

# Going silent now could be a detriment to your business, says Lindsay DBIA

*Sarah Sobanski*

Kawartha Lakes businesses have an opportunity to connect with customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they'd be remiss to let those relationships falter.

Don't be silent — that's the advice from local business associations for businesses that have had to shut down their storefronts amid the outbreak.

Many businesses have taken their businesses online, adding takeout or delivery options, but those who haven't found those avenues sustainable are at risk of going dark.

That is to say, they might step away from the customer eye to wait out COVID-19.

Melissa McFarland, of the Lindsay Downtown Business Improvement Association, says the DBIA is hearing from members on both sides. She says either way, it's imperative that businesses keep up with their customers or risk coming back to find their loyal base missing.

"We're trying to get the message out that with social media — the way the algorithms work with Facebook and Instagram — is the people who post regularly are the ones who build followings," she says.

"If you were to go radio silent, now is not the time to do that. When you have the opportunity to pick your business back up, you may not have the same customer following."

The online customer community has been surging in the wake of so many businesses being shut down.

Social pages have been set up to let people know who's offering alternative ways to get their products, organizations are running gift certificate programs, businesses are offering contests and more.

McFarland says customers know that businesses are trying, and the response has been terrific. Some of her recent posts have had more page views and interactions than the DBIA has ever garnered.

"My advice to our businesses has been make sure you're still posting regularly, even once every couple of days," she says.

"It might seem silly if your business isn't really operating in any way but it's sort of a reassurance to your customers that you're still here, you're going to be here when this is over, and you want to be able to keep up that relationship online through this so that you still have an audience."

Being off because of the novel coronavirus is also a great time to catch up with online platforms and marketing.

McFarland says business owners are often busy and find it hard to make time for new ventures. If social media wasn't your thing before, what better time to get out there, learn and thrive?

"There's lots of online workshops and webinars, a lot of them (covering) small business basics for social media... This is maybe a great time for some of them to do some sort of e-learning with some new business practices for them."