

# WEST WINNIPEG BUSINESS REVIEW

INAUGURAL  
2021

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ASSINIBOIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



**Business in an  
ever-changing world**

**The importance of  
a digital presence**

**Opportunities for growth**



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PRESIDENT & CEO  
**DAVID LANGSTAFF**

MANAGING EDITOR  
**LYNDON MCLEAN**  
lyndon@delcommunications.com

ADVERTISING MANAGER  
**DAYNA OULION**

ADVERTISING SALES  
**GARY BARRINGTON**  
**BRIAN GEROW**  
**JENNIFER HEBERT**  
**MICHELLE RAIKE**  
**DAN ROBERTS**

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CREATIVE DIRECTOR / LAYOUT & DESIGN  
**KATHLEEN CABLE**

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



**KRISTI MEEK, B.A.**  
*Executive Director of the  
Assiniboia Chamber of  
Commerce*

Welcome to the first edition of our West Winnipeg Business Review magazine! This annual publication allows us, the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce, to showcase the business community by profiling local businesses and leaders and sharing stories that are relevant and current to our area.

***"Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." – John C. Maxwell, author***

Hearing stories from businesses and community members these past 21 months has taught me that the strength to endure is ever more present and is experienced by everyone at different levels. Talking to Chamber members daily has me feeling pride, compassion, and happiness. Stories of how businesses managed, pivoted, accepted, and addressed the pandemic are encouraging and inspiring. From my experience, underlying decisions and ideas for a business are always present and thought of, but maybe never acted upon. I believe the pandemic helped nudged some decisions to be made that ultimately helped and will continue to help many businesses in the long run.

To industries that continue to be affected the most by health orders, policy changes, staffing, and more – I see you! More importantly, I want to hear more from you. Call or email me, and if I can help in any way, whether it be to look into things further, provide understanding, or just to have a fresh set of ears to listen to. The Chamber is here for you!

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## **Networking and Support – How the Chamber Can Help You**

West Winnipeg continues to see the opening of new businesses and we are happy to provide supports to all – advocacy, business savings, networking, and so much more. We take pride in our community and want to share in everyone's celebrations. Our Chamber network is strong, and the voice that the Assiniboia Chamber carries to the table echoes our business community. Having discussions with all three levels of government, hosting town halls and events to hear from local businesses and community members, and participating in policy debates on a provincial and federal level are key to the strength of the Chamber.

A reminder to everyone that we offer free online calendar listings to all businesses and organizations in

our area. We will post your event on our website, [www.assiniboiachamber.ca](http://www.assiniboiachamber.ca), for free. Let us help you widen your network and amplify your voice to the community and beyond.

We are here to help! Please contact us to learn more about the tools the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce offers your business to succeed. Visit us at [www.assiniboiachamber.ca](http://www.assiniboiachamber.ca) or call (204) 774-4154.

Wishing you success and happiness,

Kristi Meek, B.A., President, Executive Director

Office: (204) 774-4154

Mobile: (204) 471-4308

Email: [kristi@assiniboiachamber.ca](mailto:kristi@assiniboiachamber.ca)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MeekKristi>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kristimeek/> 



Chamber Executives of  
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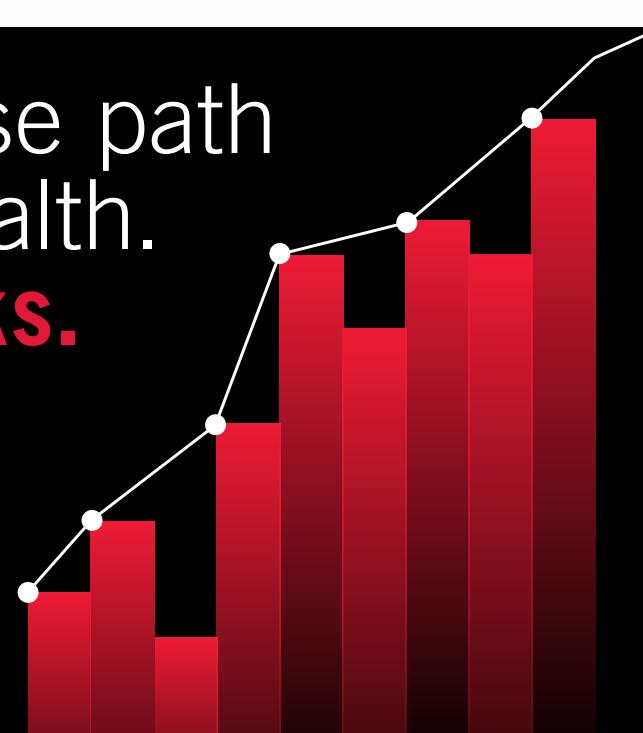


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## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



**MARTY MINSHULL**

# CHAMBER UPDATE **FINISH STRONG**

Hello from all of us at the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce and thank you for reading the inaugural edition of the *West Winnipeg Business Review* magazine. We're certain you will find value and relevance in this issue that blends insightful articles with updates and information from our local Chamber.

November is always an important time for cleaning up all of the important projects that we committed to and worked hard on throughout the course of the year. It's also a time where most start thinking about and planning for a new year, and updated goals for 2022.

Our Chamber board continued our work on adding value to members with the re-introduction of in-person events, where it was safe to do so, and including more affinity programs for our members this year. We are excited about the new membership growth we have seen throughout this year, and we are enjoying the process of planning for a year of in-person events again – fingers crossed – in 2022.

We look forward to seeing all of you in our Winnipeg West business community and getting back to true human connection, in-person networking, and learning opportunities. We also welcome the opportunity to think a little less about solving the challenge of the day and focus a lot more on long-term business planning, growth, and development.

As you look to your own planning, I encourage you to focus not only on the challenges that we have faced over the last 18 months, but also on the lessons you've learned and new skills you have acquired in the process. The adaptability, innovative ability, drive to succeed, and incredible resilience of an entrepreneur has never been more evident than it was in 2020 and 2021.

I very much look forward to all the exciting things 2022 has to offer with a new set of skills and a revitalized sense of optimism for the future, as we finish strong in 2021, to thrive in 2022.

Wishing you tremendous success for the remainder of the year, and well into next year! 

  
**Ben Bredo**  
Owner

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~ Kevin Klein



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# The Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce

## 2021-2022

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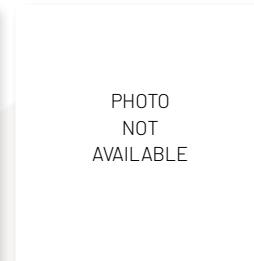


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Senior Relationship Manager  
Corporate and Senior Accounts  
Winnipeg Office  
[bonnie.bain@fcc.ca](mailto:bonnie.bain@fcc.ca)  
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Commercial Financing  
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# The Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce

## MEMBER BENEFITS

The Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce recognizes that the value of membership is different for everyone, and in order to achieve the most value to all members, we provide a wide variety of specialized services and products. Through business and membership relationships that the Chamber operates as and invests in, we are delighted to provide and share these benefits to help our business members reach their organizational goals.

Learn more by attending an upcoming Chamber 101 session that we host online every second month. Visit [www.assiniboiachamber.ca](http://www.assiniboiachamber.ca) to see the next offering!

### Advocacy & Policy

Benefit from a unified voice for business-friendly legislation at all levels of government. You can also meet and network with local elected officials during receptions and events. Our membership in the provincial

and national Chamber organizations provides resources and strength in lobbying for good government and a viable economic business community. Local issues are undertaken with your needs in mind.

### Networking & Events

Our monthly in-person events see anywhere from 10 to 30 attendees – a nice, intimate group that allows for dedicated connections and are typically held at locations throughout West Winnipeg. A mix of online meetings are a regular offering using Zoom. At every networking event, members connect with other local businesses and potential customers.

### Marketing Your Business

Helping you spread the word...that's what we do! Advertising via one of our communication channels (social media, Chamber Connection eNewsletter, website, Chamber TV) is a great way to raise your visibility.

### • Online Event Calendar

Visit [www.assiniboiachamber.ca/events](http://www.assiniboiachamber.ca/events) to see all upcoming Chamber and Community events. Posting on the Community Events Calendar is free! If your business is celebrating a milestone or hosting an event (sale, meeting, anniversary), we encourage you to post your event here as we market the calendar on our social media sites and in our newsletters.

### • Chamber TV

The Assiniboia Chamber office has a wonderful walk-by traffic location (across the bridge to Assiniboine Park and next to Sargent Sundae on Portage Avenue). With a 50-inch TV in our front window, passersby stop (enjoy their ice cream) and look in our window to see marketing loops that include: Chamber News, Events: Chamber and Community, Member News, Advertisements, Weather Updates, Quotes, etc.

### • Literature Displays

Our convenient office location means we get a lot of foot traffic! Whether folks stop by to ask questions, pick up promotional material and attraction flyers we love to connect with the public to promote our members. Member flyers and business cards are on display; ready for us to hand out to visitors.

### • Social Media Advertising

Our Chamber is active on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Follow us to find out what we are up to! Is your

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business on social media? Let us know your handle so we can follow you and share, like and retweet your events, promotions, and information about your business. Sharing your posts means more views for you and your business.

#### • Website Listing and Advertising

As a Chamber member, your business information is automatically added to our website. Want to step it up a notch? We encourage you to take advantage of our hands-on site to add a link to your website, map, and photos to maximize your company's listing. You can also post your Value Offers & Discounts and add upcoming events in our online calendar. With your member login, changes are just a click away!

### Chamber Membership Services

#### Credibility

Proudly display your certificate and affix your Chamber decal on your business window to let patrons know you are a member of the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce. We will also send you a .jpg of our member logo to add to your website and social media sites.

#### Boardroom/Meeting Space

Looking for space to hold your next meeting or seminar? Give us a call at (204) 774-4154 to book our boardroom and upstairs dining/classroom area. Free for members, small fee for non-members.

#### Zoom Share

The ACC purchased the Pro version of Zoom and wants to share it with you at no charge! If you need to host an online meeting that's longer than 40 minutes, to record your meeting, or to ask your attendees questions using a polling feature, then the Pro version of Zoom is available for you to use.

#### Member Information Centre (MIC)

The MIC is an internal website just

for members. You can view and edit company information, which automatically updates the Chamber Online Directory. Plus, download the free mobile MIC app for on-the-go access.

#### Ribbon Cuttings

Whether you're celebrating the opening of a new business, an anniversary, or the expansion/relocation of an existing business in West Winnipeg or surrounding area, we are excited for your success. Promoting the event, inviting the Chamber Board and local government officials, and so much more is what the Chamber offers to help you mark this momentous occasion.

#### The Connection eNewsletter (monthly, public)

A monthly e-newsletter that is distributed to Chamber members and the community at large.

#### Savings and Discounts

As a member of the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, our Chamber can pass some remarkable savings onto our members.

#### Chambers Group Insurance Plan

The Chambers of Commerce Group Insurance Plan is Canada's largest group benefit program for small business, serving over 30,000 firms. As a Chamber member, you can use the Chambers Plan to protect yourself and your employees with comprehensive group benefits, including dental and health insurance.

#### Value Offers & Discounts (Members Only)

As a member of the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, our Chamber can pass some remarkable savings onto our members. Our Chamber has also created affinity partnerships for our own members' benefits as well.

#### Member To Member (M2M) Deals

Members can share a special rate to fellow Chamber members and the community at large by providing an online offer and discount that we will promote through our website, The Connection eNewsletter, and social media sites. 



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# Why join the Chamber?



## EXPAND REACH

Increase visibility and promote your business through Chamber membership. Online and in-person opportunities to expand marketing reach and enhance brand reputation.



## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Develop professional relationships and build social capital through networking events, committees and groups that include business leaders in the region.



## VOICE of BUSINESS

The Chamber is your voice for connecting business interest with government. We advocate for solutions on key business issues in our community, city, province and country.



Let's keep  
moving forward.  
**Together.**



Find resources and training  
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# Business Member Application

Email completed form to [info@assiniboiachamber.ca](mailto:info@assiniboiachamber.ca) or complete online at  
[www.assiniboiachamber.ca](http://www.assiniboiachamber.ca) | Member Centre | Join the Chamber

## Business Information

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

First and Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Use Physical Address as  Mailing Address  Billing Address (if different, please provide additional address below)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Established (Year): \_\_\_\_\_ Full-Time Employees: \_\_\_\_\_ Part-Time Employees: \_\_\_\_\_

Facebook: @ \_\_\_\_\_ LinkedIn: @ \_\_\_\_\_

Twitter: @ \_\_\_\_\_ Instagram: @ \_\_\_\_\_

## Online Chamber Directory Profile

Included with your membership is a company profile on the Online Chamber Directory.

Description (200 characters including spaces): \_\_\_\_\_

Hours of Operation (100 characters including spaces): \_\_\_\_\_

Driving Directions (200 characters including spaces): \_\_\_\_\_

Keywords (240-character max length; enter a space between words): \_\_\_\_\_

## Membership Fee

**Business Membership (Annual)** \$230 plus GST = \$241.50 one-time payment

Annual Renewal is automatic on the anniversary of enrollment; at such rates as may be approved annually by the Chamber's Board of Directors.

**Enhanced Business Membership (Annual)** \$280 plus GST = \$294.00 one-time payment

Includes enhanced features on your business' online Chamber Member profile (i.e. larger description, photos, videos, links to websites, and more)

**By signing this application form, the business applicant and its employees agree to receive marketing messages from the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce and its membership. These email marketing messages will be associated with The Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce events, activities, programs, and member-to-member offers. Members can unsubscribe from the Chamber email marketing at any time.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

In accordance with Bylaw 14: An individual or organization proposed for membership in the Assiniboia Chamber pursuant to the section on membership conditions of this By-Law is admitted to membership in the Assiniboia Chamber only if the proposed Member so consents and their membership is approved at a Meeting of the Members by Ordinary Resolution of the Members. An individual or organization so admitted to membership in the Assiniboia Chamber is a Member with all the related rights and obligations immediately as of the receipt of such approval.

# Assiniboia Chamber providing FREE e-commerce sites to west Winnipeg businesses

The Assiniboia Chamber is getting ready to launch something pretty amazing for local area businesses, and we want all businesses to take advantage of it. In December 2020, we launched the West Winnipeg Cheer Guide, a web page dedicated to supporting local businesses. Plans for the page included ongoing promotions and evolving the page to a website of its own. It took a little longer than we anticipated, but the dream is now coming alive, and [www.cheerhere.ca](http://www.cheerhere.ca) will be its own website dedicated to promoting local e-commerce sites!

This shop local e-commerce platform will allow all businesses to sell their products and/or services, and for consumers to shop locally online instead of non-local online sites like Amazon. Think of it like the online mall of West Winnipeg. Consumers can purchase from multiple local area businesses and checkout in just one transaction.

There are no monthly or annual fees, and we are waiving the one-time merchant account and transaction fees for the first 85 businesses who join. The transaction fee covers your merchant processing fees and enables the chamber to market and promote your business to our local online



community and continued investments into the platform and marketing.

Plus, you'll encourage local consumers to shop for your products/services on your own eCommerce Web Store. You can also list your business in the directory, post some educational content about your products and services, or sell gift cards for your business on the Chamber Marketplace.

In addition to waiving the one-time merchant account fee, we are offering 85 businesses – on a first-come, first-served basis – to have their first 10 products uploaded by our Chamber team!

It doesn't end there: we'll also be running paid advertising across our social media platforms to promote all local area businesses on [www.cheerhere.ca](http://www.cheerhere.ca). The Assiniboia Chamber will be marketing your business on a regular basis!

If you would like to get your products and services listed on the Chamber's shop local eCommerce marketplace, call us at (204) 774-4154 and schedule a time for us to walk you through the set-up process from start to finish. 

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*Cheer Guide*  
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Website Hosted by  
  
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# Business in an ever-changing world

By Lyndon McLean



Everyone has and is feeling the impact of COVID-19. From day-to-day activities to long-term plans, our worlds have been turned upside down. And for employers, COVID has presented several major challenges in a constantly changing business environment.

The immediate disruption of business meant a deep uncertainty as to what comes next and what to do. This in turn meant a loss of income for both employers and employees.

Ups and downs exist in business, usually shorter-term fluctuations, but the last 12 to 18 months has taken a heavy toll, and some businesses will find it hard to survive or take years to recover, says Dan Furlan, CHRP, owner of HR Strategies Inc. Longer-term loss of business is a big issue, as customers may find other alternatives.

Other challenges include threats to businesses that may not have a cache of funds to draw from. If finances are already tight, relations with banks and other creditors could also be strained. And, of course, supply is a major issue, as manufacturers and other producers are similarly impacted.

Employees are nervous about longer-term employment, Furlan notes, and job security is a big concern. As a result, turnover is higher, as some employees have had to find other sources of income, while others see this as a time – albeit not of their choosing – to look for other, longer-term employment. Many are leery of returning, particularly to jobs that put them in contact with the public or a number of other people.

“Employees are harder to find and retain and our low unemployment rate indicates there are fewer people

looking,” Furlan says. As well, during the pandemic, immigration has dropped about 50 per cent, so fewer newcomers are entering the labour market.

These concerns are all echoed by Lori Lucas, owner of Chicken Chef at 3770 Portage Avenue.

“It’s a challenge just getting people to come into the restaurant,” she says. “Some days you have really good days, but after two years, people are getting tired of [takeout], so even that’s dropping off.” Lucas says a lot of people really want to get back to dining out but are reluctant to because of things like the new COVID variant. She believes it’s not necessarily out of fear that they aren’t returning, but rather concern and frustration.

Getting staff back has also been tough because some staff can make more money collecting benefits like The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) than working, especially when the customers aren’t coming in and the hours may not be there. Lucas says an increase in minimum wage has also driven up labour costs. And having done renovations just prior to the shutdown, she says other funds are used for the day-to-day business.

The Chicken Chef brand also has to be maintained, as there’s an expectation



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of quality, and it's harder now with costs of everything up, from lemons and lettuce to chicken, oil, and other supplies. Luckily, they have support from head office to try to maintain the quality and get them what they need to succeed.

With the constantly shifting public health orders and changes in how businesses can operate, employers are finding it difficult to prepare, notes Furlan. Plans established one week may need to change in a few days, meaning time is tighter and business owners need to pivot even more often. The up and down trends of COVID infections in the community may prevent employers from a planned re-opening or expanding to full service.

"Safety is an important employer obligation, but shifting rules makes this more difficult to track, respond to and enforce," Furlan says.

Lucas says their guidelines are what the government mandates, and they have to be accountable and responsible for their employees and public health.

"We keep up to date with the changes in guidelines, but 'business as usual' has been tough. You train your staff, and then things change, and guess what? You have to train them again, and retrain," she says. "It's a headache."

She gives full credit to her staff for dealing with the changes and daily frustrations especially from customers who are equally frustrated with the changes.

"We have a great group of workers who do their best every day, but they get overwhelmed. Customers are freaking out – they just lose it, taking it out on staff. We're not making the rules; we just enforce them. I'm responsible for my customers and my business, and

I don't know of any other owners who can afford the fines if they're not."

Changes in business involvement has been difficult too, Lucas says. Prior to COVID, she was able to help families in need in the community with food or promotions like pizza draws. "We just can't afford to do that anymore."

Employers are doing their best to adapt to new circumstances, and some are looking at new technology or service delivery methods as well as "employer of choice" strategies to attract and retain staff. Wages, safety, and job security are important; however, positive, flexible practices and work life balance are trends to address.

There's still a lot of uncertainty as to what is allowed and not, what type of accommodations are acceptable or not, as well as what are an employer's obligations and rights. (For example, an employer's obligation is to keep employees safe, and employers need to stress this.)

Associations such as the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce are very helpful, Furlan says, since their advice

is community-specific, dealing with public information, resources for local businesses, and access to legal information relevant to Winnipeg and Manitoba. "They can also share examples of innovations and accommodations that others have made which employers can pick up on or adapt to their situations."

Lucas agrees and says the ACC support has been invaluable.

"Kristi is a godsend," she says. "She's always there when I need to talk or get a different perspective. It's important for all businesses to have that support, and we're lucky to have someone like her who cares about each and every business."

Asked what she'd like to see next, Lucas responds like anyone would.

"I really wish we could get back to where we can have our restaurants full, to laugh and joke, see smiling faces again and be able to enjoy a relaxed atmosphere."

"And tell people to start coming to Chicken Chef!" she laughs. 

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*Lisa Thompson, president and creative director at BRD | Brand Revival & Design Inc., also known as BRD Agency.*

# Leveling up your business

## The importance of having and expanding your digital presence

By Shayna Wiwierski

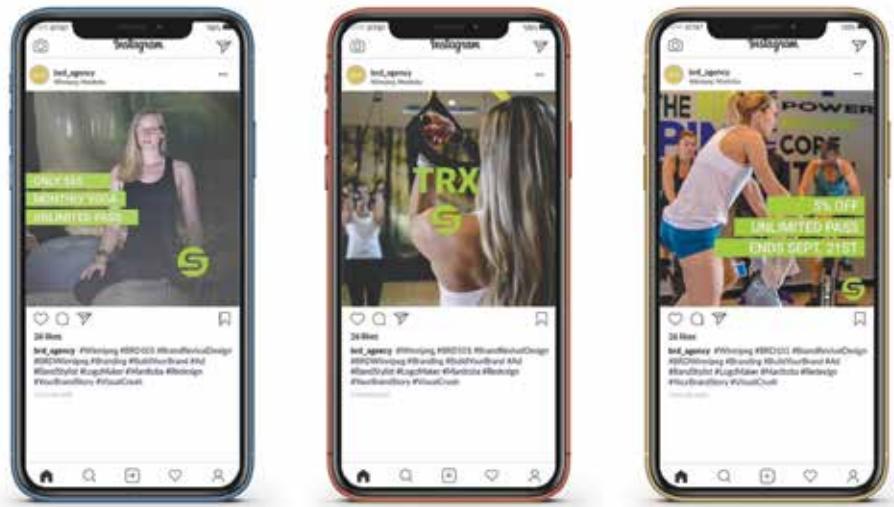
The business world is always changing

In a time where everything and everyone is online, it's important to have a digital marketing strategy to promote your business and help it succeed.

According to Go Gulf, 46 per cent of all searches on Google are seeking local information, and 97 per cent of search engine users searched online to find a local business. In today's day and age, having an online presence is just as important as having a phone number, and businesses need to have one to keep up with the competition.

Now, being online doesn't mean just having a website. There are a variety of low-cost options out there for creating a basic website (such as WordPress or Wix), but the easiest way to get online is to sign up for a Google My Business account, which is a free service by Google – the most-used search engine online – that allows businesses to create a profile.

"The bare minimum is getting your Google My Business listing profile created and making sure that you have the correct phone number, address, and website URL," says Lisa Thompson, president & creative director at BRD | Brand Revival & Design Inc., also known



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as BRD Agency. The Winnipeg-based boutique marketing agency specializes in websites, branding, and social media, supporting entrepreneurs, marketing managers, and non-profits as their go-to for all things digital and marketing.

Google My Business allows your business to pop up when consumers search for your company directly. You can add essential information, such as your full address, phone number, website, etc., as well as photos, logos, and more. It also allows your customers to leave reviews, which can help translate into higher search engine optimization (SEO), allowing your business to rank higher in Google when people search for key words within your industry.

From there, even if you don't want to create a website right away (or don't know how to), getting your business on social media should be the next



A professional portrait of Scott Fielding, a man with glasses and a suit, smiling. To his right, the text 'Scott Fielding' is written in large blue letters, with 'MLA for Kirkfield Park' in red below it. At the bottom, there is a blue wavy graphic. The contact information '204.889.0540' and 'scott@scottfielding.ca' is listed.



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step in boosting your online presence. According to HubSpot's Not Another State of Marketing Report 2021, which collected data and trends from over 1,500 marketers around the world, social media was the number-one channel used in marketing campaigns. Don't know which social media channel to start with? Thompson says to look at your customers (whether that's existing ones or ideal ones) and where they are consuming content online.

"If you are [business to business] and you know your ideal person isn't on Instagram but they're on LinkedIn reading articles at 7 a.m., then you should probably put your focus and resources into your LinkedIn profile and blogging on LinkedIn," says Thompson. "You really do need a website, but if you don't have [one yet],

then start a business Facebook page and start talking about your products and services. Share testimonials and build a following, that sort of thing, to get your online presence started."

According to Hubspot, as of Q1 2020, there are 2.6 billion monthly active Facebook users, and roughly two-thirds of U.S. adults report they are Facebook users. Facebook is also a great way to target your key audience using Facebook Ads, which allows businesses to customize their ad campaigns to fit their business goals. Additionally, since Facebook owns Instagram, businesses can run ads through multiple apps, thus targeting a wider net of potential customers (according to HubSpot, Instagram is the second-best social channel for ROI).

Of course, with social media you want to post valuable information, not just business promotion. Thompson says that companies should follow an 80/20 rule, in that there should be 80 per cent value, which includes the three Es - entertain, education, and engage - and 20 per cent self-promotion. You should also be posting regularly to social media and testing content, as in post what people want and what they engage with the most.

To level up your digital marketing game, try focusing on SEO and creating all different kinds of content, such as blogs and video. You should also be updating your website regularly and focusing on the customer journey.

"Always think like your customer and put people first," says Thompson. "Marketing and business are all about people – they're the most important 'P' in the marketing mix."

Now if you are totally lost in the digital marketing game and need some help, there are tons of social media/digital marketing agencies out there, many of them local like BRD Agency. Hiring an agency is beneficial since it gives you access to their talent, expertise, and experience. It will also modernize and elevate your brand and accelerate what your internal team can accomplish, while giving you a needed outside perspective.

"If you hire someone to help you, it frees up your time so you can focus on your business. It gives you a needed outside perspective and can inspire and invigorate your sales team and help to better connect you to your true ideal client," says Thompson. "It can also help to keep your payroll costs down in not having to hire an entire marketing

## Still don't know where to start when it comes to levelling up your digital presence in 2022? Here are some BRD tips on where to focus as we head into a new year.

- Organic + user generated growth – stay true to your brand.
- Provide value over fancy content (value vs. quality).
- Content alignment and consistency across all platforms/marketing efforts.
- Better customer journey/UX and connecting people to true brand values.
- Community and doing better for the planet – Local and non-profit involvement that aligns/takes a stand for something good!

- AI – Automate as much as possible while always remembering to stay human and 1:1 where it counts – People is the most important "P" in the marketing mix. (Your people, team, the people your services and products are for and your community).

To learn more about digital marketing and BRD | Brand Revival and Design Inc., visit them at [brdagency.ca](http://brdagency.ca) and follow them on Instagram at [@brdagency.ca](https://www.instagram.com/@brdagency.ca), Facebook at [www.facebook.com/brandrevivaldesign](https://www.facebook.com/brandrevivaldesign), Twitter [@brd\\_agency](https://www.twitter.com/@brd_agency), and LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com/company/brandrevivaldesign](https://www.linkedin.com/company/brandrevivaldesign).

department and can give your internal team the support they need to level up marketing efforts and fill any gaps they have in-house. Today business owners must think about full stack marketing [well-rounded and expertise in all areas of marketing: SEO, UX, web, social, online sales funnels, etc.] and it is rare that in-house full stack marketing can be realized without a large team"

In many cases, internal marketing employees don't have all the experience and expertise needed for the things they are tasked with, especially if you are a small business and you have one marketing person. That person might be doing the website, writing blogs, managing social media, doing event photography, etc., and they might not be a professional in all those areas.

Whether you're doing it in-house or hiring professionals, one thing is for certain: you need to have an online presence. According to Statista, there are 4.66 billion active Internet users worldwide, which is 59.9 per cent of the global population. Of this total, 92.6 per cent (4.32 billion) accessed the Internet through their mobile phone.

It's also important to note that companies should be investing in things they can own. For example, you don't own the content on social media platforms, but you can own your website and the blogs and content you put on it.

Thompson says, "Invest in email marketing and creating a good list (fans, prospects, customers, etc.), as well as take the time to create a content bank with all of your articles, social copy, and photos. We also recommend doing a custom website, using a CMS like Wordpress, and taking daily backups over using self-builders that you won't ever own, like Wix or Squarespace."

Companies must show up where

their customers are and keep up with current trends and tactics to stay relevant to not only to increase sales, but to expand their presence as well, especially in a post-pandemic world.

"I think people have understood for some time that they need some sort of digital presence, but the pandemic

put the spotlight on things," says Thompson. "Businesses who weren't online now must be, and others have had to dive deep into creating efficiencies and better customer experiences to improve, as well as level up their game online overall to compete." 



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# Opportunities for growth

By Tammy Schuster



When the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly in the early months of 2020, businesses across all sectors had to respond quickly. Adapting to rigorous restrictions meant upgrading cleaning protocols, working remotely, and serving customers in new ways.

These Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce members adapted and found new opportunities to stay in business and keep their teams employed, and they also found ways to help others and move into new territory.

While adapting to new market needs saw mask production as the biggest pivot for many businesses, Freed & Freed International, a garment manufacturer that has been a Winnipeg institution for over a century, channelled the needs of their customers into an avenue that could also raise awareness and funds for local initiatives.

"When the pandemic hit, I could see that a demand for masks would be coming very soon," says Marissa Freed, President of Freed & Freed International, who began manufacturing a range of masks immediately. But during this time, Freed says the masks were so well received, and the company was receiving so much community support, that they wanted to find a way to reciprocate.

The company began a collaboration with a local Indigenous designer to create and market masks, giving 100

per cent of the proceeds to a local organization. Freed says they chose The Butterfly Club, a Winnipeg-based program designed to support Indigenous girls and Two-Spirit youth through cultural, social, and leadership development, because they felt it was an important community program that was being under served. "It's a safe space for Indigenous girls and Two-Spirited youth, and because they were no longer able to get together in person, it made a big impact to not have that space for people to learn and be a part of life."

Through the sales of the limited-edition mask collection, Freed & Freed raised approximately \$35,000 for the program in under one month. This allowed the program to purchase laptops, enabling club members to stay connected.

The clothing manufacturing company further adapted to the changing needs of their customers through the pandemic by launching a two new clothing lines – a line of faux fur jackets and a line of versatile rompers – as a way to fuel the growing love and demand for cozy yet glamorous loungewear. "The versatility of the romper can be worn around the house while working remotely or dressed up when you need to leave the house," says Freed. "It was really about trying to serve everybody both during and beyond the pandemic."

While Freed has had success in raising awareness and funds for local causes

and success in the launch of two new lines of clothing, she says the real silver lining of the pandemic was how it made everyone very much aware of who is in their backyard and how to better support one another.

For Eshine Cleaning Services, COVID-19 affected their janitorial and commercial cleaning business in two different ways. As one of the top players in the restaurant industry, Eshine Cleaning was directly impacted by the immediate restaurant closures, which represented a significant percentage of their revenue.

"The pandemic forced us to rethink our business focus, and we had to transform our scope of business to adjust to the new reality of the world," says Mariano Velazco, Chief Operating Officer at Eshine Cleaning Services. "On the other side, we discovered a new spectrum of possibilities regarding services to offer and markets to explore."

Velazco says that they put theory into practice when adjusting to the shutdowns. "We have a multidisciplinary team with various backgrounds and strengths, and we decided to invest in market research studies. We also asked our current and former clients for their thoughts, expectations, and necessities, and we were able to identify emerging trends."

Not only were the needs of their customers changing, but Velazco says that they were able to identify new markets.



"Janitorial services were never a top priority prior to COVID," he says. "Now, nobody wants to take any chances regarding cleanliness and disinfection standards."

Eshine's ability to embrace the new reality allowed them to grow operations across Canada. "It was like pushing a fast-forward button that made us evolve into Eshine 2.0," says Velazco. "We have more than doubled the number of our staff and tripled the number of clients. We don't take this growth for granted; we work tirelessly and willfully to be recognized as the most reliable janitorial services company in North America."

Six months after the shutdown began, Canadian Business Magazine identified Eshine as the second-fastest-growing company in Manitoba and the fastest-growing janitorial service company in Canada.

On April 1, 2020, Truly Fresh Office Cleaning had lost 70 per cent of its revenue almost overnight. For a company that specializes in office cleaning, when many companies closed their offices and moved their employees to remote work, shifting focus was vital for survival. "Our primary source of new contracts was making connections at events and generating business through direct and indirect referrals. Once events shut down, we found it near impossible to talk to people at Zoom

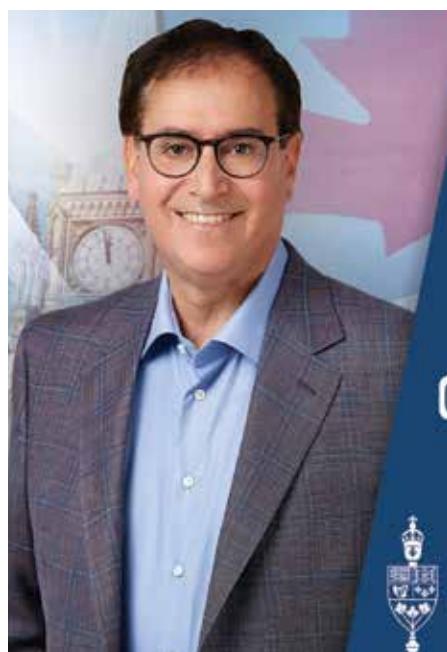
events," says James Berena, owner of Truly Fresh. "We began to target other industries, and I learned how to create connections through virtual events and ultimately upgraded our social media strategy."

Berena says he has witnessed a wide range of changing client needs which included an increase in regular site visits and an interest in specific cleaning policy. "Many potential clients began requesting our anti-pandemic measures and they were willing to pay a higher premium to companies who had full anti-pandemic plans and certification in COVID cleaning courses."

While Truly Fresh had to shift their

market, it has been a benefit as their largest source of revenue is now in condominium cleaning, something they would never have considered if the mass shut down hadn't happened. They were also able to employ more people.

"We have now grown from 19 team members in January 2021 to approximately 43 in September 2021," Berena says. "We celebrate all members for their ability to maintain operations while helping the community, upholding public safety, and supporting their staff and clients as we all emerge from the early days of the pandemic and into the new normal." 



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 **MARTY MORANTZ**

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR  
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PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHAYNA WIWIEWSKI.

According to owner Brendan McAndrew, White Pine Bicycle Co. started out as a university project that graduated into a full-fledged business. In 2014, McAndrew, an Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce member, had pitched to an entrepreneurship competition the opportunity to open a bicycle shop.

"I won the competition, and as part of my plan, I proposed opening a bike shop at The Forks using just a tent,"

McAndrew recalls. "Costs weren't expensive to start it up. I pitched the idea to The Forks and their CEO, and they were interested." In addition to The Forks location, White Pine Bicycle Co. was also located at 2059 Portage Avenue. They had two locations, but they were only at The Forks until 2018.

"We were supposed to move to Osborne, but that was right around the time COVID-19 started, and we had a property deal go wrong. In all the

# White Pine Bicycle Co. pedals on

chaos, we couldn't get a second store back up and running," McAndrew says. "We liked The Forks, but it's expensive to be there, and it wasn't always the right space for us, whereas the standalone bike shop does a little bit better."

McAndrew says his original plan included expanding to multiple brick and mortar stores, but COVID-19 has changed the economic landscape. White Pine Bicycle Co.'s theme and motto is simplicity, selling single-speed and internal hub bikes. They also specialize in urban commuter and leisure bikes that are built for work, school, and riding around in the park and enjoying yourself. Mountain and road bikes aren't found at his shop.

McAndrew always knew that his future included bicycles.

"In Grade 3, I said I would own a bike shop in the future. I've always liked bikes," he says. "I used to race competitively for quite a few years. After that, I got out of racing."

Afterwards, McAndrew ordered a bicycle from California as he couldn't find that kind of bicycle in Manitoba. Unfortunately, when it arrived, it had extensive shipping damage.

"I learned how to import these bikes and how to ship them a lot more cost-effectively. I had the insider knowledge of the industry and how

it could be done better. That's why I focused on that specific bike; I had a lot of background interest," McAndrew explains.

However, nothing could have prepared McAndrew for the COVID-19 pandemic. He experienced major shortages in the industry, relying on just-in-time inventory and ordering only what they needed when they needed it to keep inventory costs down. Eventually that led to White Pine Bicycle Co. having zero inventory.

To keep afloat, White Pine Bicycle Co. brought in other product lines, such as paddleboards, skate products, and high-end scooters to carry them through last season. Going into this season, McAndrew says he took out loans to get a ton of inventory upfront in the offseason.

"We ordered what we could when we could, and that led us to have relatively stable inventory through this season, so the numbers are good," he says. "It's still difficult to get specific models. We've waited a year and a half to get certain bikes."

Additionally, White Pine Bicycle Co. has also hired Creative Communications students from Red River College to boost their social media and online presence, managing their three websites.

Moving forward, McAndrew says handling the business they have now is their biggest challenge. Their Portage location is currently smaller than they like, and they rely on off-site storage due to limited space.

"We're just going to keep on the same path: maintain stock as best we can, and make sure we're producing a good quality product," McAndrew says. 





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# What if?

## How creativity is helping shape the future

By Dave Burke, Community Manager, RBC

Forty years ago, I started my journey with RBC as a leadership intern here in Winnipeg. This is where, at the end of this year, I am choosing to bring my career to a close as Community Manager of our recently renovated Ellice Location. At different points throughout my career, different skills have revealed themselves as being particularly relevant for that period – whether in the face of economic hardship or prosperity. This is particularly true as I look back on the past two years in the face of unimaginable headwinds brought on by a pandemic – a pandemic that is requiring us all to change the question from “what now?” to “what if?”

The pandemic has not only disrupted industries and sectors, it has also disrupted our routines and habits from how we work, shop, entertain, communicate, and do business. Why this matters is because those routines and habits are what feeds our data and informs our insights. In what was already a rapidly changing data driven world, knowledge has never had such a short shelf life as it does now.

The world requires us to be more agile than ever before. Navigating the path as a business community has never been so difficult. The predicament we currently find ourselves in

will invite in a whole new level of ingenuity, entrepreneurial thinking, and innovative approaches to both old and new problems.

### ***This makes creativity the new “it skill” of this decade.***

For all of us – regardless if academia, business, government, or even as parents – this presents the need to cultivate creativity within our existing workforce, workplaces, and within youth.

Cultivating creativity begins with understanding what creativity is followed by creating an ecosystem where it can thrive.

### ***What is creativity?***

Einstein said, “Imagination is intelligence having fun.” Creativity and knowledge not only play in the same playground, but they also often share a swing. Dancers and painters have techniques. Actors have a method. And so why shouldn’t creativity have its own process?

Imagination often comes from inspiration. Looking outside of our own industries and sectors can be a powerful way to discover and import creative solutions. Creativity flourishes



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when a community comes together to share in forums like the Assiniboia Chamber of Commerce.

### **Knowing this positions creativity as a skill that can be learned and developed.**

We need to help young people break through barrier thinking that creativity is something you either are or aren't.

While most young Canadians have a sense of confidence in their creative skills, this is not the case when compared to other critical skills.

A survey of 15,000 RBC Future Launch participants found 65 per cent of 15- to 29-year-olds have a high degree of confidence in their creative skills. However, these same youth feel more skilled at problem solving (70 per cent), collaborating (73 per cent), and thinking critically (74 per cent).

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celebrate creativity in our diverse environments, we are better preparing our youth for the future world of work.

### **A Culture for Creativity**

What we require to accomplish this is a culture for creativity where it is woven into the fabric of an organization or community.

In a recent RBC Thought Leadership report, The Coming Creativity Boom: How human ingenuity will power the 2020s, we learn about four ways to cultivate creativity:

- **Nurture Creativity:** Creativity comes naturally to some, but it can also be nurtured and developed.
- **Create a culture that enables the freedom to fail:** This allows for risk taking, curiosity, and resourcefulness.
- **Set strategic constraints:** It might sound counterintuitive, but limits can actually spur creativity.
- **Treat creativity like a team sport:** Everybody has the potential to play a role in the creative process.

### **The Coming Creativity Boom**

[rbc.com/creativity](http://rbc.com/creativity)

### **Looking to the Horizon**

A creative mindset encourages us to be curious and invest our energy to learn and innovate. Creative skills position us to quickly adapt to changing circumstances. A creative culture invites us to readily try and test new concepts.

Much like the entrepreneurial spirit that is deeply woven into the fabric of Winnipeg, let's continue to create space for that creative spirit to thrive and prosper within us, around us, and among the next generation of business leaders. Let's ask one another the same question that I will be asking myself in retirement as I look to the possibility of each new day - "What if?" 

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