

Delaware Businesses Show Resiliency During Pandemic and are Optimistic About the Future

BY STEVE CLARK

» When the COVID-19 pandemic caused Delaware and surrounding states to lock down last spring, many local businesses of all sizes were directly impacted.

Some businesses needed to pivot on short notice to safely keep their doors open and provide customers with the products and services they expected. Others planned for when they could open again under much different guidelines than before.

The result was fundamental changes to how businesses operated and the understanding that they may have to change again until there is a vaccine for COVID-19. Still business leaders adapted, peering through a different lens to not only see what their business is, but what it needed to become.

They leaned on their strengths and relationships to make it all work, and we can all learn from how they did it.

Changing with customers' needs

Early in the pandemic, many Delaware businesses changed what they produced or sold. Manufacturers began making masks, distilleries switched to making hand sanitizer.

Dining establishments pivoted to change their offerings, whether they adjusted their menus for a better take out experience or shifted to become a curbside, local grocery.

These changes to business models helped keep cash flowing into businesses,

and two-thirds (67%) of Delaware businesses surveyed in a WSFS Bank study experienced growth due to operations changes.

Making changes like these on the fly is not easy. Business leaders had to dig deep, finding the right mix that worked for short and long-term needs.

Adapting with the present and future in mind

Operational changes made by businesses largely contribute to a positive outlook heading into 2021.

During the pandemic, most businesses (88%) throughout the region changed the way they operate, and nearly all of them (89%) plan to retain their new operating models.

The survey also revealed that nearly half (46%) of businesses in the region said their bank helped them get loans during the pandemic, including Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, and four in 10 (41%) reported that their bank offered loan deferrals.

These options helped open cash flow for businesses to get the goods and services needed to operate in a constantly changing environment.

Resiliency leads to optimism

As they looked at future challenges that may impact their businesses, leaders felt previous experiences, the ability to pivot and preparedness leave them well equipped to handle a pandemic resurgence.



More than eight in 10 (84%) of Delaware business leaders feel good about the economic outlook heading into 2021, and nearly three-quarters (73%) are bullish on the employment situation. Overall, this optimism is felt by businesses of all sizes that were surveyed (\$1 million - \$50 million in revenues).

Delaware business leaders feel confident in their personal and professional outlooks, too. Ninety-five percent of Delaware business leaders feel they have been resilient through the challenges of COVID-19, and 89% have adapted well.

Business leaders recognize the challenges ahead, but their nimbleness, relationships and new operational models have nine in 10 (91%) feeling prepared to weather another storm.

For Delaware communities, this is a welcome source of strength as we head into 2021.



Steve Clark joined WSFS Bank in 2002 and has served as executive vice president and chief commercial

banking officer since May 2016. He received his MBA in Finance from Widener University and his Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration (Marketing) from the University of Delaware.