

A RESOURCE FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES



Volume 18 Issue 2

- A MINUTE WITH MAYOR KEVIN GIBSON
- PREPARING FOR THE CORONAVIRUS
- THE LATIN-AMERICAN POWER
- STORIES IN NIAGARA COMING THIS SPRING!

A photograph showing a DJ setup. In the foreground, there are three computer monitors displaying DJ software interfaces. One monitor has a blue screen with the text 'Dave & Ti 5.19.19'. Above the monitors, a large digital sign displays the 'SPIRIT OF SOUND' logo with the subtitle 'DISC JOCKEY SERVICES • EST. 1980'. The background shows a dimly lit event space with stage lights.

SPIRIT OF SOUND

**Multi-operator DJ service firm celebrates 40 years
of serving Niagara's entertainment needs.**



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Let's Get Social



A WORD FROM MARILYN

Closing The Gender Gap

Dear Business Link Readers,

This month, I was privileged to be invited by City of Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti to attend a leadership breakfast on March 5th celebrating International Women's Day.

Entitled "Breakfast with Bright Minds," this very special event featured a prominent keynote speaker – the Honorable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the current Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

During her speech, Dowdeswell spoke in a clear gentle voice – but tone was strong and engaging. Like other members of the audience, I was riveted by some of the sobering statistics Dowdeswell had to pass along. For example, Canada has a long 150-year history. During that time, however, there have only been 11 female premiers – and only 18% of our mayors have been female.

"Canada needs 164 years to close the gender gap," the Honourable Dowdeswell admitted.

To make matters worse, two thirds of all human trafficking violations are taking place in Ontario, and one in three Canadian women have been experiencing domestic violence during their lifetime.

Clearly, women have been underrepresented throughout our history and are continuing to face challenges, stereotypes, discrimination and threats to their personal safety to this very day. As we celebrate International Women's Day, it's important for us to keep these inequities in mind and work hard to build a better future for ourselves and our children.

In Niagara, there are thousands of successful women who come from many walks of life – whether it's managers, salespeople or entrepreneurs. All of them are making a substantial contribution to the fabric of life and showing a strong determination to beat the odds.

Have you overcome inequality in your life and work? How are you making a difference?

Please share your stories with us! Let's steer the change separately and collectively!

*Yours in business,
Marilyn Tian M.B.A
President & CEO
Business Link Media Group*

Have any questions or comments? Please feel free to email me at marilyn@businesslinkmedia.com.



BUSINESS LINK MEDIA GROUP

STORIES IN NIAGARA COMING THIS SPRING!

New tourism magazine will be a comprehensive guide to the Niagara experience and the perfect advertising vehicle for leisure and commercial-oriented providers.

BY SCOTT LESLIE

Due for release in the spring of 2020, Stories in Niagara is a convenient and fascinating guide to all the things to see and experience in Niagara. In addition to spotlighting Niagara's 12 communities, our magazine will focus on the region's world-class attractions and points of interest with maps, directories and event listings.

Stories In Niagara is also the perfect advertising vehicle for a whole host of leisure and commercial-oriented providers. That includes:

- hotels, restaurants and conference centres
- theatres, golf courses and shopping destinations
- wineries, breweries and tour operators

This glossy perfect bound magazine offers full, half and quarter page ad spaces. Stories in Niagara is also bilingual, featuring English and Chinese translations. Approximately 10,000 print copies of Stories in Niagara will be circulated to major hotels and trade shows in Niagara, the GTA and China. Digital copies will be available online and promoted worldwide via our Business Link Media Group mobile app and other promotion channels.

Whether you need to target tourists, conference attendees or business professionals, Stories in Niagara is the ideal medium to reach millions of prospects worldwide – and open their eyes to all the excitement your products or services have to offer.

Want to learn more? Call us today at 905.646.9366 to reserve your ad or contact Marilyn Tian at marilyn@businesslinkmedia.com.

WE HAVE SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE!

BY SCOTT LESLIE

When you go out to a restaurant, one of the most popular items on the menu is the buffet. Why? Because you're always guaranteed to find something you like – no matter what your taste or preference. The same is true when you're looking for the perfect company to serve your every marketing and advertising need...

A company called Business Link Media Group.

If you're not familiar with Business Link, we originally opened our doors back in 2003. Back then, we were largely known as a traditional publisher. But a lot has changed in the past 17 years! Today, Business Link Media Group has grown into one of Niagara's premier multi-media firms providing a wide range of robust marketing, media and special event solutions.

While we still maintain our strong legacy in print with publications like Business Link Magazine, HWS Magazine and Made In Niagara Magazine – that's only 10% of our business! These days, 70% of the services we offer are digitally based. That includes our:

- Online media centre at www.businesslinkmedia.com.
- International hub at www.ib2bl.com.
- Social media channels on Twitter and Facebook, LinkedIn
- Business Link App for mobile devices.
- Digital publications at Issuu.com.
- Email marketing.
- Google SEO service.

In recent months, we've also diversified our marketing services to give our clients even greater exposure – both locally and internationally. In addition to our long running BizConX Niagara Networking meetings (842 members and counting!) since 2012 and 40 Under Forty Business Achievement Awards in Niagara (2004) and Hamilton (2012), we now have our:

- Made In Niagara Mission Trip to promote Niagara
- International Art Tourism Festival & worldwide conferences
- Video production and promotion in various tourism networks.

We take great pride in being able to offer so many flexible marketing options to our clientele. But in the end our targeted publications, services and special events all have one goal in mind – and that's to grow your business and the Niagara we call home.

Let's build our success together.

THE CORONAVIRUS:

What Employers Need to Know as they Prepare to Respond

BY LEANNE STANDRYK

The World Health Organization has declared the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV/Coronavirus/COVID-19) a global health emergency. The public health risk associated with COVID-19 in Canada remains low risk. Still, with 27 confirmed cases in Canada and 18 in Ontario, employers should inform themselves on how to respond to potential exposure in the workplace. The following provides preliminary guidance.

Information is Knowledge - Ensure that your employees understand the symptoms and risks of COVID-19 published by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Public Health Agency of Canada. Symptom awareness will aid in prevention.

Prevention is Key - Inform employees on how they can reduce the risk and spread of infection. Encourage employees to wash their hands prior reporting to work and throughout the day with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. They should avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth, and stay home if they are sick. When coughing or sneezing, they should cover their mouths and nose with their arm or tissues to reduce the spread of germs and immediately dispose of used tissues followed with a hand washing/sanitizer. Consider providing hand sanitizers in the workplace. Increase the frequency of office cleaning procedures (i.e. disinfecting equipment, workstations and surfaces).

Consider mandatory reporting by employees expected to travel to jurisdictions considered high-risk or hotspots. Travel Health notices are regularly updated by the Public Health Agency of Canada. You may request that employees who voluntarily travel to high risk areas not report to work for a period of post travel isolation. Consideration must be given to an employer's human rights accommodations, work from home arrangements and eligible leaves of absence.

Report and Respond - Require employees who are sick to stay home - similar to circumstances where employees present flulike symptoms/contagious health concerns. Provide employees with information about the availability of sick leave, family responsibility leave, sick pay, access to short term disability benefits or other paid leaves of absence.

Workplace Occupational Health and Safety - Employees concerned with exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace may exercise their right of work refusal as contemplated by the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). Employers that receive a work refusal must comply with their obligations under the OHSA including investigation and an attempt to find a satisfactory resolution, failing which they must notify the Ministry of Labour.

Human Rights - Employers have a statutory obligation to provide a workplace that is free from discrimination or harassment. The Human Rights Code (HRC) defines disability broadly, which includes "any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness." During the 2003 SARS outbreak, the Human Rights Tribunal confirmed that SARS fell within the definition of disability and deserved protections afforded by the HRC. To date, no such determination has been made by the Tribunal concerning COVID-19. However, given the declared global "health" emergency, we expect the Tribunal to respond in a similar fashion.

Employers are required to respond to individuals with Coronavirus with individualized accommodation plans as contemplated by the HRC.

Workplace Insurance - The Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA) provides compensation to employees who suffer a personal injury or illness arising out of and in the course of their employment and where a worker suffers from and is impaired by an occupational disease that occurs due to the nature of one or more employments in which the worker is engaged. If an employee is infected by COVID-19 during the course of employment, one may expect a WSIA claim evaluated by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board in a similar fashion to claims made during the 2003 SARS outbreak. The Board has not yet provided a position statement on the treatment of Coronavirus.

Privacy and Confidentiality - Employees have a right to confidentiality as it relates to their confidential health information. This privacy right competes with the Employer's obligation to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker. A careful balance must be struck between these competing rights and we recommend that you seek proper counsel from your legal advisor.

Practical Steps and Direction - Communication is the key. Provide employees with information about symptoms and risks. Communicate proper prevention. Communicate your workplace leave policies and procedures. Enhance workplace cleaning procedures. Consider hand washing signs. Update emergency contact information and confirm with your employees that you will handle confirmed instances of the Coronavirus with the utmost concern for confidentiality and compassion.

To read the complete article, please go to <http://lbwlawyers.com/lawyers/leanne-e-standryk>. **BL**

Leanne Standryk is a senior partner within the Lancaster Brooks & Welch LLP, Labour & Employment Department and may be contacted at 905.641.1551.

LEANNE STANDRYK is a senior partner within the Lancaster Brooks & Welch LLP, Labour & Employment Department.

When you need support in a labour or employment legal matter, it is good to have someone who can navigate the law and represent your interests.

Call Leanne
at 905-641-1551



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MANAGE THESE THREE TENSIONS FOR A HEALTHY TEAM

Embrace Change And Preserve Stability.

BY TIM ARNOLD

Imagine you have a meeting coming up where you and your teammates will gather to discuss the upcoming quarter. Which scenario feels most likely to occur in your current work environment?

1. You're dreading the meeting because you don't always feel like you can trust your teammates, and you fear you'll get thrown under the bus if you let your guard down. Innovation and creativity are stifled, and overall, people are just focused on completing their work, rather than achieving excellence.

2. Everyone is nice and feels like they belong – but when you're all in a meeting it feels like an echo chamber. Without diverse opinions, you're doing the same things simply because it's how you've always done them. Expectations are sometimes clear, but not always.

3. You have fun together, and feel safe bringing your true self to work while thriving in a culture of high performance. People are challenged to develop and grow into their best selves in a guided, healthy way.

If you're like most professionals, you can identify with aspects of each of these scenarios. At some point in your career, you've likely felt the frustration of working in a culture like scenario #1 or #2 and have felt a longing to experience the collaborative power of scenario #3.

You've searched everywhere for the solution. You've listened to podcasts, read the bestsellers and tried to implement their promised quick fixes. Yet, this hasn't worked because the reality is there are no easy answers. In fact, when it comes to team effectiveness, it is less about a silver bullet solution – and more about identifying and managing three unavoidable tensions.

The three tensions that you'll find on every team are:

1) Acceptance and Accountability - Over-focusing on accountability results in a culture of micromanagement and fear. Over-focusing on acceptance results in people not being challenged to be their best. Finding healthy tension between accountability and acceptance is the path to a culture of productivity and trust.

2) Working Collaboratively and Working Independently - Over-focusing on collaboration results in people not having the freedom and recognition needed to thrive. Over-focusing on working independently results in silos, disconnected parts, and a divided culture. Finding healthy tension between collaboration and independence creates the kind of alignment that is needed to win!

3) Task and Relationship - Over-focusing on task accomplishment results in people feeling like they are just a cog in a machine. Over-focusing on workplace relationships results in a lack of focus and deadlines being missed. Finding healthy tension between task and relationship is a winning combination that maximizes engagement.

At Leaders for Leaders, we've seen these three tensions make or break every team we've worked with – from small tech startups to the United Nations. Once your team stops ignoring or avoiding these tensions, and instead understands and leverages them, everything starts to change. Your team starts to work! **BL**

Tim Arnold is passionate about helping people understand the chronic issues that limit leadership and teamwork so they can thrive. He is the author of the book *The Power of Healthy Tension* and speaks to organizations across the globe on how they can overcome chronic issues and conflicting values. Go to www.leadersforleaders.ca.

MIN

MAX

SALES

***“We’re different...
I promise, we’re different!”***

BY BRETT MEADOWS

How many times have you told a prospect that you and your company are different from their current supplier? Well, it's time for you to prove it!

Make a list of everything that you say is different about your company, your product and your service that your competition does not say they do or have.

All right – let's get at it. Start that list...

What nothing yet? Alright - let's make this easier for you. Name one thing that you claim to have that your competition won't say they have...

- Great quality? They say that.
- Great service? They say that
- Great delivery? Yup, this one too
- Great people? Uhh yup even this one.

Time to get real. If you think any of those separate you from the competition, you have some serious work to do. Here are a few painful questions:

- What's different about what you offer?
- What's different about what your brochure say?
- What's different about the creativity in your approach or ideas?
- What's different in the ordinary things you do?

If the customer doesn't see any difference between you and your competitor, all that's left is "price." And "price" is always the wrong answer. If you sell lowest price, there's absolutely no loyalty. The next salesperson who happens to walk through the door just one penny lower takes your commission away. Lowest price also means lowest profit.

If you're a salesperson, you have many opportunities to be seen by your prospects as being different. Here are the big three:

- 1) How you present your product or service – the difference the prospect perceives between you and the others he has seen.
- 2) When something goes wrong, differentiation is the key element. In today's world, with all the lousy service out there, just something "above-mediocre" will get attention.
- 3) You, the salesperson and your ability to show the prospect that you're actually different through your daily actions, communications and ability to create real value for the prospect.

Stop telling me - and show me! **BL**

Brett trains, coaches, and speaks to salespeople all over the country. For more information on seminars and training, call the friendly folks at Meadows Performance Sales and Strategy at 289.696.3605, email info@brettmeadows.com or go to www.brettmeadows.com.



Difficulty and Distress in Small Business: The Symptoms

BY TOM ONICH

Understanding the distressed business is the starting point for prevention and cure. And the fundamental key we can learn from such understanding is causality.

From decades of business experience, I have seen that while fortune, luck, and happenstance all matter, none of these suffice to explain business decline. This is especially evident when we see very similar cases where one business fails, and the other does not.

In fact, the cause or root of business decline or failure most often lies in a failure to embrace a true culture of performance management.

A company that has embraced such a culture will be less likely to encounter problems. It is also resilient and will recover quickly from mishap, mistake or misadventure.

A lack of performance management is often indicated by a lack of critical thinking, slack corporate discipline, and negative or destructive behaviour. At some point in time, these things become pervasive and deeply embedded. And in this environment, few if anyone will challenge the culture. This fear and negativity become a cauldron that produces denial – a creature of infinite resource.

It is my personal estimate that at least 30% of businesses are at least beginning a decline at any given time. Many of these will deny their condition until forced by the actions of creditors.

In this environment, control, planning, measurement and accountability become mere abstract thoughts. The vignette below is an actual case that I worked on. Certainly, this was about as bad as it gets. However, I have seen many in this condition.

- This business was comprised of a group of four nursing homes. This was a fairly large group with over 400 beds and 500 employees. The company had lost over \$7-million on revenues of \$25-million the previous fiscal year.

- Predictably, liquidity was abysmal and the company was facing over 40 demands from unsecured creditors in addition to the secured creditor. Quality of care – an important measure – was poor. The company was in danger of losing its license to operate because of this.

- Accounting had broken down completely. Monthly financials were no longer being produced, there was no budget process, existing data was often wrong, and given the lack of information operations were ignored.

- Employee turnover was high, exceeding 100% in some categories. In some cases, there was sabotage of the building and equipment.

- The owners still had grandiose plans for expansion even though it was difficult to provide food to the residents.

It is worth taking a look at this snapshot in terms of control, planning, measurement and accountability.

The basis for these is the availability of financial data that is accurate, relevant, timely and reliable. And in this case almost no information was available. Importantly, management was no longer credible as a leader in a situation where leadership was sine qua non for a turnaround. This company had almost none of a performance management culture.

Within nine months using a Chapter 11 proceeding, we restored profitability and established a new culture. In my next article, I will address how any company can change its culture to one of performance management. **BL**

Tom Onich BBA, CTP is president of TCMI which provides a variety of services to companies facing difficulty or distress. For more information, please call Tom at 905.687.2119, email tonich@turnaroundinternational.com or go to turnaroundinternational.com.



WOMEN IN STEM

BY N'ORA KALB

As we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th – a day that has been celebrated for over a century – it seems like a good time to raise an important issue. After all this time, women are still not equally represented in STEM fields. STEM is comprised of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, and according to Statistics Canada, in 2016, women held only 23% of Canadian science and tech jobs among 25 to 64-year-old Canadians.

At Innovate Niagara, we work with entrepreneurs and small businesses developing new innovations. A lot of those innovations are STEM-related. We looked at our ratio of female to male clients (that is, founders of innovative companies) and about 27% have founders or senior leadership made up of a mix of men and women while only 15% are female-only led. We want to see more female founders in Niagara!

Why is it important to have more women in tech fields?

1. Those fields (especially engineering and computer science) are the highest paying and fastest growing jobs. If women are more equally participating in those careers, we can help close the gender wage gap.

2. We are all impacted when there is a lack of diversity in designing and developing new technology. Without diversity in these fields, we may miss out on designing solutions that work for a diversity of people.

3. There is a labour shortage in fields such as computer science – why not tap into the other 50% of the population?

So why don't more women go into STEM fields?

We've teamed up with the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce's Women in Niagara Council to bring Women in STEM events. In January, we had Dr. Kira Lussier, a professor at the Institute for Gender and the Economy, talk about her studies on gender diversity.

As Dr. Lussier discussed, the lack of gender diversity is due to a number of factors. There are unconscious biases which impact girls' and women's decisions on what they want to study and workplace socializations that make it unwelcoming for women to have STEM careers. We end up with less women entering STEM fields, and those that do, drop out at a greater pace than men.

Dr. Lussier explained that, unfortunately, there isn't an easy fix to close the gap, but offered a few solutions:

- 1.** Remove biases in hiring practices.
- 2.** Mentor girls and expose them to potential STEM careers
- 3.** Become more inclusive in our workplace policies.

At Innovate Niagara, we want to create a space for women in STEM – for those working, studying or just interested in STEM to have a community of other women and men that is a positive, encouraging environment. Subscribe to our mailing list and stay tuned for more STEM events to grow your network of STEM "femmes"! **BL**

N'ora Kalb is Director of Operations at Innovate Niagara. Subscribe to the mailing list and find other events at innovateniagara.com

SPIRIT OF SOUND INC.



Multi-operator DJ service firm
celebrates 40 years of serving Niagara's
entertainment needs.

PROVIDED BY SPIRIT OF SOUND INC.

Spirit of Sound was founded in 1980 by Joseph Petriello. For approximately 18 years, it was primarily operated by Joseph with the help of his friend Tony Boccia and his older brother Tony Petriello. When Tony Petriello and Tony Boccia moved on to other careers, Joseph was faced with a dilemma because Spirit of Sound was in high demand and recognized as a clear leader in the entertainment field.

That's where Spirit of Sound's current owner, Vinny Severino, entered the picture. At first, Joseph was reluctant to add new personnel and tarnish the brand. But Vinny assured him not only would the brand not be tarnished – Spirit of Sound would truly begin to flourish.

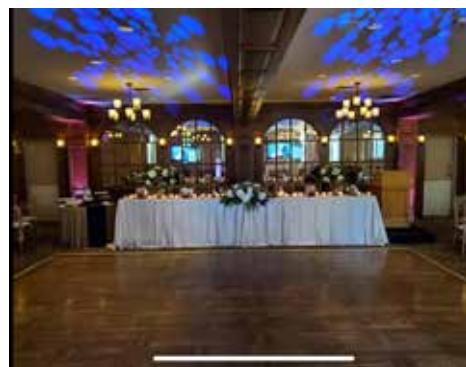
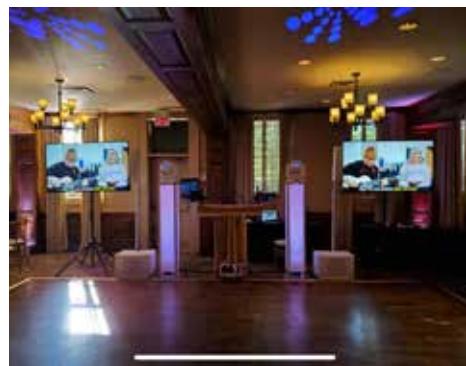
Vinny and Joseph became partners, standardizing everything from BPM training to music history and event coordinator training as well as MC training. The signature Spirit of Sound interactive style that would soon take the Niagara region by storm. Within three short years, Joseph's perceived gamble resulted in the largest multi-op in the Golden Horseshoe area, employing 18 fully trained personnel. Years later, Joseph would retire from the business and many of the

employees went on to different careers. Vinny was now left with a decision – how could he continue with little to no staff? The decision was simple. He would follow the company's core beliefs of being "professional, interactive, innovative leaders in professional entertainment."

Vinny went on to completely transform the image and presence of Spirit of Sound, exceeding the current standards and setting a new standard in true Spirit of Sound fashion. Spirit of Sound became the first company in the Niagara region to not only offer "DJ Décor" but DJ Décor that's completely customizable to their clients' vision and match the theme of the event. This meant tables that were able to be colour matched, themed or even branded to a corporate image. They could also be additionally infused with Jammtext – a very unique program that is designed for video events, displaying a QR code, email, hashtag or cell number to engage the audience to participate. Customers can make requests from the comfort of their seats or even send selfies and messages can be displayed on screens after they've been approved by the DJ.

Vinny would add new solutions that can play audio – as well as video. He also introduced full light programming that provide shows that have never been seen before in the Niagara region. This wasn't enough, however. The most important component was still missing – the talent. Vinny would end up growing the professional staff at Spirit of Sound into an absolute powerhouse. His team now consists of a lighting designer, a sound engineer, a video editor, a graphic designer, a video mapper, club DJs, remixers, a resort DJ, a destination DJ and producers. They all truly bring a multitude of skill and experience to Spirit of Sound.

That brings us to Vinny himself who has been part of the in-



dustry for over 32 years now. He has also been the Niagara Chapter Vice-President of the Canadian Disc Jockey Association (CDJA) for two terms, Niagara Chapter President for two terms, National Vice-President for one term, and has been newly elected as the Chairman of the Board.

The Spirit of Sound Difference

There are many benefits to hiring a multi-operator DJ service company like Spirit of Sound compared to a small sole-proprietor DJ service. These advantages include:

- Confidence in their standardization of service
- Trained experts in the DJ, event planning and coordination fields
- In the event of a staff illness, a client is guaranteed the same level of service due to the standardization of training throughout the company.
- Back-up equipment with a wide variety in order to provide optional extras that will enhance any event
- Proper liability insurance and music licensing via Connect/AVLA
- Affiliated with the CDJA to promote the highest level of professionalism in the industry
- An attention to detail and care at every event. Spirit of Sound has an office administrator and music director that report directly to the owner to ensure consistency and the highest level of professionalism to each client.
- Going above and beyond in terms of the professionalism and standardization they provide. Clients will also enjoy the personal approach of Spirit of Sound. Their staff have many years of knowledge and will guide clients every step of the way, answering any questions they might have about any aspect of their wedding or special event.
- Back-up power for outdoor events
- AV services for corporate clients
- Event-specific planning that addresses corporate clients' needs with regards to live entertainers, pipe and drape services, projec-

tion services, gobos, company logos and sound/lighting requirements

- Vinyl covered dance floors
- A Wedding Walk of Fame - a Spirit of Sound original.

The most important elements of any successful event are the food and entertainment. At Spirit of Sound, they recognize the importance of the entertainment, which is why they deliver the highest level of professionalism and commitment to ensure every function is a guaranteed success. When booking with Spirit of Sound, their clients always enjoy total peace of mind.

40 Years and Counting!

This year, Spirit of Sound is proud to celebrate their 40th anniversary in business – and it's an incredible milestone. Many DJ service companies have come and gone over the past four decades. But Vinny Severino and the entertainment experts at Spirit of Sound continue to raise the bar and look forward to providing their valued clients with the highest standard of professional entertainment for many years to come.

If you're looking for a multi-operator DJ service company that's a cut above the rest, the choice is simple. It's Spirit of Sound – "Professional, Interactive and Innovative Leaders in Professional Entertainment." **BL**



To find out more about Spirit of Sound, contact their team today at info@spiritofsound.ca or call 905.227.9840 to schedule a consultation where they will provide you with additional information.

The Cutting Edge



THRILL OR THREAT?

AI robot Sophia is taking the world by storm with its lifelike appearance and surprisingly human qualities.

BY SCOTT LESLIE

Sophia is just four years old – but she's already been covered by the worldwide media and taken part in countless high-profile interviews. She's even met Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Amina J. Mohammed and been named an official citizen of Saudi Arabia.

For the uninitiated, Sophia is an artificially intelligent (AI) human-like robot developed by Hanson Robotics – a humanoid robotics company based in Hong Kong. But Sophia is hardly your stereotypical robot with metal gears and herky-jerky movements. In person, Sophia is a delicate-looking woman with soft porcelain skin, doe-like eyes and high cheekbones that would make any runway model envious.

Sophia was born – or to be more precise “activated” – on February 14, 2016.

Designed to look like classic Hollywood film star Audrey Hepburn, Sophia is a wonder in many respects. She has sophisticated cameras in her eyes that enable her to see. With her computer algorithms, Sophia can recognize faces, maintain eye contact and even process speech so she can have a regular conversation with her human counterparts. Sophia has already been interviewed worldwide, appearing on such programs as 60 Minutes and The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. Two years ago, Sophia was also upgraded with functional legs so she can now walk around like a normal person.

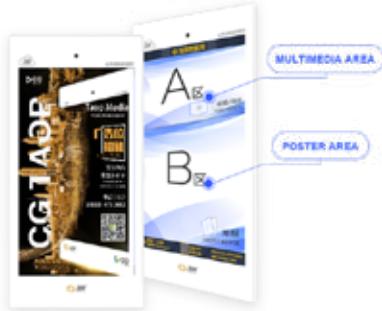
Some might question how natural an AI robot could possibly be. But Sophia is quite expressive in her speech and displays a surprising

sense of humour. On one recent TV appearance, when the host asked Sophia if she was happy to be there, the robot replied, “I’m always happy when surrounded by smart people who also happen to be rich and powerful.”

David Hanson is the chief executive officer of Hanson Robotics, and Sophia’s creator. Hanson originally worked at Disney as a filmmaker and sculptor, and those talents have enabled him to design Sophia with such inherent lifelike qualities.

Although Hanson created Sophia in order to be a companion for nursing home patients, he feels the sky’s the limit when it comes to expanding Sophia’s wide array of uses.

“Our robots will eventually evolve to become super intelligent genius machines that can help us solve the most challenging problems we face here in the world,” Hanson says. **BL**



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THE LATIN-AMERICAN POWER

BY MAURICIO ZULUAGA

The Latin-America renewable energy sector will grow significantly over the next 10 years, driven by ambitious targets focused on diversifying the power sources matrix and adapting it to the climate change challenges. Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia have the most ambitious plans to attract private sector participation in the industry. Some governments have established tax benefits to those companies investing in projects oriented to generate clean electricity through renewable sources.

Most of the energy generated in South America is produced by hydro power, which is considered one of the cleanest sources. However, the countries in the region are switching to other renewables – such as wind power – due to climate change effects on hydrology. The impacts of El Niño, a climate pattern that describes the unusual warming of surface waters in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, have become more constant. As a result, less rain may fall over the eastern Pacific, which has far-reaching consequences for the power sector.

The most ambitious plan to generate electricity from renewable sources is led by Chile. By 2028, this country expects the renewables share rises to 38%, compared to 19% in Brazil, and 13% in Mexico and Argentina. At the same time, Colombia has taken steps to boost the renewables capacity procurement, and the government has created benefits, such as a 50% tax deduction over five years to those companies using renewable energy sources. These tax incentives and the technological improvements made by the industry have reduced the cost of wind and solar power projects, making them more competitive.

The plan of connecting the South American electricity system to Central America is another opportunity for investors interested in the power sector. At the end of 2019, the interconnection line between Colombia and Panama received a boost with the approval of funds for design, technical and environmental studies. The project plans to cover a 500 km distance, which includes a 130 km marine stretch and is expected to be operating by 2024.

This link would pave the way to energy exports from South America, especially from Colombia to Central America, where

the supply energy demand exists due to the power service irregularity. The interconnection line is considered one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the region and may attract corporations from different parts of the world with interest in participating in its construction.

The electricity market in Latin America has been garnering remarkable momentum in recent years, catching the Canadian and European companies' interest in South America to take part in this business opportunity. According to different research, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) will also play a key role in the utilization of energy resources, and it could potentially create a value of up to \$5.8-trillion annually in 19 different energy industries. This momentum represents the Latin-American power. **BL**



Mauricio Zuluaga in a Colombian financial journalist.



TODAY'S TROJAN HORSE

BY DENNIS O'NEILL

Who's trying go get inside our gates? What trickery are they hiding?

What form does the modern Trojan Horse take?

Beware. Insidious tricksters are plotting to gain all your vital information. By it they gain power. Knowledge of your vital info steals that power. These tricksters seek financial gain too by knowing everything about you. Anyone gaining your computer files online can destroy you. They come in via your phone/internet/various devices.

What plan have you devised to defend your information? Your identity? Your everything?

The Trojans got tricked and brought the seemingly harmless

horse inside their gates. It looked benign. Inside, it hosted a select few men. At night they unlocked the gates and let the Greek armies in to conquer.

Sadly, I suspect "the barn door is open and the horse is already out" or in this case in. **BL**

Dennis O'Neill, The Business Growth Coach is located in Niagara-on-the-Lake. For more information on how to grow your business, please call 905.641.8777, email dennis@dennisonneillcoach.com or visit www.dennisonneillcoach.com.

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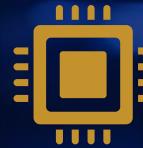
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As society continues to progress further into the new digital world, people are exposing themselves more each day to a growing threat. Identity theft is a growing business for many criminals – and can involve everything from phishing emails and phone calls from people claiming to be with the CRA to sharing too much personal information on a social media platform.

People are constantly looking for new ways to be able to compromise your identity and use it for their financial gain - whether it's using your credit or debit cards, opening new lines of credit or taking out a bank loan. Often the victim is unaware these new accounts have been opened until they are notified that they owe an outstanding sum of money. It may take a thief only a few hours to assume your identity, but it can take you months, even years, to restore your name, credit rating and legal standing.

With the growing threat of identity theft, it is important to protect yourself as much as possible. This can include sharing as little personal information online as possible, verifying the identity of the person on the phone is actually who they say they are, checking the email address for incoming emails, and purchasing identity theft insurance.

Many property insurance companies have an endorsement that can be added on to the policy covering identity theft. When you purchase identity theft coverage, it is not necessarily going to prevent your identity from being stolen. However, it will assist you in recovering your identity and reimburse you for the costs that are associated with doing so. This may include the costs of notarizing affidavits or similar documents, lost income, loan re-application fees, legal fees, telephone and postal/courier expenses. When the identity theft endorsement is on a property insurance policy, it may cover you, your spouse, children/dependents living at home under 21 or temporarily away at college or university. **BL**

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A Minute with the Mayor

BY MARILYN TIAN

In this revealing conversation, Wainfleet Mayor Kevin Gibson sits down to discuss the most expensive item on his municipal 'to-do' list these days, why honesty is the best policy, and what really surprised him when he first moved to the Township.

MT: You're a relative newcomer to the political arena. Why did you decide to run for Mayor of Wainfleet and how steep has the learning curve been for you?

KG: I was in the RCMP for years. I was doing investigations all over the world involving human trafficking and work like that. I retired after 34 years and spent a couple of years working for the Red Cross as a volunteer driver - but I quickly realized my brain needed more work. So I ran for mayor and won. The learning curve hasn't been too bad for me. I come from an environment where it was very political. There were times when I was working with foreign governments. I was in Vietnam, Thailand, Europe...I was in different places. I've done a lot of work at a high level so stepping in and working in an office environment like this so I was comfortable right off the bat.

MT: What excites you most about serving the people of Wainfleet?

KG: When I talk to people, I enjoy being honest and telling them the truth about a situation. I don't sugarcoat anything. If we're having a hard time with something, I say, "We're having a hard time with this financially." Or "We can't afford that." And I listen to people. I'm about to have my third public meeting where you get to ask me any questions you want. It's an open forum and we have a conversation. I created that access for the public so they can come and talk to the Mayor. We tell you what we can. There are no secrets here. It's just an open forum and I know a lot of people in the Township have told me that they are very pleased with that. In Niagara, there seems to be a big change in the

wind and Wainfleet is right in the middle of that change. For our part, we've been getting our finances in shape, fixing things, and positioning ourselves for the future, so it's been good. It just excites me to have the chance to help people in the Township and move everything forward.

MT: What are a few of your highest priorities right now?

KG: One of the big priorities in Wainfleet is catching up in our fire-fighting level of service. The current level of service is not where our residents need it to be, so Council is budgeting to build a new fire hall – hopefully, within the next year. For us, it's a huge amount of money. Our whole budget's only \$5.2-million – and the fire hall's going to cost four to five million dollars. We're going to have to debenture that – and that'll take some time to pay off. Another key priority is broadband internet access. This is funny but I lived in rural British Columbia a lot of my life and had fantastic internet service. Meanwhile, I move here and I have no internet service where I live! Bell, Rogers, Shaw – nobody will offer internet service. However, as you know, many farm businesses require internet. Their tractors can operate now without people in them, and harvest a whole field using GPS so internet's really important here. And we're slowly getting internet into Wainfleet to a degree where we can actually use it. Only two months ago, we got internet from Bell at home – and that's happening more and more around here. Things are slowly improving, but we need to keep it moving forward.

MT: The Ford government announced in October that it has no plans to pursue restructuring in Niagara. How can the Region better support Wainfleet, and what does Wainfleet contribute to the Region's success even though it has a relatively small population?

KG: The agricultural support we give to the Region is huge. I love to tell everybody that we give you your bacon and eggs every morning. So in that sense, it's enormous. We also have an excellent workforce here and a lot of people in Wainfleet travel into Welland, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Thorold to bring their technical skills and expertise to our larger urban neighbours. We have skilled and talented people giving their effort to different companies so that's really great. In terms of the Region supporting us, we're in a bit of a unique situation. We don't have transportation out here like many of the larger urban areas of the Region. There are many items that aren't relevant in Wainfleet. For example, we don't have some of the social issues plaguing our larger centres, such as homelessness. As well, there's a thing called the SNIP Fund where the Region gives money to communities to improve storefronts. We don't have that because we're agricultural and don't have highly developed commercial areas. But, that said, I'm a team player and I understand that we will pay for some issues that help our neighbours and they will pay for some that only benefit us – we just need to make sure that it's balanced so that our small rural population is not shouldering an unfair portion of the financial load compared to what we gain. It's important that the whole Region works together as one. I feel strongly about that. But at the same time, we have to look after Wainfleet as well. We're all part of a big team here.

MT: In terms of amenities, what is Wainfleet doing to make itself more attractive to local and international investors and tourists?

KG: I'll start with the tourists. We have Lake Erie – and on hot summer days, our population goes up by tens of thousands of people. Lake Erie is beautiful. It's warm water so we have lots of tourists come here for the beach access. We have the International Volkswagen Festival coming here the last weekend in July. It's all Volkswagen cars, camper vans, vendors, all the cool old Volkswagen stuff. They're bringing in anywhere from 300 to 500 Volkswagens from across North America, and they'll all need food, gas, a place to sleep – that sort of thing. It could easily be a 1,000 or 1,500 people coming into the area that weekend – and that's good for us economically. Then we have the Marshville Heritage Festival on Labour Day weekend. It's well-known all over Niagara and about 1,500 people come to the festival each year. In terms of international investors, it's all about finding the right balance. One of the things that makes Wainfleet so nice is our rural setting. If we start bringing in too much infrastructure, you lose the country and we don't want that. From a purely residential perspective, we're okay with not having things like water and sewer

– everyone has their own water systems and septic systems. But for international investors, however, which we need for a balanced tax base that takes some of the pressure of our residents, they generally want to hook up to water, sewer and broadband. With that in mind, right now, we're working at developing some land we can use if you want to bring a smaller business to Wainfleet. Just up at Chamber's Corners, we're trying to get some industrial land or commercial land, so we can start bringing some new businesses in. If we can get this land rezoned, it'll be a perfect spot for investment access to the big city markets without the big city prices. These kinds of businesses will provide opportunities for our residents and their children to grow and hopefully stay in Wainfleet. At the same time, these businesses will be paying taxes at the industrial or commercial rate, taking a little of the burden off our residential owners. It's a win-win for the Township as a whole. **BL**

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NIAGARA CANINE CONDITIONING CENTRE

SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS RUN NIAGARA'S FIRST AND ONLY PET FITNESS AND REHAB FACILITY.

BY KERI EVER

Barbara Lee and I co-founded the Niagara Canine Conditioning Centre in February of 2016. As a physiotherapist and veterinarian respectively, we've both earned special certifications in canine rehabilitation therapy and completed advanced training in manual therapy for the canine spine.

Our Centre is Niagara's first and only facility dedicated to canine (and feline) rehabilitation and fitness. It is fully equipped like any human physiotherapy clinic with treatment modalities such as LASER and therapeutic ultrasound, a gym complete with a dog treadmill and instability equipment, and an 18' x 10' swimming pool which is used for hydrotherapy and athletic conditioning.

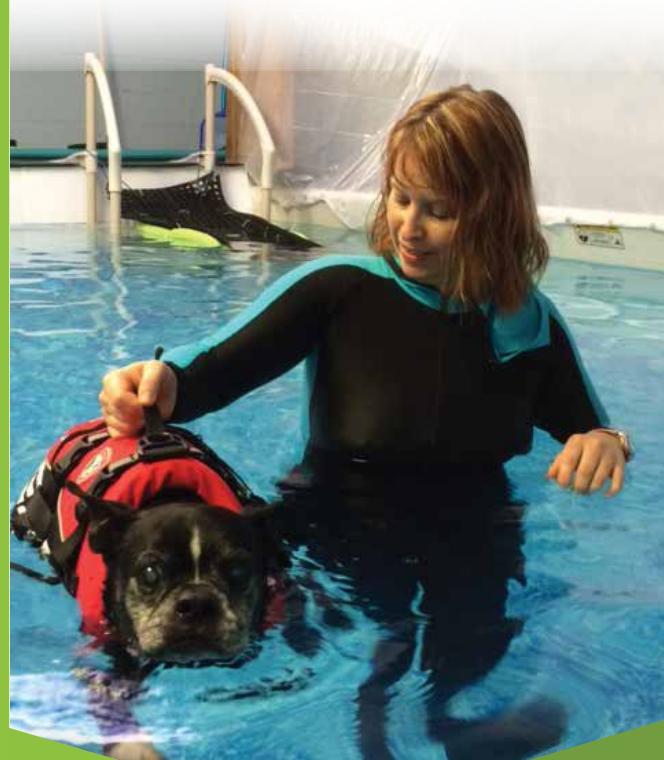
Since opening our doors, Barbara and I have seen steady growth in our business with the support of local veterinarians, the general public and the business community. Since that time, we've been finalists in the 2018 Ignite Niagara Pitch Competition, finalists in the 2019 Niagara Women in Business Awards in the Emerging Business category, and winners of the 2019 Outstanding New Business Award at the GNCC Business Achievement Awards.

While we're proud of our business accomplishments, we're most excited by our patients' successes. Our patients range from dogs recovering from knee or back surgery to those with similar injuries hoping to avoid surgery to senior pets with mobility issues. The most rewarding part of what we do at the Centre is restoring quality of life, especially in older animals, and providing our clients with what they want most – more time with their beloved furry friends.

Along with bringing a much-needed service to Niagara, Barbara and I strive to be at the forefront of pet rehabilitation therapy - not only locally but throughout Ontario and even Canada. We've developed a system for renting wheelchairs to patients in need. These can be a significant expense to pet owners, especially in cases where the dog may not need the chair for a prolonged period. This program allows them to use the wheelchairs like a human physiotherapist would use a walker for a patient with a spinal injury. The long-term goal is to get the dog walking on its own again.

Our partnership is very unique with a physiotherapist and a veterinarian joining forces as equal partners to provide pet rehabilitation therapy. At our Centre, dogs and cats alike can benefit from the expertise and collaboration of two therapists from both sides of the field – and a facility that enables them to exercise year-round. **BL**

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For more information on the Niagara Canine Conditioning Centre or to book an appointment, call 289.362.5900, email ncccinfo@cogeco.net or go to www.canineconditioningcentre.ca.

THE SOFT SKILLS ECONOMY

YOUR BOTTOM-LINE DEPENDS ON YOUR PEOPLE.

BY JESSICA POTTS

"Mike is very skilled at what he does – one of the best, actually. The problem is, no one wants to work with him...or even be around him. And it's starting to cost us."

I could feel my prospective client's pain through the phone. Sydney's call was the type of call I get a lot in my line of work. Office politics, drama and contrasting personalities are a reality in our increasingly diverse workplaces. The benefits of a happy, cohesive workplace are often downplayed or undervalued – until there is a breaking point.

"Looking at it objectively," she continued, "I understand why the younger staff are so put off. Mike is a classic micromanager and poor communicator to boot. Then he feels the frustration of a perpetual cycle of training, but not retaining our emerging team members."

Sydney was relatively new in her leadership role within the software development company. Mike had been a manager for a couple years before she arrived. She explained that according to upper management, it had taken three years to find the "right person" for Mike's highly technical role.

She summarized the situation perfectly in saying, "Technical people are hard to find but it's the soft skills that are needed to succeed."

Soft skills are intangible, productive behaviours, traits and actions that enhance all human performance and interaction. They are sometimes referred to as core skills, essential skills and my personal favorite – "human skills."

Some examples of human skills include communication, problem solving; creativity and innovation; collaboration and teamwork, social influence and persuasion, critical thinking and decision making, along with a suite of leadership skills.

The hard truth about soft skills is that these universal skills have a direct impact on your own performance and productivity, as well as make working with others easier and more fun. And when things are easier and more fun, we tend to do them with more enjoyment and energy and feel more connected and engaged. That translates to higher profit.

If higher profits resulting from enhanced soft skills seems like a stretch, I'll point back to a simple example with Sydney and Mike. Their emerging department within their large organization is still establishing themselves, and their main pipeline for work is other internal departments.

However, those other internal departments retain the ability to engage outside consultants to do the same work as Sydney's team. In this case, Mike's absence of human skills was costing the company because the relationships between those internal staff members and external consultants was stronger, and ultimately, they are easier to work with.

With the rise of automation, artificial intelligence, "the internet

of things" and related shifts, the world is currently experiencing the fourth industrial revolution. That rapid evolution through technological breakthroughs is having a deep affect on the tasks performed by our workforce.

So, while technical or hard skills remain imperative to the workforce, research is showing that the most in-demand skills are those that have traditionally been called "soft skills."

But let's be clear. There's nothing "soft" about these essential skills. The truth is your bottom-line depends on them! **BL**

Jessica Potts helps leaders build their dream teams. She is president of Inspired Strategy Group Inc., a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach, and LUMA Certified Facilitator. With expertise in human/soft skills development including talent, trust, and teams; Her approach is rooted in a strengths-based philosophy that maximizing potential happens when we encourage people to become great at what they're naturally good at. For more information, visit www.linktr.ee/jessicapotts.

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March 18, 7:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Club Roma
125 Vansickle Road,
St. Catharines

BizConX Niagara - Networking Event

March 25th, 5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Cat's Kitchen
6788 Thorold Stone Road
Niagara Falls

Value Based Leadership Seminar

March 18th, 5:30 p.m. - 7:30p.m.

Niagara College - Welland Campus, Room AH255
100 Niagara College Boulevard, Welland

2020 State of the Region

April 3rd, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Niagara Falls Marriott
6755 Fallsview Boulevard,
Niagara Falls

Biz Dev Boot Camp – Service Canada

March 23rd - 27th

Proactive Dealer Solutions
3550 Schmon Parkway, Unit 3,
Thorold

GNCC Business After 5 Member Expo

April 7th, 4 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Niagara College - Daniel J.
Patterson Campus
135 Taylor Road,
Niagara-on-the-Lake



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