

EXPERT ADVICE

Is my benefit plan's cost sharing sustainable?

BILLI MOYER | MANAGING CONSULTANT | BHH BENEFITS p6



DIFFERENTIATE YOUR PERSONAL BRAND WITH CREATIVITY

"Understanding the power of your personal brand to motivate, engage and inspire is how some of the top global entrepreneurs are standing out and getting their message heard..."



"...look for innovative ways to strengthen relationships with your customers by engaging the intuitive and sensing side of your brain. This is where creativity and innovation play a vital role."

BY GERRY D. VISCA

The focus of this article is on the power of differentiating your personal brand with creativity and the need to position yourself creatively in the market place. There needs to be an emphasis on the "feeling and emotional" aspects of your personal brand. This means that you need to understand the power of developing an "engaging brand experience."

Engaging clients in this manner is the underlying fuel to successful marketing and branding initiatives. How you position yourself is essential to attracting and winning an ideal client. Creative positioning is like a game of chess in that you need to carefully and strategically visualize all your moves. Think of creative positioning as the way in which you want to be perceived in the marketplace.

Understanding the power of your personal brand to motivate, engage and inspire is how some of the top global entrepreneurs are standing out and getting their message heard, and ultimately building a

stronger brand loyalty. Differentiating your personal brand in this manner works to create a new personal brand experience. By applying creativity, you can weave your personal brand into many facets of an organization including brand building; innovation; communications; sales and marketing; new customer presentations; customer relationships; and striving to compete for emotions.

Today's top entrepreneurs are competing to connect with the emotions of the clients they serve. If you continue to market solely based on features and benefits, you are simply connecting with your customers' heads and you risk being perceived as a commodity with no meaningful point of differentiation. Rather, use creativity and focus on connecting with your clients' hearts and you will win them for a lifetime. The shift in marketing today takes into account two significant principles that I would like to highlight here. In the past, many entrepreneurs focused solely on features...

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The City of Thorold

This growing municipality is providing a strategic location for many new business enterprises.

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BUILDING NIAGARA

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ONTARIO GOVERNMENT'S SOUTHWESTERN DEVELOPMENT FUND NEEDS TO INCLUDE NIAGARA

"Niagara businesses are facing increasing challenges and if the fund is properly designed and implemented, it could be another tool to help make business more competitive and sustainable in our community."

PROVIDED BY THE GREATER NIAGARA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Ontario government recently introduced the Attracting Investment and Creating Jobs Act that, if passed, will create a \$20-million fund in support of southwestern Ontario. While details of the fund are still being developed, the Southwestern Development Fund aims to provide support for areas that are facing economic challenges.

"We are encouraged that the Ontario government is putting in place a program that could have a direct benefit to local businesses," explains Mike Watt, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce. "Niagara businesses are facing increasing challenges and if the fund is properly designed and implemented, it could be another tool to help make business more competitive and sustainable in our community."

As part of the development of the fund, the province announced it would meet with business

leaders across southwestern Ontario to help shape the program and ensure the new fund addresses the regional challenges facing businesses and communities. It is anticipated that funding could be directed towards programs to provide financial assistance to promote the retention, expansion and attraction of business through support for capital spending, skills development, infrastructure needs and other related business related development.

"The Greater Niagara Chamber will play an important role in facilitating the discussions with the Ontario government regarding this fund," adds Kithio Mwanzia, Director of Policy and Government Relations for the St. Catharines - Thorold Chamber of Commerce. "Through our membership, and by working with other business organizations, our goal is to make sure that Niagara is fully included in the Southwestern Development Fund, and that its implementation is designed to directly benefit Niagara businesses."

The Greater Niagara Chamber also supports a resolution that was recently presented by Port Col-

borne Mayor Vance Badawey to Port Colborne City Council that calls for the Ontario government to include Niagara in the Southwestern Development Fund. The resolution was passed by City Council and Mayor Badawey is seeking support from regional council and other area municipalities.

The Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce is the champion for the Niagara business community. **■**

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"As part of the development of the fund, the province announced it would meet with business leaders across southwestern Ontario to help shape the program and ensure the new fund addresses the regional challenges facing businesses and communities."



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Can changes in the economy impact my benefit program?



BY CAMERON CAMPBELL

Depending on the size of your organization you may feel the impact of changes in the economy differently. While changes over the past two years have adversely affected many businesses, few have taken the time to consider the impact to their benefit plan.

Studies have shown that in times of economic uncertainty, occurrences for some benefit claims increase such as Long Term Disability (LTD), dental care and prescription drugs. Employees often feel insecure about their future and the stability of their company (or job). This factors into increased claiming patterns as an employee may feel the need to maximize their coverage.

Fluctuations in Demographics and Benefit Claims

As decision makers for businesses we are often concerned with the financial well being of our company during times of economic instability. For many employees the concern is also for their own financial future. As a result, employees tend to utilize benefits out of fear that the benefits may no longer be available to them, therefore overall claims increase in times of uncertainty which leads to higher costs for the plan and additional financial strain on the employer.

For example, if your company is forced to temporarily reduce production or employee hours, claims will almost certainly increase. If these reductions lead to layoffs, the services of younger workers tend to be terminated before those of older tenured employees, and as a result the demographics of your group may change to represent an older population. This causes two key issues: 1) the chance of high claims increases with age, and 2) pooled benefits such as Life and Disability are based largely on your group's demographics. By increasing the average age of your employee population you can increase your risk of large claims significantly which will lead to higher rates for all benefits at the time of renewal.

For small groups, insurers may not accept your individual claims experience as credible since additional claims for one employee (or lack of claims within your organization) could have a large impact on the performance of your group. In these cases the insurer may apply their "manual" rate factor to your plan at renewal. The "manual" rate

is essentially the average for that insurers' block of business and could be of benefit or detriment depending on the performance of your plan.

Long Term Disability (LTD) and Low Interest Rates

The incidence of LTD also increases in many industries during times of economic uncertainty. Employees face additional financial pressures at home which often lead to family stresses, resulting in greater absenteeism costs for the company. In addition, interest rates can have impact on the rate for disability benefits, if an employee submits a claim and is approved for disability the insurer is required to establish a fund called a Disabled Life Reserve (DLR) to pay all future expected claims. The DLR periodically decreases in value through payouts to the employee and earns interest over time, however, when interest rates are low the DLR does not receive as much interest. Therefore to ensure the DLR is sufficient to pay out the employee's claims the insurer must put more money in the DLR at the time of claim to make up for the lower interest rate received. The insurer then passes along this additional cost to the employer through higher LTD rates.

Consumer Price Index (CPI) vs. Trend

On a regular basis insurance carriers review historical trends and anticipate future costs based on new legislation and products/services offered. The result is a trend factor which is applied at renewal and can differ between carriers. The trend factor is the expected rate of cost increase for your plan over the next year, and has been significantly higher than CPI inflation for each of the last ten years. Based on the increased occurrences of claims for high cost drugs and costs associated with older employees in the workforce, it is anticipated that this factor will continue to outpace CPI inflation for the foreseeable future.

Don't get caught in a tough situation by only budgeting for a benefit increase equal to the CPI inflation rate. Be prepared by using The Benefits Budgeter on our website: <http://bhhbenefits.com/documents/the-benefits-budgeter-for-2012.pdf>.

Creating a plan design that limits your exposure to areas where outside factors impact your benefit plan is a strategic approach to help keep your rates and claims below the average. Only an elite advisor like BHH Benefits can investigate your plan and help to minimize losses and maximize savings regardless of the outside influences. **BL**

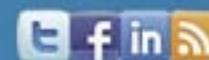
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LOOK OUT FOR THESE HAZARDS WHEN MOVING TO THE CLOUD

“Looking ahead, experts see a few trends that companies should look out for as they make decisions about moving to the cloud.”



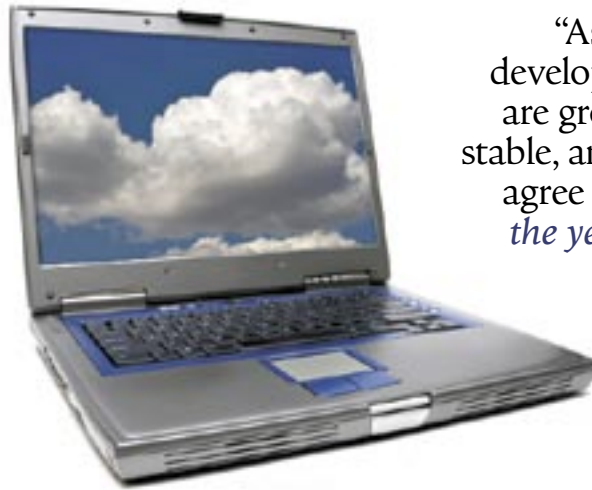
BY SCOTT PUTMAN

Businesses that want to take advantage of the maturing cloud marketplace in 2012 can learn from some common mistakes others have made.

One of the most common errors companies make when moving to cloud services is failing to set up redundancies for disaster scenarios.

People often assume that that cloud server is somehow redundant or backed up somewhere else. An individual cloud server on its own is not normally redundant or backed up. This is sometimes referred to as “the uneven handshake” between the services that the cloud providers offer and the responsibilities left to the customer. And this extends beyond disaster recovery. Developers, who are commonly the people in an organization who start using these kinds of cloud services, often assume that the cloud service takes care of security, application availability, backup and recovery, and ensuring service performance. Unfortunately, in most cases, this isn’t true.

Sometimes, companies might think that they can save money by ignoring redundancy plans. What they are actually ignoring are standard best practices. Some people are so focused on cost, it looks like they’re putting blinders on to best prac-



“As the cloud market develops, some segments are growing increasingly stable, and experts seem to agree that 2012 *‘feels like the year when the cloud is maturing.’*”

tices. Sooner or later, they’re likely to get burned.

Some cloud users did in fact get burned last year. During an Amazon outage, thousands of enterprise apps and a number of start-up companies went dark for 24 to 48 hours. This is a prime example of how customers don’t design for events beyond their control. Cloud services are often designed so that individual low-cost components can fail, but many customers are

so fixed on low-cost that they fail to take advantage of this.

To offset this, some IT and cloud service providers have started offering various services around the cloud so people don’t have to do it themselves. These are in the form of new enterprise capabilities relating to better security and monitoring features and the release of operational audits and certifications.

Another mistake that some users of cloud ser-

vices make is failing to accommodate for potential bandwidth issues. The performance of the cloud applications is important. As companies are beginning to look harder at the ability of the cloud to support business critical elements, the demands on data centres and the corresponding bandwidth are ever increasing. As a result, poor app performance may be driving some businesses to switch from public clouds to private clouds.

Looking ahead, experts see a few trends that companies should look out for as they make decisions about moving to the cloud. With many independent, relatively young companies offering services, businesses would do well to examine the health of the service provider before moving critical applications to their platforms. Betting your business on a venture-funded entrepreneurial shop can be risky, but even well-established vendors might not be the best bet.

As the cloud market develops, some segments are growing increasingly stable, and experts seem to agree that 2012 “feels like the year when the cloud is maturing.” **BL**

Scott Putman is the president of I/O Vision. For more information please call 905.937.7658, email scott@iovision.ca or visit them at 3-23 Nihan Drive, St. Catharines, ON. www.iovision.ca

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INSURANCE EXPERT



Leah Cochrane
Certified Financial Planner

QUESTION

What can I do to reduce my business insurance premiums?

ANSWER

The insurance environment has changed dramatically over the last several years. Some factors contributing to higher premiums include an increase in natural disasters, the threat of terrorist attacks, and mediocre investment returns. However, there are some steps you can take to control your premiums:

Increase Your Deductible

The higher your deductible, the lower your premiums will be. The average deductible for a policy today should be between \$1000 and \$2500.

Complete a Policy Review with your Agent

Insurance companies may change their coverage offerings, or discounts. Make sure that you are reviewing your policy annually to take advantage of any new offerings that may apply to you. For example, you may be paying for several individual coverages, and your company may be able to "bundle" them together for a more favourable rate.

Consolidate Your Insurance

Most companies offer multi-policy discounts for carrying two or more lines of insurance with the same agency. Explore having your vehicle, home or life insurance altogether with the same company.

Take a Proactive Approach to Avoiding Losses

Installing an alarm system or a sprinkler system could save you 10-20% on your premiums. These are proven methods to reduce loss frequency and severity.

Avoid Claiming Smaller Losses

Having a Claims Free rating on your policy is likely saving you 10-20%. When you put a claim through, you may lose that rating. Before putting a claim through, assess your deductible and the impact it will have on your policy in future years. If you can financially handle paying the claim yourself, you should. Save the insurance for a time when you need it financially.

Any of our licensed Associate Agents would be willing to review your policy with you, to ensure you are getting a good rate with no gaps in coverage. **BL**

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FINANCIAL WEALTH EXPERT



Christopher Kruczynski
Senior Wealth Advisor

QUESTION

Should I invest outside Canada?

ANSWER

Today, investing internationally is as easy as it is to stay at home. You can look to the U.S. markets, international mutual funds or listed, exchange traded funds or foreign stock exchanges.

Canadians can use the U.S. markets to receive the benefits of diversification. The U.S. market is the largest in the world and is considered a "foreign" market. With its broad offering of industries and companies the U.S. is the ideal first step for global diversification.

When moving offshore, international mutual funds are an excellent vehicle for investing in international markets. These funds provide access to both equity and fixed income investments presented in a diversified fashion managed by experienced professionals.

Another approach is with listed, exchange-traded funds (ETFs). There are a variety of listed ETFs that offer index exposure to a variety of countries. Each index series represents shares in an underlying portfolio of common stocks in a particular country. These products are denominated in U.S. dollars, trade like equity securities and offer many advantages to individual investors. They are an easy and affordable way to gain exposure to a specific country's broad market index.

Finally, investors can invest directly on foreign stock exchanges. However, a few factors should be considered. These include currency exposure, withholding tax, higher selling concessions, language barriers and timing differences.

The strategy you adopt will depend on the size of your portfolio, your age, time horizon, investment objectives and risk tolerance. Please feel free to call me for a complimentary financial assessment and portfolio review. **BL**

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HUMAN RESOURCE EXPERT



Chris Berrington
Human Resources Consultant

QUESTION

Is there any value in using pre-employment assessments as part of our hiring process? How do you decide which assessments would be most effective?

ANSWER

In order to compete in any business environment, you have to have the best employees—and performance is crucial. Hiring the right person for the right job is the most important element of performance.

Why should you consider pre-employment testing? Typically, employers use resumes, interviews, references and "first impressions" to make hiring decisions. Statistically speaking, two of every three new hires will disappint within the first year. Using reliable and valid assessments can increase the quality of new hires and support future success.

Pre-screen tests are designed to predict job performance through a combination of three measurable criteria: Experience—what they have done; Intentions—what they want to do; and Skills and Abilities—what they can do.

Different styles of assessments measure these criteria differently—affecting their ability to predict differing types of job performance.

- Ability and Aptitude Tests – evaluate an applicant's abilities against specific position requirements;
- Achievement Tests – measure an individual's current knowledge and skills which are important to a particular job; and
- Behavioural Assessments – provide insight into a candidate's motivational and behavioural characteristics.

In order for pre-screen assessments to be an effective aspect of your hiring process, they must:

1. be chosen based on a clear definition of the required job performance needs;
2. effectively measure key characteristics that influence performance; and
3. be administered in a consistent and standardized manner.

Companies that use assessment tools as part of their hiring process have a clear competitive advantage over those who rely on the traditional methods. The Burke Group is available to work with your organization to develop an assessment package that meets your specific recruitment and performance needs. **BL**

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BENEFITS AND RETIREMENT EXPERT



Billi Moyer

QUESTION

Is my benefit plan's cost sharing sustainable?

ANSWER

The rate of inflation for health care is well above Consumer Price Index (CPI). As rates for your group benefit plan escalate, are the cost sharing arrangements of your plan aligned to produce the results that you want over time?

Traditionally, plan costs were contained through deductibles where employees would pay a fixed dollar amount before receiving benefits from the plan. While this is effective at having employees participate in cost sharing, the flat dollar amounts remain constant while plan costs increase. A flat dollar deductible which represented 10% of costs in 2002 now represents only 3.6% of costs for the average plan and as a result the employer has to cover a larger percent of the cost.

Another component of a cost sharing arrangement is employee participation in premium payments through payroll deductions. Although this arrangement can be more effective at combating inflation, employees are likely to increase their usage of the plan to receive value for their money. When employees contribute through payroll there is a tax advantage to applying their payment to certain benefits first.

An additional option for sharing plan costs with employees is through co-insurance which applies cost sharing at the time of use, splitting the cost between the employer and employee based on a set percentage. This reduces the amount reimbursed to the employees who use the plan and by doing so it encourages them to be better consumers, however it can have a significant financial impact on those with catastrophic claims.

Finding a combination of cost sharing arrangements that fits the needs of both your organization and its employees is an important part of your overall benefits strategy. If you'd like to know more about an appropriate arrangement for your business speak to one of BHH's expert advisors today! **BL**

Billi Moyer is a Managing Consultant at BHH Benefits in Stoney Creek. She can be reached at 1.800.514.4944 or at b.moyer@bhhbenefits.com

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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EXPERT



Scott Putman

QUESTION

What should I look for when using tablets in my organization?

ANSWER

There is no doubt that tablets, like the iPad, are here to stay, and that they can set your workforce free, but with benefits come risks and tradeoffs, from securing and supporting tablets to budgeting for them.

While the benefits of tablets are clear—portability, instant boot ups, thousands of apps, beautiful and useful graphics and a touch-based user interface. The tricky part from an organization's perspective is to set policies and secure access to data, and safeguarding the devices themselves.

Assess your workforce to see who really needs a tablet. Workers who are desk-bound and create content should use a PC, whereas executives and "roamers" like travelling salespeople are prime candidates for a tablet.

Safeguarding the tablets require a balance between flexibility and control. Although many organizations support workers' personal tablets, some are buying suitable devices for their workers. Either way, IT should apply the normal security precautions, such as enforcing password policies, use mobile device management tools to manage the tablets, provide hardware and data encryption, and deliver user support.

Currently, the tablet is less secure than a notebook, but with more and more "software giants" developing apps designed specifically for tablets, they are bound to evolve into enterprise devices and will be worth the extra security effort.

Feel free to contact us about this and other computer related issues. **BL**

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ADVERTISING EXPERT



Adam Shields

QUESTION

How often should I change my ad to generate a response?

ANSWER

The best way to generate a response through your advertising is 1) with the right message and 2) frequency. When it comes to advertising, the right message will work every time. The hardest part is trying to figure out what that right message is. Is it a sale, is it your competitive advantage, is it your brand, is it a new product/service? No one has that answer but when you find the message that starts to get the phone ringing, website visits up, more store traffic and/or an increase in sales...stick with it!

There is a misconception out there that ads need to be changed all the time. I'll give you an example of a client of mine who had this same misconception. After a few weeks of developing the right message for his ad we began his campaign. After the first ad ran he said he hadn't received any calls and wanted to change the ad. As always, I recommended we stay with the same ad for a few months to create the awareness of his company and the service he provided. After the second ad ran he said he had only received a few calls and wanted to change the ad. Again I recommended that he stay with the same ad as the message was beginning to generate a response. He agreed and we proceeded with his third ad. After the third ad ran he said he only received half a dozen calls and once again wanted to change the ad. We sat down, had a brief discussion and he now understands that because we came up with the right message and are frequently targeting the exact audience he needs, the ad can stay the same and generate a response. **BL**

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MONTH IN REVIEW



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December 21st, 2011 City of Welland Receives 66,000-square-foot Gift

Press Release

Canadian Tire Financial Services (CTFS) will demonstrate its commitment to the community by announcing the donation of its vacant building at 555 Prince Charles Drive to the City of Welland.

December 15th, 2011 To Do List

The Business Link via twitter

What's on the top of your to-do list for 2012? Add a new product or service, get more from your team, hire more staff, or expand into a new market?

December 15th, 2011 Welland/Pelham Chamber of Commerce Election Results

Press Release

The Board of Directors of the Welland/Pelham Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce the four individuals who have been elected to the Board of Directors for a three year term, and the one individual who has been elected to a two year term.

December 15th, 2011 Ontario Government's Southwestern Development Fund Needs to Include Niagara

Press Release

The Ontario government recently introduced Attracting Investment and

Creating Jobs Act that, if passed, will create a \$20-million fund in support of southwestern Ontario.

December 11th, 2011 HWS – Health, Wellness & Safety Magazine

The Business Link via twitter

Animal Reiki Healing: Animals, including wild animals, intuitively recognize and appreciate Reiki's ability to heal.

December 9th, 2011 CFIB

The Business Link via Facebook

New Accessibility Rules – Is Your Business Ready? CFIB is ready to help you with all questions.

December 8th, 2011 Chambers Welcomes New Canada – U.S. Border Action Plan

Press Release

As Niagara continues to play a leadership role in Canada's economic transition, the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce and St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce welcomes the new Canada – U.S. Border Action Plan announced today.

December 5th, 2011 Heart Niagara

The Business Link via Facebook

Heart Niagara is Reaching out for Community Support as they Search for a New Home.

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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



The Welland Canal runs through Thorold and has been a critical factor in the economic prosperity of the city. The construction of the fourth Welland Canal began in 1914, and was opened in 1932. Eight locks built of concrete including four of the world-famous Flight Locks are in Thorold. Pictured here at the Lock 7 Information Centre situated atop of the Niagara escarpment on Chapel Street a picturesque view of Locks 4,5,6 & 7 draws tourists and local canal enthusiasts to admire the ships from a viewing platform. Photo courtesy of Thorold Tourism.

THE CITY OF THOROLD

This growing municipality is providing a strategic location for many new business enterprises.

BY PAUL CARFAGNINI

A look into Thorold's history may give us a glimpse of the future in the city known for visionaries and entrepreneurial leadership in Niagara.

Business started in Thorold as the early settlers arrived in 1784. Originally the area was planned to be called St. George but was officially named

in honour of Sir John Thorold, a member of British parliament who showed a keen interest in colonial affairs. After settlers cleared the forest, the wooded plateau overlooking Lake Ontario was called Stumptown for a brief period. It was listed as a village in 1850, a township in 1875, and officially declared a city in 1975.

Today, Thorold boasts a population of 18,647 in a

growing municipality, and is centrally located in the Niagara Region. Strategically situated for business, Thorold spans 12 miles from the U.S. border at the Rainbow Bridge in Niagara Falls, and 75 miles from Toronto. The proximity to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie has historically drawn investors to capitalize on Thorold's strategic location.

Back in 1812, three owners of mills on Twelve

Mile Creek—George Keefer, William Hamilton Merritt and John DeCew—capitalized on their vision to build a canal in Niagara that would cut through Thorold. In those days, the water supply was unreliable during dry periods which would disable production at their mills. Their partnership envisioned a...

Continued on page 10



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A new generation of business owners has revitalized downtown Thorold in the past few years. A group of entrepreneurs rejuvenating the business community is pictured from left, front row: Mario DiFelice – Elio's Foot Comfort Centre; Tammy Easton – Tammy's Hair Boutique; back row from left, Grace Wileichuk Smith – Photography with Grace; Rob DiFelice – Elio's Foot Comfort Centre; Ken Atmekjian – Steadman Jewellers and Talia Gillan – Gypsy Alley.

Continued from page 9

...canal linking Lake Ontario to Lake Erie as a source of a steady water supply to run their mills.

A change to the proposed route far from DeCew's west-side property compelled him to drop out of the project. Legislation was enacted in 1824, incorporating Keefer, Merritt and others as the Welland Canal Company, with a capital of 40,000 Pounds Sterling. As the largest stockholder, Keefer was appointed president.

In 1932, construction of the current canal's fourth version was completed, redirecting sections of the first route and expanding the system. The Welland Canal runs through Thorold and has been a critical factor in the economic prosperity of the city.

As a reliable source of water and efficient transportation for industry, the canal boosted business in Thorold throughout the 1900s as the area emerged as an industrial centre in Niagara. Manufacturing plants and pulp and paper mills were established in the city. The smokestacks from plants such as the Exolon, Hayes Dana and other factories booming in the 1900s have since closed, and some have been repurposed with new businesses. The former Gallagher Paper Mill on Front Street has been refurbished into a giant warehouse for The Book Depot. The Welland Mills property on Pine Street was developed into corporate offices and residential properties.

For Thorold, the canal means more than transportation for industry; the waterway also lifts business as a tourist attraction. The Thorold Flight Locks attract thousands of people each year who view the ships being raised or lowered over the Niagara Escarpment. Numerous events such as the Thorold Annual Car Show, the Thorold Arts and Craft Show, the Canal Bank Shuffle, and the Santa Claus Parade draw visi-

“The revitalization of buildings has created a buzz in the downtown area with businesses such as *On the Front Café & Eatery*, *Print Three*, *Henderson's Pharmacy*, and *Canal City Realty Ltd. Brokerage* as prime examples.”

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Success in business is a piece of cake topped with a commitment to community service at Henderson's Pharmacy where Owner and Pharmacist John Henderson is shown accompanied by wife, Cathy, at their 70th anniversary event in 2009. The family owned and operated pharmacy has been the heart of the community since 1939 when John's father, Edward Henderson, established the business in the building formerly operated as McCartneys at 15 Front Street South.

Photo courtesy of Photography with Grace.

tors and stimulate business for local merchants. To help boost local business, Thorold Tourism recently launched a promotion campaign using the city's "L2V" postal address in a creative theme: "Love to Visit Thorold."

Thorold's Downtown Revitalization

Changing old buildings and creating new and lively businesses is a popular trend that is growing in Thorold. Revitalization of the downtown area was an idea that took roots more than 25 years ago.

the community based on historic buildings and canal city image.

In the second phase of the revitalization project, a Facade Improvement Study Analysis for the Thorold Business Improvement Area (B.I.A.) introduced several ideas to help guide improvements for private properties. This facade program has evolved into a relatively successful initiative, showing beautiful results in the heritage image of today's downtown.

Serge Carpino remembers the 1980s as a critical

"The business outlook in Thorold should focus on the city's proximity to three economic engines says local entrepreneur Michael Skrtich, pointing to Brock University, the Welland Canal, and the new hospital under construction in St. Catharines."

The long-term plan is gradually branching out with impressive results. The revitalization of buildings has created a buzz in the downtown area with businesses such as On the Front Café & Eatery, Print Three, Henderson's Pharmacy, and Canal City Realty Ltd. Brokerage as prime examples.

In 1985, an investment of \$200,000 started a streetscape project with funding by the City of Thorold and the provincial government's Commercial Area Improvement Plan (C.A.I.P.). Front Street was reconstructed as the downtown core was revitalized. The project included the redesign and extension of sidewalks, laneways, and parking lot areas. Pedestrian areas including amenities such as lighting, islands, and street furniture were produced to enhance the urban theme of

period in the renaissance of the downtown area. As a dedicated volunteer with the Thorold B.I.A., Serge served as the organization's chair for close to 25 years while paving the way for continual improvements including the development of a facade improvement program. Not only did Serge provide leadership for the B.I.A., he has personally made substantial investments to revitalize downtown properties for the community to prosper.

For instance, Carpino purchased a vacant property on Albert Street in December of 1987, and converted the dilapidated building into a modern business centre branded as Towpath Square. In 1939, Louis Reid had constructed the building at...

Continued on page 12

Carpino Family Teamwork



Taryn Carpino
Sales Representative



Adam Carpino
Sales Representative



Serge Carpino
Broker of Record

"Our Family Teamwork Works Hard for You"

- 30 Years as a Family Operated Local Business
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- Serge is a Top Achievement Award Winner
- Only Thorold-based continuous realtor and Thorold resident since 1982.

For 30 years in Niagara, Serge and Toni Carpino have worked as a team to satisfy clients. Producing results for real estate clients since 1982, Serge has consistently been recognized as a top producer in the Region.

As lifetime Thorold residents, the Carpino family has always shown a commitment to the community they serve. They all work and play in Niagara as active members of the Thorold community. In fact, their volunteerism has been recognized in the community where Serge is known as "The Good Guy."

Married for 30 years, Serge and Toni show great teamwork by producing positive results. Together they have expanded the Carpino family business with their daughter Taryn and son Adam.

Their family owned and operated business, Canal City Limited Brokerage is known for unsurpassed customer service. As a result, their sales have grown annually for 30 consecutive years, says Adam Carpino. Referrals by loyal clients help them find new generations of real estate buyers and sellers, adds Taryn.

A strong believer in education and

knowledge, Taryn graduated from Brock University in 2007 with a B.A. degree.

Since the market is continuously changing, Taryn takes courses and updates her knowledge of the market

on an ongoing basis.

Market knowledge and excellent customer service are keys to their success. The personal attention to all the details cuts the stress out of buying or selling real estate, says Adam, a Brock University graduate with an Honours degree in Political Science with first-class standing.

Joining the firm in 2010 as a licensed agent, Adam has stepped up to focus on clients' needs, while working on "one-on-one" relationships.

Clients say the Carpino personal touch creates total satisfaction. The Carpino family works hard as a unified operation. The family works as a team every step of the way to achieve their clients' goals.

Personalized service distinguishes the Carpino family from other real estate groups. Client testimonials attest to the Carpino commitment to "go the extra steps" in selling their listings.

When buying or selling real estate, get their family teamwork on your side. They will work hard for you.



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"We All Pull Together for Our Clients"



An old building has gained a new life with a refurbished facade and a fresh business idea by Michael Skrtich to open On the Front Cafe & Eatery. Skrtich completed the renovation of the historic building in conjunction with the city's facade program for downtown businesses.



Print Three is a new business owned by franchisee Bill VanderKlippe in Thorold at 15 Towpath Street in a historic building with a new facade. The Towpath Square development by Serge Carpino enhanced the heritage theme in the downtown business community by participating in a facade grant program with the City of Thorold and the Niagara Region.

“Commercial buildings in the downtown Thorold area have been getting a facelift thanks to \$80,000 budgeted in 2011 by City Hall and the Niagara Region, contributing to numerous projects for entrepreneurs.”

Continued from page 11

...15 Albert Street West to serve as a retail outlet for Liquor Control Board of Ontario. Today, Dr. Emilio Raimondo occupies the main floor with a dental office while Carpino runs Canal City Realty Ltd. Brokerage as a realtor on the second floor.

Tim Hortons, State Farm Insurance, and Print Three are national companies that opened franchis-

es in Thorold as the result of the relentless efforts and personal investment by Carpino to produce commercial developments. The former site of the Thorold News on Regent Street has been developed by Carpino into the current location of Tim Hortons and an optometrist's office where residents can get their vision tested.

In business, visionaries can see beyond the current challenges and look into future opportunities. The business outlook in Thorold should focus on the

city's proximity to three economic engines says local entrepreneur Michael Skrtich, pointing to Brock University, the Welland Canal, and the new hospital under construction in St. Catharines.

Skrtich envisions future generations gravitating to the downtown areas in urban centres. As Skrtich researches the revitalization of downtowns, he notices every community has a great coffee shop. This trend inspired Skrtich to launch On the Front Café & Eatery slated to open in January.

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Serge Carpino has focused on facade improvements to buildings in Thorold as a key factor to the revitalization of the downtown area. Shown with the plans for a facade improvement in 2009 at Cosmo's Diner, 26 Front Street North, from left, Carpino, then B.I.A. chair joins the owner of the building, Luigi Femia; and Kenneth Shelton, architectural designer on the project. Today, the co-owner of Cosmo's Diner, Karen Brokes says "the facade improvement has made a tremendous impact on the success of our business."



Fast Facts *Thorold*

- Current population: 18,647
- Number of households: 7,296
- 2011 per capita income: \$29,303
- 2011 average household income: \$74,892
- The average household income of Thorold residents is 11% below the national average.
- Average household expenditures include:
 - Food: \$7,655
 - Shelter: \$13,707
 - Clothing: \$2,913
 - Transportation: \$9,386
 - Health and personal care: \$2,735
 - Recreation reading and education: \$5,888
 - Taxes and securities: \$19,158

Source: FP Markets Canadian Demographics 2011

Facade Improvement – Grant Encourages Enhancements of Downtown Buildings

Commercial buildings in the downtown Thorold area have been getting a facelift thanks to \$80,000 budgeted in 2011 by City Hall and the Niagara Region, contributing to numerous projects for entrepreneurs.

The Downtown Thorold Area Facade Improvement Grant Program is intended to assist and encourage downtown Thorold property owners or tenants to enhance the exterior appearance of their buildings. The program is based on government funding channeled to developers, while motivating private sector investments in the revitalization of existing commercial building facades in the downtown Thorold area.

The program focuses on building facade improvements, and is intended to inspire entrepreneurs to complete other non-funded improvements including structural and waterproofing repairs that might be required to maintain a building's integrity.

A total budget of \$80,000 was allocated for the program in 2011. Each grant matches half of every dollar invested in the project up to a maximum of \$10,000 per building. The Regional Municipality of Niagara matches the city's grant of 50%, and based on a maximum grant of \$10,000, the city and region each contribute \$5,000 per project. (In 2011, the city and the region each contributed \$25,000 towards the facade program because only five projects obtained the grant.)

Facades have been installed under the grant at notable buildings including Print Three, On the Front Café & Eatery, and Young McNamara Barristers—Solicitors—Notaries, among other buildings.

The facade project reinforces the heritage image in the downtown area. When it comes to heritage in Thorold, Henderson's Pharmacy has succeeded as the heart of the community since 1939. A trip downtown for shoppers means a stop at Henderson's to buy personal care products, prescriptions or to browse through their heritage photos displayed around the store.

In 2010, Dave De Grave envisioned bigger opportunities for Hartzel Auto & Marine (H.A.M.) by relocating to Thorold where he expanded his business. The half-acre property on Ormond Street South offers easy access off Highway 58 for the convenience of customers coming from Pelham, Welland and Niagara Falls. With more space at the facility, H.A.M. added boat repairs and service, as well as trailer hitch installations and repairs. Businesses can also count on H.A.M. for a certified truck and coach technician to provide official safety checks for commercial vehicles.

Businesses are taking advantage of Thorold's location to draw customers to the hub of the peninsula. With close to 100 retail establishments in the city, numerous corporate and professional offices, the business community is growing in Thorold. For the future, new businesses such as Print Three and Lucy Popoli Chartered Accountant are growing with a regional vision focused on Thorold's central location as a strategic asset. **BL**

"With close to 100 retail establishments in the city, numerous corporate and professional offices, the business community is growing in Thorold."

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Lucy Popoli Chartered Accountant Professional Corporation has opened

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A SOCIAL MEDIA RESOLUTION FOR SUCCESS IN 2012

Here are 8 tips that will help you get on the right track with your social media this year.

“In business we all know that branding is important. Your Facebook, Twitter and other Social Media accounts should be designed to match the look and feel of your organization. Having that custom imagery will help set you apart and build confidence among your readers. *Don't use the standard templates that the Social Media sites offer. How professional does a template appear to you?*”

BY JOE JONES

We have all been the guy or girl at some point in our lives who is a little reluctant to change. Let's face it—we are creatures of habit and we usually don't like stepping out of our comfort zones, even if there is a promise of greener grass. Let this year be the year that your business or organization steps out of comfort zones and into areas of new growth, new clients and new leads. Social media has a proven track record of bringing in new business.

Here are 8 tips that will help you get on the right track with your social media this year.

#1 Show them the Real You

When you are tweeting or posting on social media sites, be real. No one wants you to act different than you are in person. Social media is all about building relationships. Those relationships are the very thing that helps you gain new leads and clients.

#2 Focus on What you do Best

If your company or organization offers a million different services or products then only focus on a select few. If you try and bring all of your services or products into play, you will end up appearing unfocused. This will deflate your brand power and repetition among followers.

#3 Start Generating Leads

Become interactive with users and leads will start

to generate. Don't become a one-sided conversationalist who only looks for people to reply and never comments on others' posts! Users like to feel that you are interested in their lives. Any kid, who received a signed baseball from a pro, will carry that memory with him forever.

#4 Customize to Match your Brand

In business we all know that branding is important. Your Facebook, Twitter and other social media accounts should be designed to match the look and feel of your organization. Having that custom imagery will help set you apart and build confidence among your readers. Don't use the standard templates that the social media sites offer. How professional does a template appear to you?

#5 Work Harder by Planning

Start planning in advance and don't work off the last minutes of the day. Think at least a month ahead of time of what you want to promote on social media. This will help you to have a creative edge by allowing you to ponder different methods, hooks and unique offers in advance. It is impossible to create a successful contest during the last minute of the day.

#6 Cut into Video

Video is an item that basically goes hand in hand with social media. Video has become super easy for us to create on the internet. We can utilize a number of free services to host our videos such as YouTube

and Vimeo. Video can help you capture a whole new demographic of followers and will allow you to say a whole lot more in a limited time frame.

#7 Monitor your Successes and Failures

Often we think something is working or not working because we are not tracking its actual results. You will be surprised to know how many people read each one of your blogs or newsletters that you send. In most cases, business owners start investing more time after they see how much traffic is actually being generated because of social media.

#8 Give it Away

We often think that we should not share some of our secrets. However, sharing some of this information on social media can be a huge benefit. People start talking about your method and this automatically starts generating more traffic. In many cases you will be viewed as an expert and this will allow you to gain the trust of your followers. Usually people don't want to build their own car; they want to trust the manufacture that they are buying from. **BL**

Learn how Symetric's innovative social media strategies can help build your audience and getting you results. Please contact Joe Jones at 905.933.4910, joe@span.com, by twitter@span or visit www.symetricproductions.com.

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SYMETRIC

THE NEW COLD CALL – IT'S NOT COOKIE CUTTER

“How successful are your cold calls?”



BY JEFFREY GITOMER

“Jeffrey, come down to the office, there’s a guy here who has cookies for you! They’re those Biscoff cookies, the ones that you like.”

How could I resist? I love those cookies. I’ve eaten them for years, predominately on airplanes, more predominately on Delta. They also have them in the Delta lounge, and occasionally you can find them in the grocery store.

For ten years, my good friend, the great Nido Qu-bein, sent me a case of Biscoff cookies for Christmas. They were usually gone by the first of January.

When I got to my office Bradford Coons was beaming from ear to ear. His ploy had worked. But in reality, he was not just giving me the cookies, he was representing the cookie company, Lotus Bakeries.

He demonstrated his special “100 cookie caddie box” door opener.

And went on to enthusiastically explain that this new product package was being designed for corporate America, and sales people in particular. It could even be customized with the company logo or photograph.

At a very reasonable wholesale price, I quickly became interested in using the product myself. I thought it would make a great gift (people always give what they want to get—keep that in mind while you are shopping this holiday season).

I decided to try the cookies at our next public seminar event. As an enticement, Stephanie and Elizabeth strategically placed one Biscoff on the table at each seminar participant seat. Using the potato chip philosophy, you can never eat just one, they figured all the boxes of cookies would be gone by the end of our two-day event. And, except for one box, they were correct.

But lets go back to the original cold call.

Bradford Coons did not make a cold call, he made a strategic, targeted cold call. In fact, that day, I was his only cold call. He was well prepared, got through to the decision maker, created engagement, made the sale, and left smiling.

- How targeted are your cold calls?
- How strategic are your cold calls?
- How pre-prepared are your cold calls?
- How engaging are your cold calls?

And here’s the killer question: How successful are your cold calls?

HISTORY: If you know me, and my sales philosophy, you also know that cold calling is at the very bottom of my list, with respect to making sales connections and sales. Especially in these times, there are smarter, better ways of making a cold call. And my definition of cold call is not “dialing for dollars” or “calling from a list” or selecting a category and making random calls, either on the phone or in person. Those strategies are a total waste of time, and “no” is 98% of the outcome—or more.

There are 2.5 basic understandings of a cold call:

1. It is the lowest percentage sales call.
 2. Rejection is likely.
- 2.5 Several rejections in a row can cause self-doubt and can challenge your attitude.

Read more about “The New Cold Call” at www.businesslinknewspaper.com. **BL**

Jeffrey Gitomer is the author of The Sales Bible, Customer Satisfaction is Worthless Customer Loyalty is Priceless, The Little Red Book of Selling, The Little Red Book of Sales Answers, The Little Black Book of Connections, The Little Gold Book of YES! Attitude, The Little Green Book of Getting Your Way, The Little Platinum Book of Cha-Ching, The Little Teal Book of Trust, The Little Book of Leadership, and Social BOOM! His website, www.gitomer.com, will lead you to more information about training and seminars, or you can email him personally at salesman@gitomer.com. © 2011 All Rights Reserved—Don’t even think about reproducing this document without written permission from Jeffrey H. Gitomer and Buy Gitomer, Inc • 704.333.1112

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Cutting edge St. Catharines machine shop and repair facility marks over 65 years of service excellence.

BY SCOTT LESLIE
The Business Link

When you've been in the business as long as Girotti Machine, success comes with the territory. Family owned and operated, Girotti Machine is one of Niagara's premier machine shops and repair facilities. Located on 26 Seapark Drive in St. Catharines, their firm has over 65 years of experi-

ence in nearly every aspect of machining, machine repair, fabrication and welding.

"At Girotti Machine, we offer complete design, machining, assembly and fabricating services," says Don Girotti, the president of Girotti Machine. "We can take care of everything from large machining jobs to small precision parts. We also have a press refurbishing facility and can offer complete engineering and rebuilds."

The Girotti Machine team has a strong reputation for being the go-to experts when it comes to manufacturing, installing, testing and maintaining a wide variety of machinery and parts. Over their six plus decades in business, the Girotti Machine team has also expanded their horizons, doing work for everything from oil fields and steel mills to power generation firms.

"We pride ourselves on our ability to be versa-

tile," Don explains. "Our team has catered to a wide variety of industries. Some of our customers are major suppliers to the paper, steel, textile, printing, automotive and nuclear sectors."

Built To Last

Girotti Machine has been meeting all their customers' production and machining challenges since 1946. But their operation started modestly enough.

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Humble beginnings in 1946: the Girotti brothers open shop in their father's garage on William Street in Merriton.

The company was originally established following the end of the Second World War. Brothers Silvio and Marino Girotti had been busy working steadily at Clark's Machine Shop in St. Catharines but were looking to go into business for themselves. They soon set up a small machine shop in their father's 12 x 24 foot garage on William Street in Merriton. All they had was one drill press, one lathe and one shaper—but they had boundless energy and their small business began to flourish.

cated to their current location on Seapark Drive.

These days, the second and third generation of the Girotti family has firmly taken over the management reins at Girotti Machine. In addition to Don, there are his cousins Vince Girotti, Norm Girotti and Len Bianco, as well as his daughter Karen Girotti-Livingston.

According to Don, Girotti Machine has grown substantially since its early formative days and can now service customers anywhere in North America.

“Over the years, we’ve handled the complete manufacture and set-up of equipment for hundreds of customers throughout Canada, Mexico, Spain and the U.S., and that includes every facet of the project, whether it’s design, build, testing, shipping or installing machinery.”

– Don Girotti, president of Girotti Machine.


It didn't take long before other members of the Girotti family came on board including their brothers Nello, Dino, Mario and Guerino (Scotty). By the early 1950s, the Girottis had moved to a larger facility on Boyle Road (now Glendale Avenue) and worked on major projects such as manufacturing idler and drive rollers for the new Stelco plant in Welland. The Girottis would eventually begin diversifying into other areas such as concrete products. (The company was later split into two separate companies—Girotti Machine and Hy-grade Precast Concrete.) By 1980, the operation had continued to prosper and the Girottis re-

“Over the years, we’ve handled the complete manufacture and set-up of equipment for hundreds of customers throughout Canada, Mexico, Spain and the U.S.,” he says. “And that includes every facet of the project, whether it’s design, build, testing, shipping or installing machinery.”

A Commitment to the Customer

Whether it's reworking existing parts, manufacturing new ones or taking care of entire machine ...

Continued on page 18



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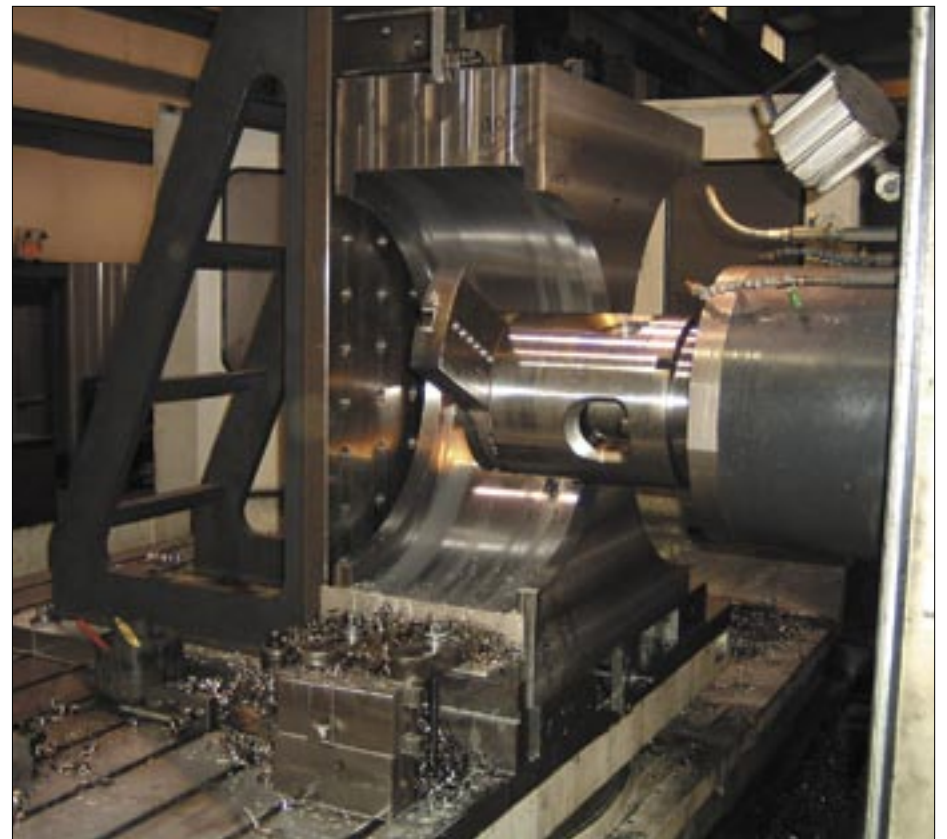
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Machining of intermediate bearing cartridge.

Continued from page 17

...rebuilds, the Girotti Machine team has the ability to source materials, design/engineer drawings, manufacture parts, and install them when necessary.

"It doesn't matter how tough the work is or difficult the material," Don says. "Our knowledgeable team can help every step of the way—from the drawing board to the final installation."

1. Machine Repair

A big challenge with many of today's industries is being able to keep their machinery running at peak capacity. Equipment breakdowns can often lead to expensive downtime, not to mention long production delays.

The Girotti Machine team also prides themselves on the speed of their repair work. The typical turnaround time for minor repairs can be as little as 24 hours while a full rebuild can be completed in 10 to 12 weeks.

2. Machining

"Our CNC department can handle any job," Don says, "from complicated one-offs to high volume production. Whole production cells have been designed and implemented at our facilities when our customers' demands are great enough."

Girotti Machine has full jobbing shop capabilities with a variety of manual and CNC equipment. (Their CNC department is integrated with an enhanced CAD/CAM system.) They also have full in-house design capabilities for the development of prototype machines and other related components.

3. Fabricating and Welding

At Girotti Machine, their in-house fabricating and welding department is able to produce fabrication work with the finest detail—everything from small two piece fabrications to large machine frames.

Through the years, Girotti Machine has been involved in the design, fabrication and testing of various different types of specialized machines.

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Finished machined large Steel Mill coupling drive spacer.

Girotti Machine's welding department also has many years of experience in overlay welding and is capable of welding a wide range of materials.

Don says they're able to get the job done for their customers due to the strong sense of teamwork and commitment among their departments.

"Our in-house fabrication and machining teams all work hand in hand," he says. "That way, if a customer needs changes to a certain prototype, we can make those changes quickly and easily, and at a minimum cost to the customer."

4. Heavy Forge Maintenance

In recent years, Girotti Machine has experienced exponential growth in the area of heavy forge machine repair. With the high cost of new forging equipment, reworking existing equipment is usually the only option for most forging companies—and Girotti Machine is perfectly suited to the task. Their 42,000 square foot facility is fully equipped with eight overhead cranes that give their team the ability to handle

a variety of heavy parts and equipment safely and securely.

Through the maintenance process, existing presses can be brought back to OEM standards or modified with new technology depending on the customer's requirement. That can involve several options such as die nest modifications, lubing systems, computer monitoring or new safety features.

Quality and Continuous Improvement

Throughout their company's history, continuous improvement has played a major role in the way they do business. In 1998 for example, Girotti Machine received their ISO 9001 registration from the International Organization for Standardization—a worldwide organization that recognizes companies for their commitment to continuous improvement and for having an effective quality management system in place.

Continued on page 20

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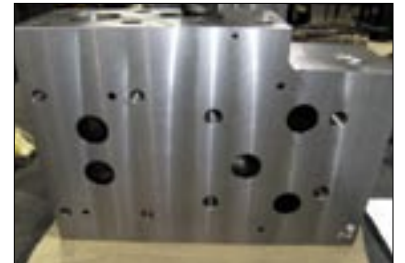
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1300 ton national press rebuilt at Girotti's and being staged for transport.



Forged tooling die set—designed, supplied and machined at Girotti's.



High pressure manifold for steel mill application.

Continued from page 19

Through their ISO registration, Girotti Machine has dramatically increased their company's efficiency over the years—and has been able to deliver a more enhanced brand of service to their clients. Being ISO registered and Z299.2 designated enables Girotti Machine to maintain constant control over their work. For example, Girotti keeps strict documentation of all customer supplied materials such as jigs, fixtures and casting patterns so their team can properly track and maintain everything that's shipped to their facility.

Don feels that their belief in delivering the highest quality work possible is one of the big reasons behind Girotti's growth.

"Our quality control department is one of the busiest parts of our organization," he explains. "Whether it's values for production runs or a rush job with no part drawings, our inspectors are committed to making sure everything that leaves our

plant is completely defect-free."

"All our inspection gauging equipment and standards are qualified on a yearly basis according to our ISO standards," Don says, "and we're very proud of that fact. Our customers are free to review our ISO manual at any time."

But the Girotti Machine's team commitment to improving their firm doesn't stop at quality control. They're also dedicated to constantly adding to their plant capabilities and that means having all the latest computer technology and software in place.

"We're constantly working hard to upgrade our technical capabilities," Don explains, "whether it's increasing our machining capacity or providing more specialized equipment and computerization. Innovation doesn't just happen. We make it happen."

Girotti Machine has been busy with several projects in recent months. A proud member of Niagara Industrial Association (NIA), Girotti Machine recently began work with NIA member Dilts Piston Hydraulics to produce a series of 24 Collomatic

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“...our success can only be measured by the dedication of our employees and the success of our customers. That’s what matters the most.”

Completed steel mill roll top cover assembly.

Winches for the Chengxi Shipyard Company Limited in mainland China. Girotti Machine is responsible to manufacture the entire base and all of the machined components.

The Girotti team has also recently completed a \$1-million dollar project with St. Gobain Technical Fabrics to fabricate and build two complete 174” scrim machines used for textile weaving. (One machine was for their plant in Albion, New York and the other was for their facility in Spain.)

“We’re working with new customers in several diverse fields lately,” Don says. “Currently we are helping a Mississauga-based power company with the design and prototype of some of their breakthrough energy storage technology and renewable power sources.”

Locally, Girotti has also been working with Lakeside Steel in Welland (and their facilities in the U.S.) with the refurbishing of forging equipment, aiding them in the production of their drill pipe product.

Major international projects like these are a defi-

nite sign of the Girottis’ commitment to the growth of their company. But after 65 years in the business and thousands of completed assignments, their success always comes down to one thing—satisfying the customer.

“Running a successful operation like Girotti Machine means a great deal to us,” Don says, “but our success can only be measured by the dedication of our employees and the success of our customers. That’s what matters the most.”



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NIAGARA SUCCESS STORY



“At Nu-Craft, we’ve concentrated solely on windows and exterior doors, we feel that if you try to do too many things like roofs, siding and fencing, you can become a master of none. We want to focus all our attentions on windows and doors.”



Fred (left) and Jason Richards; father and son, and owners of Nu-Craft Window & Door Company.



NU-CRAFT WINDOW & DOOR COMPANY

Innovative Niagara window and door specialists celebrate 30 years in business.

BY SCOTT LESLIE
The Business Link

When you’re looking for a local outlet to serve all your window and exterior door needs, there’s no better place to call than Nu-Craft Window & Door Company in St. Catharines.

The Nu-Craft team has been proudly serving the Niagara and surrounding regions for nearly 30 years now. And there’s a good reason for that longevity.

“We’re committed to being the best,” says Jason Richards who co-owns and operates the Nu-Craft Window & Door Company with his father, Fred.

“Whether they’re an experienced do-it-yourselfer or need someone to manage the job from beginning to end, we’re the perfect choice for new construction and replacement windows and doors.”

Located on 188 Bunting Road, the Nu-Craft Window & Door Company has been providing their residential customers with a complete line of windows and exterior door products since 1982. Their firm’s wide range of products includes steel doors, wood and vinyl windows, patio doors and shutters.

Nu-Craft carries some of the most recognized names in the Canadian window and door industry—whether it’s casement windows from North

Star Vinyl Windows and Doors or steel doors from Dorplex Entry Systems.

Jason says that their decision to keep their services focused is one of their main strengths.

“At Nu-Craft, we’ve concentrated solely on windows and exterior doors,” he explains. “We feel that if you try to do too many things like roofs, siding and fencing, you can become a master of none. We want to focus all our attentions on windows and doors.”

A History of Quality

Over the past thirty years, Nu-Craft has helped hundreds of customers with their window and door projects.

Much of that success is due to the hard work and perseverance of company founder Fred Richards.

Fred began his career working in the construction industry in the late 1960s and launched his own lumber firm with a business partner in 1974. By the early 1980s, he was looking to take things a little easier and sold out to his partner in 1982. Later that same year, however, a business opportunity came along that Fred couldn’t pass up.

“My dad met two brothers that wanted to start up a new window and door company,” Jason explains. “He was a little reluctant at first but he soon gave in and Nu-Craft was born. My dad acquired the



Thirty years of old-fashioned service shepherded by father and son owners, Fred and Jason Richards...guaranteed craftsmanship by qualified, courteous and proud staff... a showroom full of meticulously-selected products...and a commitment to meet any budget, even the experienced do-it-yourselfers’... make Nu-Craft’s resume stand out as one of Ontario’s finest suppliers of new construction and replacement windows and doors.

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“We’ve served all kinds of people at Nu-Craft over the years, and we look forward to serving many more. We offer the kind of old-fashioned service you just don’t find much nowadays. *And that never goes out of style.*” – Jason Richards, co-owner.

business from his partners some time later. The rest is history.”

These days, Fred and Jason hold the positions of president and vice-president respectively. They both take care of various roles at the company—everything from managing sales and billing to administration and supervising installations. Jason joined his father’s firm in 1991 and bought in as his partner several years later.

“I’ve grown up around the construction business,” Jason says of his decision to join the Nu-Craft team, “so it just seemed like a natural fit for me. It’s an exciting field to work in and it’s been a rewarding experience dealing with so many of our satisfied customers.”

A Belief In Being The Best

Nu-Craft may have the same location on Bunting Road it has had since 1982 but that doesn’t mean the Richards family is standing still with their operation. They’re constantly adding new product lines to better serve their customers.

“All our products are made right here in Canada and that means a great deal to us,” Jason says. “We’ve positioned ourselves with several strong innovative manufacturers to make sure we provide our customers with only the latest window and door technology.”

Nu-Craft carries a wide range of styles, colours and configurations including products from such leading window and door manufacturers as Vinyl Window Designs, PH Tech Patio Doors, North Star Vinyl Windows and Doors, Bonneville Solutions (steel doors) and Dorplex Entry Systems.

Customers looking to see firsthand what the Nu-Craft team has to offer firsthand are invited to visit Nu-Craft’s 2,500 square foot showroom. Here, customers can get an excellent overview of their various window and door products.

“We have a large showroom where customers can come in and try full size samples to see what best suits their needs,” Jason explains. “We also provide free estimates on all our installation work and can come right to your door for an in-home consultation.”

When it comes to installations, the Richards are dedicated to putting their customers first—and it shows.

“We believe the customer is the most important part of any project,” Jason says. “If they have a dream and want us to help it become a reality, we’ll do our best to make sure the final result meets their exact requirements.”

At Nu-Craft, their team starts by working closely with the customer to determine what they’re looking for. Next, they provide a quote on the project and go over things to make sure that all their needs are being addressed. Over the coming weeks, the Nu-Craft team will order parts and schedule a convenient time for the work to begin. Once the door or window installation has been completed, the installers will review the work with the customer to make sure that they’re fully satisfied with the end product.

“You can’t be a success in this business unless you treat your customers with respect,” Jason says. “All our professional installers are fast, friendly and courteous. During each job, we also take care of the little things like making sure we keep the customer’s property clean and safe until our work is done. Being conscientious is a big deal with us.”

After sales service is another area where the Nu-Craft team shines. All their labour is guaranteed for ten years, and the window and door warranties they offer can vary anywhere from a decade to a lifetime.

“Our service is what really separates us from the competition,” Jason says. “We’ve partnered with a number of companies like Vinyl Window Designs that back up their products. If one of our customers purchased a window as far back as the 1980s, my father probably sold it and he’s still here to service it to this day. We also partner with Eco Home Financial so we can provide our customers with straight-forward financing. Eco Home can add the financed amount right to your Enbridge bill.”

A Recipe For Success

Jason and his father take great pride in their work. But they’re also proud to be strong members of their community. Nu-Craft is a proud sponsor of many community sports teams and charitable events including the St. Catharines Junior B Falcons, Grantham Optimist Softball, Port Weller Soccer and the Annual Heidehof Golf Tournament.

In terms of their industry, Nu-Craft continues to be a member in good standing with Siding & Window Dealers Association of Canada (SAWDAC) and has an A+ Rating with the Better Business Bureau.

Much of the Richards’ business comes in the form of referrals. And that comes as no surprise to the Nu-Craft team. Their commitment to quality and being the best has made Nu-Craft one of the longest serving companies in the local window and door industry.

And whether they’re catering to a home renovation project in Niagara Falls or a do-it-yourselfer working in Burlington, the Richards don’t plan to change their recipe for success any time soon

“We’ve served all kinds of people at Nu-Craft over the years,” Jason says, “and we look forward to serving many more. We offer the kind of old-fashioned service you just don’t find much nowadays. And that never goes out of style.” **BL**



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KATZ KORNER

DECEMBER 2011

BY ARCHIE KATZMAN



Many thanks to Joseph O'Brien (Club President 1998) who laid the wreath once again at the Cenotaph November 11th on behalf of all Club Members...very much appreciated Joe! Congratulations to Bob Harris, Tim Atherton, Laurie Graham & our friends at Astral Media on the success of their 7th Annual Food Drive held at the radio station for Community Care, two bus loads of food & gifts were collected. The St. Catharines Business Club is currently celebrating their 55th anniversary...keep up the good work! It's the Big 50th Wedding Anniversary for Bill & Pat McLean...wishing you many more happy & healthy years together. Milan Plentai is pleased to announce that his team has joined the National Bank of Canada, Good Luck Milan! Roy Timms & Timbro Design Building Contractors were the recipients of the Ruby Award for Eco Action...and Club Member Steve Judge, President & C.E.O. of International Breweries captured two awards at the World Beer Awards in England for their strong lager Australian Max. So happy to welcome back Sandra Sabo (St. Catharines General Hospital Foundation) after a long absence...you have been missed! Happy to report that Paul Stunt is back home after having a knee replacement, (no excuses now Paul on your golf handicap). Congrats to Sandra Shorthouse (S.G. Shorthouse Insurance & Financial Services) & Harvey McIntyre on their recent engagement, a summer wedding is planned...Our Club has been working on a new web site which we hope to have finished by the end of this month, stay tuned for updates on this...Now that the year 2011 is over, I would like to thank each & every Member for your continued support of your Club. Our Board of Directors, all of our full & part-time staff hope you & your families have enjoyed a very Happy & Healthy Holiday Season.

Take Care, Archie **K**

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DIFFERENTIATE YOUR PERSONAL BRAND WITH CREATIVITY

“Creativity is passion and at the core of exceptional entrepreneurs.”



Continued from page 1

...and benefits. Today, you need to introduce two vital ingredients into your marketing mix, “identification and experience.” By integrating these into your marketing you are communicating to your clients that “we know what you feel and what you are going through.”

So why is this essential today? Remember, your personal brand is what “they” say it is. This is where creativity can help you differentiate your personal

attachment that you feel when you experience them. Some of my favourite brands that are great at invoking emotion include Apple and Starbucks. Think about the feeling that you get when you look at an iPod: sleek, leading edge, high-tech, quality and ahead of its time.

Companies like these clearly understand brand engagement and brand loyalty. Over the next several months, look for innovative ways to strengthen relationships with your customers by engaging the intuitive and sensing side of your brain. This is where creativity and innovation play a vital role.

“Creativity can be an inspirational thrust that helps you build momentum. It allows you to cultivate more meaningful relationships with everyone around you. It defines a *higher level of innovation within your personal brand and distinguishes your brand with greater impact.*”

brand in the marketplace. Creativity can be defined as talking action and building momentum; creating unique market opportunities; standing out and differentiating your personal brand; becoming a master presenter and communicating like a champion; re-thinking and challenging convention; striving for a higher level of magnificence; zig when others zag; playing bigger and living life on purpose.

And what is an innovative entrepreneur? A problem-solver that uses creativity and intuition. Look for ways to infuse creativity in all aspects of your personal brand. Strive to cultivate an innovative culture in your brand community by continually and consistently drawing on ideas from your network. Creativity can be an inspirational thrust that helps you build momentum. It allows you to cultivate more meaningful relationships with everyone around you. It defines a higher level of innovation within your personal brand and distinguishes your brand with greater impact. Creativity is passion and at the core of exceptional entrepreneurs.

Get creative with everything you do
Think of some of the top brands and the emotional

Creative differentiation can weave itself into many facets of your personal brand. Use creativity as a means to ZIG your marketing touch points and focus on connecting with your customers’ hearts and you will win them for a lifetime. The shift in marketing today takes into account two significant principles: Today, you need to introduce two vital ingredients into your marketing mix known as “identification and experience.” By zigging you are communicating to your customers a message that “we know what you feel and what you are going through and, here’s how we can help.” I prefer to define the art of differentiation as: “ZIGGING.” So why is this essential today? Go to www.businesslinkniagara.com to get the rest of Gerry’s tips on differentiating your personal brand. **BL**

Gerry Visca, Canada’s Creative Coach™, International Speaker, Author and Coach. For more information about Gerry Visca please visit www.Gerryvisca.com.

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PLAN FOR SUCCESS

A BUSINESS PLAN FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS

"Business owners often think they need a business plan to get financing..."

SUBMITTED BY THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS OF ONTARIO

Are you a small business owner without a business plan? Perhaps you think that you are too busy to write one or that you don't need one. In fact these days, you can't afford to be without one! Here are some tips from the experts on why you need a business plan and how to develop one.

A business plan is not just for the bank – "Business owners often think they need a business plan to get financing," says Chartered Accountant Robert Gold, FCA, Managing Partner with Bennett Gold LLP in Toronto. "But you need to think of your business plan in terms of internal focus, as well as external focus. An internally focused plan can guide you on cash flow management, capital expenses and cyclical issues. It can help you focus and forecast. It is your crystal ball." External audiences for your business plan may include investors, suppliers and your bank who will be a part of your financial forecast.

A good plan will help you make good decisions – "Anyone starting a business should do a business plan," agrees Chartered Accountant Chi Ho Ng, Principal, Auditing and Assurance Standards for the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. "It provides a road map for the business owner to

determine whether he or she is on the right track, which, in turn, provides the information required to make important decisions, such as whether to continue the business or go to Plan B."

Customize your content – "A comprehensive business plan includes a cover page, table of contents, executive summary, business description, analysis of the business environment in which you are operating, industry background, analysis of your competitors, market analysis, marketing plan, operations plan, description of the management team and a financial plan," says Gold. "You can pick and choose from these elements, depending on your plan's focus and audiences."

Include goals and timelines – "Ask yourself what you realistically want to achieve in the next three months, six months, nine months, year, two years and five years," suggests Ng. "Then set out what you have to do to get there. For example, within the first three months you may want to have a client list and marketing materials. Within the first six months, your goal may be to contact 100 potential customers." The plan should also identify break-even points and timelines. "This will help you know when to go to Plan B," explains Ng.

Write the first draft yourself... – "The business owner is the most knowledgeable about the business, so the owner should write the first draft," says

Ng. "You can start from scratch or use one of the many business plan templates that are available."

...then seek professional assistance – "You will need a Chartered Accountant to help draft the financial part of the plan and a communications person who has written business plans before, and who understands the market and the industry," advises Gold. "The communications person should work with the CA to ensure that the financial and other information flows through the entire plan." Banks often insist that the financial part of the plan be prepared by a CA. "The owner is the best person to predict revenues. The owner and CA need to work together on this part of the plan," explains Gold.

Monitor, update and adjust – "Once you write the plan you have to work the plan," says Gold. "See your CA on a regular basis to compare your financial projections to your actual results and then adjust the plan as needed." ■

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After the New Year— A Time for Change?



BY BLAKE CORNELIUS, GCDF, RAS

With the New Year come and gone, perhaps you have had some time over the holidays to assess your career and whether or not you are satisfied with the direction it is taking. If things are good—that's good; however, if you are re-evaluating the path your career has taken, now is as good a time as any to make that resolution to question what motivates you and examine what you need to be satisfied in moving forward.

How do you know if you are ready for a new career? You're the only one that can answer this question. For some, it takes a lot of soul searching, while for others, it's an easy process of discovery. As a first step, though, think about how you would answer the following questions about your current position and how the answers make you feel:

- Are you excited and motivated to go to work or are you bored?
- How is your work environment?
- Is your company experiencing the effects of current economic conditions?
- How secure does your job feel?
- What is the state of your profession across the board?
- Has the scope of your responsibilities changed in such a way that it now limits your growth potential?
- Have you had to take on an increased workload with no added compensation?
- Does your job negatively affect your family life?

If you answered negatively to any of these questions, it could be you are feeling some discontent with your position, or overwhelming stress from your working environment. It probably depends on how strongly you feel about your responses, but if a new career is what you are looking for, here are a few actions you can take to get you started:

- Clearly define your professional objective.
- Augment your skills to include those needed in your new career—take classes, volunteer or work part-time.
- Thoroughly research those occupations / careers you are considering.
- Network, network, network. Use your friends, family and professional contacts.
- Consider relocating if necessary.
- Keep a positive attitude.

Choosing a career path is never an easy task. Since most people change careers approximately six times in their lifetime, it is essential to evaluate your situation periodically to avoid being passed by or becoming "skill obsolete."

You always want to make informed choices based on a good understanding of yourself as well as what is available to you. Research needs to be done on the occupations available by looking at the various resources including labour market information, job descriptions, and future outlook for the career. You'll also need to identify and assess your priorities and the lifestyle you desire to ensure the career you choose fits your personal needs as well as your skills and interests.

Knowing yourself is the first step. To help you

identify your strengths, answer these two questions: What do you do well? and What do you enjoy doing?

• **Aptitude:** What do you find easy to do? What are your talents? Think about these things and discuss them with others to see what talents you have that can be used in different occupations.

• **Skills and Education:** Compile a list of skills you have, and relevant education and professional development.

• **Personality:** List your qualities (be honest!). You can also ask others to help you with this list.

• **Responsibility:** Consider the amount of responsibility you want within a job? Do you work better within a team or do you like to work independently and make your own decisions?

• **Values and Needs:** Consider what you want your job to offer you, and list these by importance. Understand that in order to have one thing, you may need to give up something. To work through something like this, write out each of the values of each that are important to you.

• **Interests:** Make a list of your work interests and your hobbies—these may help in determining the type of job you'd like.

Ultimately, you want to have a balance between your lifestyle and your career plans. When evaluating yourself, make sure you've included everything that might be useful in your choice.

More than likely, you've got a variety of careers to choose from that may be right for you. It's important to look at all the possibilities before making your decision.

List them under what you'd like and what you'd like a lot. The next step is looking at jobs, and job descriptions, and eliminating those that you're not interested in. What you should end up with is a list of jobs that you'd like to explore further.

In exploring options, think about asking a mentor, and talking to people within your network, as well as other professionals in the field to understand realistically how achievable your goals are and how to work towards them. Once you have a list of jobs you are interested in, ask yourself some of the following questions to help you decide on what you'd like to do: Do I have the education required or do I require additional schooling or professional development? Do I want to go back to school? Can I see myself doing all the tasks involved in this occupation? Would I be happy doing it? Does the career satisfy my needs? Are there good opportunities for the future? Do I like my co-workers? My manager? The type of supervision involved?

All of these items together (your self-assessment, the type of occupations you've chosen, as well as the research you've done to help achieve your goals) should help you narrow the path to travel to get into the field of your choice. **BL**

Blake Cornelius, GCDF, RAS is Senior Career Consultant for The Burke Group, and has been providing career consulting, executive coaching and assessment services for over twenty-five years.

Blake has managed career outplacement centres, conducted career transition training seminars, and provided job-search coaching and counseling at all levels, from junior staff to senior executives.

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ONE MORE TIME

Don't say it once. Say, it again. Say it often. Frequency sells. Tell'em again.



BY DENNIS O'NEILL

If you tell people enough times, eventually they'll get it. They'll do it. Frequency is a factor of memory, and it wears through big time as a convincer. Like water dripping on a rock.

Forgetting

The Ebbinghaus curve of forgetting shows that in 20 minutes people forget 42% of what they have just learned. After nine hours they have forgotten 64%. With each passing day memory grows dimmer.

So, what to do about it? Say it again. Say it often.

Learning

Think back to school. When test time came, we went over the points again and again, until we had them in mind. It's no different in the marketplace. Say it again. Say it often.

The psychology is simple. Professor Herbert Krugman says... People have to go through three stages: 1. Curiosity – What is it? 2. Recognition – What of it? 3. Decision – What am I going to do about it?

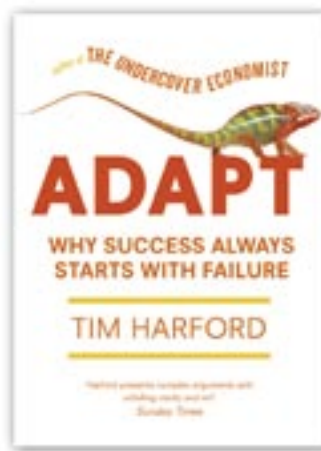
Action

Even when people decide they might do something, it may not be until the time is right. So the frequent reminder acts as... 1. the engine of psychological progression and; 2. the memory sustainer until the opportune time to act.

Say it often. Don't stop saying it. Say it again. Frequency wins. One more time. **BL**

Dennis O'Neill, *The Business Growth Coach* is located in Niagara-on-the-Lake. For more information on how to grow your business please call 905.641.8777, email dennis@dennisonellcoach.com or visit www.dennisonellcoach.com.

BOOK REVIEW BY JOHN STORM



ADAPT: WHY SUCCESS ALWAYS STARTS WITH FAILURE

By Tim Harford
Bond Street Books

Do you believe anyone when they say they know what will happen to our economy, our world? There are so many unknowns that good experts say they aren't really sure what's going on anymore. Tim Harford's new book is a good stab at a different way of analyzing our world, making sense of the abstract. Our conventional ways of solving problems clearly no longer work well. Using psychology, evolutionary biology, anthropology and physics, he says we not only need innovation, but we also need fresh trial and error approaches. The author of the *Undercover Economist* lays out a solid basis from which business and individuals can prepare for the new world we are heading into. I give a very strong recommendation to his book. **BL**

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IIX... "Bringing Networks Closer Together"™

"IIX's fully-integrated solution will also reduce costs for its member-networks, by reducing their dependency on 'Internet Transit...'"



BY JEFF CHESEBROUGH

The Internet has been around for years now. Most homes and businesses now have an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that provides them with access to

the internet, but when is the last time we stopped and thought about how the internet really works. The internet is basically a "network of networks," but how is data (emails, audio, video, etc.) sent and received and where exactly is the data going?

The path the data travels is dependent upon the ISP, and more specifically, how the ISP connects to the Internet. To date, many ISPs have primarily used one or more "Internet Transit" Providers to connect their ISP network to the Internet.

The Problem with only using Internet Transit

The moment the data travels onto their network, the Internet Transit Provider determines the path or direction taken. Often, data will travel east before going west (or vice versa) to its ultimate destination. Comparable to taking an indirect airline flight with multiple stopovers in different cities before arriving at the destination (versus taking the preferred direct flight straight through with no zig zags). Internet Transit providers can be looked at as the "middleman" network that has control over the path or direction taken. Data also often "hops" from network to network to network before the destination is reached.

This doesn't sound that efficient does it? What if the data simply needs to travel to a nearby destination? Can the "middleman" network be bypassed? And if so, how?

One partial solution has been for ISPs, Content Providers, and other network operators within common market areas, to connect to a local Internet Exchange Point (IXP) in that market area.

What is an IXP?

An IXP is physical infrastructure to which multiple networks can directly link. With one connection to an IXP, a single network (an ISP, or Content Provider, etc.) is directly connected to all of the other networks connected to that IXP. This way of directly connecting is called "Peering." Data "hops" directly from the originating network onto the destination network in one hop. The benefits of using an IXP



include: improved performance (reduced network latency or lag-time); increased capacity; increased control; and reduced costs.

The Problem with Single-Site IXPs

Unfortunately, a single IXP provides a limited benefit. Network operators would be limited to connecting only with networks that are also connected to their IXP. With so many networks across North America and around the world, these organizations would need to connect beyond their local IXP to reach all. If "Network A" wishes to connect with another network ("Network B") that is not connected to its IXP, then "Network A" would need to extend their network into that other city (perhaps in another province/state/country, where "Network B's" IXP operates. This could be very costly.

In order to connect to multiple IXPs in various cities, an organization would need to "piece together" multiple cost-prohibitive factors. As a result, few networks choose to connect directly to multiple IXPs around the globe.

International Internet Exchange (IIX)

One organization that has set out to help more and more networks participate in Peering in multiple markets is IIX.

IIX is in the midst of establishing a "Neutral IX Grid" of geographically distributed IXPs across North America.

The Niagara Region has been recently selected as one of IIX's first three sites across North America, specifically, our *Generator at One* datacenter facility at 1 St. Paul Street, in St. Catharines.

The other two sites are located in the "carrier hotels" at 151 Front Street, Toronto and 350 Main Street, Buffalo. The next cities that IIX will soon be expanding into include Chicago, Ashburn, and New York. Over the next 24 months, IIX intends to have a Grid that extends across North America into over 20 cities.

A recent visit to IIX's website notes companies like Yahoo! and Google amongst its initial members.

IIX's fully-integrated solution provides an efficient and effective method for small to large global networks to exchange traffic and improve the performance of their networks through the use of IIX's Internet Exchange Grid.

With a single connection to one of IIX's IXPs, a member-network is able to directly peer with other member-networks that are connected to the same IXP, as well as across the Grid directly with member-networks at IIX's other IXPs. There is no middleman

or no Internet Transit Providers in between each of the connected networks.

IIX's fully-integrated solution will also reduce costs for its member-networks, by reducing their dependency on "Internet Transit" as well as eliminate the need for networks to extend their backbone into multiple markets for the purposes of "piecing together" access to single-site IXPs.

Clearly computers, when connected to two different ISPs, two users with identical hardware won't necessarily have the same online experience. Next time you are on the phone with your ISP, ask them, "at which IXPs are you participating in Peering." My guess is that you will be left on hold by their customer support staff for a while, before they can find someone who understands your question.

To learn more about IIX, visit their website at www.iixnetwork.net. **BL**

Jeff Chesebrough
Chief Executive Officer, nGen
www.ngen-niagara.com



2011: ANOTHER GREAT YEAR FOR THE ARTS IN NIAGARA

On stage, in the cinema, as well as major activity "behind the scenes."

BY S. JAMES WEGG

Once again, artistic activity all across the peninsula has been filled with excellence, innovation and a collective effort to raise the bar of quality. During the past year there were hundreds of opportunities to hear first-class performers share their art. Classical music, new music, theatre of all stripes (traditional, music theatre, children's theatre) were all on the live-performance menu. As well, Canada's film industry proved once again just how mature and hard hitting it has become.

Here are the highlights from the past twelve months:

Teamwork paid off in spades for The Gallery Players of Niagara and Primavera Concerts. By combining forces, they were able to find the wherewithal to bring Ensemble Polaris to St. Catharines in May—cultural tourism of a different sort. In a rare instrumental treat, Ben Grossman's arrangement of the Hedningarna Set allowed the room to appreciate his hurdy gurdy ability atop a steady drone deftly anchored by cellist Margaret Gay.

Just a few weeks before, the short trip across the Peace Bridge to the Burchfield Penney Arts Center was rewarded with an especially eclectic program from Charles Haupt and his A Musical Feast series. Quite rightly, a spontaneous standing ovation greeted the final bar. This truly shared experience (with music ranging from Iannis Xenakis to César Franck) was the perfect finish to a concert that most successfully dared mix the unfamiliar with instantly accessible art. It was another cross-border cultural experience most excellent and admission was free!

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Shaw Festival racked up a successful and varied season. One of the standout productions was Director Emeritus Christopher Newton's take on George Bernard Shaw's Heartbreak House. From the opening curtain, it was clear that Newton's savvy understanding of Shaw's intention would be reinforced at every turn by other like-minded artistic adventurers. This production saw the Shaw Festival firing on all cylinders and a most worthy start to its 50th anniversary season.

The region's growing reputation as a hothouse for scripts, actors and audiences was succinctly demonstrated on several occasions. The In the Soil Festival's theatre component yielded a bumper crop of invention, notably The Nona performed and written by Amy Teetzel, Graham Shaw and Fede Holten Andersen. The Carousel

Players continued their mandate of bringing professional productions to school children and—simultaneously—developing tomorrow's audiences. Particularly memorable was Playwright Jason Long's Offensive Fouls. Actors Mayko Nguyen and Jason Doyle dove into the issues of racism with integrity, compassion and a marvellous sense of fun that allowed the important messages to take root in very young minds, hopefully before having to face their own challenges with schoolyard bigots and bullies. Finally, Lyndesfame Theatre Projects hit one out of the Sullivan Mahoney Courthouse Theatre with a truly sensational run of Willy Russell's gritty Educating Rita. Actors Ric Reid and Jenny L. Wright combined their considerable talents under the ever-thoughtful eye of artistic director Kelly Daniels.

In the cinema, Canada's reputation as being one of world's top documentary producing countries was reinforced. Whether involved in the arts and business, a viewing of Jamie Kastner's Recessionize! for Fun and Profit! 15 Simple Steps is highly recommended. Throughout the biting satire there are lessons for all. Alan Zweig's gritty portrait of incarceration and addiction in A Hard Name, will help anyone better understand the plight of those trying to overcome addiction and stay on the right side of the law.

Of course with many of these films, access is a huge problem. Aside from film festivals and occasional showings on the Documentary Channel, how can we discover for ourselves the wealth of material that is produced every year?

Newly appointed executive director of the coming Performing Arts Centre, Steve Solski knows. As reported earlier, he's been diligently working behind the scenes to bring everything and everyone together under one roof. One of the anticipated components will be a room equipped for film. Like the bounty of performing arts companies fully primed to take the main stage, the promise of also exploring the arts through experimental and documentary films in our own backyard is just more icing on the cake. **B.L.**

S. James Wegg is managing editor of James Wegg Review (JWR). The popular online Ezine has over 1,400 articles related to fine arts and film including reviews, previews, interviews and commentaries. Further information can be found at www.jamesweggreview.org. He can also be reached at 905.938.2850 or jamesweggreview@bellnet.ca.

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ENERGY FITNESS STUDIO

New results-oriented fitness club is using state-of-the-art facilities and good old-fashioned service to help members "change their lives."

BY SCOTT LESLIE
The Business Link

Since 1998, St. Catharines has had one of the highest rates of obesity in Canada. But Energy Fitness Studio—one of the Garden City's newest fitness studios—is working hard to make that record a thing of the past. In a little over a year, they've helped hundreds of local members to fight the battle of the bulge and reach their fitness and wellness goals.

"We're big on health, wellness and lifestyle," explains Cameron Douglas, the club manager at Energy Fitness Studio. "A lot of clubs have got away from wellness in recent years but with us, fitness and wellness go hand in hand. We care about our members and want to help them find the right balance of life."

Energy Fitness Studio is conveniently located on 89 Meadowvale Drive in St. Catharines, next door to the Days Inn St. Catharines-Niagara. Their fitness studio includes several state-of-the-art amenities

such as free-motion equipment, power cycling, a fully equipped weight room, a ladies circuit room, and yoga and Pilates training. Open seven days a week, they also provide locker rooms and towel services as well as a sauna and indoor pool.

Energy Fitness Studio offers several fitness programs for the beginner and experienced trainer alike including speed cycling and weight loss circuit training. The studio also has many affordable memberships available including student, couple and family rates. (Corporate memberships are even available

for groups of five or more.)

Cameron says the demographic of their membership runs from 20 to 60 years of age, and the studio has gone to great lengths to make sure they're meeting everyone's individual needs.

"Some studios are very generic and don't take different demographics into consideration," he explains. "With Energy Fitness Studio, we designed our facility for both older and younger age groups—from our training equipment, right down to our change rooms and swimming pool."

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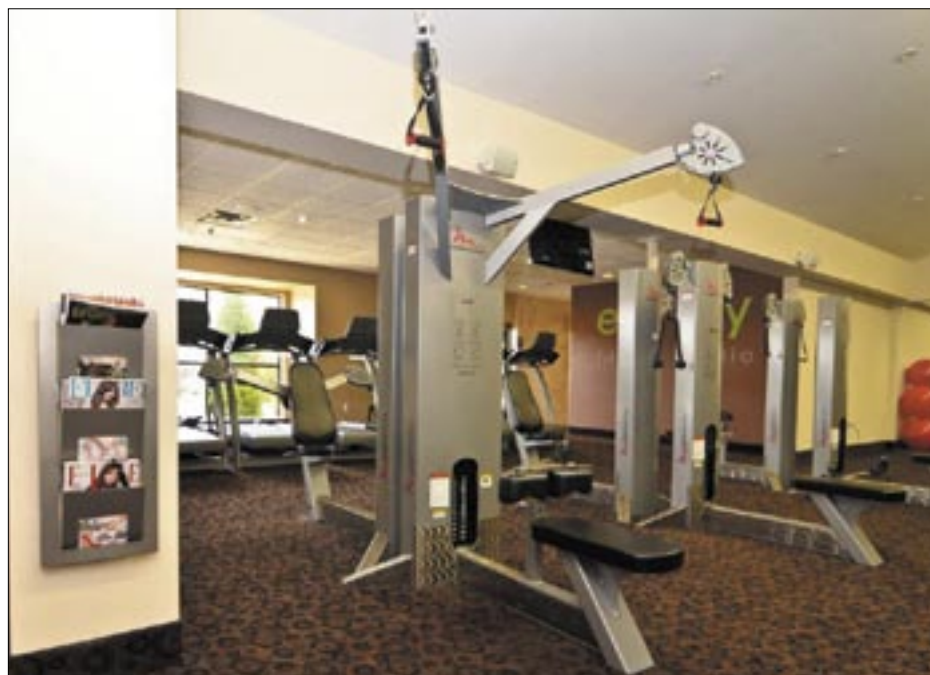
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When people first join Energy Fitness Studio, their training staff will start by screening members to determine their physical conditioning and personal goals.

"We make a point of checking them for injuries or medical conditions like high blood pressure or high cholesterol," Cameron says. "Screening is critical if we want to help our members achieve their goals. Some people want to lose weight. Others want to gain muscle or focus on treating conditions like osteoporosis."

Energy Fitness Studio has a highly qualified staff of over 15 personal trainers and fitness instructors that pride themselves on their one-on-one training and high degree of person care.

At Energy Fitness Studio, their trainers are all fully certified and have a variety of training experience from reconditioning car accident victims to professional hockey players. Trainers will work closely with the member to develop the ideal rehab or conditioning program and help them deal with other related areas like nutrition.

"We're very results-oriented," Cameron explains. "We want to provide people with a comfortable atmosphere so they can stay motivated and reach their fitness goals. We have no hidden fees here. We just want to offer our members a high end product at a great price."

"I love my personal trainer, Hilary at Energy Fitness Studio."

— Lou Ann Campbell

Building on Their Success

Energy Fitness Studio is owned and operated by Heart of Niagara Hotels—one of Niagara's largest hospitality firms. Run by the Nitsopolous family, Heart of Niagara Hotels has been serving St. Catharines and the Niagara Region since 1979, and has been in the fitness club business for many years. Heart of Niagara Hotels also operates Reflexions Real Life Fitness Centre—a 10,000 square foot facility located at the nearby Best Western on 2 North Service Road in St. Catharines.

"Reflexions has been around for several years now," Cameron says. "We've been incredibly successful there but we're also beefing up our facilities at Reflexions, adding things like fitness classes and circuit training."

This month, the Nitsopolous family will have a third fitness studio in the works. Heart of Niagara Hotels will be opening the Xecutive Health Club at the Holiday Inn & Suites Parkway Convention Centre on 325 Ontario Street in St. Catharines. Geared towards their corporate clientele, the new club will have a limited membership of 200 members and extend a variety of service and exercise features.

Heart of Niagara Hotels has had a formula for success with their fitness operations, and Cameron feels that breadth of experience has served them well.

"At the end of the day, a fitness studio is a business," he says. "Some studios close because they have a hard time handling the business or marketing side of things. But if you can bring the right management skills to the table and run your fitness studio like a well-oiled machine, you can be successful—and that's the way we run ours."

Bigger and Better

Over the past year, Heart of Niagara Hotels has been working hard to expand their Energy Fitness Studio and serve their members better. In the last few months alone, the Nitsopolous family has expanded the studio dramatically, adding 12,000 square feet to the business. The 24,000 square feet facility now boasts a multi-purpose studio that can accommodate classes of up to 60 people.

Continued on page 34

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Continued from page 33

"We have more space so we can handle a lot more people than some of the other studios out there," Cameron says. "For instance, we've tripled the size of our exercise room. That means less wait time to use our machines and even more time to spend on your fitness training."

With the newly renovated space, Energy Fitness Studio has been able to double the amount of classes they run each week. The studio's expanded range of programs now includes advanced yoga, hot yoga, Pilates, zumba, boxing and kickboxing classes. They have a cardio studio and a new spin program that features a full audio visual theater and new Keiser bikes. Over the coming months, Energy Fitness Studio is also looking to add nutritional wellness personal programs at the studio as part of their commitment to their members' health.

According to Cameron, the updates were necessary to help manage the growth of their business and offer a superior product.

"It's a competitive market," he says of the fitness industry, "so you have to have a great product. If you're not friendly or the place isn't clean or you don't have the proper facilities, people won't come back. It's that simple. We've got a great product here. That's why our business is expanding so rapidly."

In fact, Energy Fitness Studio has taken off faster than anticipated. Since the studio opened in October of 2010, the club has signed up nearly 1,500 members. Many of their members have also referred Energy Fitness Studio to their family and friends.

"We've had a great response," Cameron says of the feedback they've received. "People are really impressed with what we've done here. Many of our members have been looking for an alternative to other fitness clubs for some time. We care about them and they notice that the minute they walk through the door."

Energy Fitness Studio has grown substantially due to word

of mouth. But Cameron feels that much of their development is due to the work of their marketing manager Ann-Marie Nitso-polous.

"Ann-Marie is very creative," he says. "She's done a lot to help our business grow since we first opened. You have to get people in the door and she's really got the word out on Energy Fitness and helped us take things to that next level."

Cameron says Energy Fitness Studio has really benefitted from the current health craze and the growing interest in health foods and alternative medicines.

"It's a growing industry right now," he says. "People are becoming more and more health conscious. You see it all the time with the internet. People are doing the research now...seeing what they should and shouldn't eat. Even the big supermarket chains are jumping on the bandwagon and promoting eating right and leading a healthier lifestyle."

With their state-of-the-art facilities and commitment to delivering good old-fashioned service, the staff at Energy Fitness Studio are looking forward to helping their members feel better about themselves and get results.

"We're selling change here," Cameron says. "We want to help people get motivated, healthy and get changing their lives." **BL**



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