

# **2010 White Paper**

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## ***Bismarck-Mandan Chamber of Commerce***

### ***Introduction***

Over the past five years, the Bismarck-Mandan Chamber of Commerce took a thirty thousand foot look at the community and where it was headed. As we strove to be a leader in the community, we rolled out a plan and began to work to not only meet, but also exceed the abilities of a Chamber in a community twice the size of Bismarck-Mandan.

We executed new Web sites, added new programs and implemented a progressive political agenda at the local, state and national level. We began blogging, tweeting and linking in a way that was unheard of a few years back. And in the process of all this forward movement, we have not been able to ensure our membership were able to keep pace. We are going to change that.

### ***This is not your parents' Chamber***

The Chamber of 2010 is a mere shadow of the Chamber that put on air shows, community festivals and boat races. Learning from our past successes and failures we moved onward, working to help the businesses of Bismarck-Mandan become players in an increasingly technology-driven arena. It is not a mistake that our tagline is "Your Future is Our Focus." That is what we focus on as we work to make your business better.

### ***Open communication is key***

One of the biggest challenges and successes the Chamber has experienced is the means in which we communicate with our members. Ensuring you know what is happening at the Chamber means you understand your investment. Though we would love to be able to make individual calls and visits to each member each time something is happening, this is not a reality. Instead, we have developed a few methods that allow us to tell you what is happening at the Chamber and within the business community at large.

The Chamber Connection is our tried and true method of letting you know what is happening throughout the community. Here you can find out what the Chamber has happening and who the firm next door is hiring. It is a general overview of topics and ideas that we believe you will find informative. Our members also drive it and we want to hear what you want from the publication. If you have a story idea or a story to tell, please call us and let us know. As someone who is experiencing your nook of the economy each day, you know what is happening more readily than we do.

The Chamber has utilized the fax machine to the benefit of our members for years. However, with changing times, increased use of email and the creation of RSS feeds, the fax machine is falling in line with the telegraph. To ensure you never miss a beat or an opportunity to advance your business, the Chamber is working to utilize email and our Web site more. You and all of your employees can opt in to the weekly ChamberLink email and special announcements we send out. This allows you not to have to rely on one person to forward the information. It also allows the

enterprising people to be proactive in their involvement with the community and business. Let them read and choose.

The push to our Web site does a few things. One it ensures that as the fax machine continues its slow march on the path towards being obsolete, the Chamber will already have open lines of communication established where you can find all the latest information. The other benefit in this push is creating a new place to market your business. Both the weekly ChamberLink email and the Web site offer opportunities for you to advertise, reaching a new group of Chamber members in a way that we are now accustomed to, electronically.

The Chamber is also ramping up our efforts to utilize social media to communicate quickly to our members. By utilizing Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogging, the Chamber can share what is happening both at the Chamber and with our members. As we begin to utilize these progressive avenues for information sharing, the Chamber will be able to further the economic base of our community. It is through sharing information that we are able to promote businesses and encourage those with newsworthy information to share it with the rest of Bismarck-Mandan. There is no room for modesty in business.

### ***Remember, a member is a member***

One of the biggest points that we as an organization want to drive home is that ALL employees of member organizations are considered Chamber members and are entitled to the same benefits as the CEO or President. That means member pricing for all employees, the mixers are open and our Friday at the Chamber series offering lunch for next to nothing is also open to all. Consider how the up and comers in your organization could benefit from a little networking or a bit of lunch and learning. Encouragement from you could mean a better employee who is poised to continue to climb the preverbal corporate ladder. After all, it is all about whom you know if you know what to do with the knowledge.

### ***Open hand to open doors***

Now how do you get to know all those people? That is one of the many benefits of a Chamber membership. We arrange the events; it is up to you to reach out and shake hands.

One of the most talked about benefits that come with being members are the opportunities to network. We know you invest in the Chamber and we understand each business and budget is different. If you have not tried our events, we invite you to do so. We offer a host of activities at a variety of prices with a variety of focuses.

Consider starting with one of our free or almost free events, such as the mixers or plaza events. These are geared towards networking with a minimal financial investment and time. An hour here and a half hour there can be the key to opening a door that previously stood closed. It might even lead to a new partnership. Eide Bailly and Schmidt Insurance/SIA Marketing can attest to this. Their new building is a product of a conversation at a Chamber board meeting.

As an employer, this is a great way to help your employees get more involved in the business community. What is an investment of five dollars if it opens an opportunity for a major deal? Though we will recommend you try things more than once. The theory is the first time you get your

feet wet, the second time you whet your appetite and the third time you share a drink with a President or CEO.

While getting involved at that level and learning the value of that minimal investment, consider looking at the more moderately priced events. The Chamber provides opportunities to further your business education and your knowledge of the community. As Peter Drucker said, "More business decisions occur over lunch and dinner than at any other time, yet no MBA courses are given on the subject." We'll bite, or at least offer you a bite to eat as you are learning, getting involved, and keeping your face and business in front of other eager members.

There are pricier options for involvement. Sponsorships allow us to run the events, pay upfront, and keep ticket prices in reasonable price range and allow more members to get involved. Show how your business is involved in the Chamber in a broader sense through sponsorship. With name and logo recognition in publications, emails, and at the event, you are able to put your commitment out on the table for the membership to see.

One of the things the Chamber continues to do is create and recreate events to fit with the wants and desires of our members. It also means our programming is always fresh and filled with new ideas and opportunities.

### ***Open minds, open doors***

From the beginning, business matters. Consider this: we are teaching and training our kids to play hockey and soccer from ages as young as two. The skills of teamwork, sportsmanship and goal scoring are instilled in the youth from the word "go." So why not business? The meaning of a dollar and the flow of that dollar from piggybank to a financial institution and beyond is a lesson that our children will carry with them long after their dreams of winning an NCAA championship are achieved.

The Chamber understands the importance of helping the next generations not only understand the importance of a dollar, but the importance of how item A and item B are related on a local, national and global level. That is why the Chamber offers programs to reach students from second grade through high school.

These programs are always looking for more people to go into classrooms, offer tours and enable employees to get out into the community and give back. Though there are sponsorships available for many of these programs, this is another low-cost opportunity. As an employer, it will cost you employee time. And yes, time is money but who better to teach that lesson to your future workforce than today's workers?

### ***Open discussion***

Over the past years, the Chamber has begun to create an aggressive agenda to discuss the issues that will affect business on a local, state and national level. By participating more in government, the Chamber is better able to advocate for business within our community.

We understand our members are diverse in their views and beliefs. Because of this, we utilize the guidance of our members, as well as our board of directors, to pick the issues that pertain to the majority of our members.

We know there are issues that will affect your business and though it might not fulfill the criteria that we look for when it comes to choosing an issue, that certainly does not mean we cannot help. We are more than happy to work with you to discuss the ins-and-out of legislation and lobbying for an issue. Watch for the workshops near the end of 2010 to learn more about how to be an effective advocate for business at the state level. We not only want to get involved, we want to help you get involved. Your voice in your niche speaks ten times louder than our voice for general businesses ever will.

The Chamber may choose sides on an issue, but it is our policy not to endorse candidates. Instead, we want to encourage our members to run for office at the local, state and national level. Through candidate forms, debates and articles, we work to help our membership keep informed and up-to-date on the issues and the candidates running for office.

If you want to get involved in the process at the Chamber level, please consider joining us for a committee meeting. Sit in and see what our committees focus on. You can also read the Chamber Board of Director minutes and agendas online. You can even submit comments.

### ***The door is always open***

We understand that business is ever evolving and keeping pace is hard. The Chamber works to do that by ensuring our members are running alongside us is just as important. As we continue to focus on the future, we want your help focusing us on what you want the future to look like in Bismarck-Mandan. This can only happen if we hear from you.

Responding to surveys, calling and letting us know your thoughts, as well as stopping by the Chamber to chat with us helps all the staff at the Chamber better understand what the membership wants.

It also helps us get to know you better. Though you are always welcome to drop by, if you call and set an appointment to chat about your views and desires, we can guarantee you our undivided attention. Your being proactive helps us be proactive as well.

The Chamber is here for you. We are focusing on your future and we will continue to do so. Our mission statement says we will advance the business environment and economic base of the Bismarck-Mandan area. With input from our members, we can move forward, keep pace with the national trends and continue to make headlines.

It is a grand adventure and we want you with us every step of the way.