

# Creative Community:

## Finding Your Organizations Role in a Crisis

### Conversation with Angie Prather:

Vice President of Marketing and Communications for the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce

**TJ**

Hey, Angie, how are ya?

**Angie**

Great. How are you today?

**TJ**

I'm doing all right. I'm doing all right. So are you just into this work from home environment?

**Angie**

Well, I like everybody else. I'm giving it my best shot. And so far it's working. A little clunky and I don't feel as efficient as I should or could be, but we're making it work.

**TJ**

Absolutely. I'm with you. It's weird because you think like, oh, working from home should be easier, but it feels like a different skill set. Like it's a different set of muscles that I just haven't used before. It's really an odd sensation. ... Well, Angie, tell me tell me about who you are and kind of what you do.

**Angie**

Okay, my name is Angie Prather. And I'm the Vice President of Marketing and Communications at the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce. So my team does all the marketing and communication for the chamber in its efforts to educate members and promote them, and to get them involved in networking opportunities so that they can build and grow their businesses.

**TJ**

Absolutely, absolutely. So how long have you been with the chamber?

**Angie**

Oh, gosh, I think it's seven years now.

**TJ**

I'm fairly new to getting connected with the Chamber, but I get to see you all the time when we're at the different events that we've been to. It's just been a really great experience for me. How's COVID-19 kind of affected how you guys do what you do?

**Angie**

Right? Well, it has had a major impact on us and of course, our members too. And we have had to really, first of all, we had to kind of go through the process of deciding "Are we canceling?" Are we deferring or rescheduling? As we went, you know, before we have the state directive to shut things down, and and we shut things down pretty early, and it was very, very difficult for us, but because it was our Small Business Awards

Mingle. And that's such an exciting event. And it's a such a great way to highlight our members. But we made the decision with the help of Newman University who was hosting it to that it would be better not to do that. And so then

we went into the mode of changing everything and then then we had to decide, okay, now how are we going to provide these important services to our members, when we can't do it face to face anymore? How are we going to make the best of this situation? So it's been a fascinating challenge. And we've jumped right in and started using tools that we weren't familiar with. And the great thing - We have so many subject matter experts who are members who can help and guide us through these very difficult times. So it's been a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with them and really make the most of a difficult situation.

**TJ**

Absolutely, yeah. It's an interesting experience because for us. We were we were super excited about the the Mingle, like we'd planned to go we you know, we'd all our whole team was coming because it's such a fun event. It's something to just to get to celebrate, those folks in our community are kind of making an impact. And it just like everything that Wednesday just kind of ground to a halt. It was like, okay, here we go. It's been like this experimentation with like, what's working, what isn't working? Like how are we going to continue to connect what [will] this look like? Because some of our partners as a creative agency have totally shut their doors for a period of time because of the nature of their businesses, but others are still working. They're still out there, teams are still moving out. Like we were with some HVAC companies who are still like they're active like they, we all want air within our homes to work. And so we need those folks still out and about. So it's been a really interesting season of experimentation for us, too. So, is there something like that you feel like in particular, in your past, there's something where you got a chance to learn, that helps you kind of learn how to pivot or get ready for something like this?

**Angie**

Well, I think, throughout my career, dealing with everything from Y2K to 9/11, to various crises like that, I think you learn that it's important to be very resilient and responsive and resourceful. You just have to keep going. And the great thing like you said right now is all the experimentation that's taking place. That is fabulous. And that's what I keep reinforcing to our team. It's the wild wild west. There aren't any rules, people are forgiving. We can experiment. And we should experiment. And like you, we just keep trying different things to see what will hit, what works best for our members. Because this is such a critical time for them. And we are so passionate about doing everything we can to make sure they have the resources so they can continue to operate. And it's heartbreaking for us to see them have to even temporarily close their doors, because we know how difficult it is to run a small business. How difficult that is to be an entrepreneur under the best of circumstances. And so this has been very difficult for us to watch because they're not just our members, they're our friends. And we want to do everything we can to support them. So we've tried to experiment with different things. And one of the things we're doing right now is a stay at home checklists. So in an effort to highlight our members every day, we're producing a checklist that we share on social media channels and we try to feature a retailer because you can still shop online. And many of them are offering a great delivery service. We try to feature a food service because many of them are offering curbside pickup that kind of thing. And then we're trying to offer something fun that maybe one of our nonprofit members does. One of the museums or Douglas Design District,

you know, they have a an app, you can download and do a mural tour. So there are lots of wonderful offerings that are nonprofit and members are continuing to offer it. And this is such a nice way to highlight them instead of overburdening people with lots of things. We're kind of trying to stick to three things and then encourage people to stay home but still support their local retailers and food service providers and attractions.

**TJ**

Absolutely. I saw that a bit on Twitter the other day and I thought I thought it was such a fun idea. I love that. because sometimes in this kind of thing, it's like, you know, now I have to go buy tacos from everybody because I feel like everybody's struggling and, you know, it's this thing of you feel like you have to do everything. And having three a day makes it a nice manageable thing. And I saw them like Jenny Dawn Cellers there, they were doing a giveaway. That was just such a fun way to interact with people to connect to show like, hey, we're still present, we're still working. Even if we're not open for events, I think it's just a really clever idea. So kudos to you guys for that. Yeah, and I agree with you like it's one of those pieces where it's this resiliency and it's this long term struggle to kind of figure out how to be ready to go, how to pivot really when none of us have experienced anything like this. I've been trying to explain to my, my kids who are five, seven and nine like, you know, this has never happened. That's lifetime. It's never happened. My parents like it's just we have no reference point for what to do here, or how long it's gonna last, or what it's going to look like. And so it's been hard to kind of pivot through that. But I can see kind of these changes that are taking place in our community. Do you have any predictions or any guesses is what kind of long term changes we're going to see as a community, things you wish you could see about, like, who we become who our country becomes kind of through this?

**Angie**

I think that's such a great question. I think it's something we're all thinking about in terms of, there has been such a wonderful sense of collaboration. The innovation that we've seen from members is just astonishing. And it's so fabulous, and I love highlighting it whenever we can. And so I think if we can continue that spirit of collaboration, some of these new tools really do break down barriers if we can continue to use webinars, which you know, we always kind of tinkered with but never jumped in full, you know, full bore with that. I think those are great opportunities to break down barriers and be much more inclusive. Because you don't have to leave your desk if you're an entrepreneur who has a deadline, but you still want to participate in a webinar or it can be recorded, and you can see it later. So I love the idea of breaking down barriers, collaboration, innovation, and what I what I really enjoy personally, is that everywhere I go, I feel kindness and concern for each other. And we've gotta hang on to that. And we've got to build on that because that's so critical for our community and for our children and for our world.

**TJ**

Absolutely, I can see that that kindness that that hope, you know, even just in some of the little groups I'm a part of on Facebook, where folks are jumping in and like offering to bring food to seniors who don't know how to download like Uber Eats or DoorDash, like just this this desire

to serve your neighbors to be helpful to make sure folks know they're not alone in all of this. I've definitely seen that too. So what's one question that I think I didn't think to ask that, that I should have asked you here in this?

**Angie**

Um, gosh, I don't know. I think you did a you did a pretty thorough [job].

**TJ**

Great. I think it's been a fun season for us. You know, we're big fans of the Chamber. You know, it's one of our, as an agency, is one of our favorite things to do to get to be a part of it, we especially miss the Sunrise Scramblers, you know, to getting to get to see folks, you know, just this last week, Ryan from Thrive Restaurant Group last month, when he shared just did such a great job on highlighting part of how to build that, that dynamic culture, I think we're seeing some of the need for that. And organizations, like if your organization wasn't healthy before, this, you know, COVID-19. Like for folks who have underlying health

concerns that gets exposed all of that, you know, trying to figure out how to work from home if you're not healthy. And so it's definitely been something that's important to us. So we're looking forward to getting back but it's also been fun to see you guys engage with folks and growing folks and help to share kind of resources. I know we've taken advantage of some of those already and are looking forward to what's coming up. So what are some what are the best ways to connect with the Chamber [to] kind of keep up like, especially like that, that that daily checklist like where are some ways to do that?

**Angie**

Okay. Well, I think that, you know, you kind of alluded to this before, it is like a firehose of information right now, and it's really hard to process all of it. So we're kind of taking both approaches. So when we learn about something because we have members sharing and staff sharing, we try to, to channel to share that right away on our social media channels. So if you're following us on Twitter or Facebook, when the Kansas Department of Commerce makes an announcement or the governor makes an announcement or anything that affects business, we're trying to share that as quickly as possible on our social media channels. But then Monica Poe on our team who is overseeing the Wichita Resource Center, She's really kind of paring that down to what are the essential things business needs to know. And she's tracking that on that which our resource page, which is [wichitachamber.com/COVID-19](http://wichitachamber.com/COVID-19). And so perhaps if you missed a Facebook Live event or a webinar, she's posting those recordings under certain categories. So if you're worried about employment, or you're looking for financial tools, there are kind of a couple of ways we're trying to share that so we can be more things to more people. So I would say follow our social media channels, particularly Twitter and Facebook. But we are also posting on Instagram, that's still a great platform for us. And of course, LinkedIn as well. And then I would strongly recommend that landing page where we're trying to keep it organized. There are a million ways to organize that information, but I think Monica has picked a really great way to organize it in terms of looking for topics and then looking to see, is this an upcoming event or a past event that where I can still access the information?

**TJ**

Absolutely. That's awesome. Well, thank you very much. Thanks for taking the time to do this and kind of share what you guys are doing. We're going to continue to watch as you experiment and grow and just so thankful to have you guys. As such a dynamic leader in our community, the Chamber just does such a great job. So thank you so much.

**Angie**

Well, thank you. It's members like you that make it all worthwhile. And it's our role to make sure that you thrive and survive and do really well. And so we want that to happen for all of our members and all of our business community.

**TJ**

Absolutely. Well, thanks again, Angie.

**Angie**

Thank you.