

The National Chamber Review

Vol. 4, No. 3 YOUR LOCAL PAPER, NO MATTER WHERE YOU LIVE www.nationalchamberreview.org

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National Chamber Review
130 East Main Street, Granite Building
Rochester, NY 14604

Where Have All The Unions Gone? Doing the Minimum: The Fight for \$15

Carly Morgan
Head Writer

The roots of American labor unions extend as far back as the mid-17th century, when shoemakers and coopers in Boston first formed trade guilds in order to protect their common interests. Since then, the size and force of the Labor Movement in the United States has waxed and waned in a cycle of episodic uprisings punctuated by long periods of relative dormancy, reaching its peak levels of size, influence, and power in the decades following World War II.

Then, as the economic boom of post-war expansion receded, the U.S. became a net importer of goods for the first time since the 19th century, and the country began to lose faith

in the Keynesian principles underlying such legislation as Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. So, against the national backdrop of economic deregulation, organized labor began its slow descent into political obscurity as union membership steadily declined from one-third of American workers, to its current state of just over 11 percent of the U.S. workforce.

Nearly a century's worth of data indicates that when union membership is high, wealth inequality is low. Wealth inequality, of course, is not inherently bad; it only becomes problematic when it leaves a consumer economy without a thriving middle class. This distinction is especially relevant today: as we delicately navigate a fragile eco-

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Brianna Clegg
Staff Writer

Growing up, I was always told that doing the minimum wasn't enough. Work hard, put in the hours, and you will be recognized for your effort and rewarded accordingly.

But what if, in working hard, doing your best, and putting in the hours, you are only given the minimum in return? When your effort, no matter how much you put forth, is considered barely enough, how do you survive?

For many Americans, especially those earning minimum wage, the answer to survival comes in the form of SNAP, WIC, Medicare, and the like. These solutions, funded by public tax dollars, compensate for the low wages on which so many must

live. In other words, the American public has been tasked with subsidizing workers' low wages.

In 2012, fast food workers in New York City rallied together to strike. Their goals were simple: a \$15 an hour, industry-wide, minimum wage, and the right to unionize without the threat of employer retaliation.

Since then, the movement has continued to grow and now includes workers from other low wage industries, from gas station attendants, to airport workers, to homecare providers. April 15th, 2015 saw what the *Guardian* called "the largest protest by low-wage workers in U.S. history." Demonstrations occurred across the country, and the movement incurred a level of visibility that made it difficult to ignore.

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Net Neutrality: What It Is and Why It Matters

Charlie Wildey
Staff Writer

As markets continue to adjust to an ever-shifting media landscape and Internet-driven economic climate, the issue of net neutrality is proving to be one of the most important and impactful discussions of our day. At the core of the conflict is the question of how, or if, Internet bandwidth should be regulated or protected.

Net neutrality is the concept that all Internet traffic is to be treated equally, meaning Internet service providers cannot block or throttle bandwidth for certain content, while allowing other users faster access for a higher fee.

If Internet service providers were to charge higher fees for extra bandwidth to enhance streaming services, larger companies like Netflix would have little trouble foot-

ing the bill, so their ability to provide high-speed streaming would not be hindered. But newer, smaller companies that also rely on access to bandwidth for streaming information wouldn't be able to pay the higher fees and, consequently, would be less able to compete.

In March, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruled that the Internet is a public utility, and service providers should be regulated accordingly (i.e., under Title II of the Communications Act).

calls for "just and reasonable" conduct on the part of businesses, to be determined by the FCC on a case-by-case basis. Analysts point out that this terminology is too ambiguous, and too open to subjective interpretation. Opponents suggest that this "catch-all provision" may result in the FCC wielding too much power over businesses.

The United States Chamber of Commerce has spoken against the FCC's decision. The chamber's Senior Vice President for the Environment, Technol-

Water, Water, Everywhere (Except In California)

Alex Ross
Staff Writer

Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop in The Golden State.

Last winter, the state of California experienced a drought of such epic proportions that California Governor Jerry Brown declared a State of Emergency on January 17, 2014. Then, in April 2015, Governor Brown issued an executive order calling for a 25 percent statewide reduction in potable urban water use, effective through February 2016.

Droughts are nothing new to California. But to the rest of the country, especially in places east of the Mississippi (home sweet Rochester included), the idea of such an extended rainless period is a foreign one.

The drought struggle in California is currently in its fourth year, and is one of the worst droughts in recent history. That's right, *one* of the worst. The U.S. Drought Monitor categorizes droughts in four stages: moderate, severe, extreme, and exceptional. As of June 2015, 98 percent of California land is considered to be in some stage of drought, with roughly 47 percent falling under the "exceptional" category. Droughts like this—and even the more extreme "megadroughts"—have been a natural part of long-term climate patterns on the West Coast for hundreds of years, even before the settlement of the land in the 1800s. And they can last for decades.

In other areas of the country, drought isn't a major concern. In New York State, for example, the last major drought was in the 1980's. Like California, New York has regulatory conservation efforts in place should the state enter a period of extreme drought. Unlike California, though, New York's drought history, regulations, and plans are far from extensive. Due to the abundance of freshwater lakes and reservoirs in New York, as well as the area's temperate climate,

"foreign" may even be an understatement when it comes to describing the idea of drought.

Water is a fundamental, necessary building block for life. We use water to bathe our smelly dogs, our cars, and ourselves. We cook with water; we play in water. We drink water to survive. We are literally mostly made of water. Sometimes, though, we also waste water.

Now, you may be wondering where, exactly, all of California's water is going. Many will immediately conclude that human-caused climate change is to blame. But, the Heat Miser can't be working alone at this. While low precipitation levels (attributed to rising atmospheric temperatures) bear the brunt of the blame, crop farming accounts for a great amount of California's water usage.

Recently, California almond farms have received a lot of media attention for their heavy water use, making them something of a scapegoat for the current water crisis. However, according to the Almond Board of California, almond crops occupy only 12 percent of California's irrigated farmland,

Drug Administration. On top of that, California's enormous agricultural industry is responsible for most of the avocados, broccoli, grapes (read: wine!), tomatoes, spinach, and lettuce produced in the U.S. Long story short: with 80 percent of California's water supply devoted to agricultural endeavors, almond farms can't be entirely to blame.

According to an assessment report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Program Office, the natural heating and low precipitation patterns in California's recent history are not (necessarily) at the hand of global warming. While human-caused climate change can exacerbate an already-fragile climate pattern, it is important to remember that the heating trend is just that: a fragile, *natural* pattern. The report reads: "The current drought is not part of a long-term change in California precipitation, which exhibits no appreciable trend since 1895." However, regardless of the "how" or "why," the sobering fact is this: the rain just isn't falling, and it's becoming a problem.



Net Neutrality Threatened

Credit: Mike Licht

Commission Chairman Thomas Wheeler said in a statement that the ruling intends to preserve the Internet as the "core of free expression and democratic principles" by ensuring that access to it remains competitive.

It is expected that the FCC's new ruling will be met with much debate and extensive legal battles. Opponents of this new ruling, which include a number of the nation's largest Internet providers, are taking issue with the federal government's involvement in Internet regulation. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), for example, expressed concern that the ruling would discourage innovation by "suffocating it under the weight of an outdated bureaucracy and poorly named regulations."

Another point of contention regarding the ruling involves one particular provision that

ogy, and Regulatory Affairs, Bill Kovacs, said in a statement that this decision "will plunge the industry into years of litigation and cause extreme regulatory and market uncertainty. ... We should not shackle this dynamic and competitive market with rules from a bygone era."

This rhetoric is common among those who oppose the FCC's current stance on Internet regulation. Former Governor (and presidential hopeful) Jeb Bush, speaking to an audience in Iowa, labeled the new measure as outdated. "Just think of the logic of using a 1934 law that was designed when we did have a monopoly for wireline service as the basis to regulate the most dynamic part of life in America," Bush said.

Other Republican presidential hopefuls Ted Cruz and Rand Paul have also spoken

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Lake Shasta's Low Point

Credit: Torroid (flickr)

and they only use 8 percent of the Golden State's irrigated water. And, almonds aside, California is also the nation's sole producer of eleven other commodities, including dates, olives, and prunes, according to date from the U.S. Food and

In recent months, shocking photos and videos of Lake Tahoe's low water levels and barren shores have been proliferated alongside snaps of patchy, more-muddy-than-snowy ski runs. These photos are a

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Ask The Experts: Fundamentals of Branding

Carly Morgan
Head Writer

In case you missed it, in January of this year, the *National Chamber Review* underwent a comprehensive re-branding. The *NCR* is a different publication today than it was a year ago, and we wanted our image to reflect that. For much of its existence, the *NCR* was pretty much just a newspaper: we had a website, but we never devoted the attention to it necessary to ensure that it accurately portrayed the *NCR* brand. (Or the fact that *NCR* was even in circulation still, as we left the articles from April 2013 up on our homepage for... well, longer than it should have been.) And we needed to change that.

The *NCR* is an updated spin on an old-school medium, and we wanted that to come across on the platform where readers are interacting with us most frequently: our website. So, we launched a brand new website that was more modern and interactive than anything we had ever had before. We also wanted our publication to have a more humanized feel to it this time by letting it reflect our personalities, our interests, and who we are not just as writers, editors, and designers, but as people, too.

To design our new website, we worked with a framework called Foundation. Foundation is mobile responsive, which means websites built with it can be easily viewed on a computer screen of any size. This was a major priority for us, because we wanted readers to be able to engage with us and our paper regardless of whether they're using a desktop computer, tablet, or mobile phone.

We also wanted our re-branding to still be in keeping with the whole newspaper tradition, so we (and by "we"

I really mean our Creative Director, Katherine Philbin) used lots of blacks and whites in the website design. But then, we (again, read: Katherine) brought in what Katherine calls "a pop of orange" to breathe new life into the old tradition of which we are a part.

Our publication is only four years old, and even with the entire media world abuzz with assertions and laments that "Print is dead!!!" we still insist on a physical, hold-it-in-your-hands-and-get-ink-on-your-fingers, print publication. That's so old-school, it's almost an innovation unto itself. We're a throw-back to the news of generations past, updated for a 21st century readership. Our staff is young, but we're a bunch of old souls, and we really love what we do. We believe the *NCR* is truly a unique entity, and now, our brand reflects that.

Re-branding, or initially establishing a brand identity and working from the ground up, is a long, involved process, and a lot of it comes down to the smallest details: what may seem, at first glance, to be of little or no consequence, is actually likely to play an integral role in how your business, community, or organization is perceived by the public. You want to have as active a role as possible in shaping your public image. The more specific and comprehensive you are in defining your brand and executing your branding strategy, the more control you will have. It is your branding strategies and tools that allow you to make sure that your first impression on clients, consumers, or residents, is a positive one.

It is crucial for businesses, communities, and organizations to understand certain branding basics, and to know how to employ them in order

to craft a cohesive, credible, and trustworthy brand identity. Since I am no expert, I decided to turn to some people who *are* experts and pick their brains on the topic. Rather than parse their words myself, I've let them do most of the talking by including transcript of the most relevant excerpts from what amounted to a 90-minute panel discussion. (Don't worry; the conversation has not been reproduced in full, partly because that would take up way too much room, but also because we definitely started talking about things like *Zelda*, *True Blood*, and Kyle's dating history on more than one occasion.)

Our panel includes four members of the CGI Communications Art Department (pictured on the right): Rachel Walden, Graphic and Web Designer; Kyle Woolley, Graphic and Web Designer (and the guy responsible for putting together the *NCR's* layout each quarter); Katherine Philbin, Art Director and (*NCR* Creative Director); and Pauline Wegman, Graphic and Web Designer, as well as the department's custom logo coordinator.

Oh, and I'm Carly Morgan. I'm the one asking the questions.



Left to Right: Rachael Walden, Kyle Woolley, Katherine Philbin, Pauline Wegman

Credit: Tim Epner

KW: I think it's important to remember though that branding doesn't make the company. An incoherent, or just plain sloppy, branding strategy might hinder you, but if you're a terrible company with an awesome logo, you're still not going to get very far. You definitely have to be both. Branding doesn't make the company, but it's an extremely important part; it has to go hand-in-hand.

KP: It's all in the details. All of the small details and the little pieces have to come together to form something greater than the sum of its parts. Otherwise, it's just a missed opportunity.

CM: And what about a logo? I know you guys all spend a lot of time designing and editing company logos. But let's just start with how you would define the word "logo"?

PW: So, if your brand is how you want to represent yourself to the public, then the logo is the visual component of that. It's something people can see and immediately relate to your business.

KP: I feel like the logo is at the center of your entire branding strategy, almost. It just completely sets the tone for everything else.

KW: Well, if you want to get technical, the logo is specifically the symbol or the icon.

CM: So you do want to get technical, is what I'm understanding.

KW: Yes. So you have the symbol or the icon that represents your business, and then you have the logotype, which is the text that goes with it. Both of them combined make your trademark. Logos are the first impression. It's just like dating.

CM: It is? Do you have a logo for dating, Kyle?

KW: Yeah.

CM: You do?

KW: No.

"With defining your brand ... it all comes down to research. ... You have to do your research and figure out your audience, but also know what kind of feeling you want to give your audience. Who are you aiming for and what are you trying to say? That's all part of figuring out your branding strategy, and it's all research that goes into that."
-Rachel Walden, Graphic and Web Designer

CM: No. Ok. When you guys are designing logos, what goes into that? What are some key design principles that you pay attention to?

PW: I usually stick with five basic rules: you want a logo to be simple, memorable, timeless, versatile, and appropriate for your audience.

CM: OK, since I know absolutely nothing about graphic design, can you give me an idea of what those terms mean in this context?

KW: Are you saying you've never heard any of those words before?

CM: Yes, Kyle.

KW: Wow.

CM: No, Kyle. I'm asking for you guys to give me more context-specific definitions. What does it mean for a logo, specifically, to be simple, memorable, timeless, et cetera.

KW: Well, for simple, your logo has to pass a variety of tests. Does it look good in color? Does it look good in all black? Does it look good in grayscale? Does it look good blown up really, really big? Does it look good really small, like as a little one-inch-by-one-inch Twitter profile picture? It has to be simple enough that it can convey the same, general idea in all different formats.

RW: Definitely. Timeless is a big one too, because you're always going to have to decide when to follow the trends, and when to stick with something more tried-and-true. Obviously, there are going to be a lot of design trends every year and they're going to be constantly changing. Flat design is really in right now, but for good reason, because it shows up great on digital screens. But you don't always want to be designing according to the newest, hottest trends. Take Lobster, for example. That was a really popular font a couple of years ago. And not to say it was a bad font, because it wasn't, but it got completely overused and you see it everywhere now. So now, if you see a logo in that font, you might think, "Oh, that was made two years ago." And it just doesn't look so great any more.

KP: "Timeless," too, is sort of related to "simple," because it can mean something that's easy to update, without sacrificing any brand recognition. Coca-Cola does that very well. They're always updating their logo and kind of revamping it to appeal to different audiences, but they always keep that red and white, and it's always the full name: "Coca-Cola." Their logo has changed over the years but you can still recognize a Coca-Cola can from the 80s or 90s, even if you've only ever seen what they have out on store shelves today.

KW: "Memorable" also goes together with simplicity. I think something is most memorable when it's simple. If you take an item and strip everything away from it that you possibly can, and it's still recognizable for what it is even without all the trinkets and embellishments hanging off of it, then that's memorable. That's good design; when you've taken everything away that you can.

CM: What about "appropriate"?

PW: Well, usually when I design a logo, if it's for like a children's center or something, I'll use a more fun font, whereas, if it's for more of a corporate business, I might use something more formal-looking.

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Carly Morgan (CM): I thought I'd start by throwing out a few terms and having each of you just give me what your own working definition for each one is, or what your understanding of each term is. You can jump in whenever, just don't talk over each other. And no one throw any punches. The first word is "brand." What do you think of when you hear the word "brand"?

Kyle Woolley (KW): For me, I think of "brand" as your promise to the consumer, what you're bringing to the table.

Rachel Walden (RW): I definitely agree with that. It's something that completely encompasses how you want to present yourself to a client—the overall feeling you want your business to give off, or that you want someone to feel when they see your brand.

Katherine Philbin (KP): I hear "brand" and I think "how you set the tone."

CM: What about "brand identity"?

KW: That's how the customer views your brand. You can have an idea of what you want your brand to be, or how you want it to be perceived, but that may be different from what you're actually getting across.

KP: I agree with that. Your brand is the concept that you have; it's more abstract. But your brand identity is how you execute that brand, how you reinforce it with the public.

Pauline Wegman (PW): And the ultimate goal is to make those go hand-in-hand.

KP: Definitely.

CM: Alright, so, what goes into defining a brand? What are the components of a branding strategy?

KW: Really, it's everything from your trademark, to the colors you want associated with your company, to any sort of visual ad campaigns or marketing initiatives. With a solid branding strategy, everything goes together.

RW: With defining your brand, too, in order to get there, it all comes down to research. I feel like that's what should drive decisions about what you want associated with your brand. You have to do your research and figure out your audience, but also know what kind of feeling you want to give your audience. Who are you aiming for and what are you trying to say? That's all part of figuring out your branding strategy, and it's all research that goes into that.

KP: You also want to figure out what sets you apart from your competition, because that's probably going to be a big part of the message that you want to drive home to your audience. You want to figure out how to set a tone that says, "This is what we're all about. This our company culture. This is what represents who we are, our attitude, our style."

CM: What are some examples of companies, communities, people, anything like that, that you guys think have a strong, coherent brand identity?

KW: Well, you can take the obvious examples, like Nike and Apple.

RW: Target, too. Target doesn't even necessarily have to use their name in ads sometimes. A commercial starts on TV, and it just has that Target feeling. You know it's Target without it having to say anywhere.

CM: Why is this something that businesses, communities, or even chambers of commerce should be concerned with doing? Why is establishing your brand and tailoring your brand identity an important part of being a successful establishment?

RW: It all comes down to legitimacy and trustworthiness. If you see a community website, for example, and it's outdated—it has problems, maybe broken links, the logo is in Times New Roman—a person's going to see that website and they might think, "This is not somewhere I want to visit." Then they might skip over to the town next door that has a beautifully made website, a professionally produced video, a well-designed logo, and it's just going to feel more welcoming. When you put that extra effort into your first impression, people notice.

Ask The Experts: Fundamentals of Branding

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ing. But, obviously, this rule is flexible. “Appropriate” doesn’t have to mean “literal.”

KW: Exactly. What does an apple have to do with computers? Nothing. And they’re doing just fine.

RW: Right. I think it just means appropriate for the kind of response you’re hoping to get from the consumer, and for the audience demographic that you want that response from.

CM: I think the only one we haven’t talked about yet is “versatile.”

KW: It has to be useful for everything you could possibly need it for. You’re going to want something that looks good on a banner, but also works on the corner of a business card.

PW: You want to come up with as many different uses for it as you possibly can, before the design process is complete. You don’t want the day you get company polo shirts delivered to your office to be the same day you realize your logo doesn’t look good embroidered on a bunch of different color shirts.

CM: What are some potentially detrimental effects of having a poorly designed or outdated logo?

KP: It really can just make you seem much less legitimate. I think branding and graphic design and all of that is all becoming so much more mainstream now, because we’re all constantly exposed to so much more of it. Even the general public is talking about it, like with Hillary Clinton’s campaign logo. You don’t have to be in advertising to look at something and think, “Oh my, that’s bad” or, “Wow, what happened here?” It’s people’s initial, immediate reaction that’s going to be a major determining factor in whether or not they’re going to trust you. I see my friends do it all the time: if the first impression isn’t a good one, they just kind of avoid that place.

PW: You want to come across as professional, whether you’re a business and your trying to appeal to consumers, or you’re a community wanting to attract visitors or new residents.

CM: Lots of companies, even after they have become established brands, opt for a re-brand, or at least for a new logo design. Katherine, you mentioned Coca-Cola earlier as a company that’s constantly updating their logo. If you’re an established business or community, what might be some reasons to re-brand, or to update or revive an existing brand?

RW: Well, if you already have a logo, if you look at it and go through that list that Pauline mentioned earlier [i.e., simple, memorable, timeless, versatile, appropriate] and it isn’t any or all of those things, then it might be a good idea to consider re-branding. Which doesn’t have to mean complete re-branding, but maybe just an update.

PW: If it doesn’t fit on a mobile screen now, that’s a big reason for updating logos, too. If they’re too intricate, they may need to be updated to be more flat-design so that they show up on more modern tech devices. We’ve come across that a lot lately—just simplifying things to make sure you can scale your logo down on smaller screens.

KW: Especially for communities. I see so many communities whose logos are just their, you know, town seal that’s been around since 1902. It’s not even digitized; it’ll just be some sketch in the corner of their website. And, going back to first impressions, if this is your community, you don’t want your first impression to be one that just screams “outdated.”

RW: That’s not saying that a community in that position has to get rid of their seal. That’s part of

The City Manager and the Chamber Executive

Penny Maynard, IOM
Contributing Writer

When a chamber of commerce executive is hired by a chamber’s board of directors, one of the most important relationships to establish (and one the significance of which often goes unrecognized) is that between the chamber executive and the city manager.

I am certain that most of you have faced this situation and found yourselves in a dilemma. The board that hired you may have an established relationship (be it positive or negative) with the city man-

ager. A negative relationship may stem from professional or personal issues. A positive relationship may stem from personal feelings as well, but could also come from a pre-existing relationship in which the chamber is not expected to challenge the city on business issues, even when doing so would be a natural part of the chamber fulfilling its obligation to advocate for the business community.

I am certainly not suggesting that the executive ignore the board’s direction. However, a chamber executive establishing his or her own relationship with the city is critical to a successful tenure as a chamber executive.

As the city manager answers to and carries out the policies of the city council, he or she will realize that the chamber executive does the same in working with the chamber board.

A step the executive can take after arriving in the community is to contact the city manager to arrange a breakfast meeting to discuss the community and the issues facing it. Try to maintain a monthly get-together in order to keep each other updated on issues of concern and upcoming projects. Be candid, straight forward, and scrupulously honest in your communication. At public events, after recognizing elected officials

and chamber leadership, thank and recognize the city manager.

Net Neutrality: What It Is and Why It Matters

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out unambiguously against net neutrality, despite the fact that 85 percent of Republican voters are in favor of the government taking action to ensure service providers maintain a free Internet, according to a University of Delaware survey. The same survey determined that 81 percent of Democrat voters also support Internet neutrality.

Speaking in favor of net neutrality, President Barack Obama said, “The FCC was chartered to promote competition, innovation, and investment in our networks. In service of that mission, there is no higher calling than protecting an open, accessible, and free Internet.”

The battle over the Internet is a complicated one, as both sides are essentially fighting for a free Internet, at least rhetorically. Those in favor of net neutrality want to establish and protect a level playing field for all businesses and consumers online. Those who oppose net neutrality want to protect the Internet from overbearing, bureaucratic government regulation.

If businesses are left to their own devices, there is some reason to believe that they might do whatever it takes to make the most money, regardless of whether or not those actions are in keeping with what’s best for consumers and Internet users across the country. Conversely, if we give the govern-

ment regulatory power, there is no guarantee that that power will be wielded responsibly.

Ultimately, the question should perhaps not be framed as, “Should we have an open Internet?” but instead as, “Do we *currently have* an open Internet?” Is our current Internet landscape open and fair? Many believe that without government involvement, the market for Internet access could come too close to a monopoly.

On February 13, 2014, Comcast publicly announced plans for a \$45 billion acquisition of Time Warner Cable. The two companies were not in direct competition for customers and, if they were to merge, the resulting conglomerate would control roughly two-thirds of the country’s cable television market, and an estimated 40-57 percent of public access to broadband Internet. After the vocal and fervent public debate over net neutrality in the year following the announcement, however, Comcast abandoned its plan to merge with Time Warner.

But not long after Comcast walked away from the deal, Time Warner was purchased for \$55 billion by Charter Media. This merger, which was announced at the end of May, will mean Charter and Time Warner now control about 30 percent of broadband Internet service nationwide, and comes at a time when Time Warner

is struggling to stay relevant as a cable television provider. This is because the market for paid television is in the midst of an immense transformation due to new competition from online streaming services.

There is still no conclusive answer as to why Comcast’s deal fell apart while Charter Media’s acquisition was successful.

On the local level, a monopoly is pretty much already in place. Most areas can’t financially support the infrastructure necessary for there to be multiple, competitive Internet service providers. According to Tim Worstall in *Forbes* magazine, “The costs of doubling [existing] infrastructure will be vastly higher than whatever gains we might make from the competition.” The Internet is widely viewed as the most important development of our era, both socially and economically, as it places the power of information and expression in the hands of the individual in a way that has never before been possible. It is imperative that this new right is protected so that the sharing of information remains free. Freedom on the Internet has advocates on both the left and the right side of the aisle, but the question will ultimately come down to one of how best to ensure that freedom.

their history and part of what makes them unique. But maybe just repurpose it so it’s not their official logo.

CM: So, since you guys all work in the CGI Communications Production Department, can you tell me what a company like CGI can do to help a business, chamber, or community either establish, refine, or update its brand or brand identity?

PW: Well, one thing we do is custom logos. I’m actually the custom logo coordinator. So, what happens is the client and the designer work together to establish a logo for the client. Then, once the design and revision process is completed, we send the client a whole branding guide booklet that shows them how to use their logo on business cards, t-shirts, letterheads, things like that. We also do logo repair for a business that might have an existing logo that either needs to be updated, or that they want changed. So we can definitely work with what the client already has and just kind of make it more modern, or make it so it more accurately conveys their business’s message.

KW: At CGI, we also do websites for clients that don’t have them, or that want existing websites updated. We actually just got a bunch of updated frameworks that look great, are mobile-responsive, and come packed with working galleries, sliders—pretty much everything you would need to get a quality website that works on multiple platforms. And in this day and age, where everyone is on the Internet on their cell phone, it’s really important that your website is responsive and transitions smoothly from being viewed on a desktop, to a tablet, to an iPhone.

RW: I think today, too, a big part of establishing your brand identity is adding video on top of all of these layers, which is something that CGI does as well. A lot of communities, for example, have great websites, great logos, but aren’t taking full advantage of more contemporary video technologies. How many community websites are you going to go to and find videos showing, you know, the area’s parks and recreational attractions, the local businesses, the school districts, the annual events? It’s a great opportunity to add another layer to your community’s brand by showing people why it’s great to live there.

CM: So then, what are the main components of a community or organization’s brand?

RW: It’s anything that your company or community puts out into the public domain. It’s all part of your brand.

KP: The logo, the website, the video, any brochures or print outs, even the banners that you might have up and down Main Street. You’re setting the tone for your community’s identity and culture, and you have to have it all consistent. When everything is consistent and coherent, you look organized. It makes you look legitimate. It makes it clear that you put a lot of thought into how you’re portraying your community, and the consistency makes it clear that your portrayal is an accurate one.

CM: So it adds to your credibility?

KP: Yeah, for sure.

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with the city manager should not be the sole determinant of the nature of the executive’s relationship with the city manager; board membership is too fluid, and the relationship can become too personal, to the detriment of both the executive and the chamber as a whole.

When determining how to best approach establishing or building a relationship with the city manager, it is important for the chamber executive to keep in mind that the city has the power to help or hinder the chamber in meeting its goals.

When the board changes, away go some chamber members and a portion of the volunteer structure. The executive has to start over building or repair-

ing community relationships. My advice is to maintain your own relationship with the city manager and you can usually weather the storms. All of this advice was inspired by situations of which I am personally aware, as well as anecdotal information from other executives’ experiences. Some have survived attempts by city managers, partnering with a few disgruntled chamber members, to have the executive removed, and some have not. This is intended to make you aware of the importance of the relationship between a chamber executive and a city manager and how you can insure a positive experience for both your staff and the city.

Each year, a chamber’s board of directors changes. It is never the same board from one year to the next because of term limits. The board’s relationship

Water, Water, Everywhere (Except In California)

(Continued from page 1)

dozen ski resorts, the Lake Tahoe area draws vacationers from all over the country during its ski season, which typically starts in mid-November and extends through April.

So, with such a time-sensitive tourism industry, could California’s dry spell tip the scales negatively for local businesses? Earley, for one, seems to think that the Lake Tahoe economy is more resilient than that.

“The businesses that suffered this past winter were specifically related to skiing, such as the resorts, ski rental, and sales firms,” she said. However, like nature itself, tourism and the local economy run on a system of checks and balances. “Some businesses, such as mountain bike shops, are experiencing an increase in business as spring and autumn activities are expanding due to the ease of getting to Tahoe on the roads and dry trails,” Earley continued. “Restaurants and hotels had a solid winter and are ahead of normal booking levels for the summer already.”

So, despite the dismal headlines, the delicate balancing forces are at work in the Californian universe. Though water and snow are lacking, lake water quality and summer mountain sports are thriving. For adventure lovers, this part of the country is like the Holy Grail of both sun and snow.

With more than a half-

are being felt by residents throughout California. As part of the statewide conservation efforts, many home owners are tearing out their lawns and replacing them with indigenous, drought-tolerant plants. Businesses are also conserving water in any way that they can. For example, in accordance with a mandate issued by the California State Water Resources Control Board, restaurants and bars may only serve water to customers upon request, and hotels and lodging establishments must provide guests the option of not having their towels and linens laundered daily.

What Lake Tahoe’s response to the California drought shows us, though, is the importance of a diverse local economy. For chambers of commerce, promoting a business climate that fosters diversity—perhaps through a tiered dues structure that makes membership more accessible to more businesses, or more events that cater specifically to smaller market segments—might not be a bad goal. That way, if one industry dries up (pun definitely intended) your community will have other assets to fall back on.

If you’re not a Californian and want to do your part, keep up with current legislation regarding climate change, and, if you’re brave enough, do a rain dance for the Golden State.

CHAMBER SPOTLIGHT: 2 DIFFERENT CHAMBERS, 2 UNIQUE COMMUNITIES

Every chamber of commerce has a unique story to tell. In "Chamber Spotlight," we take an in-depth look at Chambers from across the country and tell their story. Want to be considered for a chamber spotlight? Tell us why at nationalchamberreview@gmail.com.

Chamber Spotlight: Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce

Carly Morgan
Head Writer

One region, one voice. Or, as Jim Albert puts it: "One louder voice."

That's how Albert, who is the president and CEO of the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce, as well as the Bristol Chamber of Commerce in Bristol, Connecticut, describes the collective impact of several chambers of commerce working together toward common goals. This idea is embodied in the Central Connecticut Chambers, which is a federation of seven chambers of commerce throughout the region.

The seven chambers, which represent the communities of Bloomfield, Bristol, Burlington, Farmington, Plainville, Plymouth/Terryville, and Wolcott, came together little by little, over the past couple of decades, to share. And, Albert added: "You can fill in the blank on 'share.'"

During times of economic recession, it is not uncommon for chambers of commerce to have a harder time maintaining their membership numbers and staying financially viable. As a means of combatting such challenges, the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce formed to allow participating chambers to support each other by sharing everything from events and staff, to economic development and political advocacy.

Which is one of the places where the "louder voice" component becomes especially relevant: by working with the Central Connecticut Chambers, Albert explained, "instead of having a chamber of commerce with, let's say, 150-200 members, you end up joining [an association] that has 1,500 members." A voice of that size, he added, tends to garner more attention from elected officials at the local, state, and even federal level.

Such is one of the benefits any organization stands to gain by expanding its representation to include a larger region. What separates the Central Connecticut Chambers from most other regional chambers, however, is that under the association's collective umbrella, smaller, local chambers are still able to maintain the unique cultural quali-

ties specific to their localities. "Where we can share, we share," Albert explained. "Where it's better to have local independence, we leave that alone." What that means is that each of the seven chambers maintains its own board of directors, its own president, and many of its own officers. And, even though each chamber typically opens its events to members of the other six chambers, it's certainly not unheard-of—or discouraged—for a chamber to host its own separate event.

Albert says that that's all part of ensuring each chamber of commerce maintains its own, individual character. "Small towns versus larger towns versus industrial towns versus rural towns, they all have their own culture," Albert explained, "and nobody loses [that culture] as a result of joining the Central Connecticut Chambers consortium."



Fall Day in Central Connecticut

Credit: Chris Lewis

One of my first questions upon hearing about the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce was a simple one: "But how does it *work*?" Fortunately, Albert was not only explicit, but also extremely patient, in explaining it to me.

"One of our rules is that if you join one chamber [that's part of the Central Connecticut Chambers], you get access to all of them." Which, not surprisingly, does a ton to enhance the value and cost-effectiveness of chamber membership for any business.

Take events, for instance. By sharing events, members have more opportunities to network with more people. "Instead of

having an event just for you chamber that would draw, let's say, 20 to 25 people, we can have an event that draws 50 to 100, to 200, to 300 people," Albert explained. Consequently, he continued, members get to network "a bit more robustly, more vibrantly." And, not to mention, more frequently: "We do over 100 events a year," Albert said. "That's two significant events, on average, per week."

It also makes for better speakers, like more prominent politicians, business leaders, or authors. "Because you're larger, you get a little bit more attention," Albert said, "which gets you access to bigger people, [like the] Hillary Clinton and Marco Rubio kind of people."

And none of this is at any extra cost to chamber members. Area business owners simply pay the normal membership dues to whatever chamber they happen to belong to,

to all of the chambers' events.

"Now, if you [come to us] and say, 'I also want an executive director, part-time, twenty hours a week, to help run events and board meetings,'" Albert said, "then we add to the dues the amount of money it costs to hire a part-time person to come in and do your event planning and board management." He said that one similar, even more popular option is for smaller chambers to have a financial officer from the Central Connecticut Chambers assist in doing their books and managing their bank accounts.

Albert believes that such a model is highly impactful when it comes to a chamber's operational efficiency, since a lot of the more back-of-the-house jobs are fundamentally similar, regardless of where they are being done. For example, Albert explained, "when you have someone who's used to running golf tournaments [and runs] three or four of them a year, they can do it a little quicker, faster, better, [because] they just know the flow."

Hiring someone who understands and organizes such large events for a living, and understands the basic, logistical challenges inherent in doing so, might be more effective than having "somebody in your staff once a year drag out the folder and try to figure out how to put a golf tournament together."

Albert equates the three-year contracts that the Central Connecticut Chambers signs with the smaller, local chambers to the contract one might sign in hiring a consultant group or a management company. The biggest difference, however, is that after the chambers sign their contract, they continue to have say in the ins and outs of the agreement "after the fact."

"Our Central Connecticut board of directors is made up of all the presidents of all the different chambers, plus some of their officers, plus the chairmen of some of the committees, which spread across the chamber," Albert explained. "So, when you're talking about contracting with the [Central Connecticut] Chambers, you almost end up contracting with yourself." This is because, he continued,

the 42-member board of directors, which has representatives from each of the seven member chambers, has a lot of say in such matters as salaries for the Central Connecticut Chambers' executive officers, the amount of money to be spent on individual events, the makeup of the Central Connecticut Chamber's budget, and which issues are going to be represented in the state capital, as well as who is going to be responsible for representing them. "It ends up regionalizing a lot of the discussion," Albert said, without losing much, if any, of each chamber's "local culture and local flavor."

Of course, working so closely across such a wide region of community and business demographics does not come without its challenges. And the biggest challenge? Logistics. "We have to make sure that our events don't bump into each other," Albert said. "So we have a lot of calendar coordination going on." Then, he added, chuckling, "I am literally sitting here looking at a giant laminated calendar on the back of my office door that has everybody's events on it, color-coded, across all the months. And it takes up the whole door, top to bottom."

The fact that cross-chamber organization is the biggest challenge facing the Central Connecticut Chambers seems like a rather lucky situation for the organization to find itself in. But the reason this is the case in fact has very little to do with luck, and a whole lot to do with being proactive and pre-empting potential breeding grounds for conflict.

In order for an association like the Central Connecticut Chambers to run smoothly, Albert said, you "have to go in with some ground rules that everyone is more or less comfortable with, and [everyone] agrees with." For starters, that means making a conscious effort to maintain similar dues structures. Even though Albert has found that potential members don't necessarily "comparison shop" when trying to decide which of the seven central Connecticut chambers to join, it helps that none of the seven chambers have membership fees profoundly lower than those of the other six.

"What we find is most businesses join the chamber of the town they're located in," Albert said. "They move into town, they open up a restaurant, and that's the chamber they belong to."

Which brings up another component of the Central Connecticut Chambers' agreement: "We have this rule that I don't go into your town and actively recruit members for my chamber," Albert added. Albert did mention, however, that on the rare occasion that a business from one town contacts a chamber from the next town over and asks to join that chamber instead, the business will be welcome to do so. "We don't actively market to each other's clients, but if someone expresses an interest in becoming a member in another town, we encourage that," Albert explained, "because it's good for everyone in the long run anyway."

Which speaks to the underlying, guiding principles of the Central Connecticut Chambers' operations: Albert said that the organization first came to be back in mid-1990s, when former Bristol Chamber President (and Bristol Mayor) John Leone realized that chambers of commerce in neighboring towns were struggling to remain afloat. "And so [Leone] just said, 'Hey, not for nothing, but if we all got together, we could do better,'" Albert recalled. "And [the other chambers] believed him and they joined in at it worked." Since then, the Central Connecticut Chambers has grown from four participating chambers, to seven, all of which work together to promote economic and community development throughout the region, while improving the overall quality of life.

"If you raise the tide, you lift all the boats," Albert explained. "If your area is a nicer place to live, people will tend to be there, which raises the price of your real estate and brings in employers because there's a workforce there. So it's a good thing for everybody."

For more information on the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce, visit www.centralctchambers.org.

Kerrville Area Chamber of Commerce

-Kerrville, Texas

Patrick McCabe
Editor-in-Chief

Nestled in the beautiful Texas Hill Country along the Guadalupe River, Kerrville, Texas is the largest city between San Antonio and El Paso, and it's "sort of out here by itself," according to Harold Dean, IOM, President and CEO of the Kerrville Area Chamber of Commerce. But they consider that a strength. With a strong, dedicated business community, the chamber has experienced great growth since Dean took over in 2012.

How were they able to increase membership from roughly 800 businesses to over 1,000 in just three years? A lot of it had to do with their new dues structure. Like a lot of chambers, member dues used to be based on the number of employees and other financial information of a member business. Unfortunately, that didn't give members a lot of choice in regards to what they want, so they decided to switch it up for a more *a la carte* approach.

"You can pick the level that you want based on the amount and type of benefits you want in return," says Dean. "So it's a voluntary level that you pick when you start as a member, and you can upgrade or downgrade at any time, your choice. It's a new way throughout the chamber industry to administer dues."

Dean considers the success of the new tiered system one of the big reasons for recent membership growth. With five different levels to choose from, members are able to ease their way into the chamber however they feel comfortable. And if a higher-level commitment has one extra piece a business in a lower level would like without all the rest, they are able to pick and choose. This allows members to see absolute value in their membership; they aren't paying for anything they feel they don't need, just getting all the great benefits they desire.

Policies and organizational habits like this are what build trust between the chamber and



The Guadalupe River

Credit: mlradio(flickr)

its members, and we all know how important it is for mem-

bers to trust the chamber in regards to its goals and functions. Another way that the Kerrville Area Chamber of Commerce has continued to prove they deserve the trust of their community is through the U.S. Chamber's Accreditation Program.

When Dean took over at the chamber, they had been a 3-Star Accredited chamber in the past, but that expired in 2009. After re-application to the program they are now a 4-Star Accredited chamber. There are over 7,000 chambers of commerce in the United States; only 199 are Accredited by the USCOC.

What is the accreditation process like? "It is lengthy," says Dean. "And it helps you get your

tion that you need. It makes sure you're a complete operation as far as a chamber. It gives you the credibility, of course, to your members and to your community that you're a quality organization that covers all of its bases, and provides the best service that a chamber nonprofit can."

Dean is very proud of this designation, and deservedly so. "There's three, four, and five star Accreditation levels, and the 4-Star is of course a pretty impressive level for this chamber here. Top 3 percent in the United States," he says.

The accreditation process is not easy. "A lot more documentation that is required by a nonprofit to operate nowadays," says Dean. "Some of it's federal, some of it's state required, some of it's just basic good business sense that you have certain documents." Like he said before, it's about keeping "your house in order."

Chambers of commerce need to be more organized than ever before, and have plans established and written down for every possible contingency, even those everyday things you might take for granted. "For instance," Dean says, "they called it a canned spam act, it was what you do when you're sending out bulk information, and you have a plan for that. It's in writing; it's been approved." And that's just one example.

"You have an emergency plan. What happens if a disaster happens? You have to have something in place, in writing,

that lets your employees know what to do in case something like that happens. Documents and pieces of the puzzle that help you operate a small business or a nonprofit business, all that kind of stuff takes a lot of time to put together that had never been done before, allowed us to move the chamber up to a four star accreditation from three."

It's a huge accomplishment. They are one of twenty-six 4-Star Accredited chambers in the country. You can see why it would cause their membership to increase so rapidly. Business owners see that and feel they can trust the organization to do right by their needs. You can see that the chamber is organized and has a plan.

The Kerrville Area Chamber of Commerce's plan is called Vision 2016. Each year, the chamber has its annual program of work, what they hope to accomplish in that particular year. But back in 2013, they wanted to scale a long-term plan, and dubbed it Vision 2016. "Vision 2016 is a long-range plan that helps us guide ourselves toward larger goals for a number of years. ... probably half or better of [those] goals have already been met."

How are those goals determined? "It's a group of member volunteers that come together as a committee, and they meet over a period of however long it takes, maybe a month or two, and they help develop the goals that they want to see their chamber do," says Dean. "They can

be all kinds of goals, but most of the time it's to promote commerce within the community. That's what we do. ... Some are very lofty, some are very simple and easy to do. It depends on what they come up with. Those are presented to the board of directors of the chamber for approval. And if they're approved, then they're put in play."

Once 2016 rolls around, they will evaluate what they accomplished and set sights on a new plan: "Maybe Vision 2020, who knows?" says Dean.

Goals, a plan, and organization with a track record of accomplishment. With a small, dedicated staff, and a business community eager to help, it's easy to see how the Kerrville Area Chamber of Commerce has experienced such success in a short period of time.

To learn more about the chamber and what they do, visit www.kerrvilletx.com.

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Looking Abroad for Business Opportunities: Tips for Trade Missions

Bianna Clegg
Staff Writer

Businesses are always on the lookout for ways to improve their business model and widen their customer base. A highly rewarding way to grow area businesses is to organize a trade mission or participate in one that visits your area.

Trade missions aid in the formation of international connections and help business owners find new strategies for growing and managing their company. Some businesses also find an added bonus in connecting themselves and their communities with another culture.

Trade missions take a lot of work to organize, and chambers of commerce can play a vital role in the organizational process. For the last quarter-century, the Filipino Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii (FCCH) has done just that, and last Febru-

ary, the chamber celebrated its 25th mission to the Philippines.

The trade missions first came about when the FCCH identified a need in its community: Hawaii has a large Filipino population, and members of that cultural demographic were in the market for Filipino products. With their trade missions, the FCCH encourages the growth of area businesses by helping them foster relationships with countries in the Philippines, thereby affording business owners greater access to the Filipino products that were in high demand, but short supply.

Paul Gaerlan Alimbuyao, the current president of the FCCH and a vice president and manager of First Hawaiian Bank, does a large amount of the legwork (or phone work, as it were) to ensure trade mission participants are given every opportunity to grow as individuals and to grow their business.

Some challenges faced by trade mission organizers include: finding businesses to work with in the host country, navigating a foreign country you may not be familiar with, and keeping a large number of adults focused on the task at hand.

One way to get businesses from the host country interested in participating is by making appeals to authority. When Joe Schmo from the United States calls Jane Schmo, located on another tectonic plate, why should she believe working with him is a good use of her time?

Having members of your local government on your team will provide you the credibility you need to gain traction in the country you wish to visit. Reaching out to the foreign government will also add credibility and help you locate businesses there that might be interested in participating in the trade mission. This year, State

of Hawaii Lieutenant Governor Shan Tsutsui, County of Kauai Mayor Bernard Carvalho, and Consul General Gina Jamoralin of the Honolulu Philippine consulate supported and participated in the FCCH's 2015 trade mission to the Philippines.

Alimbuyao was also helped in his efforts to reach out to government officials by the existing sister relationship between the City and County of Honolulu, and various cities in the Philippines. Consider utilizing existing relationships between your local government and the government in your target country to make establishing initial contacts easier.

In speaking with Alimbuyao, it seemed like his best advice in terms of alleviating the stress of executing the trade mission on site was obtaining the services of a top-notch travel agent. Figuring out how to transport all of your partici-

pants around a foreign country is a daunting task, but the right travel agent will make you wonder why you were ever concerned in the first place. Alimbuyao swears by the ability of a great travel agent to reduce the work and stress of planning a trade mission by making sure everyone gets to where they need to be.

Employing the services of a travel agent will also help you keep participants on track. In a very complimentary way, Alimbuyao likened keeping participants on task to herding cats. With a large group of strong-minded business people, all of whom are leaders in their own right, it is not entirely surprising that it might be challenging to convince them to be lead for a change.

Having a strong, well-planned schedule with prearranged transportation will keep you from arriving in another country with forty participants, and walking into your events

with only five of them in tow.

Properly planning and managing your trade mission will make for a rewarding experience for you and for your businesses. If you are interested in organizing a trade mission for your area, look for a specific need in your community, and cater your recruiting efforts and itinerary development to that need. Having a focus will help direct your efforts and ease the stress of organization. By building from a need in your community, you will organize a mission uniquely suited to benefit businesses in your area. Participants make connections, learn about another culture, and are able to personally assess the trade infrastructure and market demand for international goods.

U.S.-Canada Relations Go "Beyond the Border"

Carly Morgan
Head Writer

The United States and Canada share the longest international border in the world. Officially known as the International Boundary, the border spans a total of 5,525 miles, with its longest stretch running more or less along the 49th parallel north, although closer examination of the physical demarcation of this particular section of the border indicates that its adherence to the "straight line" characterization of popular lore actually falls mostly into the "less" category, as it is actually comprised of roughly 900 zig-zagging lines.)

The United States and Canada also share the most robust and comprehensive bilateral trade agreement in the world: the two countries do \$2 billion in trade and commerce every single day. The U.S. is Canada's largest trade partner and foreign investor, and Canada is the second-largest trade partner for the U.S. (second only to China). This trade relationship supports millions of jobs in each country, and data from the U.S. State Department shows that approximately 300,000 people cross the U.S.-Canada border daily.

However, at the North Country Chamber of Commerce in Plattsburgh, New York, President and CEO Garry Douglas says that he and his staff prefer not to use the term "trade" when describing the economic symbiosis shared by the U.S. and Canada. "We don't believe the U.S. and Canada trade with each other," he explained. "The way we put it, the U.S. trades with Thailand. Canada trades with Bulgaria. The U.S. and Canada are an almost fully-integrated economy that makes things together."

Even with the deep economic ties, the U.S. and Canada

do remain completely sovereign from each other. This makes their trade relationship truly unique, and Douglas believes that the logistics of maintaining the relationship should reflect that unique quality. "We need to get past this notion of trade and understand, as we see it, ... as a national economic region within which there is in an inconvenience we have to manage, but doesn't define regionality," he said.

It seems to be to this very end that President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper first announced the Beyond the Border initiative back in February 2011. The Beyond the Border initiative is a coordinated effort between the U.S. and Canada to enhance border security while also facilitating trade and commerce by reducing the number of restrictions and bureaucratic formalities associated with border-crossing.

The most recent development, however, is the beginning implementation of the plan's "preclearance agreement," which was announced by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security last March. Once fully implemented, the agreement will allow for the "immigration, customs, and agriculture inspections required for entry into either country to occur on foreign soil," according to a statement from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. That translates into less congestion, and less time spent waiting at the border for people and goods alike.

David Hull, Executive Director of the Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce in Cranbrook, British Columbia, believes lessening the hassle of border-crossing is vital to the economic competitiveness of both countries. This is especially true in today's economy, wherein the U.S.

and Canada are both competing with countries all over the world for international market shares.

Cranbrook, British Columbia is only about 60 miles away from the U.S.-Canada border, just north of the spot where Idaho, Montana, and the International Boundary come together to form a "T" shape, Hull explained, so local residents are all too familiar with the often onerous border-crossing procedures. "If you've traveled through Western Europe in the last twenty years, unless you pay attention to the signs, you can't tell when you've crossed from France to Germany, or Germany to Holland," Hull said.

"So when you truck into Amsterdam and you're looking to go to Southern Germany, away you go. ... [But] if I wanted to go from Cranbrook to Idaho with my goods," he continued, "it's a tremendous process." That process, Hull added, is not only time-consuming, but also costly, and those costs have to be allayed somewhere—probably by the end-user—in order for businesses to stay profitable. It can put businesses who rely on cross-border transport in a bit of a tough spot, especially since, as Hull noted, when it comes to profit margins, "a few percent here or a few percent there is the difference between success and failure" for a lot of businesses.

For instance, in the western Canadian community of Cranbrook, most of the fresh fruits and vegetables available to consumers are trucked in from California. When transporting fresh produce, every hour spent in transit makes a difference in overall freshness. By allowing a truck's cargo to be cleared for entry into Canada prior to its departure from the United States, the amount of time that produce spends sitting in the back of the truck waiting to cross the border is dramatically reduced.

"That makes a real difference for the people producing the product, the people hauling it, and the people receiving the product on the other end," Hull said.

The preclearance agreement also applies to railways which, for many communities close to the Canadian border, translates into one major new development: Amtrak preclearance.

The Amtrak Adirondack train travels daily between Montreal and New York City. Garry Douglas says that it's not unusual for these passenger trains to get held up at the border for up to two hours while passengers wait to be cleared by customs agents—a method Douglas aptly described as "19th century." But with the preclearance agreement in place, Amtrak will eventually have U.S. customs agents at the train station in downtown Montreal, clearing passengers for entry into the U.S. before they ever even set foot on the train.

The busiest border checkpoint between the U.S. and Canada is the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit, Michigan with Windsor, Ontario, and is the site of passage for 25% of all traded merchandise between the two countries. However, while the brunt of the commercial-crossings burden is borne by metropolitan areas, there are plenty of smaller, more rural communities for which efficient border crossing is a central part of residents' day-to-day lives, and an integral component in maintaining the economic viability of their communities. Beyond the Border's preclearance agreement, in its call for the preclearance of travelers between countries, would also be impactful for these communities.

"We have a whole range of other small, rural border crossings that have connected hundreds of years," said Douglas. In the sparsely populated,

northern-most frontier of New York State, these low-traffic border crossings are mostly used by local people going to church, going to the store, going to visit family—all of the general activities around which everyday lives revolve.

The preclearance agreement will mean that these rural communities have a better chance of maintaining their gateways through the border, as it will allow officers with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection to conduct immigration and customs inspections in Canada, and Canadian officers to do the same on U.S. soil. This means that the smaller, rural communities to which Hull referred will be less at-risk of losing their border crossings to budget cuts.

"We had started to see ... some raised eyebrows about some of these little crossings, looking at them as a way to perhaps save personnel and money and say, 'Well, you know, people could go down the road and go across at the next border crossing. We could save money by closing this one,'" Douglas explained. But, he added, "That would be a tragedy for those rural communities, and in fact a tragedy to be eliminating any of the long-existing connections we have between people in the U.S. and Canada."

Currently, each checkpoint has agents on both sides of the border, in separate facilities. Border agents are not left to conduct customs inspections on their own, so that means that both of the separate buildings have two agents stationed in them. By streamlining the process and allowing one, single location to clear traffic in both directions (regardless of which side of the border it happens to be on), the low-traffic, rural crossings will not be as targeted as a means of cutting costs, since consolidating the customs inspections

will automatically reduce the costs to both governments.

Douglas believes that what the Beyond the Border initiative ultimately does is solidify the relationship between the United States and Canada as fully trusted partners. "That's a remarkable recognition," he said, noting that the U.S. and Canada have had a unique and trusted relationship for much of their shared history. This new initiative, however, "open[s] the door to translate that into how we actually function at the border, treating it, as we have called it for years but haven't always treated it that way, as a shared border."

David Hull echoed Douglas's statement from his position on the other side of the U.S.-Canada border. He said that with 80 percent of the Canadian population living within 100 miles of the border, being able to get across efficiently is key. "It's a big part of our life, whether it's pleasure, whether it's business," Hull said. "Trade and commerce do not respect geopolitical boundaries." A border riddled with bogged-down choke points hinders the natural movement of trade and commerce.

"The United States is Canada's biggest trading partner. ... We're tied at the economic hip," Hull continued. "And so, to that end, the Peace Arch [border] crossing down south of Vancouver says, 'Children of a common mother.' And other things say, you know, 'Brothers in arms.' But what we need to be is brothers in trade and commerce, and the first thing you do for family is make sure they can come into your door without being held up to stand on the cold porch." The Beyond the Border initiative stands poised to achieve that very objective.

For more information on the Beyond the Border initiative, visit btb-rcc.canada.usembassy.gov.

Why Brand Identity Matters for Chambers



Marcy Weaver
Contributing Writer

Is a brand identity important for chambers of commerce? What exactly is a brand identity? Can a brand identity be explained? As a chamber executive or board member, these are critical questions to ask yourself. If you can't accurately define it, aren't sure how to explain it, but are pretty sure it might be important, could

you even come up with brand identity for your organization?

Yes. As a matter of fact, you're probably further along in the process than you realize. It's just a matter of analyzing what elements are already in place and determining what is needed to complement those items. Maybe you're saying to yourself, "Oh, we have a brand identity. The board approved the new logo last year."

Good, you're already on your way to making sure you have an established brand. The logo is a critical component. It is the foundation of a brand and gives a visual of your organization's identity.

But what about the rest? What exactly is brand identity? (Spoiler alert: it's more than just a logo.)

Branding Basics

Branding gives people a mental impression of your chamber. It makes your organization both recognizable and memorable. Con-

sider the following quotes:

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"Your brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services, and it differentiates your offering from that of your competitors. Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be, and who people perceive you to be." - "Small Business Encyclopedia," entrepreneur.com

•••

"Branding is the art of aligning what you want people to think about your company with what people actually do think about your company. And vice-versa." - Jay Baer, author of the book *Youtility: Why Smart Marketing Is About Help Not Hype*

•••

Define Your Brand

Defining your chamber's brand can be as simple or complex as you want to make it. The easiest way to begin defining your brand is to ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the benefits,

features, and unique aspects of your chamber's products or services?

- What do your members and prospective members already think of your chamber?
- What qualities do you want them to associate with your chamber? Be honest in your answers. Authenticity is key in reaching your target market. Your members' core values and goals should be at the forefront of your effort (for both this exercise and your overall mission).

So, where do you go from here? You've successfully defined your brand; the next step is to capture that definition with a brand identity.

Establish Your Brand Identity

A brand identity should communicate your chamber's promise, look, attributes, and personality. (Yes, even personality.) Business may be the name of the game, but don't forget that businesses are made up of people, and people inherently operate on an emotional level.

Your brand stands for

who you are. It should represent the sum of all of your marketing efforts. Creating a brand identity begins with a variety of elements, such as:

- Name: the word or words (e.g., Coca-Cola or Coke)
- Logo: the visual trademark (e.g., Quaker Oats' Quaker man)
- Tagline: a catchphrase or slogan (e.g., Nike's "Just Do It")
- Graphics: a clear and effective picture (e.g., Nike swoosh)
- Colors: consistent and unique color palettes that can be associated with your brand (e.g., Owens-Corning is the only brand of fiberglass insulation that can be pink)
- Sounds: an audio logo to reinforce brand through sense memory (e.g., NBC's three-note flourish)

Remember, your chamber's brand will be communicated frequently in multiple, diverse arenas, so consistency is key. Defining brand identity creates the foundation for the rest of your

marketing and brand strategy.

There's a challenge in defining your chamber's brand identity. It's easy to emulate what others have done, and that can be a safe bet—it worked for them, so it could work for you. But, that's them. Remember, personality and authenticity are key. You may think your target market is very similar to theirs, and that might be true. But "similar" still isn't the same. The differences may be subtle, but they are there, and they're part of what makes you unique. Your chamber's brand should be unique, too. Don't be afraid to forge your own path.

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Where Have All The Unions Gone?

(Continued from page 1.)

conomic recovery, a thriving middle class could curtail the volatility characteristic of a market driven by the spending of only the super-wealthy and hasten recovery with growth less tenuous than that of recent years.

The declining agency of the average worker and the slow disappearance of the middle class have major implications for the well-being of our nation's economy. These changes, rooted in part in the continual evolution of our domestic economy to accommodate a global marketplace, also reflect a shift in the collective consciousness and values of society as a whole. As a result, labor unions, once the primary means of political advocacy for working-class Americans, have all but faded into oblivion, leaving behind mere echoes of a movement once centered around a booming rallying cry.

But just so we're clear: this is not a rhetorical crusade under the banner of "class warfare." This is not a condemnation of economic competition, nor is it an ideological attack on free market capitalism. If anything, labor unions and the broad-based prosperity they seek to establish are here presented as a means of preserving our competitive market structure, and the democratic principles upon which capitalism is based.

Organized labor need not be seen as the subversion of capitalist ideals as which it is so often characterized, as it may in fact be the exact stabilizing force necessary for allowing us to maintain the economic system that defines our democratic republic.

A Brief History of the Labor Movement

The era of organized labor most relevant to our purposes begins in the throes of World War I, as the rapid diffusion of a syndicalist ideology made "industrial democracy" the primary cause of organized labor.

Syndicalism, which originated in France as an oppositional response to political socialism, is the belief that workers should achieve reform and protect their interests through direct, democratic action spearheaded by the decentralized, cooperative units that are labor unions. With a democratized workplace as their new preoccupation, workers petitioned for greater responsibility, input, and authority in an effort to shift the employment paradigm away from the "master-servant" model of the traditional workplace, and toward one of greater collectivism.

Meanwhile, from the widely-felt economic expansion of the Progressive Era emerged a freshly-minted middle class—the first middle class majority in history—which brought with it unprecedented levels of consumer demand. To accommodate these demands, manufacturers began to move away from the steel, coal, and textile production of the Industrial Revolution, and toward the mass production of consumer goods.

As production of these goods grew increasingly efficient and cost-effective, manufacturers found themselves in a "race to the bottom," as each one sought to outpace competitors in price reduction. Manufacturers quickly realized that the best way to lower production costs was to lower the wages of factory workers. But as wages fell, so did purchasing power, and problems of overproduction were exacerbated by a climate of underconsumption. Before long, the wealth and excess that defined the Roaring Twenties ground to a catastrophic halt with the Stock Market Crash of 1929, and the years of economic depression that followed.

Efforts to revitalize the American economy eventually came in the form of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Among its many provisions was the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which enhanced job security for union workers by making it illegal for an employer to

deny rights to a worker based on his union involvement.

Over the next decade or so, unions experienced dramatic increases in membership, and by the 1950s, one out of every three American workers belonged to a union. With unions at their peak enrollment, collective bargaining became the new status quo. Because effective collective bargaining is almost entirely contingent upon worker solidarity, labor unions, in an effort to maximize their efficacy, organized across entire industries, instead of on a plant, trade, or regional basis.

Solidarity is vital to a union's bargaining power because of the way in which market forces act upon demand for labor. Demand for labor is considered elastic, so it responds to changes in price: all other factors remaining constant, if wages go down, employment should go up; if wages go up, employment should go down. As unions demanded higher wages and improved benefits, the centralized collective bargaining of industry-wide organization effectively removed wages from competition. This meant that workers didn't need to worry about organizing themselves out of a job, since there were no wage benefits to be gained from trying to purge plants of union members. Industry-wide worker solidarity meant industry-wide wage standards, thereby allowing unions to circumvent (if not subvert entirely) labor's price demand elasticity.

As a result, real wages doubled in the United States between 1940 and 1967, according to Nelson Lichtenstein's *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*. The economy grew steadily, and equitably, complicating certain tenets of neoliberal dogma. In 1973, the number of Americans living in poverty had dwindled to 11.1 percent of the population—the lowest it's ever been since the Census Bureau started collecting such data in 1959.

But even when organized labor was at its peak, there were already harbingers of its impending decline: in 1947, a Republican congress overrode President Harry Truman's veto and passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which profoundly narrowed the scope of allowed union activity. The Taft-Hartley Act outlawed closed shops and union shops (both characterized by compulsory union membership as a condition of employment) in favor of agency shops. In agency shops, workers are not required to join the union, but they must pay a percentage of union fees, the rationale being that all workers stand to benefit from collective bargaining regardless of their membership status. The law then took this provision one step further by also granting states the right to ban agency shops, making Taft-Hartley the legal foundation for modern-day "right to work" initiatives.

Lawmakers weren't the only ones to blame for organized labor's gradual retreat into political obscurity, however. The movement's decades of heightened visibility also meant decades of heightened scrutiny, and before long, unions found themselves on the wrong side of public opinion. Today, unions—and the insular, hierarchical bureaucracies that they represent—have a reputation as corrupt and nepotistic impediments to growth and productivity. Unfortunately, these perceptions are not entirely baseless, though they reflect the actions of a small minority of unions.

Many of these problems were first brought to public attention during the 1957 McClellan Committee Hearings, centered on an investigation into the operations of the infamous International Brotherhood of Teamsters. The hearings were televised, which meant that 1.2 million Americans were able to tune in as the committee detailed Teamster leaders Dave Beck and Jimmy Hoffa's egregious misappropriation

of union funds, as well as the group's ties to organized crime.

But the charges of internal corruption that continue to plague organized labor's credibility are, as *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof points out in "The Cost of a Decline of Unions," a far cry from some of the abuses perpetrated "in the corporate suite" today. Kristof writes, "One of the things you learn as a journalist is that when there's no accountability, we humans are capable of tremendous avarice and venality. That's true of union bosses—and of corporate tycoons. Unions, even flawed ones, can provide checks and balances for flawed corporations."

The inception of labor unions was predicated on the belief that those who are not in positions of power and authority should be afforded some vehicle for self-advocacy. It was that same belief that inspired Americans to throw chests of tea into the Boston Harbor almost 250 years ago in order to make their political voices heard. To deny workers the same means of representation in the workplace would be to directly undermine the principles upon which our country was established by suggesting that democratic privileges are only to be afforded to select people, and under select conditions.

American Unions and Today's Economy

The distribution of wealth in the United States in 2015 looks almost precisely as it did in 1929, right before the proverbial wheels fell off and the country spiraled into the economic abyss of the Great Depression. The last time the economy looked like this, workers flocked to unions in droves. Why, then, are today's enrollment numbers nearing an all-time low? And what does it mean for the vitality of our nation's economy if organized labor continues on this same trajectory?

Globalization is often identified as the primary culprit for organized labor's contemporary woes. With the low wage demands of overseas workers, the decision to organize at home seems like the final nail in the coffin that is industrial outsourcing or off-shoring. But this argument is complicated by the fact that the industries with the strongest history of unionization have jobs that are largely immobile, and their ranks are diminishing just as quickly.

In fact, the sector that has experienced the greatest decrease in union membership is the construction industry: in 1973, 40 percent of construction workers were unionized; by 2004, that figure had plummeted to 15 percent. Globalization does not explain that. Nor does it explain the decline in union membership among carpenters, cooks, truckers, and store clerks. In the U.S., only about 15 percent of all low-skill workers are in manufacturing. The rest are mostly concentrated in retail and trade services, both of which are virtually immune to the effects of globalization.

But even when it comes to jobs that are more susceptible, globalization does not have to affect union enrollment. A study by Duke University political scientists Peter Lange and Lyle Scruggs indicates that globalization only negatively impacted union density (i.e., the proportion of active wage and salary earners enrolled in unions) in countries where union density was already on the decline prior to globalization. In countries with a stronger union presence, however, union density has either remained the same or increased in the years since globalization set in.

In Germany, for example, autoworkers are 100 percent unionized under IG Metall. They earn nearly twice as much per hour as U.S. auto workers, and produce twice as many vehicles as American auto companies. And, contrary to the idea that financial efficiency demands low wages, German auto companies remain highly profitable: in 2014, Munich-based BMW, for

example, saw a 9.2 percent increase in full-year profit. That's a net increase of \$6.2 billion.

German unions have the leverage they do because German law is in fact designed to protect the rights of workers. Germany's Works Council Constitution Act effectively mandates workplace democratization, and grants workers "co-determination" in company decisions—a big part of why the most lucrative factory jobs remain at home. Compare this to the climate of the American workplace, where the rules of globalization have been left almost entirely in the hands of corporations, and it's no wonder that the two countries' paths to globalization have looked quite different.

The fact that globalization has been able to have the impact that it has on union density in the U.S. is not indicative of any qualities necessarily intrinsic to a globalized, international marketplace, but instead a reflection of the supply-side fixation of U.S. economic policy aimed toward mitigating the perceived threats of a globalized economy. The results are the same, though: the decentralized collective bargaining structure that permeates the landscape of U.S. labor relations undermines unions' capacity to take wages out of competition. This, in turn, diminishes the appeal of union membership (and at a time when many employers see worker organization as inherently adversarial). Consequently, popularity wanes, membership decreases, and the original problem of unions' weakening leverage is further exacerbated by lower enrollment; organized labor's decline continues along the same vicious retrograde loop.

Economic Deregulation and the Right To Work

In the United States, the 1970's era of globalization was met with economic deregulation. This supply-side compulsion of the late-twentieth century indicates an ideological inversion of the Progressive Era notion that federal intervention was necessary to ameliorate the harsh forces of capitalism, instead characterizing government intervention as the antithesis of market efficiency and economic growth. This new mentality (coupled with the heightened sensitivity to individual rights brought on by the Civil Rights movement) rendered the entire idea of organized labor less resonant with the American populace, and labor unions suddenly seemed to embody the very faults of which they are still accused today: they were unnecessary, inefficient, cash mongering freeloaders.

But organized labor's struggle to remain relevant predated globalization, beginning with the 1960s "Sun Belt Boom" and the rapid population growth and economic expansion of the South and Southwest United States that followed.

Traditionally, unions have been most concentrated in the American Northeast and up-

per Midwest, where heavy industry and manufacturing were once the driving market forces. While typically harder to pass in states that already have a strong labor presence, the "right-to-work" legislation allowed by the Taft-Hartley Act predated southern industrialization. Consequently, within one year of Taft-Hartley, twelve states, many of them southern, adopted right-to-work measures that preemptively combated the spread of unions, and prevented organized labor from ever gaining a foothold in the southern states' economies. This resulted in an economic order in the south dialectically opposed to the collectivism-steeped industries of the unionized north.

The Economic Impact of Labor's Departure

Today, with unions representing a mere 11 percent of the American workforce, organized labor has been all but ineffective in curtailing the erosion of a once-robust middle class. The income gap between the country's richest and poorest began widening into its current state in the 1970s—right around the time that organized labor first started to feel its power waning—and many studies suggest that this relationship is not just correlative, but causal.

According to Nelson Lichtenstein, the living standards of the American working class doubled in the generation following World War II, when union membership was also at its peak. But that trend turned around rather quickly, as data from the Congressional Budget Office shows that, from 1979 to 2007, inflation-adjusted income for the top one percent of American earners increased 275 percent, while middle-income households saw an income increase of just under 40 percent over the same period. Ironically, the relatively minimal income growth of the latter demographic is in spite of the fact that, on average, Americans today work more hours per year than workers in any other industrialized country, and average worker productivity has increased by 400 percent.

Of course, economic inequality is not inherently bad. After all, capitalism is defined by its competitive marketplace, and in any competition, some will always fare better than others. The prospect of being able to earn more by doing more is a major motivating factor in encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship. But economic competition is also predicated on the possibility of upward mobility.

In fact, that's the very basis of the "American Dream": if you work hard and spend wisely, you'll be able to "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" and climb the proverbial socioeconomic ladder. Without that promise, the incentive that economic competition purports to offer is negated, and the competitive meritocracy of a capitalist marketplace devolves into a plutocratic land-

scape of indentured servitude.

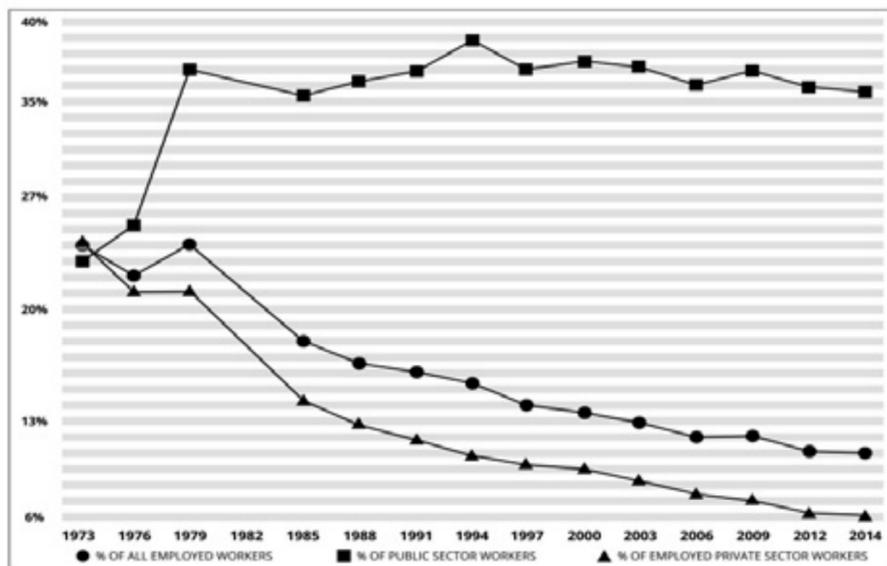
Inequality has been proven many times over to be an impediment to economic growth, and there exists a widely-held belief that redistribution efforts are the best, if not the only, means of combating inequality. However, if maintaining market competition without stymieing growth really is what we're after, then redistribution initiatives may not be the answer. In fact, data from the International Monetary Foundation suggests that wealth inequality's negative effect on overall growth may be partly attributable to the redistribution efforts it calls forth, which can undermine growth in their own right.

So maybe—just maybe—flawed though the institution may be, organized labor is the solution to our current problems of tenuous and plodding economic recovery. Lange and Scruggs write, "A critical dimension of interest group relations in Western democracies ... is the system of interest group participation and representation in economic and social policy." Without unions, workers' voices are silenced, and the American working class and political left lose one of their most formidable means of representing their interests in Washington. And, whether you agree with that platform or not, the continued functionality of a democratic republic is necessarily contingent upon adequate representation of all interests.

Right now, union enrollment numbers do not exactly inspire much optimism in organized labor's future. At a time when unionization is made that much harder by popular hiring practices (i.e., hiring workers as independent contractors or as temporary employees) and right-to-work legislation (Michigan became the 25th "right to work" state last March), perhaps what labor needs today is a reinvention of its antiquated model and a reexamination of its role in the economy. Or, at the very least, a "rebranding" of sorts, that would allow the labor movement to divorce itself from its public image as a bloated, bureaucratic impediment to economic growth.

Or, maybe, the best way to help revive the labor movement is to realize that the relationship between unions and employers need not be an adversarial one, as both parties in that relationship have a vested interest in a thriving domestic economy. What we're doing right now doesn't seem to be working, and the numbers suggest that we might be headed toward either a New Deal-style federal agenda of heavy-handed redistribution, or the devolution of our competitive, capitalist democracy into a superficial facsimile of itself, devoid of the incentive for hard work, innovation, and entrepreneurship that defines our economic system today. I don't know exactly what the answer is, but I think it might be in all of our best interest to find it before history repeats itself.

UNION DENSITY



Doing the Minimum: The Fight for \$15

(Continued from page 1)

With the Fight for \$15 Movement, the question the American public is faced with is: Should we raise the minimum wage? Finding information on both the micro and macro economic effects of raising the minimum wage in order to answer that question is not easy.

If you do a quick Google search, your results will likely show a 50/50 split between attitudes of, "Raising the minimum wage will cause all American pies to burn in their ovens and the world to implode"; and, "Not raising the minimum wage will cause the world to descend into chaos as children and kittens die in the streets."

A good place to start when deciphering such messages is with a little inquiry into when and why a minimum wage was established in the first place. I turned to the United States Department of Labor (DOL) for some background.

An increased demand for jobs after the Great Depression made it difficult for workers to negotiate a fair price for their labor. To help pull the American people out of poverty and repair the economy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and many others spent years fighting for the rights of workers.

Historically, fiscal conservatives and the Supreme Court have been opposed to the idea of a federal minimum wage. However, a federal minimum wage of 25 cents an hour was signed into law in 1938 under the Fair Labor Standards Act, a piece of New Deal legislation. The night before signing the bill, President Roosevelt had this to say to his opponents: "Do not let any calamity-howling executive with an income of \$1,000 a day ... tell

you ... that a wage of \$11 a week is going to have a disastrous effect on all American industry."

The federal minimum wage was first implemented to help improve the lives of those supporting themselves and their families in a time when, for lack of a better phrase, the economy was in the toilet. In order to assess the need for a minimum wage increase today, it is important to understand the demography of the current generation of minimum wage earners, to determine whether the financial demands they face are analogous to those of earlier generations.

There seems to be a general stereotype of the typical minimum wage worker as a teenager looking for pocket change. As it turns out, the DOL reports that 88 percent of minimum wage workers are at least 20 years old. About 53 percent of minimum wage workers are also working full-time, and 28 percent have children to provide for.

These are people who are on their own. Or, if they're not, they want to be. This likely applies even more so to older workers, of which there are plenty: the average age of minimum wage workers is 35 years old.

These are the people slapping together your Big Mac when you don't feel like cooking; providing support to your grandmother who lives in an assisted living facility; ensuring your kids don't drown at the community pool; and generally making sure that society is able to keep moving on a day-to-day basis.

Even if we were to decide that minimum wage earners should receive a raise, before implementing any wage increase, we must consider how it might impact job security. Many fiscal conservatives look

at labor as any other commodity: through the lens of tried and true economic principles. Namely, they cite the law of demand: increase the cost of a commodity, and demand for that commodity will decrease. The extent of that decrease depends on the commodity's price elasticity of demand.

Opponents of raising the minimum wage believe labor has an elasticity of an absolute value greater than one. This means that increasing the price of the commodity that is a worker's labor will significantly decrease the employer's demand for it; higher wages, fewer jobs. Consequently, employers will hire less, and may even fire existing employees. Under these circumstances, increasing the minimum wage would increase the rate of unemployment, ultimately hurting the group of people the raise was intended to help in the first place.

While oft cited as an argument against raising the minimum wage, this exact scenario seems to be rooted more in economic theory than marketplace reality: according to the DOL, very little effect on employment was found in a review of 64 studies on minimum wage increases. While some studies do show a slight increase in unemployment for low-wage earners, the vast majority of workers benefited. This is because the excess production costs associated with higher wages aren't being absorbed by job cuts. Instead, increased production costs can be, and often are, mitigated through product price increases or through a marginal reduction in corporate profit margins. This reminds us that individuals are not the only concern when it comes to wage raises. Businesses are also a major

concern, and rightly so. Businesses provide the jobs, and it is vital that the economic environment remains friendly towards businesses, and continues to foster growth and prosperity.

But even here, we encounter less cognitive dissonance than one might think: While increasing wages can affect businesses in negative ways through increased prices and (potentially) decreased profits, it can also have positive effects on the business as a whole.

According to the DOL, research has shown that higher wages increase employee loyalty and morale. These effects help balance potential losses incurred by higher wages. Increased worker loyalty means lower turnover rates which, in turn, means less money spent on new-hire training. Improved morale among workers leads to increased productivity, which only serves to benefit a company's "bottom line." Businesses, even those with notoriously small profit margins (think: restaurants), actually seem to do well when they pay a higher wage.

Unlike many other states, California does not have a lower minimum wage for tipped workers. That means restaurant servers in California are paid \$9 an hour, the state minimum, before tips. That is substantially more than what servers in most other states make: in New Jersey, for example, servers can expect to be paid as little as \$2.13 an hour, which is the federal minimum for tipped workers. Patrons are then left to make up the difference through tips (another example of public dollars subsidizing the low wages of private firms). The California Restaurant Association estimates that California's restaurant industry, already 1.4 million workers

strong, will add another 145,900 jobs over the next ten years.

Regardless of whether we make the move to a \$15 hourly minimum, it is pretty clear that with wages anywhere from \$2.13 to \$7.25 an hour, we can afford a raise.

Minimum wage is not keeping pace with inflation, and the longer we go without addressing this disparity, the further behind minimum wage workers will fall as their purchasing power lessens. According to the Pew Research Center, minimum wage has already lost 8.1 percent of its purchasing power since its last increase in 2009.

There are many factors to consider when it comes to whether or not to raise the minimum wage, as well as many valid concerns about the effects it might have on the economy. But the fact of the matter is that low-wage jobs constitute the fastest growing employment sector in the nation, and the people working those jobs are not making enough money to make ends meet without the help of public assistance. Ignoring the problem of low-wage poverty—and hoping that a little more elbow grease will make it go away—will only lead to more problems for the country as a whole.



Fight for \$15 on 4/15

Credit: The All-Nite Images(flickr)

If You're Young, Rich, and Beautiful, Don't Read This



Glenn Shepard
Contributing Writer

But if you've lived long enough to notice a wrinkle or two, experience the stress of supporting a family, or have ever wondered what happened to the optimist you were at 21 years old, then answer one simple question:

What happened to you?
I know it sounds rude,

but why is your life so different now from how you thought it would be back then?

If you're like most people, the current version of you would be a disappointment to the 21 year-old version of you.

And that's not necessarily a bad thing, since people's expectations in their youth are usually unrealistic. Because life is inevitably full of disappointments, and reality rarely lives up to the fantasy. At 16, I wanted to play lead guitar for AC/DC, despite the fact that I had neither the talent nor the ambition.

But now that your expectations are more realistic, are you still disappointed with where you are?

If you're completely content with your job, financial situation, relationships, health, and where you are in your life, stop reading here. But if you're not, read on and know that you're far from alone.

I meet thousands of people in my management seminars

each year. An alarming number live their lives in a spirit of frustration and with at least some sense of failure. Some are underpaid. Some are over-educated and underemployed. Some have abandoned their dreams, given up on getting ahead, and settled for getting by.

They try to please others, but rarely please themselves. The peace, contentment, and happiness they expected at 21 have turned into living in defeat and compromise. So how does one go about changing this? It begins with increasing your self-esteem, and the only way to do that is to do something to impress yourself. Real self-esteem cannot be given; it must be earned.

It feels good to receive attention from a member of the opposite sex, praise from an authority figure, or a compliment from a colleague. But that feeling is temporary because it only lasts as long as

that person is there to give it.

We end up feeling hungry for more when those people aren't around. This can create the unhealthy and destructive habit of relying on others for validation, which makes us weak, needy, and leaves us with no self-esteem whatsoever.

Our character, compassion, conscience, courage, and accomplishments are the avenues through which we build true self-esteem. You must work to earn it. But once you do, no one can ever take it from you.

Want to put this principle to the test? Name three things you did in the past year that you are so proud of, that if someone else did them first, you'd say, "That's someone I want to be more like." This is what happened to me in May of 2014 when I heard about a California philanthropist named Jason Buzi.

Buzi began a "Pay It Forward" movement called "Hidden Cash" in San Francisco by randomly hiding money

around the Bay Area and then tweeting clues to its location. I saw the story on the local news in my hometown of Nashville, Tennessee, and said to my wife, "Someone should do that in Nashville!" She responded, "Hmmm. You should meet my husband. He's a professional speaker who says the only way to lead is by example."

We launched Hidden Cash Nashville that day. I pledged to hide an envelope containing anywhere from \$20 to \$200 at a different Nashville business each week for the rest of the year, and send out clues to the locations via email and social media. While I only gave away about \$3,000, the time and effort it required were far more than I anticipated. By the end of the year, we had nearly 5,000 people following and playing the game, thanks in part to media coverage from several local TV stations and newspapers.

Organizations from the Nashville Predators to the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce served as drop locations, and it became one of the biggest

"Pay It Forward" movements in Nashville history. While I would not have done it if I had known how big it would get, it's one of those things I'll always look back on with pride, just like making Eagle Scout when I was 17, earning my pilot's license at 20, or Skyjumping off the top of the Stratosphere in Las Vegas on my 50th birthday.

If you can name three things you've done to impress yourself in the last year, your self-esteem will be solid as a rock. If you can't, make a list of three things you'd like to do to impress yourself. You'll be amazed at how quickly your self-esteem will increase as you get closer to accomplishing them.

Based in Nashville, Tennessee, Glenn Shepard is a professional speaker and internationally recognized authority on managing problem employees and eliminating deviant behavior in the workplace. He's the bestselling author of 6 books and over 500 published articles. His company provides accredited management & leadership seminars for universities and chambers of commerce. More resources are available at www.glenshepard.com

Are You Building this New Asset?



Frank Kenny
Contributing Writer

Did you know that you are sitting on a new, and very valuable asset, right now?

Don't laugh. I'm serious. Most organizations haven't realized that they too are sitting on this valuable asset. As a matter of fact, some organizations, upon hearing that they either are,

or should be, sitting on this very valuable asset, scoff at the idea.

What is this asset, you ask?

Your exclusive, or proprietary, online audience.

Not sure what I mean? Think of it this way: Back in the day, media companies were the ones with an audience. Newspapers, radio stations, cable companies, and others of the same ilk, they had audiences. Everybody else was an advertiser.

If an organization wanted to reach a certain audience, they had to pay a media company for access.

Today, organizations have an opportunity to build and nurture their own unique online audience.

This online audience is a very valuable asset—one you can tap into at will to increase your membership, bring in sponsorship dollars, increase event registrations, and just about any other conversion event you have a mind to create.

The most beautiful thing about this new opportunity is that instead of conversion events that incur an expense (i.e., advertising), almost everything about creating and nurturing your audience increases the value of the asset with very little, if any, cash outlay.

Has your organization given much thought to your exclusive, proprietary, online audience? Have you assigned a dollar amount to its value?

Perhaps your organization is still thinking in an old school way, borrowing the audience of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and all the rest. Maybe your organization isn't focused on creating its own unique audience, but is instead focused on conversions first. If that is the case, chances are you don't have much of an online audience to tap into.

I am not talking here about creating your own social media platform. I'm talking about building and nurturing your online audience by providing valuable content (rather

than self-promotions and advertisements) and then building relationships with your fans, followers, and friends. I'm also talking about strategically using conversion events that allow you to grow your audience while monetizing it.

Here are the simple steps to creating and growing your unique, proprietary, audience:

1. Consistently provide valuable online content that informs, entertains, and inspires your target market demographic. Maintain a presence everywhere that your target market is online, and provide them value.
2. Proactively build relationships with your target market through online engagement; in order to have a friend, you have to be a friend. Remember, engagement isn't a hassle; it is an opportunity to build and nurture your audience. As an added benefit, this engagement leads to higher retention rates.
3. Obtain permission and

consistently communicate with your audience through email. You will need this channel, and your website, when it comes time to convert.

4. Create opportunities for face-to-face relationship building with your budding audience. Do meet-ups. Don't eat lunch alone. Keep in mind that your online audience includes both existing and prospective members.
5. Give, give, give. Have patience as you build your audience through content marketing and relationship management. The old model of ABC ("Always Be Closing") is dead.
6. Once you have grown and nurtured your unique, proprietary audience, you can flip the switch from giving to asking. After all, you're friends now—you know, like, and trust each other—and what you're offering benefits them. You did the smart thing early and built real relationships

with your market. When it comes time to ask, if you ask correctly (think: "digital marketing"), they will respond very favorably.

7. Don't forget the final step. Thank your audience and go back into your giving and relationship-building mode.

If this doesn't make sense or seems impractical, perhaps you are still thinking with an old-school, mass-marketing mindset. Converting strangers has always been a struggle. Today, it is nearly impossible.

I call this strategy "Give Gifts; Be Generous." You will find that it leads to massive awareness of your organization (i.e., the top of the social media marketing funnel). It will also lead to growing the middle of the funnel (i.e., people in your target market who are favorably positioned towards your organization). When the time is right for conversion, you simply have to ask in the right way.

Give it a try. Give gifts and be generous. What do you have to lose?

3rd Quarter 2015 Upcoming Events:

This section is designed to suggest new ideas, inspire creative thought, and hopefully encourage other chambers to try new things. So take a look at this long list of events and try to think of ways they can apply to your chamber and your community. Have a third quarter event you're really proud of? One you want to shout about from the rooftops? Email your upcoming events for October, November, & December 2015 to nationalchamberreview@gmail.com to submit them for our next issue!

July

-Canandaigua Chamber of Commerce, Canandaigua, New York: BBQ Battle Tent Party (7/4). You're invited to an amateur BBQ competition, tasting, and Independence Day celebration that will include an outdoor BBQ, a DJ, prizes and fireworks! Join your friends at the Center for the best 4th of July tent party around! Starting at 6 pm, come to our Garden Tent to enjoy music, food, and complimentary Genesee and Genny Light from 6-7 pm! A full cash bar will also be available. Our NYWCC Chefs will create a finger-licking spread of BBQ ribs and chicken, salt potatoes, macaroni salad, corn-on-the-cob, fresh fruit salad, tossed salad, rolls and butter. When you buy your ticket, you'll automatically be entered to win one of two spots to be a Guest Judge for the Center's Amateur BBQ Battle Rib competition! As the Winners of the BBQ Battle are announced, the Center will open our diet-breaking make-your-own sundae bar so that you can continue to sit and relax under the Garden Tent or in the NYWCC Gardens for the 4th of July fireworks over beautiful Canandaigua Lake!

-The Chamber of Commerce of Greater Cape May, Cape May, New Jersey: Barefoot Beer Fest (7/11). Get ready for Cape May County's Barefoot Beer Festival! Imagine sipping amazing craft beers listening & watching the waves break 50 yards away on the beautiful private beach of Icona Resorts Diamond Beach. You & your friends have to join us for this unique experience! 40+ breweries will showcase their one of a kind brews. For this event, you'll enjoy unlimited pours of tons of specialty craft beers in your own keepsake sampling glass. NOTE: You do not need to be staying at the Icona Hotel to attend this festival. However, if you need a room, please book well in advance as rooms will sell out. There will be two sessions for you to choose from: 12:00-3:30pm, and 4:30-8:00pm. Enjoy live music while you find your favorite pour. Food prepared from our world-class chef is included—everyone will receive two food tickets. In addition to a great time sampling craft beers, this event also caters to the educational side of brewing beers. Each session will include a 30-minute program, "The Magic of Hops", which features an exploration of the history of hops. So put your toes in the sand and a cold beer in your hand, we'll see you July 11th! Designated Driver tickets are available. BUY TICKETS: <http://barefootbeerfestival.upcomingevents.com/icona> General Admission Tickets Include: Access to unlimited samplings from 40+ breweries on the beautiful, private Diamond Beach, A keepsake glass, Two food tickets, and a 30-minute educational program on hops brewing NOTE: Prices are subject to increase as we get closer to the event date and more at the door (if not sold out in advance).

-Salida Chamber of Commerce, Salida, Colorado: 19th Annual Colorado Brewers Rendezvous at Riverside Park (7/11). More than 70 Colorado breweries bring all their very best, along with T-shirt sales, local food vendors, entertainment and fun. Admission includes unlimited samples. Tickets will be available at the Salida Chamber of Commerce. Brought to you by the

Colorado Brewers Guild and the Salida Chamber of Commerce.

-Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, Fairbanks, Alaska: Alaska Business Week (7/18-25). Alaska Business Week (ABW) is a one-week summer program teaching business and leadership skills to Alaskan high school students. Participants live on a college campus, where they work as teams, mentored by a business leader from the community. Now five years young, ABW is modeled after the very successful and long-running Washington Business Week Program. Through our partnership with University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Management, ABW offers two college credits to all participants who successfully complete the program.

-Key West Chamber of Commerce, Key West, Florida: Sloppy Joe's 35th Annual "Papa" Hemingway Look-Alike Contest (7/23). The look-alike challenge takes place at Sloppy Joe's Bar, 201 Duval St., frequented by Hemingway when he lived and wrote on the subtropical island throughout the 1930s. The contest's preliminary rounds are set for 6:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday, July 23 and 24, and the newest 'Papa' is to be chosen during a final round beginning at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, July 25.

-Kalispell Area Chamber of Commerce, Kalispell, Montana: The Event at Rebecca Farm 2015 (7/23-26). For more than a decade, Rebecca Farm has created courses of the highest quality—and The Event is the biggest of its kind in the United States with more than 450 competitors, 350 volunteers, and over 20,000 spectators. In addition to the competition, a trade fair with arts and crafts is also offered throughout The Event with a wide range of food concessions. "The Event at Rebecca Farm is truly world class," says Jim Wolf, executive director of sports programs for the United States Equestrian Federation. "The facilities, the footing, and outstanding organization combine to create a premier world class event." Horses, riders and spectators from across the nation and even the world come to The Event at Rebecca Farm for its world-class amenities, beautiful scenery and one-of-a-kind competition. Dressage, cross-country and show jumping are the three disciplines that make up this multi-day, world class competition. During all four days of The Event, we showcase the Northwest's finest vendors, craftsman and artisans with our annual trade fair under the big tent. An excellent selection of food vendors and family fun is available for all ages. Admission is free (with a suggested \$5 parking donation, all proceeds go directly to breast cancer support and prevention.) Visit www.rebecca-farm.org for more information.

-Bemidji Chamber of Commerce, Bemidji, Minnesota: The Bombing of the Big Bog (7/24). This year's International Bog Day keynote speaker is Doug Easthouse, manager of Big Bog State Recreation Area, who will present "The Bombing of the Big Bog." Until recently little was known about this episode in local history. Doug has researched it extensively and will discuss the bog's use as a target range in the 1940s and 1950s, the role of the air base in Bemidji, and military events on Upper Red Lake and the Red Lake Peatlands. First-hand accounts, rare photos, and artifacts bring to life this fascinat-

ing event in our region's history.

August

-Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce, Bar Harbor, Maine: 14th Annual Carol Dyer Memorial Luminaria Evening (8/1). 7:00-10:00pm. An event that started as a way to celebrate the life of a friend has now become a local tradition honoring people from around the world. Join us Saturday, August 1st on the Bar Harbor Village Green as we light the night with candlelight in honor of all who are living with cancer, survivors, and those who have lost their lives to cancer. The walkways of the Village Green will be lit with candle lanterns naming all those honored. Live music sets the tone for a celebration that honors and remembers. Suggested donation of \$10 per luminary benefits the American Cancer Society. Luminaries may be purchased at the event or in advance by downloading an order form at www.barharborybs.com.

-Moscow Chamber of Commerce, Moscow, Idaho: Scottish Highland games (8/1). The highland games is an annual event, and there is something for everyone to enjoy, including our famous Scottish dish, haggis, for the braver of souls! Featuring Scottish traditions of bagpipe bands, highland dancing, and athletic competitions. Enjoy Celtic music and merchants, Gaelic lessons, and children's games. Join in the tug-o-war, shortbread, photo, Robert Burns poetry slam, Nobby Knees and Stout Calves contests. Face painting, sheep herding, Highland cattle exhibit, heritage events, and more!

-Orcas Island Chamber of Commerce, Orcas Island, Washington: Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival (8/6-22). Tickets are on sale for the 18th Annual Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival, which takes place August 6th through August 22nd. This year's Festival is going to be spectacular! Cellos play a big part this year, including one concert with eight cellists on stage! Opening and closing weekends feature the beautiful two-piano music of Rachmaninoff. Artistic Director Aloysia Friedmann and Artistic Advisor Jon Kimura Parker welcome saxophonist Timothy McAllister, fresh from winning a 2015 Grammy! He will perform everything from Gershwin to William Walton's colorful Façade. Metropolitan Opera's Principal oboist Nathan Hughes brings his warmth of sound to Mozart and more. Add masterworks of Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Schönberg's haunting Verklärte Nacht—all being performed by superstar musicians—and you'll want to be part of this exhilarating two-week Festival.

-Kay Largo Chamber of Commerce, Key Largo, Florida: 3rd Annual Reef Crawl (8/20). Conserve, Preserve, Promote & Grow Join the 2015 Upper Keys Reef Crawl The Reef Crawl® is coming to the Upper Florida Keys August 20th thru the 23rd. Reef Crawlers have four amazing days to dive, snorkel, kayak & paddle the beautiful reefs from Key Largo to Islamorada. Learn about the impact we have on the reef systems and how we can leave a smaller environmental footprint. Work side by side with REEF and the Coral Restoration Foundation when you sign up for their one day seminar & coral dive using your 2015 Reef Crawl® VIP Cards. What's A Reef Crawl? The Reef Crawl is like a Pub Crawl, but

instead of going from pub to pub, Reef Crawlers go reef to reef exploring the beautiful reefs, wrecks & mangroves of Florida's Upper Keys. Reef Crawlers snorkel, dive, kayak or stand up paddle at preferred rates with participation Reef Crawl Operators on any of the Reef Crawl tours. Reef Crawlers can sign up for seminars on reef eco-systems, coral restoration, fish identification, and invasive species like the lionfish. Afterward they can also opt to dive with the conservation group leading the seminars. A portion of every Reef Crawl Registration goes to help local conservation efforts so sign up today! Visiting the reef has never been easier, more fun, or for a better cause. See Ya'll at Reef Crawl.

-Sedona Chamber of Commerce, Sedona, Arizona: Sedona Restaurant Week (8/21-30). The Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau is pleased to announce Sedona Restaurant Week! We hope you will attend both the weeks planned in 2015: August 21-30 and December 4-13. This event gives local foodies and visitors the chance to experience a selection of specially priced meals (\$22, \$33, \$44) from a wide variety of Sedona's restaurants. Guests will enjoy three-course, prix-fixe dinner menus including an appetizer, entrée and dessert. SedonaRestaurantWeek.com.

-Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce, Ellensburg, Washington: Chamber Cowboy's 63rd Annual Ellensburg Rodeo & Kittitas County Fair Kick-Off Breakfast (8/22). Join the Chamber Cowboys for their 63rd Kittitas County Fair & Ellensburg Rodeo Kick Off Breakfast in Wells Fargo Drive through. The Ellensburg Rotary Clubs, Rodeo City Kiwanis, Kittitas County Fair Board, and Ellensburg Rodeo Board members will be on site to feed you a fantastic pancake and sausage breakfast along with coffee, milk, and OJ. There will be the Littlest Cowgirl & Cowboy Contest, music, and other surprises. 4-H Club Members, Top Hands, and other groups will be on hand to help out. Breakfast is followed by the City of Ellensburg Parks and Rec. Department Annual Kids Parade.

September

-Whitefish Chamber of Commerce, Whitefish, Montana: 28th Annual Taste of Whitefish Façade. Metropolitan Opera's Principal oboist Nathan Hughes has become one of Montana's premier food events. Local restaurants, caterers, and beverage companies will be offering samples of their finest specialties, with live entertainment by acoustic trio "Fresh off the Vine". Your ticket includes beer & wine tasting and samplings from all food & beverage booths. This is a rain or shine event. Tickets go fast! So get yours early: \$40 in advance, \$45 at the door. Available at the Whitefish Chamber office, located at 307 Spokane Ave., #103, by calling (406) 862-3501 [Visa/MC]. This event is fund raiser for the Whitefish Chamber of Commerce and is sponsored by Kalispell Toyota.

-Coronado Chamber of Commerce, Coronado, California: South Bay Pride Art & Music Festival (9/12). This event will include live entertainment throughout the day as well as DJ's and dancing. Kayaking rentals will be available in addition to food sales, drinks, arts and crafts exhibitors, and over 50 non-profits and retail vendor exhibitors. We are expanding the Arts & Crafts exhibitors to highlight the amaz-

ingly creative artisans found in our area. All of this will be facilitated while keeping the wonderful leisure "in the park" feel for a whole day of fun! This is a premiere occasion to show your support for equality and diversity in our amazing communities here in the South Bay with an expected attendance of over 10,000 throughout the day.

-McCall Area Chamber of Commerce, McCall, Idaho: Cascade Gravel Grinder Challenge (9/12). The event starts at the American Legion in downtown Cascade. It continues down Cabarton Road to West Mtn. Road connecting to Forest Service roads on West Mountain. The route takes riders through breath-taking terrain with views of the Wallowa Mountain range and Indian and Long Valleys. The 76 mile ride option will level out and bring you back along West Mountain Road ending where you started at the American Legion. Along the way you will encounter different road types: pavement, gravel, and Forest Service roads. Both mountain and cross bikes are acceptable modes of transportation for the ride. For those individuals that want to do a shorter distance, there are 35 mile and 57 mile options. Warning! This ride is not for the faint of heart. It is intended for experienced mountain bike riders. There will be 2,000 feet of vertical climbs and 12% grades along the route.

-Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce, Lake George, New York: Adirondack Balloon Festival (9/18-20). Hot Air Balloons and special shaped balloons! Family activities and entertainment ~ Big Balloon Breakfast ~ PLEASE DO NOT BRING YOUR DOG TO THE FESTIVAL! ~ Balloon lift-off is wind and weather permitting ~ Launches at 6:30 AM and 5 PM. ~ For more information visit: www.adirondackballoonfest.org.

-Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce, Avalon, California: Catalina Island Women's Forum Wine Festival (9/19). This 20th annual fundraiser features over 80 wineries, delectable hors d'oeuvres, and smooth jazz. Net proceeds help support

mentoring and scholarship programs. 2pm-5pm, ocean-front on Crescent Avenue (Front Street). Tickets available at the Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce. 310 510-1520, www.catalinawinefestival.com.

-Meridian Chamber of Commerce, Meridian, Idaho: FitOne Healthy Living Expo (9/24-25). Dates: September 24 from 12:00-9:00 pm & September 25 from 10:00 am-8:00 pm Location: Boise Centre (850 W. Front Street) Admission: FREE! Move For Fun, Get Fit For Life! FitOne builds healthier communities through fun, active living! Being fit is not a destination; it is a way of life, and through FitOne our vision is to inspire families to come to the starting line every September and encourage progressive steps in a healthy direction throughout the year. The FitOne Expo is a fun, engaging experience with a focus on fitness, health, and nutrition! At the Expo, you will be introduced to a variety of products or services to help you enhance your life and create a healthy lifestyle. As an added benefit, we're offering an opportunity to know your numbers. St. Luke's Health System will offer FREE health screenings for registered 5K, 10K and Half Marathon participants and the general public. The FitOne Expo is also where our 5K, 10K and Half Marathon participants pick up their race packets and t-shirts. Packet pickup at the Expo is available during Expo hours only.

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THE NATIONAL CHAMBER REVIEW

Founded in 2012

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Printed & Distributed by:
Messenger Post Media, Canandaigua, NY

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How to Win the Battle for Readership

Melynn Sight
Contributing Writer

In his bestselling 1970 book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler writes, "Information overload occurs when the amount of input to a system exceeds its processing capacity. Decision makers have fairly limited cognitive processing capacity. Consequently, when information overload occurs, it is likely that a reduction in decision quality will occur."

45 years after *Future Shock*, on any given day, the average person is still overloaded with information. In fact, the average person receives 147 email messages per day, according to an analysis from Baydin, an email management service. That same analysis says that of those 147 email messages, 71 percent of them get deleted.

This is an average. Still, that's a lot of information to process.

What makes a communication better than average?

Well, it's one that your member opens, reads, and does some-

thing with as a result—including changing their perception of the value of your organization.

Readership studies offer dozens of ways to cut through the clutter and win the battle for readership.

If you want more members to recognize, open and do something with your information, then heed the advice of the American Readership Institute, McKenzie Global Institute, Mark Magnacca, and others who advocate many of the "Eight Steps To Prepare Your Communications To Compete In Your Members' Crowded Inbox."

Discover It: Although it's technically step four of eight, when you answer the "So What?" about membership in your organization, your message underlies all eight steps. Take the "Discover" step first if you are unclear about your chamber's value proposition. A customized, clear, and simple message of value should underlie all of your communications.

Segment It: Targeting specific member groups (i.e., your target audience) is one misun-

derstood concept. Segmenting is about identifying unique member groups who are important to your future, in order to identify common behaviors. For example, what content grips a young member? Or, which website pages do new business owners visit most often? Once you begin to analyze behaviors, new ideas will emerge for how to communicate more effectively with those member groups and move them to action.

Verify It: There are several automated tools to help you learn how to simplify your writing so that it's outrageously easy to read. For example, studies by the American Readership Institute show that comprehension is best when your writing is at a seventh grade level.

Plan It: If you want to get more attention from any particular membership group (or groups), go to the "Plan" step and, before you start writing anything, ask yourself these four questions: (1) What is the goal? (2) Who is the audience? (3) What's in it for the member? (4) What do you want

them to do after they read? As you write, use your answers to these questions as the basis for your editorial decisions.

The "Eight Steps" will help you plan, organize, and review every kind of communications you write in order to get an even better response from your target audience.

If you want an outside set of eyes to review your materials, consider a third party communications audit, or a staff writing workshop to give your staff a fresh look at what your members see, complete with suggestions for positive change.

Melynn Sight speaks to and works with local, state, and national associations across many industries and chambers. Her goal is to help chambers deliver and communicate relevant member value through plans, campaigns, audits, and training. Learn more at nightsightmarketing.com or contact Melynn at Melynn@MemberValue.org.



America's College Promise: Making Higher Education More Accessible

Alexandra Ross
Staff Writer

College. The glory days. You remember them, right? Four years filled with friendship, adventure, parties, and studies (of course!). Today's college students, however, are finding that those four years are also filled with the looming threat of financial insecurity, as they find themselves waking up the morning after graduation clutching their diploma, a wicked hangover, and an even more wicked pile of student debt. The culprit? Climbing tuition costs.

But President Barack Obama wants to change that with the help of a new initiative. First announced during this year's State of the Union Address, the initiative, known as America's College Promise, is a new approach to higher education in America, and a new strategy for tackling the daunting price tag that comes attached to it. The basis of the plan, as President Obama stated, is that higher education at a community college should be "as free and as universal in America as high school." And with his help, coupled with the recent rise in community college enrollment, maybe it will be.

Here is a breakdown of some of the plan's key provisions, as detailed by the U.S. Department of Education: "Community colleges will need to offer high-quality programs and implement evidence-based reforms to

increase the number of students who persist, graduate or transfer;" "Participating states must contribute matching funds, invest in higher education and training, and allocate a significant portion of funding based on performance, not enrollment alone"; "Students must enroll at least on a half-time basis and maintain at least a 2.5 GPA."

Reasonable enough. The initiative implies that everyone involved—schools, governments, and students—is pulling their weight in the deal. With so many students choosing the community college route, teamwork in a situation like this is imperative.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges, 46 percent of all undergraduate students in the U.S. are enrolled at community colleges, and it's easy to see why: with national tuition averages being where they are (i.e., ridiculously high), it's getting to be nearly impossible for students of any age to afford a typical four-year undergraduate education.

When the Baby Boomers were graduating from college sometime between 1975 and 1985, the average tuition bill was like a puppy compared to the Cujo-esque beast that it's become today. According to CollegeBoard, the average price of tuition and fees for a private, nonprofit, four-year school for the 1980-1981 academic year was \$3,617. Adjusted for inflation, that's equivalent to \$10,420 today.

Data from the 2014-2015 academic year shows average tuition and fees tipping the scales at \$31,231. And that doesn't even include room and board, something that students covet as a sort of late-adolescence, rite-of-passage, as it the first time many of them have ever had an opportunity to live away from home. For private, nonprofit, four-year schools, tuition and fees and room and board during the 1980-1981 academic year came to a combined average price of \$5,594; or, \$16,116, adjusted for inflation. Today, that same average price has sky-rocketed to \$42,419.

As the country has come to find, a casual 42 grand isn't always easy to come by. So, what's a student to do? Options are few.

According to the Institute for College Access & Success, in 2014, 66 percent of graduates from public schools had loans, while 75 percent of private school graduates had loans. Those students are in for a world of payback pain. At public colleges, the average debt for graduating seniors with student loans was \$25,550. At private schools, average debt was \$32,300 for students at nonprofit institutions, and \$39,950 their for-profit counterparts. That's a little more than your average summer job can pay for. Community colleges, with average tuition costs that hover around \$3,000 a year, are a viable option for students looking to pursue higher education with-

out being dirt poor for (at least) the next ten years of their lives.

America is one of the most diverse countries in the world. There are people of every race, religion, background, upbringing, and socioeconomic status. With room for great disparity spanning from the top to the bottom of the economic ladder, higher education options are hardly one-size-fits-all. For many individuals, the prospect of higher education leaves their financial situations feeling awfully tight.

In this year's State of the Union Address, President Obama noted that nearly half of our nation's college students chose to enroll in community college over a four-year university, and it's the diversity of this demographic of students that the president highlighted as a major component of the rationale behind America's College Promise. He noted: "Some [of these students] are young and starting out. Some are older and looking for a better job. Some are veterans and single parents trying to transition back into the job market. Whoever you are, this plan is your chance to graduate ready for the new economy, without a load of debt."

Education in America is changing for a new age. No longer is education just for upper-class eighteen year-olds looking to get away from home, chug some beer, and pull all-nighters in the library (maybe). The scope of students looking to

earn a college degree is becoming broader and more diverse as time goes on, and the price of pursuing the American Dream is getting steeper every year.

According to the National Institute of Education Statistics, going into the 2014-2015 school year, 21 million students in the U.S. were expected to attend colleges and universities—an increase of nearly six million over the past fifteen years. With this influx of students came an increase in the overall diversity of the American student population.

A larger, more diverse group of prospective college students means that more students are going to need assistance or alternative paths to obtaining college degrees. In light of this, an extremely valuable aspect of community college programs is the opportunity afforded to students to transfer to a four-year school after receiving an Associate's degree.

Some community colleges, like Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York, offer "2 + 2 Dual Admission" programs, in which admitted students are guaranteed transfer admissions (with full

junior-year status) to a Bachelor's degree program upon the completion of their Associate's. Financially-conscious students often choose programs like this to achieve their goal of a Bachelor's degree at a fraction of the cost: not only do these students save on tuition during their first two years of school, but many are awarded merit-based scholarships by the four-year university to which they decide to transfer. With the help of President Obama's initiative, more students will have the opportunity to go further in their education, regardless of age, income, or background, without having to resign themselves to tumbling down the student debt rabbit hole.

In the land of cat pictures and inspirational quotes that is the Internet, one example of the latter that seems to resurface and circulate with relative regularity reads, "What if the cure for cancer is trapped inside the mind of someone who can't afford an education?"

With America's College Promise, we might not have to keep asking that question for much longer.

Improve the Membership Renewal Stage

Cathi Hight
Contributing Writer

The **Membership Life Cycle** is an ongoing cycle of acquiring, integrating, engaging and renewing chamber of commerce members. Regardless of how long an individual or organization has been a member, we always have to earn the renewal.

Stage 4: Renewal of Members

The renewal stage often reflects a quantitative measurement of how much members value the organization. Sure, some members may not renew due to factors outside of the organization's control (e.g., business failure, merger, relocation, closure), although most renewals could be influenced proactively or reactively by the organization. *The number one reason* most members choose not to renew is *they do not see the value in the membership and their expectations were not met*. The second highest reason is simply that members forgot to renew or are preoccupied with other pressing priorities.

The most common challenges organizations

face in this stage include:

- Lack of urgency by members to renew timely.
- Members face resource constraints due to economic and business conditions.
- Organizations are torn between terminating benefits after the renewal period or continuing to provide access to membership benefits to maintain relationships with members.
- Lack of resources to manage the renewal process or to conduct outreach to non-responsive members.
- Renewals based on a calendar year (January-December) catch members at a busy time of the year to remember or want to renew and may place smaller organizations in jeopardy financially if renewal revenue doesn't arrive timely.

There are many strategies that are successful in improving the renewal stage. Make sure you start with implementing a strategic Retention Plan to minimize the number of pending renewals on the Aging Report. Our **Member Retention Kit** offers a step-by-step process to create a Retention Plan that can

focus on specific retention challenge areas before determining other strategies to employ. **Best Practices for the Renewal Stage:**

- Increase the frequency of renewal notices: Send multiple renewal notices rather than multiple invoices—although they seem interchangeable, notices and invoices are different. Jean Murray, U.S. business law/taxes expert, defines the difference as follows: "An invoice is a bill sent by a provider of a product or service to the purchaser. The invoice establishes an obligation on the part of the purchaser to pay, creating an account receivable." A membership renewal legally does not constitute an obligation on the part of the member to pay. Invoices should be sent only when a member or prospect has agreed to assume the obligation to pay. Plan on sending seven to ten renewal notices before the renewal date and after. (Our Member Retention Kit provides examples of renewal notices in Section V, Renewal and Reinstatement.)

Make the renewal decision easier:

- Offer automatic renewal plans: offer payment options that are convenient and meet the needs of members including automatic credit card renewals or automatic monthly or quarterly credit card installment payments.
- Provide discounts or incentives for renewal: offer discounts for multiple year memberships to reward members for acting proactively. Consider offering incentives such as discount coupons for upcoming events, free admission to an event, or eligibility for prize drawings for renewals paid by a deadline.
- Allow for electronic renewals: provide links to pay online in electronic renewal notices as this is more likely to generate a quicker response than if members must write a check and mail it with the invoice.

Offer reinstatement options for lapsed members:

- Use a "Win-Back" Program to Remarket to Lapsed Members—studies show that members are likely to rejoin if they have recently let their membership lapse

for some reason. Offer to meet with members to discuss factors in their non-renewals and how to help them receive more value from their investments. Offer a discounted rate on the next year or other incentives such as a discount to a benefit they were interested in and didn't use while they were a member previously. (Learn more about reinstatement strategies in the next issue of ACCE's Chamber Executive magazine

- Make members feel they are being re-approached with sincerity.
- Target dropped members with the highest "Lifetime Values" (i.e., those who have invested the most when calculating both dues and non-dues revenue since becoming a member)

Rather than assuming that the Renewal Stage and processes you implement are great as they are, spend time really reviewing this stage and identifying areas for improvement. This may involve getting together with member services, accounting, and other staff who play a role in the renewal stage and learning what each of them do specifically to support this stage. Have them work together on an improved process to make the renewal stage more effective than before.

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or in our Member Retention Kit in Section V, Renewal and Reinstatement.)

- Best practices for Win-Back Programs include:
- Identify the real reasons why members don't renew.
 - Focus on quick win-back members (those you are most likely to get to rejoin).

Your Gavel is Not a Magic Wand, Crown, or Crystal Ball



Bob Harris
Contributing Writer

wear the gavel. It does not give the chair any more authority than others on the board; directors all have one vote, though officers do have more responsibilities as described in bylaws and descriptions of duties. Royalty, however, is not a characteristic of leadership in this context.

Not a Crystal Ball: The gavel is not a gazing ball with which one can predict the future. Nothing can replace the need for continuous scanning of your environment and the factors influencing on your chamber. The board has a responsibility to monitor threats and opportunities.

The position of board chair requires a combination of skill and character. For anyone who finds him or herself in the position of incoming board chair, consider these words of advice:

1. You are the elected chair, not the king or queen.
2. The chair and executive director (president) work best as equals.
3. Take your role, but not yourself, seriously.
4. Don't ask the executive director to interview or employ your family members.
5. Planning 100 days prior to your term will have the highest dividends.
6. Allocate time to read, read, and read.
7. Be the chamber's premier cheerleader.
8. Have a deep understanding of the chamber's strategic plan and finances.
9. Never use your position for personal gain.
10. The chamber belongs to the members, not to you.
11. Memorize the mission

statement. It should frame everything you do.

12. Don't ask the staff to do anything personal for you. They are paid to manage the chamber, not to manage you.
13. When and if you spend money, be ready to justify those expenses as being in the best interest of chamber members.
14. No one can do this job alone; build your team before your term begins.
15. Find good ways to use your chair-elect.
16. Be the model of accountability.
17. Take antitrust avoidance seriously; penalties include fines and jail.
18. Ask the executive director's advice before undertaking projects or speaking out publicly.
19. Consider diversity in making appointments.
20. Streamline board meetings with well-planned agendas.
21. Start and end on time.
22. Attend at least one meeting of each of your committees, but as a show of support, not a meeting take-over.
23. Follow the lines of communication as depicted in your chamber's organizational chart.
24. Be the leader your members will respect and thank for years to come.
25. Promote transparency by avoiding rump sessions and secrets.
26. Listen to the whispers and you'll avoid the shouting.
27. Don't neglect your family or business; they still need to be there when your term is



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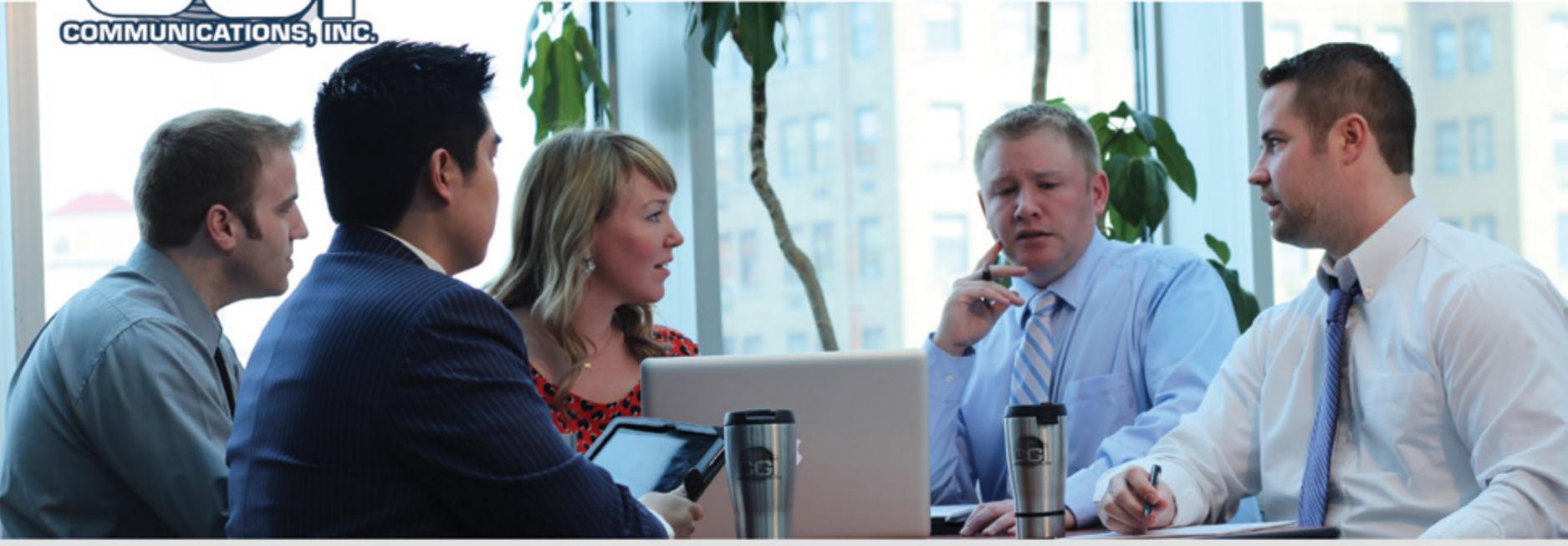
28. Stay physically fit—stress kills.
29. Be flexible; it is not important that you always win.
30. Never say, "We have always done it that way"; or, "We tried that once before." Innovation breeds success.
31. Collaborate and form partnerships; avoid working in a silo.
32. Aim to be inclusive; avoid the image of a "good ol' boys' club."
33. If you aren't moving forward, you're losing ground.
34. Avoid telling jokes; inappropriate comments will come back to haunt you.
35. Mix and mingle with the members before every meeting; avoid the head-table-clique
36. Call on other leaders (past and present) for counsel; they can be some of your best resources.
37. Don't be embarrassed to admit what you don't know.
38. Have the courage to acknowledge that someone else may have a better idea than you.
39. The process is often as important as the product.
40. Don't take criticism personally.
41. Give credit to others, and give it often.
42. Respond promptly to emails and phone calls.
43. Invite everyone's input but work to reach consensus and make decisions.
44. Your job is to advance the strategic plan, not to make a to-do list for your legacy.
45. Membership is voluntary; don't end your term with fewer members than when you started.
46. Promote small successes; they will add up by the end of your term.
47. Get to know, and thank, the staff.
48. Don't miss meetings; you're expected to be there.
49. Do fun things during your term – life is short!
50. At the conclusion of your term, you are history.

Cartoon commissioned by Bob Harris, CAE. He provides free governance tools and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.







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