

RETAIL

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business services firm says it can identify items that current retailers could be selling in their store and suggest new businesses that may do well in Wadena.

“I see this as a very great marketing opportunity for this community,” WDA Executive Director Dean Uselman said.

In Park Rapids, the city’s chamber, business and lodging associations, the county and two foundations banded together to fund a branding project. Working with a Dallas-based branding and marketing agency for 10 months resulted this past summer in a new brand for the area: Heartland Lakes. Butch De La Hunt, president/CEO of the Park Rapids Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce, said the Heartland Lakes branding has brought new opportunities to highlight all the region has to offer.

“We’ve got to continue to promote the region and the great assets we have and say, ‘Hey, if you live here, shop local, support your local businesses. If you visit here, support the neighboring communities,’” he said. De La Hunt points out that without that support, area businesses cannot survive. “Once they’re gone, it’s harder and harder to re-establish them.”

The Alexandria chamber is working on raising awareness of supporting local businesses in a couple of ways. One strategy involves educating a generation that has grown up with online shopping.

During presentations to high schoolers, Bitzan said the chamber shows students “how their money turns over in a community, and if you buy local that money goes into paychecks for local people who turn around and spend their money in other local places.”

It seems to have worked. She heard how students changed their spending behavior based on what they learned through these efforts.

“Now that we have gotten our message across on a smaller scale,” Bitzan said, “we intend to ramp up that education model and move forward with a community-wide marketing campaign.”

She is referring to a “Do Business Local” program designed to encourage

residents to spend more of their dollars in town. The marketing program will include print and radio advertising, signs in storefront windows, social media campaigns and presentations.

“Our goal is education,” Bitzan said. “Most people don’t stop to think about the impact that sending their money out of the community has on the local economy. It is convenience that they think about.”

Going online

Convenience is often cited as a key reason consumers shop online. While e-commerce remains a relatively small part of retail sales – less than 10 percent in 2018, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce – it is growing rapidly. National sales figures show that e-commerce sales are increasing at nearly three times the rate of total retail sales.

However, this past June, a U.S. Supreme Court decision requiring sales tax to be charged on more online purchases will help brick-and-mortar retailers in their battle with online competitors.

“We’ve been fighting for this for 20 years,” said Bruce Nustad, president of the Minnesota Retailers Association. “There’s a sense that some fairness in the sales tax arena will at least level the playing field.”

Some businesses have decided if you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em. They have expanded their markets globally by going online.

The most recent addition to Morris’ retail scene is a business with an online presence and a retail store. Inherit Clothing Company had been using a website to sell modest apparel for women and children out of a rural warehouse, before opening a retail store and in September moving to downtown Morris.

“We ran out of space,” owner Amy Ekren said of why the businesses moved.

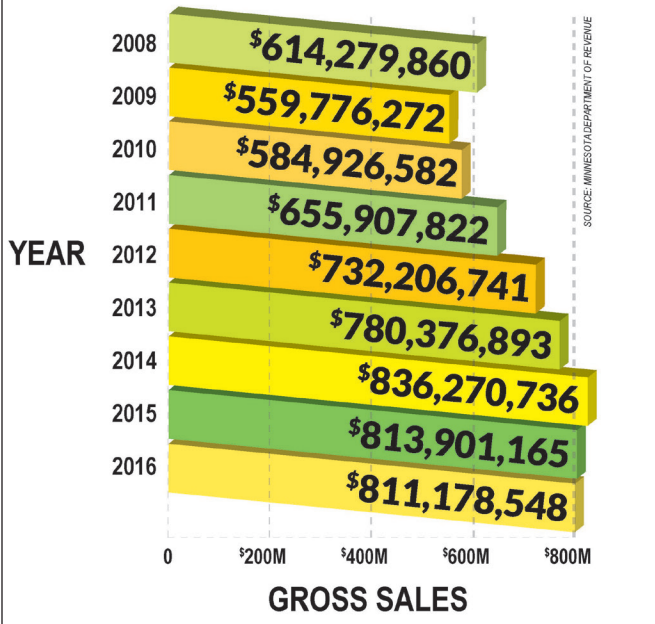
Customer first

Nustad recommends that store owners get close to their customers, who they know better than anyone.

“Those doing best are really embracing their customers through loyalty programs and providing an experience for shoppers,” Nustad said. “It’s not a magic bullet, but it’s something they can do.”

In talking with people from the lakes area

DOUGLAS COUNTY RETAIL



region, it becomes clear there are several other things that retailers can do. One is to capitalize on community events that draw big crowds, by reeling in shoppers that may have had no reason to shop in a store before. To do that, businesses have to be open during hours when it is convenient for people to shop, and not rely so heavily on the peak summer months.

“Drawing people downtown in the off-season might require more businesses to be open then,” said Kim Holder, owner of Rustic Cabin Decor in Park Rapids. “Even if we did just once or twice a month when as many stores as possible were open that would encourage people to come here.”

Bill Simpson, who owns the Trading Post in Park Rapids, advocates keeping stores open at least on Fridays and Saturdays throughout the winter.

The biggest edge brick-and-mortar stores may have is in providing a level of personalized service that consumers can’t get online. Deb Brown of SaveYour.Town, the group that helps West Central Initiative deliver webinars, says more consumers are seeking customer service.

“People want to be treated special. They want to have an experience. They want to know they are valued,” Brown said. “They don’t want the same old thing.”

After all, a computer can’t stretch shoes for a more comfortable fit, or hustle to a rack for a better size.

“You will never outbuy Amazon,” said Jed Brazier, executive director of the Wadena Chamber of Commerce, “but you can pivot and lean into those things

forget a time when he received no welcome and even had the lights turned off on him while looking to make a significant purchase.

“That’s just a great example of how it’s being done wrong,” he said. That’s the only bad example he had to share, but it shows how just one bad experience for a customer can be their last with a business.

“Having good customer service is the most important thing. We insist on it,” said Steve Sorenson, owner of Aunt Belle’s Confectionary/Grandpa’s Cabin shop in Park Rapids.

“I had an experience years ago putting over \$100 worth of fuel in a truck and I didn’t get a thank you. Guess what? I never went back,” he said. “Now I tell my employees to greet everyone who comes in the store and when they leave, even if they don’t buy anything to thank them for stopping. You don’t know if they are

coming back later to buy something.”

Those bad experiences for Brazier and Sorenson were isolated incidents, with friendly customer service far and away being the rule. And as long as customers continue to have good shopping experiences, many area retailers will continue to thrive.

As Patty Dusing, who owns a women’s clothing boutique and serves on the Alexandria Downtown Merchants Association, points out, how many “girls’ weekends” can be done sitting around a computer?

In the end, perhaps the most effective way of taming the 8,000-pound gorilla named Amazon is to update the familiar phrase coined more than 100 years ago – the customer is always right – with a new slogan: Do what’s right for your customers. Give them the kind of shopping experience that keeps them coming back for more.

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Saturday, December 15 ♦ 7:30pm

See full schedule at Medora.com

Tickets: \$30

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Alexandria Covenant
4005 Dakota St.
Pastor: John LeVahn
Sunday Worship: 8:00am Traditional Worship
9:15am & 10:45am Contemporary Worship
Sunday School: 9:15am Children, Youth & Adults
320-763-5659 | www.alexandriacovenant.org

Alexandria United Methodist
2210 Sixth Ave. E.
Pastor: Gary Taylor
Sunday Worship: 8:00am & 10:30am
Sunday School: 9:15am
Coffee & Fellowship 9:00am
320-763-4624 | www.alexumc.org

Berea Lutheran Brethren Church
1605 Sixth Ave. E.
Pastor: Steve Walswick
Sunday Worship: 10:30am
Sunday School: 9:30am
Holy Communion first & third Sunday of month
www.welcometoberea.org

Emmanuel Episcopal
12th Ave. E. & Lake St.
Rev. Tom Sinning
Sunday Worship: 10:30am
Sunday School: 9:30 am 1st & 3rd Sunday
320-763-3201 | www.alexmnepiscopal.org

First Congregational United Church of Christ
221 Seventh Ave. W.
Pastor: Scott Keelin
Sunday Worship: 10:00am
Communion second Sunday of month
Sunday Worship Radio Broadcast: KKRA first Sunday of month 10:00 AM
320-763-3341
www.firstcongregationaluccalex.com

First Lutheran Chuch (ELCA)
822 Douglas St.
Pastors: Greg Billberg, Kari vanWakeren & Ben Jacobson
Wednesday Worship: 6:15pm
Saturday Worship: 5:00pm
Sunday Worship: 8:30am, 9:45am & 11:00am
Sunday School: Call or visit our website for times
Holy Communion & Sunday School:
Please visit our website for times
Sunday Worship
Radio Broadcast: 9:45am KKRA 1490AM
320-762-2196 | www.firstlutheranalexandria.com

Good Shepherd Lutheran
2702 Hwy. 29 N
Pastor: Tim Schiller
Sunday Worship: 8:00am & 10:45am
Bible Study & Sunday School: 9:30am
Holy Communion first & second Sunday of month
320-762-5152 | www.goodshepherd-LCMS.org

Grace Church
1704 Hazel Hill Rd SE
Pastor: Craig Dahl
Sunday School: 9:00am
Sunday Worship: 10:15am
Saturday POINT Worship: 5:00pm
320-763-4393 | www.gracechurch-alexandria.com

Lake Community Church
1751 Co Rd 44 NW
Pastor: Jon Ewton
Assoc. Pastor: Paul Peterson
Minister of Women: Melody Warren
Sunday Worship: 9:00am & 10:30am
Sunday School: 10:30am
Youth: Wednesday 7pm - 8:30pm
320-762-5424 | www.lakecommunity.org

Living Word Lutheran Church
1722 16th Ave. E.
Alexandria, MN 56308
Clergy: Pastor A.J. Kluver
Sunday Worship: 9am, Special seasonal services (White church South of Woodland Elementary)
(320)762-1997
www.livingwordalexmn.org

New Testament Church
2505 Hwy 29 North
Pastors: Peter Reishus & Mike Loween
Phase I: 9:30am – 10:15am
Phase II: 10:30am – 11:30am
Sunday School: 10:30am
Wednesday Bible Study: 6:30 pm
320-762-2444 | www.ntcalalexandria.org

Shalom Lutheran (ELCA)
681 Voyager Dr.
Pastor: Dennis Preston, Interim Pastor
Sunday Worship: 9:00 am
Communion at every Sunday
Sunday School: 10:00am
320-762-8641 | www.shalomlutheran.org

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church (WELS)
718 Victoria Dr.
Pastor: Michael Neuman
Sunday Worship: 9:00am
Sunday School & Bible Class: 10:30am
Communion first and third Sunday of month
320-762-1644 | www.stpaulalex.com

Word Alone Fellowship
(A Traditional Christian Worship)
1906 6th Ave. East
Alexandria, MN
Pastors: Steve Walswick, Eunice Wold-Bakke & Ralph Erickson
Sunday Worship: 9:00 am
Sunday Adult Bible Study: 10:30 am (Dodie Sorbel)
Communion: First and third Sunday

Zion Lutheran (LCMS)
Third Ave. E. & Lake Street
Holy Communion: 8:00am 1st & 3rd Sundays
10:45am second & fourth Sundays.
Praise worship: 8:00am
second Sunday of month and 10:45am
third Sunday of month
320-763-4842 | www.zionalex.org

Other Areas

St. Luke’s, Garfield (LCMC)
201 Ida St Garfield
Pastors: David L. Gran & Susan J. Davidson
PR. David Wallin Visitation Pastor
Worship: 8:30 & 11am
Coffee Fellowship & Bible Studies: 9:45am
Holy Communion 2nd & last Sunday
320-834-2285
www.stlukeschurchgarefield.org

Trinity Lutheran Church
16 North Douglas,
Carlos, MN
Pastor: Mark Schwarz
Worship: 10:00 AM
Bible Study & Sunday School: 8:45am
Communion: 1st and 3rd Sundays
320-852-7530

To be included please call Izzy at 320.763.1227