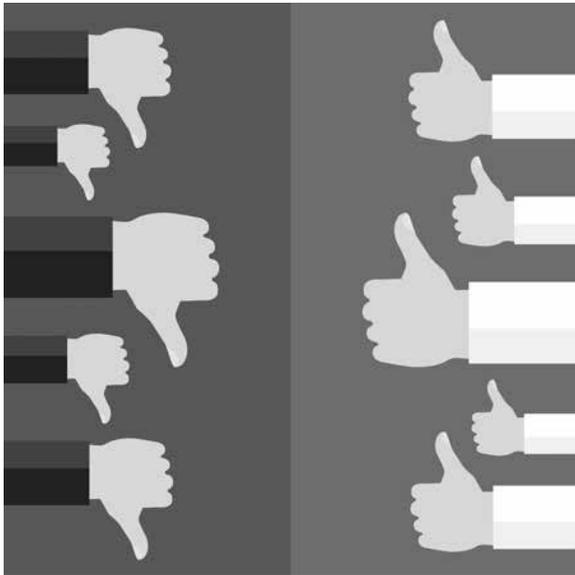


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MUNICIPAL LIQUOR STORE

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On the Cover

Reviews have never been so important or influential. In wake of COVID-19, the information they provide and customer experience they paint are closely and regularly analyzed by consumers.

In the digital marketplace, reviews are the first link to connecting with your business and the first deciding factor in moving to a competitor.

To stay competitive, businesses must proactively remove any obstacles that prevent customers from leaving reviews.

See page 6 for more information.



MMBA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**By Chris Arnold,
Bagley**

It's hard to believe it's been a year since everything changed in our industry and in the rest of the world. When the world and our industry changes we must adapt and change with it or we will get left behind!

With that said I'm going to tell you all about the new monthly staff trainings we started doing at Bagley Liquor. Pre-2020 we would only do quarterly safety trainings with the city and our alcohol server training when needed through MMBA.

I decided with increased business we needed to do more. So I started scheduling the last Saturday of the month to have my full time and part time staff come in for training from 8 to 9:30 a.m. In addition, I invite my call in staff to join in on the trainings.

During the meetings we improve our knowledge of products, customer relations, technology and efficiency. We usually start the morning with question and answers for the manager and then go through the new items that have come in over the last month.

One of the most important parts of the training is "efficiency improvement." What is this you ask?

Well, I try to get in the store about a half an hour before the staff and walk around to find issues I see that affect our efficiency. Sometimes I also set up problems that have happened earlier in the month.

I then ask the staff to walk around the store and write down on a piece of paper what problems they see. Next, we go around and see how many noticed the problems. I then ask them to help with a solving of the issues and explain what they can do to solve the issues and improve the efficiency for all.

I have found this has greatly improved our operation. In fact, I'm finding it harder to find problems - but there always seems to be one or two.

We also use the time to educate employees about the products we need to push and move the next month because we have overstock or we took advantage of a good deal and the product is on sale.

These meetings have really opened up communication among the staff and has helped them better understand what's happening in their work environment.

Summer is just around the corner and I hope everyone is open and prepared to be busy.

Take care and I hope to you this fall at the MMBA Annual Conference currently scheduled for September 25-28, 2021.

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THE NEW WORD OF MOUTH



By Flora Delaney
MMBA Conference Presenter

Most folks know that word of mouth marketing is the most trusted, least expensive marketing there is. Heck – who wouldn't want current customers bringing in new customers? Don't you wish you could get that to happen more? Well, word of mouth has a new name: Online Business Reviews. It doesn't matter if it's on Google, Yelp, Facebook or Trip Advisor, getting a solid online reputation is THE way to build credibility with potential customers.

I just read a study about how reviews are more important than ever for local businesses since COVID. 42% of customers say they are MORE compelled to patronize local businesses since COVID and 33% say they have found a new local business they have started patronizing that they didn't before. How do they find these businesses? Online reviews.

Does it matter?

Consumers say reviews influence 88% of their discovery of a local business. Only 12% say it plays no role at all. So sure, it isn't going to attract everyone. But what marketing does? Consumers say online reviews are 2x more important than loyalty and 7x more important than "traditional marketing." So if you are spending time on ads, events and promotions and no time at all on managing your online reputation, you are missing out on the most important (and current) way to influence customers.

It's not just about 5 stars

How many reviewers and how recent they are matter as much as a 5-star review. Especially in retail. Think about it. If you see that the latest good review was written in 2017, do you think that is relevant? For local businesses it is all about getting more and recent reviews. How? Have a plan! Sure, you can use a professional platform like podium.com to do a bunch of aggregation like converting text and email inquiries into sales and then ask for a review. But on a more basic level, you can focus on getting more reviews by asking for them directly in ads, receipt messages, and in conversation at the register. Start by asking every member of your city council to write a review. In the meantime, build a plan.

The most effective reviews for local businesses are on Google. Recent and positive reviews will move you up in search results and flag your location on Google maps. Consider adding a link to Google reviews for your location in any emails you send.

The basics always matter

Of course, customers still expect quality products and selection, good prices and great customer service. But I know from working with MMBA members, that you are already delivering on that. Now get credit for it by making sure that your online reputation reflects your value in the market. Ask for reviews. Make a plan (or use a service) to get them. And take advantage of the digital equivalent to word-of-mouth marketing.

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By Tom Shay
MMBA Conference Presenter

Welcome to a new year. And congratulations for having made it through the just finished year. Before you begin the celebration, the word of caution is that just because the calendar turns a page, it doesn't mean that the challenges have all passed.

So that you will be a strong business at this same time next year, we would like to share with you 10 observations of what you can cut out from the past to be prepared for the future. And you will likely be surprised that the most of what we are cutting out is not expenses.

1. Avoid Excessive Media Influence

Diminishing the amount of time spent with the mass media, such as watching television, listening to radio and reading the newspaper, will mean you are cutting out a lot of negative news.

Although you may find it to be important to stay atop current affairs, we all have a tendency to take that information and apply it to our business. When we hear of big business' making cut backs, we often think our small business should cut back. As compared to allowing the news of the world affect your business, consider allowing a different source to affect your thinking.

Why not take most of the time currently focused on the media and instead spend it reading books about how to grow and improve your business? Allow your attitude to guide your business more than the media.

If you are not one that has previously enjoyed reading books, you may want to start with something like *Purple Cow* by Seth Godin. It is a quick and easy read that has a great message for you about your store.

2. Target Your Advertising

Your existing customers are the individuals in your community that have shown a preference for your store, and the products you sell. Traditional advertising puts your name and merchandise in front of everyone that sees the advertisement. Viewers and readers who do not dance, or have dancers close to them, will have little interest in what you sell.

You will get a much better response to your message if you can direct it specifically to existing patrons and their friends and family. There are many ways you can talk specifically to your existing customers. This requires you to begin with offering them a reason to share their name, address, phone number or email with you. With this information you can mail announcements of new products or send coupons and birthday cards. You can even call them to just say 'hello' or invite them to come see what is new in your store. Few

customers can resist an invitation when you tell them you are thinking about them as you are looking at something new in your store.

For any advertising you do on a large scale, make sure that you have properly narrowed it to potential customers. Ask each of the media for the demographics of their target audience. You may find that they have different audiences on different days or different times of the day. Your advertising needs to specifically speak to those that are most likely to visit your shop. Especially if your store incorporates a lot more than dancewear, establish who your customers are as soon as possible. That is because you can easily have a mental picture of the customer and what they will purchase.

3. Don't go looking for a new customer base

In a changing economy, there will definitely be a temptation to consider repositioning the store's merchandise; perhaps you would consider dropping some of the more expensive lines of products and stocking only the basics or less expensive items. In doing this, you may have made a mistake. Think about how long you have been in business and the customers you have targeted for all those years. By shifting, you may find that you have instead abandoned your target customer.

A challenging economy such as the one we are having now, traditionally last for a period of months. The image you have developed with your customer has taken years to achieve. It does not make sense to throw away years of effort for something that is only going to last months, and then start again to rebuild what was thrown away.

4. Systematically plan your changes

In a challenging economy, many businesses approach the challenge with a 'butter and toast' strategy; they simply want to spread their cuts around. They do so much like a person spreads butter on a slice of toast; they want to spread it evenly over everything. And while this idea may make the toast taste better, it does not work for a business.

Some businesses will begin to cut their hours without any analysis of what their best hours are, and they may be closing when most of their customers are looking for them.

They may begin to cut their inventory levels and not realize they are eliminating some of their best selling merchandise. These stores may be decreasing the amount of basic and fashion merchandise without giving any consideration to what has been their best sellers. Doing so, they may be losing sales. Some will cut the amount of employees they have. In a store that is known for great customer service, they may be eliminating what has been their best selling point.

5. Be ready to step into the competition's space

While the fifth suggestion may sound counter-intuitive, this challenging economy may be your best opportunity to expand your business. While you will follow the advice given in point number four in your business, you should take a careful look at your competition at this point and observe what they have been cutting back on.

When their cut backs defy logic as you observe the dance business in your community, you should take a serious look at adding these components to your business. This may be the opportunity to stock more basics or fashion clothing; add some hours to your weekly business schedule, or perhaps take a look at the great salesperson that has been working at the competition who now finds themselves only working part time.

6. Don't cut out your "wild thinking"

When you first opened your business, how many people told you it would never work? How about the people that told you not to move to your new location or that you should not add dance shoes to your product mix? Yet you did, and with each you have made it work profitably for you. These friends probably see you as somewhat of a 'wild thinker'.

Challenging times require radical action. The economy caused most all business to reconsider how they operated during the holidays and will require them to continue to do so throughout the foreseeable future. In this situation, you need to not only make preparations for the challenges, but you also have to be able to make changes in how you do business. It is however, not time for you to change your thought pattern.

Here's another book idea to charge the batteries of your wild thinking; a book titled, *The Big Moo* by The Group of 33 and edited by Seth Godin. Within the 33 chapters is one entitled, "They say I'm extreme".

This one chapter represents the type of thinking that is necessary for businesses to be successful when things are rapidly changing with their community, customers, and industry. Your thinking style got you this far, it is not time to abandon it.

7. There are things to "give up" on

While the saying, 'patience is a virtue' may be a great saying, this is not the time to simply sit things out. What about the person working in your shop that you have been trying to teach how to sell, but has not achieved an acceptable level of performance? This could be the time to give up and look for a replacement.

The same is true for a product line; you may have stocked a line of tights that sold well for someone you met at the trade show. However, the line is not doing well in your shop. It may be time for you to give up, clear out the merchandise, and look for another line. Right now, you need all of your money working as hard for you and your business as you are working. If it hasn't worked yet, or they are working, get rid of it, or them, now and move on.

8. Enlist your staff

It takes a team effort to win in the challenging economy. You do want to be a cheerleader, letting your staff know that your business is going to be one of the winners in this situation. However, they do need to know they cannot be sideline spectators. For the store to succeed, each team member put forth their best effort. Their effort to engage a customer, complete the sale, and helping the customer to know they are especially invited to return, goes a long way toward developing that customer loyalty.

If there are fewer people spending fewer dollars, then the dollars spent by each customer should be welcomed more than ever.

9. Do logically cut out expenses

Without question, this is a time to review expenses. But the examination should be done systematically. Take your year end profit and loss statement, and look at each row of expense. Make a notation as to whether the expense is a 'fixed' or 'variable' expense. A fixed expense is one that the dollar amount does not fluctuate from month to month. A variable expense does fluctuate.

The second step is to review all of these expenses again to see which are "controllable" and "uncontrollable". The uncontrollable expenses are those that cannot be stopped. A controllable expense is one that are not absolute 'must happen' expenses of the business.

As you look at the two notations with each expense, you can ignore the fixed-uncontrollable expenses. But with all of the others, there are amounts of those items that you can possibly do without. Reviewing your business in this manner makes it easier and removes most of the emotion of chopping expenses.

10. Don't forget to understand the financials

Whether you prepare the monthly financial statements or have an accountant that performs the task, as the owner of the business the responsibility of understanding the financial statements and make decisions about the future of your business based upon them is an essential component of good management.

In addition to the classes offered at a trade show, you can also sign up for a class through a local community college. In doing so, make sure that you are taking more than just an accounting class, but that you are taking one that is designed to help a small business owner understand their financials. This can be one of the best investments you can make in your business.

Observe these ten points, and as the year progresses, you will find that your business will likely continue to be stronger and more profitable. We'll look forward to seeing you soon as we profit together through the coming year.

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STATEMENT OF POSITION – THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL CONTROLS



**From Minnesota
State Auditor
Julie Blaha**

Internal controls are designed to protect a local government from loss or misuse of its assets. Sound internal controls help ensure that transactions are properly authorized and that the information contained in financial reports is reliable.

This Statement of Position will provide practical answers to some of the questions most frequently asked by public officials and employees about internal controls.

What is the purpose of internal controls?

An internal control is a process by which an entity attempts to prevent or minimize the likelihood of accounting-related errors, irregularities, and illegal acts. Internal controls help safeguard funds, provide efficient and effective management of assets, and permit accurate financial accounting. Internal controls cannot eliminate all errors and irregularities, but they can alert management to potential problems.

How much will this cost?

The cost of internal controls should not exceed the expected benefit. When adopting policies and procedures on internal controls, it is important to maintain a balance between what is needed to ensure public confidence and to maintain the integrity of the financial systems with the cost of providing the control in terms of money, time, and efficiency. Many simple and cost-effective internal control procedures are available.

Does someone need to review every transaction?

No. It is not practical or cost effective to attempt to independently review every transaction. Instead, management should be alert to “red flags” that could indicate potential problems. Looking into “red flags” will not only detect irregularities, it will prevent them from occurring in the first place because an environment of accountability will have been established.



What are some “red flags?”

When an alert is raised, follow-up is critical. Too often we see “red flags” continue unabated long after they were first detected and reported. Here are some examples that would merit further review:

- Any unusual discrepancy between actual performance and anticipated results (for example, a major budget overrun in “supplies” or an unexplained decline in user fees);
- Receipts not matching deposits;
- Disbursements to unknown and/or unapproved vendors;
- Presigned blank checks or one signature on checks;
- Gaps in receipt or check numbers;
- Late reports; or
- Disregard for internal control policies and procedures.

What types of control policies and procedures should be implemented?

The control policies should be adequate to ensure that:

- All transactions are properly authorized;
- Incompatible duties are segregated;
- Accounting records and documentation are properly designed and maintained;
- Access to both assets and records is controlled; and
- Accounting data are periodically compared with the underlying items they represent.

Extra care needs to be taken where cash transactions are involved. Cash transactions are prevalent, for example, in liquor stores, parks and recreation programs, athletic departments and petty cash funds.

What does it mean to segregate incompatible duties?

Simply put, no employee should be in a position to commit an irregularity and then conceal it. An example taken from everyday life is a movie theater where one person sells tickets and another person collects the tickets. This helps prevent the person selling the tickets from: (1) collecting the price of the ticket, but allowing entry without a ticket (allowing the ticket seller to pocket the ticket payment without being detected); or (2) allowing entrance without the purchase of a ticket.

STATEMENT OF POSITION – THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL CONTROLS, CONT'D.

Duties can be segregated by department or by individual. Examples of incompatible duties that should be performed by separate individuals are:

- Receipting collections, posting collections to registers, and making bank deposits;
- Signing checks and reconciling the bank accounts;
- Receipting collections and posting collections to the accounts receivable records;

And

- Approving receivable write-offs/write-downs and posting adjustments to the accounts receivable records, adjusting accounting codes, and reviewing the monthly detailed report of receipts and disbursements for accuracy.

What if we are too small to be able to segregate duties?

If it is not practical to segregate duties, management should be aware of the lack of segregation and implement oversight procedures to ensure that employees are following other internal control policies and procedures. In addition, management may want to implement other controls. For example, a mandatory vacation policy or periodic rotation of duties among employees would allow management to observe if there is any noticeable change (for example, a marked increase in cash receipts) while another person is performing the duties. These alternative controls also help lessen potential disruptions caused by employee turnover.

Do some statutes require internal control procedures?

Yes. For example, the statutory requirement that more than one person must sign a check is designed to ensure a deliberate decision about who to pay, how much to pay, and when to pay bills. Pre-signing checks and signature stamps defeat those controls. Statutory requirements should be incorporated in the internal control policies and procedures.



What sort of accounting documentation is needed?

Accounting records need to be complete. Key documents (for example, invoices, receipts, checks) should be sequentially numbered. Voided documents should be retained. Record retention schedules should be followed. Employee timesheets should be reviewed and countersigned by a supervisor or other third-party.

How do we “compare accounting data with the items represented”?

Bank statements should be routinely reconciled with the cash balances recorded in the general ledger. Check amounts should be compared with the claims approved, as recorded in the minutes. Any differences should be reconciled and documented. An annual inventory of fixed assets will ensure that the location of all recorded items is known. Similar checks can be made of other accounts (for example, petty cash counts).

Explanations of discrepancies should be corroborated by supporting documentation and evidence.

Do we have to write down our procedures?

Proper documentation of control procedures is essential. Written policies and procedures outline the specific authority and responsibility of individual employees, providing for accountability. Written policies serve as a reference and training tool for new employees and ensure that procedures remain in place despite employee turnover. To be effective, an accounting policies and procedures manual must be complete, up-to-date, and readily available to all employees who need it.



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RAPIDS SPIRITS CREATES FASD AWARENESS



By Robin D. Fish
Park Rapids Enterprise

Rapids Spirits Liquor Store received a new batch of bags to wrap up wine purchases this week. The bags, printed with information about fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), are part of a joint project with the Minnesota Municipal Beverage Association (MMBA) and the Proof Alliance.

"It's an awareness type of thing," store manager Scott Olson said of the bags, which arrived Feb. 16. "Our product is a regulated product, and there are, of course, issues that go along with it. As a municipal store, in our organization, we're all about having people use our products responsibly. This is one of those things where we feel is something we can participate in."

Starting Feb. 18 – which was National Drink Wine Day – customers buying wine at Rapids Spirits and many stores across Minnesota were given bags printed with a design that says, "This bag can change a life."

On the reverse, the wine bags note that drinking during pregnancy can lead to an irreversible brain injury that affects one in 20 children today.

"The more we talk about the risks, the better choices we make to give kids the best chance," the printing adds, along with a QR code and a web address directing readers to proofalliance.org/convo for more information.

Olson said the bags came about after a discussion with the MMBA about how municipal liquor stores can help get the message out.

According to a press release from Proof Alliance, heavy drinking among women increased by 41 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic. This contributed to a statewide 20 percent increase in gross liquor receipts, worth almost \$32 million according to the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

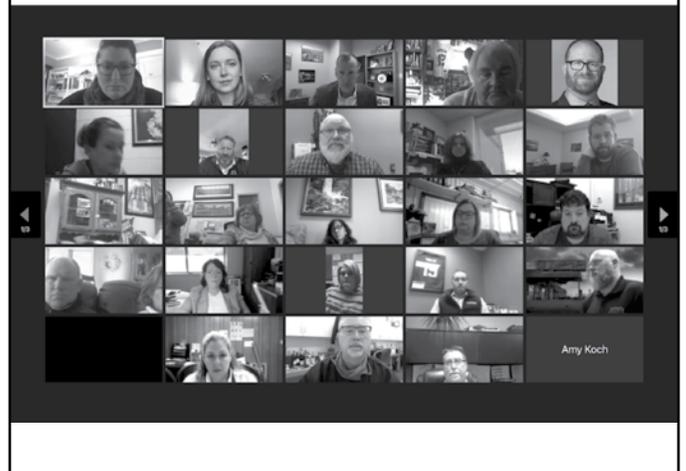
In response, the St. Paul-based nonprofit partnered with the MMBA and a Minnesota-based chain of wine stores to print 25,000 specialty wine bags with a message that they hope will promote responsible drinking and stimulate conversation about the spectrum disorder, formerly known as fetal alcohol syndrome.

"Proof Alliance is not against drinking and they support drinking responsibly," said Sara Messelt, the organization's executive director.

"FASD is 100 percent preventable, yet one in nine women report to drinking while pregnant," Messelt said in the release. "It is our goal to empower women with credible information so that they can enjoy their favorite glass of wine without worry – especially during these times of isolation and uncertainty."



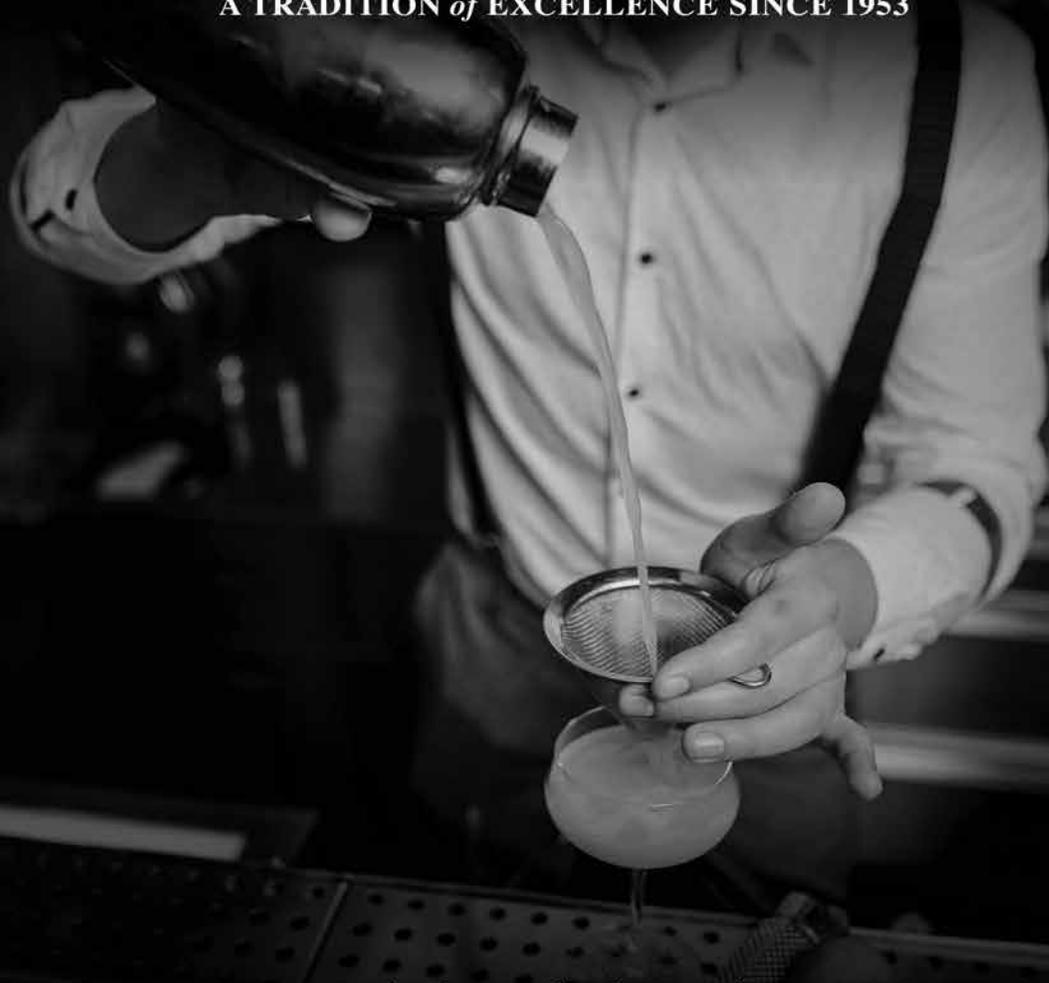
Special Thanks to House Commerce Chair Zack Stephenson for Speaking at the Recent MMBA / MLBA Legislative Day!





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