

Case Study:
Supporting Oxford – A project created with collaboration and love



1. Participants:

- Alyssa Humphrey, [The Social Factory](#)
- Meredith Maywood, [Tourism Oxford](#)
- Ronda Stewart, [Oxford Connections](#)
- Lindsay Wilson, [Community Futures Oxford](#)

2. Oxford County’s Economic Context

Key Sectors in Oxford’s economy

1. Automotive and Manufacturing
2. Agriculture and food processing
3. Tourism

Examples: local farms that have added tourism, cheese producers, maple syrup producers, farm equipment manufacturing.

Main Impacts from Covid-19 in Oxford’s Economy

- In agriculture: workforce shortages
- In manufacturing: supply chain challenges, workforce shortages, production schedule modifications to keep up with demand
- In tourism: businesses had to find new ways to engage with consumers and meet their needs.
- Not always bad news: local producers are reporting that the demand exceeds the supply

3. About the Supporting Oxford Platform

The platform supportingoxford.ca/ was the result of collaborative work between Lindsay Wilson (Community Futures Oxford) and local entrepreneur Alyssa Humphrey (The Social Factory). Supporting Oxford is an online directory for local businesses impacted by Covid-19 where they can submit their business information and the alternatives offered to reach consumers.



Initially, businesses were using google docs for submissions and Alyssa would upload their information to the website. The initial categories included food & drinks, gift certificates, home goods & essentials, shopping & gifts and online fitness.

Tourism Oxford and Oxford Connections were also connecting with businesses so the initiative transitioned to a weekly economic development group that was having conversations on how a campaign to promote purchasing local would look like.



Then the platform evolved. A contact form was added to the website for business to fill out their information. When Oxford County reached stages 2 and 3, the needs of the consumers and the website changed. Businesses were encouraged to update their listings with new guidelines and operating hours. New categories were added: businesses making non-medical grade masks, garden centres, nurseries and golf courses. Blogs were added to the website with topics that would resonate with people.

Tourism Oxford re-directed their regular campaigns to push the Supporting Oxford platform. The group wanted a digital advertising campaign reflecting the needs of the businesses community. It made sense to use Supporting Oxford because it already had the directory and an audience.

Outcomes:

- Over 600 thousand impressions with the digital campaign;
- The click-through rate was above industry average, people were really interested in supporting local and see the local content;
- The business community feels supported: when you ask them *how can I help you?* And they tell you, they need to see the outcome to feel heard and supported.



Next steps:

- Supporting Oxford was meant to be temporary when it started (March, 2020). Now it has been useful for several months. It is still a directory, it can be used if a second wave of Covid-19 hits.
- The focus on small and local businesses will continue to be the driving force behind it.
- When the time to end the project comes, the group will be happy that this tool has served its purpose.

4. Learnings and Recommendations:

Benefits of multi-stakeholder collaboration:

- Supporting Oxford stands in very strong partnerships. They built on reliability, dependability and trust within organizations.
- Openness, full transparency, communication and clear identification of roles were key in this partnership.
- All organizations work with different people. By working together, they are helping more people that they would have if they were working by their own.
- The group did not identify any challenges aside from not being able to agree with a hug and a handshake.



Value of supporting small/local businesses by enhancing their online presence

- People want to support local but not necessarily want the traditional experience of shopping. Having presence online and making it consumer focused is critical right now.
- There is a need for the reach and the brand awareness. Having an online platform really helped businesses connect with their consumers.
- The platform makes it easy for consumers to find what they are looking for. The categories are broken down by location; it is a user friendly website experience.
- Online presence is one thing which the platform is encouraging. But there is also a digital shift in relying on technology in general. For example, for the berry pickers it was how to create online booking options, for others it could be contactless payment.

- Rural Oxford Economic Development offered an E-business grant. All the Supporting Oxford partners contributed to the success of this program.



Learnings:

The stakeholders involved in this project took partnership to another level. They were listening to the community, they frequently communicated what they were hearing and out of these conversations a new project emerged. This partnership worked not only for Supporting Oxford but for other projects.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Partner new ways, try new things.
- ✓ Pick up the phone, call your business community (as oppose to emailing them), and ask how you can help. Then pick up the phone and call some community partners, ask *are you hearing the same things? And what can we do about it?*
- ✓ Build in relationships and collaboration. True collaboration stems expertise, knowledge and ideas. You don't have to know everything or do everything.
- ✓ Use data to support your ideas.
- ✓ Enter partnerships with the intent to take action on whatever it is that you are bringing to the table.
- ✓ Move quickly and adapt as you go.

For more information [watch the complete interview here](#)



Other resources on e-commerce and businesses' online presence:

- [How COVID-19 could forever change the way Ontarians buy food](#)
- [Retail e-commerce and COVID-19: How online shopping opened doors while many were closing](#)
- [COVID-19: How to get through the crisis with an online strategy \(video\)](#)
- [Digital Main Street - Ontario Grants](#)

About the Rural Rebound Initiative:

In order to accelerate a rural renaissance from Covid-19, the [Rural Ontario Institute](#) is collecting, curating and sharing stories featuring positive examples of innovations drawn from across rural Ontario.

The [Rural Rebound](#) section of the ROI website showcases these stories and provides links to other useful resources and tools. For more information, please contact Lissel Hernandez-Gongora at lhernandez@ruralontarioinstitutr.ca.