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## Bigger Bang for Our Bucks

*Real Change! That's the goal. And for social service organizations to walk our talk, we need to be paying more attention to our "value chain" – how we spend the billions that flow through our coffers each year. Here are some ideas and inspiration.*

Don't underestimate the power of your dollar "votes". Little bits add up: Vancouver's Social Purchasing Portal helped channel \$2.5 million of purchasing to benefit Canada's poorest neighbourhood in 2008.

Research from other jurisdictions suggests this type of local spending circulated 7-8 times through different businesses before leaving the community. The cumulative potential benefits for local employment and revenues are so significant a key champion, Business Objects, is helping to develop software systems for tracking the impact.

The new software will help Simon Fraser University quantify the benefit of their \$1 million contract with Out To Lunch catering. (It was pressure from students that helped the University switch caterers based on OTL's policy of employing marginalized people. SFU has since embedded social purchasing into its procurement policies.)

Where is your organization?

If you are like most, you have progressive hiring policies (an important contribution to local communities), but your primary criteria for other purchasing is likely price, mixed with convenience/habit.

Perhaps the strongest factor is the preferences and history of the people who make purchasing decisions. Supplier relationships, like other relationships, develop over time, we favour the familiar, and if it ain't broke, why fix it....

Amar Virk is a strong spokesman for thinking again.

Far from being a side show, purchasing decisions by community organizations large and small can be important levers for achieving mission.

The secret is thinking of the value chain – favouring suppliers who themselves have suppliers that embrace social purchasing, and so on – creating a web of relationships that can shift our culture from

single bottom line, to a triple bottom line.

Think of the choice between a big box store – where profits leave the community -- and a local stationer – where profits stick around.

If you want to stay with Big Box, think of chatting with the store's manager about sourcing its janitorial services from suppliers who employ people with mental illness or developmental disabilities, or asking for assurances that cleaning supplies are locally sourced and environmentally friendly.

Yah right, you say. Like I have time to make that phone call.

Like you have time for all the other things on your to do list.

Organizations make the effort to pursue social purchasing because one or two people champion the cause.

What about inviting a staff or board member to take this on? Good chance there will be someone, or someone who knows someone with a passion for this way of making a difference.

Here are a few ideas for how to get started:

- Be a champion for the social purchasing champion.
- Start with catering, printing, office supplies and cleaning – the easy fruit of social purchasing.
- Continue with social purchasing for construction and renovations, IT, consulting and event and/or meeting space.
- Watch for the [Social Purchasing Portal](#)'s new online resource, launching next month, complete with sample SP policies, RFPs and tracking systems.

*Based on a conversation between [Amar Virk](#), Business Development Coordinator for [Building Opportunities with Business](#), and the Co-op's [Kate Sutherland](#).*