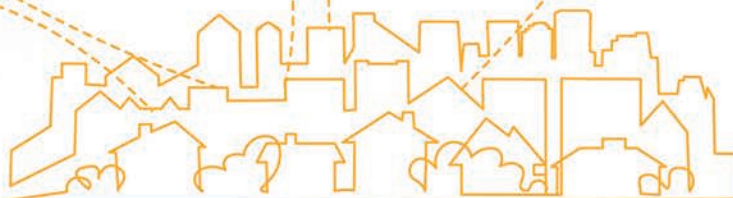


#shoplocal





# We are all connected

In the past 12 months, every aspect of our social and economic environment has been impacted by the pandemic. This has redefined why and how we connect.

Digital Main Street (DMS) was created on the idea of connection long before the pandemic. In late 2014, the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA) saw the need to help main street small businesses adopt more ways to connect with their communities and their customers in an increasingly digital world. DMS has always been about providing business owners with the tools, resources and education to embrace a new and exciting future.

However, the pandemic added a new level of urgency to why and how businesses connect with customers. With traditional bricks-and-mortar operations facing extended lockdowns and public safety measures, getting their businesses online became critical to their survival.

**Recognizing the value of DMS in helping businesses cope through the pandemic, both federal and provincial governments stepped up in June 2020 so the program could expand its reach.** The Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) provided \$42.5 million under the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF), and the provincial government’s Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT) contributed \$7.5 million.

The Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA) once again administered the DMS Ontario Grants Program (OGP), including the Digital Service Squad Grant, the Digital Transformation Grant and some of the training webinars for the main street small businesses that lie at the heart of Ontario’s communities.

In this report and accompanying [video](#), we feature the stories of small businesses from across the province, as well as two of the local Digital Service Squads (DSS) that helped them transform. **Our stories span rural to urban, village to major metropolitan areas, and reveal why connection to people, customers and community is integral to the success of businesses and the health of our neighbourhoods and downtown cores.**

With the help of DMS, these business owners have learned to embrace digital transformations that will connect them to a broader market and new opportunities, and build greater resiliency into their operations.

“DMS has given main street small businesses a thread of hope to strengthen their operations and become a hybrid of storefront and e-commerce during the pandemic,” said Kay Matthews, Executive Director of OBIAA. “These stories illustrate that without that digital connection to customers and community, more businesses would have been negatively impacted and forced to close over the past year.”

Digital Main Street was officially launched in Toronto by TABIA, with the support of the City of Toronto, in June of 2016 and proved to be a huge success. Thousands of businesses were helped through the first year of programming, which led to interest in expanding the program to other communities.

## DMS in Perspective

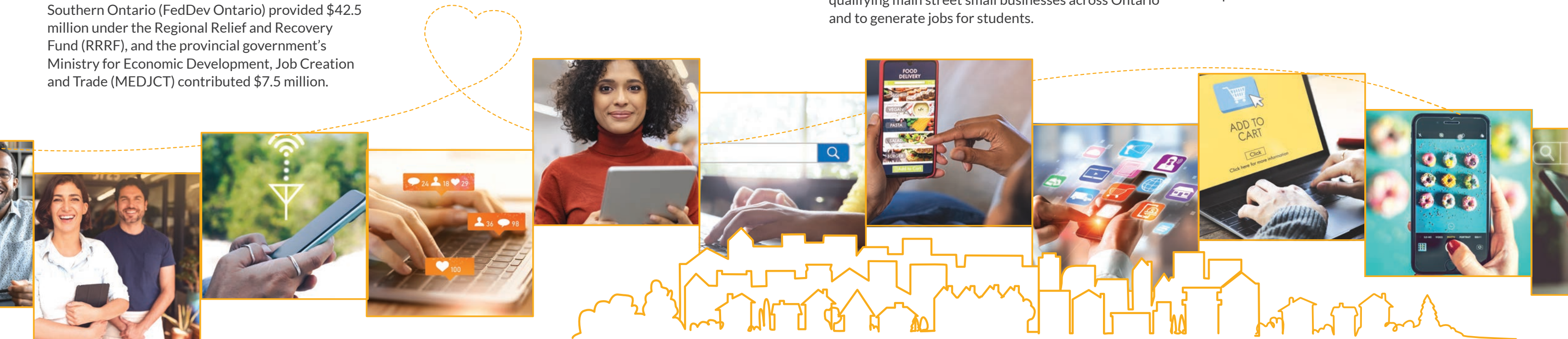
In 2018, the Government of Ontario invested \$12 million into the expansion of the DMS program, which continued through early 2020. More than \$5.4 million in Digital Transformation Grants (DTGs) were distributed to qualifying businesses across Ontario and more than 11,000 businesses were assisted by the DSS.

In June 2020, three months after the pandemic began, the DMS program was expanded across Ontario to include ShopHERE, Future Proof and the Ontario Grants Program. As part of the larger federal and provincial investment, OBIAA received \$15.8 million to continue administering the DMS OGP to assist qualifying main street small businesses across Ontario and to generate jobs for students.

As of the end of March 2021, the DMS OGP has distributed \$10 million through 4,007 DMS grants to qualifying businesses. The DSS covered 255 municipalities and more than 14,000 businesses had access to their services.

In addition to the robust online training required to apply for a grant, Ontario small businesses were offered weekly training webinars that rotated through 12 key topics. Almost 3,000 businesses attended these webinars, which featured content relevant to today’s digital environment. This knowledge transfer is a key component for business owners, giving them the essential understanding they need to successfully weave digital tools into their business plan.

The DMS program has provided business owners across Ontario with the confidence and knowledge to evolve into truly hybrid enterprises able to engage and transact with customers online as well as in person.





## Online art lessons keeps Inglenook customers connected to their creative side

Monthly sales up by 350 per cent compared to six and 12 months ago – a stunning achievement for any business of any size. Artist Irene McCuaig, owner of Inglenook Art Studios in Kenora, achieved just that ... during a pandemic, no less.

When the first pandemic lockdown forced Irene to close her doors, she feared the worst. Her business was entirely in person, from sales of her own original art to the art classes and workshops offered by her and other instructors to local aspiring creatives.

Through Kenora's Northwest Business Centre, she turned to Digital Main Street (DMS) and qualified for a Digital Transformation Grant. The grant came in hand with the educational resources and counsel to help her develop a digital marketing strategy, update her website and launch an online store for the first time.

In addition to her own art, Irene is now offering **Zoom art classes** through her online store. She is making more effective use of Facebook as an outreach tool to drive more traffic to her website.



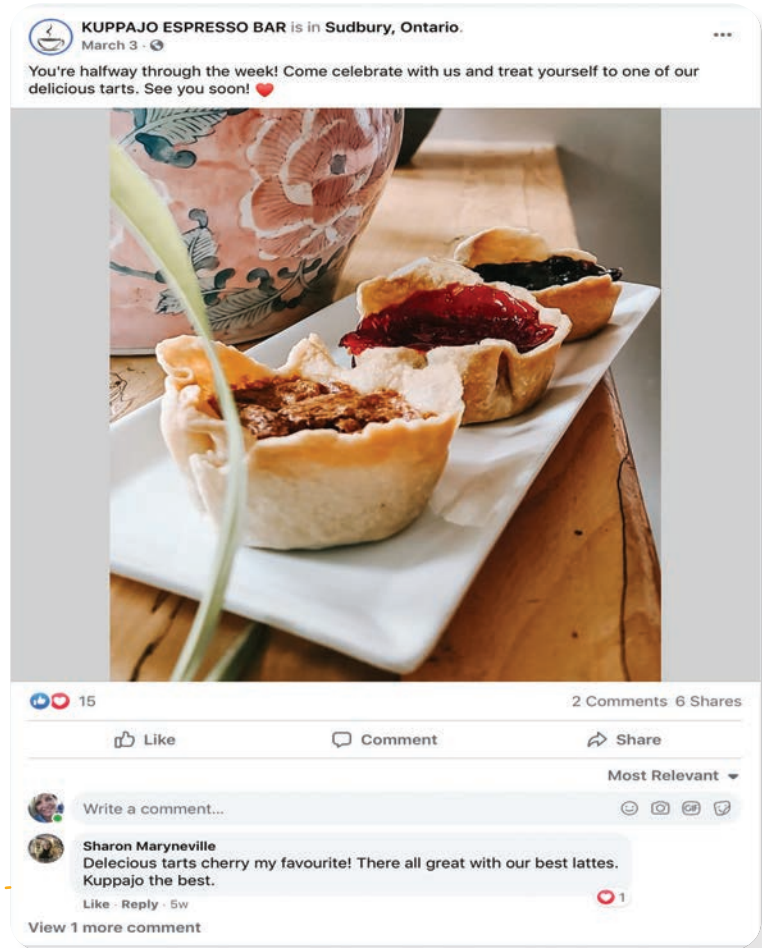
“The DMS training sessions have given me a better sense of direction for my business – it was also great to see other entrepreneurs in action,” Irene said. “My improved social media presence and the online store have gone a long way toward ensuring Inglenook Art Studio survives this COVID crisis.”

## Linking the social vibe of a coffee bar to an online space

Kuppajo Espresso Bar in Sudbury is an upscale café that features espresso-based beverages, teas, cold drinks, baked goods and a vast food menu. Like any independent, it faces an ongoing challenge to hold its niche against those big coffee chains.

The key is to find that caffeinated sweet spot – great products, great service and an in-store experience with its own unique vibe and atmosphere. When the pandemic struck, owner Betty-Ann Serré and her team worked to convey Kuppajo's distinct appeal online. She engaged with Digital Main Street (DMS) to take advantage of its grants, counsel and other resources.

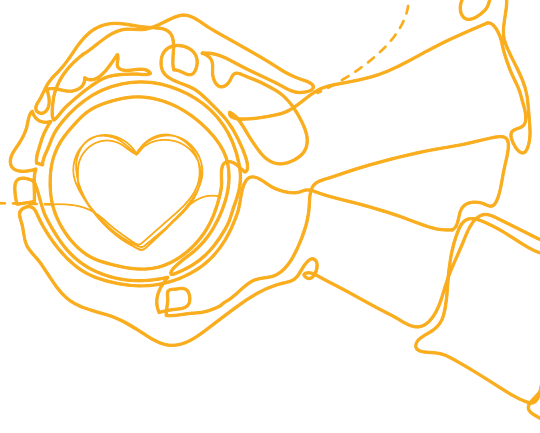
Betty-Ann used part of her grant to hire a marketing firm that could help her improve the user experience on her website and carry out **new marketing campaigns with online advertising**, Instagram and Facebook. All this was supported by **new videography and photography**.



## Online Vibe

“DMS has come at a crucial time for small businesses,” Betty-Ann said. “COVID shifted the bulk of our sales online, and because of this, we had to figure out ways to be creative and have a greater online presence. DMS helped us do just that. It was so important for us to broaden our marketing strategies and learn new ways to maximize our customer reach. This has helped us navigate the devastating effects of COVID. Thank you to our local BIA and DMS!”

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Building an online presence so rich you can almost smell the flowers



Michelle VandenBosch and Gary Parker lead a team of talented and passionate florists at Rebel Petal. This unique floral design studio is located in the picturesque village of Manotick within the City of Ottawa.

A 2,400-square-foot showroom features bushels of “floral gorgeousness,” with cool designs, stunning flowers and giftware. Or at least it did before the pandemic struck. Michelle and Gary made the decision to keep the showroom closed throughout the pandemic for the safety of their team and their patrons. Instead, they rely on deliveries, curbside pickup and an e-commerce storefront powered by Shopify.

But the switch to an entirely online business did reveal some areas in need of improvement. Michelle and Gary learned about Digital Main Street (DMS) through their local BIA and how it could help them make a bigger splash online and remain connected with their customer base.

ADD TO CART 

Michelle and Gary’s Digital Transformation Plan included a social media content plan with weekly and monthly themes, a digital advertising campaign, new video and photography, a monthly newsletter, website enhancements and search engine marketing (SEM).

Their goals are to draw more clicks to their online storefront, increase engagement from social media posts and generate more sales from featured products.

“DMS came at a great time when we wanted to improve our website and social media,” Michelle said. “These improvements are helping us weather the pandemic as we can direct our attention to other issues rather than building a new website from scratch.”

Digital Marketing



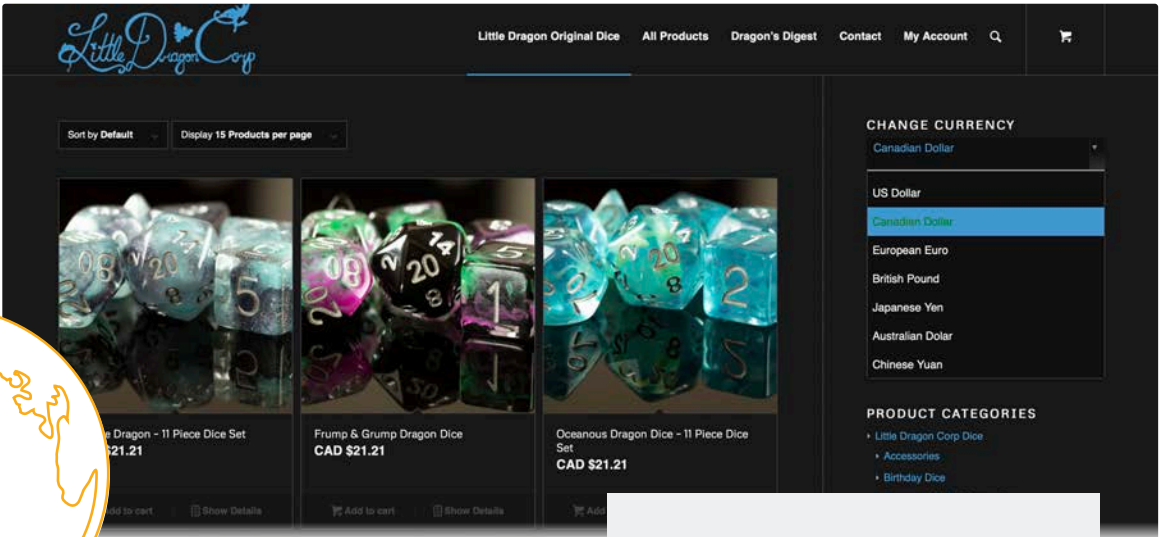
A roll of the dice that pays off thanks to a strong, connected digital presence

Little Dragon Corp. is the kind of business ideally suited to bring you some much-needed social interaction and escape during a pandemic. This Brampton-based business designs and retails beautiful custom dice for role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons.

Since founding Little Dragon as a home-based, crowd-funded business two-and-a-half years ago, owner Colette Chappell has grown to become a manufacturer and wholesale distributor reaching 60 countries. Little Dragon is active on multiple social media platforms with outreach programs to build a sense of community and connection with gamers everywhere.

But that didn’t mean that Little Dragon’s online presence didn’t have room for improvement as the pandemic forced Colette’s bricks-and-mortar retail location to close during the lockdowns. She turned to Digital Main Street (DMS) for help to **grow her customer base by 20 per cent and move 40 per cent more inventory.**

Her local Digital Service Squad helped Colette hire a developer and create eye-catching imagery with which to revamp her website and also engage in a new social and digital media advertising campaign.

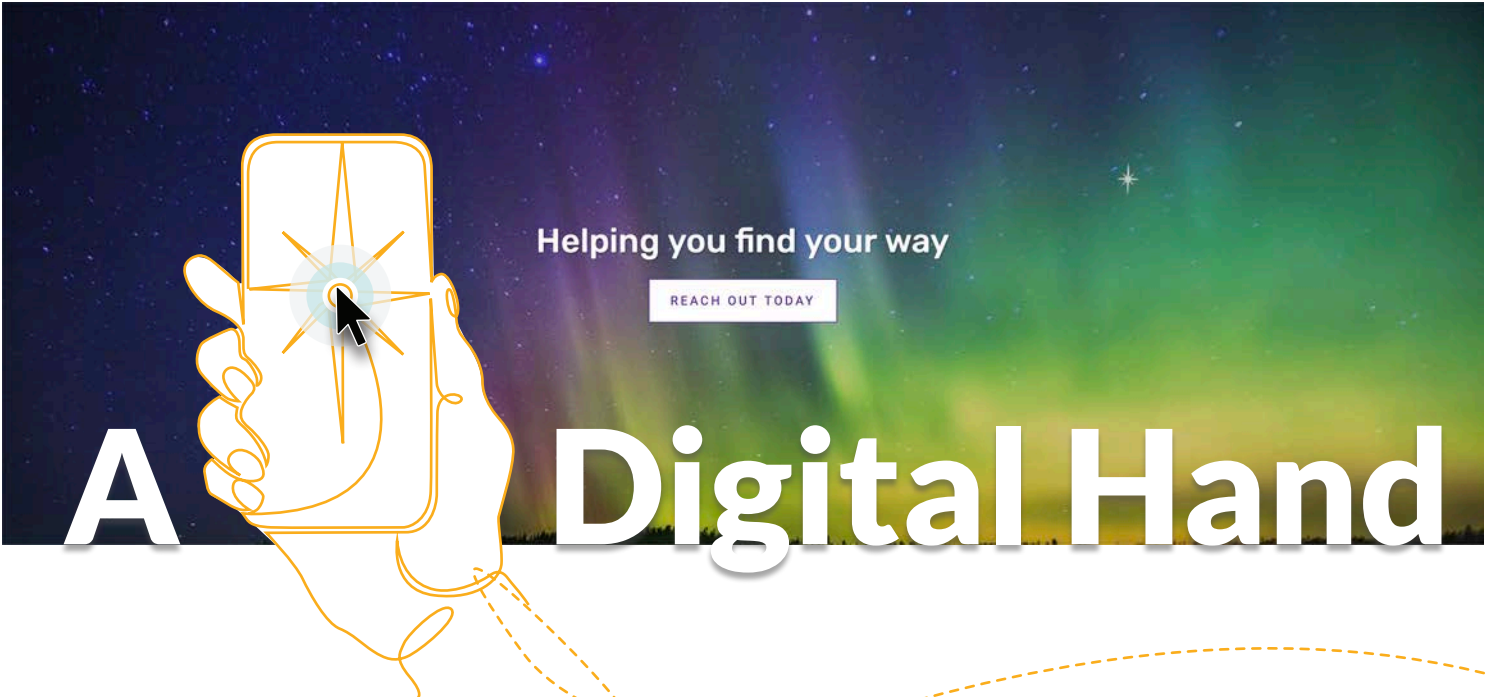


Global Gaming Market

“I approached DMS because I wanted to have my website feel professional versus the homemade one that I had originally created,” Colette said. “With its help and lessons, I was able to bring my advertising to a new level and my website has never looked better. I think there are a lot of small business owners like myself who could benefit from programs like this where we can adapt and learn new techniques.”



## Connecting online to help people connect with themselves



Psychotherapist Allyson Lucas’ goal is to help each of her clients discover their inner “North Star” – that steadfast reference point we each carry within that always knows our purpose, passion and life direction. Modern digital technology, on the other hand, is not Allyson’s strong suit and she freely admits it. As a sole proprietor who became an entrepreneur later in life trying to establish her first private practice in a new city, Allyson felt overwhelmed by the challenge of building her brand online.

She turned to Digital Main Street and qualified for a Digital Transformation Grant. This gave her access to hours of free consultations with a digital marketing expert, help with optimizing her search engine rankings, and valuable evaluations of where and how to improve her website and social media presence to better connect with her community and client base.

**Allyson found the support she needed to build her skills in social media marketing and email marketing.** She is also adopting into her practice mobile devices and new automation software to improve efficiency and reduce paper.

“At the beginning of this process, I felt as if I were standing on the platform waving at the technology train as it left the station,” Allyson said. “Thanks to the Digital Transformation Grant, I’m now on board and know the direction and the destination. As I’ve been telling my clients, old dogs can learn new tricks ... even if it’s only one at a time.”

## Petites entreprises aider les propriétaires de petites entreprises

*Plus de participé*

Au début de leur vingtaine, les sœurs Deslauriers, Nathalie et Chantale, ont décidé qu’elles avaient des aspirations au-delà de travailler comme coiffeuses pour quelqu’un d’autre. Animées de l’esprit entrepreneurial, elles ont plutôt décidé de fonder leur propre salon de coiffure.

Plus de 20 ans plus tard, le studio Shanthaly continue de servir ses clientes de l’est de l’Ontario, à Embrun, en leur offrant une expérience de salon moderne, élégante et professionnelle.

Lorsque la pandémie a frappé, l’équipe du studio Shanthaly avait déjà un site de commerce électronique, des comptes Facebook et Instagram et des ressources en marketing par courriel. Ce qu’elles n’avaient pas, c’était le temps et l’expertise nécessaire pour profiter pleinement de ces atouts numériques.

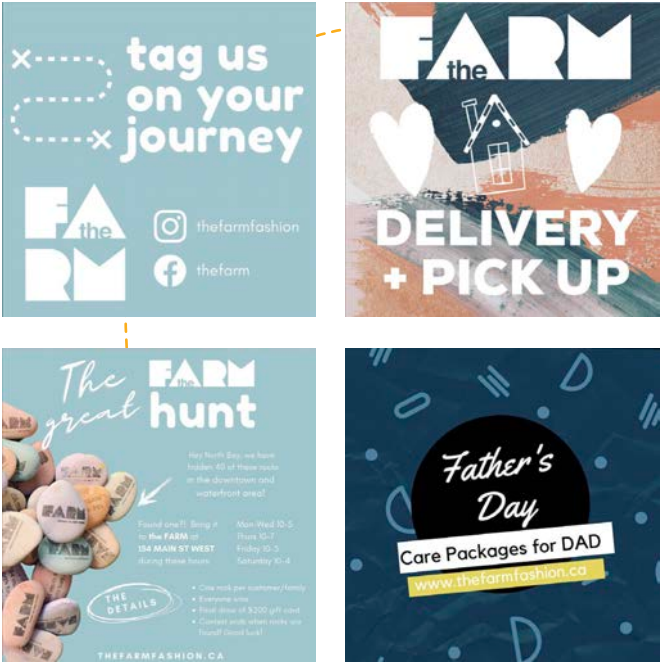
Nathalie et Chantale ont obtenu une subvention de transformation numérique de Digital Main Street. Elles ont utilisé le financement pour les aider à améliorer la visibilité et les ventes en ligne de leur salon. Avec l’engagement d’une équipe locale de services numériques, elles ont travaillé à moderniser leur site Web, de même qu’à créer une nouvelle stratégie de marketing numérique.

**Elles se sont donné des objectifs de marketing initiaux comme augmenter le nombre de visites au site Web et le nombre d’abonnés sur les médias sociaux de 20 pour cent.** Autant, elles voulaient tirer plus d’informations sur les ventes en ligne avec des données de la plate-forme de traitement des paiements Stripe.



“Quand la vie nous donne des citrons, fabriquons de la limonade! Alors nous pouvons dire que cette pandémie nous a donné des citrons, mais avec la contribution financière et toute l’éducation transmise par Digital Main Street, nous avons fait une vraiment bonne limonade!” affirment les sœurs. “Afin d’encourager l’achat local et inciter le recrutement de nouveaux employés, nous avons pu être visibles d’une façon massive sur les réseaux sociaux par le biais d’une campagne marketing exécutée par une petite entreprise de la région. Merci DMS de soutenir les petites entreprises!”

Fashion and design retail collective adds online to better bridge local artists to customers



The FARM in North Bay is a fashion and art retail market that operates as a collective to showcase the talents of emerging and established designers. Owner Katie Bevan provides both a boutique-style retail space as well as a workspace for members to share their skills and experience.

When the pandemic struck, Katie realized that investing in the tools and skills to create a strong and compelling digital presence for the bricks-and-mortar collective was no luxury, but an absolute necessity.

She turned to Digital Main Street (DMS) for the grant funding and professional support to re-evaluate the entire customer journey online. Visuals were key – to tell compelling stories through photos and video about the collective’s creators and their creations. Katie is also sharpening her efforts to draw web visitors through social media and create a more compelling shopping experience on her e-commerce storefront.

Katie is now targeting a 50 per cent increase in her online conversion rate and online sales growth of 20 per cent in 2021.

Sustainable

“Thanks to DMS, we have been able to make enhancements on our website that allow for an easier transition from mostly selling in the shop to selling more online,” Katie said. “Advancing bricks-and-mortar’s technical capabilities is crucial when doing business today, not only due to COVID, but also from increased competition and to prepare for other business disruptions that are out of our control.”



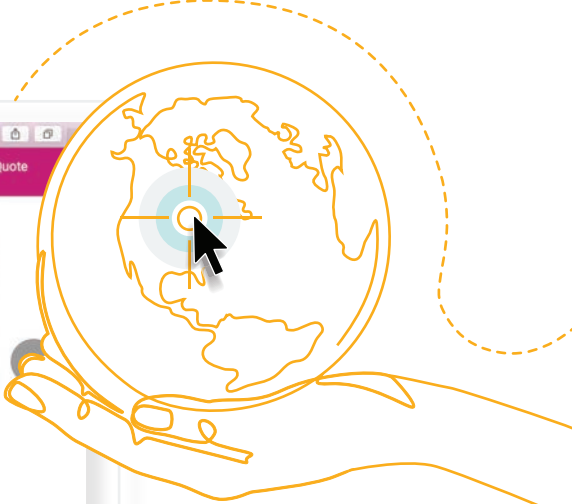
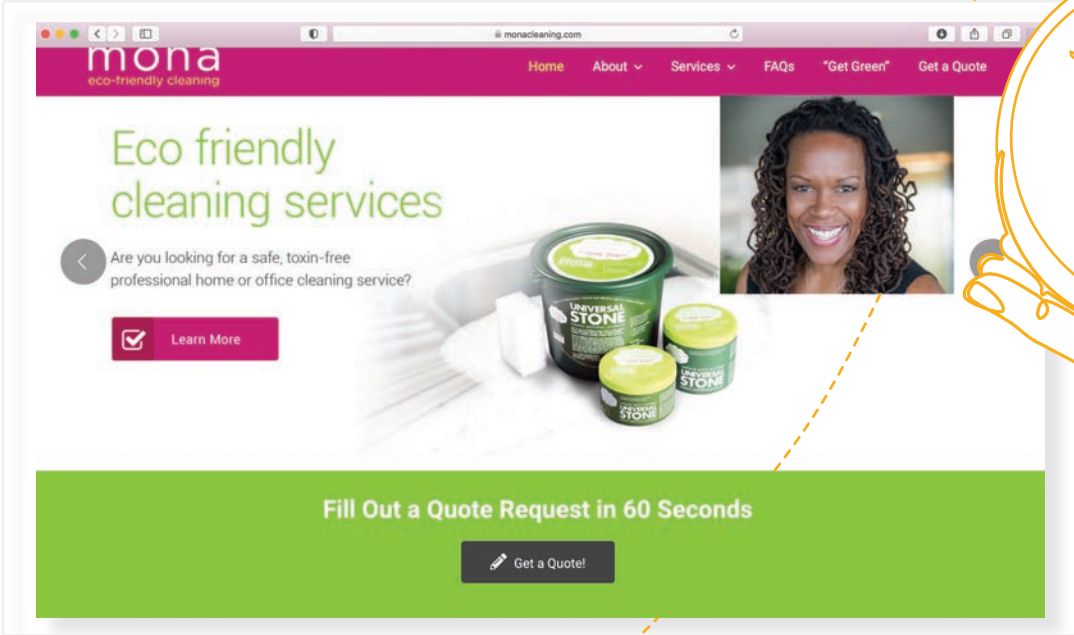
Near-death business experience becomes opportunity for new growth online

When 75 per cent of your business disappears practically overnight, there really isn’t much left to lose on taking a chance with something new.

Sheri-Anne Woolley found herself in that situation when the pandemic struck. For 12 years, she had owned and operated Markham’s Mona Home and Office Cleaning. The focus of her team on delivering five-star service using eco-friendly products instead of harsh chemicals had led to steady growth with residential and office clients.

But a roster of loyal clients proved a poor defence as pandemic lockdown measures took effect. Faced with the possible collapse of her business, Sheri-Anne turned to Digital Main Street (DMS) for help to build a stronger web presence, better connect with a broader base of potential customers and create an e-commerce capability.

Her initial focus has been on building lines of communication and engagement with increased social media activity supported by new video content, through email marketing and by advertising online. **The goal is to drive double-digit increases in organic web traffic from online search results.**



“DMS offered us tools and resources to help us get back on our feet and make changes to our business to not only stay open, but to regain some business,” Sheri-Anne said. “If it wasn’t for this program, I don’t think we would have survived until now. We have been able to grow the office side of our business with industries that are deemed essential.”



# By the Numbers

June 2020 to March 2021

OBIAA™

Ontario

tabia

Canada

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

DIGITAL  
MAIN ST.™

Progress Report 5 | 2021

“ Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, a source of local jobs – and local pride. With Government of Canada support, thousands of entrepreneurs across Ontario have adopted and expanded their digital presence, strengthening their customer connections as a result. We are so proud to see the incredible impact OBIAA and its DMS partners are having on small businesses in the region, setting them up for success in the future digital economy.

- The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario

## Digital Transformation Grants



4,007 # OF GRANTS ISSUED



\$10 million TOTAL VALUE OF GRANTS

## Digital Service Squad Grants



255 # OF PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES



\$4.2 million TOTAL VALUE OF GRANTS

“ Creating new opportunities for businesses to get ahead is key for our economic growth—and supporting Main Street businesses today is a critical investment in Ontario's tomorrow. The innovative Digital Main Street program is providing small businesses with the tools they need to connect to more customers, transform their operations, and continue serving our communities in the months and years ahead.

- Prabmeet Sarkaria, Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction

## Training

6,164 # BUSINESSES TAKING DMS ONLINE GRANT TRAINING

2,878 # BUSINESSES ATTENDING IN-HOUSE EDUCATION WEBINARS



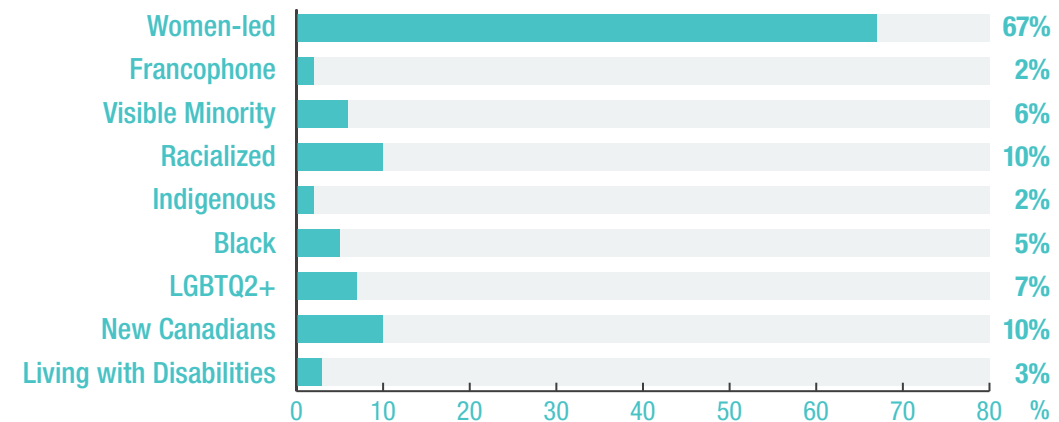
“ The stores that line downtown streets in communities across Ontario play an important role in our civic identity and pride. That is why our federal government is proud to invest in programs like DMS that support them. Throughout this pandemic, OBIAA and its DMS program delivery partners have provided timely assistance that is helping keep these businesses open and even discover new revenue streams, which will help them come back even stronger.

- Marie-France Lalonde, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages)

## Of Businesses That Have Reported:

99% CONSIDERED DMS A SUCCESS

91% BELIEVED THEY WERE MORE COVID-RESILIENT



Data taken from 1,157 reports.

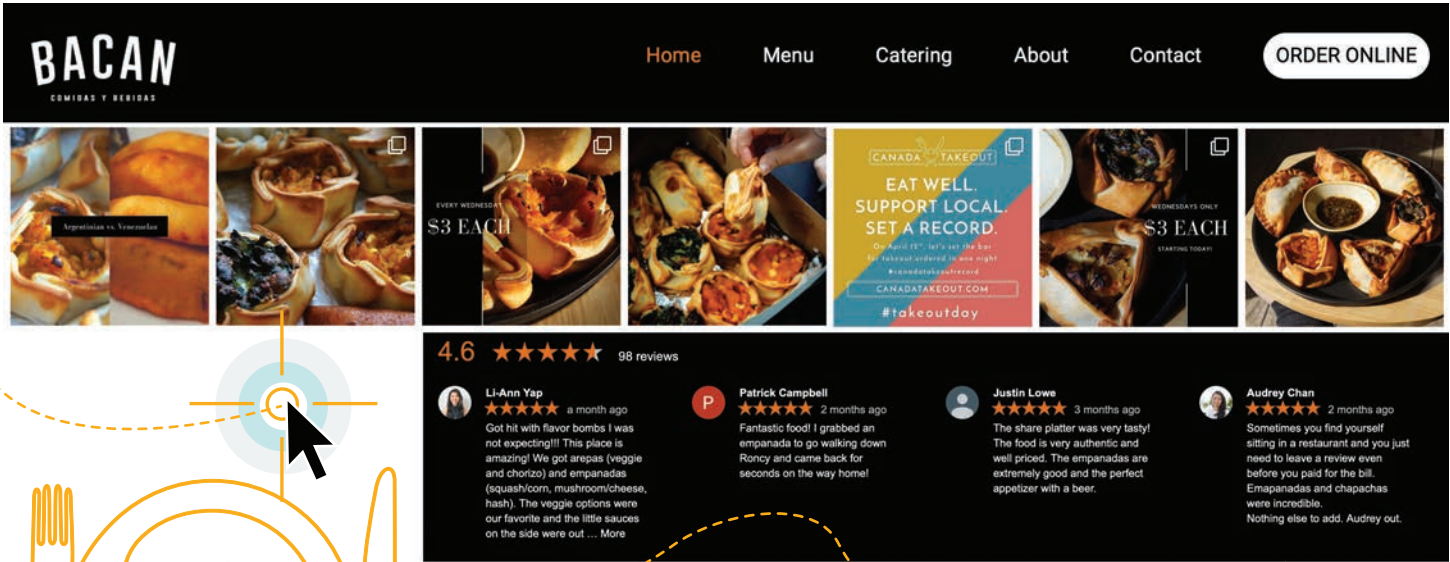
Marketing a compelling restaurant concept that resonates online

Bar Bacan is a female-led and LGBTQ+ friendly family business that offers a rich menu of Latin American cuisine in the heart of Toronto’s Roncesvalles neighbourhood. Guillermina (Mina) Buzio and partner Alejandra Sifontes founded the restaurant two years ago to build on the success of their popular food truck.

Mina learned about Digital Main Street (DMS) through her local BIA. Throughout 2020, she and Alejandra worked with their local Digital Service Squad to get the best bang for their buck from two subsequent Digital Transformation Grants.

The first grant helped with the transition from food truck to full-service restaurant. **The second grant came at just the right time to help Bar Bacan refine its concept, expand its social media efforts through Facebook and revamp its website to remain connected with the community as the pandemic arrived.**

Mina and Alejandra made the decision to keep the dining room closed through the pandemic. Instead, they rely on the patio when seasonal weather permits, as well as the takeout window. The investment in Bar Bacan’s digital presence has proved critical to remain on the radar with local residents.



Perseverance

“It’s been helpful to have other people asking the questions to get us focused on defining our concept – the experience we offer – beyond just focusing on what we have on the menu,” Mina said. “The DMS grant funding and support have been really helpful to help us reorganize, adapt and market a restaurant concept that works through the pandemic. Small businesses need this kind of step-by-step support to continue.”

Keeping minds sharp with online learning

Annie Hardock understands the value of connecting with other business owners and local organizations, particularly when you are new to a community.

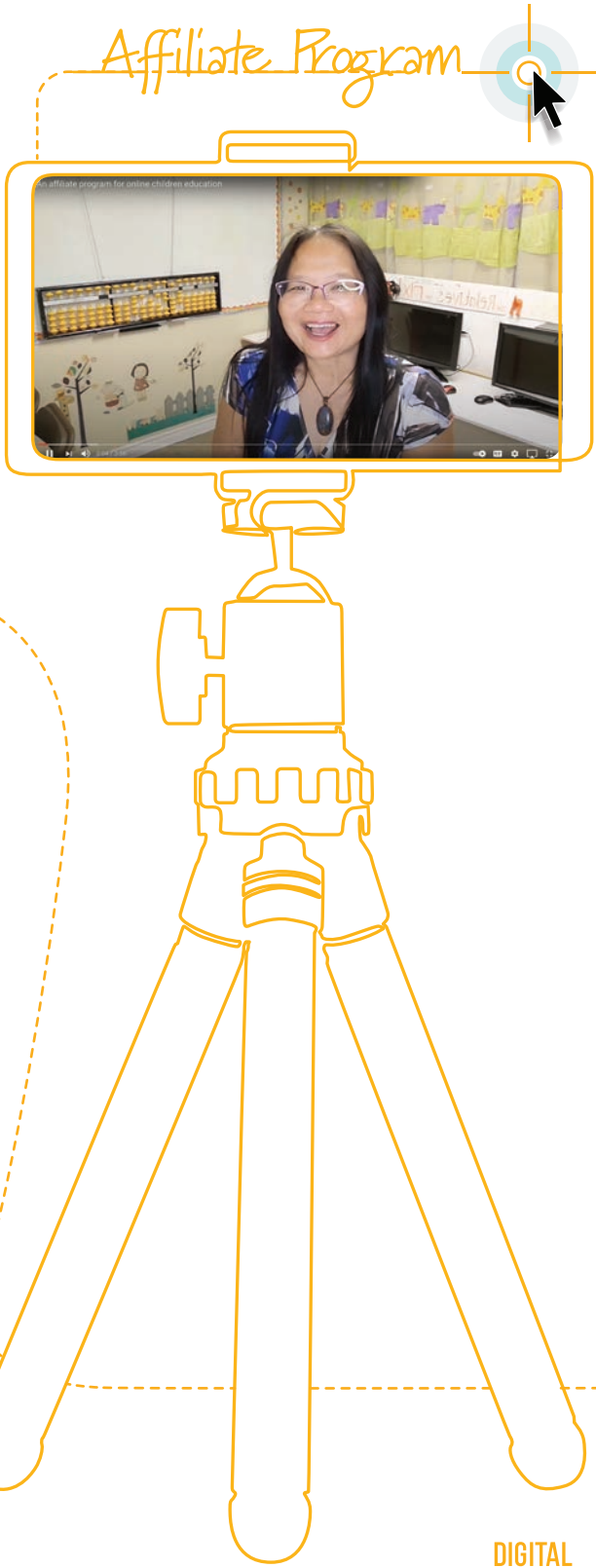
This tireless entrepreneur, networker and community volunteer, who first came to Canada as a university student in 1980, has been a force in Uxbridge since the mid ’90s. In 2010, she started a new business with her son Michael – a learning centre for mental arithmetic based on the principles of abacus calculation and high-speed listening training.

Easy Math for Kids has since expanded with pre-school programs and a unique mental fitness abacus program for seniors over 60. It’s not just about math – fans of this learning method say it also improves focus, concentration and memorization.

“DMS is giving me new tools and resources to market the business,” Annie said. “Even the free consultations with the DMS team are very helpful. Not only did DMS help my business survive the lockdowns from the pandemic, but it has set us up to thrive online in future.”

Annie’s business had already proved popular with caregivers eager to improve learning outcomes. This has become even more pressing with the pandemic’s disruption of work and school. To ensure Easy Math for Kids continued to serve clients and reach new ones, Annie turned to Digital Main Street (DMS) and qualified for a Digital Transformation Grant.

Working with her local Digital Service Squad, **Annie is executing an extensive transformation plan that includes a website upgrade, a new blog program, hiring a social media expert and new video and photography.** Annie’s goal is to increase by 50 per cent the number of new client leads from online channels and overall website traffic by 50 per cent.





Gaining the digital tools to maintain a great guest experience



For the past 12 years, Salamanders of Kemptville has cooked up the 5 Cs: Cajun, Creole and Low Country Cooking with a Canadian twist.

Like thousands of other small, independent restaurants across the province, Salamanders has struggled to ride out the pandemic. It's all about striking a workable balance between take-out, catering services, opening a patio during warmer weather and offering inside dining, when permitted, with proper safety measures in place.

Owner Paul Cormier and his team realized the value of building out Salamanders' social media channels beyond Facebook and creating an e-mail marketing list to remain engaged and connected with their customer base. **They also decided to adopt new technology to reduce reliance on paper and to make operations and customer service more efficient and safer.**

Salamanders has used its Digital Transformation Grant and worked with its local Digital Service Squad to adopt new software and new mobile devices, implement new operating procedures, and set milestones for customer growth and other service improvements.

“ This grant has contributed to what is the life-blood of restaurants everywhere in these difficult times: the capacity to change, improve and meet the needs of our honoured guests,” Paul said. “Starting in early spring with the annual grand opening of our patio, we expect to see improvements in our operation that we will be able to measure and factor into further improvements over the next year.”

Take-out Delivery Patio

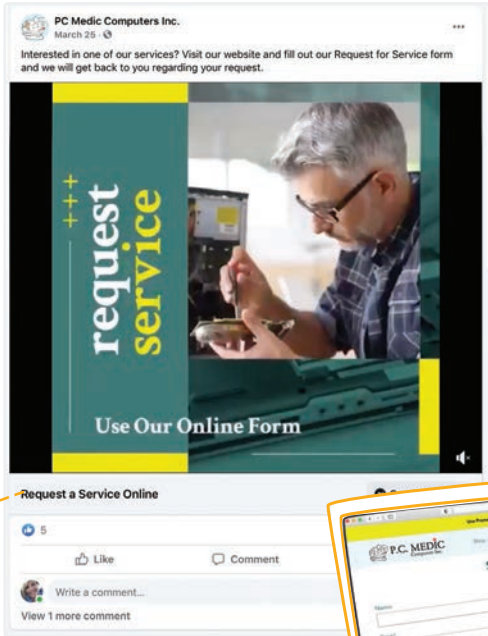


Computer equipment became the thread that joined us all together during the pandemic

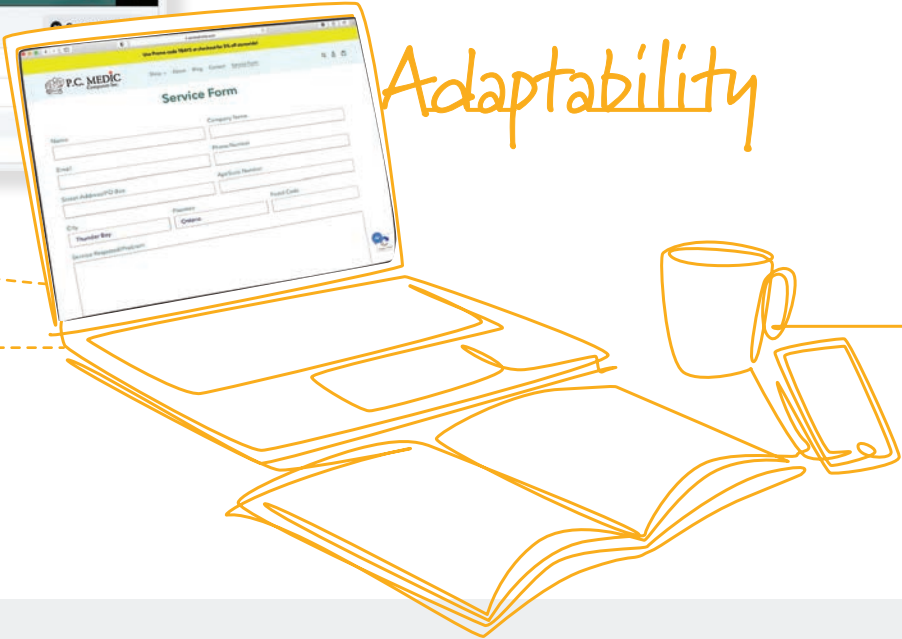
Pandemic or not, people need functional computing devices, particularly if they are working from home. For Donna Brown, owner of PC Medic Computers Inc. in Thunder Bay, that has meant juggling accessibility and availability while respecting public safety measures.

Because of the services it provides, as both retailer and repair shop, PC Medic Computers is considered essential and allowed to remain open through provincial lockdowns. Still, customers needed new ways to safely engage with the business. **Donna realized she had to provide online options for sales and service requests, in support of curbside pickup.**

But e-commerce was not a strength of Donna's business. She turned to Digital Main Street (DMS) and qualified for a Digital Transformation Grant. With counsel from her local DMS team, Donna is using the grant to create an online storefront with Shopify, launch a new website and implement a strategic social media plan to better reach her community.



Adaptability



“ Our goal is to introduce online sales, increase our web traffic and increase social media activity,” Donna said. “None of this would have been possible without our DMS grant, so we are very thankful to have received it. PC Medic Computers is celebrating 26 years in business, and we got here by changing with the times and always looking for ways to improve the service we provide. Digital Main Street has helped us do that.”

# Building business resiliency through education in Chatham-Kent

Chatham-Kent is a single-tier, mostly rural municipality in southern Ontario with an economy reliant on the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. The municipality participated in both phases of Digital Main Street (DMS) – before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jamie Rainbird, Manager, Economic Development, Services and Community Development for the municipality, led the charge both times to assemble and deploy a Digital Service Squad of three.

The squad’s experience between the two phases of DMS was night and day. When DMS was first introduced, many business owners were skeptical about the program itself and about the need or value of investing in a digital presence. That changed with the arrival of the pandemic.

“The pandemic certainly pushed business owners to take more interest in DMS and see more importance in digital,” Jamie said. “Many of our target businesses were older and the owners were web wary. But the lockdowns made them realize they had no choice if they wanted to be found and able to transact with customers outside of in person.”

To help businesses navigate their new online world, DMS provided Digital Transformation Grants for costs associated with adopting digital technologies. The program also gave businesses access to a variety of free online supports, including a digital assessment, online and webinar training and a Google listing.

A total of 89 grants were awarded and 302 area businesses engaged with the local Digital Service Squad, who provided individual attention and guidance to meet each business’s particular needs. **Jamie believes it was the program’s training and support components that provided the greatest value to the businesses he serves.**

“In times of crisis such as this, people are more focused on the money, but it’s what they take away to make a lasting change that’s most important,” said Jamie. “The feedback from our squad is that our business owners are learning, they are changing how they operate, whether or not they got a grant. My hope is that this will make their businesses more resilient.”



# Crossing the online divide in Kenora and Rainy River

The Northwest Business Centre in the City of Kenora serves as the premier small business and entrepreneurship centre for the Kenora and Rainy River districts.

This vast northern region encompasses more than one third of Ontario’s total geographical area. Communities are small and far-flung. Many small business owners, regardless of their generation, are rooted in a traditional bricks-and-mortar way of doing business.

Manager Allyson Pele and her team at the Northwest Business Centre tackled this resistance to change when they took part in the second phase of Digital Main Street (DMS) and deployed a Digital Service Squad.

“There is always a challenge with getting our local businesses to embrace any kind of program available for new technology adoption,” Allyson said.

Existing personal and professional networks proved vital to introduce DMS across such a vast region with a Squad of only three. Allyson chose her Squad members wisely, hiring individuals with their own business networks and relationships, to drive engagement with as many business owners as possible.

With the pandemic in full swing, impacting service delivery and DMS application deadlines, it took an all-hands-on-deck effort to spread the word and coach as many business owners as possible through the DMS process.

Allyson and the Squad succeeded in connecting with 253 businesses, 27 of which ultimately qualified for a DMS Digital Transformation Grant. That was on target with the Northwest Business Centre’s goal.

But Allyson is quick to focus on another number as well – 93. That’s how many of those 253 businesses took advantage of the free resources available through DMS to begin their digital journey or enhance their existing online presence, regardless of whether they received a grant.

“Business owners of all ages are now coming to us with more willingness to change and less fear,” Allyson said. “They also have more awareness for the Business Centre and the other programs we offer that they can access. **Our Squad opened the eyes of business owners to what digital technology options are out there and how they can help.**”

Allyson does have one critical piece of advice, and a request, should DMS again be renewed – open up access to the program to any small business with a commercial storefront.

“More grants could have been awarded with a different set of criteria,” she said.

Allyson remains positive about the impact that DMS and the efforts of her Digital Service Squad have had on the region.



## Insight

“I am optimistic that the program has helped people,” Allyson said. “I am impressed with the feedback from participating businesses and the changes they were able to make. So even just going through the free training that’s available from DMS on how to use digital technology can be really valuable to our business owners.”



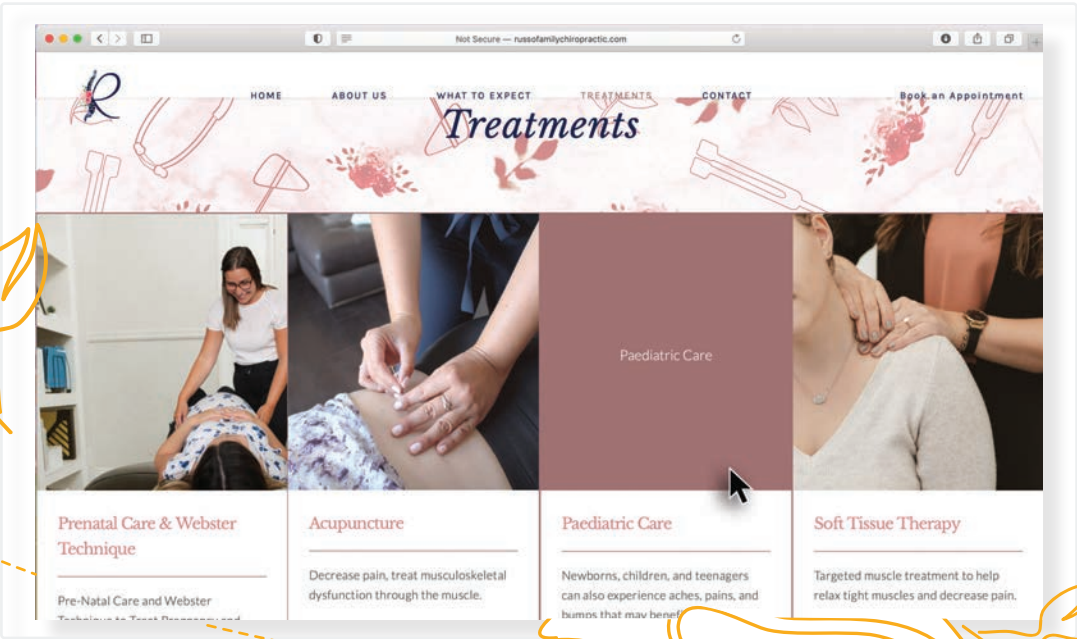
## Connecting with Patients at Home

Dr. Alena Russo, chiropractor and owner of Russo Family Chiropractic in Downtown Brampton, faced the same challenges that many small healthcare clinics across Ontario have during the pandemic.

The need to provide important care must always be balanced with the need to ensure the safety of both patients and staff. To that end, Russo Family Chiropractic has worked to balance in-person care with supporting patients at home where possible.

Dr. Alena also turned to the Digital Main Street (DMS) program to take her clinic digital. **This included implementing a new paperless charting, billing and scheduling system that is compliant with Canada's Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA).**

The local DMS Digital Service Squad has also helped Dr. Alena boost her website visits from Google Search and from Instagram and Facebook, by increasing the frequency and the regularity of her social media posting, complete with new photos, videos and virtual treatments.



## Balance

“DMS has been instrumental in helping to create an online presence for my business,” Dr. Alena said. “I have received so much positive feedback from my patients about the ease of booking online, and personally find it so much easier to be on a paperless system. Now more than ever, it’s important to think outside the box and be creative. I am fortunate enough to have the means to do this with the help of Digital Main Street, and I cannot thank them enough for kick-starting this initiative for me and my business.”

Boo Bah Lou Candy Corner and Sugar Bush Canadian Coffee are hard at work satisfying sweet tooths on Manitoulin. The two businesses are the livelihood and passion of owners Sandi and David Hurcomb, who run the two storefronts in picturesque Kagawong.

The tourist trade on Manitoulin was a big business driver for the Hurcombs, but the pandemic put a temporary halt on steady walk-in business. Astute business owners, Sandi and David turned to Digital Main Street (DMS) to help them take advantage of the opportunity to promote their businesses online and improve some of their back-end functions. **Their goal was lofty: to increase all sales by 20 per cent over last year and do it by investing in streamlined processes, e-commerce, videos, technology and social media.**

Their Digital Transformation Grant from DMS funded most of their plans and has set them up for ongoing success, even after the pandemic is over.

“This Main Street grant has helped us get out on social media and spread the word. We also used a portion of the grant to update our technology to help us improve our social media planning, online banking, ordering and staff scheduling,” said the Hurcombs. “We also added in-person training and coaching to the mix so we’re ready for this summer. This grant has made such a difference and we couldn’t be more grateful.”



**Sugar Bush Canadian Coffee House**  
April 20 at 9:30 AM · 🌐  
Decisions, decisions... What's your favourite baked treat from Sugar Bush?  
Comment below 🙌🏻



**Boo-Bah-Lou Candy Corner**  
April 3 · 🌐  
We are OPEN TODAY 10am-5pm 🐰  
We are fully stocked with the perfect treats for your loved one's Easter baskets!

## Spreading the Sweet Word... on Manitoulin and Beyond.

# Great success lays the foundation for an even broader effort.

“We are incredibly proud of what we have done and the role that we have played in helping deliver the DMS Ontario Grants Program, particularly over the past year, on behalf of main street businesses,” said **Kay Matthews, Executive Director of OBIAA**. “There have been many days through the pandemic where the only good news has been a success story of a DMS-supported business.”

To recap, more than 14,000 businesses across the province were reached by the DMS OGP from June 2020 to March 2021. More than 4,000 of them received Digital Transformation Grants. Thousands more have also benefited from free DMS educational sessions that helped equip them with the skills and knowledge to become more resilient and embrace a new digital future.

DMS has not just been about helping businesses get online to connect with customers. The program has itself served as a vital channel for human interaction and mutual support. DSS members across the province have taken business owners by the hand, often virtually, to guide them through a learning curve that for some is steep, but not insurmountable.

The numbers speak to the importance of the DMS OGP to small business. Ninety-one per cent of reporting businesses said that they were more resilient to the pandemic, while an incredible 99 per cent considered the program to be successful.

“We have just skimmed the surface of what DMS can be and who it can reach,” said **John Kiru, Executive Director of TABIA, Founder of Digital Main Street**. “Supporting local while selling global makes our main streets whole while helping small businesses to thrive and recover.”

“COVID-19 has required small businesses to adapt to a rapidly changing marketplace,” said **Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade**. “That’s why our government has been proud to support this program, which is providing innovative tools and grants to help businesses go digital all over the province. Through Digital Main Street, more Ontario small businesses have what they need to rebuild in the present and compete in the economy of the future.”

## Readiness

DMS has clearly become part of the innovative ecosystem for small business success. OBIAA is primed to continue delivering the DMS Ontario Grants Program, to help Ontario’s small businesses thrive today and be ready for the future, by connecting with customers globally and sustaining their communities locally.

The opportunity remains huge. Tens of thousands of small businesses across Ontario could still benefit from assistance to transform how they operate. The Government of Ontario has recognized this in their latest budget and have committed to further invest in the DMS program, with more details to come.

## Courage

## Might





**OPEN**  
*FOR* TAKE-OUT  
& DELIVERY

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**DIGITAL**  
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The DMS program has provided business owners across Ontario with the confidence and knowledge to evolve into truly hybrid enterprises able to engage and transact with customers online as well as in person.