

Ecommerce Insider

issue
**20
21**

Plus Dr. Liza on your best foot forward // London Drugs on essential operations // Smash + Tess on shaping the future

People.
Planet.
Profits.

Cheekbone Beauty
CEO defines backbone
of brand's success



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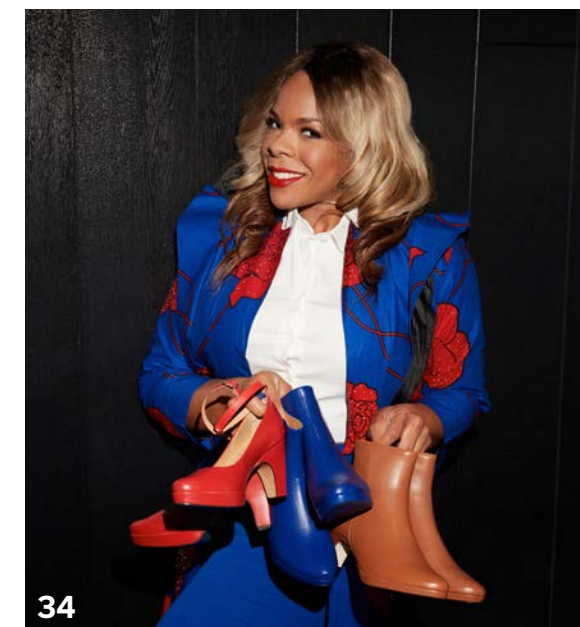
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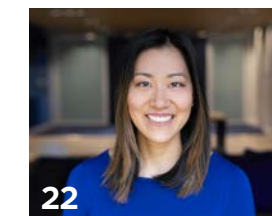
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> LETTER FROM CEO

Emerging more resilient together



This issue is dedicated to you, the retailers who have survived one of the toughest and most chaotic retail periods ever. You have adapted, evolved and are now re-emerging and moving forward.

After so much change and challenge, it seemed the time was right to reflect upon and redefine the purpose of our *Delivering the Online World* magazine and to centre it around you. We started with a new name – *Ecommerce Insider*.

You'll notice that we've expanded the number of pages, given the design a brand-new look and feel, and focused the content entirely around better informing and inspiring your business. In this debut issue, we talked with over a dozen thought leaders. We interviewed ecommerce retailers credited with creating formidable strategies that pose strength, agility and leadership – and we reveal the lessons learned that they'll carry with them into the future.

This reimagined magazine is an example of the wider transformation Canada Post is embarking on – a transformation that will define how we plan to serve our great nation going forward.

The pandemic has fueled fundamental change in Canada. The economic and social toll is creating a need to build back stronger. For big organizations like ours, there is the expectation to demonstrate leadership in ways that transcend the services and products we offer. Our plan ensures that Canada Post reflects our nation's common values, A Stronger Canada – Delivered.

We're making investments to increase our capacity to better enable the ecommerce economy, which saw accelerated growth with the significant shift to online shopping. This will help us better serve your shipping and delivery needs, while helping you meet the changing needs of Canadians. Our Chief Customer and Marketing Officer, Rod Hart, explains the vision behind this strategy.

We're also more committed than ever to serving Canadians. Part of this means testing new parcel services that will make it easier for people to receive their packages how they want, where they want and when they want. These exciting changes – like automated parcel lockers – will offer a superior delivery experience for your shoppers.

Throughout this transformation, the safety of our employees will remain a top priority and we're strengthening our commitment to sustainability, including targets around climate action, zero waste and sustainable delivery. We know these are important factors for Canadians, who are our customers and your customers too.

As we all turn the corner on a period of time that has left a lasting mark on our history, you've shown your mettle. I firmly believe that in the face of such tremendous pressure, we will emerge more resilient – we are emerging more resilient – and we are already seeing positive signs. At Canada Post, we're excited to be there to serve Canadians and support the businesses they love as we move forward together.

Doug Ettinger
President and CEO

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POST SCRIPT

Building a solid foundation for the future.



It's impossible to overstate the upheaval COVID-19 brought to Canadian companies of all sizes. Our business changed along with yours, and we saw firsthand the extraordinary work you did to support your customers and communities, to adjust your practices and to survive.

We know that some companies had to close their doors for good, while some saw growth they had never experienced before. Some are emerging stronger.

No matter their particular stories of challenge over this time, businesses today are operating in ways they could not have predicted before the pandemic. Ecommerce is at the heart of that change.

For some businesses, ecommerce fundamentals were well established. Those companies had integrated digital platforms that made for seamless shopping experiences; they had efficient fulfillment processes and trusted delivery partners. However, even for these brands, extensive supply chain issues disrupted inventory and network distribution, and unprecedented shopping volumes took a toll on their operations.

For companies without that critical infrastructure in place at the beginning of the pandemic, the adjustment was even greater. They had learning to do around how to best serve their customers online, curbside and after the sale. They needed help when their ecommerce growth skyrocketed overnight.

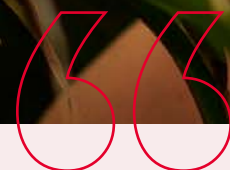
The pandemic ushered in a period of profound challenges and lasting change. We will be your partner moving forward and finding success in this new reality. As we look to the future, we're committed to putting Canadians first. It's a purpose that reminds us that doing good for Canada, doing good for our business and supporting your growth are not mutually exclusive.

How are we accomplishing those goals? Over the next five years, we'll make strategic investments in our business to bring meaningful benefits to yours. We'll invest in services and solutions that will support the growth of your business, helping to close the gap between you and your customers.

We know many small and medium-sized businesses experience growing pains as they lay the groundwork for future success. While for many large businesses, who are the backbone of the ecommerce landscape, their success is linked to our ability to optimize our infrastructure and utilize our resources to build a solid foundation for the future. As your partner, we will listen and respond to the needs of your business and we'll lean in, allowing you to leverage our scale to grow.

The pandemic isn't behind us just yet, but we're committed to delivering a stronger Canada – for Canadian businesses of all sizes, for the communities we serve, and for all Canadians.

Rod Hart
Chief Customer and Marketing Officer



Zero waste is an absolutely impossible goal – we know that. But it’s the crazy big hairy audacious goal we are striving for as a brand and as a business.

– Jenn Harper,
Cheekbone Beauty Cosmetics CEO

➤ BUSINESS PROFILE

Something bigger than herself

Cheekbone Beauty CEO looks beyond today to define her company’s success

Jenn Harper will never see her dreams fully realized – but, then again, that was never the point.

“Zero waste is an absolutely impossible goal – we know that. But it’s the crazy big hairy audacious goal we are striving for as a brand and as a business,” says the founder and CEO of Cheekbone Beauty Cosmetics. “It’s about harnessing our Indigenous roots, my Nishnawbe roots, about creating and making things that leave less of an impact on the planet.”

As a digitally native direct-to-consumer brand, Cheekbone is creating a new segment in the industry – sustainable, socially conscious beauty. Rooted in a loving relationship with the gifts of creation, that commitment touches every aspect of the brand’s operations – people, the planet, and profits.

“This concept of sustainability is not new for Indigenous peoples. Take the whole idea of seven generations thinking. If you were to think seven generations ahead about what you’re doing today, how would you act?” Harper says. “It’s powerful to think how our people have been doing that for hundreds and thousands of years. That kind of thinking is a big thread through our plans.”

That kind of thinking also led to the company’s “crazy big hairy audacious goal” – operating with a zero-waste environmental footprint by 2023.

Impossible? Maybe, Harper admits. But it’s the journey toward that goal that makes all the difference.

Lifecycle thinking

Launched in 2016 by an industry and retail rookie with a dream, Cheekbone Beauty offers what *Elle* magazine described as “universally flattering but also environmentally sustainable” products. It is a unique niche that has garnered tremendous attention for the St. Catharines, Ontario-based brand, especially after Harper’s moving appearance on CBC’s *Dragons’ Den* in 2019. (By the way, she turned down a \$125,000 offer for 50% of her company from then-Dragon Vincenzo Guzzo.)

Like the *Dragons*, her customers are wooed by Harper’s “lifecycle thinking” in considering every step of a product’s life, from its source materials and ingredients to its final days of use and disposal. This isn’t about lessening the load on landfills; it is about eventually avoiding the landfill entirely.

“Whether we’re talking about water sources, land sources or the harvest, everything we gain is a gift. So how do we honour those gifts by trying to do less damage?” Harper says. “By marrying western science and Indigenous wisdom, we’re figuring out ways to do it.”

Cheekbone has been doing just that, from the company’s compostable, biodegradable, even plantable packaging, to its bio- and plant-based, fair trade, and cruelty-free ingredients, to its sustainable shipping methods. In 2020, they launched a less-waste line of lipsticks, SUSTAIN, and are working on a foundation that uses agricultural and/or plant waste.

Future innovations look even bolder: eliminating single-use plastics; refill options for all products; biodegradable and compostable packaging.

Admittedly, the journey hasn’t always been easy. In 2017, Harper cut ties with her original manufacturers as the product’s formula went against her vegan desires and included lanolin (which comes from sheep’s wool).

Then there is the budget hit. Thinking and acting sustainably may not always be cheap, but it is worth the effort to attain your larger goals.

“When we tell the story of this journey to customers, we try to be honest, transparent and authentic in why we’re doing it, how we’re doing it, where we succeed and where we fall short,” Harper says. “We need them on this journey with us.”



Streams of giving

Harper thinks about “streams of giving” as much as she does “streams of revenue.” Maybe more. Cheekbone’s definition of success, she stresses, is not based on what you attain for yourself, but instead in what you give back to your community.

“Like the world needs more billionaires? I don’t think so,” she laughs. “What we do need, however, are more people thinking about how they can start supporting people, communities and the planet.”

Cheekbone has donated more than \$108,000 in total to a wide variety of causes, including the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society (FNCFC), Shannen’s Dream, First Nations Career Services (FNCS), Navajo Water Project and One Tree Planted.

Additionally, it seeks to create a space in the beauty industry where Indigenous youth feel represented and seen. The company continues to promote the hiring of Indigenous peoples, offering Indigenous languages and training/development programs for all employees, moving Indigenous faces to the front of marketing campaigns, even supporting Indigenous youth education.

These are not brag points for a website or social media campaign. Every effort, Harper will tell you, serves a wider desire to honour the gifts of the present by creating a better future.

“We know this is going to take a lot of time. Humans are so imperfect. So we approach it by taking one step forward in the right direction every day. We don’t have to build it all in one day. That’s not even possible,” Harper says. “There’s no end point to sustainability. It will be a forever journey for us.”



There’s no end point to sustainability. It will be a forever journey for us.

— Jenn Harper,
Cheekbone Beauty Cosmetics CEO

New frontier of ecommerce

Story will always be at the root of Cheekbone's success.

The brand has integrated its story into its ecommerce growth journey by weaving it into the fabric of its online experience, marketing and social media presence.

"We are an ecommerce business built with the tools that social media has afforded us. When we market, we make sure our story is being told loud and proud. When someone is new to our community, they get our story told to them, whether it be from our website, our social media platforms or from the insights we give them after that initial connection they make with us."

In June 2021, that story took an incredible turn when Cheekbone signed a vendor agreement with Sephora Canada, landing the brand on Sephora.ca in 2022.

"This is such an exciting milestone for us," Harper says. "As Sephora continues their commitment toward championing diversity, inclusivity and empowerment while being a world leader in beauty innovation, we couldn't think of a better way to drive our mission global so we can ensure every Indigenous kid on the planet sees and feels how important their lives are."

cheekbonebeauty.com ↗



Key Takeaways

01

Sustainability in ecommerce involves balanced thinking between people, the planet, and profits.

02

Thinking and acting sustainably may not always be cheap, but can be worth the effort.

03

Communicating your worthwhile investments with your customers can increase their motivation to buy.



The accidental e-retailer

Canadian candle brand refused to let panic extinguish its spirit of innovation

Amanda Buhse was never overly concerned with ecommerce. Coal & Canary, the Winnipeg-based candle company she founded in 2014, was built on a unique product, combined with a fun, energetic vibe and Instagram-worthy aesthetic. Sales depended on engaging customers' senses.

Therefore, she based her business on customer-to-candle contact – a brick and mortar company store in her hometown with 500 retailers in Canada and the United States, plus 40 to 50 trade shows a year. She never viewed online as an opportunity because scented products sell best when, as you might guess, you can smell them.

All that changed, however, an hour into a March 2020 trade show when the world shut down. But instead of panic, Buhse pivoted and embraced an ecommerce strategy now integral to her company's future success and a key piece of its new customer experience.

"As a business owner, I'm always trying to be 10 steps ahead. That was the first time that I felt out of control. The situation was telling me what I had to do as opposed to me being in charge of the situation. That was really scary," Buhse says of the day a global pandemic was declared.



“

As a business owner, I'm always trying to be 10 steps ahead.

— Amanda Buhse,
Coal & Canary CEO and Chief Creative Officer

As in-person sales channels disappeared overnight, stressors remained: a 10,000-square-foot manufacturing facility; production costs; payroll and eventual layoffs; rent at a brick-and-mortar store.

“Absolutely terrifying. We were in this whole new world trying to figure out what to do to survive as a scented candle company,” she says. “But entrepreneurs solve problems – and this was just another problem to solve.”

That solution involved a full revamp of the company website in an effort to bring its in-store experience online. They wanted the brand to remain memorable, recognizable and relatable even in a new environment. For customers now unable to shop in stores, they could go to a website and feel comfortable and enjoy the same kind of experience.

To drive people to a site, Buhse invested heavily in Facebook and Instagram advertising. “We started spending, taking risks, spending lots of money on advertising. I didn’t want this thing to fail,” she says. “Luckily, it worked.”

Pre-pandemic, the online store generated only four to five sales a day. That changed – quickly. A world seeking comfort needed candles, and a brand now aggressively advertising on social media sent online sales skyrocketing. It was exciting and overwhelming.

With most staff laid off, Buhse and her husband filled the orders themselves across 14-hour days.

They also tried new things: contactless pickup; free local delivery across Winnipeg (driven around the city by Buhse and her husband); free shipping across Canada for the bulk of the pandemic.

“Those things are not easy. We learned a lot,” she says. “Shipping is not cheap, as candles are heavy, but I knew the hit would pay off. We got into the hands of a lot of new customers who had never experienced us before. The reason they wanted to try it was because of the free shipping.”

Strengthening customer connections

The company also continued to strengthen its connections with customers.

No grand gestures. Just simple steps. For instance, they launched a contest for kids stuck at home – a challenge to kids (and parents) to come up with a new candle including scent, name and packaging. The contest exploded among the company’s social media followers.

“We got notes from teachers using the contest as a fun class assignment and others saying this was the first positive fun thing that their family had done together since the pandemic started. It meant so much to them that we were thinking outside the box and giving them things to do that were meaningful.”

For her dedicated customers, she launched a password-protected store where the company released a limited-edition VIP candle every Thursday. Customers were notified via email at 11 am every Thursday in June, July and August.



We got notes from teachers using the contest as a fun class assignment and others saying this was the first positive fun thing that their family had done together since the pandemic started.

— Amanda Buhse,
Coal & Canary CEO and Chief Creative Officer





55

Our success comes by providing special, experiential moments in our stores for our customers. Anything we can do to give people a reason to go into the store is going to be huge.

— Amanda Buhse,
Coal & Canary CEO and Chief Creative Officer



That exclusivity drove customers mad. The company's email list exploded.

Each release sold out in a handful of hours. That email alone generated more than \$45,000 in clickthrough sales during the slowest three months of the year.

Buhse says Coal & Canary is a new company today because of what they have endured – one better positioned to withstand any future shocks.

In-person sales will continue to be key. But the stores will evolve. The brick-and-mortar business model will include more interactive spaces, which will be key in giving customers a memorable reason to visit in person.

“Our success comes by providing special, experiential moments in our stores for our customers. Anything we can do to give people a reason to go into the store is going to be huge,” Buhse says.

Those experiences will be augmented with a continued robust online presence, as well. Pandemic experiments will become permanent parts of the customer experience. Free shipping will pop up for special events or perks.

The pivot has become permanent in many places.

“There were a lot of changes. It was almost like hitting the reset button,” Buhse says. “I see everything as an opportunity. This was an opportunity to try new things I would never normally have had the guts (or the financial reason) to try. It was so difficult, so stressful, so challenging. But there are so many takeaways and positive things we will apply to our business going forward.”

coalandcanary.com



Find out how Coal & Canary furthered its brand by having its products end up in the hands (and on the social accounts) of celebrities from the cast of *Schitt's Creek* to *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

canadapost.ca/SwagBags



Key Takeaways

01

Ecommerce plays a role in any business – no matter how sensory driven it may be.

02

Customers embrace a consistent experience across all brand channels.

03

Free shipping offers can open your product up to new customers.

➤ BUSINESS PROFILE

Born of necessity

High-end baby retailer nurtures digital, physical customer experience

Agatha needed a place to call its own.

Inspired by their own pregnancy, André Malépart and Agathe O'Donoghue launched the brand as an online platform in 2012 targeting moms-to-be seeking stylish, upscale baby products alongside a supportive community. Despite no background in ecommerce, the couple's understanding of the industry and spot-on aesthetic led to success within the high-end baby market in Quebec.

After only two years, Agatha had outstripped its home basement headquarters. And despite the infinite digital room of the web, the ecommerce brand needed some real-world space to grow.

"We wanted to offer more. We wanted to be able to sell big gear: strollers, furniture, car seats," Malépart explains. "But at the time, it took a brick-and-mortar store to do that. Otherwise, the quality suppliers were not interested in giving us their product lines if we were just going to sell online."



For me, a sale is a sale no matter where it comes from. Online. In the store. On the phone. It doesn't matter. The synergy of online and brick-and-mortar can't be overlooked as part of our growth and part of our journey forward.

André Malépart,
Agatha co-founder and Vice-President



Key Takeaways

01

Don't overlook your in-store channel, rethink it. Synergy is key to your growth strategy.

02

No matter where or how, shopping with you must be easy, efficient and responsive.

03

Engaging in-store experiences can help grow sales – online and off.

Agatha first opened a warehouse store in Mirabel in 2014 and then a boutique store in Mount Royal in 2019. It is the latter location that truly catapulted the brand. Large, light and airy, Agatha Boutique is not just a retail outlet, but an IRL (a.k.a. in real life) experience for customers who live their lives on social media.

The space has been a hit since it opened. In fact, the location has become a key marketing tool for the brand, with many customers taking photos of themselves in the store and with the products and posting on their social channels.

"We wanted a physical store to live up to what we were offering online," Malépart says. "With the Mount Royal store, we were able to really merge two spaces and have both the quality of an online store and the shopping adventure of a physical store. The web and the store are complementary and nourish each other. That's how it should be."

Despite the pandemic pivot of many to digital, Malépart sees no retreat from brick-and-mortar locations. For instance, buying baby clothes online is one thing, but when parents invest \$1,500 in a stroller, they want to touch, try out and get advice on making an informed choice.

"There will always be room for physical branches. We just have to be in the right place for the right customer," he continues. "For me, a sale is a sale no matter where it comes from. Online. In the store. On the phone. It doesn't matter. The synergy of online and brick-and-mortar can't be overlooked as part of our growth and part of our journey forward."

agatha.boutique ↗

Five for the next five

Google SMB expert offers insights into future

Don't let the future scare you, Elana Chan stresses. As a small- or medium-sized business, you've been there before.

"The issues you are facing today are not actually new: How do you keep up with consumer demand? How do you manage the supply chain? How do you keep up with the competition? How can customers find you? How do you communicate with them? You have been dealing with these things for a long time. But the pace is now next level," says the Global Lead, SMB Partnerships Marketing at Google.

To help prepare for the future, Chan offered up five lessons to guide growing businesses over the next five years.



Don't let the future scare you, Elana Chan stresses. As a small- or medium-sized business, you've been there before.

— Elana Chan,
Google SMB Partnerships
Marketing Global Lead

Listen. Then act.

Businesses need to stay flexible and listen to their customers. Get that real-time feedback by using your data and analytics. A lot of businesses either don't have a data infrastructure or have a lot of data and aren't using it. But that's the best way to make sure you are adaptable. You can see how consumer behavior is changing: How they are shopping, what they are buying, how they are consuming all this information. Their patterns are changing, so monitoring your data is the fastest way to get feedback and know how to act.

Be accessible.

Up your ecommerce game. Having a strong online presence means that you have a store that never closes. That may sound simple, but we still have a lot of retail businesses in Canada that are not online or their online experiences fall short of customer expectations – even after the biggest kick in the pants anybody could have gone through. There's some technological lag here. There's still room for digital transformation in our market.

Our goal is not pre-2020. The immediate future is going to be an omnichannel, ecomm-heavy model. The customer is king at the end of the day and they're going to do what's easiest and best for their busy lifestyles. That means having more options in front of them.

Always assume "this and ..." when thinking about what to offer customers.

Engage existing customers.

Business owners have spent the whole life of their business building relationships with customers. Just because we're not seeing the person doesn't mean you can't keep this up virtually. Those email lists, social media lists, those are valuable assets.

The simplest, easiest, most impactful ask is for people to give you reviews. That simple. Research shows that 94% of consumers are more likely to choose a small- or medium-sized business that has a positive review and 79% trust them as much as a recommendation from family or friends. That's huge.

Give your most loyal customers the chance to advocate for you. They're so happy to do it. You can even reward that, like through early-bird access to a sale or a special coupon or something that makes them feel like they're part of your community. This takes time and effort, but the end results are well worth it.

Be authentic.

More than ever, people are looking to shop their values. They are looking for meaning in what they're buying. SMB owners have such a wonderful story to tell. They have probably weathered some ups and downs on their journey. Celebrate that resilience.

It's a great time to celebrate your diversity. Whether you're a woman-owned or BIPOC (black, Indigenous and people of colour) business, let people know. Customers are legitimately interested. 86% of customers expect businesses to speak out about societal or community issues. They want that for you.

People are looking for more than just a widget from Canadian businesses. That's a great opportunity for storytelling.

Think big.

When it comes to growing your business, don't hesitate to think big. These businesses are the lifeblood of our communities. If they don't succeed, none of us succeed. If your business is based locally, why stay limited to that? By expanding your ecommerce capabilities, the world is your oyster. 🦪



Discover how Google is helping its small business customers, including with tools like Local Opportunity Finder for personalized tips to stand out on Google, Grow My Store to improve retail websites and Market Finder to discover helpful operational information to start selling around the world.

Visit thinkwithgoogle.com for details.

Beyond the basics

Web-savvy shoppers can be a difficult bunch to impress. Been there. Bought that.

And it won't be getting any easier.

In addition to the table-stake expectations they always had when visiting your ecommerce store, online shoppers have developed new behaviours and additional expectations during the pandemic. Only time will tell which of those new ways will stick, and which will be left behind.

Until then, the pressure remains on you to provide the kind of features, capabilities and experiences that not only help you stand out from your competition but entice even the most fickle online shopper.

Canadians told us the unique website features that not only surprise and delight them when shopping online, but also get them to click "buy".



72%

Offering "Buy now, pay later" – flexible payment options.



71%

Offering themed subscription box that gives the opportunity to try new products.



61%

Pre-ordering items prior to release.



48%

Displaying inventory visibility across store channels.



51%

Using digital wallet to pay.

Generation expectations

Gen Z has far different expectations of you and your business than previous generations.

Here are five areas in which Gen Z demands far more than their elders – a blueprint for where you need to focus when targeting the next generation of online shoppers.



01 An easy-to-use mobile app

02 Ability to reserve online and pay/pick up in store

03 Inventory system that reflects availability across every store location

04 "Back in stock" estimates for out-of-stock items

05 Recurring delivery for frequently purchased items

Completing the sale

Online shoppers have a shortlist of basic expectations that drive them toward completing their purchases:

- Coupon codes
- Free returns
- Easy-to-reach free shipping threshold
- Product reviews
- Price-difference refunds

Find their way to free

Online shoppers will try (almost) anything to find their way to free shipping. Here are their top five techniques toward getting there:

- Add additional items to their cart
- Search online for a promo code
- Choose the slowest transit time
- Ship to store
- Wait for a free shipping promotion



For more exclusive insights, research and intelligence to inform and inspire your decisions, visit canadapost.ca/insights

The future is unwritten

Ipsos consumer behaviour expert: Customers of the future are still deciding who they want to be

Ask Naumi Haque how long it will be before customers of the future reveal themselves to retailers and he offers one word: patience.

“Things aren’t going to be ‘normal’ for some time. We’re going to have to keep a pulse on how things are changing both locally and globally. Shoppers are going to do this on their own whether retailers like it or not. They’re going to be reassessing their risks constantly,” explains the Senior Vice President Research-Market Strategy & Understanding with Ipsos North America. “And as the risks of re-entry will be in the back of their minds for a while, it needs to be at the forefront of retailers’ minds, as well.”

Retailers are clamouring for clarity about customer desires. Which customer behaviours from the pandemic are going to be sticky? That is a difficult insight to offer, Haque stresses, as many customers won’t know themselves for perhaps several years.

“As long as we don’t stamp COVID-19 out globally, customers’ behaviours are going to be in flux. Retailers and brands are going to have to keep tabs on them,” he says. “The winners, however, are going to be the ones that are adaptable. We’ve seen that already. Do you have a pulse on how your customers are feeling today and how quickly can you respond to those feelings? That’s just the new normal for retailers – being more responsive, agile and keeping a pulse on what’s happening with consumer sentiment.”



As the risks of re-entry will be in the back of their minds for a while, it needs to be at the forefront of retailers’ minds, as well.

– Naumi Haque,
Ipsos North America, Senior Vice President
Research-Market Strategy & Understanding

In Canada, “re-entry” and “normality” were never the same, Haque says, as a consistent majority believe it will take at least a year, if not more, to establish a sense of normalcy again.

Canadian cautiousness will also translate into shopping habits. That means retailers need to continue clearing pathways for customers to get information before they step outside their home: Pre-store product research and reviews. Transparent in-store availability. Easy-to-find general information like store hours, mapping, and protocols.

“There will continue to be a whole lot of preparation that happens ahead of retail. Things will snap back. But we don’t know how much they’re going to snap back to an in-person physical retail environment versus which things are going to stay digital. That makes the omnichannel experience so much more important,” Haque says.

While this may seem like a huge challenge, retailers should know they are starting from an advantageous position.

“In a lot of countries, including in Canada, there has been a negative feeling toward governments and how they navigated through the pandemic. Where governments saw the pandemic as a risk, a lot of brands saw it as an opportunity to connect with consumers. There was a lot of communication coming from brands as to how they were supporting customers,” Haque says.

That communication has led to a third of Canadians trusting brands over governments as a source of information during the pandemic.

“It’s an amazing opportunity for retailers,” Haque says. “While many brands took a leadership position through the pandemic and gained some trust, they can leverage that now as part of the recovery. There is a role for brands and retailers to play that is bigger than it was before.”

Two-way communication will play a key role in that – how are customers feeling, what are retailers doing.

There are a host of paths retailers could take to achieve that: Do polls. Talk to customers. Talk to retail salespeople who are talking to customers. Look at online data to see what pages are popular on your ecommerce site. Monitor your COVID-19 information and protocols page.

“There’s going to be more and more discussions about how businesses make people comfortable. Early on, that communication from retailers was about hand washing, mask wearing and social distancing. Now, retailers need to listen to their customers to know what those communications need to be about going forward.” ❖



Watch Naumi Haque of Ipsos North America take to Canada Post’s virtual stage and explore the latest insights into customer behaviour and their journey toward a new normal.

canadapost.ca/LeadTheWay

New services look to address evolving needs for tomorrow's online shopper

As Canadians increasingly hit the buy button, Canada Post is responding by creating new ways to make it easier and more convenient for them to receive orders from ecommerce retailers. The following article highlights some of the programs and services you'll be hearing about this year.

Parcel locker programs securing the future of online shopping

As online shopping continues to grow, calls for secure and convenient delivery have risen. With its parcel locker program, Canada Post answers those concerns with a variety of options that deliver satisfaction and peace of mind to both online shoppers and e-retailers.

For Canadians living in apartments and condos, parcel lockers provide the convenience that completes the perfect shopping experience. For merchants, they deliver loyal customers and repeat business.

With more than 13,000 parcel lockers installed (and growing), more than two million Canadians living in apartments and condos are benefiting from the program – and retailers are seeing results. Where parcel lockers have been installed, there has been an 18% growth in parcel volumes.

But the lockers aren't just for apartment and condo dwellers.



Canada Post is extending its locker service into neighbourhoods that experience high parcel volume growth. As part of a new project, additional parcel compartments are being provided next to existing community mailboxes to securely deliver more items to Canadian shoppers. Initial survey feedback shows these extra compartments were incredibly popular with residents.

In 2020, Canada Post also launched a pilot project of 10 automated parcel lockers across the country offering shoppers an option to send items directly to a secure locker. Much like the indoor parcel lockers, these automated lockers have a few additional features, including:

- Hassle-free self-serve delivery, where consumers pick up packages using an access code or barcode shared by email. Consumers do not have to interact with anyone during pickup;
- Convenient use as consumers choose to have items sent to these lockers via their FlexDelivery™ accounts; and
- 24/7 pickup and accessible outside at some locations.

Canada Post plans to continue testing, learning and expanding the pilot project in 2021.

Connect with a representative to find out how parcel lockers can help offer your shoppers a best-in-class experience at canadapost.ca/ExpertHelp.

Unlocking the secrets to postal box data

Through its Postal Box Data program, Canada Post offers the only lists in Canada that let retailers access postal codes for parcel locker compartments, apartment/condo lockboxes and/

or post office (PO) boxes, including the number of addresses associated with each.

Retailers can use it to:

- Measure marketing campaign responses for apartments, condos and multi-unit buildings;
- Hard-code shipping systems to select Canada Post as the default shipper for these locations; and
- Gather business intelligence to reach and target consumers with relevant communications.

Learn more about postal box and postal code data at canadapost.ca/LicenseData.

Shipping Manager makes online shipping as easy as possible

Shipping Manager lets retailers create, pay for and print shipping labels and send parcels anywhere in the world. Businesses with a commercial contract can access this free online tool and get started printing labels anywhere, without installing any software.

Shipping Manager is designed to make shipping as easy as possible by allowing retailers to:

- Save a set of packaging dimensions and weight as a template for future shipments;
- Integrate customs forms into your shipping labels;
- Create and pay for multiple shipping labels at once;
- Pay for prepared shipments when necessary; and
- Request a pickup.

Try Shipping Manager out for yourself today at canadapost.ca/ShippingManager. ✦

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Business of the mind

Book Depot found ecommerce success by never turning the page on its core values



Wilf Wikkerink didn't need a pandemic to know his business was essential.

"We talk a lot about our core purpose – our 'why,' if you will – which is 'Enchanting the Mind,'" says Wikkerink, CEO of Book Depot. "The last year has really solidified that, brought it to life for us. Our people needed to understand they were having a huge impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people worldwide."

As a discount books wholesaler and supplier, the company's sales traditionally have been driven by their business-to-business channel, Book Depot. But as retailers shut down throughout 2020, the company saw explosive growth in its direct-to-consumer channel through its BookOutlet.ca and KidsBooks.com/ca websites.

It was a complete flip of their operations. And no wonder. In 2020, print book sales saw its largest annual increase in more than a decade, with more than 750 million books sold.

Individuals. Families. Schools. Libraries. Non-profit organizations. They all rushed to Book Depot. Parents looking to occupy children; teachers purchasing books for their students; charities getting books into the hands of those who might not be able to afford them otherwise.

"What we're doing had never mattered so much to so many people all over Canada and in more than 100 countries around the world. The impact our team was having was exponential. It brought us together in this sense of renewed purpose. The core values of our company just came to life."

Dealing with a spike in its direct-to-consumer channel challenged an operations team used to fulfilling large orders for its business-to-business clients – think pallets of books – now faced plucking single copies off the shelf. But the team rallied to make immediate adjustments to fill orders and eye future changes needed to address the shift.

"As a company, we've been on this journey of investment in technology and automation. We're always very much looking at the leading edge," says Wikkerink of Book Depot's tradition of innovation, starting with its website launch in 1997 and followed by significant automation and technical upgrade investments over the next 20-plus years.

These moves were rooted in the belief that their work was – and always will be – essential.

"We all know the numbers – physical book sales are up. The question remains, however: Is it going to stick? We believe it will," Wikkerink says.

"Nothing replaces the allure and tactile experience of curling up with a great book. In our digital age, people are looking for ways to reduce their screen time. One of the ways to do that is by creating a love for books. We're excited to be part of that."

bookdepot.ca



Key Takeaways

01

Let your business's core purpose help navigate changing landscapes.

02

Invest in your future success.

03

Winning retailers are embracing customer-centric approaches like hybrid business models.

Best foot forward

Dr. Liza Shoes makes customer connections part of the experience

Don't talk to Dr. Liza Egbogah about sweatpants.

"When you finally step outside your Zoom box, it will be a whole new world. Maybe you will be going into the office only two or three days a week. But that means you have two or three days a week to look and feel your best," she says. "We are tired of being sloppy. We want to emerge from this pandemic and spruce it up."

Egbogah, founder and owner of Dr. Liza Shoes, has encouraged her customers to put their best foot forward for years by designing modern women's footwear that blends fashion and wellness.

Part doctor, part dynamo, she has created a brand by cultivating a community of women who embrace a deep, personal connection with the owner. Whether watching her appearances on Canadian television, catching her mingling with celebrities at the Academy Awards or sharing a glass of wine with her at a popup store, Dr. Liza's customers know she is part of the experience.

"I look at my brand the way I look at my patient base – everything I do is to help them live their best lives," says the Toronto-based chiropractor. "I want women to be comfortable, to feel stylish, to do what they want, to look great and feel great. That's why there's so much of me in the brand."

It is a brand-customer connection that proved itself capable of surviving almost anything over the last year.

Previously, customers were introduced to Dr. Liza Shoes via popups around the country. The experience was high-touch, as the events could be mistaken for a cocktail party with customers and their friends enjoying drinks, trying on different shoes and asking questions of the owner. It was creating an informal way to ask about chronic, nagging problems that prevented these women from wearing stylish shoes.

"When you are a woman and have trouble with shoes because you think you have troublesome feet, you're very wary about purchasing shoes online. You want to try them first. When you are able to try them on and get this personalized approach, and you find the shoes that are right for you, then you feel confident in ordering them over and over again." That confidence, in turn, transferred to their friends. Word-of-mouth has always been Dr. Liza's most powerful influencer.

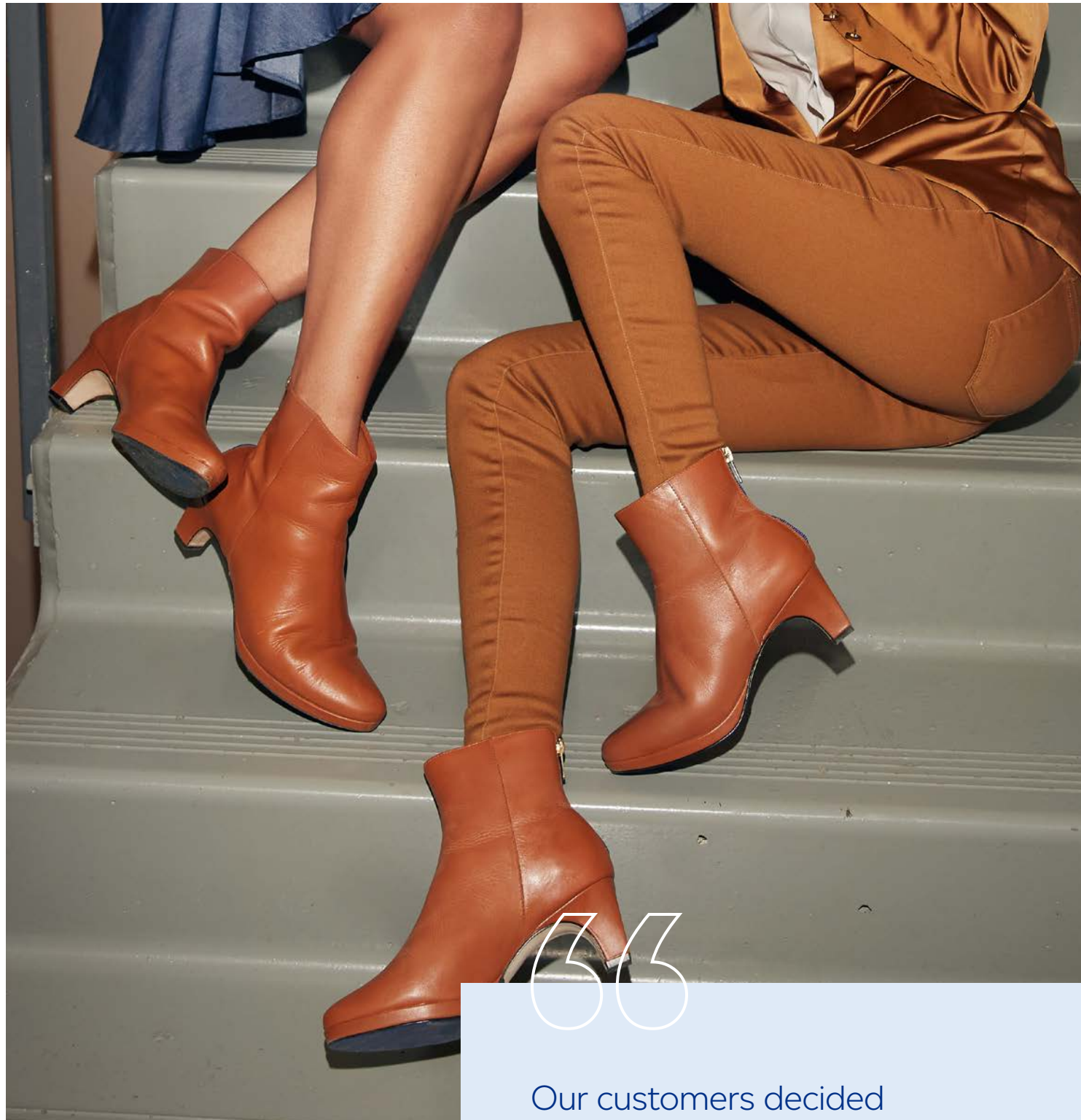
Then sweatpants and slippers became work-from-home attire in spring 2020. As sales dipped, Egbogah used customers staying at home to create an even tighter community by offering them deeper virtual connections with her and each other.



I look at my brand the way I look at my patient base – everything I do is to help them live their best lives.

– Dr. Liza Egbogah,
Dr. Liza Shoes founder and owner





Our customers decided they're not going to let this pandemic get them down...

— Dr. Liza Egbogah,
Dr. Liza Shoes founder and owner

New online experience

In the last year, her ecommerce site has been fully redesigned twice, each time in an effort to make a more interactive, intimate experience. She wanted to take the personal aspect – and a bit of the party – out of the popup and put it online.

The new site uses storytelling and addresses common questions through quizzes and FAQs, as well as offering a new direct chat function, all in an effort to boost confidence in purchases and reduce exchanges and returns.

An older generation of shoppers, one not native to online shopping, is now coming to the site in droves. Egbogah was mindful in making the online experience as user-friendly as possible for these new shoppers.

The site also boasts a strong Dr. Liza vibe, as if she is shopping at your side.

“I am a positive, optimistic person and when you show your personality you tend to attract like-minded people. When I do that, they feel comfortable putting themselves out there,” she says.

Her *Doctors Notes* section, in particular, offers up personal takes on the products beyond your standard description. On the back end, her integration with Shopify and Canada Post has saved her hours, with access to easy label printing, making order management much more efficient.

The brand's community continues to thrive on social media, with Egbogah often interacting directly with advice, conversation, and even consultation on the creation of next season's collection.

The changes have led to continued success for the business. Black Friday 2020 was the company's biggest, with 40% of sales coming from the United States alone.

“Our customers decided they're not going to let this pandemic get them down,” Egbogah says. “We joined them by focusing on optimism, optimism that said we can make the best of our world for now and look forward to a bright tomorrow.”

drlizashoes.com



Find out why Dr. Liza Egbogah, owner of Dr. Liza Shoes has moved away from social media influencers and is focused on her strongest advocates – her customers.

canadapost.ca/Influencer



Key Takeaways

01

Strong brand-customer bonds are capable of surviving almost any shock.

02

Don't be afraid to inject your personality into your business and let it shine.

03

Design your ecommerce site to boost confidence in purchases and reduce exchanges and returns.

Seeking sustainable solutions

As ecommerce grows in prominence in the lives of Canadians, so too does their concern for its impact on the environment.

Shoppers will continue to evaluate retailers against one another – that’s a given. But they’re not only considering product, price and choice. Every aspect of your business’ environmental impact will be closely watched, from product and promotion, to packaging and shipping, the size of your footprint and the genuineness of your public position.

No longer a nice-to-have consideration, environmental sustainability has become a key influencer for shoppers and a necessary part of your business plan.

An important first step comes in understanding how your customers feel about the environmental impact of your business.

42%

Percentage of Canadians who say they’re concerned about the environmental impact of ecommerce.

Going green matters

Brand and retailer environmental efforts continue to resonate with online shoppers, as Canadians are more likely to shop with retailers that:

37%

Are focused on reducing their carbon footprint.



36%

Promote an environmental cause.



32%

Use a delivery company with a lower carbon footprint.



25%

Use a carrier that helps ease traffic congestion in urban areas.



Waste not. Want not.

The vast majority of online shoppers are looking for retailers to be mindful of their use of packaging and are looking for them to make an effort to minimize packaging.

63%

Are upset when retailers use excessive or unnecessary packaging when shipping purchases.

56%

Prefer retailers to ship all their items at the same time to reduce packaging, even if it means waiting longer.

51%

Prefer retailers to ship all their items at the same time to reduce emissions, even if it means they have to wait longer.

26%

Believe online retailers are making an effort to minimize shipping waste.

Generational divides

While the vast majority of all generations care about environmental sustainability as it relates to shipping, understanding the differences in what they care about offers insights into your target audiences.

- 01** Gen Z and Millennials are far more focused on reducing their carbon footprint versus older generations.
- 02** Pre-Boomers, Boomers and Gen X are most annoyed by excess packaging when receiving products.
- 03** Nearly half of Gen Z wants your brand to take a stand on environmental causes.

Sustainability isn’t always easy. Building partnerships that are long lasting, scalable and transformative, and delivering on shared values, will be key to creating a more sustainable future. ❖

2021 Canadian Online Shopper Study, CPC 21-205, April 2021. Ipsos Essential Report May 6 to 9, 2021 Fieldwork: For the Exclusive Use of Subscribers

➤ BUSINESS PROFILE

Essential understanding

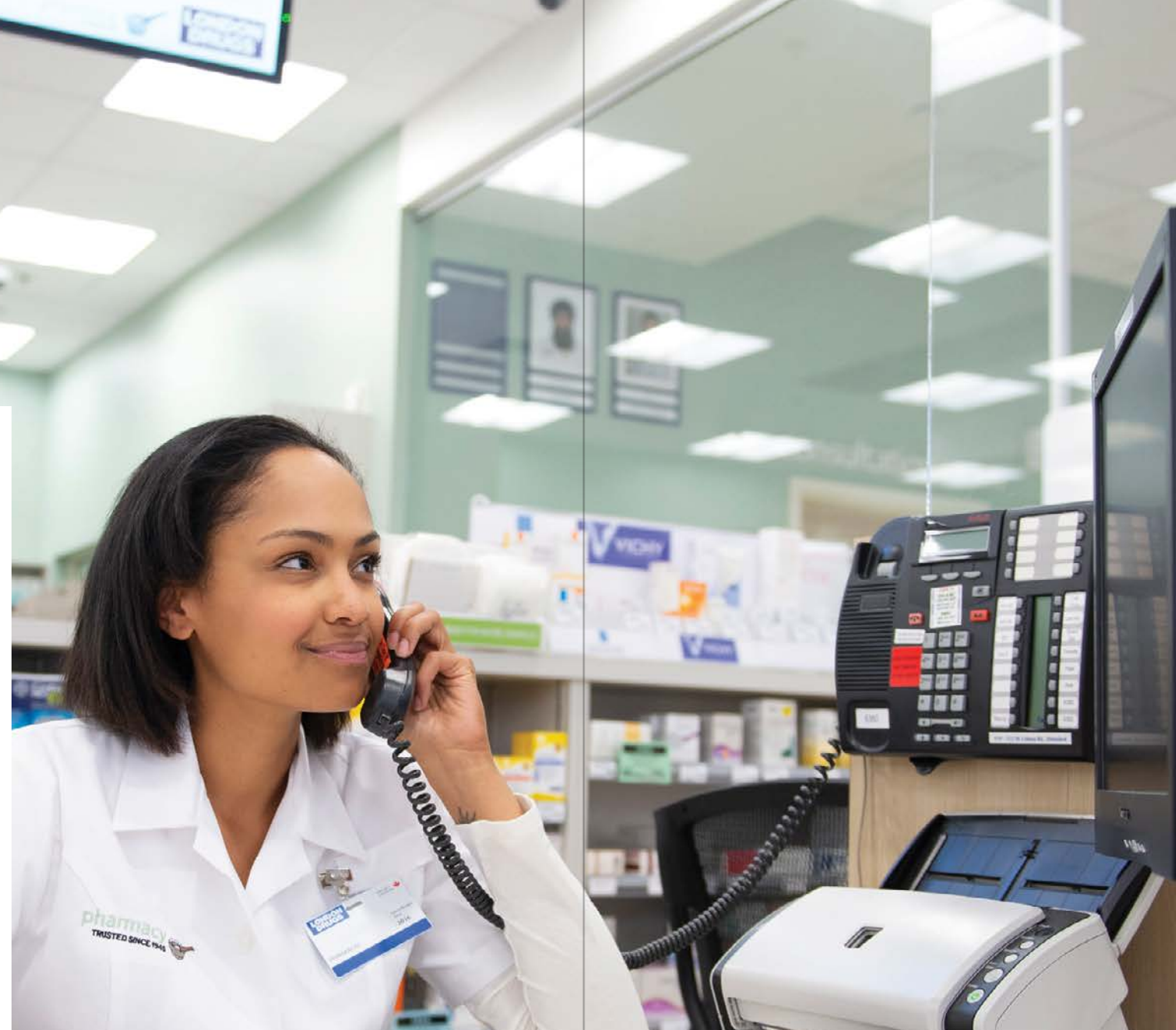
London Drugs COO reflects on life as an essential business

You don't need to explain the concept of essential to Clint Mahlman. He gets it.

A trauma nurse wife. A COVID-19 ward nurse daughter. A Canadian Armed Forces son. A firefighter future son-in-law.

"I never needed a reminder of the reality going on in our communities," he says.

As President and COO of London Drugs, Mahlman also leads an organization where being essential isn't simply a pandemic-inspired designation, but rather part of an effort to root the company's success in service to community by being prepared for whatever it faces next.



Know your customer and know what quirks and uniqueness your customer sees in you because those tend to accelerate in hard times.

— Clint Mahlman,
London Drugs President and COO



Unique positioning

Founded in 1945, London Drugs has brick-and-mortar stores in more than 35 major markets throughout British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as well as an ecommerce presence that sells worldwide. With the pharmacy at the heart of its operations, the company also offers a wide – what they call “eclectic” – mix of products and services.

That purposeful mix has confounded industry experts for years, Mahlman says.

For instance, the company is proudly SKU heavy with stock from both major brands and unique suppliers. The company's business plan specifically calls for seeking out small brands – all differentiators customers have come to appreciate.

When COVID-19 revealed a slew of challenges to worldwide supply chains, some of those smaller, local brands had an easier time pivoting quickly and supplying product to the store.

“This diversity – the kind of stuff experts snickered at – is very much by design,” Mahlman says. “Take for instance that for a number of weeks during the pandemic, we, this little corner drug store in Western Canada, were the largest Apple authorized repair centre in North America. Our diversity of products and services has always been a major strength.”

“Know your customer and know what quirks and uniqueness your customer sees in you because those tend to accelerate in hard times.”



We have always tried to build competencies that today may not make sense but tomorrow will be important.

– Clint Mahlman,
London Drugs President and COO

Valued partner

When you're essential, you're essential to everyone.

From the start of the pandemic, the company worked closely with national, provincial and local governments, as well as health and safety officials and individual doctors, all of whom sought the company's expertise of securing and importing goods, especially personal protective equipment (PPE).

With one of the largest distribution centres in the West, and the largest with medical supplies, London Drugs and its business continuity team has worked with numerous emergency management authorities throughout the region, tackling outbreaks like SARS and H1N1 or disaster planning for earthquakes and fires.

The company can respond with trailers, generators and cellphone charging stations at a moment's notice. They even ordered a fleet of minus-70 Celsius refrigerators when early speculation noted that some COVID-19 vaccines might require extreme temperatures for storage.

"We have built infrastructure around serving communities. That helped us when the pandemic struck as we already knew how to work together," Mahlman says. "Governments had their hands full managing the public health response. We had a moral obligation, a leadership obligation to support our communities."

Simultaneously, London Drugs was managing store protocols and hours, employee and customer safety measures, and doing everything possible to remain open.

The company was prepared, in many ways, thanks to a long tradition of embracing experimentation: launching in-store pickup for online shoppers; developing a unique tech repair business; introducing curbside pickup a decade ago; testing drone delivery technology for prescriptions.

"We have always tried to build competencies that today may not make sense but tomorrow will be important," Mahlman says. "Sometimes, our own people questioned why we were experimenting when they didn't always pay off. They're right – they don't always pay off. But these experiments build a knowledge base that you never know when you're going to need to pull from. As the pandemic proved, when you need it, you don't have time to experiment, you have to go to what you've learned."

Focus on local communities

Amidst the big-picture planning, London Drugs never forgot where it started, in communities; setting up hotlines for senior citizens, establishing special hours for frontline workers, or cleaning physical and virtual spaces for local businesses, restaurants and even the Girl Guides to sell their products. Anything to keep everyone afloat.

For many of these small brands, it was their first taste of ecommerce, exposing their products to a world of new customers.

"Think about all these local entrepreneurs who would show up at farmers markets and perhaps couldn't spin up an ecommerce site fast enough. With our Local Central initiative, we brought them in and, next thing you know, people from all over are ordering locally made Bear Bait Honey from south of Calgary."

In the big world of ecommerce, Mahlman can feel outgunned by investments, automation and the latest software, but that realization is only further motivation to constantly find ways to compete by doing something unique.

"Consumers don't have to be fair. They see us in the community and expect more from us. Yes, it can be frustrating when you see a box from a competitor on their doorstep and they're expecting you to take care of the Girl Guides. But you do it because it's the right thing to do," Mahlman says.

"But people are starting to question how they're purchasing things. They saw who showed up, who was in a position to help the Girl Guides, or the

local entrepreneur, or the local restaurant that was shut down, and started thinking that maybe those places deserve support."

From its frontline workers back to the executives, that customer response has also inspired the London Drugs team.

"A lot of what was going on was amazingly motivational for us. As an essential retailer, it gave us a sense of additional purpose. We're not just here to get you your medicines, or make sure you can learn from home or maintain your business online. We're also making a serious contribution to the community. We saw massive sparks of staff pride," Mahlman says.

"We pride ourselves on our 'neighbourhood-out' philosophy. We have gotta take care of our neighbours so our neighbours can take care of us."

londondrugs.com ↗



Find out more about London Drugs' Local Central program that helped community businesses stay afloat through the pandemic – while also selling a few Girl Guide cookies.

[canadapost.ca/
CommunityBusinesses](http://canadapost.ca/CommunityBusinesses)



Key Takeaways

01

Range of services, products and suppliers insulates in times of disruption.

02

Embrace developing new ecommerce competencies today that may not pay off until tomorrow.

03

Your communities look to you for more than products in a crisis; they will look for leadership.



➤ BUSINESS PROFILE

Authentic attitudes

Smash + Tess CEO shares her fashion house's secrets to community, collaboration and world domination

Ashley Freeborn knows you are watching.

"People want to know who is behind a brand. What they stand for. What their values are. How they show up when it comes to their community," says the CEO of Smash + Tess. "People want to be proud of their connection with a brand. That is such a privilege for us – but it is also a huge responsibility."

The popular Vancouver-based fashion house specializes in rompers – those comfortable, versatile and on-trend pieces seemingly tailor-made for work-from-home lifestyles. That perfect positioning of the direct-to-consumer ecommerce company led to explosive growth in 2020-21 with year-over-year sales up nearly 80% and a team that more than tripled in size.

But a hectic run of success was no excuse to shed the values customers counted on from them, Freeborn stresses. In fact, she credits commitment to those values for helping the brand, her colleagues, and their customers navigate uncertainty together.

"You have to make sure that every word you say you can stand behind. Every word," says the self-professed "romper revolutionary." "Sometimes you make mistakes, but people will understand. It's about transparency, accountability and consistency. We do our best and if we fall short then we own that and try to do better. That's all you can do."

As the CEO, Freeborn leads by example. She welcomes customers virtually into her home, introduces them to her family, makes them part of their lives. She is an open book, be it talking about her struggles with Crohn's disease or sharing how her own journey with a newborn in the NICU led to the creation and distribution of special gift boxes to comfort other moms at BC Women's Hospital.

That same authenticity echoes throughout the brand: celebrations of diversity and Pride, sustainability and community, family and female empowerment. The company website and social accounts are full of personal stories from members of the #SMASHTESSFAM, Giving Tuesday events, design collaborations with frontline workers, even a banana bread recipe from Mama Tess.

There is nothing phony about these interactions – they are what the brand is; who the team members are.

"When we created this company, it was rooted in social responsibility, giving back and community. We are so much more than clothing," Freeborn says. "We want our customers to always see themselves reflected in our brand. Everyone needs that connectedness, that support, that love. Our vibe is for everyone."

That belief extends well into the brand's ecommerce presence, where investments in something as simple as photography have gone a long way in creating inclusivity. When it comes to product information, for example, the brand shows images of models wearing every size of romper (from XXS to XXXL) to help consumers see themselves in the product. That kind of investment takes time, Freeborn says, but it's well worth the money and time.

"For decades, fashion has been telling us that we're not good enough. Lots of size zero models, right? Smash + Tess is turning that on its head and saying, 'You know, you're beautiful just the way you are, and you don't need to change.' Through our marketing and our platforms, we want people to see themselves and be like, 'Oh, her story reminds me of my story.'"

With the pandemic lighting her fire for ecommerce, Freeborn is looking ahead for new ways to combine a powerhouse ecommerce presence with more creative, experiential real-world interactions.

She is also excited to lead a team that has gained a new appreciation for flexibility, creative thinking and the values that unite them.

"This last year, having to really articulate what matters to us, what we stand for and what we don't stand for is something that will be our compass as we continue to scale and take over the world," she laughs. "That is our ultimate plan."

smashtess.ca

Find out why Smash + Tess CEO Ashley Freeborn believes "collaboration is queen" when it comes to furthering her brand.

canadapost.ca/Influencer



Key Takeaways

01

Meaningful customer connections are both a privilege and a huge responsibility.

02

Authenticity doesn't take a break when times get difficult. That's when it shines.

03

Make sure you can stand behind every word you say as a brand. Every word.

Matters of inspiration



**WILF WIKKERINK IS
CEO OF BOOK DEPOT.**

Explore what business leaders tap into in order to educate themselves, further their businesses or simply find a bit of relaxation and enjoyment.

READ.

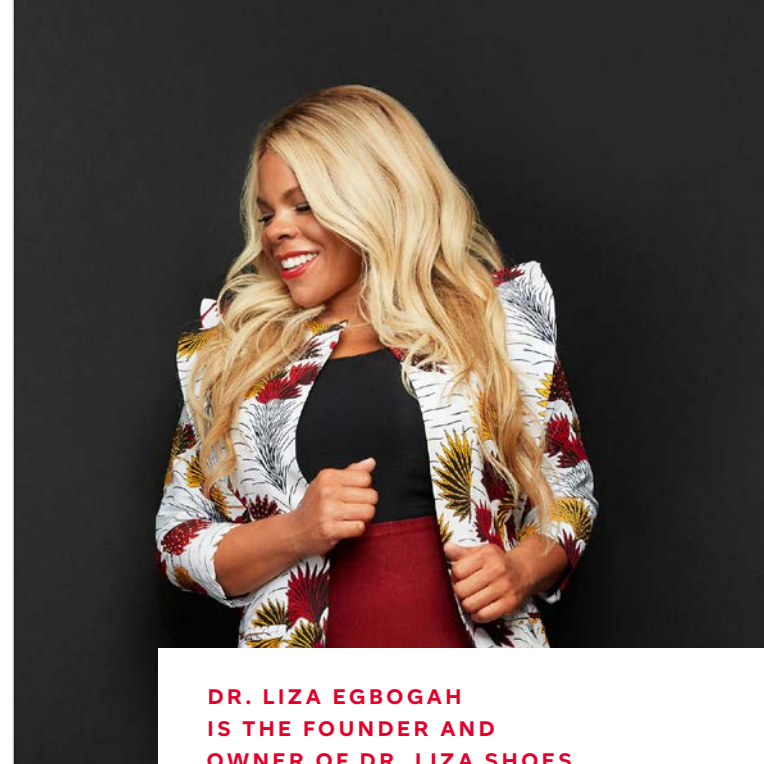
I am reading *An American Life*, the autobiography of Ronald Reagan. In a day and age where leaders spend far too much time following and seeing which way the wind is blowing, Reagan's autobiography provides a refreshing perspective on how true leaders take risks and inspire their people to achieve more. From his humble roots growing up in Middle America to becoming President of the United States, Reagan remained a true servant leader.

WATCH.

As a family we regularly watch *Shark Tank*. Even with six children of varying ages, it's a show that can be enjoyed by young and old alike. I find it encouraging to see that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well. Small business is the economic engine that drives our economy and a show that encourages entrepreneurship is just what we need to help build the economy of the future.

LISTEN.

My favourite podcast is *How I Built This with Guy Raz*. Guy interviews and shares the stories of entrepreneurs who built some of the world's best-known companies. Hearing how these innovators and dreamers took ideas and turned them into multi-million dollar businesses, while often overcoming seemingly impossible obstacles, inspires me to always be reinventing myself and thinking about what's next.



**DR. LIZA EGBOGAH
IS THE FOUNDER AND
OWNER OF DR. LIZA SHOES.**

READ.

I am reading *Unleash Your Primal Brain* by Tim Ash and *100 Things Every Designer Needs to Know About People* by Susan Weinschenk. I find it fascinating to learn more about the way people think and why they behave as they do. While certainly a personal interest, it is helpful for business. Subscribing to BoF (*Business of Fashion*) helps keep me up to date on what current trends are in the fashion industry.

WATCH.

I enjoy *90 Day Fiancé* and *Sons of the Caliphate*. When I watch TV it's primarily for pleasure and to relax, so I try to watch things completely irrelevant to my work life where I can completely escape.

LISTEN.

Collective Insights podcast by the Neurohacker Collective. This is an interesting podcast on how the mind works and ways to optimize the body and mind and lead a more fulfilling life.



Go deeper into why these ecommerce leaders draw inspiration and relaxation from their selections.

canadapost.ca/ReadWatchListen

READ.

I'm between two books currently, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* by Deepak Chopra and *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill. I try to switch it up and switch between something that inspires me personally with something that motivates me professionally.

WATCH.

I wish I had something more impressive sounding for this, but to be honest, I love a good horror movie! So anything scary on Netflix is usually a good idea for me. If I'm not watching a horror flick, my guilty pleasure is watching the *Below Deck* series (my secret dream is to be a chief stewardess on a luxury yacht somewhere in the Mediterranean, but for now I can live vicariously through the cast of the show).

LISTEN.

I work best when listening to music and think I may have listened to the entire Spotify library at this point. My playlist changes every day depending on my mood, and I love so many different types of music. If I had to choose some favourite genres, I would say 70s/80s classic rock (Fleetwood Mac, The Doobie Brothers, ELO, etc.); 90s pop and power ballads; as well as anything indie. ✦

**AMANDA BUHSE IS THE
CO-FOUNDER AND OWNER
OF COAL & CANARY.**





➤ CASE STUDY

Powerful pivot

Over Company combats shutdown thanks to new approaches, strong partnerships

It's not unusual for businesses to be launched because a creative person can't find what they need. They make something for themselves that the market is missing and, in the process, discover there's demand for their creation.

Sabrina Maulucci found herself in that position after her daughter was born premature and she couldn't find the right protective gear her tiny newborn needed. Inspiration struck and Maulucci created the "Over" – a breathable, lightweight fabric shield that covered her baby in her car seat and while she was nursing. Friends and family started asking where she got them and if she could make them one too. The Over Company was born.

As owners of a small business driven entirely by ecommerce, Maulucci and her husband, Michael Maulucci, signed up for Canada Post's free program, Solutions for Small Business™. "When we brought our shipments to the post office, we felt guilty because we held up the line for so long," Maulucci says.

After a few months of strong sales, they began working with dedicated Canada Post sales representatives to get strategic about shipping. "We realized we could get recurring scheduled pickups from our house, which honestly was a game changer," Maulucci says.

Five years into their partnership with Canada Post, they now ship 10 times as much per year and their products are available in more than 200 stores. Given the explosive growth, being able to lean on their shipping partner was critical. "We've been with Canada Post since Day One," Maulucci says. "And we really feel like they care about our business."

Canada Post representatives provide guidance on growth strategies for companies of all sizes. The Mauluccis worked closely with their Canada Post representative to enhance their company's returns policy and transitioned from a home-developed ecommerce platform to Shopify with the support of an ecommerce integration expert. They also enjoyed access to exclusive industry insights, relevant whitepapers and digital events to stay ahead of evolving customer needs.

Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the Mauluccis closed their small storefront permanently, but ecommerce sales made up the difference. May 2020 sales were higher than any month in the company's history.

That success required shifting priorities but they felt that Canada Post was invested in helping them execute their evolving ecommerce strategy. "When we think of Canada Post, we think how invested our sales reps have been in our business, especially during our growth and growing pains – and we are so grateful."

theovercompany.com





➤ CASE STUDY

Cooking up success

Targeted campaign proves successful for Doyon Després moving into home kitchens

When it comes to kitchen equipment, Doyon Després is well established in the industry. With eight locations in Quebec, the store supplies restaurants, hotels and commercial institutions across the country. From ovens to refrigerators, espresso machines to BBQs, the company has a mouth-watering selection of professional-grade equipment.

But their sturdy products serve the home cook, too, and that message wasn't getting through.

Customers recognized the brand, but they associated Doyon Després with the restaurant industry. How could they change that perception and drive retail customers in-store and online? Changing their marketing approach to include strategic use of direct mail proved to be the secret ingredient.

Previously, the company sent 450,000 flyers a year to neighbourhoods around their store locations, but they weren't seeing the results they wanted. After speaking with a Canada Post sales representative, they realized they needed to try something new. "We took their existing customer database and assessed their typical customer," says Christine Valin, sales representative. "Using those insights, and information from Canada Post's data solutions, we developed a targeting approach specifically for Doyon Després."

The company's marketing director, Stéphanie Cloutier, targeted homeowners in a specific demographic with an average income similar to their existing clientele. "Canada Post really helped us with data and figuring out which postal routes to choose to target our best prospects," Cloutier says.

They increased the distribution to 250,000 pieces per campaign season and at the end of a year, the results were clear.

In-store and online sales were up 35% over the previous year. In fact, online sales alone were up 193%. Sales of BBQs were up 36% and the company's Facebook followers jumped by 3,000.

The partnership with Canada Post also proved to be beneficial during the COVID-19 crisis, which took a toll on Doyon Després. The company's distribution centre, which supports residential and long-term care facilities as well as hospitals, stayed open as it was an essential service. But the retail locations were closed for weeks. "In our worst period, we went from 180 working employees to 32," Cloutier says.

And with restaurants forced to close their doors, some closed their accounts with Doyon Després.

Rather than pull back for the short-term, the company doubled down on investments for the long-term, opening a new location in Montréal and committing to marketing throughout the year. "We allocated more dollars to our campaign with Canada Post, to cover all regions where our stores are located," Cloutier says. "We'll be renewing with Canada Post for 2021, and we'll be adding more marketing dollars to direct mail."

doyondespres.com ❖



Emotional rescue

Sampler CEO draws leadership lessons from pandemic

Marie Chevrier Schwartz is unafraid to find lessons in difficult moments.

“When you live through a health crisis, an economic crisis and an overall challenging time, it makes you believe you really can get through anything as a team,” says the Sampler CEO and founder. “Obviously, I would have preferred this never happened. But it did, so chalk it up to experience and use it to make ourselves a stronger team and myself a better leader.”

Heading one of the country’s fastest-growing and most progressively minded tech companies, Chevrier Schwartz has taken those experiences and refocused her company – and herself – in new and unexpected ways.

When the world headed into lockdown, Sampler saw a huge surge in business. Obviously, brands could no longer do sampling on street corners and grocery stores, so they had to go to digital.



It’s a competitive advantage to be a good person.

— Marie Chevrier Schwartz,
Sampler CEO

But new business brought a need for new balance.

Like so many, her team was dealing with the personal tolls of the pandemic, from health concerns and homeschooling to information overload and isolation.

A transparent and empathetic leader, Chevrier Schwartz has been open with the public about her personal struggles. Here, she saw a chance to open a wider dialogue and create an open, safe space for her team.

“No organization can help 100%. But as leaders, our job is to serve the team. It’s so much easier to create a culture where someone feels safe lifting up their hand and saying ‘this is what I need’ versus me trying to come up with a yoga program or meditation program.”

In the early days of lockdowns, the team wanted to use what they described as the brand’s “superpowers” to help others. That desire ended in Sampler partnering with a fabric company to send packages to consumers with enough material to create 20 masks for themselves, their families or frontline workers.

“It was important that we show up and say this is how we do business,” Chevrier Schwartz says.

Showing up was an important sentiment when it comes to her team. “As our colleagues welcomed us into their homes via video conference, we have been given a unique window into the lives and challenges our co-workers face,” she explains.

“We learned a lot about each other and what we prioritize. We got to know each other, what’s going on in their lives. It’s crazy how much people have opened up. I am closer to people in many ways.”

That window into each other’s lives also revealed more than what people have on their bookshelves – it was a clarion call for a new way of working.

“We’ve learned that every organization needs to have a better marriage between personal life and work life. With that balance being different from person to person, we have to address that through pure flexibility. Be broad. Don’t be prescriptive. Lean on your team. You don’t need to come up with observations yourself.”

For example, Sampler created a committee focused on both internal and external solutions aligned with the organization’s values. “In every part of our business, we wanted to be able to show how we showed up with our values,” she says.

Part of that is a call for personal improvement: A need to be nimble, more iterative, more innovative, and, most importantly, more human with her team.

“It’s a competitive advantage to be a good person. People will ask about how to be a leader. I just try to stop and I think, ‘Am I being a good person right now? What would a good person do in this situation? What does my heart tell me?’ Leading genuinely and transparently is super important.”

[sampler.io](https://www.sampler.io) ↗



Key Takeaways

01

No company can help their employees 100% of the time – but always remain open to their needs.

02

Successful businesses know their core values and live them in good times and bad.

03

The greatest leaders lead with their hearts as much as their heads.

Find your inspiration.



Join Canada Post throughout the year as we bring together top retailers, industry experts and thought leaders from across the country to engage in meaningful conversations about ecommerce, marketing, small business, strategic sales and customer relationships.

Recent event topics have included:

- Retention hints to keep customers coming back
- Ecommerce strategies to outpace and outperform
- Integrated marketing to get results and drive sales
- Ecommerce leadership to provide the best shopping experience
- Secrets of direct mail marketing to reach new audiences

Join the conversation. Visit canadapost.ca/Events.



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