



VOICE OF BUSINESS

As 2021 ends, Dayton is stronger than ever



Chris Kershner
President and CEO
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of Commerce

2021 was not just about survival; it was about adapting, investing and growing. The Dayton region's business community persevered and continued forward, setting us up for strong economic opportunities in 2022. Dayton businesses hustle, adapt and lead change. It is what our businesses have done since the 19th century and these core principles and characteristics remain true today.

Reflecting on 2021, I am optimistic that the Dayton area economy did not remain stagnant, but found ways to advance. Businesses reopened

safely, employees returned to work, holiday gatherings occurred and we safely celebrated with one another. And Dayton has a lot to celebrate.

In 2021, we saw minority business enterprises lifted up; equity and inclusion was not a trend - instead, our business community created real action and investment. In 2021, the Hub at the Dayton Arcade opened for businesses, the region's construction industry boomed, housing demand soared and people continued to flock to downtown Dayton - generating a staggering 97% occupancy rate for downtown's residential housing.

The Dayton area unemployment rate in December 2020 was 7.55%. Fast forward to today, and Dayton is realizing a 4% unemployment rate and every single business leader reading this article can attest to how hard it is to attract and retain talent right now. Labor shortages throughout the pandemic have plagued the business community, but

Residential Home Sales

	August '21	August '20	%Change	YTD '21	YTD '20	%Change
Number of Homes Sold	1609	1707	-5.74%	11,334	10,925	3.74%
Total Home Sales	\$361,384,114	\$348,114,929	3.81%	\$2,472,725,989	\$2,105,719,680	17.43%
Average Sale Price (\$)	\$224,602	\$203,934	10.13%	\$218,169	\$192,743	13.19%

Source: Dayton Area Board of Realtors, Dayton Area Home Sales

Sales Tax Collections

County	Current Rate	August 2021	August 2020	12 Mos Change	YTD 2021	YTD 2020	YTD Change
Butler	0.75	\$4,456,355	\$3,953,387	12.72%	\$35,699,884	\$29,067,098	22.82%
Clark	1.50	\$2,441,546	\$2,468,947	-1.11%	\$20,891,136	\$18,169,112	14.98%
Darke	1.50	\$892,175	\$812,251	9.84%	\$7,412,989	\$6,426,427	15.35%
Greene	1.00	\$3,761,573	\$2,478,483	11.42%	\$22,423,993	\$18,992,746	18.07%
Miami	1.25	\$2,025,660	\$1,913,271	5.87%	\$15,579,909	\$13,843,749	12.54%
Montgomery	1.25	\$9,992,342	\$8,929,187	11.91%	\$77,239,541	\$67,467,507	14.48%
Preble	1.50	\$566,662	\$566,636	0.00%	\$4,885,850	\$4,147,150	17.81%
Warren	1.25	\$5,400,989	\$4,737,375	14.01%	\$42,203,270	\$36,754,664	14.82%
Region Total		\$28,537,302	\$25,859,537	10.36%	\$226,336,572	\$194,868,453	16.15%

Source: https://tax.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/tax/researcher/tax-analysis/tax-data-series/publications_tds_sales

we have not let this stop us. Restaurant owners are running the grills in the kitchen, employees are working extra hours and stepping up to fill in where there are staff voids and leaders across the region are rolling up their sleeves to not only work "on"

their businesses, but work "in" their businesses.

This is where Dayton area businesses have an advantage. Since the beginning of the modern era, Dayton business leaders have crafted their own future, instead of having it decided for them.

This is our town, this is our community, and this is where every one of us has an investment to grow. We will fight and we will move forward so that our families, our employees' families, and future generations have a community with opportunity. If

you think our business community is going to let a pandemic stop us from moving forward, then you do not know Dayton. Dayton is stronger than ever.

Chris Kershner is the president and CEO of the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce.

Apply now for diverse business award

Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce

The Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce is now taking applications for the next Premier Health Workplace Diversity Award, which recognizes companies that foster an inclusive work environment.

Winning businesses, such as Premier Health, the award's namesake, have created a culture within their workspaces that encourage all employees to contribute their ideas. The chamber believes these busi-

nesses find innovation and success by fostering different perspectives and experiences.

"The chamber believes welcoming diverse backgrounds and thought in the work environment are crucial to true business success," said Chris Kershner, president & CEO, Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce. "This belief is outlined in the chamber's core values and is integrated into the way in which we support the Dayton region's business community."

Since 2006, the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce

and the National Conference for Community & Justice of Greater Dayton (NCCJ), have awarded organizations and companies that foster this inclusive work environment. In 2017, what was then known as the Greater Dayton Workplace Diversity Award, was renamed to honor the award's first winner, Premier Health.

Last year, the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce awarded Montgomery County Alcohol, Drug & Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) the Premier Health Workplace Diversity Award.

The Premier Health Workplace Diversity Award is an important tool for area businesses to benchmark and learn best practices, especially at a time when more and more business leaders are committing themselves to intentional inclusion. Awards such as this provide a platform for organizations that are making strides in this arena, and allow others to take away lessons for continuous improvement.

Applications are due by 4 p.m. on Feb. 11, 2022. Apply at DaytonChamber.org.

DAYTON AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Register for all events at DaytonChamber.org.

- In-person: Government Affairs Breakfast, Jan. 11, 7:30-9 a.m. Topic — Overview of FBI's Office of the Private Sector. Location — Marriott at the University of Dayton, 1414 South Patterson Blvd., Dayton
- In-person: Leadership Dayton Class of 2023 Information Session, Jan. 20, 7:45-9 a.m. Topic — Learn about the region's

premier leadership program. Location — Marriott at the University of Dayton, 1414 South Patterson Blvd., Dayton

- In-person — Chamber Member Orientation, Feb. 24, 7:45-9 a.m. Topic — Keep up with the benefits of chamber membership. Location — Montgomery County Business Solutions Center, 1435 Cincinnati Street, Third Floor, Dayton

SOCIAL ISSUES

Red brands and blue brands: Is hyper-partisanship coming for corporate America?

David Gelles

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The year is 2041, and Starbucks has real competition. Black Rifle Coffee Co., the java brand favored by conservatives, has opened thousands of locations around the country.

Starbucks, whose long-time CEO Howard Schultz pioneered a new wave of liberal corporate activism in the early part of the century, still dominates the coffee scene in college towns and blue-state urban centers. But Black Rifle Coffee, now publicly traded with a \$250 billion valuation, is flourishing in suburbs across the country and in cities large and small across the Deep South and Mountain West.

Online, the partisan rift is equally wide. Facebook has become essentially a one-party site, a forum for conservatives — and occasionally for conspiracy theorists — to discuss the perils of immigration and excessive government regulation. Snapchat has become the go-to social network for liberals to share videos calling for voting reform and raising taxes for social programs.

Even clothes have become fully politicized in 2041. As Americans sought for ever-more obvious ways to flaunt their tribal allegiances, two brands that were previously middle-of-the-pack retailers — Levi's and Wrangler — have become corporate juggernauts. At Democratic rallies around the country, the red Levi's logo is just as ubiquitous as red Make America Great Again hats were during the 2016 presidential campaign. In Republican strongholds, Wrangler jeans are as common as Nike shoes.

This imagined future is not as far-fetched as it may seem. In recent years, major brands have become increas-

ingly entangled in social and political debates and CEOs have become spokespeople for causes on the right and left. With few indications that the country will become any less polarized in the years ahead, it is perhaps inevitable that corporate America, like the electorate itself, splits into red and blue brands.

"This is permanently part of the social context of business," said Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a professor at Yale's School of Management who has helped chief executives formulate their responses to hot-button issues. "It's the job of CEOs to elevate issues and explain how it matters to them."

Brands have been tangled up with politics for decades of course. Pepsi and General Motors were among the companies to stop doing business in apartheid-era South Africa. IBM and Apple were among the first companies to offer benefits to same-sex couples in the 1990s. Yet for the most part, corporations did their best to steer clear of the culture wars.

The 2016 election of Donald Trump changed all that. Trump's positions on issues ranging from immigration to race relations to climate change forced companies to make their positions clear. Oftentimes, under pressure from employees and customers, corporations broke with the president. After Trump equivocated in his response to an outburst of white nationalist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, for example, two advisory councils stacked with prominent business leaders disbanded, with many of them repudiating the president and his response.

More than four years of this dynamic finally led many senior Republicans to begin pushing back against big



Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a Yale professor, at home in Branford, Conn., in early 2021, says CEOs must deal with social context. CHRISTOPHER CAPOZZIELLO / THE NEW YORK TIMES

business. This year, as companies rallied against restrictive new voting laws being advanced by Republicans around the country, Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky told CEOs to stay in their lane.

"My warning, if you will, to corporate America is to stay out of politics," he said in April. "It's not what you're designed for. And don't be intimidated by the left into taking up causes that put you right in the middle of America's greatest political debates."

There are some indications that executives are trying to disentangle themselves from politics. When Texas lawmakers passed a restrictive abortion law this summer, few corporations spoke out on either side of the debate. Google, which three years ago stopped work on a Pentagon contract after an employee uprising, is quietly back in the bidding for defense work. Such developments suggest that a hyper-

partisan future may not be the inevitable outcome for corporate America.

Yet for every example of companies trying to moderate their affiliation with controversial issues, there are new instances of chief executives wading deeper into political scuffles.

Kenneth I. Chenault, the former CEO of American Express and one of the Black business leaders who led the corporate response to a wave of restrictive voting rights laws this year, recently said that he was unmoved by calls for chief executives to stay out of politics and that he viewed it as his obligation to keep speaking out on issues he believed in.

"We can have partisan disagreement," he said. "What we have to be aligned on as a country are what are the fundamental values and principles that we are going to stand for."

Determining when to speak out and when to stay silent is one of the

most fraught calculations for leaders these days. Keep quiet on a given issue, and impassioned employees and customers might accuse the company of callousness. Engage in a public debate about a partisan topic, and members of the opposing party may accuse the brand of playing politics.

"How do you determine what's important to your stakeholders?" said Tim Ryan, the U.S. chairman of PwC, the accounting and consulting firm. "They're trying to figure that out. What's important to my employees, customers and investors?"

Research shows that the public increasingly expects chief executives to speak out. Edelman, the public relations firm, routinely surveys people about the role of business in politics and this year found that 86% of respondents expect corporate leaders to publicly engage on major societal issues.

Yet as brands have found

out all too often in recent years, doing so can lead to calls for boycotts, bruising battles on social media and distracted workforces.

There is always a chance that the political waters will calm down, that the toxic partisanship gripping this country will abate, that Americans will find common cause in a new era of bipartisan comity. Should that unlikely development occur, corporations might be able to gracefully disentangle themselves from the red-hot debates about the big issues of the day.

More likely is a world where CEOs and the companies they lead are more and more often affiliated with one party or the other. When Trump ran for reelection, news sites feverishly tracked which executives were supporting his campaign, and which had sided with Joe Biden. In the months since the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, research groups have tracked which companies are donating to Republicans who voted against certifying the Electoral College results.

Darren Walker, the CEO of the Ford Foundation and a director at several major companies, said that the shape that the future of chief executive activism takes may in some ways depend on who is in charge two decades from now. Greater diversity at the highest levels of the business world, Walker said, would almost certainly lead companies to take more forceful stands on issues that mattered to members of those communities.

"If 20 years from now the Fortune 500 has dozens of people of color and women as CEOs," he said, "if there are boards and committees that are diverse, I think it's a resounding yes that corporations will be more engaged."