interesting though that the sort of bringing people to Adelaide, there's been quite a move here since Covid particularly. I mean people would see from the busy eastern states of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, very, very busy cities and they were looking towards Adelaide saying, "Well, Adelaide's got a population of around 1.5 million. It looks like the lifestyle looks pretty good there," as you said in your intro it's a lovely lifestyle. And all of a sudden we've had quite a bit of demand of people wanting to come here and the property prices have increased quite dramatically.

Matt Wagner:

Oh yes.

David West:

Because people have said, "Let's head over that way." And it's interesting during Covid because the mainstreets around Adelaide, CBD did very, very well and the vacancy rate dropped by half to around 5%, and that was because people were looking to go local and they had to stay home, so they were out of the CBD.

But we didn't have a lot of lockdowns in Adelaide. We were lucky, but the mainstreets actually reduced their vacancy rate. And the thing now, really the issue now is getting people back into the CBD and getting those city workers back in, the percentage is around 80%. So we are actually doing quite well. Adelaide and Perth are both doing quite well.

Matt Wagner:

In terms of occupancy, David? In terms of commercial office occupancy?

David West:

Yes, office vacancy. And it was, sorry, occupancy, but there's been also a lot of offices have been built in this same period, so there's a lot of shifting going on around the CBD of people moving from B grade up to A grade. And so there's been a bit of a shift and I think we're still going through a stage there. But Adelaide has got quite a few people back.

But the thing has happened is of course same in UK and America I imagine is the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday are the busy three days, and we've become a sort of three-day week and it's changed the dynamics quite dramatically. So we're still working on how to get people to come more consistently, and then getting them to still go out on a Thursday night instead of a Friday night. How do you do that? It's really an interesting challenge.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, there's a lot of transitions happening I think in some of the bigger CBDs across the world in fact because of the changing nature of work that was not only a US or an Australia thing, it was a global phenomenon in many respects. I wonder if you could compare or contrast what you've seen in Adelaide of course. But to your point, there are a number of rural programs emerging. Could you talk a little bit about what small town CBDs or small town mainstreets are like in South Australia and perhaps how they're different from your work? Certainly historically in Adelaide.

David West:

So I've got a bit of work in some of the regional towns, and I think their biggest challenge at the moment is getting their workforce to come back, getting people to go to the regional areas. So you're talking out of the CBD, you're talking two, three hours away into a country region, which may have a mainstreet there with, it still might have around 250, 300 different stores. Different shops, retail hospitality, probably a bit more of a mix of some larger stores like electrical stores and things like that.

But those stores are changing a lot too. There's been a lot of movement around with the cost of doing business, and people setting up, and transport costs, and things like that. But the small regional centers are really trying to get more focus on them to try and help and get some of their workforce back in there to help them, especially the hospitality to get people to come back.

But even in the CBD, and I noticed that in the UK as well and in Canada, it was that getting hospitality workers back after Covid has been a struggle because people have gone elsewhere, and a lot of the owners are back in the businesses working there and trying to attract more staff. It's been quite an issue.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. We had a number of, the highest quit rates in terms of leaving the workforce in the hospitality, food, accommodations sectors of the economy. And I think a lot of that was also there was just shifting in wage levels as well, especially here in the US in logistic positions and that kind of shipping, because everyone was having orders coming to their homes. And so fulfillment warehousing became a really big thing and it was easy to find additional jobs at much higher pay scales.

David West:

Yeah, I think it'll settle down now. It's starting to settle down I think because people are re-looking at where they're going and I think everybody's realized what the issue is and saying, "Okay, we've got to start to deal with this and actually address it."

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. One of the things I wanted to talk about a little bit aside from the mainstreet CBD of compare and contrast, was also on the small business side. And I'm just wondering in a post Covid era where I think we're starting to get some new norms, what's some of the shifting that you've seen in terms of small businesses and how they operate now, perhaps versus how they operated pre-2020?

David West:

I think a lot of them are running quite lean. I think they've really had a look at how they're running the business, and looking at the areas that they can follow through on that will make them money to keep them going. I think they've had to cut very closely. And that's going to be interesting to see how they generate growth. I know that from some of the surveys I've seen that one of the areas that does need increasing is the marketing.

And I think the benefits of the mainstreet marketing together, and forming partnerships, and working in collaboration is really, really important. And I think that's what has got to come in the future is the small business realizing that mainstreets are a great opportunity, great location to set up. But you've got to make sure that you're looking outside the store and you're working with the retailers next door to you and the other businesses, and you can't just operate in isolation.

I think the most successful streets are partnership streets that are working together and I think that's a really important category. Sorry, area that they've got to look at, but also looking at, they're watching their cost savings very closely and making sure that they're keeping their costs down, because cost of living crisis is affecting people here. I know I've heard that in the UK a lot because my daughter lives over there and the same commentary. Cost of power, utilities, running a business is not cheap anymore, and I don't know that it ever was, but looking at how do they reduce those costs so that they run at a really efficient rate is a really important angle to take.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. I mean, I think the real commonality is just this thinning margins for all businesses, costs going up on obviously the expense side. And here in the US, retail's been running at maybe 3% growth, 3.5% growth. But you really have to dive deeper into those numbers, and see that nearly half of that growth was because of e-commerce growth.

So if you're not in the digital or at least in a bricks and clicks kind of game, the brick side of you, you may be slightly flat, especially when you count in inflationary pressures. But I wonder if you have seen as well is with that note of bricks and clicks, there was a Salesforce prediction that came out that was basically if you were a bricks and clicks business, you would grow at 1.5 times the rate of bricks or clicks separate, not having both of them.

And I think in many respects for the first time from a mainstreet perspective that a perceived competitor is actually an opportunity, but you also have to have the digital skill set or the mindset to kind of move in that direction. I wonder if that's been a big push for mainstreets and small businesses in South Australia and where you're familiar in terms of just digital transformation and getting online.

David West:

Yeah, I think it probably hit Victoria more than us. I think Mainstreet Australia did a lot of work there with digital programs, because a lot of the businesses were locked down for quite a long time. They were over 250 days of lockdowns where they were very limited market. That was during the Covid period.

And so there was a lot of programs that were introduced into the mainstreets, but they were really based on a lot of digital work about how to get to a local customers and how to do it really effectively and build up your database, and make sure you're working them really hard.

In South Australia, we're also on the same program of helping the small businesses with their digital, but it's really interesting here in Australia, the digital hasn't quite grown as fast as they were predicting. So obviously there was a really big increase during Covid. It previously was about 10%, it jumped to probably around 15, but it's come back to around 12 and is sitting fairly steady at the moment.

And I think some of the predictions of online growth was going to be in fresh food, and that the supermarkets would really dramatically increase their market share through online. And it hasn't quite moved the same speed that they thought it would. So it's been a little bit controlled and people are being a little bit calm about that, and more reserved about that growth in that area. So it stayed fairly steady on the retail side, but the fresh food I think is there in the future will grow, but I think it's just a lot slower than people were predicting.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, that's fascinating. I would think we're probably about 6 to 7% higher in terms of the e-commerce. But to your very point, the growth has certainly flatted a little bit. It's not certainly the pace that it was in 2020 and 2021 for sure. I mean, I think we've reached some new norm growth across the retail sectors. What about just in terms of technology adoption? It was hard to go through 2024 and it still is, without not seeing an article on artificial intelligence or something along those lines. Certainly, social media continues to be a huge part of the retail and consumer adoption. I'm just wondering how that is in Australia as well.

David West:

Yeah, definitely. I think AI has just been talked about thoroughly. It is on the agenda, and I think the businesses are really, it almost takes you back to when digital and online started to really become prevalent and small businesses realized they had to do something and they're trying to work out now, which one are we going to choose? Are we Twitter, Facebook, what are we going to do here? I think it's sort of come to that again is, what are we going to do with AI? How are we going to include that?

But the thing about the digital is really, really fascinating is that I think originally when it sort of came out, people said, "Well, this should be fairly easy to do. It's fairly cost-efficient and we can just put out a few posts here and there." I don't think they quite realized about how you have to be so efficient at it and you have to be constantly feeding the consumer, because the demand is just huge and they just continuously want more and more information.

And then you've got to balance that you're not overdoing it. It's a really delicate balance of managing your customers and providing them with the latest information at a control speed. And so I think certainly, AI has been right on the agenda and there's been some programs, people talking about it here and saying now how do we include that in our mainstreet programs?

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. I think we're starting to see some greater adoption of AI, especially as it comes to social media because of the ease of just, "Hey, I need X, Y, Z, know on Facebook. Write me something. This is for customers and describe them." I mean if you give it enough prompts, it'll practically save you a couple hours at least in terms of time. So I think it can certainly be advantageous, but I can understand the nerves behind it as well.

David West:

Yes.

Matt Wagner:

As we think about the common bonds, I'm wondering if there's certain things that you feel from a management perception are consistent from all of your travels. I don't want to think of it this as a formula like you need these five things. But I suspect through going so many districts that you visited that there's some commonality about success. And I wonder from your thinking what that includes.

David West:

I think it comes back to the Main Street America program there of having organization as being one of the key cornerstones. And that followed really on from the management of the shopping centers, and managing Rundle Mall, and how I was looking at that angle. But I think that the management and the organization of the mainstreet is absolutely critical. The governance model has to be right. And just recently just here in Adelaide, I just ran a masterclass on governance and we talked about, how do you engage people, how do you get them involved, and how do you make sure the property owners and the businesses are not just saying to council, "You can do it. We are paying our council rates. Just get on with this mainstreet program." They've got to be really involved in the program and engaged in it. And I think the best model I've seen is the business improvement district model.

And back in 2005, I went to Philadelphia and I stayed with Paul Levy for a week over there, and I was just blown away by the detail and how they were looking after the streets, and how they managed the security, and managed the cleaning and their marketing programs. I said, "This has got to be the way." And when I came back to Australia, I sort of continued in promoting this and I think there was a little bit of resistance. I think people sort of how went, "Does this work? What do you mean? Do they manage the whole street? Which part of it and which part don't they manage?" I said, but just the improvements for the customer. That's just what I came back to is just that the customer is the beneficiary of these business improvement districts.

And so recently I was just in Toronto in Canada where they started the first business improvement area back in 1970. And what happened there was that the has said, "Nobody's actually giving us any funds to help us just look after our street. Everybody's distracted by, this area over here needs attention. That needs attention. The government's spending money over here. How do we get something for ourselves?" And they got the businesses and property owners to come together and they raised in the first year about $47,000 and then started a mainstreet beautification program.

And it's a really beautiful street. They've done a lot of work. And of course that was 50 years ago, and they've had to renew the program 10 times for each five years. But what I like about it is that the thing about the business improvement district's approach and the business improvement areas is the vote, because the vote means that people are solidly committed to being in that program, because otherwise it's just gestures and we feel like we'd like to be part of it if it's a good program. Whereas because the bids are organized with legislation behind it, the vote actually carries the mantra of the majority of businesses in the street. And property owners say, "We want to try this program and we are going to try this. We're going to improve this, but we're going to ask you first what you want, and then we're going to deliver and you can measure on us. And then after five years if you don't like it, let's stop the program."

But because they see all the programs they get provided, and it's so organized that I think over 95%, 96% of the UK programs have all been renewed multiple times. Multiple times.

Matt Wagner:

That's an amazing stat.

David West:

And the other thing is too, is that the number of people who vote for the business plan proposal that's put up, often you'll get around 55, 60% of businesses get involved and actually it's a voluntary vote. And you've got them all voting to say, "Let's try this, let's have a crack at this." And I'm absolutely 100% behind business improvement districts. So we've only got, our first one in Australia happened last year, and that was in the waterfront in Sydney. So that was the first one we've ever had. Yes, I was talking a lot but not getting that far. But now we might be starting to get somebody.

Matt Wagner:

It takes a little while sometimes.

David West:

It does take a while for those ideas to get in. But yeah, so the waterfront is up and running in Sydney. And then also, what I like about it is they've started 10 pilot programs. And the pilot programs really demonstrate what the benefits are and then the community can say, and the business community can say, "This is a really good idea, let's keep on doing this. This really works." And it gives them that taste of what it's about.

So I'm really hopeful that those programs that have started in Sydney will then will flow on and across the other states, across Australia. So that's what I'm sort of pushing for because I really believe in it.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, I mean it's a funny model that can work for lots of different places at bigger scale, smaller scale. Certainly here in the US, we've got everything from downtown development authorities, to business improvement districts, and other legislatively enhanced funding tools that many districts utilize, whether it's for infrastructure, in some cases operating. So it can be a great, along with we always talk more about the diversity of the income stream just like in a small business. And it's certainly one of the important ones out there.

David West:

Well, I think it's important to how the partnership comes together, because you look in San Francisco and they've got their tourism business improvement area. And basically what they're doing there is just all the hotels have come together to say, "Here's what we want. We will fund that, and it's in a business plan, and we'll get on with the job," so they can deliver what they're actually working towards. And I think that's where, like you say, they work in industrial areas, they work in a mainstreet, they work in a city center. It's a very versatile model and it really gets gains-

Matt Wagner:

The common theme being ownership and controlling some of your destiny.

David West:

Yep, yep. That's exactly right. Yeah.

Matt Wagner:

David, as we wrap up our discussion, you've been at this for a long time, one of the stewards of mainstreet, not only in Australia, but I like to think globally. And I was wondering what your future is for mainstreet in Australia, and do you see any sort of significant trends or challenges that will shape its development into the future?

David West:

Yeah, I think it's a big opportunity because I think that the shopping centers rely on a lot of their chain stores to be a part of their base of their business mix. And I think if we compare that with a mainstreet, which is looking at independence, and starting up new businesses, and innovation, that's the home of innovators and independence.

And I think we've got to make sure that the movement continues, that mainstreet are the birthplace of small businesses and that we certainly promote them and support them, because they provide that variety. And because they are so closely linked to the community, they're really a key part of where the future is for our society. Really. We need our mainstreets to be there. And so we will keep pushing hard on the different areas of mainstreets to try and help them. And linking in with Main Street America and linking to the different groups in the UK is really important, because we're all facing similar challenges, and we are trying to actually help those small businesses and the mainstreets to keep going.

Matt Wagner:

Well said David, and so thankful to have you on the podcast, and certainly look forward to our future chats together. Thanks for being on the show, David.

David West:

Thank you, Matt. Thanks for the opportunity.

Matt Wagner:

So there you have it. I hope you enjoyed the conversation with David West, principal consultant at Premier Retail Marketing down under in Adelaide, South Australia.

So over the last few years, I've had the opportunity to engage with David in the work of the South Australia Mainstreet. And while we use slightly different words to describe something, for example, shopping carts are called trolleys in Australia and they call a downtown a principal shopping district, much more formal. There are so many cross-learning points relative to both challenges and opportunities. Movements to digital remain both a struggle and also a large growth strategy for most small businesses. And AI represents great potential for cost and time savings as we attempt to harness this new technology adoption.

But while inherently I think we knew this, it's just truly heartwarming to understand the importance that small businesses and communities central business districts have on maintaining and creating quality of place. Not just here in the US, but truly across the globe.

So as always, if you're a business owner, and likewise to my place professional colleagues, I hope this episode has provided plenty of new insights, solutions, and inspiration. And as consumers, please continue to support your local small businesses and of course tell their stories. They're so important to our local and national economies. And most importantly, they provide and promote quality living to the places we all call home.

And don't forget to show your mainstreet pride by checking out our mainstreet swag at shopmainstreet.org. That's going to do it for this week's episode. Please remember to check out our growing library podcast recordings and other related films of the podcast on our Main Street America YouTube channel. Thanks for listening. Please rate and review us. And as always, be sure to subscribe and tell your friends, family, pets, neighbors, and colleagues.

And I just want to close with a special shout out to our friends in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. I had a chance to tour and chat a bit with the marketing coordinator at Kelton Weaver, and was blown away that as part of their business networking and sharing new learning strategy, they share out the podcast to their small business owners. Aside from my immense gratitude, we aren't everywhere to hear firsthand about perhaps the impact or other topics you might have of interest, or even additional feedback that might be helpful in making this the most effective in telling these important stories and sharing critical learnings for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

So please leave a comment, it's really helpful to us. Or feel free to reach out to me directly at mwagner@mainstreet.org. We'd certainly love to hear from you. So until next time, thanks as always for your support.