

LOCAL CHAMBER BEST PRACTICES

**Open Forum
2004 AGM**



**The Manitoba Chambers
of Commerce**

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INTRODUCTION:

Dan Overall, MCC Director of Policy: The Best Practices initiative really feeds into our strength - the fact that there are challenges which, regardless of our size, regardless of the money or staff we have, truly confront us all. Every chamber in Manitoba must deal with membership recruitment, membership retention, access to funding, lobbying issues and economic development issues. What we try to do in the Best Practices is share that incredible pool of information and experience.

As you go through the report there may be stuff that you are familiar with, but that's ok, because the purpose of the report is not just to give you new ideas, it is to let you know that there may be someone out there who is trying something similar to what you are doing. Knowing that is useful to you, because you now have the option of contacting them to see what insights they have in relation to that activity.

This year we were fortunate to have access to information from the Canadian Chamber Executives of Canada (CCEC). They are putting together a comprehensive 'Best Idea' Directory'. It is not finalized, but they were kind enough to allow us access to it. We will certainly provide you with notice when it is completed. When it is available it will be for sale, \$100 for members and \$250 for non-members.

Next year what we are looking at doing is moving away from the annual survey and onto more regular communication throughout the year as to what you are doing. As well, we want to access as never before your newsletters and website updates. At the end of the year, the Best Practices Report will catalog the ideas and insights that we gained from those efforts. We certainly recognize that it is unrealistic to expect you fill out a Best Practice Survey every year and that is why we will be moving away from that next year. We may return to using the survey once every three years.

Thanks to all the chambers that responded to this year's survey.

Last year's discussion of Best Practices was one of the most popular parts of the AGM. It will remain a regular feature of our AGMs. Of course, the key to making this a success is you - your participation in discussing and sharing the ideas, experiences and issues that matter to you.

Mission Statements

Dan Overall: To start off the discussion, and to pick up on my indication that the MCC is working on its Mission Statement and hopefully will be unveiling it in the next couple of months, I would like to draw your attention to p. 4. There was an idea from Brandon circa 1991 that suggested chambers should have a mission statement and be 'loud and proud' about it, including prominently displaying it. How many chambers here actually have mission statements and would anyone be willing to give us a sample of what it says?

Grant Nordman, Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce: We actually have it on our business card; we use both sides of our business card. We have both our Mission and our Goals on the back of the business card. The Mission Statement is: “The promotion of entrepreneurship and competitive enterprise in west Winnipeg.” It’s short and sweet and to the point.

The Goals are: “To create opportunities for business and social contact among chamber members; to effectively represent local business interests to government and to provide beneficial programs and services to chamber members.”

Ted Kelly from Falcon/West Hawk Lakes Chamber of Commerce: Ours is very similar except, because of our uniqueness (we’re in a Provincial Park), we have one additional sentence ‘while respecting the environment’. That is a key local issue.

Keeping Track Of New Businesses That Move Into The Community

Dan Overall: Another interesting pattern from this year’s responses was the fact that a lot of chambers have a difficult time becoming aware of new businesses as they move into the community. It’s a very common strategy that local chambers will approach new businesses. Does anyone have a particular system that ensures that they are apprised of any new businesses locating in the community?

Unidentified: Frequent the Main Street local coffee shop.

Unidentified: Our local real estate agent is part of our welcoming committee.

Unidentified: Check with town council for business licenses.

Unidentified: Consult with your local economic development officer.

Cash Calendars

Dan Overall: Another interesting idea came from Oakville. It relates to fundraising and involves a ‘cash calendar’. It is discussed on page seven of the report. They sell the calendar and then there are a series of draws: a weekly draw for \$25, two draws for \$100 and a final draw around Christmas time for \$500.

Not only is a great revenue generator, each year the calendar pictorially features a certain aspect of the community such as a local artist or a nature theme.

Are there any other chambers here that do cash calendars?

Susan Eyolfson, Riverton & District Chamber of Commerce: We don’t do it but our skating rink did a birthday calendar. Most communities actually do one. If you don’t, get

one, because people are very quick to throw money into a calendar that will feature their birthday. They put a town picture in the centre and all the town businesses can advertise around it. I bet you that calendar is in 75% of the houses in town, so your ad is sitting there all the time.

Incentives For Locating Downtown

Dan Overall: On page 10 there is an idea from Rossburn. In conjunction with their town they have actually developed incentives for locating downtown. Is there any chamber here that is involved in a similar incentive program?

Rob Palamar, Russell and District Chamber of Commerce: There is a bit of a rivalry between Rossburn and Russell and they actually got that idea from us. Our chamber has been doing it for about 35 years, although not to the extent of what Rossburn is now doing. Every Fall we have a 'Welcome To Russell' that offers incentives to locate downtown.

It's been an enormous success in terms of attracting people. In the last five years our population has increased whereas a lot of communities have been in decline.

I am new to the community, but I believe most of the businesses that have been attracted by the incentives have stayed and been very successful. The business that I am involved in actually bought a dollar lot and is looking at putting up a brand new quarter-million dollar facility.

Shop Local Initiative

Barb Matthews, Selkirk and District Chamber of Commerce: When we looked at the demographics of our membership we had very few retailers. One of the programs we instated was a 'shop local' program. It increased our membership from the retailers significantly, by more than three or four times. It was a program where we produced a gift certificate in a multitude of denominations and it was basically a cheque, so there was no work for the retailer – and no additional work for me. We lucked out in that our local banks and credit unions made the gift certificates available for purchase from them.

We also made it available to non-members and charged them \$40.00 to cover our printing costs and the minimal advertising that we did.

I think it's been a great success. We sold \$14,000 worth of them since the beginning of November. We find that many of the businesses are very interested in them and are using them for employee rewards.

Multi-Year Memberships

Gord Peters, MCC Board Member: On the issue of membership drives, one of the questions I've always had is I wonder why no one has ever come with a three or five year membership. We sign leases for three to five year leases all the time. I know there is a cost to the chambers in having to go out and resell that membership every year. It seems that you can you price the multi-year membership to take advantage of that while also giving the chamber the benefit of getting that money up-front.

Dan Overall: I don't think any of the chambers here have multi-year memberships. What we can do is see if any other provincial chambers are aware of multi-year memberships and then relay that information to you.

Sharing Information Through The MCC

Ted Kelly from Falcon/West Hawk Lakes Chamber of Commerce: We just went through the incorporation and constitution process, and I've talked to some people here. If someone is a smaller chamber, and they want to see a sample of a smaller chamber's constitution, maybe we could create a library at the MCC and they can be shared. It's a big job and not having to start from square one would be very useful.

Graham Starmer: We have discussed that and I think it is a very positive idea. We have a file on every chamber so it wouldn't be a big deal to put it on the file. It came as a surprise when we looked at the incorporation list to find out the number of chambers that are incorporated that we didn't know.

Dan Overall: There are a couple of aspects to this issue: there are the basic constitution/by-law documents, there are Minutes, and there are newsletters. Various local chambers have suggested that we house/share a variety of these documents. There will be a discussion as to what exactly we should house and or circulate, and it would be helpful if you kept this issue in mind so that you have a preference when you are asked.

Trial Memberships

Grant Nordman, Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce: There are two chamber chat lines that are a tremendous resource. One is American, it's called the 'Chamber Post' and questions are thrown out and chambers from across the U.S. will answer the question. Some issues are totally American, but some are totally generic.

The other one is the Canadian version, which is the CC.

Grant Nordman, Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce: One more idea, we tried something and unfortunately I wasn't at the meeting last year to share it with you folks. We did a membership campaign; we called it 'the Winkler method'. In Winkler it's there

practice to just send an invoice to every business in town and if you want to pay you do and if you don't you are not held as a receivable. It certainly gets everybody's attention and makes sure they get a chance to participate in the association. We put an Assiniboia spin on that and what we did was we made 4,000 businesses free members for six months telling them at the outset that, at the end of the six months, we would send them an invoice for the next calendar year and, if they didn't want the invoice to phone us. Out of those 4,000 we sent out we only got about a hundred phone calls. The net at the end of the exercise was about 70 new members. I don't see why, if you are in a smaller community, that you wouldn't just send all the busses an invoice.

Dan Overall: I think we will wrap it up at this point. If you have a newsletter and you haven't been sending it to the MCC, please do so. If you have an AGM coming up or something you would like highlighted, give us a call and we'll do a story on it. It's a win-win, your chamber and its Board/members get some profile and you are sharing information that may help other chambers, making us stronger as a chamber movement. Thank you.