



2006 Business Retention and Expansion Survey Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
DECEMBER, 2006



**Executive Summary of the
Brantford•Brant Business Retention and Expansion
Survey Report**

James Chowhan*

Brantford, Ontario
E-mail: chowhan@sympatico.ca

December 6, 2006

--

* Any views in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the City of Brantford, other survey sponsors or stakeholders. Please do not cite without permission of the Economic Development Department or the Author.

Brantford•Brant Business Retention and Expansion Survey Report

Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2005-06, the City of Brantford Economic Development Advisory Board in partnership with Human Resources and Social Development Canada (Service Canada), the County of Brant, Mohawk College, Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board (GETAB), Brantford•Brant Employment Services, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing conducted a survey of local businesses. The Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Survey was conducted to inform the Brantford Economic Development Advisory Board of the current industrial development climate in the City of Brantford and the County of Brant.¹ The information derived from this survey will aid the Board's ongoing commitment to the development of the Brantford•Brant economy through the development of business retention and expansion strategies.

The BRE 2006 survey follows two previous surveys conducted in 1998 and 2001. The current survey improves upon the previous surveys by including questions that gain more insight into the intensity of competition faced by firms, the markets being accessed, operational planning, workforce characteristics, and human resource practices. The information collected in the BRE survey satisfies the need for more detailed data to guide and inform economic development strategies leading to strengthening and diversifying local prosperity.

The main objective of this report is to develop an understanding of the current business climate; firms' needs, wants, perceptions, and state; and identify strengths and weaknesses. Knowing the community's strengths and weaknesses gives federal, provincial, and municipal departments, community organizations, and business organizations the opportunity to develop business retention and expansion strategies for the Brantford•Brant economy.

¹ For brevity throughout this report, the City of Brantford and the County of Brant will be referred to jointly as Brantford•Brant. Further, throughout this report the City of Brantford will be referred to as Brantford and the County of Brant as Brant, again for brevity.

Further, knowledge of weaknesses provides an opportunity to address potential problems early before they become a more urgent concern or issue. Issues should be identified and for the purposes of prioritization separated into: action already initiated, immediate priorities, and long-term priorities. Stakeholders can draw on the information to develop practices and policies that improve competitiveness, identify development opportunities, and support and aid the efforts of business to continue and grow within the community.

Description of Survey

The Business Retention and Expansion Survey (BRE) was designed to explore a broad range of issues relating to employers. Specifically, the questions asked were categorised under the following headings: business climate, future plans (including issues such as downsizing, relocation, expansion, and closing), company information (where general firm characteristics were reported), business development (in terms of location, markets, and finances), workforce development, a section specifically for firms in the manufacturing industry, local community, and questions of local concern (these are specific to the community and for this survey focused mainly on human resource questions such as recruitment and training). It can be argued that the potential for great insights that this detailed dataset provides justifies the response burden imposed on participants.

The Brantford•Brant Industrial Directory was used to provide contact information for the units of the survey. A total of 457 attempted contacts were made and 422 active firms were identified. Of the 422 firms identified, 69% of the firms participated in the survey (sample size=292). The 1998 and 2001 surveys had response rates of 77.5% and 53%, respectively.² Even though the 2006 survey was targeted primarily at manufacturers, not all firms completing the survey were manufacturers. Generally, firms not identifying themselves as manufacturers are industrial businesses as this survey did not target commercial or retail businesses. Of the 292 firms responding to the survey 172 completed the manufacturer's section of the survey.

² In 2001, 530 firms were contacted and 281 participated in the survey, and in 1998, 467 firms were contacted and 362 responded.

The information presented in this report has been reviewed to ensure that the confidentiality of individual responses is respected. Any estimate that could reveal the identity of a specific respondent is declared confidential, and consequently not published.³

Summary of Analysis

Overall, Brantford•Brant is rated as a favourable place in which to do business, and for the majority of firms this sentiment has not changed in the last 3 years. Further, of the businesses that changed their opinion nearly all developed a more favourable attitude toward the business climate in the community. Businesses are generally the most satisfied with services from community and business organizations followed by local, federal, and provincial government services.

Most firms have an expectation of either expanding or remaining the same (83%). Expanding firms will generally be investing in new equipment (93%) and major site renovations (53%), while increasing their workforce (90%). Nonetheless, some firms planning on expansion report having difficulties with their plans (42%). A small proportion of firms expect to downsize, relocate, or close their operations (16.7%).

Sole-proprietorship/partnerships, corporations, and other legal forms are the three main types of business entities in Brantford•Brant. Most of the firms are small or medium sized workplaces (by employment). The unionization rate among firms in Brantford•Brant is 12.3%; this is the proportion of firms reporting a unionized workplace. The majority of Brantford•Brant businesses are family owned (63%), with the owner residing in the community, and most employees live locally within Brantford•Brant (81%).

The majority of firms responding to the survey are completely satisfied with their site and location (61%). Firms identified energy costs, the availability of labour, workforce skill development, business planning, and workplace

³ Even though the BRE survey has a considerable response rate data quality is still a concern. For example, aggregate and single category statistics or estimates using the entire sample size will generally have a relatively lower variability than estimates generated when multiple categories/breakouts are combined (resulting in a reduced sample size per estimate) leading to relatively high variability in the precision of the estimate. Thus, estimates with high variability should be interpreted with caution.

health and safety as the most important factors that will maintain business competitiveness, over the next 3 years.

Brantford•Brant firms mainly service markets in North America (Canada and the U.S.) with only a small proportion of total dollar sales coming from Europe, Asia, and other regions. Of all firms responding, 49.3% indicate exporting products and services to markets outside of Canada; this is slightly lower than the 54.8% of the firms that reported exporting in 2001. The majority of firms report that their total dollar sales have increased, over the past 3 years, and that they expect future sales to be higher. In general, firms report facing increased competition, but they have for the most part responded by increasing market share or staying the same.

Over the past 3 years, the majority of firms' workforces have either remained the same or increased. Over the next 3 years, these same firms also expect their workforce will remain stable or increase. Growing sales, new products/services, increases in market share, new markets, and renovations are the main factors for retention or growth. Most businesses report that the availability of workers to meet their business needs is a concern (61.3%), and that the quality of the labour force (in terms of skills) is an issue (54.5%). However, the majority of firms still report being able to find and recruit sufficiently qualified employees for their business needs.

Nearly all manufacturers (95%) indicate that they will maintain the current size of production; maintain their current size but diversify; or expand the size of their plant and diversify their product line. Nearly all firms report their primary product is either in an emerging, growing, or maturing phase of the life cycle (94%), results are similar for firms' secondary product (96%). The majority of firms (66%) report that their plant or equipment is generally underutilized, whereas about 30% report that their equipment is at capacity. Seventy-six percent of manufacturers export--notice firms that identify themselves as manufacturers are more likely to export than the general sample, see above--about half export to multiple markets and 26% to a single market. Over half of the manufacturers indicate that export markets are very important to the business remaining competitive.

The top rated advantages of doing business in the Brantford•Brant community include: quality of life, access to markets, access to suppliers, availability of transportation, and support from local business. The main disadvantages are municipal taxes, development charges, availability of

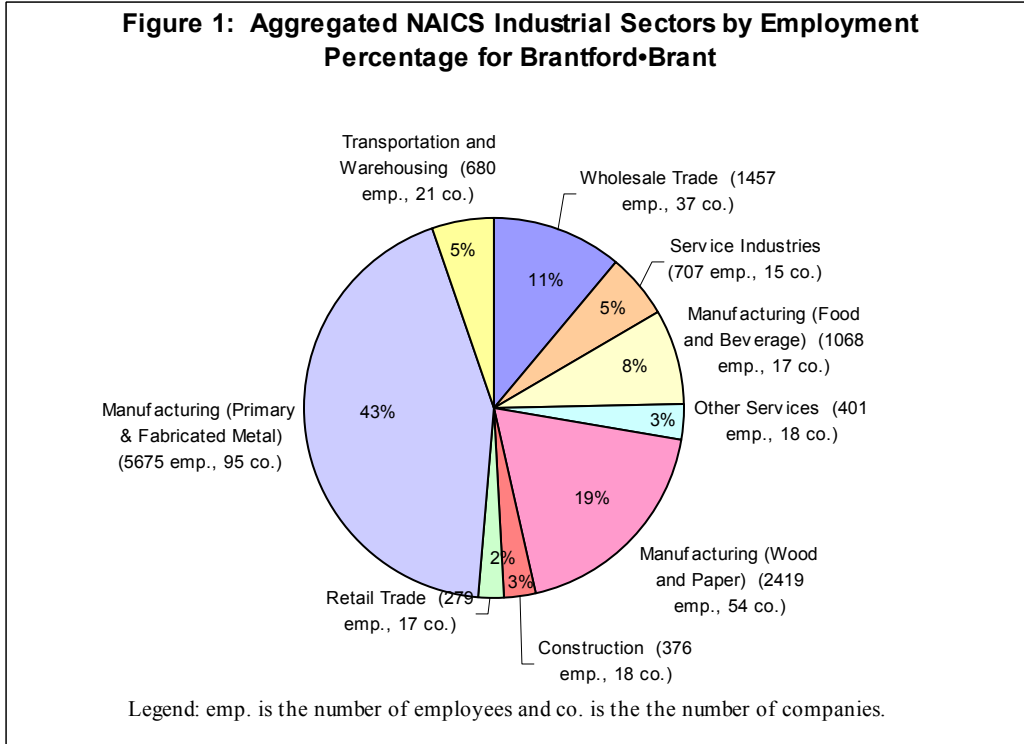
skilled labour, local permit process, and size of local market. Many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in this survey were also identified in the previous 2001 and 1998 surveys.

About 40% of firms are having problems hiring qualified employees. To address these issues firms either develop skills internally (by training) or search externally for qualified employees. Most firms engage in either classroom (51%) or on-the-job training (77%). Most businesses are familiar with the training opportunities available in Brantford•Brant (54.8%), but not all of their needs can be met by the training offered within the community.

Detailed Analysis of Survey Data

Figure 1 presents counts of employees and firms for Brantford•Brant's industrial sectors by employment proportions.⁴ To generate the employment distribution breakout by industry, the total number of full time employees for each industrial sector is divided by the total full time employment across all firms (13,062). The top three industrial sectors in terms of full time employment in Brantford•Brant are Manufacturing (Primary & Fabricated Metal), Manufacturing (Wood and Paper), and Wholesale Trade.

⁴ The BRE survey uses the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) (at the 4-digit level). The aggregated industrial sectors are compiled from the NAICS 2-digit level, see the "Brantford•Brant Business Retention and Expansion Survey Report" for details.



The majority of firms in Brantford•Brant (74%) have a total number of employees equal to or less than 50, placing them in either the 1 to 19 or the 20 to 49 firm size categories, see Table 1 column 2. Statistics Canada has traditionally defined small workplaces as 1 to 99 employees, medium workplaces as 100 to 499 employees and large workplaces as 500 employees or more. Following this definition, the distribution of firm size for Brantford•Brant is approximately as follows: 86% small and 13% medium, with only 1% of firms being large.

Table 1 also shows the employment contribution by firm size (column 5). In Brantford•Brant firms in the medium size category or in firm size groups 100 to 299 and 300> generate the majority of employment (58.5%). It is interesting to note that firms with 1 to 19 employees make up 48.3% of the number of firms, but only 8.6% of employment.

Table 1
Firm Size Distribution and Employment Contribution

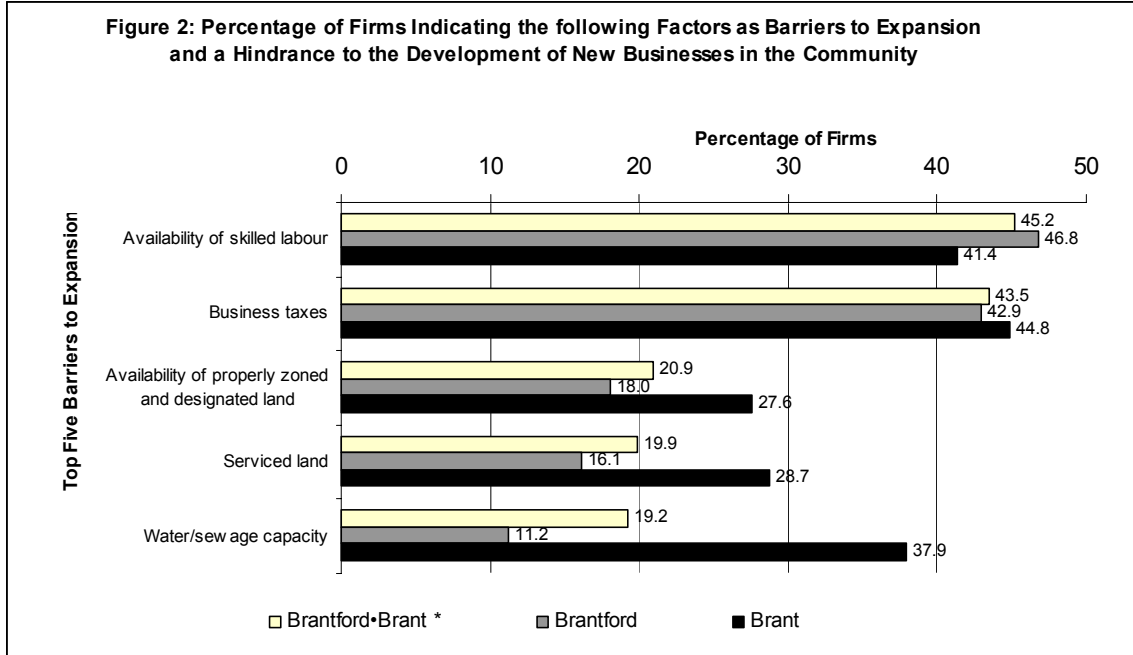
Firm Size	Number of Firms	Percent by Number of Firms	Total Number of Employees	Average Number of Employees	Percent by Number of Employees
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Zero*	9	3.1	0	0	0
1 to 19	141	48.3	1,202	8.5	8.6
20 to 49	66	22.6	2,138	32.4	15.2
50 to 99	35	12.0	2,496	71.3	17.8
100 to 299	33	11.3	5,129	155.4	36.5
300 >	8	2.7	3,093	386.6	22.0
Total	292	100	14,058	48	100

* Zero implies that the owner is likely the only “employee”.

The distribution of firms between Brantford and Brant is 70.2% (205) and 29.8% (87), respectively. The firm category sizes 20 to 49 and 50 to 99 make the largest contribution to the Brant distribution, whereas Brantford’s proportion is being driven by the 1 to 19, 100 to 299, and 300> categories.

Business Climate

Firms were given a list of factors and asked to indicate factors that are barriers to the expansion of existing businesses and the development of new business in the community. The factors generally cover infrastructure, municipal development policy, labour force, and community resources. The top five barriers in Brantford•Brant are the availability of skilled labour, business taxes, availability of properly zoned and designated land, serviced land, and water/sewage capacity, see Figure 2 below.



Future Plans

The BRE survey asked a series of questions to assess the future plans of the businesses in the community. Firms were asked what plans they intend to undertake at their site over the next 3 years—five options were offered as responses: expand, remain the same, downsize, relocate or close. The majority of firms (83%) indicate that they plan on expanding or remaining the same 38% and 45%, respectively, see Table 2.

**Table 2
Future Plans for this Site within the next 3 Years**

Action to be Undertaken	Count	Percent
Expand	110	38.1
Remain the same	131	45.3
Downsize	10	3.5
Relocate*	32	11.1
Close	6	2.1
Total	289	100

* Of the 11.1% that are relocating, 37.5% indicated that they are relocating to expand

The next largest proportion (11%) indicates that they will be relocating, and of these 32 firms (12) 37.5% indicate that they are relocating so that they can expand their operations; further, of the 32 firms planning to relocate, 20 firms indicate their relocation will be within the community. Only 5.5% of the firms indicate that they intend to downsize (3.5%) or close (2.1%). Of the firms that are downsizing, 70% report that this would result in a workforce reduction.

Company Information

Firms were asked whether their workplace is unionized or non-unionized; 12.3% report the workplace is unionized. Of the firms responding to the survey, Brantford firms are more likely to be unionized than Brant firms. The national private sector unionization rates, from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey, report the proportion of private sector employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement as having declined from 1998 to 2005, from 20.9% to 19.3%.

Business Development -- Location

Firms were asked to rate their satisfaction with their site and identify sources of dissatisfaction. The majority of firms report that they are completely satisfied with their site (61%). Of those businesses reporting somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied, the top five reasons for their lack of complete satisfaction were no opportunity for expansion (31%), site too small (28%), lack of availability of skilled labour (26%), business taxes (24%), and location inconvenient for customers (21%).

These sources of dissatisfaction re-iterate the results found above in Figure 2. In this figure, the main barriers to expansion that firms identify are lack of availability of skilled labour, business taxes, the availability of properly zoned and designated land, availability of serviced land, and water/sewage capacity. Four of these top five barriers to expansion are similar to the top five main sources of dissatisfaction with site/location.

For the factors influencing business competitiveness, firms were asked to rate each factor as: Very Important, Somewhat Important, or Not At All

Important. The percentages in Table 3 report the firms indicating that a factor is either Very Important or Somewhat Important in ensuring business competitiveness.

Energy costs are rated the highest among factors (over the next 3 years) that will affect business competitiveness (73%). The availability of labour, workforce skill development, business planning, and workplace health and safety are also in the top five factors that are important to ensuring and maintaining business competitiveness (see Table 3 below).

Table 3

Over the Next 3 Years, How Important are these Factors to Ensuring this Business Remains Competitive

Top Factors	Percentage*
Energy costs	72.7
Availability of labour	71.9
Workforce skill development	71.6
Business planning	71.6
Workplace health and safety	70.9
Availability of telecommunication services	70.5
Strategic marketing	70.5
Improved customer service	69.4
Improving worker productivity	66.9
Water/sewer costs	66.5
Outside local area market development	66.2
Exchange rate for Canadian dollar	64.7
Water/sewer availability	64.0
Add or change in products or services	61.5
Accessing capital	61.5
Local market development	60.8
Resolution of cross border issues	59.4
Product research and development	58.6
Strategic alliances (joining with other business to provide products/services)	58.6
Access to importing products & services	56.5
Access to exporting and international markets	49.6
Industry/professional standards	47.8
ISO9000/14000 or HACCP management standards	45.7
Other	2.5

* These proportions are generated from a sample size of n=278.

Business Development -- Markets

The markets section identifies the markets that are being serviced by Brantford•Brant firms. Of all firms responding, 49.3% indicate exporting products and services to markets outside of Canada. The main markets being serviced are within North America (Canada and the U.S.). The average approximate percentage of total dollar sales to Europe, Asia, and other regions has remained relatively constant from 3 years ago to the present at 2% of total sales, while the proportion within Canada has increased from 68.6% to 72.6% (Table 4). Of the markets being serviced within Canada the proportion within the area has remained approximately 27%, the proportion in Ontario has increased from 39.6% to 44.4%, and within the rest of Canada the proportion of total dollar sales has increased from 14.6% to 17.7%, over the reference period.

Table 4

Average Approximate Percentage Total Dollar Sales by Market

Markets	3 Years Ago*	Current
Within Canada	68.6	72.6
Within the U.S.	16.4	18.5
Europe	0.9	0.8
Asia	0.6	0.8
Other	0.5	0.4
Within Canada Markets		
Within the Area	26.5	26.6
Outside Area, but Within Rest of Ontario	39.6	44.4
Outside Ontario, but within Canada	14.6	17.7

* These proportions are generated from a sample size of n=292.

Of the firms responding, the majority report competition in their market is increasing (51.4%). Only 26.7% of all firms report that they face increasing competition and that their market share is also increasing. Of the firms facing increased competition, approximately 12% report their market share is also declining. Of the firms facing a decrease in market competition, 72% report being able to increase their market share, 16% believe their market share is staying the same, and 12% indicate their share of the market is falling.

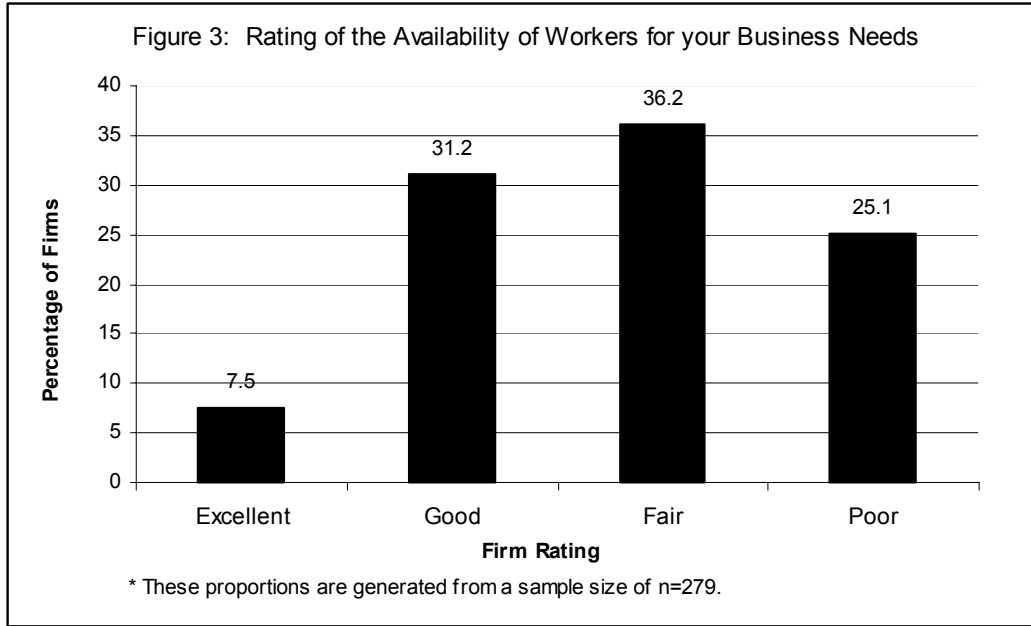
Workforce Development

The top five reasons for workforce increases, over the past 3 years, were increasing sales (71%), new products or services introduced (31%), increase in market share (29%), entered new market (21%), and renovation or expansion (16%). The top five reasons for workforce decreases include declining sales (45%), increase in market competition (24%), declining market share (22%), technological changes in business (22%), and corporate decisions or policies (16%).

The majority of firms report that they plan to either expand or maintain the status quo at their site (83.4%). A similar proportion (88.3%) of firms indicates that they plan on either increasing or maintaining their current workforce size. Of the businesses replying, 29.3% expect to both expand their site and workforce, and 24.7% indicate their site and workforce size will remain the same. Only 6% of businesses report the number of employees in their business is expected to decline, and only 1.8% of businesses indicate that they expect to cease operations over the next 3 years.

With regard to the number of employees increasing or remaining the same, expectations for the next 3 years are similar in magnitude to the 2001 BRE reported expectations (88%). The average expected increase in the workforce over the next 3 years is 9.2 workers per firm reporting expected workforce increases. The net expected total change in employment over the next three years is 1017, which is greater than the net increase of 744 over the past 3 years.

In the BRE survey, most businesses report that the availability of workers to meet their business needs is either fair or poor (61.3%), see Figure 3. Only 7.5% of firms rate the availability of workers as excellent.



Further, 54.5% of firms indicate that the quality of the workforce available to meet their business needs is either fair or poor. A low proportion (6%) reports an excellent quality workforce available. Nonetheless, 56% of firms are still able to find and recruit sufficiently qualified employees for their business needs. The remaining 44% that are not able to recruit sufficiently qualified employees generally rate the quality of the local workforce as fair or poor quality (19.6% and 12.4%, respectively).

In the 2001 BRE survey, 55.9% of the firms indicated that their business had experienced problems hiring qualified employees. This proportion is similar to the estimate found in Table 5 below (56%). Further, in 2001, 14.2% of firms described the lack of skilled labour as a major weakness for the community (this was reported by 11% in 1998); this sentiment appears to have grown in 2006, since 21.2% rate the availability of skilled labour within the community as poor.⁵

Table 5 ranks the skill areas that firms identified as needing improvement and breaks out the proportion responding by whether the firms answered yes or no to the question “Are you able to recruit sufficient qualified employees for this location?” The top five skills areas identified as needing

⁵ See Table 33a of the “Brantford•Brant Business Retention and Expansion Survey Report” for more details.

improvement are supervisory, working with others, written communication, quality assurance, and health & safety.

Table 5
Percentage of Firms Needing to Improve Workforce Skills in the Following Areas

			Are you able to recruit sufficient qualified employees?	
Skill Areas	Count	Total	Yes	No
Supervisory	274	50.4	49.0	54.1
Working with others	276	45.7	42.1	53.6
Written communication	275	43.6	40.5	49.5
Quality assurance	271	43.5	40.0	50.5
Health & safety	272	42.6	45.7	40.2
Computer software	273	39.9	40.5	38.3
Oral communication	271	39.1	36.2	45.0
Customer service	272	37.5	36.2	40.0
Sales & marketing	266	35.7	35.4	35.2
Numeracy	270	28.9	24.2	38.0
Reading	273	23.1	23.7	25.0
Computer hardware	269	22.7	28.0	17.0
Financial management	268	19.4	17.6	21.5
Other	48	16.7	16.7	20.0
Total	266	--	56.0	44.0

It is interesting to note that oral communication ranks higher on the list of skills needing improvement for the firms that are not able to sufficiently hire qualified employees than it does on the aggregate list.

Manufacturing

Of the 292 firms responding to the survey 172 completed the manufacturer's section of the survey. Manufacturers were asked to indicate their current plans regarding the operation of their plant: 75% report that they will maintain the current size of production, 10% will maintain their current size but diversify, and 10% reported they will expand the size of their plant and diversify their product line. Only 6% of manufacturers indicate they plan to either downsize or exit the industry.

Most firms outsource the production of components for their products, 64% report that 0 to 25% of their components are outsourced. The outsourcing is primarily within Canada (83%), the U.S.A (28%), and China (13%).

With respect to research and development (R&D), of the 172 firms responding to the manufacturers' questions 95 firms (55%) report conducting R&D at their location. Further, 15% indicate head office, and 10% identify another location for R&D efforts.

Looking forward to the next 3 years, 52% of firms rate the development of export markets as very important to ensuring the business remains competitive. Twenty-four percent rate export markets as somewhat important and 23.6% of firms rate export markets as not very important or not at all important to ensuring competitiveness. Further, multi-market firms that rated export markets as very important make up 40.5% of the responding sample (and are approximately 80% of the multi-market exporting firms). Firms that are only potential exporters more frequently respond that export markets are not at all important.

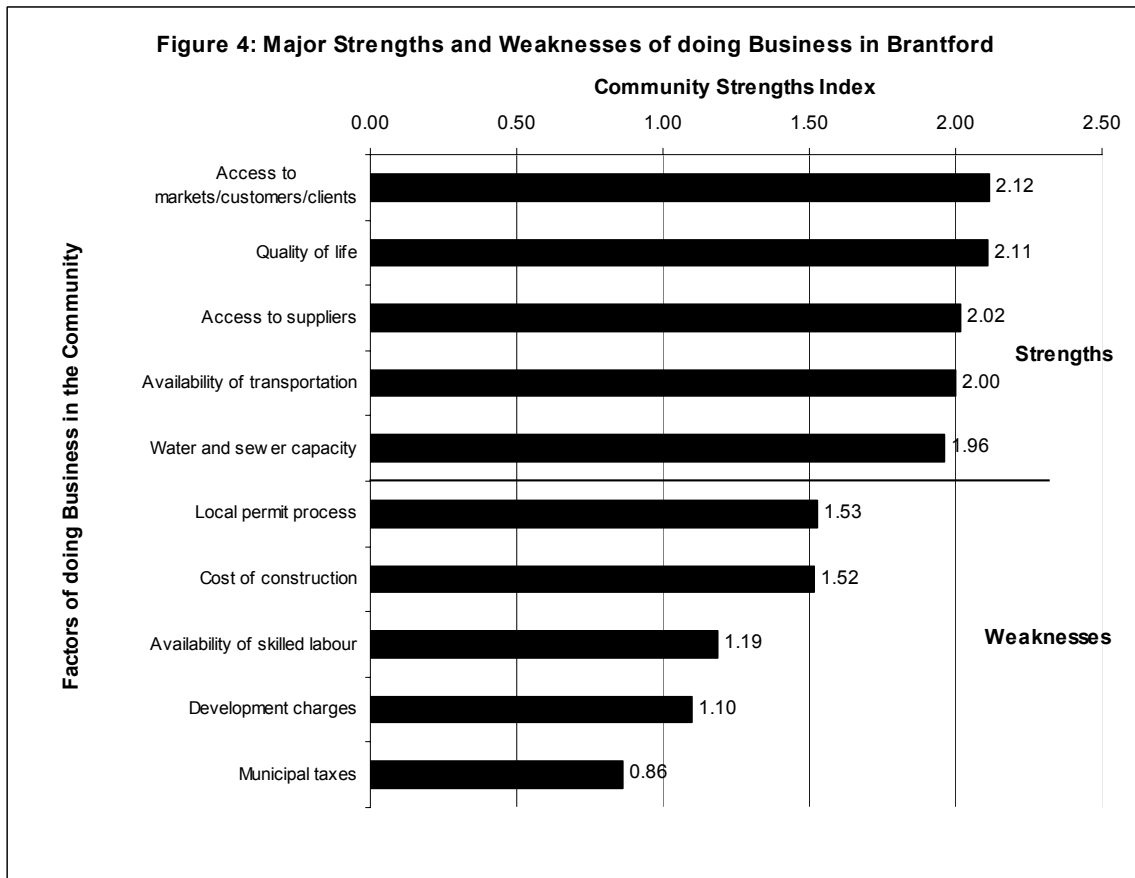
Local Community

Firms were asked to rate the advantages and disadvantages of doing business in the community. A scale of excellent, good, fair, and poor was provided. Figure 4 and 5 below rank the factors by the community strengths index. This index was calculated by setting an individual firm's response for poor equal to zero, fair equal to one, good equal to two, and excellent equal to three. An index score is calculated by taking the average score across all responding firms. Thus, as the community strengths index approaches 3 it is an indication of a favourable sentiment toward that factor for doing business in the community.

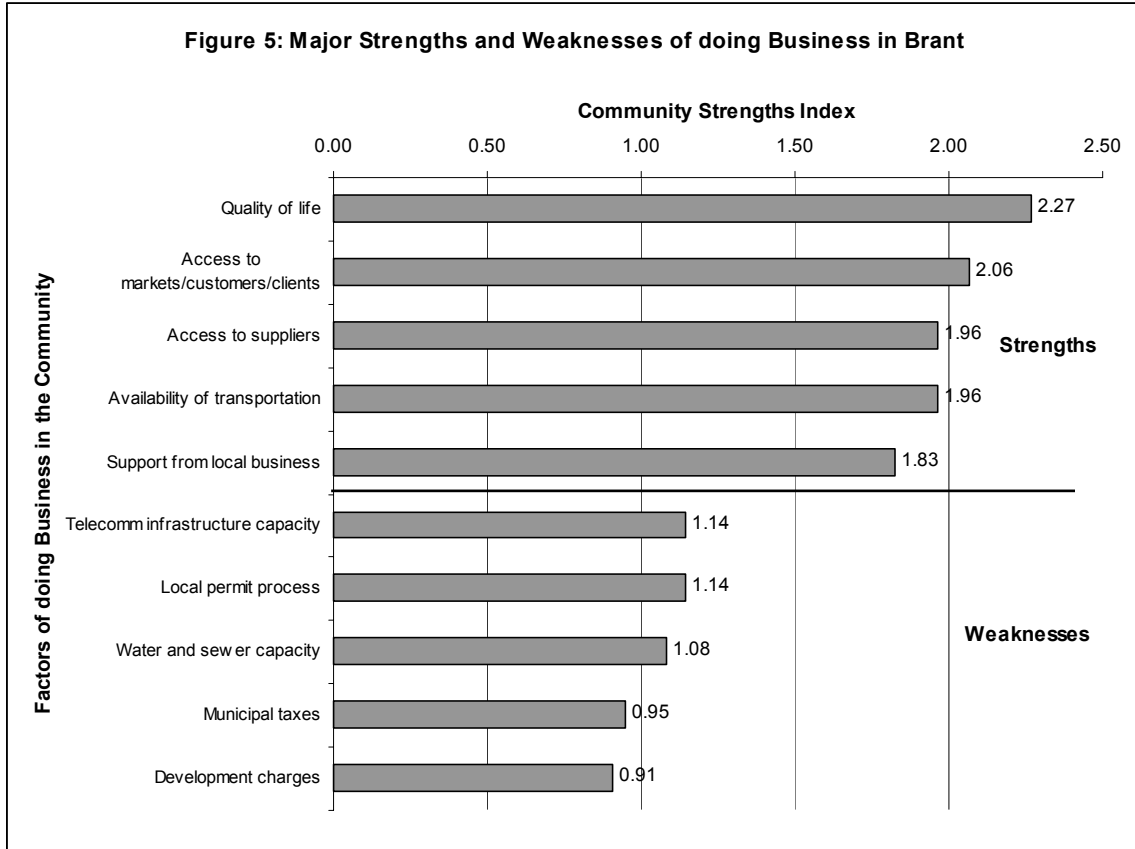
The top five factors of doing business in Brantford•Brant are quality of life, access to markets (customers and clients), access to suppliers, availability of transportation, and the support from local business. The bottom five factors are municipal taxes, development charges, availability of skilled labour, local permit process, and the size of local market. These lists are similar to the strengths and weaknesses rankings in Figures 4 and 5 of doing business in Brantford and Brant, respectively.

The 2006 top and bottom five strengths and weakness are very similar to the 2001 BRE results. The top five strengths in 2001 were central location, 403 access, good place to live (quality of life/close to home), proximity to customers (and markets), and the availability of labour. In 2001, the bottom five weaknesses were downtown, high/unfair taxes, lack of skilled labour, poor local government (decision-making, planning, lack of coordination), and access to customers (and markets).

Even though the concepts across the two surveys (2001, 2006) are not identical it is clear that the community’s location to markets and transportation systems, the quality of life available to residents, and a mutually supportive business community are identifiable as strengths that continue to endure. With respect to the community’s weaknesses municipal taxes, the availability of skilled labour, and some of the processes in local government are still issues as they have been identified repeatedly as concerns of firms.



It is interesting to note that of the factors listed as weaknesses such as land costs, municipal by-laws, support from municipality, availability of appropriately zoned land, local permit process, development charges, and municipal taxes local governments have the power to effect change and improve upon the current perceptions.



Community Questions

The BRE survey instrument allows communities to design and include additional questions for the survey. The City of Brantford Economic Development Department included questions covering human resource issues ranging from recruitment and hiring to skill development and training.

Across all firm sizes in Brantford•Brant the median total gross payroll per full-time employee is \$41,667. The median total gross payroll per total employment is \$38,095, where the denominator used in this ratio is the

number of total employees (14,058) including: full-time (13,062), part-time (494), seasonal/ temporary (186), and contract employees (316).

Some firms report hiring employees outside of a standard full-time arrangement: 25% of firms hire part-time, 6% seasonal/temporary, and 10% contract employees--these proportions do not imply exclusivity, firms that hire part-time may also hire temporary or contract workers, for example. Part-time employees make up 3.5% of total employment, temporary 1.3%, and contract workers 2.2%.

Of the firms hiring part-time workers, on average, 29.5% of their workforce is part-time relative to their full-time employees. Businesses hiring seasonal or temporary employees have, on average, 46.3% of their workforce as temporary, and firms hiring contract employees have a similar proportion (46.6%) of their workforce as contract workers relative to their full-time employees. It appears that firms that hire temporary or contract employees use these types of employment arrangements to meet a substantial portion of their staffing needs.

The main problem businesses are having with hiring qualified employees is that most applicants lack job experience (35.3%). The attitude, work ethic, and lack of skill of applicants is also problematic (23.3%), too few applicants (22.3%), most applicants lacked educational requirements (16.1%), and most applicants declined job offer (6.2%) are the main problems with hiring qualified employees.

There are two main styles of training that the BRE 2006 collected information on: classroom and on-the-job training. The percentage of firms using the on-the-job training style is typically greater than those using classroom training—nationally 31% of firms engage in classroom training and 45% engage in on-the-job training. This is likely due to the informal and accessible nature of on-the-job training. When making a comparison to the national training levels, a higher proportion of Brantford•Brant firms report providing classroom (50.7%) and on-the-job training (77.1%).

Of the businesses reporting classroom trained employees and classroom expenditures on training, the average training cost per trained employee in Brantford•Brant last year was \$1,395, with the average expected to increase to \$2,164 next year.

The top five most significant barriers to employees receiving the necessary training are: loss of productivity during training period (37%), cost (33%), unable to release employees (29%), awareness of existing training programs (21%), and losing trained employees to other businesses.

Most of the firms in Brantford•Brant are able to find the training they require in the community (44.9%), while 31.9% need training that is not available in the community. The majority of firms in the community report being familiar with the types of training available in the community 54.8%, compared to 24.7% that indicate that they are not familiar.

In Conclusion

Stakeholders and service providers may take the opportunity that this updated source of information provides to: establish cooperation between community leaders on urgent issues; establish early warning signals for potential problems; raise awareness of available community resources; directly assist firms that have requested assistance; use this information to set priorities and inform strategic planning; improve government/business relations; address training needs in the community; improve the quality of human resources; and generally work toward the formation of effective economic development programs.

Finally, regardless of the policies or practices implemented, as a part of Brantford•Brant's Business Retention and Expansion Program, one key component needs to remain: the effective communication between the three levels of government and business. Any plan must keep open the lines of communication that the BRE have opened. By ensuring ongoing communication, issues and concerns can be identified and addressed early, and opportunities can be explored. This will enhance Brantford•Brant's reputation as a pro-business jurisdiction, attracting new businesses and building the support network to foster more home-grown businesses. This approach may translate into well-paying, challenging jobs for Brantford•Brant's residents.

Addendum – Action Plan

In response to feedback from local industry to the first BRE survey conducted in 1998, the Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Committee was established. The committee is comprised of representatives from all three levels of government: municipal (Economic Development Departments of the City of Brantford and County of Brant); provincial (Ministry of Economic Development and Trade); and federal (Service Canada). The committee was created to provide direct firm assistance and enable area industries to become aware of resources available to them.

The 2006 survey identified two key findings that can be drawn from the BRE report:

1. Firms have repeatedly identified labour supply concerns
2. Local governments can enhance existing business retention and expansion programs and services.

The BRE Committee will continue to be the primary steering committee for activities and actions related to the BRE program.

The BRE committee will strive to improve workforce readiness in the area by addressing employers concerns of skilled and general labour availability and quality, to ensure that an appropriately qualified labour supply exists to satisfy local demand. To this end, the committee will disseminate the findings of the 2006 survey to all community service providers and agencies involved in employment and training initiatives. The committee will follow up with companies that have identified issues with employee recruitment and accessing training required for adequate workforce development. The committee, in concert with other community agencies, will identify the specific types of training required and will develop strategies that address issues of labour availability, recruitment and retention.

The BRE committee will prioritize companies that have identified expansion/relocation and export market development as key issues from the 2006 survey and target these businesses for immediate visitation. Companies with unique issues specific to their own business operations can be addressed individually by the committee members during their one-on-one follow-up visitations. Common themed issues expressed by multiple companies (e.g. export development) can be addressed by developing

strategies that deal with these issues in the larger context (e.g. MEDT export training seminar developed in cooperation with community partners). The remainder of the businesses identified in the Brantford•Brant Industrial Directory will continue to be visited systematically to satisfy the BRE committee's annual company visitation goal. Since being formed in 1998, the committee has set its annual company visitation target at 100. To better service local business and enable area industries to become more aware of the resources available to them, a new annual target of 150 is proposed.

Any issues raised that are outside the scope of local government will be forwarded to the Economic Development Advisory Board for review. The Board, in tandem with other like-minded community agencies (e.g. Chamber of Commerce Brantford•Brant) can work cooperatively to advance the issues and advocate on behalf of industry before the appropriate senior levels of government.

By this commitment to a proactive, responsive contact system, City and County Economic Development offices and community leaders will be able to develop strategies, set priorities and establish effective economic development programs aimed at the retention and expansion of businesses and jobs in the City of Brantford and County of Brant.