

The Handshake Economy: Survey Finds Handshake Economy Is Still Alive in U.S. & Canada

Advance Funds Network surveyed 3,005 small business owners to uncover the towns and communities where people believe a handshake can still carry real weight.

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, June 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In an era of digital signatures, 20-page contracts, and "just looping in legal," there's a growing sense that something simpler has been lost. Not everywhere, though.



how-many-small-business-owners-still-rely-on-handshake-deals-2026-survey

In pockets of North America, business is still built on reputation, relationships, and the kind of trust that doesn't need a paper trail. [Advance Funds Network](#), a business financing company, wanted to explore where that mindset still holds, surveying 3,005 small business owners to uncover the towns and communities where people believe a handshake can still carry real weight, and whether, in 2026, your word alone is ever enough.

“

The handshake economy has not disappeared; it has just become more selective. Small businesses understand the value of contracts, but they also know that trust is built long before anything is signed.”

Irving Betesh, CRO of Advance Funds Network

Specifically, the survey asked small business owners whether people in their town are still more likely to do business on a verbal agreement or handshake than through written contracts. Based on their responses, these are the top 5 “handshake economies” in America:

#1. Greeneville, Tennessee

Greeneville feels like the kind of place where business relationships still have roots. With its historic downtown, long-running Main Street culture, and small-town setting in

the foothills of East Tennessee, it has the right ingredients for a handshake economy: familiar

faces, repeat customers, and reputations that travel quickly. In a community built around local pride and close business ties, trust can still feel like a practical currency.

#2. Oxford, Mississippi

Oxford may be best known for literature, college life, and Southern charm, but its business culture still revolves around a very old-fashioned idea: people know who they're dealing with. The Square has been the city's cultural and economic hub since Oxford was incorporated in 1837, and that kind of compact, visible downtown helps explain why reputation still matters. In a place where shops, restaurants, alumni, locals, and university life overlap, a good name can carry real weight.

#3. Mountain Home, Arkansas

Mountain Home has the feel of a town where business is still personal. Set in North Central Arkansas, the community leans heavily into values like hard work, local relationships, and looking out for one another, exactly the kind of environment where trust can matter as much as paperwork. Its mix of small businesses, retirees, outdoor tourism, and long-standing local institutions gives it the feel of a place where word-of-mouth still has genuine economic power.

#4. Murray, Kentucky

Murray's result has a believable small-town logic to it: this is a place that actively trades on friendliness, local pride, and repeat relationships. Its visitor bureau even highlights its "Friendliest Small Town in America" recognition, which fits neatly with the idea of a business culture where reputation still does some of the heavy lifting. Add in Murray State University, local events, and a compact community rhythm, and it is easy to see why business owners might feel that trust still travels faster than paperwork here.

#5. Boone, North Carolina

In Boone, the handshake economy likely comes less from old-fashioned formality and more from the town's tight social overlap. It is a mountain college town, home to Appalachian State University, with a downtown that sits at the center of local life, tourism, student energy, and small business traffic. In that kind of setting, people are not just customers or vendors; they are neighbors, alumni, regulars, landlords, guides, artists, and friends-of-friends. That makes reputation unusually visible, and visibility is what gives a handshake its power.

In Canada, the top 5 were:

#1. Dawson Creek, British Columbia

Dawson Creek brings a frontier-town quality to the handshake economy. As the starting point of the Alaska Highway, it has long been associated with movement, logistics, resource work, agriculture, and people who need to rely on one another in practical ways. Business trust here feels less polished and more functional: who can get the job done, who can be reached when needed, and who keeps their word when conditions are not easy. In Dawson Creek, a handshake still carries that northern sense of accountability.

#2. Portage la Prairie, Manitoba

Portage la Prairie's result makes sense for a prairie city where reliability is part of the business culture. Agriculture, food processing, local retail, trades, transportation, and regional services all depend on people who can be counted on over time. This is the kind of place where a good reputation is built through steady follow-through rather than big promises. In Portage la Prairie, the handshake works because trust is practical: people remember who delivered when it mattered.

#3. Summerside, Prince Edward Island

Summerside's handshake economy feels tied to the intimacy of island business life. It is large enough to have its own commercial base, but still connected enough that reputations do not stay private for long. Local retailers, trades, fisheries, tourism, public services, families, and community groups all feed into a culture where people tend to know who follows through. In Summerside, trust has a practical edge: when the business world is close-knit, your word can travel almost as quickly as your work.

#4. Kenora, Ontario

In Kenora, trust is shaped by lake-country realities. Tourism, cottages, boating, trades, Indigenous and long-standing local communities, seasonal businesses, and regional services all operate in a place where people often need reliable contacts quickly. Who fixes the dock, manages the property, runs the shop, handles the job, or comes through during a busy season? Those answers tend to travel by word-of-mouth. Kenora's handshake economy feels less like a ceremony and more like survival by reputation.

#5. Miramichi, New Brunswick

Miramichi's handshake economy feels rooted in a place where community memory still counts. River life, forestry traditions, fishing, local services, family businesses, trades, and deep neighborhood ties all help create a business culture where people tend to know who is dependable. This is not trust as a marketing slogan; it is trust built through years of showing up, helping out, and being known. In Miramichi, your word matters because people are likely to remember whether you kept it.

Douglas Haddad, CXO
Advance Funds Network
+1 888-310-3110

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.