

Sooke Business Pulse Check

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Eight questions asked of the Sooke Business Community
Feb 12-19, 2021

Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce



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Unit 1A, 6631 Sooke Road, Sooke, British Columbia, V9Z 0A3

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Thank you to Respondents

The Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce would like to thank all the respondents who contributed to this survey. All responses were unanimously submitted. If you wish to follow up on any of the questions that were asked, please feel free to reach out to the Chamber!

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About the Survey

This eight-question survey was posted on February 12 and closed on February 19, 2021. It was first posted on SurveyMonkey.com and then re-posted¹ using Google Forms. A total of 76 surveys were received.

The intent of the survey was to get a sense of how local businesses were coping with the pandemic, which is now entering into its second year. The Sooke Region Chamber of Commerce was also interested in the shorter and longer term needs of businesses.

Survey Overview

- Eight questions, multiple choice with comment field
- Last question was text response only
- Originally posted on SurveyMonkey
- Then posted on Google Forms
- This report amalgamates responses from both platforms

Survey Results

Total Respondents: 76

How the survey was accessed

- 93% of respondents - Newsletter
- 7% of respondents - Facebook

¹ SurveyMonkey originally allowed 100 responses using their free service. That number was recently reduced to 40. Not aware of the change, the Sooke Chamber received 55 responses and was unable to access 15 responses without paying for an annual subscription. The Chamber opted to repost the survey to Google Forms. As a result, there may be some duplication in responses. See Limitations. Because the survey was set up to be unanimous, there is no way to determine what if any responses were duplicated. This survey is an amalgamation of all responses (40 from SurveyMonkey and 36 from Google Forms).



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How quickly people responded

- 42% responded within the first hour of the newsletter going out
- 15% responded in the second hour
- 9% responded in the third hour
- 2% responded in the fourth hour

Respondents typically took two to three minutes to respond

Limitations of the Survey

There are several limitations to this survey.

First, the survey was posted on SurveyMonkey and then reposted using Google Forms. This means there could be some duplication of answers.

Second, it reflects only the operating realities of businesses who answered the survey. Sooke has over 600 registered businesses. The survey was first sent to 555 email address, which had a 50% open rate and a 40% click rate. The survey was then re-sent to 542 email address, which had a 51% open rate and a 29% click rate.

Third, this survey probably does not capture businesses whose doors have already closed who have either unsubscribed from receiving emails from the Chamber or were among the un-read numbers. Of those who answered, besides one retired person, all responses indicated some form of business activity.

Fourth, because a number of federal government COVID-19 loans included a portion that becomes non-repayable provided certain conditions are met, there is a likelihood that some respondents indicated “grant” when in fact, technically, they have received a loan. One response definitely referenced a loan as a grant, suggesting that others may have as well.

Despite these limitations, the information paints a picture of the status of businesses in Sooke and reflects their overall needs and wishes in the coming months as a new normal takes shape.

Executive Summary of Findings

- Overall, businesses in Sooke are doing well.
- Grants, loans, and CERB combined have been the most utilized form of assistance.
- Sooke Businesses will focus on growth for the next four months.
- Business owners have a desire to learn more about online tools.
- Chamber newsletter and email blasts are valuable.
- Online learning to continue during the pandemic.
- Post-pandemic sees networking and skills development as a priority.



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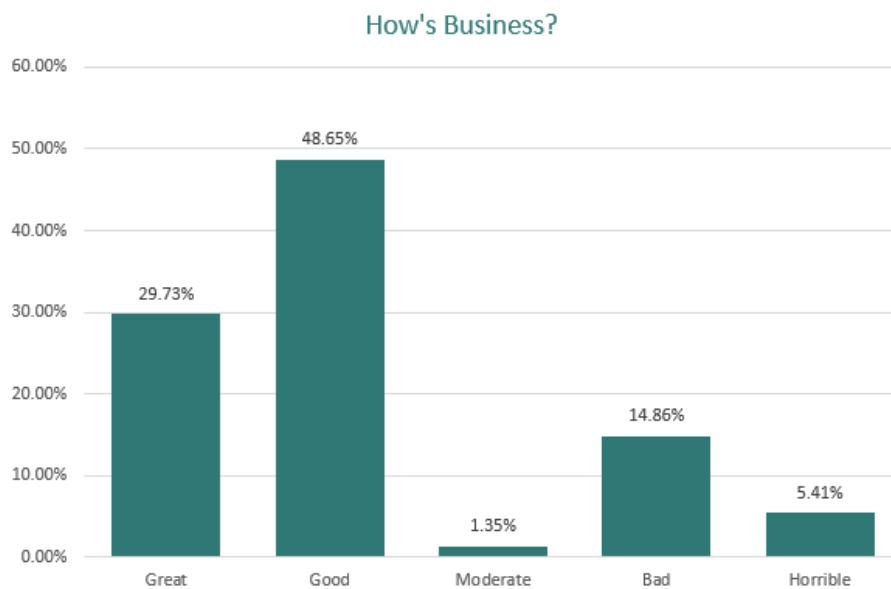
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The Eight Questions

Overall, business in Sooke is doing OK, with just under 80% of all respondents selecting either Good or Great. Just under 20% of business are experiencing negative effects. Under a handful are facing closure.

Q1: How's business?



Comments²

- Storefront closed. Struggling to get online.
- We are at about 75% capacity right now as individuals are choosing not to have services because of COVID
- Covid has,slowed things down a bit
- I am a hairdresser so I am doing the minimal amount of clients, so as to not expose myself to the virus.
- busy, more than ever
- at capacity re: ability, below pre-COVID revenue
- I don't own a business, I work part time at one
- we are barely breaking even
- Slower than 2019
- I took another job due to funds being low so haven't been focusing as much on my business

² Note: The comments are "raw" meaning that the text is exactly as it was entered in the survey.



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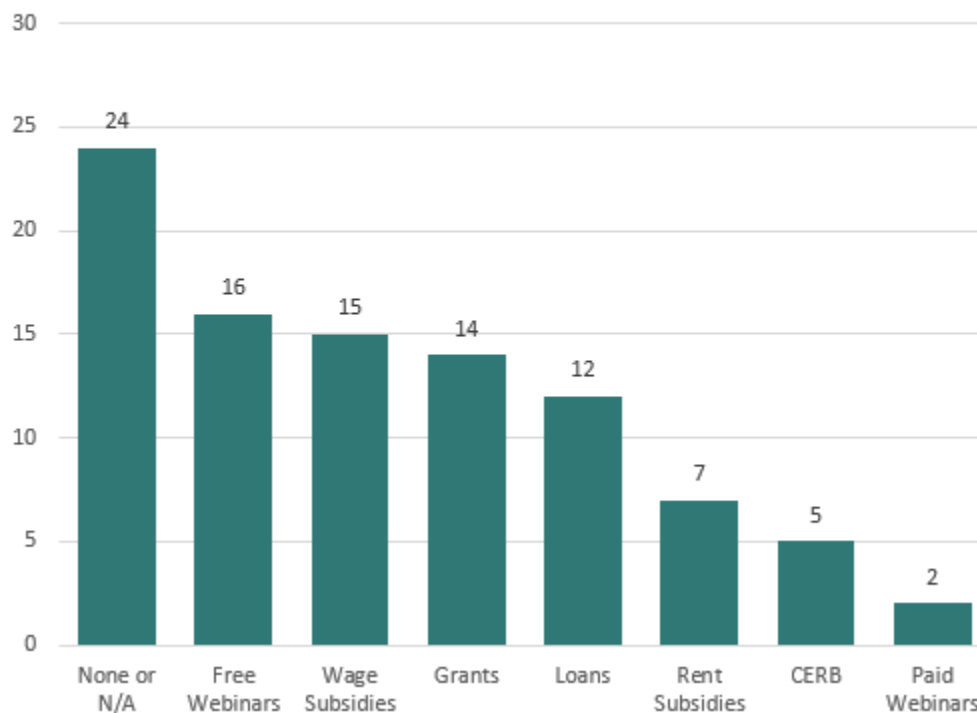
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Q2: What COVID-19 support programs have you taken advantage of?

A combined total of 41% took advantage of financial assistance (grants, loans and CERB). Just under one third (32%) have not taken advantage of any support programs, which ranged in selection from free courses to grants and loans. Free webinars were far more popular than paid webinars, with 21% opting for the former and only 2.5% opting for the latter. Only 9% of respondents indicated that they had taken advantage of rent subsidy.

What COVID-19 support programs have you taken advantage of?



Comments

- My business fell through the cracks and did not qualify for anything
- only qualified for March and April wage subsidy
- One grant that we haven't cashed in on yet, that was in the beginning because we didn't know what was going to happen. The \$40k, pay back \$30k.
- in process of applying for small business grant which we did not qualify for prior to the new guidelines



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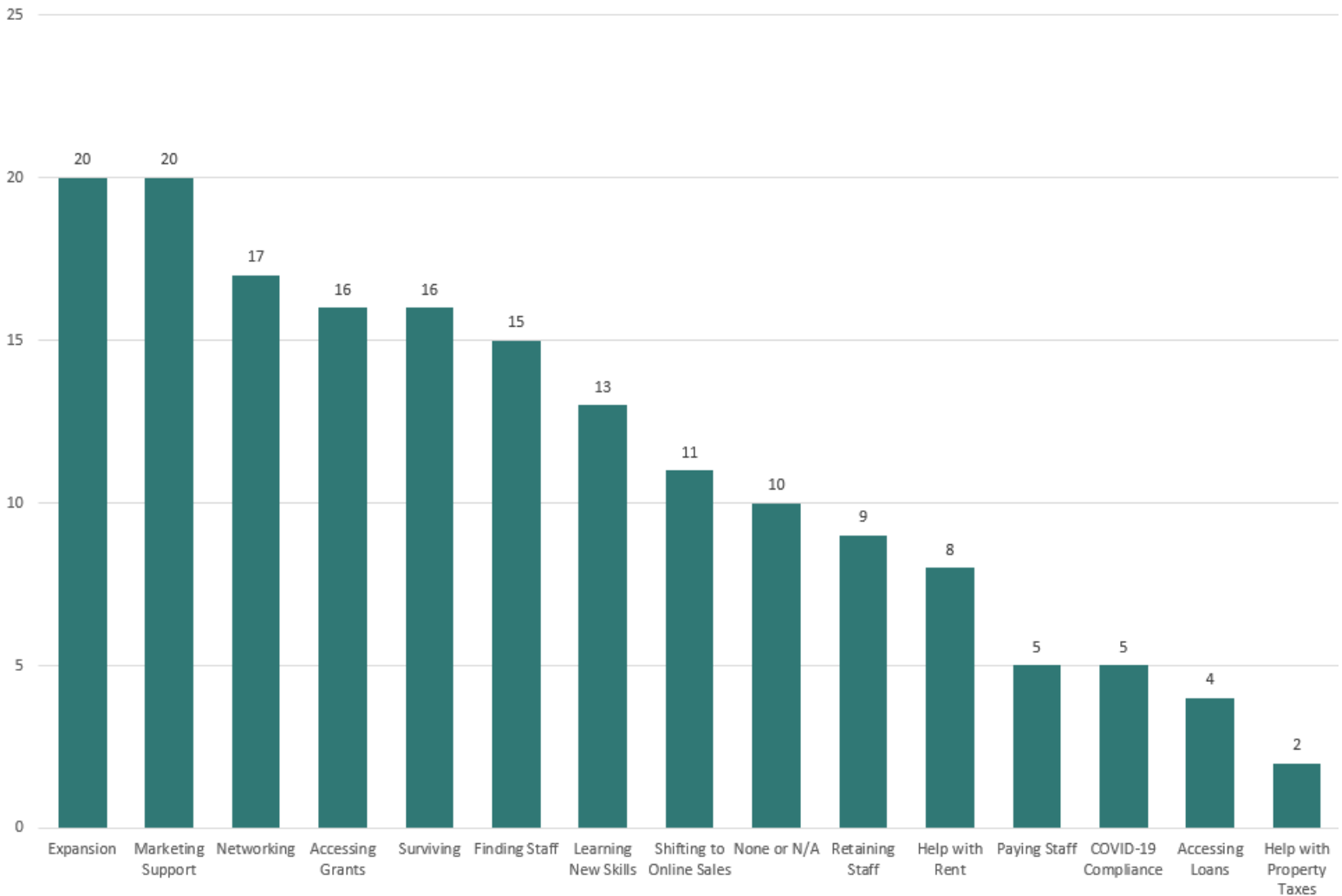
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Q3: What are your top business needs over the next four months.

Growth was an overwhelming priority. Twenty respondents (26%) indicated that Expansion was a priority, with an equal number interested in obtaining Marketing Support. Networking was a popular priority (22%). Despite this positive start, among the top priorities was Surviving (21%) matched equally with the Accessing Grants category. This suggests that despite the strong positive outlook that there is an underlying tension concerned with the future.

What are your top business needs over the next four months?





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Comments

- We are holding our own actually, pretty lucky
- Advertisement, business insurance
- we need the time to come where covid restrictions can be lifted & we can started working in the community
- recruiting volunteers as a non profit
- Recruiting and supporting volunteers
- Bringing in clients
- With individuals not accessing services we are not able to provide full time work anymore.
- Learning New Skills;I have gone back to school as all Universities and Colleges are online now.
- lack of business/commercial property in DT sooke"
- Just moving forward. Business is good as long as the outside markets may operate.
- Taxes in Sooke are too high. Rents and property costs are too high. We need space to rent/share for business use and meetings at a reasonable cost.



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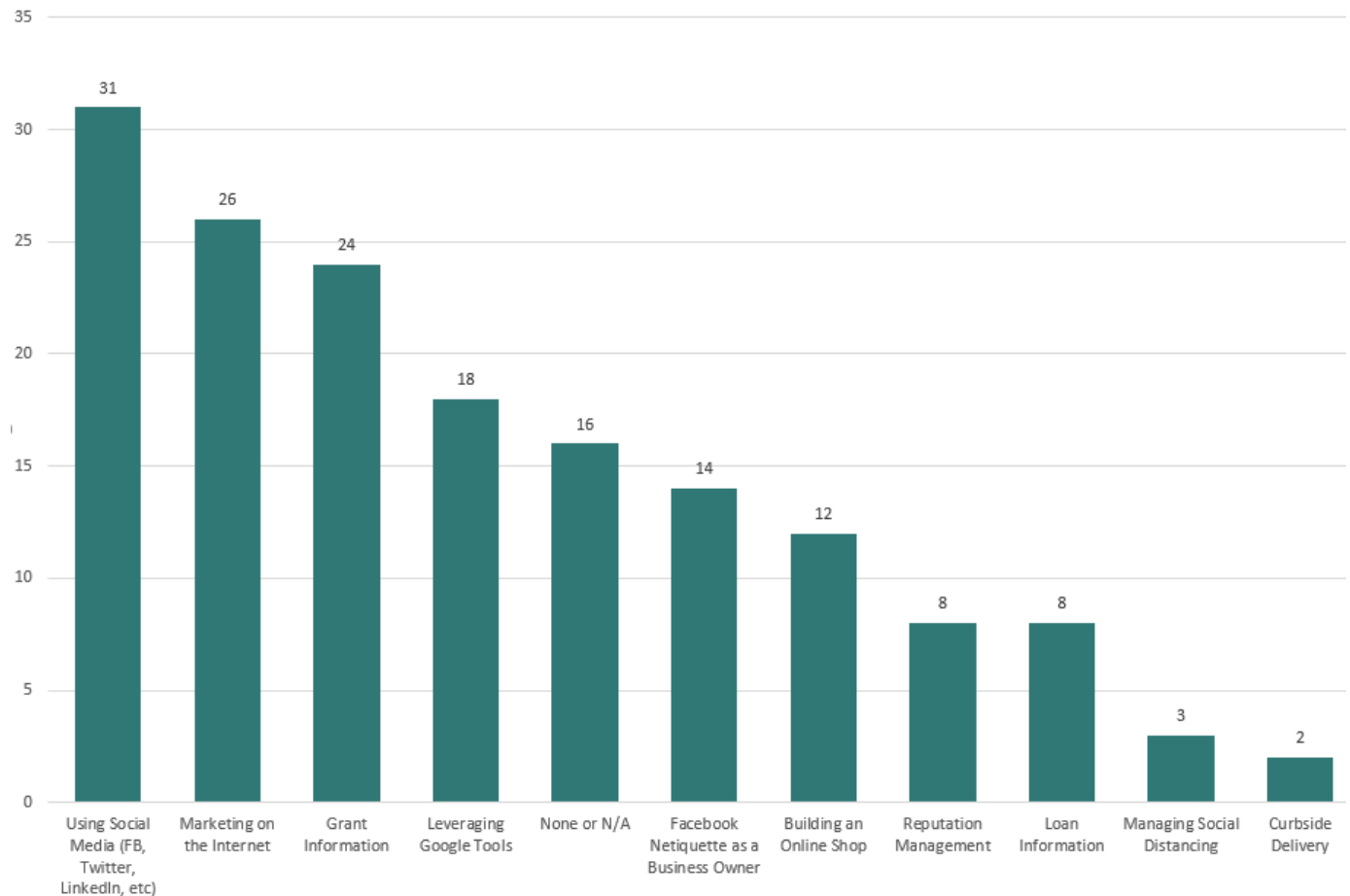
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Q4: What seminar topics interest you?

Online activities (Marketing on the Internet, Leveraging Google Tools, and Building an online shop) held the interest of 74% of respondents. A significant number of respondents expressed an interest in learning more about social media with 59% of respondents indicated an interest in Using Social Media combined with Facebook Netiquette. Another 42% were interested in learning more about financing with a heavy emphasis on Grants (32%) as opposed to Loans (11%). Just over 20% indicated that they had no need of seminars. Reputation Management came in at a low 11%.

What seminar topics interest you?



Comments

- have our own industry seminars i attend
- how to lobby local government for change.



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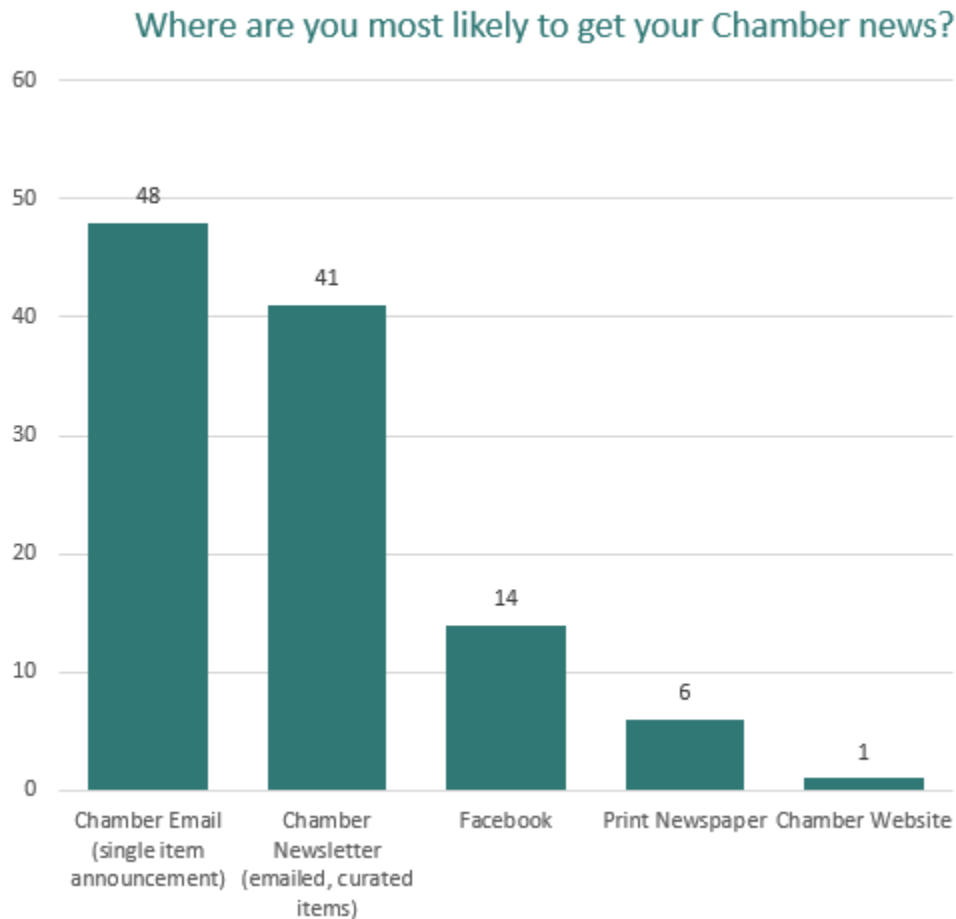
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Q5: Where are you most likely to get your Chamber news?

The Chamber's newsletter is by far the most robust way to reach local businesses. This is seen in both how people accessed the survey, with 93% of people arriving through a link in the newsletter and the remainder linking it through Facebook. In the survey itself, 63% said they would prefer single itemized email blasts from the chamber and 53% said they found value in the curated newsletter. Only one respondent indicated that they get Chamber news directly from the Chamber's website.





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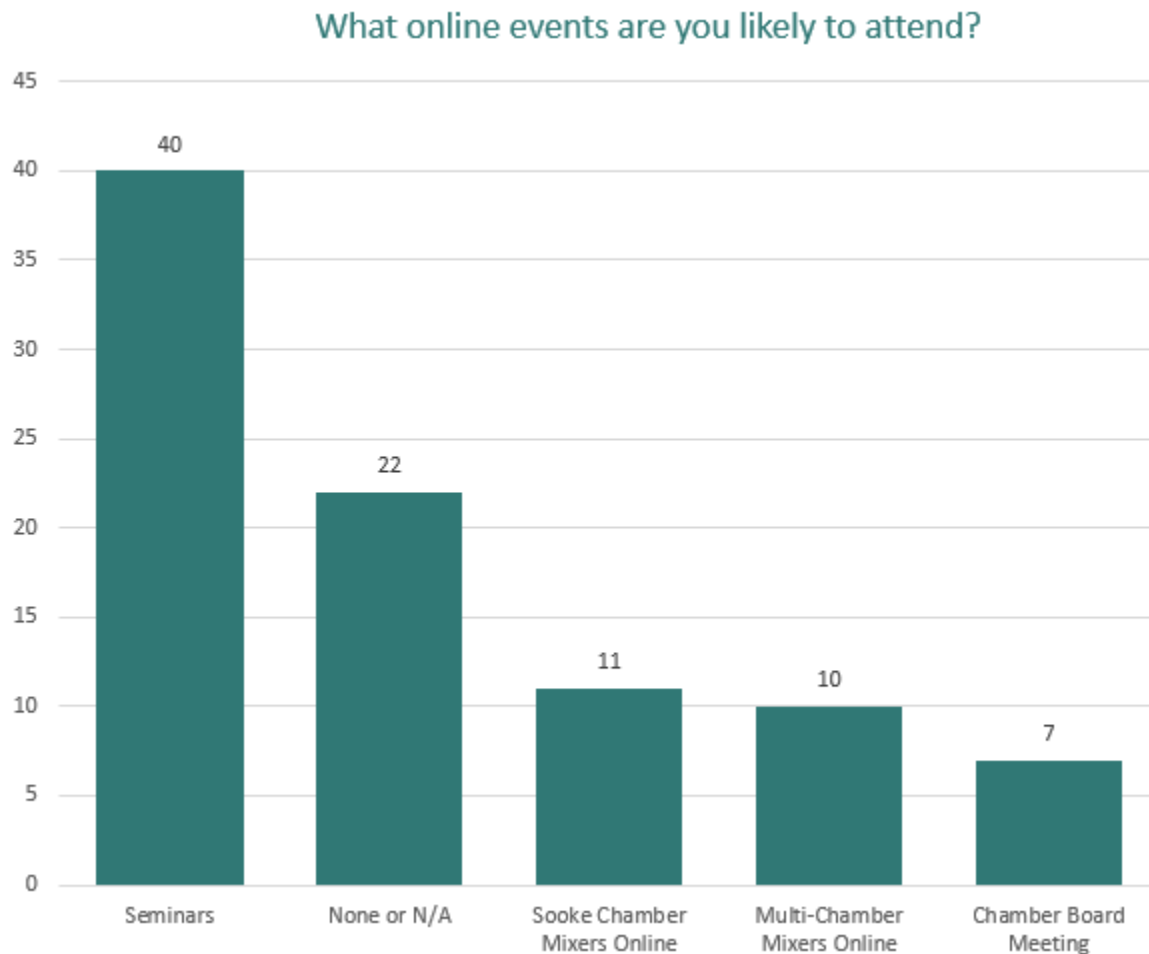
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Q6: What online events are you likely to attend?

As the Pandemic continues, over half of all respondents (52%) indicated they are most likely to attend online seminars and under one third (28%) indicated either a Sooke Chamber mixer or a multi-chamber mixer. Just under a third (29%) weren't interested in any of the options provided.



Comment

- (on selecting Seminars) Depends a lot on topic



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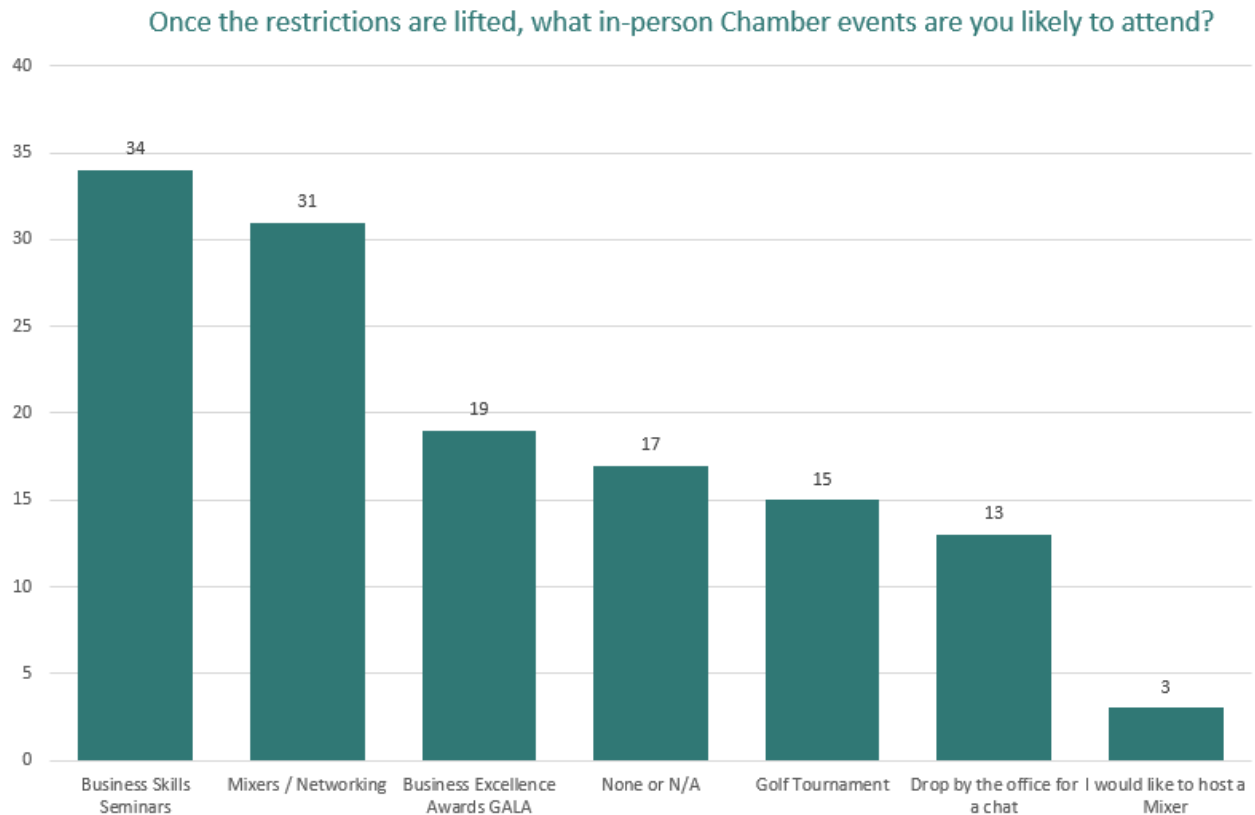
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Q7: Once the restrictions are lifted, what in-person Chamber events are you likely to attend?

Post-pandemic, once the new normal arrives, respondents indicated strong interest in in-person networking events (85% selected mixers, the GALA, or a Golf Tournament) and just under half (45%) would participate in in-person business skills development seminars. Just under 20% indicated the Chamber Office would be a resource they would visit. Just over 20% wouldn't attend any Chamber events.



Comment

- not sure
- information sessions around members' activities
- prob none....it will be a long digging out period



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Q8: How can the Sooke Chamber better serve your business?

When asked the open-ended question, ***How can the Sooke Chamber better serve your business?*** there was a range of responses including 10 positive, 5 neutral, and 2 negative. Of the 13 constructive suggestions (meaning, something that the Chamber can directly control or influence), networking and connections were repeatedly emphasized. The Chamber will consider all of these suggestions. A number of concerns were beyond the scope of the Chamber (like, helping someone with a mortgage) or simply expressed a gap or a frustration. By way of publishing all of the responses, the Chamber hopes to give a platform to these concerns.

Positive feedback

- We are loving the renewed sense of excitement coming from the chamber.
- This chamber group is doing a good job.
- You guys are doing a great job! Thanks!
- We appreciate your service to our local businesses. Keep caring about our community.
- keep doing what you're doing....
- So far, so good! Keep up the good work!
- keep up the good work
- Keep on doing the good work that you have started this year!
- so far so good
- I think they are doing a great job now.

Neutral

- I am giving that some thought.
- Not applicable in my case. Thank you
- Well, can not tell right now...
- I don't have a clear answer for that at the moment, sorry.
- Not sure

Negative feedback

- They've never done anything for us - I don't anticipate that changing
- They can't / they never have been supportive



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Constructive³ suggestions

- it would be good to see Chamber Directors etc out & about
- advocating to the District to keep improving our down town and tourism
- Promotions / Networking
- Just newly learning about how as a one-person business I might take advantage of the Chamber as a resource and community. In the past, I've always thought of the chamber as focusing on retail shops and services, so as a sole-proprietorship offering services mostly through online marketing, I wasn't sure if I was a good fit. So I'm exploring. I lost my main client at the beginning of the pandemic through his retirement so need to find clients to replace and would like to work with local people if possible. Side note re Question 1. I wanted to check a box between good and bad. I wouldn't say business is good and I wouldn't say it is bad. Things are ticking over. It's more "meh." :-)
- More advertisement
- keep folks connected; keep track of/share info about opportunities
- Help me promote business and gain customers
- Do not focus on "better serving your business". Focus on better serving the community and this will create a better business environment. Currently there is almost an antipathy towards businesses in Sooke and we have only ourselves to blame for that attitude.
- Tourist related build up
- Make more connections with the public and non-profit sectors to create linkages to grow social economic development in the region.
- Invite Sooke Councillors to mixers, speed dating for businesses
- Promote business in Sooke
- I am in it for the benefits package. I am a consultant and my work has moved along reasonably steadily so I don't need any help. I would have some interest if the Chamber started to talk about the real local economy of Sooke or the climate emergency

³ "Constructive" means something that the Sooke Chamber can directly control or influence.



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Beyond scope of Chamber

- Convince the government to stop handing out grants to people who are capable of working. Everyone is just taking advantage of it and using COVID as an excuse not to work, or to work as little as possible (so they are eligible for CERB).
- Ask RBC to approve a mortgage so I can buy in Sooke.....
- Keep my ad posted
- I find the lack of brick and mortar stores to be shocking
- Stop the selling of illegal cannabis. the fb social sights constantly allow the illegal dispensaries to advertise where the legal ones get banned when we do so.