

Headlines & More



Back By Popular Demand: SpringFest Expo



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AFTER THE HIGHLY ACCLAIMED VIRTUAL FALL FEST EXPO SPONSORED BY NEFA, SEFA, AND PDCA LAST FALL, SURVEYS DEMONSTRATED A STRONG DESIRE FOR MORE VIRTUAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN 2021.

Respondents to an after-event survey overwhelmingly supported similar events in the future and specifically called for a smaller spring version. DLI has lent its support as a sponsor of the new program, and the SpringFest Committee has announced a 3-day program from April 28 – 30th. The program will follow the same outline as the Fall version but features new speakers and topics.

“The program was a tremendous success,” offered Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Vice President, “and I am really excited about developing another program. There is a thirst for knowledge and people are looking for opportunities to learn about and explore ideas to help them come out of this storm stronger and better prepared for what the future holds.”

While the full slate of presenters and contributors is still being finalized, the Expo Committee is working diligently to construct a terrific program. One keynote program will be a S.W.O.T. Analysis on the entire industry performed live by some of the leading names in the industry. SpringFest will again feature a single price for the entire staff, and plans are to include programming for managers, owners, and customer service personnel. Plants registering for the SpringFest will receive discounted registration for November’s FallFest ‘21.

Other topics include “Leveraging Your Brand and Solidifying your Reputation” as well as a roundtable including some of the most notable drycleaners in the country discussing how they are preparing for the re-opening of the industry.

“Breakout rooms will be an integral part of the program,” offered Leslie Schaeffer, PDCA Co-Executive Director. “Attendees loved engaging with peers and sharing their experiences with other cleaners throughout the country, and this will be a conference highlight.”

Details of the new program will be released on the association’s web pages as they are finalized.

North East Fabricare Association
www.nefabricare.com

JANUARY/FEBRUARY, 2021

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE...

What is Your Reputation Worth?

I RECENTLY READ A REPORT THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING SMALL BUSINESSES TODAY IS MANAGING THEIR REPUTATION. WHEN YOU REALLY SPEND SOME TIME TO THINK ABOUT THAT, I KNOW YOU WILL AGREE THAT YOUR REPUTATION, AND THAT OF YOUR COMPANY, IS MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN AT ANY POINT IN RECENT HISTORY.



Peter Blake,
NEFA Executive Director

Over the course of my last few articles I have focused a lot of time and energy helping people with their marketing plans and programs. I have provided tips and tools to help develop a social media marketing strategy and to also assist in content creation. I want to now turn to your focus to the need for "Reputation Management". This is an area that is often overlooked and not given a very high priority, but like it or not, Google is the new phone book. Everyone turns to the internet when they need to find a product or service.

Reputation management is critical to your success, and simply put, what people say about your business is more important than anything else. Almost all of your current marketing vehicles including social media, texting, print advertising, direct mail, email marketing, all prompt your target customer to do some further research. You are looking to drive them to your website, find you on Facebook, or reach out for information. If your potential customers are greeted with a number of negative reviews about your company, they'll probably end their search right there and look elsewhere. An unfavorable online reputation is essentially a customer repellent.

"It takes 20 years to build a reputation, and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that you will do things differently." -- Warren Buffet

More and more people are making buying decisions based on relationships. People are choosing to do business with companies that reflect the ideals they feel are important and are often choosing to use businesses based on people, not companies.

KEY CONCEPT: CHECK YOUR LISTINGS

I know it sounds very simple, but you can spend a lot of time and effort knowing what is said about you and your company. The first step should be to set-up a Google business listing or profile. Just because you created a business profile, that does not automatically give you management and editing capabilities. You need to also create a free Google my Business account for that profile.

Next you need to do an online search for your listings and reviews so you can know what is being said about you. There are some great tools to assist you with this. One of the key components of Search Engine Optimization is consistent contact and business information. You need to make sure your listing match on different websites. There are several ways to do this, but I have found YEXT.com is a great tool. You can run a free report that will identify where you have inconsistencies in your listings and profiles, and then you can fix them yourself – or use their service to help keep your profiles synced and up to date.

KEY CONCEPT: MONITOR YOUR REPUTATION

Let's face it, someone, somewhere is talking about you and you need to know what they are saying! Google has a free business tool called Google Alerts where you can

Continued on page 5

Are You Leaving Money on the Table? NEFA/DLI Are Here for You



WITH THE INDUSTRY STRUGGLING CONTINUING, DRY-CLEANERS NEED TO INVESTIGATE EVERY POSSIBLE RESOURCE FOR ASSISTANCE. DLI IS HELPING ITS MEMBERS EXPLORE EVERY OPTION AND ALL

POTENTIAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE.

DLI has been leading the fight for more stimulus help, and for more relief for distressed businesses like drycleaners. DLI fought for a second round of PPP funding, for easier forgiveness guidelines, clearer tax-free guidelines and other changes to the relief packages. All of these issues were addressed in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

THROUGH THE ERC, NEFA AND DLI CAN HELP SAVE YOU THOUSANDS!

Also included in that act was a fundamental change in the use of the Employee Retention Credit (ERC). Prior to the act passing, businesses had to choose between using a PPP loan or receiving the ERC. Now the Act provides for BOTH retroactive applicability of the ERC for 2020 AND extending and expanding the ERC for the first two quarters of 2021. The Act has also significantly liberalized the ERC requirements for 2021.

For example, ERC credits could potentially be received if:

1. The employer's Qualified Wages were not provided by the proceeds of a PPP loan.
2. The employer's Qualified Wages were provided by the proceeds of a forgiven PPP loan for which forgiveness was not obtained with the same wages that would be used as ERC Qualified Wages.

If you are eligible for the ERC, you could be looking at a tax credit up to \$5,000/employee in 2020, and as much as \$7,000/employee for each of the first two quarters of 2021. This may not be an easy process, and there will be some serious record keeping and documentation required. In spite of the requirements and limitations, the reward could be significant.

We are talking SERIOUS financial assistance, and DLI is helping members navigate the complexities of the program.

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN TO YOU?

In a nutshell, if your business had fewer than 100 employees and

was severely impacted by the pandemic in 2020 and your revenue dropped below 50% of pre-pandemic revenues, you can qualify for the ERC.

As of the first quarter of 2021, that employee threshold changed to 500 employees, and a reduction in revenues to 20% over previous years.

In order to apply for the tax credit, you will need to amend your returns for 2020 so you will need to work closely with your accountants, payroll service, and/or Human resource company to fully take advantage of the program, but it is worth it.

Working with DLI's partner, PuzzleHR, one member recently received \$80,000 in ERC credits for 2020 – and they may be entitled to even more!

WHY HAVE I NOT HEARD OF THIS?

DLI is researching every potential avenue to help our members. We were fortunate enough to partner with one of the best HR companies in the country: PuzzleHR to help us understand and explain these opportunities to our members.

Continued on page 4

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Maximizing Financial Relief Opportunities

Continued from page 3

The stimulus packages have been a moving target and have changed rapidly, and you need expert advice to understand all the benefits. Even now, many CPA's and payroll companies have not understood the magnitude and the potential financial relief these programs can provide. With the Act just being passed on December 27th, CPA's are struggling to keep up to date with all the tax implications of Covid-relief and it is easy to understand how some programs could go under used. DLI wants to make sure that doesn't happen to you.

Through a partnership with DLI, PuzzleHR has provided services to our members at a GREATLY reduced rate and waived the set-up fees that usually range between \$2,000 - \$5,000. Additionally, they have substantially reduced their service fee for all DLI members. Fees can range between \$750 - \$1,500 depending on the size of the company. This is a substantial savings for our members.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

Be forewarned, this is a complex issue and you must factor in your use of any PPP funds received and used. You need to strategically approach your payroll to maximize effective use of both the PPP and the ERC. For instance, you can not file for the ERC in a pay period you are using the PPP funds. In order to maximize the potential financial assistance, you need to carefully plan the period you will be using your second PPP loan for forgiveness. Most

likely you will need to use your PPP in an 8-week period that is split between the first and second quarters of 2021. You may also have to closely monitor the 60-40% split on payroll and other permissible uses. This will require significant record keeping as we are dealing with some potentially large amounts.

DLI strongly urges you to contact Sue Boardman at PuzzleHR to help you take full advantage of these programs and other cost-saving HR benefits. She can be emailed at sue@puzzlehr.com or by phone at (603) 714-2112. You need to access as much assistance as possible to help you survive these trying times. While your biggest incentive to retain their services may be to capitalize on the ERC and PPP benefits, they have also helped our members take advantage of WorkShare programs, Work Opportunity Tax Credits, Unemployment, and the FFMLA.

You can also choose to work with your Payroll Services and CPA's to monitor the ERC in 2021 and file amended returns for 2020, but make sure to explore all your options. If the experts at PuzzleHR can save you even two additional employee tax credits, they will have paid for their ANNUAL service!

As other DLI Members can already attest, PuzzleHR's services more than pay for themselves by helping you make sure there is nothing being left on the table.



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Managing your Reputation

Continued from page 2

can register keywords -- including your own name, the business name, your competitors business, industry information, etc -- and Google monitors the web for new content and notifies you via email of any mentions. The next step is to set-up a routine to monitor all review sites including Google, Yelp, Yahoo, and every other site used in your community. This can be time consuming, and frustrating but you need to do it. When you find a negative review it is critical you respond to it and work to resolve the issue. Often times you can get the reviewer to change the review based on how you react. You can not let any negative review remain unanswered or ignored.

It may be advantageous to also monitor your competition and see what is being said about them. You can often find some valuable information about what potential customers are looking for. Are your customers being praised for a service you don't perform? Are they getting recognition in the press? Your main objective is to make sure the potential customers in your market think of you first whenever they need textiles cleaned.

If you don't have the time, or expertise to do it, there are some great services that will assist you with this for a reasonable fee. "Review my Drycleaner" from BeCreative360 is a great one. They help act like a watchdog for you and help to proliferate good reviews on your behalf. You can also use a service such as sotellus.com. No matter how you do it, you need to make sure you know what is being said about you and that you are being responsive.

NEXT STEPS

The next step should be to review your social media profiles and look for consistent themes. You need to develop a strategy for highlighting the core values of your business. You need to decide what you stand for: Customer Service, Quality, Honesty. What are your buzzwords that describe your basic values?

Next month we will explore these core values and how to increase awareness. We will also explore ways to highlight community involvement and leverage your reputation to drive brand awareness and higher sales. We will also discuss best practices for dealing with negative reviews and cultivating positive reviews.

If you have any questions about the basics I have outlined in this article, please contact me and I will be glad to walk you through how to use the tools and give you tips on how to strengthen your digital presence.

Be safe, be strong, be resilient – things are getting better, and we need to start re-building and re-focus our energy on the future.

Peter Blake

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LIVE TRAINING MARCH 2021



- **Tuesday, March 2, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Smoke & Fire Restoration Services with FRSTeam
- **Wednesday, March 3, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Supply Chain Disruption, Panel Discussion with Industry Suppliers
- **Tuesday, March 9, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Dye Stains with DLI's Brian Johnson
- **Wednesday, March 10, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Customer Service with Frank Brierchek of Seitz, The Fresher Company
- **Tuesday, March 16, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Little-Known Tax Breaks Can Add Up to Significant Savings with PuzzleHR
- **Wednesday, March 17, 1 p.m. Eastern**
The Magic System that Allows Price Increases to Fund You & Your Team
Members' Raises with Marketing Coach Dave Coyle
- **Tuesday, March 23, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Reputation Management with Yash Patel of BeCreative 360
- **Wednesday, March 24, 1 p.m. Eastern**
DLI Members Share Secrets on Engaging with their Customers - Panel Discussion
- **Wednesday, March 30, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Easy Tools to Make Attention Getting Videos with DLI's Peter Blake
- **Wednesday, March 31, 1 p.m. Eastern**
Computer Backup Tips, Hard Drives, Malware Prevention, and more with Chris
Birk of One Hour Cleaners

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New Federal Minimum Wage Reform Would Reach \$15/Hr with Automatic Increases



TOP DEMOCRATS RECENTLY INTRODUCED THE "RAISE THE WAGE ACT OF 2021" WHICH WOULD GRADUALLY INCREASE THE FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

Murphy to introduce legislation that would gradually raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025. After 2025, automatic increases in the minimum wage will be tied to inflation and future increases in the median wages.

"The initial proposal to tie this to the new stimulus package is particularly infuriating," offered Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Vice president, "since the hardest hit businesses would be retail industries like ours. In the aftermath of the devastation left by the pandemic, small business would be hard-pressed to withstand these additional hardships. Different areas of the country have very different costs of living, which is why many states appropriately develop their own standards."

TO \$15 AN HOUR OVER THE COURSE OF FIVE YEARS.

The federal minimum wage has not been raised for over a decade, and President Joe Biden proposed to raise it in his \$2 trillion stimulus proposal. The provision was met with partisan criticism.

To address the issue, House Labor Chair Robert Scott joined incoming Senate Budget Chair Bernie Sanders, incoming Senate HELP Committee Chair Patty Murray, Congressional Progressive Caucus Chair Pramila Jayapal, and Florida Rep. Stephanie

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

DLI is opposed to this drastic increase in the federal minimum wage, and has provided a link on DLIOrganize.org for members to voice their concerns to their legislators. On the DLI Site you will find handy links to find the contact information of your legislators as well as sample text you are free to use and to adapt with your own opinions. The time to Act is NOW!

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Should You Invest in Lockers During Covid-19?

Submitted By Dan Stoof, Breezy Laundry Lockers



HERE'S THE GOOD THING ABOUT LAUNDRY LOCKERS: MOST ASPECTS OF THE BUSINESS, LIKE DELIVERY AND SALES, CAN BE INTEGRATED INTO YOUR EXISTING OPERATIONS.

Therefore, laundry lockers can provide a steady passive income stream with minimal upfront investment. B2B laundry locker businesses have reported an increase in clients since the onset of COVID-19. Due to the changes brought on by Covid, many association members are inquiring about lockers and their potential benefits.

Laundry lockers have been growing in popularity because laundry business owners are being switched onto the idea that there's a real need to adapt to the contact-free economy. Breezy clients have realized that laundry lockers are a cost-effective method of not just surviving, but actually thriving, in the present climate.

Big retail brands, like Amazon, have been championing the use of lockers for contact-free pick-up and delivery. However, lockers are also accessible to small and medium -sized businesses, like drycleaners and laundromats, because they allow you to generate loyal customers worried about the virus.. Lockers can increase

revenues and provide customers with contact-free flexibility in pick-up and delivery services.

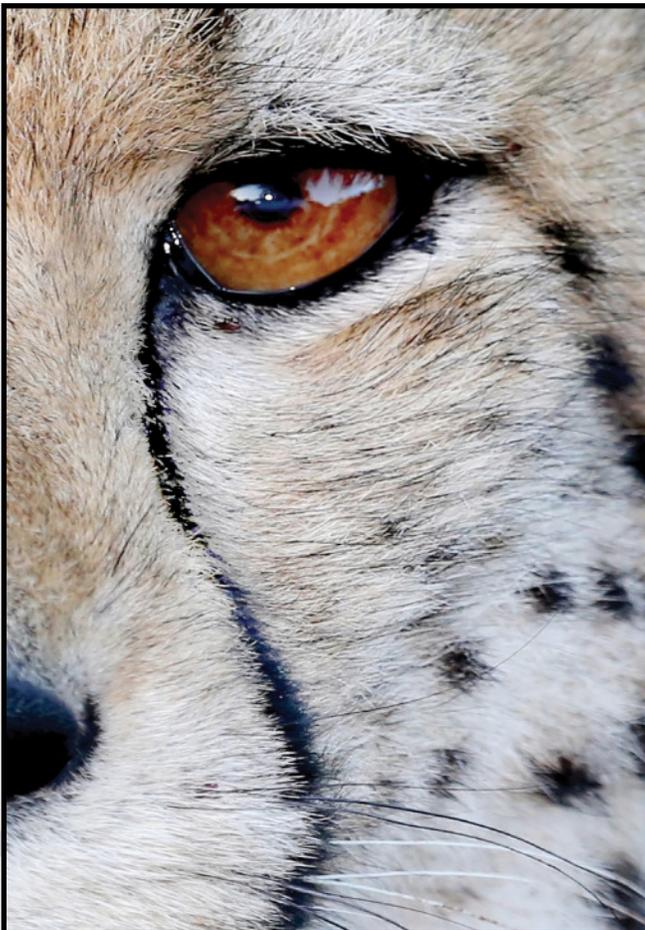
Many drycleaners are exploring the option of providing alternative socially-distanced pick-up and drop-off points. Through securing premium lockers, many clothing care companies have been successful in establishing high-value locker space in residential apartment complexes, allowing them to capture this segment of the industry.

For customers, laundry lockers are a convenient drop-off and pick-up point for laundry and dry cleaning. It is as simple as 1-2-3:

1. A customer puts their laundry into any empty locker.
2. The customer orders their laundry treatment via the app.
3. They'll be alerted once the laundry is ready to be picked up again from the locker.

Prior to COVID-19, laundry lockers were preferred by busy, city professionals without much time, but now, a wider demographic are using laundry lockers

For more information contact Dan Stoof at Breezy Laundry Lockers: dan@breezyll.com



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Idea of the Month: Sneaker and Golf Shoe Cleaning



DIVERSIFICATION CAN HELP YOU RECOVER SOME OF THE LOST REVENUE YOUR BUSINESS HAS BEEN SUFFERING THROUGH.

Many Members have embraced these opportunities and have recognized new areas of

emphasis for their business. By adding these new revenue sources, you open yourselves up to a host of potential new customers.

One member, Rod Garner of Eagle Cleaners in Albany, GA, recently shared his new foray into the world of high-end sneaker cleaning. Sneakers have become collectable and a source of prestige in many areas of the country, and these items need to be professionally cared for. Rod recognized this and took steps to capture the local market.

“After cleaning a few of these sneakers,” offered Garner, “I knew

I had found something unique. My customers were thrilled and word quickly spread. I started working on ways to do an even better job including restoring the aglets on the laces, and in some cases replacing them with suggested colors and unique trims.”

Rod recently produced a video on the process and has put it up on his website and will also be including it in his email marketing program.

“To me, this is a great idea,” offered Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Vice President, “and I appreciate Mr. Garner sharing. He saw a need and an opportunity and went about finding ways to answer that need. After discussing the program, I suggested Golfers have the same needs. We discussed a possible service where a drycleaner could approach country clubs and golf facilities in their area and pick-up golf shoes for cleaning, and then deliver them back to the course for their members.”

“As a golfer, continued Blake, “I think that could be a high-demand service. I know in my golf league many of the players would take advantage of a service like this. Golf shoes are expensive and definitely get dirty on the course when you are like me and don’t spend a lot of time in the fairway!”

Do you have an idea you would like to share? E-mail it to peter@nefabricare.com



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NEFA/DLI Continues March to Post-Covid Prosperity



THERE'S A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL AND IT'S GETTING BRIGHTER EVERY DAY, BUT THE DRYCLEANING & LAUNDRY INSTITUTE IS NOT SLOWING DOWN.

In March, DLI offers members 20 events: 10 virtual training sessions and 10 separate opportunities to discuss industry-related topics. Two webinars are held each Tuesday and Wednesday at 1 p.m. eastern and Peer-to-Peer Zoom meetings are held each Tuesday at 10 a.m. and starting in March -- Every Thursday at 1:00 p.m. eastern. To help members keep pace, DLI send email reminds two hours before each event begins.

MARCH 2021 WEBINAR SCHEDULE

In addition to twice-weekly Zoom meetings, DLI offers two webinars each week to help drycleaning business owners adapt and train employees.

DLI presents the following schedule of webinars and virtual training opportunities, all programs go live at 1 p.m. eastern:

- Tuesday, March 2: Smoke & Fire Restoration Services with FRSTeam
- Wednesday, March 3: Supply Chain Disruption, a Panel Discussion with Industry Suppliers
- Tuesday, March 9: All About Dye Stains with Brian Johnson, DLI Director of Analysis & Education
- Wednesday, March 10: Customer Service with Frank Brierechek of Seitz, The Fresher Company
- Tuesday, March 16: Little-Known Tax Breaks Can Add Up to Significant Savings with Puzzle HR
- Wednesday, March 17: The Magic System that Allows Price Increases to Fund You and Your Team Members' Raises with Industry Marketing Coach Dave Coyle of Maverick Drycleaners
- Tuesday, March 23: Reputation Management with Yash Patel of BeCreative 360
- Wednesday, March 24: DLI Members share secrets on Engaging with their Customers—Panel Discussion
- Tuesday, March 30: Easy Tools to Make Attention Getting

Videos with DLI's Peter Blake

- Wednesday, March 31: Computer Security Systems Part II: Backups, Tips, Hard Drives, Malware Prevention Software, and More with Chris Birk of One Hour Cleaners

“Our goal, as always, is to give members more value than the cost of membership, even in these challenging times,” said Mary Scalco, DLI’s CEO. “Now is the time to make sure you and your staff have the skills required to take on new challenges or even brush up on some old ones,” she said.

“This month’s schedule is packed with more weekly training webinars covering topics that are not only important for your staff but for yourself and your management team,” Scalco said. “We also host Peer-to-Peer Zoom calls every Tuesday and Wednesday. Members hear how other cleaning business professionals are adapting to the current business climate, share ideas, get answers to questions, and even just vent. DLI’s doors are always open and all drycleaning professionals are invited to join DLI and participate in these events.”

ON DEMAND VIDEO LIBRARY

Each week DLI adds recordings of the presentations to make them available to members who may have missed the live program. Members login to DLIonline.org and click the program to watch. DLI’s archive currently contains more than 60 videos on the following topics:

- COVID-19 Relief Programs
- Diversification
- Maintenance
- Management
- Marketing
- Production
- Finishing
- Stain Removal
- Business Sales and Acquisitions

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

All professional drycleaning and laundry business owners are invited to join DLI and participate in these programs, access the video library, and enjoy the many benefits of DLI Membership.

NEFA and DLI exist to help member drycleaners succeed.

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