

# BUSINESS VOICE

HALIFAX'S BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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## Serving up success

Halifax entrepreneurs come out on top despite COVID-19



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Prioritizing safety and collaboration

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**12**  
*I had always had an idea to start a media company focused on branding and this kicked it into high gear."*  
— Ryan Williams, Ryan Williams Photography,  
Atlantic Live Stream and Unbound Media

**COVER STORY:**

# Serving up success

Halifax entrepreneurs come out on top despite COVID-19



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# CHAMBER EVENTS

For a full and up-to-date list of our Chamber events, please visit  
[www.halifaxchamber.com/events](http://www.halifaxchamber.com/events)

## MEET YOUR CANDIDATES

PRESENTED BY: NSAR

DATES: September 30 – October 9  
 Recordings available on the Halifax Chamber YouTube page

## CHAMBER GOLF CHALLENGE

PRESENTED BY: Chambers Group

**Health Plan**

DATE: Wednesday, October 7  
 TIME: 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
 LOCATION: Glen Arbour Golf Course

## CHAMBER 101

DATE: Wednesday, October 28

TIME: 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

LOCATION: Halifax Chamber office,  
 32 Akerley Blvd.

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: WEBINAR SERIES

SUPPORTED BY: Department of Labour  
 and Advanced Education

DATE: Starting Monday, October 19

TIME: 8:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

## SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

DATES: October 18 – October 24

WEBSITE: [HalifaxSmallBusinessWeek.com](http://HalifaxSmallBusinessWeek.com)  
 for details

## NETWORKING FOR SUCCESS

In-person and virtual

DATE: Friday, November 6

TIME: 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

LOCATION: Halifax Chamber office,  
 32 Akerley Blvd.

## SAVE THE DATE:

## WONDER WOMEN CONFERENCE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

## 2021 HALIFAX BUSINESS

## AWARDS

JAN. 28, 2021

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Chris Mann at [chris@halifaxchamber.com](mailto:chris@halifaxchamber.com)  
 to learn more about our opportunities.

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# Making magic happen

Sharing success stories of Halifax entrepreneurs

@prezhfxchamber



**PATRICK SULLIVAN**  
PRESIDENT & CEO

I know what you're thinking: Here comes another COVID-19-focused issue. From front to back, I will read story after story of perseverance, success and the dreaded unprecedented times. Well, I'm excited to report that, despite COVID-19 remaining an insistent reality, this issue is about our next steps.

The Halifax Chamber is here to support business in Halifax. Our members range from the smallest to the largest businesses and each and every one of them contributes to the growth and prosperity of our city. To grow, we need immigration and retention. To retain our immigrants and our youth, we need more businesses. It's a never-ending cycle that highlights an obvious solution: entrepreneurship.

Our city is bursting with new buildings, new businesses and new ideas. We have the Halifax Innovation District, Centre for Ocean Ventures and Entrepreneurship, some of the top universities in Canada, NSCC and countless other nationally recognized organizations that encourage students and individuals to venture out on their own. We're lucky to have so many organizations promoting and nurturing the entrepreneurial lifestyle. To drive the point home, we need to keep sharing stories of success from our local entrepreneurs.

For this issue, we've chosen four entrepreneurs from the tech industry, the events and arts industry and the hospitality industry. Each had a different experience building their business, growing their business, taking it online

**“** We want Halifax to be the entrepreneurial capital of the world — and that starts with us.”

and, for some, shutting it down over the last few months. During COVID-19, these were the hardworking folks who had looked at their business models and adapted them to an everchanging environment. That is the definition of entrepreneurship: predicting the future and making magic happen.

Being your own boss has its ups and downs, of course. But pursuing your passion, creating jobs and being part of the fabric of Halifax is possible. All that's left is taking that first step. We want Halifax to be the entrepreneurial capital of the

world — and that starts with us. Ask one of these organizations what they think of your idea. Build a business plan. Head to a potential financial partner. All of the best entrepreneurs will tell you that all it takes is a good idea. That couldn't be truer in Halifax; the infrastructure exists to guide you through each and every step.

We hope you'll enjoy our first print issue since April 2020. It's filled with advice on marketing, planning for the future, holding safe events, securing financial partners and entrepreneurial inspiration. Happy reading! ■

**WONDER WOMEN CONFERENCE**

**WELCOME BACK, WONDER WOMEN.**

**SAVE THE DATE**

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4**

**HALIFAX CONVENTION CENTRE**

**WWW.HALIFAXCHAMBER.COM**

# NEW & NOTED

We welcome our new Chamber members

## 1PET NUTRITION INC.

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BUSINESS & PROF. SERVICES –  
Import/Export/Trading

## AZTEK SOLAR LTD.

### **Brian McKay**

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[www.azteksolar.net](http://www.azteksolar.net)

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT –  
Energy Management

## BALANCE FITNESS

Balance Fitness is a gym that offers a team of dedicated personal trainers, group training instructors and experts in the field of exercise and health and nutrition support. We provide a unique exercise experience that is team oriented and focused on achieving your goals through education, commitment, dedication and good, old-fashioned hard work.

### **Erika French**

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[erika@balance-fitness.ca](mailto:erika@balance-fitness.ca)

[www.balance-fitness.ca](http://www.balance-fitness.ca)

SPORTS & RECREATION –  
Recreation/Sports/Fitness

## BLENDED ATHLETICS INC.

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### **David Rafuse**

580 Wright Ave., Unit 101  
Dartmouth, NS  
902-405-3580

[dave@blendedathletics.com](mailto:dave@blendedathletics.com)

[www.blendedathletics.com](http://www.blendedathletics.com)

HEALTH CARE – Health Club

## CANADA POST – GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

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BUSINESS & PROF. SERVICES –  
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## EXECUTIVE TOUCH CLEANING

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[airtight@tateengineering.com](mailto:airtight@tateengineering.com)

[airtightspaces.com](http://airtightspaces.com)

**EYE LEVEL LEARNING CENTRE**

Eye Level Learning Centre is the first centre in the Atlantic provinces. Our focus is to develop each child's critical thinking and analytical skills. We cater to students from Grades Primary to 12. We launched at 30 Farnham Gate Rd. in Clayton Park in September 2020.

**Manisha Talluri**

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[manisha.talluri@gmail.com](mailto:manisha.talluri@gmail.com)  
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EDUCATION & PROF.  
DEVELOPMENT – Education/Schools

**FANTASIE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

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ARTS, CULTURE &  
ENTERTAINMENT – Music

**FERVENTE CANADA**

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[yassermasmal@gmail.com](mailto:yassermasmal@gmail.com)  
SHOPPING & SPECIALTY RETAIL –  
Retail (General)

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**Craig Harris**

15 Camburhill Ct., Unit C  
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ADVERTISING, PR & MEDIA –  
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**HALIFAX BREAD FACTORY**

Halifax Bread Factory is an advanced commercial bakery in Burnside offering a variety of leavened and unleavened breads, flatbreads, sweets, cakes and pastries. We do both wholesale and retail. All products are baked on site. We use no mixes and no artificial additives in any of our baked goods.

**Hesam Shahravan**

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[www.halifaxbread.ca](http://www.halifaxbread.ca)  
RESTAURANTS, FOOD &  
BEVERAGE – Bakery

**HUDDLE.TODAY**

With reporters in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Huddle is a business publication that tells the stories of creative, innovative and interesting entrepreneurs working in the Maritimes. We are a news site and gathering place for people with ambition who, through their companies and communities, want to help build stronger economies. That includes owners and operators of businesses, people who work for them and people invested in the success of local companies and communities.

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ADVERTISING, PR & MEDIA –  
Advertising

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**Iona Stoddard**  
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OTHER – Individual Member

**KEILIN RAMIREZ REAL ESTATE****Keilin Ramirez**

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REAL ESTATE/CONSTRUCTION –  
Real Estate Residential

**LIFESHIELD**

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**Kyle Mohler**

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Halifax, NS  
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[www.lifeshield.ca](http://www.lifeshield.ca)  
SAFETY & SECURITY –  
Occupational Health and Safety

**NPOWER CANADA**

NPower Canada is a charitable organization that launches diverse young adults ages 18 to 29 into digital careers, while providing employers with a skilled, motivated pipeline of junior tech talent. Operating in Halifax, Calgary and Toronto, our program equips youth with no-cost IT skills training, industry certification, job placement and alumni education.

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**OT HEALTH INC.**

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**Marybeth Fleming**

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HEALTH CARE – Occupational Therapy

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At Plum Strategies, we work with organizations that come in all shapes, sizes and market caps and develop unique solutions that cater to each organization's individual needs. We use our knowledge of strategy, stakeholder engagement and online media, combined with communication skills and analytical abilities, to help shape how new and existing businesses grow. No matter how complex or high profile the relationships, we have the ability to build long-lasting partnerships to jointly explore and execute mutually beneficial interests that drive consistent results.

**Haley Brown**

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[www.pm-co.ca](http://www.pm-co.ca)

REAL ESTATE/CONSTRUCTION – Property Management

**REALGUARD CANADA**

RealGuard is a global provider of breakthrough technology embedded into innovative products, such as washable and reusable masks and gloves, scientifically proven to trap and destroy COVID-19. RealGuard solutions feature Livinguard Swiss Textiles and offer superior protection without the environmental impacts of disposable alternatives.

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[www.realguard.ca](http://www.realguard.ca)  
OTHER – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

**THE SUSTAINABLE SOCK CLUB**

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**Robert Hanlon**

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[www.thesustainablesockclub.com](http://www.thesustainablesockclub.com)  
SHOPPING & SPECIALTY RETAIL – Retail (General)

**THE SUTTON PLACE HOTEL HALIFAX**

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[www.suttonplace.com](http://www.suttonplace.com)

TRAVEL & TOURISM – Hotel/Motel

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**Bill Organ**

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[www.warehousetransport.ca](http://www.warehousetransport.ca)  
TRANSPORTATION – Logistics

**Are you a new member?**

To submit your 50-word description for New & Noted, please contact Mandi Bowser, Administrative Specialist, 902-468-7111 or [mandi@halifaxchamber.com](mailto:mandi@halifaxchamber.com) within the first six months of membership.

# MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

How our members are growing Halifax



## QEII HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE FOUNDATION WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT AND CEO

Susan Mullin returns home to Nova Scotia and joins the **QEII Health Sciences Centre Foundation** as President and CEO. After a national executive search over several months, Mullin was the successful candidate. A Mount Allison University graduate, she has dedicated her 30-year career to leading successful capital campaigns, major gift and annual giving programs in the health and higher education sectors. She was previously President and CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation, a full-service hospital serving York Region, Simcoe County and Muskoka in Ontario. Mullin received the Outstanding Fundraising Professional Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), Greater Toronto Chapter in 2010 for her contributions to the fundraising profession and breakthrough work. Welcome, Susan Mullin!

## OFFICE INTERIORS LAUNCHES ONLINE STORE

**Office Interiors** is excited to announce that we now offer an online store so that our customers can easily buy all of their office supplies (e.g. toner, ink, desktop printers, task chairs, ergonomic accessories) with the click of a button. Check out the new online shop at [shop.officeinteriors.ca](http://shop.officeinteriors.ca) and let us know what you think.



## NEW DOWNTOWN HALIFAX SPA CATERING TO 'MASCULINE' DEMOGRAPHIC OPENS

New Glasgow dealership owner Bruce Herron had been thinking about opening a spa for more than seven years and he finally did it. With a passion for customer service through his car business, Herron felt the need to create a "masculine" space for men to feel more comfortable getting treatments done. **The Highlander Spa** is located in downtown Halifax and has larger pedicure chairs for larger men.

It also has a barber station, individual televisions at each pedicure chair and a fully stocked bar, serving both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. The spa staff cleans and disinfects the building regularly while wearing masks, ensuring all safety guidelines are followed to make customers feel safe getting work done. Though The Highlander Spa has a masculine brand, women are more than welcome, too.

## FOOD INDUSTRY LEADERS BLOOM AT NEW GLOBAL KITCHEN FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The government is working closely with community-based producers and organizations, such as **Hope Blooms**, that will not only make our food supply strong and sustainable, but also create entrepreneurial opportunities for youth in the agri-food sector. With \$250,000 from Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency to Hope Blooms toward its Global Kitchen for Social Change, the new 3,000-square-foot commercial community kitchen will complement the existing Hope Blooms garden and

greenhouse, which are well established in the Halifax area. The new building will provide youth with the resources and space they need to create their agri-food social enterprise initiatives, as well as enable Hope Blooms to diversify its product offerings, build new sales relationships and identify new, innovative sales approaches. Newcomers and community members who have started their own food-related social enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures will also have access to the kitchen.



## PETER GREGG APPOINTED PRESIDENT AND CEO OF NOVA SCOTIA POWER INC.

Following a rigorous Canadian search that attracted a long list of high-calibre internal and external energy executives, Peter Gregg was selected as the next President and CEO of **Nova Scotia Power Inc. (NSPI)**. Gregg brings deep experience in the Canadian energy sector with a focus on energy efficiency, renewables and innovation. He is joining a strong team at NSPI that's committed to transitioning to a lower carbon future, while ensuring reliability, affordability and a superior customer experience for Nova Scotians. Gregg is currently the President and CEO of the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) in Ontario. He was attracted to this exciting opportunity because NSPI is recognized as an innovative and customer-centric utility with an impressive track record and plan for the continued transition to cleaner energy. Gregg will officially join the NSPI team in mid-November 2020.

## FEEL AT HOME IN *Nova Scotia*

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REALTOR® Member of The Canadian Real Estate Association and more.

## STRATEGY UP SIGNS PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF ONTARIO

As COVID-19 continues to challenge businesses in Canada and abroad, **Strategy Up** and The Chartered Institute of Marketing Management of Ontario (CIMMO) are teaming up to assist entrepreneurs to rethink their business model and their strategic plan. This achievement proves that Nova Scotia businesses are making an impact outside the province's boundaries, keeping up with the long-standing tradition of excellence of Nova Scotia businesses and their influence in Canada and abroad. As part of the partnership, Marc Zirka, CEO of Strategy Up, will be leading as CIMMO's Chief Strategy Officer.

## YMCA HIRES HEALTH, SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER

The YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth is pleased to announce Yasmin Mukhtar as their new Health, Safety and Compliance Officer. "Our YMCA remains committed to ensuring the health and safety of our staff, volunteers, participants, members and clients — and this has never been more important than now in this COVID-19 environment. We are very fortunate to have Yasmin jump into this position at this critical time in our history." Mukhtar will provide leadership to ensure that the YMCA's operational practices are compliant, staff are trained and the YMCA is adapting and adjusting their health and safety measures as the COVID-19 situation evolves, especially during this critical time of back to school.



## HELPING FEED LOCAL FAMILIES THIS FALL

### Pete's Frootique & Fine Foods

was excited to host the second annual Thanksgiv'er in support of Feed Nova Scotia. Working alongside Q104, Sobeys and the Cherubini Group, the event helped feed families in need this fall. Customers were encouraged to make food or cash donations in store or purchase a \$5 basket that will go directly to a family. Thanksgiv'er happened on October 8, 9 and 10. Q104 hosts were live from our Bedford location on October 10. Let's feed families together!

Visit [petes.ca](http://petes.ca) for more information.

## BIONOVA NAMES PITCH COMPETITION SEMIFINALISTS

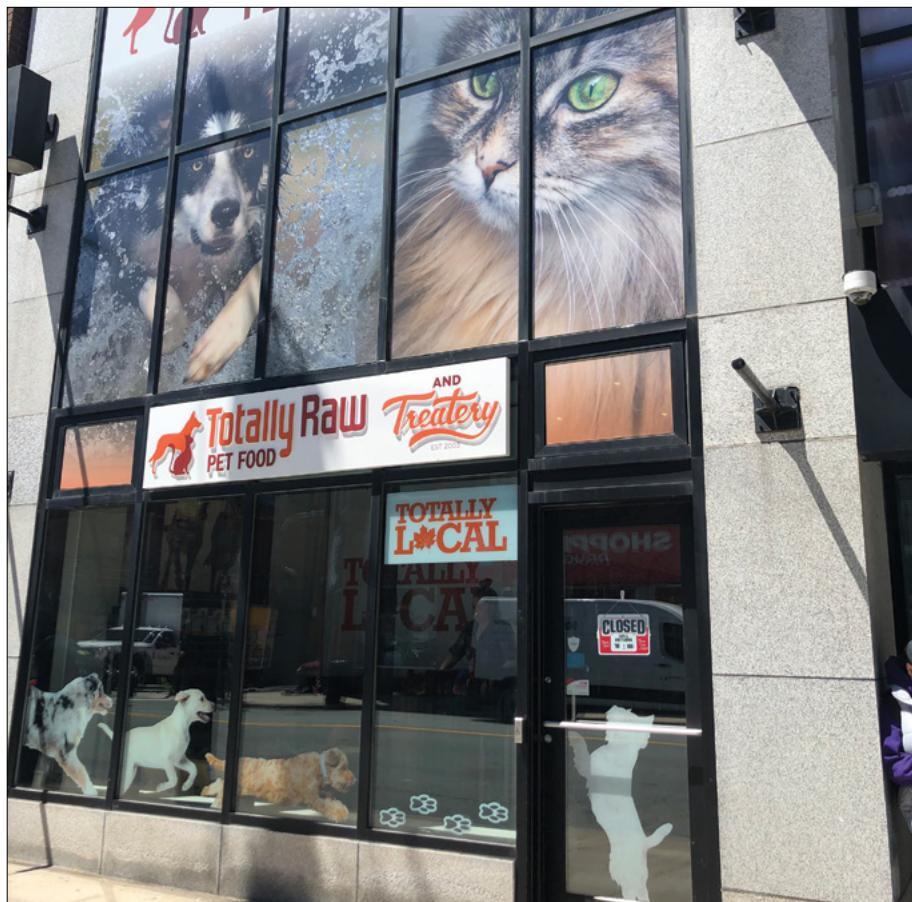
Eight semifinalists have been chosen to compete in the 10th annual BioInnovation Challenge (BIC), **BioNova's** regional health and life sciences business competition, which will be held virtually on November 3 and 4 during BioPort 2020. BIC is one of the longest running business competitions in the region, with more than 50 companies having gone through the program since 2011. Many of the companies coming out of the program have gone on to raise millions to grow and scale. ABK Biomedical, the first-place winner of BIC 2011, raised a record-setting US\$30-million venture capital round in 2019. Semifinalists will receive significant training to be positioned for business growth, including sessions with expert pitch training coach Linda Plano, who has more than 10 years of experience mentoring entrepreneurs with startups in life sciences. This year's winner will receive \$25,000 in funding to develop their business idea, as well as a package of support services and mentoring valued at more than \$30,000.



## ACCEL WELCOMES NEW PHYSIOTHERAPIST

**ACCEL Physiotherapy and Sport Performance Centre** is pleased to announce the addition of Physiotherapist Cassy MacGillivray to our ACCEL Dartmouth team. Since graduating from Dalhousie University in 2013, MacGillivray has attained advanced training in acupuncture, dry needling, concussion management, manual therapy and the certificate in sports

physiotherapy. She has worked with many sports, including Hockey Canada and Hockey Nova Scotia high-performance teams, gymnastics, soccer, basketball, cheerleading and is currently a dedicated therapist for the Dartmouth U-18 Major Hockey team and the Halifax Xplosion Women's Football team. MacGillivray is now accepting new clients into her full-time practice.



## TOTALLY RAW OPENS SPRING GARDEN ROAD LOCATION

We are pleased to announce the opening of the fourth Totally Raw store, which is in the heart of downtown Halifax. **Totally Raw Pet Food** manufactures and retails premium raw pet food, dehydrated treats

and natural supplements. Our raw food, treats and supplements have just the natural good stuff — no preservatives or additives — so pets can play harder and live longer.

## ATLANTICA HOTEL HALIFAX PROCEEDS WITH BIG RENOVATIONS

The **Atlantica Hotel Halifax** announced this massive renovation back in January, when things were much more normal in the world. When COVID-19 hit in March, the hotel management decided to push through. “He [hotel owner Sukhdev Toor] forged ahead and said now is the time and let’s not stop and keep the construction guys employed,” explains David Clark, Atlantica’s General Manager. Atlantica was built in 1974 and was due for a new look. The lobby will look completely different when renos are complete in a few months. Most noticeably, the bar, which used to be in the restaurant, will now be in the front lobby. All 240 rooms will have new flooring, new beds and new furniture. The bathrooms will also have a lot of work done. The huge renovation has been great for the local economy. There are up to 50 trade workers on site every day.

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# Serving up success

Halifax entrepreneurs come out on top despite COVID-19

BY SARA ERICSSON

PHOTOS BY DAVID GRANDY

Even in the midst of COVID-19, these Halifax entrepreneurs have forged ahead with innovative ideas and adapted to make their businesses come out on top. From left: Melanie Little, CEO and Co-Founder of vlife by Quantum Link; Moe Alhaj, Founder of G-Street Pizza; Ryan Williams of Ryan Williams Photography, Atlantic Live Stream and Unbound Media; and Joel Muise, Co-Founder and CEO of Tranquility.

The mark of an entrepreneur is someone who is able to work dynamically, anticipating hurdles before they appear and pivoting successfully when taken by surprise. While it could be easy to argue that COVID-19 has presented one of the biggest hurdles to business owners in modern memory, many Halifax entrepreneurs have proven amazingly nimble as they adapt to their respective new realities.

The pandemic has provided the opportunity for four such Halifax entrepreneurs to solidify their current offerings and even expand into others. If one really examines the situation closely, thinking of how an entrepreneurial mind works, it's clear this really is a perfect time for creativity and invention — driving innovators like Ryan Williams, Melanie Little, Moe Alhaj and Joel Muise forward on their journeys.

*Once I realized the scale of COVID-19 and the impact it would have on my business, I realized right away I needed to pivot.*

— **Ryan Williams,**  
Ryan Williams  
Photography,  
Atlantic Live Stream  
and Unbound Media

## ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPANSION

"I'm an entrepreneur and I'm getting to help other entrepreneurs improve their creative strategy and online presence, which will, in turn, attract them more customers. I don't think there's a better business I could be in right now," says Williams.

Williams went into COVID-19 with plenty of work at both of his companies, Ryan Williams Photography and Atlantic Live Stream. But as the events he was hired to capture were cancelled one by one, he decided to hit pause, take some time for his own professional development and refine his existing skillset, while learning new skills to add to his toolbox. "Once I realized the scale of COVID-19 and the impact it would have on my business, I realized right away I needed to pivot. I got certified to be a drone operator





just a few weeks into the pandemic and also started honing my editing skills for video. I wanted to come out of this period with something to show," he says.

Williams had begun shooting video over the last year and partnered with a friend on producing a video for Doctors Nova Scotia, which thanked people for supporting one another while following health guidelines during the pandemic. When the video got more than 200,000 views in 10 days, Williams saw how this was the perfect time to start his newest company, Unbound Media, which will create photo, video and creative strategy content for his clients and their brands.

Williams says his video going viral made him realize that content creation wasn't going anywhere, as many people were wanting to get their brand online more than ever as the pandemic gave

## COVER STORY



Joel Muise (left) and Moe Alhaj are in different industries, but they both have entrepreneurial drive in common.

**“We always prepare for the worst and will be sticking with all procedures and exercising caution. We won’t ease up, even if case numbers are low, because you never know.”**

— Moe Alhaj, Founder, G-Street Pizza

them time to pause, review their work and leave their nine-to-five jobs in favour of focusing on their own ventures.

"I had always had an idea to start a media company focused on branding and this kicked it into high gear," he says. With his mindset focusing on coming out of the pandemic stronger than how he went into it, Williams' work on expanding his offerings is something he suspects others have done as well. "Entrepreneurship is all about resiliency, pushing forward no matter what and adjusting when needed as you find ways to make it work ...," he says.

### PROFIT NOT THE ONLY PRIORITY

Adjustments of a different kind were made by Little at vlife, an online platform she co-founded with Riaz Khan. The platform — full name vlife by Quantum Link — features small, independent businesses in a virtual storefront (or v-store) that drives traffic to each business' website, all to encourage supporting local. Their platform is run as a social enterprise with a triple bottom line: people, planet, then profit.

After launching in December 2019, vlife first offered its providers a free trial with the intent to move into a paid

service in March. But when COVID-19 turned the world upside down, Little and Khan pivoted, deciding to delay revenue until the end of June and then re-evaluate. The platform has now transitioned to a paid service, costing \$30 per month, but will continue offering free services to their providers still recovering from COVID-19 losses before transitioning them to paid later.

"The pandemic has allowed us our first big opportunity to live our values, which are in the order of people, planet, then profit. It's one thing to say you're a social enterprise and another to live it. In a way, this is delayed revenue and is not ideal from a business point of view, but we don't look at things from just a profit point of view," says Little.

Despite the pandemic, vlife has expanded its client base earlier than anticipated and now promotes small businesses within the Halifax Regional Municipality and across Atlantic Canada. Little says she has been impressed by how quickly small, independent businesses have adapted to their customers' needs and feels grateful for the opportunity to work closely with them to keep followers aware of their offerings during



**T**It all happened overnight and we had to go from zero to 60 really quick.”

— Joel Muise,  
Co-Founder and CEO,  
Tranquility

that provides affordable, individualized virtual cognitive behavioural therapy to users on their smartphones or laptops as paraprofessional clinical psychologists (called coaches on the app) monitor their progress. Tranquility has grown to include six full-time staff, including Muise and Co-Founder Dr. Alissa Pencer, three contracted staff and seven coaches, who Pencer recruited from Dalhousie University’s clinical psychology and psychiatry department, where she is a senior instructor.

Muise says despite having just closed a round of funding in January and hiring three new staff just before COVID-19 hit, the team transitioned easily into working from home. Their challenge, according to Muise, was in accommodating an increasing number of new users, including health-care workers for whom the app was made free to access during the pandemic.

“It all happened overnight and we had to go from zero to 60 really quick. As hard as it was, I think long-term it was helpful for us as a team to go through this. We’ve come out of it stronger,” he says. Muise says research has confirmed the virtual delivery of the app is proving to be not only extremely cost-effective and accessible to users, but also comparatively successful to person-to-person sessions. The app continues to see success and is even coming out with a depression program in a few months.

#### IN IT TOGETHER

As Muise and his colleagues work to ready the app for its new users who are keen to sign up, they and their counterparts, Williams, Little and Alhaj, prove that another marker of being an entrepreneur is working hard at your business, while bringing others up alongside you. “Our mentality is that a rising tide raises all ships. If we work at this together, it could mean we aren’t hit as hard if this happens again,” says Little. ■

**C**Our mentality is that a rising tide raises all ships. If we work at this together, it could mean we aren’t hit as hard if this happens again.”

— Melanie Little, Co-Founder and CEO, vlife by Quantum Link

these challenging times. “We’re seeing a real resurgence of people’s interest in bolstering their local supply chain — and online is key to that,” says Little.

#### ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Alhaj, Founder of G-Street Pizza, says dine-out at his Gottingen Street restaurant became a no-go when COVID-19 descended in March, but the installation of new custom French-door-style partitions between tables has seen traffic increase over the summer. He says takeout orders of pizza and other menu items also decreased but are now relatively steady. And the restaurant pivoted to offer a new menu item during the pandemic: a make-your-own-pizza kit for customers to build and bake their own pizzas at home.

“The box has the pizza dough, toppings, cheese and sauce, along with directions on how to spread the dough, what to add, what temperature to cook it at and for how long. We launched this in March, when people were stuck at home, as an enjoyable thing to do with your partner or family while still enjoying pizza,” says Alhaj.

The ever-evolving health regulations have been no problem for the business,

which has always prioritized hygiene with strong precautions in place, like wearing gloves while handling food and frequent cleaning of all surface areas. Precautions have been added, like masks for all staff and customers and barriers between tables. Employees also have their temperatures taken each shift.

Alhaj says he feels such precautions will likely continue being necessary until at least next year or until a vaccine or other solution to COVID-19 is discovered. “We always prepare for the worst and will be sticking with all procedures and exercising caution. We won’t ease up, even if case numbers are low, because you never know,” he says.

#### TEAM APPROACH

It was Muise’s own personal dilemma that first inspired him to start his own company when his anxiety and depression were exacerbated by his career as a stock analyst. “I had trouble finding help within the system, but eventually found something online that was helpful. I wrote a blog about it that later went viral and that was a signal that there was a lot more here that needed exploring,” he says.

Muise is the Co-Founder and CEO of Tranquility, an anxiety therapy app



Photo provided by Discover Halifax's Meet Again Halifax campaign. Learn more at [meetagainhalifax.com](http://meetagainhalifax.com).

# Meeting again

Safety and collaboration top priorities in the events industry

By Sara Ericsson

**S**tephanie Purcell says 2020 is what starting at square one looks like for the event and meetings industry, which has been hit hard by COVID-19. The industry was the first hit and looked like it might be the last to recover, but the hard work put in by Nova Scotians during the early days of the pandemic has meant that things are now settling into a new normal. Small businesses are open, restaurants are serving their guests and people are beginning to meet again, slowly but surely, as we adjust to the current circumstances.

This move back to meetings is a silver lining for people like Purcell, Agent and Founder of VOX Management Agency, Jessica Muzzeral, Director of Sales and Marketing at the Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel, and Dave O'Connor, President of Glow the Event Store. They all agree that while things are not yet back to normal, they surely are on an upward trend. It's evidence of the remarkable strength of the industry and its members collaborating on the facilitation of in-person meeting opportunities for the rest of us.

"The professionals are still trying to figure it out. It's a big part for them to make sure that people want to show up and are comfortable going through all of these new practices. It can definitely be uncomfortable at some points — it's a new world for everybody — but people in our industry are talking about this one on one every day and they are doing it together," says Purcell.

## COLLABORATION IS KEY

In a regular year, Purcell and her team at VOX would work alongside event planners as they booked talent for events and helped in the consulting of existing industry protocols to ensure the proper planning of an event. But when COVID-19 changed things, it "put a hard halt on the industry," according to Purcell. "It changed everything for everyone and created a whole new set of guidelines to follow that were never a necessity before."

Despite it being old hat for industry professionals to self-educate on protocols, Purcell says relearning what

The following businesses are members of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and are also involved with the Meetings and Events Coalition of Nova Scotia:

- groundSOUND Inc.
- MacFarlands Events
- eSource
- Scanway Catering
- Kitchen Door Catering
- Basil Audio-Visual
- ZedEvents
- LimeLight Group
- Kelly Clark Photography
- FMAV
- Crescendo Events Limited
- Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel
- Lord Nelson Hotel
- Taste of Nova Scotia
- No Time for That Anti-Bullying Society
- Fox Harb'r Resort
- Brookes Diamond Productions
- Glow the Event Store
- White Point Beach Resort
- East Coast Music Association (ECMA)
- Grey Sea Artist & Event Management Inc.
- Global Convention Services
- Dalhousie University
- The Westin Nova Scotian
- Many Hats Workspace
- Culture Link CIC
- Golden Dog Productions

planning parameters now exist has been challenging, as changes are constant as COVID-19 evolves. This is what inspired Purcell to team up with her industry colleagues and form the Meetings and Events Coalition of Nova Scotia, bringing the industry together and starting conversations on how to safely resume meetings and events. She says it has also started a dialogue in the media, with health stakeholders and within businesses and has fostered cohesiveness within the event industry itself.

**C** It's easy to say 'no,' but you see businesses opening up and following the rules. This can be done for events, too."

— **Dave O'Connor,**  
President,  
Glow the Event Store



Dave O'Connor believes the events industry can make a speedy and safe return as long as collaboration and support are prioritized.

"I've never seen so much togetherness and strength in our industry as I have in pulling this group together," she says. Purcell hopes this coalition helps to highlight what she says should be a collaborative approach between the industry and the Nova Scotia Health Authority in the creation of public health protocols that will keep people safe, but also allow the industry to start back up again in Halifax.

"It's really important for us to get people back to work. This [pandemic] is going to be with us for a while, so we have to start putting protocols into practice as we settle into this new normal," says Purcell. "If we don't start coming back, we could lose venues, professionals will move on and so will Halifax's artists. We have a strong event culture here and a great place to meet, so let's do what we can to not lose that."

#### LET THE PROFESSIONALS LEAD

Meeting venues have also been hard at work, implementing public health protocols and arranging meeting rooms to accommodate social distancing so that the city's business community can start meeting in person again. Hotels have always facilitated meetings and events in Halifax, according to Muzzeral, who says such booking represented 30 to 40 per cent of the hotel's business before the pandemic.

Muzzeral says meetings also made up a similar percentage of the city's economy, as visitors go to restaurants, work at coffee shops or frequent and support other small businesses, most of which stopped completely when the pandemic first hit. "We saw a near 100 per cent drop of events happening at the hotel. ... But we were able to focus on getting people to rebook rather than cancel, which ensures they come back to Halifax and back to the hotel," she says.

Muzzeral says the most important factor in facilitating meetings is ensuring that people feel safe and comfortable when meeting in person, as they see that proper protocols are in place. This, in turn, ensures that Halifax can get back to business and that its downtown area can start welcoming meetings once again.

For anyone wondering what space to book for their meetings, Muzzeral says hotels remain among the best hosts, thanks to their teams of professionals. "We have safety protocols in place through Marriott's Commitment to Clean program and follow public

health guidelines. We have done all of the legwork for businesses and planners to make it a seamless planning process in hosting your meeting here. It makes it easy for them and also safe for attendees, so everyone feels comfortable," she says.

#### SUPPORT ENSURES SUCCESS

Collaborating with fellow coalition members was a positive experience and reprieve from the negativity surrounding COVID-19, according to O'Connor, whose business has also had to adapt so it can continue to supply events safely. That initial negativity has waned, adds O'Connor, who says he's noticed the tides beginning to turn. "We've got a long way to go, but are we better than we were in the spring? One-hundred per cent," he says.

O'Connor says his business also had a strict cleaning process for inventory before and after events, even before the pandemic, but that a new elevated approach has since been put in place that goes above and beyond public health protocols to ensure not only the inventory's safety, but that of event guests who interact with it.

"A lot of things that people are doing at their place of business are also easily doable out at an event—and we are here to supply what is needed to make that happen," he says. "We have stanchions to direct crowds, signage, personal protective equipment and many other things that can help event planners ensure a safe and rewarding event for all."

O'Connor says he and other coalition members have not only gotten word out that meetings and events can now happen safely, but they have also taken the lead to come up with a new way of doing things. Glow, for example, now supplies mobile sanitizing stations for events and has invested in new lines of products that are geared toward social distancing rather than crowds. He says this can-do attitude will be key in continuing to foster the feeling of safety at events and to encourage more support from government and other organizations toward a return to meetings again.

"We have to find a way to say 'yes, we can' rather than 'no, we can't.' Could we be going faster towards a return to meeting in a controlled, safe way? I do believe so and this is where we need the government's help. It's easy to say 'no,' but you see businesses opening up and following the rules. This can be done for events, too," says O'Connor. ■



Liam Hennessey/Applehead Studio

*We have done all of the legwork for businesses and planners to make it a seamless planning process in hosting your meeting here. It makes it easy for them and also safe for attendees, so everyone feels comfortable."*

— Jessica Muzzerall,

Director of Sales and Marketing,  
Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel

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# Focusing on the future

Events East Group using COVID-19 as a time to plan ahead at Halifax Convention Centre **By Sara Ericsson**

**C**arrie Cussons knows she's not alone in thinking times have been tough in 2020. She is the President and CEO of Events East Group, the team that manages and operates the Halifax Convention Centre. It was a booming few years for events in Halifax, an industry that in a normal year totals \$115 million and more than 1,000 jobs.

It's apparent this industry, next to small business owners, has been hit hardest by the new reality of COVID-19, for which procedures necessary to curb the pandemic's spread meant any live event slated to run after mid-March was cancelled. Cussons says the year "hasn't gone exactly to plan," which is a sentiment shared by nearly all of Halifax's business community. It's been a year that no one could see coming, but one that has left no one untouched.

But there is some comfort to be found in that, as Cussons says, since

Nova Scotians and the businesses they own and work for have shown remarkable adaptability in coping with the circumstances, as well as creativity in finding new ways to move forward in spite of the pandemic.

"We had a very busy calendar of events — particularly national and international ones — which, of course, has been impacted by COVID-19. ... Our community and industry have been deeply impacted by COVID-19," says Cussons. "But as Nova Scotians and as an industry, we're strong and resilient. I know we'll be back to hosting those events and visitors from away as soon as the time is right."

## BACK TO BUSINESS

Cussons says that despite the pandemic creating a "strange and challenging time" for business, she and her team have been taking the time to regroup and plan ahead as the world gradually begins

to settle into this new normal. "We have tried to stay focused on the future. Our sales team has been hard at work securing events for 2021 and beyond and continuing to maintain strong relationships with our clients," says Cussons.

The event operations team at Events East Group has established a number of new and enhanced health and safety protocols at the Halifax Convention Centre, which are based on public health guidelines and ensure the safety of staff and guests during events. And all of its meeting rooms are set up to enable physical distancing so events can continue within this new COVID-19 landscape.

Cussons says there are also several new health and safety protocols that have been put in place around the Halifax Convention Centre's food and beverage offerings to ensure this can also be safely delivered. "We have a talented in-house food and beverage team who

have full control over safe food preparation and handling and already have a rigorous food safety and cleaning plan in place. We're looking at fun, creative ways to help people navigate our space using directional arrows, signage and, of course, our team, so that our guests can get to their meeting space safely and efficiently," she says.

"We're also working with event organizers to help them clearly communicate key information to their delegates prior to the event so we can ensure they've completed self-assessments and can do contact tracing if needed. And, of course, contact tracing and self-assessments for our staff and suppliers will be mandatory prior to coming in for a shift."

### FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

The importance of getting people together for meetings is something that event industry members can't overstated. It's also something that people are reminding themselves of after months spent social distancing at work and spending free time within small family bubbles.

Since it's something that venues like the Halifax Convention Centre and countless others have proven can still be done safely and securely through adherence to public health guidelines, it's another box we can tick showing our new normal is beginning to look more like the old normal — albeit with face masks and hand sanitizer.

While social distancing is still in place, large events will slowly start picking back up and, with them, the local economy, which eventgoers, in turn, stimulate as they grab a bite to eat or visit small businesses. And that important role played by this industry couldn't happen were it not for facilitators like the Halifax Convention Centre, which host the key events that draw people to this city, according to Cussons.

"We really believe our convention centre is a platform for driving research and innovation and making connections. Those connections extend to our local universities and research institutions, our businesses and our community overall," she says. "We measure our success based on the economic and community impact we drive through the events we host, which is why we're so focused on bringing a strong, diverse lineup of regional, national and international events to Halifax again as soon as the time is right." ■



Events East Group President and CEO Carrie Cussons says that while the event industry has been the hardest hit by COVID-19 changes, she is confident it will gradually bounce back.

*We measure our success based on the economic and community impact we drive through the events we host, which is why we're so focused on bringing a strong, diverse lineup of regional, national and international events to Halifax again as soon as the time is right."*

— Carrie Cussons, President and CEO, Events East Group

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# A new equation

The bottom-line impact of partnerships



**LINDSAY CROSS**  
DIRECTOR OF BRAND  
AND PARTNERSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT, CUA

I've always appreciated the rightness of math, especially the moment you know your answer is undeniably correct. The check mark evokes equal parts satisfaction, relief and closure and it offers us permission to move forward. As it turns out, however, not all math is created equal and, in business, there is a growing case to adopt a new equation:  $1+1=3$ .

I promise that's not a typo.

I remember the first time I heard it from Marie Mullally, CUA's President and CEO. It not only described the topic of partnerships, but also my own philosophy of adding value through collaboration. Given CUA's place in the financial services sector, I recognize the irony. Still, I hope you'll consider looking at your current business and strategic plans through this lens.

## THREE QUESTIONS

Whether you have lived in a household with a four-year-old or are leading a business with \$4 million in annual revenue, you have likely invested heavily in answering the question "Why?"

For organizations, it generates a shared vision of desired impact, inspiring a rallying cry to remind us of our daily mission. It brings life to our values, making clear what they look like in the delivery of our promise to clients, colleagues and communities. There's a reason Simon Sinek's Start with Why book went viral; it's the best question to ask first.

This article, however, isn't about that question. You know your why, which is the reason you may be feeling a "potential-actual" gap. Your bottom line has potential and you may be focused on finding a solution that your business can implement on its own. While there is always value in looking inward when asking "What's getting in the way?" new math also asks, "Who else would benefit from solving this problem?"

The thing getting in the way might have little to do with your core products and services. It could be an issue with how they are perceived, purchased and implemented.

## A FOCUS ON PURCHASING

Within the context of the provincial economy and consumer spending patterns, it is critical to inspire Nova Scotians to spend with intention here at home. In recent months, the call to buy local is on high rotation from elected officials, public and private-sector champions, as well as experts in sustainable development. Simply put, the value of a dollar depends on where it is spent and the impact of every dollar is amplified when directed to a Nova Scotia-owned business.

Regardless of the product or service being purchased — a heat pump, a mountain bike, home renovations or groceries — the decision often boils down to a buyer's perception of quality, convenience, choice and cost. And when it comes to cost, how it is positioned can be a game-changer.

## BITE-SIZE BUSINESS

According to the 2019 Canadian Financial Capability Survey, nearly three-quarters of Canadians leverage debt as a way to smooth out their spending. Consumers have largely adopted a buy now, pay later approach to big purchases like houses, cars, furniture, appliances and education. Why not offer the same for products and services offered by Nova Scotia businesses?

The question "What's better: paying for something upfront or paying over time?" is best answered with information about the buyer, their current situation

and the impact of the purchase on their financial health. If paying now is the only option, it becomes a question of available cash, credit or savings. It also becomes a question for a buyer and their banking provider.

As a business owner, it's impossible to predict (and rather uncomfortable to advise) what's best for your customer. This is why partnering to offer both a pay now and pay later option can benefit your bottom line.

## MAKING IT EASY

The Nova Scotia economy needs us to step up and think outside the box. If we want people to choose Nova Scotia-owned businesses, I believe we must go further than telling them how to spend. As business leaders, let's explore what's getting in the way in order to identify potential partners and a path forward. Two partners can create mutual benefit for themselves, as well as benefit for their shared customer. That's  $1+1=3$ .

It's a model we've adopted at CUA and it works. As a financing partner of EfficiencyOne and dozens of businesses in the energy-efficiency sector across Nova Scotia, we're enabling homeowners to easily and affordably invest in energy-efficient upgrades. It's a simple referral to a trusted partner. Everyone stays in their lane and delivers their why with their what to their who. It's a model that can be applied across all sectors to close the gap, maximize impact and realize our collective potential.

Having a financing partner is just one example of how you might benefit from looking beyond the borders of your business to change your balance sheet. As a member of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce, the potential for partnerships is limitless. Together, we can make it easier to say "yes."

CUA is a full-service banking provider to 20,000 individuals and small businesses across Nova Scotia. To reach Cross, email [lcross@cua.com](mailto:lcross@cua.com).

# Leading through chaos

Plans are useless, but planning is critical



**MATT SYMES**  
CEO, SYMPPLICITY DESIGNS

What is your plan for 2021? Do you have a forecast? A recent poll of business owners found more than 80 per cent don't have a 12-month plan. They just deliver to whoever calls.

It seems futile to think about planning for 2021 with the uncertainty of COVID-19. Will there be a second wave? Will customers come back? Will exports to the United States continue to be viable? Can you hire workers who will show up? Will there be enough access to funding and capital to keep the doors open?

There's also the reality that 75 per cent of businesses are open, but only a third are back to pre-pandemic revenue levels. Most business owners feel safer and more comfortable turning to what they know: doing their day-to-day work and focusing on the projects in front of them. That's the worst thing you can do and a risky way to run a business, especially during a pandemic.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander of the Allied forces during the Second World War, put it this way: "In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." You don't make a plan to be right. You plan so you can look at multiple scenarios, decide on the likely scenario and curate the confidence to act. Planning is not about being perfect. It's about being directionally right and ready to learn as you execute.



*You can't run a great business without a great plan and you can't develop a great plan without a disciplined planning cycle."*

We recently surveyed a group of small and micro-business owners. We asked them if they had a 12-month plan, including the following: Did they know the financial return they wanted to make? Could they explain that plan through the number of services they would offer to different clients? Less than 20 per cent had any part of that plan in place.

Most smaller businesses don't have a plan. How do they develop one? The framework is easy. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What revenue and return do you want next year?
- What products or services will allow you to achieve that revenue?
- Do you have enough clients who want to buy those services?
- Do you have the capacity (i.e. skills, hours and production capability) to deliver those services?

An excellent 12-month plan considers the financial return, the product/service mix for the return you want, the sales and operational capability and the resources to make it work. It's a bonus if you also consider cash-flow projections.

As you work through the levels of your business, you're going to see things in a new light. The market may not be big enough. We may be serving too many of the wrong customers. Perhaps we don't have the production capability or maybe we don't have enough of the right skillset to serve the customers we want.

This is iterative. It requires multiple

edits. Your first draft won't add up. That's OK. Go through it again and again until it adds up and you're directionally confident. Remember: the plan is useless, but planning is critical. The great organizations stop every 90 days, take stock of what they've learned and go through this planning exercise. They leave with a forecast for the next rolling 12 months and a 90-day plan to work in the business, on the business and from a resource standpoint.

You can't run a great business without a great plan and you can't develop a great plan without a disciplined planning cycle. The world is always changing. What your client values today changes tomorrow. The way you deliver that value is changing even faster. The great organizations are able to adapt. And they can adapt because of their planning cycle. The military calls it "battle rhythm." We call it the calendar of commitments.

In moments of extreme chaos — and COVID-19 counts as extreme chaos — the rate of change can feel paralyzing. Most organizations freeze. The great organizations, by contrast, increase the cadence of meetings and focus on the gap between the plan and actual. They learn. They adapt. They create a new plan and then they execute.

As we move through a world in chaos this year, it has never been more important that you know your plan — and that you have a way to update that plan as you learn more.

# A better way to resolve grievances

Improve your labour relations climate while saving time and money



**JARROD BABOUSHKIN**  
CHIEF CONCILIATION AND  
MEDIATION OFFICER, CMS

Most unionized workplaces have grievances filed from time to time. Collective agreements are complex legal documents and there are bound to be disagreements around interpretation of language and varying points of view on workplace incidents.

So, what happens if an employer and union don't see eye to eye, but don't want to pursue the time-consuming and costly option of arbitration? Grievance mediation, an informal and without prejudice approach to dispute resolution.

A report from The Conference Board of Canada entitled *Staying Out of Court: Alternative Dispute Resolution as a Business Tool* states that alternative dispute resolution (ADR), such as grievance mediation, can lead to significant savings in time, money and interpersonal relationships. It goes on to say the results from ADR are "often immediate and dramatic."

Grievance mediation involves using the services of a professional mediator to help solve the problem. The mediator works as a neutral third party and keeps the process flexible, informal and creative. This means they are not on the side of labour or management in a dispute. The mediator has no stake in the outcome and their only motive is helping the employer and the union come to an agreement they both can live with, without harming their relationship.

The Conference Board of Canada's 2016 Industrial Relations Outlook featured a spotlight on dispute resolution services in which management representatives "highlighted the importance of discussions with the union and grievor,



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**“Believe it or not, grievances can actually be good for the labour-management relationship if they are handled correctly.”**

including face-to-face meetings, and creating opportunities for frank conversation between the parties." Management respondents also indicated that "making use of mediation ahead of the arbitration process is helpful not only in resolving disputes, but also in terms of minimizing costs."

In a grievance mediation, there are no rules of evidence, calling of witnesses, cross examinations or other elements generally included in arbitration. The intent is to find solutions that satisfy the interests of both parties, rather than having someone outside decide and impose an outcome. However, if the mediation is unsuccessful, arbitration is still an option for the dispute.

Believe it or not, grievances can actually be good for the labour-management relationship if they are handled correctly. They can provide an opportunity to problem solve and develop consensus around an issue, making for a stronger relationship and potentially clarifying collective agreement terms. To gain the most

benefit from a grievance, both labour and management should be willing to think outside of the box and be open to compromise and creative solutions that may not have been previously explored, ideally through mediation.

Sitting down and talking through issues with a neutral party allows for time to consider solutions that might otherwise be overlooked. Mediation lets participants craft mutually agreeable outcomes that are more durable and reflective of their day-to-day realities. No one wins, no one loses and everyone compromises, which can really help the relationship and the labour relations climate of the workplace over the longer term.

CMS has a variety of free-of-charge programs and workshops available to assist labour-management groups, including grievance mediation. To find out more, go to [novascotia.ca/lae/conciliation/](http://novascotia.ca/lae/conciliation/), email [conciliation@novascotia.ca](mailto:conciliation@novascotia.ca) or call 902-424-4156.



# WORKING FOR YOU DURING COVID-19

\*Numbers accurate as of August 2020



Our office closed  
to the public.



Our office reopened.

We worked from  
home with no  
interruption for  
our members.



## NOVA SCOTIA BUSINESS & LABOUR ECONOMIC COALITION

We created the Nova Scotia Business & Labour Economic Coalition (NSBLEC). Made up of over 135 organizations and representing over 200,000 workers, the NSBLEC met three times a week for real time policy making with all three levels of government to better support our business community.

### Guests on the NSBLEC call included:

- Andy Fillmore, MP for Halifax
- The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade
- The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages

- The Honourable Geoff MacLellan, Minister of Business
- Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Nova Scotia
- Mayor Mike Savage



Navigating COVID-19 Webinar Series:

**86** free webinars  
**2,400+** attendees



**13,600+**  
hits on our COVID-19  
Resources webpage.



**70+**  
M2M offers to encourage  
supporting local businesses.

**89**  
NEW  
members  
joined.





# TRESPASSING ON RAILWAY TRACKS IS DANGEROUS

Always keep a safe distance from trains.  
Occupying railway property and tracks is illegal.

Everyone's safety depends on it!

## ##### DID YOU KNOW? #####



The average train needs at least 2 km to stop



Trains can often appear slower and farther away than they actually are



Today's trains are remarkably quiet and you may not hear them coming

See something unsafe?  
Say something!

Call CN Police at 1-800-465-9239

[www.cn.ca/railsafetyweek](http://www.cn.ca/railsafetyweek)