

The fall of small independent stationery shops

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HONG KONG - In recent years, there is a decrease in the number of small independent stationery shops in Hong Kong. According to a report of Hong Kong Books and Stationery Industry Association, the number of independent stationery shops in Hong Kong has decreased by 10% in the past 5 years. However, the report showed that there is a dramatic increase in the number of online stationery shops, increasing by 50% in the past 5 years.

Mr Cheng, an owner of an independent stationery shop in Hong Kong, was interviewed. He pointed out the main reason behind the trend. "The rent is rising month by month," he answered. "Small independent stationery shops like ours are struggling to survive under the high rent. Compared to ten years ago, the rent has doubled," he added. When asked if the number of customers has decreased, he admitted, "There are far fewer students buying stationery from my shop."

Lando, a local student, was asked about his habits of buying stationery. "If I need stationery urgently, I will go to small independent stationery shops close to my school or my home." However, he also mentioned that most of the time he would buy stationery online. "It's convenient to buy online, some online stationery shops have good quality, cheap stationery. Although there are extra expenses in delivery, I can buy in large amounts every few months to lower the delivery costs."

Mr Lee, an owner of a small stationery shop, was asked about the range of products available in his stationery shop. "As you can see, most of the products here are basic stationery items

like pens and correction tapes since most of my customers are students,' he said. The limited range of products on offer can be one of the causes affecting his business or even the chance of his shop surviving in this competitive market. 'I don't have many new customers. I remember once there was a group of young girls asking for some fancy stationery items, you know, those memo pads with Japanese cartoon characters or even pop idols on them. I don't sell those,' he said.

Ms Wong, an owner of an online stationery shop, kindly answered our questions about her online shop. "I used to own a small independent stationery shop in North Point, just like many others, my shop couldn't survive under the high rent." "A friend of mine suggested that I could start an online stationery shop, I found a cheap unit in an industrial building, and started my online shop," she said. She also told us about the differences before and after she opened her online stationery shop. "It costs cheaper as the unit is upstairs, I have far more space to stock my products, and now my source of customers is not limited to those living or studying near my shop, they can order from anywhere, anytime."

With easy access to the internet, customers would prefer to buy stationery online at a lower price. Together with the increasing rent, this made small independent stationery shops more prone to closing. However, just like Ms Wong, closing their brick-and-mortar shop isn't the only option, owners of small independent stationery shops can transform their business to an online shop and continue to serve the community.