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[New economy competitors must also collaborate](#)

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

Our family was at Skyreach Place on Monday for the Celebrate Kelowna ceremonies.

We were really impressed with the emotion and positive energy demonstrated throughout the day.

The parade was great as was the ceremony itself and the activities outside for the children.

We were truly thankful for all of the efforts that went into fighting the fires and keeping our residents safe.

Our attendance at the parade, ceremonies and activities were but a small token of the appreciation that we all feel.

We will never forget the experiences of this past summer but may we always remember the extraordinary spirit of cooperation and caring that our city has shown each other and the world.

As Pastor Tim Schroeder of Trinity Baptist said, "There was a spirit born in this town that made us all proud to say that we're from Kelowna."

As we walked into the Skyreach parking lot, my kids immediately recognized Heather Hughes from CHBC and Kim Calloway from the news radio station CKOV 63 co-anchoring Shaw's live broadcast of the event.

I couldn't help but appreciate all of the cooperation that the media has demonstrated throughout this crisis. Competition was put aside in favour of extraordinary levels of cooperation amongst normally fierce media competitors.

I was impressed that all of this cooperation was being demonstrated even for an event that could have been an opportunity for any one media group to grab the limelight.

Instead, it made me think of the words of Bernard Baruch, a leading banker and financier for much of this century, who said, "You don't have to blow out the other fellow's light to let your own shine."

The media has put these words into practice and have made us all very proud.



There are many lessons that our business community can learn from the extraordinary levels of cooperation demonstrated by our media.

It is exactly the opposite of the ultimate win-lose view of the business world that comes from author Gore Vidal: "It is not enough to succeed. Others must fail."

This simply doesn't always have to be the case. In fact, most businesses succeed only if others also succeed. For example, in the technology world the demand for Intel chips increases when Microsoft creates more powerful software.

Microsoft software becomes more valuable when Intel produces faster chips.

It's mutual success rather than mutual destruction. It's win-win. The cold war is over, and along with it the old assumptions about competition.

In fact any business that serves business customers is highly dependent on their prosperity for their own.

Even our local United Way campaign can attest to the value of this truth in fundraising. When the business community is doing well, contributions are higher.

So is business peace?

That doesn't sound quite right, either. We still see fierce battles with competitors over market share, fights with suppliers over cost, and conflicts with customers over price.

And the success of Intel and Microsoft hasn't exactly helped Apple Computer. So if business isn't war and it isn't peace, what is it?

Perhaps the cooperation in our local media will help our community to apply a business concept called cooptation, which is simply cooperation among fierce competitors for the good of the whole.

While competition can be seen as one of the key forces that keeps companies on their toes and drives innovation, that emphasis was challenged in 1996 by Adam Brandenburger, of the Harvard Business School, and Barry Nalebuff, of the Yale School of Management.

They were radical in their suggestion that businesses can gain advantage by means of a mixture of competition and cooperation.

Cooperation with suppliers, customers and firms producing complementary or related products can lead to expansion of the market and the formation of new business relationships, perhaps even the creation of new forms of enterprise.

They chose cooptation for this concept (a blend of cooperation and competition), which they used as the title of their 1996 book explaining their theories, a book which has become a best-seller.

The technology industry has embraced this concept, where strategic alliances are common in order to develop new products and markets, particularly between software and hardware firms.

So how can the principles of coopetition be applied to our community and to your business?

For example, what if membership based organizations in our community demonstrated coopetition by offering a dual membership in their organizations?

To my mind this would increase value for the member and increase the total membership in both organizations.

While protecting an organization's membership may be a noble cause, reaching new markets through competition can result in increased benefits for all involved.

The main reason that businesses don't cooperate with their competition is that they truly believe that their business possesses all of the skills, abilities and equipment that can satisfy all of their customers' needs.

While this may be true in some cases, if we were honest with ourselves we would readily admit that some of our competitors offer unique products or services to their customers that we simply do not have.

In contrast, our business also has unique capabilities that our competition simply cannot match.

The real question is how can you and your competitors work cooperatively together to exploit new markets that either company wouldn't be able to obtain on their own?

Cooperation doesn't mean that you no longer compete.

For capabilities that are the same between yourself and your competitors, go ahead and compete fiercely.

However, seize market opportunities with your competitors by cooperating in instances where you can collectively gain more market share together that would not be possible independently.

So perhaps the unprecedented cooperation of our local media can have a permanent impact on your business.

Take the time to explore the possibilities that coopetition can bring.

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