



ST. CATHARINES - THOROLD
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
For A Stronger Niagara

Strategic Plan

2008 – 2011

“To be the leading business organization in St. Catharines and Thorold providing maximum value to its membership by recognizing and encouraging the private sector’s role as the driving force in the local and regional economy.”

Executive Summary

The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce is the oldest business organization in Niagara. Founded in St. Catharines in 1867, and Thorold in 1889, the chambers of commerce have played a leading role in building and supporting commerce and trade in our communities. In 2006, the chambers of St. Catharines and Thorold merged becoming the largest chamber in Niagara, and one of the biggest in Southern Ontario, with over 1,000 members. The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce is committed to building a stronger Niagara by supporting its membership, and by being the leading voice of business in its communities.

Strategic planning is vital to the success of any corporation, business or organization. With the completion of the merger, the board of directors embarked on a process of designing a plan that builds on the strengths of the Chamber, as well as positioning it to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

The plan captures the core objectives identified by the board as crucial elements to the evolution of the Chamber as it strives to meet the needs of its membership. Through an examination of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, this plan sets the stage for a more focused, powerful Chamber by building on its rich history, and leading the way to help create a stronger local economy by following the Chamber's vision, mission and guiding principles.

The approach adopted by the board includes connecting the core objectives to action items with accompanying reporting metrics and means systems to achieve the actions. The objectives identified are as follows:

- **Building Partnerships – For A Stronger Niagara**

Proactively encourage Niagara's chambers of commerce, businesses, municipalities, elected officials and citizens to work cooperatively and collectively for a stronger Niagara.

- **Membership Growth**

Engage the business communities in St. Catharines and Thorold to increase and strengthen Chamber's membership

- **Advocacy**

Advocating and proactively communicating with all orders of government and other community groups and organizations enhancing the Chamber's positions as the voice of business.

- **Business Working Together**

Focus on enhancement of business-to-business relationships supported by a strong Chamber network.

- **Membership Benefits & Services**

Align member benefits and services to meet dynamic needs of the membership.

- **Recognize Member Achievements**

Promote business excellence and entrepreneurship and foster a sense of excellence and achievement amongst members.

- **Operational Excellence**

Continuously improve efficiency, effectiveness and financial stability of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce while providing leadership to business and the community.

The 2008-2011 Strategic Plan is a comprehensive document that sets the stage for the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce to become a dominant business organization. It sets the course for exceptional growth and opportunity for the Chamber through 2011. It's time to implement the plan and build.

On behalf of the Board of Directors,

Alan J. Simpson
President, 2007

Walter Sendzik
Executive-Vice President & General Manager

The Vision

To be the leading business organization in St. Catharines and Thorold providing maximum value to its membership by recognizing and encouraging the private sector's role as the driving force in the local and regional economy.

The Mission

To serve as the leading voice of business in St. Catharines and Thorold committed to the enhancement of economic prosperity and quality of life in our cities and region.

Guiding Principles

Professionalism and integrity united in the delivery of high value services and benefits.

Respect for and celebration of the contributions and achievements of our members, volunteers and staff.

Remaining non-partisan in the democratic process while advancing issues affecting business.

Support the membership, and the greater interest of the business community in St. Catharines, Thorold and Niagara.

CHAMBER CORE VALUES

Integrity

Respect

Inclusiveness

Courage

Excellence

Creativity

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strengths:

- Increased membership growth (over 1000 members);
- Strengthened role as the voice of business through expanded advocacy role improving credibility in the community;
- Leading business organization in the community;
- Financial stability through strong marketing and sales approach;
- Expanded events;
- Increased staffing to best serve the needs of members.
- A rich history of chamber activity in the community with 140 years in St. Catharines and over 115 years in Thorold.
- Competitive membership benefits package.
- Positioned as a leading organization in research and development of policies to support business.
- Increased participation at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.
- Improved creditability with St. Catharines city council and other elected officials.
- Developing programs for business sector engagement.
- Relationships with other chambers of Niagara.

Weaknesses:

- Limited engagement in Thorold.
- Limited Regional engagement.
- Need for increased volunteerism.
- Lack of defined roles within the organization.

- Gathering input from members relating to events and membership benefits.
- Lack of a complete marketing plan.
- Lack of adequate engagement with Ontario Chamber of Commerce and Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

Opportunities:

- Continued membership growth
- Develop increased partnerships with media.
- Position chamber benefits as the best in Niagara.
- Work with other chambers to promote Niagara.
- Strengthen position as the most significant voice of business in Niagara.
- Networking between chamber boards in Niagara.
- Learn from other chambers beyond Niagara.
- Tap into chamber membership to aid in growth development.
- Better measure elected officials against chamber priorities.
- Greater impact on the political process.
- Opportunity for growth of events.
- Enhance chamber benefits through innovative and proactive opportunities.

Threats:

- Economic downturn.
- Challenges from other business organizations.
- Parochialism.
- Globalization.
- Shift in demographics.
- Expanded chamber overhead.

1.0 Building Partnerships – For A Stronger Niagara

To proactively encourage Niagara’s chambers of commerce, businesses, municipalities, elected officials and citizens to work cooperatively and collectively for a stronger Niagara.

1.1 ACTION

Develop stronger partnerships with various chambers in Niagara.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Schedule meetings and encourage participation of executive board members from other Niagara chambers.
2. Continue and encourage participation in meetings of the senior staff of all Niagara chambers.
3. Advocate on regional issues as a collective group.
4. Develop communication strategy to share information and advocacy work between chambers.
5. Partner with other OCC and CCC chamber members from Niagara to develop policy positions for annual conferences.
6. Develop a Niagara chambers event to promote business growth.

1.2 ACTION

Work with business organizations in Niagara to build economic prosperity and opportunity.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Build working relations with municipal and regional economic development organizations.
2. Engage and communicate Chamber economic priorities with business organizations and special commissions.
3. Develop active relationships with other Niagara-based business organizations.

2.0 Membership Growth

Engage business communities in St. Catharines and Thorold to increase and strengthen Chamber's membership

2.1 ACTION

Achieve 1400-member level by the end of fiscal 2011.

METRIC:

Monthly membership reports to the Board of Directors and annual report to membership.

Annual review of membership growth and retention progress by the Membership and Executive Committees.

MEANS:

1. Continue to enhance the annual membership drive campaign.
2. Develop targeted membership outreach programs by business sector.
3. Create welcome packaging for newly opened businesses.
4. Develop retention strategies to engage new and existing members.
5. Promote benefits of membership through media outlets.
6. Encourage members to invite non-members to events and programs.
7. Ensure membership marketing materials capture quality and benefits of Chamber membership.
8. Engage Jaycees and other youth business organizations to foster future membership.

2.2 ACTION

Actively communicate with various sectors of business.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Develop industry specific surveys for non-members conducted on an annual basis to determine awareness, interests and challenges of the Chamber.
2. Invite non-members to events and programs as a means to showcase Chamber's benefits of membership.
3. Increase Chamber participation in industry specific organizations and events.
4. Ensure Strategic Plan and Guiding Principles are effectively communicated to membership and community leaders.

3.0 Advocacy

Enhance position as the voice of business by proactively advocating and communicating with all orders of government and other community groups and organizations.

3.1 ACTION

Focus on issues impacting on business development and economic prosperity.

METRICS:

Regular reports from Municipal Affairs Committee and Regional Affairs Committee to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Survey membership annually to identify and understand the challenges and obstacles to business development.
2. Set priorities for Chamber engagement and input at all orders of government.
3. Provide well-researched policy positions to membership, media, community and elected officials.
4. Ensure committee volunteers are engaged and active in preparing and supporting policy positions.
5. Work with Ontario Chamber of Commerce and Canadian Chamber of Commerce with policy development and advocacy support.

3.2 ACTION

In conjunction with overall communication strategy promote and enhance advocacy work.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Delivery timely press releases and comments to media.
2. Develop partnerships to promote Chamber positions.

3.3 ACTION

Participate in the election process at all orders of government to ensure Chamber's policy positions and priorities are advanced.

METRIC:

Planning with Regional Affairs Committee and Municipal Affairs Committee and report to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Host public debates with candidates in Thorold and St. Catharines.
2. Develop partnerships with media outlets regarding election coverage.
3. Ensure Chamber remains non-partisan in all elections.
4. Engage members in Chamber policy priorities and provide opportunities for members to engage candidates.

3.4 ACTION

Ensure the Chamber remains the leading voice of business in St. Catharines, Thorold and Niagara acting as stewards of good governance and responsible fiscal management at the municipal and regional level.

METRIC:

Planning with Regional Affairs Committee and Municipal Affairs Committee and report to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Actively participate in the annual budgets of St. Catharines, Thorold and Niagara providing input where appropriate.
2. Develop working relationships with city and regional staff.
3. Ensure a strong communication with elected officials at the city and regional level.
4. Actively participate in government appointed committees and boards.
5. Present policy positions and priorities to city and regional government and participate in public forums on issues of a business interest and in the pursuit of economic prosperity.
6. Develop a program to engage elected officials at all levels of government.

4.0 Business Working Together

Focus on enhancement of business-to-business relationships supported by a strong chamber network.

4.1 ACTION

Provide high quality member-to-member networking and communication opportunities through technology, events, programs and effective committees.

METRIC

Regular reports to the Executive Committee, applicable working committees and annual reports to the Board of Directors.

MEANS

1. Ensure members are aware of all elements of member-to-member interactions.
2. Develop Member-to-Member interactive online program.
3. Ensure an environment of networking opportunities at all Chamber events.
4. Encourage committee involvement and ensure effectiveness of committees.

4.2 ACTION

Increase participation within the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC).

METRIC

Regular reports to the Executive Committee, applicable working committees and annual reports to the Board of Directors.

MEANS

1. Attend the OCC and CCC annual general meetings and policy conferences.
2. Promote and engage members to participate in OCC and CCC committees and board of directors.
3. Regional Affairs Committee and Municipal Affairs Committee to develop policy positions for the policy conferences of the OCC and CCC.

5.0 Member Benefits and Services

Provide enhanced member benefits and services to meet the needs of membership.

5.1 ACTION

Deliver membership benefits in efficient and effective ways to ensure benefits contribute to the prosperity of members.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Survey membership to gain insight into knowledge and use of current Chamber benefits and seek information on potential new benefits.
2. Conduct interviews with non-renewing members with relation to quality and support of benefits and services.
3. Ensure benefits are communicated to membership on annual basis.
4. Review benefits to seek potential enhancements and opportunities.

5.2 ACTION

Enhance membership benefits through affinity-based programming.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee. Annual reports to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Review affinity-based programs offered by the Chamber to ensure programs provide value-added returns to membership.
2. Create policy on affinity-based programs to ensure interests of membership are not compromised.
3. Include affinity-based programming as an added benefit of membership.

6.0 Recognize Member Achievements

Promote business excellence and entrepreneurship and foster a sense of excellence and achievement amongst members.

6.1 ACTION

Strengthen annual Business Achievement Awards as a means to promote business excellence and to celebrate entrepreneurial spirit.

METRIC:

Reporting from the Business Achievement Awards Committee to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Engage volunteer participation on the BAA committee.
2. Ensure BAA program includes various business sectors and acknowledges lifetime achievement and historic business development.
3. Build partnerships with media outlets to broaden exposure of the BAA.
4. Strengthen branding of the BAA as the leading business awards program in St. Catharines and Thorold.

6.2 ACTION

Promote business excellence and achievement through communication.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Acknowledge member's business achievements through Chamber's communication network.
2. Support member's achievements and recognition through media outlets.
3. Develop a process of nominating members for other non-chamber business award programs, and for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce Business Awards.

6.3 ACTION

Acknowledge volunteer work by members.

MEANS:

Annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

METRIC:

1. Promote Chamber volunteers at appropriate times during events and programs.
2. Recognize Chamber volunteers through volunteer-focused events within the community.
3. Develop an annual volunteer appreciation event to promote volunteerism within the Chamber.

7.0 Operational Excellence

Enhance efficiency, effectiveness and financial stability of the Chamber while providing leadership to business and the community.

7.1 ACTION

Developing operational guidelines and setting organizational objectives and planning.

METRIC:

Reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Develop a Statement of Principles by which the Chamber will establish its public policies.
2. Deliver an operational budget with responsible surpluses.
3. Develop annual membership investment marketing package for sponsorship opportunities.
4. Planning and executing all events on at least a cost recovery or better approach.
5. Explore and pursue revenue generation opportunities appropriate for Chamber mandate.

7.2 ACTION

Ensure organizational strength through an effective board of directors and committees.

METRIC:

Reporting to the Board of Directors. Annual report at Annual General Meeting.

MEANS:

1. Communicate leadership opportunities to membership.
2. Develop recruitment process for committees and monitor committee progress.
3. Design organization chart for effective communication between board members and staff.
4. Provide orientation for board members.
5. Review implementation status of strategic planning on an annual basis.
6. Define roles of board members and committees.
7. Engage Past President Committee.

7.3 ACTION

Secure Canadian Chamber of Commerce Accreditation for Excellence in Chamber Operations.

METRIC:

Quarterly reporting to the Executive Committee and semi-annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Review standards set by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce for accreditation.
2. Create plan to achievement standards outlined in the Guide to Accreditation.
3. Apply for accreditation in 2008.

7.4 ACTION

Develop and implement a defined communication strategy and ensure integration into all chamber operations.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. Develop a communication strategy and standards consistent with the strategic plan.
2. Ensure the full integration of the communication standards in all operations.

7.5 ACTION

Enhance Annual Business Plan.

METRIC:

Regular reporting to the Executive Committee and annual reporting to the Board of Directors.

MEANS:

1. For fiscal 2009 integrate annual budget process with this strategic plan into a complete annual business plan.

Strategy into Action

The implementation strategy defines the approach for the execution of the strategic plan. It is simply the method of putting the strategy into action – yet it is the most critical link to successfully achieving the results outlined in the Chamber's four-year strategic plan.

'Strategy into action' planning is a phased approach charting a course through performance factors, linking strategic thrusts to projects, and outlining key activities connected to committees, the board of directors, and staff. The ultimate goal is to enable the Chamber to effectively translate strategic intent all the way through to results in a clear and powerful process.

The Chamber will implement the plan through a series of initiatives including the establishment of an implementation chart, which will include leadership roles and responsibilities and measurement criteria. Initiatives will be measured against projected milestones to ensure that the initiatives are moving forward as planned. In addition, a regularly scheduled review process will provide consistent visibility to the progress of the plan. This measurement review process will provide continuous feedback to assess how effectively the implementation methods are in executing the strategy.

Paramount to the strategic plan's successful implementation is the complete support of its objectives and actions by the membership, volunteers, board of directors and the staff of the Chamber. Therefore, a communication program will be specifically designed to build support for the strategic plan – and the program will include those within the organization as well as elected representatives, other business organizations and the community-at-large.

This strategic plan sets the course for exceptional growth and opportunity for the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce through 2011. It's time to build a stronger Niagara – and it starts with the implementation of this strategic plan.