

Trouble for Big Retailers Could be a Godsend for Churches

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by [Randy Bright](#)



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Who would have ever thought that Amazon would change the way retail is done so much that it could give churches an opportunity to grow?

In a July 11 report, Amazon stated that their sales on that day were “higher than Black Friday or Cyber Monday 2016” and that the event “grew by more than 60 percent compared to the same 30 hours last year.”

Amazon also reported a spike in the number of shoppers signing up for Amazon Prime, indicating that more people signed up that day than on any other day in the company’s history. Consumer Intelligence Research Partners placed the estimate of Prime members at around 80 million, which was 22 million more than one year ago.

No longer just a seller of books, you can now buy nearly anything on Amazon, which prompted one commentator on Fox News to speculate that the Feds will eventually have to come in and bust up the company like they did years ago when AT&T got too large.

The effect on other retailers has been significant, and has been for several years. Over three years ago, an article by Daniel Jennings of OffTheGridNews.com entitled, “Economic Reality: 16 Major Chains Closing More Stores, reported the effect that the economy was having on big box retailers. Staples would close 225 stores by 2015; Radio Shack 1,100; Albertsons 26; Abercrombie & Fitch 220; Barnes & Noble 218; J.C. Penney 33; Toys R Us 100; Sweetbay Supermarkets 50; Loehmann’s – all of their stores; Sears 500; Quiznos “could close many of its 2,100 stores” after filing for bankruptcy; Sbarro pizza 155; Ruby Tuesday 30; Red Lobster, an unknown but significant number; Ralph’s (Kroger) 15; and Safeway 72.

In 2016, CNBC.com reported that Kohl’s would close 18 stores, and that over 100 stores were being closed by other retailers.

Realestatenj.com reported that Walmart had announced closures of 150 locations in January of 2016, and that Sports Authority had gone bankrupt and closed all of its more than 460 stores. It

also reported that Macy's had announced it would close 100 of its department stores, and that there was only small interest in the vacant properties, mainly by "off-price retail and dollar stores".

Time.com reported in April of 2016 that there would be a total of about 2,500 store closures during 2015-2016.

Just last week, weareiowa.com reported that Sears would be closing 8 more locations, that K-Mart would be closing 35, and that Sears had not turned a profit since 2010.

Though the economy has been steadily improving, the closings are still occurring. Granted, these closings are not entirely due to Amazon. The economy and a widely changing demographic in the way people like to shop has caused many retail giants to rethink how they do business. Amazon was apparently the first to recognize this trend, or at least the first that was capable of selling its products without physical locations.

Many, if not most, big box retailers are left with a problem that looms nearly as large as losing their customer base: what to do with 40,000-square-foot buildings that are vacant and costly to maintain and insure while seeking a buyer.

Communities don't like seeing vacant big box stores, especially if they are essentially abandoned by their owners, left to be overgrown with weeds, covered with trash, and a "for lease" sign that becomes faded after years in front of the property.

Municipal government especially don't like seeing them, since vacancies tell prospective employers that if the community is not strong enough to support these stores, perhaps they aren't what their companies need in the communities where they locate.

With this giant inventory of buildings available, churches have a great opportunity to expand their facilities quicker and for less money than if they were to build brand new facilities, and to improve their communities as well.

Big box stores typically have the components needed for a church: large open spaces for a place of assembly to worship, sprinkler systems, large parking lots and sometimes commercial kitchen facilities.

But herein lies the rub – communities often don't want churches to take over these properties because of what it does to the tax base, so churches that do try to do so may find themselves in a difficult legal battle as they seek to obtain re-zonings and building permits, or even community resistance.

This is where creativity comes in, or as President Trump would say, it's the "art of the deal." As the list of closing big box stores grows, there is more incentive than ever for communities to work with churches to take over these properties that will likely never see retail again.

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