



Sound Outlook Series Article #2: Dreaming Big

There's a great Tragically Hip lyric that goes: "We're forced to bed but we're free to dream". It's a simple message that says while we may be forced into a particular place, our minds are always free. We all have the liberty to imagine what we choose no matter where we are placed.

It's a line that's resonated with us lately for reasons you can probably imagine. We haven't all been sent to our rooms like in Gord's lyric, but we've all been forced inside - yet we're still free to dream; dream up ways of entertaining ourselves, connecting with each other, creating new ideas, and inventing new things. Dreaming about what the future will look like.

For many of the businesses in Owen Sound, it's been a period of dreaming up new ways to do business. All of us Sounders still want the products and services that are offered in our community and as the days pass by we're understandably missing some of the things that made us feel normal. Grabbing a coffee with a friend, going out for dinner, picking up a few things from the store. Those things are still available, we just need to adapt to the new ways of getting them.



Birgit Wright and her masked friends



The Milk Maid - Downtown Owen Sound

Did we ever dream that we'd be getting our physio exercises through Facetime? Did we all think we'd celebrate St Paddy's Day by watching a band perform on Facebook to an empty concert hall? Was it in our mindframe to order lumber online for small projects? Did we conjure up a situation where we'd put our Farmers' Market items in a virtual 'basket' and settle the tab with PayPal?

Many of our local businesses have been lucky in their ability to be agile and react quickly to changing circumstances. Perhaps the most advantageous thing about being a small business is being able to change course easily. Larger corporations have a tough time turning around, but the little guys can deke just about anywhere with the right motivation. The ways some business owners have had to pivot and re-imagine the way they do business has taken some serious creative problem-solving. We've all been proverbially forced to bed - and boy - did we ever dream up some cool ideas. We all got creative. We had to.

Art is essential, so naturally, musicians were first. They streamed concerts from their living rooms, basements, and bedrooms - sometimes while their kids were sleeping in the next room. They exposed their lives away from the stage and simultaneously showcased a more human way of sharing music. Live, off-the-cuff renditions with limited tech, no light shows, and no sound checks. They used new technologies like champs to bring us the music we needed. They're still doing it, and some bands are even proposing drive-in concerts this summer. Talk about dreaming big.

Locally, the Roxy Theatre dreamed up a way to keep their rehearsals going and used Zoom to communicate. They are imagining this Fall as a possible time to reschedule their much-anticipated *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* among many other concerts.

But it's not only artists who have gotten creative. Many business owners have come up with new ways of doing business. You can order online from Casero, Milk Maid, Birgit's, Mudtown Station, Europas, East Side Marios, and many more local spots. You can pick up your items in a way that safely adheres to social distancing guidelines and still support your favourite spot while satisfying your cravings.

Event organizers like Trivia by Ross' Ross Docherty have imagined a new way of delivering events by using new technologies simultaneously. When Chapman House was struggling to raise funds, he stepped up to deliver a fundraising event that raised over \$2,500. Did we ever dream that we'd be going to a charity event without leaving our living rooms? Docherty did.

Georgian Bay Centre for the Arts has been busy making everything from masks to birdhouses to keep their revenue flowing. Have1 quickly pivoted to manufacture PPE, sneeze guards, and COVID signage for businesses. Grocery stores were quick to install plexi-glass and place floor markers to keep us six feet apart. Driverseat Owen Sound installed plexi-glass in their vehicles, as well. Shopper's Clothing is steaming and sanitizing their clothing so people can try things on before purchasing, all while limiting the number of people allowed in their downtown storefront. The Nutty Baker is doing curbside pickup and deliveries. Kokoro is offering virtual workshops and meditation sessions. Nak'd Basics, the Rocking Horse, and Sweetpea Wholesome Baby are all doing free in-town delivery. Rrampt Magazine is adapting its distribution strategy to make sure it's available to all with many drop sites closed.



Sweet Pea - Downtown Owen Sound

Whatever you're missing during this time, the local business community has been working tirelessly to ensure we can continue on with some degree of normalcy. These little tweaks and changes to business are all part of an effort to stay the course, while the course itself has been changed so much.

While businesses have shifted and adapted in the short term, they've also imagined what they will be in the long term. It's a period of reflection for everyone. We've all been sent to our rooms for the night, to return to Gord's metaphor. We'll spend some time dreaming and see what the morning brings. Inevitably, the sun will rise and we'll go back outside and many things will be different, and many things will be the same.

We'll adapt to the things that are different. We'll take comfort in the things that remain the same. And we'll keep dreaming big because that's what this community needs right now.