

People Persuasion, Innovation Invasion

By Rick Kaempfer



Can you remember back to the year before you started using email on a daily basis? What year was it that you started to carry a cellular phone with you everywhere? When did you start importing and exporting information about every person in your life from gadget to desktop to cyberspace storage facility? What's the next new thing? Read on.

Innovate

\in-no-vate\ vb:

to introduce something new

TOUCH TONE CULTURE

St. Joseph's Krasl Art Center was looking for a new way to provide a more interactive experience for their guests.

"In the past we did real-estate-type boxes with fliers for each exhibition, but we wanted something a little more contemporary," explains Tami Gabois, curator at Krasl. They heard about an innovative new audio tour that was experiencing success at a few other art centers around the country, and decided to give it a try.

It was called Touch Tone Art, and it allowed guests to use their cell phones to call a number posted at selected works of art. A guest merely dials the number, hears a short introductory message, enters the stock number, and voila! An audio explanation of the artwork, sometimes even from the artist himself.

In February they brought it to Krasl. In May, they took it one step further, collaborating with the city of St. Joseph to expand Touch Tone Art into Touch Tone Culture. "In addition to selected artwork inside the Art Center and our outdoor sculptures," Gabois points out, "thirty city monuments will become part of Touch Tone Culture."

Thanks to the innovators at Krasl Art Center, culture is now literally at your fingertips along Lake Boulevard in St. Joseph, Michigan, all summer.

KRASL ART CENTER
707 Lake Blvd, St. Joseph, Mich.
269.983.0271. krasl.org



Innovate

\in-no-vate\ vb:

to effect a change

THE CATALYST RANCH

Eva Niewiadomski was an account manager at Quaker Oats in Chicago for many years, but even in that sometimes stuffy corporate world, she always managed to make her workspace unique. "It got to the point that my admin was actually giving tours of my cubicle to visitors," she says.

Though she enjoyed her account work, she also discovered that she had a talent for creating an environment conducive to creativity. "There was a company that provided these creative meeting spaces, and they were operating on both coasts at the time, and we talked a long time about maybe opening an office for them in Chicago, but they finally decided they couldn't do it. So, I did it myself."

Her Catalyst Ranch is like an explosion of the senses. The moment you step out of the elevator into this loft space, everything from the colorful paint on the walls to the vintage furniture to the eclectic toys and pictures lets you know this isn't a boring hotel conference room.

"We had three meetings booked before we even finished the place. You should have seen us in here the night before we opened, feverishly hammering, painting and rearranging," she says with a laugh.

That was almost seven years ago, and now, thanks to the innovative Eva and her talented staff, the Catalyst Ranch is one of the 100 fastest growing companies in the state of Illinois.

CATALYST RANCH
656 W Randolph St, Chicago
312 207 1710 catalystranch.com

Innovate
\in-no-vate\ vb:
to see change as an opportunity

BUCHANAN, MICHIGAN

Mary Lister's family has been in Buchanan for many years. "It was heartbreaking to see business after business close," she says, "so when people from the Chicago area started buying property and renovating a few years ago, I was excited to hear what they intended to do."

One of those business owners was Alan Robandt, whose family once lived in the area. He rediscovered Buchanan a few years ago. "It was unspoiled and not overly developed—it reminded me of what New Buffalo and St. Joseph once were."

He put his money where his heart was when he bought a 19th-century building in downtown Buchanan, rehabbed it, and relocated his antique business—Alan Robandt & Company—there. Many other innovators are following Robandt's lead, people like Rob Strom, an owner

of the new Wheatberry Restaurant and Tavern, and Tom Jolly, owner of another downtown antique shop, Redbud Home and Garden.

Steve Sprengel is developing Lake Chapin Shores, an upscale residential area in nearby Berrien Springs, and a residential community in Buchanan called Riverbend Landings. He too was drawn by the unspoiled beauty of Buchanan. "It's a wonderful, tight-knit community, attractive in its architecture, but without the hustle and bustle of places like New Buffalo," he says.

While the innovators coming to town are helping to give Buchanan an artistic vibe, they don't see themselves as agents of change. "It's less about creating the feel," Robandt says, "and more about nurturing the feel that already existed. Buchanan has a physical draw of its own."

"Most of it was built in the years after the Great Fire of 1862," historic designation consultant Pam O'Connor explains. "There are places in Buchanan that are so beautifully preserved. The Ross-Sanders Home, the first brick house in town, is still in great shape. The Library, which was built in the Frank Lloyd Wright style, and is being repurposed now as the Buchanan Art Center, is just beautiful."

Mary Lister runs the Art Center, and she agrees. "We had over 3,000 people sign our registry in 2008, so we really are becoming a destination. That has been one of our goals."

ALAN ROBANDT & COMPANY
114 E Front St, Buchanan

REDBUD HOME AND GARDEN
107 E Front St, Buchanan

WHEATBERRY RESTAURANT AND TAVERN
15212 Redbud Tr, Buchanan

LAKE CHAPIN SHORES
lakechapinshores.com

RIVERBEND LANDINGS
riverbendlandings.com

BUCHANAN ART CENTER
117 W Front St, Buchanan
buchananartcenter.org

Innovation
\in-no-va-tion\ n:
a new idea, method or device

ICREAM CAFÉ

Cora Shaw and Jason McKinney are innovators who have taken a classic idea, the ice cream shop, and given it a completely new twist. At iCream Café in Chicago's

Wicker Park, they are using the new technology of a rapid freezing process (liquid-nitrogen-based) to offer customers a chance to make interactive "designer" ice cream or sorbet from scratch, while they're in line.

By choosing your own treat (ice cream, low-fat ice cream, soy-milk ice cream, frozen yogurt, shake, etc.), and their own flavors, toppings and colors, customers can make the ice cream as healthy or decadent as they wish. "Part of the fun is watching it being made before your eyes," said customer Bill Nicholson, who was waiting in line in front of us.

Our one-word review:
"Yum."

ICREAM CAFÉ
1537 N Milwaukee Ave, Chicago
773.342.2834. icecreamcafe.com

Innovation
\in-no-va-tion\ n:
a new twist on an old idea

MAITRE D' TO DOOR

Who could better understand the pressures of getting dinner on the table than moms who have to do it every night—moms like Dona Henry and Kelly Hite. Between the two of them they have twelve children.

These two local innovators saw the need for a delivery service that offered more than just the usual delivery fare, so they created Maitre d' to Door, which delivers food from some of Valparaiso's favorite restaurants, including Bon Femme Café, King Gyros, Mama Ward's Café, Pikk's Tavern, Quiznos, Unrefined Café, Wings Etc., and Zaza Ristorante.

Right now their lunch hours are 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and their dinner hours are 5 to 9 p.m., Monday-Saturday, but they say that "special times may be arranged."

The innovative Maitre d' to Door has been delivering to hotels (since March) and residences (since April 13) in Valparaiso, Aberdeen and Heritage Valley. ☺

MAITRE D' TO DOOR
219.531.3667. md2door.com

WHAT'S YOUR NEW THING? We asked several local business owners to tell us the latest gadget, tool or service they've been using just to get insight into the way they think and to get some ideas. Here's what they told us . . .

Jason Rosenthal of J. Rosenthal Design Co.: "AirCard! Cellular Internet has allowed me to relocate my office to any coffee shop at any time."

Josh Powell of JL Powell: "My favorite day-to-day piece is a Rhodia notebook and an archival ink pen. I always have one with me to write quick sketches of clothes I see, or to get quotes from people that inspire me for copy in our catalog, to just the mundane grocery list. I just love them—the paper, the color, it feels very substantial in my hands."

Lori Zimmer of Beyond Pink: "Have you ever heard of Constant Contact? It's the absolute best and it has saved me a fortune. For like \$30 a month you can send up to 22,000 emails—directly linked to your website. We use it all the time. I'm not too technically savvy, but it's super easy to use, and the few times I couldn't figure it out, their help desk was prompt and super helpful."

Joya Helmuth of Spark Design Studio: "My latest and greatest thing is a 'select-a-size' sticky note pad. It has a stainless steel slider that lets you tear paper to the right size. It's very cool, because I never seemed to have the right size sticky note at hand before I found this."