BBB experienced an eventful year as we closed out the decade. As time marches on, nationally and locally BBB understands the need for innovation to maintain relevance with today’s businesses and consumers and to provide them with what they need to advance business trust.

As part of this innovation, changes to the national BBB governance structure occurred in 2019 as was planned and anticipated. In June, the Council of Better Business Bureaus was separated into two new organizations, one for the BBB Line of Business and one for the International Programs Line of Business. The newly formed International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB) opened up new opportunities for BBBs locally to fully embody and own BBB’s brand and allowed for the creation of new local programs.

At the same time, BBB serving Central Ohio was also laying the groundwork for many new initiatives and programs to take us into the new decade. A key project involved working with one of our Accredited Businesses to help refresh our BBB brand to ensure that our local community has a clear understanding of BBB and its mission. This effort involved speaking with many of our Accredited Businesses, BBB staff members, community partners, and board members in order to understand how our mission best intersects with the world we live in today. As a result, we created a new “belief statement” as follows:

“We believe in the power of trust. We believe in its power to grow people, businesses and communities. It’s why we were founded in 1912 and what motivates us today. To us, trust is the glue that holds communities together. It’s business owners, consumers and community partners relying on each other to survive, grow and thrive. It’s a family relying on a contractor to repair the roof that will keep them dry, warm and safe. It’s the small family business depending on its employees to do what’s right for its customers as they have done for generations, and as consumers it’s why we return to and refer businesses that uphold the trust we put in them. It’s at the heart of our most precious personal relationships and we believe it should be central to every transaction, purchase and investment we make. At Better Business Bureau of Central Ohio, we advance business trust so that people, businesses and communities grow. It’s why we exist.”

In 2020 and beyond, our BBB will focus on taking business along a trusted path of evaluation leading to Accreditation; education and training; and celebrating role models. We realize that businesses will intersect with us at various stages along their path to trust, and our goal is to work with all businesses (Accredited and non-Accredited) in supporting their needs, while building an even stronger community of like-minded organizations which have the opportunity to impact people and communities positively.

Structured within the framework of our 2020 Strategic Plan, this report will highlight how your Central Ohio BBB is well positioned to evolve and embrace this belief statement. Thank you for being a part of our community! We invite you to read through our 2019 Annual Report that highlights our accomplishments for the year; but even more importantly, sets the stage for a new decade and how BBB will help advance business trust. Because, when trust rises, business soars; and in the end, businesses and communities grow.
There is so much more to the BBB than meets the eye. Most of us are aware of the website ratings and Accreditation. That is definitely valuable. But what I’ve learned is the team is a collection of people that really care about the community, are collaborative and are helping their members be more holistic in how they do business, treat their employees and make a difference in society.

Nevin Bansal
Accredited Business (Outreach Promotional Solutions)
& CEO/Founder of Small Biz Cares

Evaluation & Accreditation

Trust is a differentiator, and at the core of the BBB mission is building a community of businesses who have agreed to uphold our standards of trust when operating their business, which ultimately sets them apart from their competition. Beginning when our team reaches out to non-Accredited businesses (whether to invite them to apply for Accreditation or working on a consumer complaint), our goal is to guide the business through the steps they need to take in order to be able to become Accredited. Our position is not to just evaluate, but to act as a consultant; to help convey the importance of having trust and integrity, treating employees and customers the right way, and contributing to the greater community.

Growing our Accredited Business roster is important for BBB, as it is through Accredited Businesses that BBB receives the financial support to create programs and services to further our mission. But it is also vital for the consumer, as knowing which businesses to trust is increasingly difficult in this high technology, online world. Trust is a differentiator as well as competitive advantage and we are happy to share that our community grew in 2019, with 891 new Accredited Businesses joining BBB.

Our online Business Directory is a core service of BBB that showcases the commitment made by our Accredited Businesses, in addition to providing vital information for consumers searching for a company, such as customer reviews, complaints and the company’s BBB letter grade. BBB places a high priority on efforts to ensure that information on local organizations is accurate and up-to-date. In 2019, we made intentional steps to increase our data initiatives by adding a team member and exploring outside resources that enabled us to grow our data quality efforts.

BBB also provides information to consumers who want to ensure that their donations to charities are going to be used the way the organizations say they will. BBB has 805 reports on charities within our service area, evaluating nonprofit organizations against BBB’s 20 Standards for Charity Accountability, which ultimately allows consumers to be informed and interact with these charities with confidence. Local nonprofits have the ability to take their commitment to trust a step further and become Accredited Charity Seal Holders, displaying their dedication to upholding the standards. We finished the year with a total of 72 Accredited Charities, 39 of those Charity Seal Holders.

We are extremely proud of our Operations Team for winning the Best Operations Award for the second year in a row at the annual BBB National Assembly in September. The award was given based on our BBB’s superior performance in providing core services that support our Accredited Businesses and our consumers, including resolved/closed complaints and Business Profiles accessed, to name a few. Kudos to the team that works with our businesses and consumers everyday to deliver our mission in Central Ohio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>891</th>
<th>New Accredited Businesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5,233</td>
<td>Accredited Businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>Accredited Business Income Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>Market Share</td>
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Nevil Bansal
Accredited Business (Outreach Promotional Solutions)
& CEO/Founder of Small Biz Cares
By all measures, 2019 was a successful year, and our approach to the 2020 Strategic Plan was to draw on these past successes while understanding that continual innovation is critical. The branding refresh project completed in mid-2019 led us to evaluate many of our existing programs, make changes where necessary, and set the stage for new ideas that will come to fruition in 2020.

Through this branding work, the theme of Building Better Businesses clearly emerged as a desired outcome of advancing business trust. Whether a business is Accredited or not, BBB’s efforts will focus on providing the guidance, resources and support to help businesses overcome obstacles, resolve complaints, respond to reviews, and more. As customer reviews continue to grow in importance, BBB will implement new tools in 2020, including a video customer review platform, to provide Accredited Businesses with resources to generate positive reviews that can be seen on the BBB Directory. With refreshed communications that are consultative and supportive, ultimately BBB seeks to drive Positive Movement among the businesses we interact with, resulting in the business building on their intentionally of trust, measured through a higher BBB rating or a higher Trust Score.

Data Quality remains a priority and the BBB team is even more committed to exploring ways to increase the quantity and quality of business profiles in our database. From implementing new vendor resources, to utilizing our community outreach specialist to provide additional opportunities to engage and impart the importance of updating profile information, BBB has set a goal to increase the number of business profiles by 50% and improve the number of profiles that qualify for ratings by 15%.

Through paid and social media campaigns, BBB of Central Ohio will remind consumers of the importance of consulting the BBB Directory prior to making an important decision on selecting a vendor. This increased brand awareness will drive additional traffic to our website and the businesses in our Directory.

There are tons of resources as well as need in our community; if you’re starting a business, contacting non-profit organizations like BBB that help startups and foster growth is a great place to start.

Zack Traxler,
Traxler Printing, 2017 Spark Award Winner
BBB’s goal is to be a community-based, trusted business advisor that provides access to resources, business counsel, advice and education, learning labs and networking necessary for businesses to succeed.

BBB has been a leader in trust since 1912, and a large part of helping our community is by providing information and training for businesses, nonprofits, and consumers. BBB hosted and participated in over 60 events in 2019 to reach consumers, businesses, nonprofits, chambers and various associations. Topics such as marketing, cyber security, and customer reviews/reputation management were just a few themes of the seminars BBB hosted in 2019. BBB also focused efforts on reaching some of our outlying counties, including Muskingum, Coshocton, Perry, Pickaway, Ross, and Fayette counties.

Businesses and charities are BBB’s primary stakeholders, however connecting with the community through outreach and education is an indispensable part of BBB’s mission as well, and BBB utilizes a variety of ways to do this. Through our events, blog, podcasts, scam tracking, training and sharing of information through our collaborative groups and media partners, we endeavor to ensure businesses and charities are informed and empowered to advance trust within their organizations, and consumers are more likely to have a positive business experience.

For 25 years, BBB has used trust and our Trust Framework to evaluate the Torch Award recipients. This led BBB to create a tool that measures employee trust and offers insight and solutions for leaders to intentionally focus on character and culture within their organizations.

We distilled the Trust Framework into Character, Culture, and Community when we introduced the Spark Awards to young and new entrepreneurs. Now, we are excited to share the evolution of our work of building trust in new and established organizations — the BBB Trust Score.

BBB Trust Score is an enhanced tool for employers to measure trust within their organization and then receive resources, tips and guidance that will help them enhance their intentionality and increase internal and external trust. This is a 360 degree view of Trust, covering an employer’s Character, Culture, Community and Customers. It’s not only a tool to check-in with your team for feedback on trust, it’s a platform to show how much trust means to the organization’s leaders and provides actionable resources in areas that need improvement.

Integrating the Trust Score and the Torch Award application will provide businesses applying for the Torch Award with valuable insight to use in their application, and will introduce the business to the value of the Trust Score so they become a regular user and advocate of the program. It will also drive new businesses to apply for the Torch Awards after completing the Trust Score.

Evaluating the trustworthiness of charities continues as a hot topic in the media and BBB is frequently sought after by reporters to comment on the best ways to evaluate organizations before falling victim to those taking advantage. We continued our work with the Consumer Fraud Advisory Group to collaborate with law enforcement and government agencies to share information and increase awareness of scams in the area. And, the BBB Investigation Team actively identifies and digs into problem businesses and scams to provide information that is passed on to businesses and consumers through our website, press releases and direct contact with the media. Thanks to the Investigations and Communications team collaboration, BBB is responsible for generating hundreds of consumer tips and warnings in 2019.

Through educational speaking events to consumer, business and charity groups; partnering in events like consumer shows; and engaging with audiences through social media and with the news media, BBB provides audiences with important information on topics to keep them informed and their information safe.

During the branding refresh work, BBB reviewed ways to hone our efforts at building trust with businesses. One major concept that emerged was further developing the Trust Score (formerly known as the Trust Survey) and the connection to actionable resources and tools provided to business in tandem with the survey results.
It’s a major honor for us to receive the Spark Award! Any time a well established organization like BBB, who is doing great things in the community, wants to talk about businesses in Columbus is an incredible honor.

Suzy Bureau
GiveBackHack, 2018 Spark Award Winner

Celebrating Role Models

A highlight for BBB is having the opportunity to celebrate Role Models within our community - no matter where they are on their journey; a future leader, a startup, or an established business - BBB loves celebrating those that are doing things the right way. Better businesses contribute positively to the lives of their customers and employees and to the communities in which they operate. These businesses are an example for others to follow and embody the BBB standards of trust. We celebrate these businesses through our events, marketing and awards so that others may stand on their shoulders.

We were excited to celebrate our 25th anniversary of the Torch Awards in 2019 and to honor our three new recipients, who demonstrated that they are committed to advancing trust in our community. Each of our 2019 Torch Awards winners took intentional steps to establish a culture based on trust.

Ability Matters - an Autism scholarship program provider that puts an emphasis on community inclusion, the organization offers services to individuals age 16 and up with a focus on personal daily living, health and wellness, employment, social, financial, family and spiritual health.

Hubbs Heating & Air - with more than 20 years of heating and cooling experience, Hubbs puts an intentional focus on reinforcing and building their commitment to transparency with their vendors and customers allowing them to solidify the ethical culture they have worked hard to create.

Pickerington Pets & Supplies - realizes the importance of their role in this process of a customer selecting the right pet, and works to reinforce with each employee the significance of maintaining an environment based in ethics, while also building external expectations for how pets and animals should be treated.

For 15 years, BBB has given Students of Integrity Scholarship Awards to local high school seniors who demonstrate exemplary leadership character, community service, personal integrity and academic accomplishments. An independent panel of judges selected 10 winners to each receive a $1,000 scholarship, generously provided by Columbia Gas, to the college or university of their choice. In its second year, BBB presented an additional scholarship - the William J Lhota Scholarship for Ethics - awarded to one of the ten recipients in memory of long-time BBB friend and supporter Bill Lhota.

In 2019, BBB Spark Awards were presented during the Ignite! Pitch With Purpose and Spark Awards event. The Spark Awards are given to entrepreneurs aged 35 and younger or businesses that are less than three years old that demonstrate an intentional focus on Character, Culture and Community. 2019 recipients included Acceptd, which connects artists with recruiters and decision-makers; Agility Partners, an IT professional resourcing and consulting firm; The Columbus Book Project, which creates coffee table books about the city; and Warrior Wear, a men’s yoga apparel company.

BBB honored 21 finalists in the Laws of Life Essay Contest, open to students in grades 6-8 who submit an essay detailing a characteristic or trait that they considered their Law of Life. The contest encourages students to think about the people and experiences that have helped to shape their principles, and challenges them to write about what they believe in. The selected finalists were invited along with their parents, teachers and contest judges to attend the Awards Banquet hosted by BBB at Wendy’s Headquarters. Students received cash awards up to $500, a certificate signed by the Governor, and a poster of their enlarged essay.
Our recognition programs will continue in 2020 and our goal is to grow the reach of these events to more businesses at various stages of their journey with BBB. In order to encourage more participation from business in outlying counties, BBB is establishing partnerships with the local Chambers of Commerce. Through this partnership, the local Chamber will nominate three businesses from their community that they feel are deserving of the BBB Torch Award. BBB is also working on ways to simplify the application process for both the Torch Awards and Spark Awards and to hold information sessions for applicants in non-traditional settings to attract new interest.

BBB is excited about sponsoring the Women’s Leadership Conference in 2020. The annual event was created by Brady Ware & Company (an Accredited Business) and is being presented by BBB and the Women’s Small Business Accelerator (WSBA). BBB has participated in the event for the past several years, but is now an official presenting sponsor. The 2020 Conference theme, “Inspire. Challenge. Achieve.” is an excellent opportunity for BBB to build brand awareness with this audience while celebrating the leadership examples from those presenting at the conference.

Throughout 2020, BBB of Central Ohio will begin preparations for the 100th Anniversary of our Central Ohio BBB in 2021. We want to celebrate our 100th with a bang, so planning is already underway.

Leaders of better businesses believe that their people, their business and their community will be stronger when businesses prioritize trust. Better businesses set the standard for others to follow. We celebrate their efforts and are proud that building better businesses is BBB’s mission and purpose.
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