

## Pandemic proves we are all very connected

**MARK PAVILONS**

It has taken a global pandemic to reveal what's been common knowledge for years. Our planet, and all of its inhabitants, are keenly connected in almost every way, shape and form. The good of the many takes precedence over the needs of the few. From the working stiffs in the factories to the ivory tower power brokers, this connectivity is evident. And it shows the inherent weakness of our fragile global economy and society as a whole. This massive domino setup began tumbling this spring, and the pieces are still falling. The long, winding road has hit every country, every industry, every business and every individual. As we sit by our cozy fireplaces with hot beverages in hand, we wonder why our new stainless steel refrigerator is a month overdue. While we exercise in front of large windows overlooking the beauty of our rural landscape, we complain about not getting to the hair salon. It's a great time to do home renovations, but lumber, copper pipe and everything else has skyrocketed due to the demand. Well, that refrigerator factor was closed, then open, then closed again. Hair salons, at least in Toronto and Peel, are now closed, and likely will not reopen before Christmas. The hotel and restaurant industry is fading fast and experts say many will not survive the next 30-60 days. This is incredibly sad, not just for small and large businesses, but for all of us. These voids simply will not be filled anytime soon. But we can just order everything ? from Christmas gifts to beer ? online and have it delivered to our door, right? Sure. Delivery people and some large retailers can still squeeze out a profit. But think about this: ?small retailers and specialty shops just can't compete. They can't have that special item, at Black?Friday prices, at your door the next day. They will not survive. So, once again we have a scenario of the large, organized retail giants squeezing out any and all competition. I?believe both Canada and the U.S. have anti-monopoly regulations, but it sure looks like consumer products are being gobbled up en masse. The sad part is, it's everyone's fault. Consumers don't care, as long as they get their Kylie lipstick and YSL?perfume. We're happy as long as we can get Uber Eats while watching The Walking Dead. I am deeply ashamed of my fellow consumers, when I see bulk buying and gouging. The latest example is the mighty PS5 Playstation. As soon as they hit the market they were gobbled up by people hoping to profit by reselling them. And boy are they ever. Originally priced at roughly \$600, they are selling for \$1,500 and more online, even from established retailers. I?wish I?had a truckload of Tickle Me Elmos to dump on their doorsteps! While I have ordered some products online, they are from local, Canadian retailers. Going to the mall is becoming less of an option, but retailers are happy to ship their products out. The other items I find online are simply hard to get in stores, so I have to search Amazon or eBay for them. I?have yet to order food to the door, but if things get much worse heading into the holidays, that may be an option. While I understand that society, and business, have to adapt, change and evolve, I think this pandemic took everyone by surprise. Many companies are just not positioned to leap into the brave new world. Some don't have the IT or infrastructure necessary. And the service industry simply cannot operate virtually. Will shopping online and ordering everything from our smart phones be the new reality? Maybe to an extent. It's hard to say. Convenient, yes, but cold, faceless and ?contactless.? When the fog lifts surrounding this pandemic, people may either remain online junkies, or flock to the ?offline? world and experience life again. I don't know about you, but I'm itching to get back out there, in the real world, meeting and greeting people. There are many cliches in life and business, but they don't seem to offer much comfort. Sure, only the strong survive. But if that means we're forever at the mercy of conglomerates, polluters and automated assembly lines, count me out. We once laughed at those going ?off the grid??but now that's looking quite inviting if you ask me. I?complain about the gas bill (whatever happened to lower utility prices?) and the wintry weather. I dig out my boots and warm jacket as the season changes. All the while, there are those without homes to heat; without boots; without a job and most of all, without hope. How does our efficient and intelligent supply chain help them? How does our ?must-have? society become a collective of givers? This situation we're in has had both good and bad effects on people. On one hand we're desperate, on the other we're generous. We shy away from people, or we go out of our way to make sure they're okay. It's yin and yang I?suppose. Maybe it's the universe's way of telling us that things have to remain in balance. But for some, it has resulted in a survival mode, a looking after number one mentality. I?get it. We all have mortgages to pay and families to feed. In our family, my wife has a second, part-time job and my kids work. ?They may not want to, but I tell them they're among the lucky ones. We can't hide or just lock our doors and turn off the lights, like we did on Halloween. We are connected, to the very end. So, let's make this inter-dependent connectivity work, for all of us.

