

**LOCAL CHAMBER  
BEST PRACTICES  
2003 EDITION**



**The Manitoba Chambers  
of Commerce**

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## 1) INTRODUCTION:

If there is an essence to Manitoba's chamber movement, it is the idea of 'strength in numbers'. Whether it is businesses gathering together to make a community stronger, or communities gathering to make our province stronger, the idea is the same, our challenges are similar and we can meet them more effectively by sharing ideas and working together. It is in this spirit that the MCC developed this inaugural edition of 'Local Chamber Best Practices'.

We would like to thank the Local Chambers of Manitoba that answered our survey and provided many of the ideas contained herein. A number of other provincial chambers and chamber organizations also issue some form of Best Practices. In order to be as comprehensive as possible we have included ideas from those publications. In this regard we would particularly like to thank Debbi Nicholson, President and CEO of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, for her kind assistance.

For ease of reference, at the end of each idea we have listed the Chamber that it came from. If the idea emanated from outside Manitoba we included either a '\*', '\*\*' or '\*\*\*' to signify one of the following sources of the information:

- \* 'Programs and Practices 2002', Ontario Chamber of Commerce Executives
- \*\* 'Programs and Practices 2001' Ontario Chamber of Commerce Executives
- \*\*\* 'Best Ideas 1998/1999', Chamber of Commerce Executives of Canada

### **How To Use This Publication:**

Despite its title, there is no guarantee that the ideas contained in here will help your chamber. They are simply 'food for thought'.

There is always a challenge in providing information to local chambers in that different chambers will have different levels of experience/understanding relating to certain issues. Some chambers will consider many of the ideas in here as 'old hat', while others will see them as revelations. There still may be a value to you if you come across an idea that you are already trying. You may wish to call the chambers that are also doing it to see if there are ways that you can improve upon the effectiveness of your activity. Alternatively, you may wish to call to see if there is any advice that you can give them.

If you do come up with any new ideas, or if you did not participate in this year's edition, please feel free to send in your information. You may do so by contacting the MCC office (email: [mbchamber@mbchamber.mb.ca](mailto:mbchamber@mbchamber.mb.ca) or fax: (204) 948-0110) or by participating in the new 'Chamber Chat' feature on the MCC website: [www.mbchamber.mb.ca](http://www.mbchamber.mb.ca).)

## 2) ADMINISTRATION:

**Idea:** A printing company donates envelopes to the Chamber and, in return, the company gets to print their name and contact info on the back of the envelope. The Chamber gets free envelopes and company gets promoted. A variation is a company donates writing pads to the chamber with the company's info on them (West Lincoln, Ontario)\*

**Idea:** Faced with a situation where demand for senior administrators was far outstripping supply, the Chamber established a Municipal Government Succession Planning Task Force to study the circumstances that led to the crisis. Recommendations will cover a plan, the process, short-term contingencies, the new realities, contracting out and leadership training (London, Ontario)\*

**Idea:** Produce a 'Sponsorship Opportunities' sheet. Enables staff/Board to operate from the same page and enables broader sponsorship drives. (Mississauga, Ontario)\*

**Idea:** We have had several Board members leave because of a difference in perception as to what the task as a Board member entails. To address this concern we first advertise an Open House for members that may wish to join the Board. At the Open House we review briefly what the Chamber does, what the responsibility of a Chamber Board and a Chamber Board member is. We outline the time commitment and our selection process for those joining the Board. Only after this is completed will we accept an application form to become a Board member.

Once elected/appointed to the Board, we complete a two-meeting orientation process, assign an existing Board member mentor to each new Board member and provide a reference manual on the Chamber.

As a side benefit to the process, the Board member's attendance is better and they are eager to work, as they know what is expected from them. (Sarnia Lambton, Ontario)

**Idea:** As a method of thanking the chief volunteer of our organization (President/Chairperson) a scrapbook of his/her activities over the term of office is compiled and presented during the Annual General Meeting. Everything from newspaper clippings, copies of correspondence, pictures, business cards, calendar events, artwork etc. is included in the scrapbook. It is a great memento for the chief volunteer, and a healthy reminder of all the good work done by the Board/Chamber over the past year. (Brampton, Ontario)

**Idea:** On all invoices, we've added the line 'Now accepting Visa and MasterCard' for payments. Of course, we've always accepted this form of payment on membership and events dues, but by adding this line to invoices, the level of retention and general payments have increased dramatically. (Brampton, Ontario)\*\*

**Idea:** We host an annual luncheon for our Past Presidents. We invite all living Past Presidents residing in our area. After lunch is served the current President gives a report on what advocacy issues our Chamber is currently working on and how we propose to approach these issues. Then each past President gives a brief verbal report on the issues during their Presidency, how they were approached, and what the results were. They are also given the opportunity to provide input on issues that our Chamber should be addressing and how to approach them. (Fredericton, New Brunswick)\*\*\*

**Idea:** Monthly meetings no longer have recorded minutes. Instead, Status Reports are used.

These Status Reports clearly show each project/issue, its current status, and future steps/deadlines. The column on our right also allows our Board of Directors to immediately see if there is an item for discussion at their next meeting. If Board approval is not needed, the Status Report is simply received and filed. Less discussion; greater time efficiency.

For our Committee Chairs, the Status Report has become their meeting agenda. Each project/issue on the previous month's report is discussed to determine current status. Any items of new business that are discussed are captured on the new Status Report. Sample:

Project/Issue	Status	Upcoming Deadlines	Next Steps	Board Approval Needed?

(Burlington, Ontario)\*\*\*

### 3) MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

#### A) Membership Drives:

**Idea:** We use our Board, teams of 2 Board members are assigned to visit 6 businesses each. (Portage)

**Idea:** Welcome new business in town & invite them to a chamber meeting. (Stonewall)

**Idea:** Full page ad in local paper explaining benefits. (Stonewall)

**Idea:** We sent out 3-month free memberships to all the local businesses that weren't members. (St. Boniface)

**Idea:** 'First 6 Months Free': We offer this to new members so that they essentially get 18 months when they sign up for a year's membership. Then we also spotlight them in our publications and in our meetings. It has been fairly successful (Headingley)

**Idea:** We offer new businesses a 'free' one-year membership, plaque and floral plant (Morris).

**Idea:** Recently, we have been pushing affinity programs more, and that seems to have worked. (Russell)

**Idea:** We engage in a 'Phone Blitz' where we gather our Board and the Membership Committee in shifts for a day to phone potential members. (Brandon)

**Idea:** During slower (for the Chamber) summer months staff visit potential members. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Compile list of perspective members (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** Mail out membership packages, follow up with phone calls and personal contact to new businesses. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** We send out Christmas Cards to potential members. (Birtle)

**Idea:** We hold a Trade Show. (Birtle)

**Idea:** We send out letters regarding the lobbying efforts of MCC. (Birtle)

**Idea:** We hold a 'Home and Garden Show'. (Birtle)

**Idea:** We publish a monthly newsletter in the local paper ('Chamber Chatter') to keep the Chamber in spotlight. (Morris)

**Idea:** 'Leading by Example'. We find that doing things on our own, rather than always waiting for government, attracts members. For example, we have upgraded some facilities. Potential members get a sense that the Chamber is committed and dynamic, and are more likely to join. (Falcon)

**Idea:** We partner with a local 'Executive Welcome Wagon' program to welcome new executives, business owners, managers, to our area. It helps expand our awareness of new arrivals. We complete a letter of welcome and provide a market summary of membership benefits and a small gift from the Chamber. Then our sales director does a follow-up call. (Sarnia Lambton, Ontario)

**Idea:** There are several instances during a year in which a small business wants to join a Chamber but cannot afford to do so. If a Chamber approached several large businesses to put into a 'pooled adoption' program they could probably get enough money to fund 5 to 10 new members in the lower fee categories or even pay half. The businesses that sponsor the program would get their names on a pamphlet and a Judges' panel would be made up of selected individuals from each company. Candidates would be reviewed on how the company can benefit the Chamber. (Windsor, Ontario)\*

**Idea:** Established a mentoring program for first year members, teaming them up with members of longer standing. We also offer new members a coupon book with discount coupons to entice them to take advantage of products. (Burlington, Ontario)\*\*

**Idea:** Use your newsletter to promote volunteers and spotlight companies. Feature company news: personal changes, photos, relocations etc. People like to see their pictures and name in print. Readers want the information too. Always fax the article to the member, just in case they missed it. In addition, have a column answering questions posed by members. (Burlington, Ontario)\*\*

**Idea:** We produce in house a list of our member accommodations in the form of tri-fold 11x17 pamphlet called “Vancouver’s North Shore Accommodations”. Each accommodation has a brief description, their prices as well as a number that plots them on a map copied on the back. We had at least 15 Bed and Breakfast sign on as new members because of this initiative.

We do not charge them to have their listing in the pamphlet, and call it a benefit of membership. Bed and Breakfasts in particular do not have the money to market themselves; this service helps them, and helps us attract new members.

We fax and mail this all over the world to any tourism enquiry. We are thinking of doing the same for our Restaurant members. The list can easily be updated, edited and photocopied if new ones join, or choose not to renew. (North Vancouver, British Columbia)\*\*\*

**Idea:** Over the years, our Chamber has developed an attractive and significant incentive package to attract new members. However, our existing members questioned why there were no incentives in place for those who continued to pay their renewals. Those sentiments spurred us on to creating our ‘Graduated Services/Benefits Plan’.

Simply, it offers different levels of chamber services or products depending on how long a business has been a member. Acknowledging that ‘year 2’ can sometimes be a critical year in membership retention, we enhanced the value of benefits for that year. Similarly, in ‘year 5’ we felt a bigger incentive was warranted.

Sample:

1<sup>st</sup> Year Renewal: 4 gratis After Business passes, 10% discount off price of tickets to Annual Meeting or Business Excellence Awards

2<sup>nd</sup> Year Renewal: 4 gratis After Business passes, 10% discount off price of tickets to Annual Meeting or Business Excellence Awards; \$25 Voucher off Info Session, \$5 Voucher off Golf tournament or Curling Funspeil

3<sup>rd</sup> Year Renewal: Gratis Annual Pass to After Business, \$25 Voucher to used for any of the following: AGM, Info Session; Curling Funspeil Meeting or Business Excellence

Awards; \$25 Voucher off Info Session, \$5 Voucher off Golf tournament or Curling Funspeil, Golf Tournament

4<sup>th</sup> Year Renewal: 4 gratis After Business passes, \$25 Voucher for any session/service/product

5<sup>th</sup> Year Renewal: 4 gratis After Business passes, \$25 Voucher for any session/service/product, gratis booth at After Business (Sudbury, Ontario)\*\*\*

### **B) Networking :**

**Idea:** Curing 'Funspiel' (Portage)

**Idea:** Golf Tournament (Portage) (Headingley)

**Idea:** Entrepreneur of the Year contests and dinner (St Boniface), Annual Dinner & Dance Awards Night (Headingley) Annual Gala Dinner. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Family Fun Day (includes Go-cart Challenge Race at Thunder Rapids Fun Park [discount entry fee], Celebrity Dunk tank. (Headingley)

**Idea:** Lowered membership dues for individuals. (St. Pierre)

**Idea:** Social evenings at local golf course or local hotel. (Russell)

**Idea:** 'New Member Reception' Held ever February, we invite new members for a free reception at the Chamber. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Pancake For Your Thoughts: free breakfast for members with roundtable discussion on community issues. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Brandon Chamber Business Information Series (BIS): our luncheons feature relatively broad topics that appeal to a large audience. BIS has focused topics (How To Identify Counterfeit Money, Canada/U.S. Relations, How To Improve Your A/R Collections) that appeal to smaller crowds. Have been very successful to date. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Spring Wine & Cheese. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** Christmas Party. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** Canada Day BBQ, also promotes locally produced hotdog. (Birtle)

**Idea:** Attend meetings of other organizations and partner with other organizations for events such as AG Days and Christmas Party for business. (Birtle)

**Idea:** We held joint meetings with Morris Community Development and Town of Morris for Round Table Discussions. (Morris)

### **C) Reporting To Members:**

**Idea:** Newsletter, quarterly luncheon meetings, faxes/emails, website (Minutes of Board meetings). (Portage) (St.Pierre)

**Idea:** Monthly chamber meetings for general membership. (Stonewall)

**Idea:** We used 'Big Mouth' automatic calling system which would call and leave a pre-recorded message to all chamber members. Was very effective for emergencies: notifying members of counterfeit currency in town, bad cheques, thefts, vandals, etc. (Stonewall)

**Idea:** 'Exiting Survey' – question members who do not renew membership (Stonewall).

**Idea:** Formal year-end report at AGM. (St Boniface)

**Idea:** Opportunity to be introduced to community in newsletter is very popular with local businesses. Advertising can cost a lot and the members really appreciate any free profile they can get through our activities/publications. (Headingley)

**Idea:** Put 'meeting report' in local paper (Roblin)

**Idea:** Update members at the start of events (Brandon)

**Idea:** Focus on good rapport with media (Brandon)

**Idea:** We have introduced the Brandon Chamber E-News. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Monthly Newsletter & News Release in Local paper including 'Business of the Month' promotion (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** 'Chamber Chatter' in the local paper, publish monthly minutes, and have a yearly review of events letter. (Morris)

**Idea:** Allow time for member input at every meeting (Morris)

**Idea:** Include copies of regular Events Calendar with all correspondence to members, including invoices. (Brampton, Ontario)\*

#### **D) Ascertaining What Members Want:**

**Idea:** Surveys of little success (a common problem).

**Idea:** Membership Committee tries to visit 1/3 of membership a year. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Weekly meetings. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** We have a local Access Television station that we have used to promote the Chamber including notification of meetings and upcoming events. They are happy to do it, for free no less. (Carberry)

**Idea:** Every member, 90 days in advance of their membership renewal date, is sent an encouraging letter from the Chairman and President regarding recent Chamber accomplishments. The member is asked to take 59 seconds of their time to complete an attached single page survey. On the survey the member has an opportunity to acknowledge their familiarity with the things their chamber is doing, suggest other issues, advise if they would recommend the Chamber to another business and state if they would like further information or a visit from us. They are also asked if they are likely to renew their membership with us.

We identify emerging issues in the eyes of our members, and we learn early who may not be renewing. All efforts are made to address their concerns and have them renew. Our retention rate has improved by 5%. (Sarnia Lambton, Ontario)\*

#### **4) FUNDING:**

**Idea:** Annual craft sale. (Rivers) (Roblin)

**Idea:** Agriculture Appreciation Evening. (Portage)

**Idea:** Beer and Wine tasting events. (Stonewall)

**Idea:** Town Garage Sale. (Stonewall)

**Idea:** Gold Membership Fee: A fairly high percentage of our community are already members, so raising money through new memberships is not much of an option. For this reason we have looked at Gold Memberships – you pay a bit more for membership but you are acknowledged at our Annual Dinner as a Gold Member and you also receive other extra profile throughout the year. (Headingley)

**Idea:** We sell postcards, sweatshirts in our tourist booth. (Headingley)

**Idea:** Directory: This seems like an obvious idea, but for the longest time we did not advertise in our Directory. We started last year and the local businesses loved the opportunity. (Headingley)

**Idea:** Each year we have a Trade Show. It is open to both members and non-members. We raise money by charging for booths. Some of our Board members attend Trade Shows around and outside of Manitoba. They promote the Chamber and make a lot of good contacts who then agree to participate in our Trade Show. This has been so successful we are looking at expanding it. (Roblin)

**Idea:** Community advertises in monthly newsletter. (St. Pierre) (Brandon)

**Idea:** Tried an ATV run (not successful). (St. Pierre)

**Idea:** The '\$1.00 A Day' Group: members contribute \$365 for the year (hence the name, '\$1.00 A Day'), which is then pooled into an advertising budget for the community. Use the funds to take out ads in various newspapers, radio, etc. This has been very successful and is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year. (Russell)

**Idea:** We own our building and lease out the excess space. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Town Postcards for sale in local businesses and an Ad Board for Retail members. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** Canada Day BBQ, also promotes our locally produced hotdog. (Birtle)

**Idea:** Selling ad space on recycling bins in downtown area (a one-time promotion). (Birtle)

**Idea:** We hold a Home and Garden Show. (Birtle)

**Idea:** We take care of tourism and the website for the community and, in turn, our town/RM provides us with funding to compensate for that. (Carberry)

**Idea:** Promote Chamber Group Insurance to current and potential members, it provides the equivalent of nearly 30 extra members a year. (Carberry)

**Idea:** We tried a One-Day Circus (not very productive). (Morris)

**Idea:** In our monthly mail we distribute a member's brochure or flyer at a cost to them of only \$170.00 + g.s.t. We allow a maximum of 6 brochures along with the Chamber's 2 pieces. We are usually sold out 3 months in advance of this service. (Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario)\*

**Idea:** Created a community Spirit Savings Card. We charge \$20 for them and each has discounts from 10-15 local companies on the back (e.g. 10% off purchase at Willy's

Flowers). Only chamber members can contribute the discounts. The 1<sup>st</sup> 10-15 that respond to the call for discounts are listed on the back. Looks at raising money while promoting local businesses. (West Lincoln, Ontario)

## **5) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

**Idea:** We developed a strategic plan for the Chamber, which led to a sub-committee called SADICC (Stonewall & District Innovative Crops Committee), a combined effort between Chamber & local Agricultural Society. Also, ongoing efforts with local EDC committee. For more information contact Robert Zurbyk at [rzurbyk@shaw.ca](mailto:rzurbyk@shaw.ca). (Stonewall)

**Idea:** Working for the past two years with the Old St. Boniface Residents Association and Riel CDC to develop a strategy and attract capital to rejuvenate Old St. Boniface. (St Boniface)

**Idea:** Three years ago, launched a successful ‘buy local’ campaign, continue to use slogan in our published material. (St. Boniface)

**Idea:** We participated on a Business Retention & Expansion Survey. (Roblin)

**Idea:** We have a Chamber representative on our community’s Economic Development Board. (Russell)

**Idea:** Our Workforce and Business Development Committees identified needs for an organized area where job, community, and business information could be found. As a result, we developed an area on our website ([www.brandonchamber.ca](http://www.brandonchamber.ca)) to meet those needs. (Brandon)

**Idea:** We maintain strong relations with Economic Development Brandon and we are heavily involved in the City of Brandon’s Strategic Economic Development Action Plan that is working on a long-term economic development plan. (Brandon)

**Idea:** We are working on an Economic Development Strategy. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** We tried a Community Round Table. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** The Christmas Cheque Program: Working with our local Credit Union, cheque’s are offered that are essentially an interest free line of credit for 6 months. People interested in the cheques have to apply at the Credit Union to make sure they qualify. Local businesses benefit because the cheques have to be used at local participating Businesses. The cheques also have to be used between October and December 24, of each year. The program has been running each year for the last 8 years and many local businesses love it. (Portage)

**Idea:** We provided new signs for our Town. (Birtle)

**Idea:** Tried a local currency Christmas promotion, 'Birtle Bucks'. (Birtle)

**Idea:** Work in tandem with the Town/R.M. and CDC, not competing against them. (Carberry)

**Idea:** Joint advertising through the Chamber: We help businesses gather joint funding to access advertising they wouldn't otherwise be able to afford. For example, a number of businesses will get together to take out a ½ page ad in a brochure. We also did a deal with CJOB: if we brought in a certain amount of 'major players' (twenty-second spots) they would allow us to tack on a five-second spot, at a discounted rate, that promotes the community. The 'major players' agree to do it so as to help out the community (Falcon).

**Idea:** Working very hard to expand tourism to four seasons. Pursuing a lights initiative that will celebrate a number of seasons/activities (Halloween, Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc) (Falcon).

**Idea:** We are working with Winnipeg River Brokenhead Community Economic Development to more effectively put together requests for grants/assistance. As well, they have been great in offering training to youth/adult learners that are willing to pursue the skills that a community needs(Falcon).

**Idea:** Rural Forum Booths. (Carberry)

**Idea:** In conjunction with the Manitoba Youth Job Centre the Chamber offers 'workers' to decorate businesses with 'western slabs' to promote the Manitoba Stampede (Morris) 'Stampede Kickoff': we sponsor a downtown pre-Stampede evening. Businesses stay open, we provide a live band for street dancing, Firefighters host a beef BBQ supper, MYJC offers face painting, Auto Club has a car display, and businesses offer specials and freebies. (Morris)

**Idea:** Offer 'Chamber Bucks' for Business and Residential Christmas lighting contest: the 'Bucks' must be used in local businesses and are redeemed by the Chamber (Morris)

**Idea:** We created signage for the community. Made sure it was clear, concise, yet engaging. Sign focuses on a geographic feature, Meteor Crater Lake. Then, when a potential tourist is enticed by the sign to come into town, all businesses have agreed that they will hand out the Chamber Directory that promotes everybody. (Falcon)

## **6) LOBBYING:**

**Idea:** We have Municipal liaisons on our Board. (Portage)

**Idea:** In recent town elections, urged chamber members to support and vote for candidates which supported concerns from the chamber, business community and economic development. (Stonewall)

**Idea:** ‘Save our Railway Station’ – a day devoted to members coming up with solutions to that issue. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** Formed an Economic Development Committee/held a planning session. (Headingley)

### **Relations With Town Council, etc.**

**Idea:** We are working with a CDC consultant and have R.M.’s on our Board. (Minnedosa)

**Idea:** A member of the Chamber Board is present at each monthly council meeting. (Headingley)

**Idea:** Hold community meetings with R.M. present. (Headingley)

**Idea:** Representative from CDC, Town Council & R.M. attend meetings (Roblin)

**Idea:** We are lobbying R.M. and Town for an Economic Development Officer. (Roblin)

**Idea:** Monthly meetings with local Town Council. (Russell)

**Idea:** Keep Board member assigned to other Boards, representation on CDC, and a member from the Councils come to our meetings (Carberry)

**Idea:** Working with local School Division to address funding and other education issues. (Brandon)

**Idea:** Try to schedule regular (quarterly or three times a year) meetings with MLAs, but have been relatively unsuccessful. (Brandon)