



Business Strategies and Financing Opportunities for Downtown Merchants

Working with Business People to Achieve More

Understanding the complexities and current challenges of the retail sector is not an easy task. Small business owner's are working in the face of tougher competition and constantly changing customer demands which are unprecedented.

Pierre Cliche is a business and retail consultant who can help local businesses

- Learn more about "Big Box" retail players and how to compete successfully
- Develop a short and long term strategies to manage business change
- Find new approaches to deal with management issues
- Analyze past performance and make plans to reach new goals
- Improve upon employee-customer relations

Susan Fournier is the Executive Director of Valley Heartland Community Futures who can help local business owners tap into funding opportunities:

- Learn about how you can qualify for non interest bearing loans for façade improvement, building retrofits and expansion
- Find out about cost sharing opportunities for interns or seasonal employees
- Access professionals who can provide you with training and learning opportunities.



Pierre Cliche - Retail Consultant/Personal Coach

He understands how hard everyone works and is no stranger to hard work himself – when he first started in the corporate world it was at the bottom – collecting trash and mopping floors. Over the years he rose up the corporate ladder of K-Mart, where he found success and eventually went on to open his own whole sale business. After years of hard work he sold his company and retired. Ultimately he decided that the retired life was not for him, which is when he decided to get into the lecture circuit as an effort to help small business succeed.

Pierre has visited out Town many times over the past few weeks, sometimes he toured the Town with Chamber members or Town Council and other times he came on his own and observed the events, people and businesses in town. He has made some first impression observations, it is not his aim to bash or to make anyone feel bad, but to simply share his thoughts and tell the truth.

Start from today and move forward – it doesn't matter what other towns are doing, all that matters is what we do. Carleton Place has a lot of great things going for us and some not so great things.

First Impressions:

EMC – this week's EMC (weekend of June 23/24) it was easy to see that Carleton Place has the monopoly on events and good press in the paper. We have to brag about the good stuff and keep pushing all of our attributes if we want to attract more people to our Town.

Restaurants – there are so many great restaurants in town and these needs to be promoted more.

Growing Population – we have a growing population and with this means more revenue.

Interest – there is not enough when you first drive through town. There needs to be better business signage and more exciting window displays. People are visual and need to be distracted by something when they are driving down the street. Trees, sidewalks and lamps will also help with this.

Promotional – There needs to be more advertising in the downtown of events – Father's Day, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, Back to School, etc. these are all “events” that occur in people's lives and businesses should be taking advantage of them. There needs to be a visual aspect to the Downtown – banners advertising everything, Pierre sighted the Dolytech Traffic study of 8,000 cars that drive down the street every day – we need to find a way to “distract” the drivers.

Mississippi River – this is a huge asset to the Town that a lot of other town's would kill to have, but we are not making the proper use of it. 3,400 people living on the Lake - we need to find a way to bring them to the downtown. If we can get them to boat right into town, then they will eat and shop and without a car there is no option to go to the box stores. Restaurants could offer specials to draw in that customer base. We could potentially draw 300-400 boaters downtown.

Arts – are promoted well throughout town.

Events – There are a lot of events going on all over town and they are not being properly promoted or capitalized on by the merchants on Bridge Street, On-line promotion is not enough, it alienates a lot of people that are not tech savvy.

Sports - there are all kinds of different sports clubs and events in the town (hockey, curling, paddling, etc.) and we need to develop a system to bring them downtown. Suggested renting school buses to transport people – market the downtown as a fun and exciting place to go.

Highway Signs – not sufficient enough to direct people downtown and advertise what we have to offer – BIA is having new downtown directional signage made and working to promote Lanark County Directional Signs to the membership.

Parking – no parking meters, this is a great success. Why should people pay money to come downtown and spend more money? This should be highlighted and promoted as much as possible, as it works to our advantage. 8,000 people drive through town every day, need to distract them into parking and exploring the downtown.

Shopping Hours – inadequate. In order to grow and foster new business everyone needs to support one another. Cannot keep lowering business hours. By decreasing business hours and not being open at night, you are handing your business over to the box stores – you have to fight back; Thursday and Friday nights are a great time to stay open later, even if it is just a few hours. The Royal Bank and Scotia Bank have evening and weekend hours because the clients wanted and needed it, so they accommodated them – this is the same thing all of the box stores on McNeely are doing, accommodating their clientele. By not being open you are losing business and providing free advertising for the box stores – you are sending them your customers. Pierre put out a challenge to the downtown businesses – try to be open Thursday and Friday. You have a specialty and possess the knowledge of products that you will not find at a box store, up sell this! No one will mind paying more for a product if they receive service and knowledge – box stores cannot compete with this. Everyone has to agree to participate in this, otherwise it is a waste of time – people will not like that one or two places are open and everything else is closed, it will make them angry and frustrated.

40 retail and 21 restaurants = 61 service/customer oriented businesses in the downtown – if 100\$ were spent during 3 hours of nighttime hours for 52 weeks – that would bring approximately 2 million dollars of revenue to the town. By doing a little bit more you can get a lot more and most importantly take business from the box stores.

Motorcycle/Car Show/Teddy Bear Picnic – there were hundreds of people in town for this and no one was open, this is very poor business. The BIA and Chamber work hard to promote the businesses and the downtown, so there needs to be some give-back from the businesses, who should be working harder to promote themselves.

What you can do:

- Services – small business can offer services that the box stores cannot and you have to promote this, anything that gives you an edge is a tool that you should be using. Ex. If you do alterations for free- this is a service that the box stores cannot offer and people will come to you because of it. Box store service is simple; need something, their open, its quick and easy.
- In order to maintain this edge you need to develop a customer fact base – what are your top five customers? They are the people that are going to help your business grow and thrive, offer them promotions, call them when new merchandise comes in, etc.
- Have promotions and offer discounts – don't give a percent off, Sears has ruined this for every business. Instead offer value – everything on this rack is 20\$ or less or for higher end customers and merchandise everything on this rack is 100\$ or less – show the value to your customers.
- Work with other businesses and offer shared discounts.
- Offer free gift wrapping at holidays.
- Call your suppliers and see what they can give you – even if it something small like a free paint stir stick, people will be happy.
- Trade Shows – these are important – everyone always say the same thing “I don't have the staff” well get the staff because if you are not attending at least 5 trade shows in the area, then you are not properly marketing yourself.

Conclusion

In the final chapter of his book *Business Strategies for Downtown and Rural Merchants* Pierre questions the business owners, which are meant to help the owners evaluate themselves.

How much inventory do you have in your store?

If the business you did last year is smaller then what you have there is a serious problem.

Divide sales by inventory – if this number equals less then three, then you have a lot of work to do.

If you are not as excited about your business as you were when it first opened then you need to rethink and renew.

Try harder – this is the only solution to making your business better. Winning is the only option.

Things can change in a second – one gesture can change a view in multiple ways, but people have to communicate and work together to support one another.

Pierre Cliche Final Assessment

One week after his original presentation Pierre Cliche returned to our town for a wrap-up meeting, which included; The BIA, The Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor, Town councilors and town employees. He discussed his first impressions on the Town and what he thought we could be doing to not only attract more people downtown, but to make Carleton Place a destination that people from all over will be talking about. We discussed some programs and strategies that we can be using to increase and enhance the downtown. The main message that Pierre wished to convey was this—Working together we can achieve great things.

We do a lot downtown—What do you do?

The BIA in conjunction with the Town of Carleton Place have been working hard on the revitalization of the downtown.

The BIA works hard to plan and organize events that bring business from the community and many tourists downtown—what do you do to support this and promote your business? These events are a good opportunity to increase your customer base and attract more business to your store.

The BIA is the leader in marketing and promotion in Carleton Place; promoting the downtown in 100 mile radius—what do you do to promote your business? Do you advertise in the paper? Do you have a website? There are many opportunities in the area for marketing yourself, you have to take advantage of them.

The BIA and the Town support the beautification of the downtown; by hanging baskets, planting planters, the LED winter light display, purchase of bike racks and benches—all of which add to the charm and beauty of our downtown—what do you do to keep your store looking its best? There are many small things that you can be doing to make your business look its very best—ensure the entryway is clean, get rid of unsightly weeds, keep windows and doors clean, remove old advertisements and tape. By making your storefront beautiful you will attract more clients.

The Town of Carleton Place maintains the street and ensures that crosswalks are in place so that people can freely cross Bridge Street—what are you doing to promote your business to pedestrian traffic?

The BIA and the Town have a façade improvement program in place to help the businesses downtown revitalize their storefronts with funding available to aid with expenses—have you ever thought about applying to renovate your storefront? A fresh coat of paint, a new door or new windows go a long way to attracting people to your store.

The BIA, the Town and the Chamber of Commerce have been working hard to have new directional signs erected on the highways, the trails, Market Square and the boat launch; all of which will point people towards our amazing downtown for shopping and dining—have you considered directional signage of your own? Lanark County offers a signage program that is easy and affordable (all information is available at the BIA office).

Why should the Town spend all of this money on the downtown revitalization if the business are not going to be doing their part? In order for the downtown to succeed everyone needs to work together.

Valley Heartland - Community Futures and Development Corporation

Valley Heartland Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) is a community-based organization dedicated to stimulating job creation and economic growth through business and community development. Funded by FedDev, Valley Heartland CFDC assists small towns and rural communities to strengthen and diversify their economies. We achieve this by:

- Providing support and access to capital to the business community
- Partnering and coordinating community action

What is a Community Futures Development Corporation? CFDCs are community-based, not for profit organizations that are each run by a board of local volunteers. They are staffed by professionals who encourage entrepreneurship and the pursuit of economic opportunities. Through FedDev the Government of Canada provides funding, advice and support to 61 CFDCs located throughout rural and Northern Ontario, which are amongst nearly 300 nation-wide.

Eastern Ontario Development Program Overview

Local Initiatives Projects are intended to support “community economic development” that is incremental and made in partnership with local Municipalities, or not for profit organizations that strive to enhance the economic development efforts of the municipality. Eligible projects may include, but are not limited to community strategic planning, tourism events, marketing or promotional events.

Community Innovation & Capacity Building Projects are intended to strengthen communities by supporting projects that are incremental, address local needs and priorities which result in long term benefits including job creation, economic diversification, and enhanced business competitiveness. Projects must demonstrate significant direct or indirect impact on the enhancement of local business and/or the community as a whole. Projects must assist and impact business job creation and job creation and maintenance. Applicants must demonstrate support from partners in the private sector, community organizations, municipalities, and/or the provincial government.

Business Development

Business Planning Projects: will assist entrepreneurs who require a full and properly developed business, export and/or marketing plan in order to ensure all aspects of the business proposal have been properly investigated, issues understood and potential problems considered.

Skills Development Projects: will assist and encourage training of employees of for-profit businesses to enhance the skills set of those employees, provide transferable skills to the employees, and contribute to the overall strength of the work force capabilities of the area. The eligible activities for the program include on-the-job or classroom; in house or out sourced training, new or existing employees.

Youth Internship Projects: provides recent post-secondary graduates with valuable skills from full-time work experience in business and economic development with the objective of leading to longer term employment in Eastern Ontario. Preference will be given to graduates in fields of economics/business development, telecommunications, sciences and technology.

Innovation & Information Communications Technology Projects: will assist and encourage innovation and technology initiatives which enhance business development opportunities in the knowledge based economy. Eligible for assistance are non-profit organizations, legal commercial entities including individuals, corporations, partnerships, co-operatives or trusts, and; and, groups or alliances of those described above where a lead recipient has been identified.

Collaborative Projects

Projects that stimulate business development and community innovation opportunities by promoting economic development leading to a competitive and diversified regional economy within Eastern Ontario. Projects must demonstrate direct impact on job creation or maintenance, and involve investments from two or more CFDCs. It is expected collaborative projects will result in a greater number of strategic development initiatives and improved partnerships to benefit Eastern Ontario.

For further information or for inquiries, please contact:

Susan Fournier Executive Director

Tel: 613-283-7002 or Toll Free: 1-888-784-7605 Fax: 613-283-7005

Email: susan@valley.on.ca

OR

Judy Rogers Loans Officer

Tel: 613-283-7002 ext. 105 (888-784-7605) Fax: 613-283-7005

Email: judy@valley.on.ca