

With seven weeks until the big vote, Chicagoans, here's what you may have missed.



Take it off

There's business for tattoo removers, as those suffering buyer's remorse look to erase the ink. **3**

Life in them yet

Michael Horrell snaps up some of the city's oldest office buildings, betting on demand for low-cost space. **2**

Keywell's next big idea

Co-founder of Groupon launches a festival; Joe Perillo Sr. brings Rolls-Royce back to Chicago. **Taking Names, 4**

FOCUS



Social-marketing mavens

We scouted out which businesses are doing the best job of using social media to build buzz and sales. **21**

BUSINESS OF LIFE



Part-time dieters

They count calories or shun meat, but not every day; it seems to work for some, but experts disapprove. **25**

Wearing thin

Frayed cuffs, outdated suits spur men to return to clothes shopping. **25**

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Happier days return (sort of)

Factory sector powers recovery in 2011, but housing remains a dead weight

BY BRIGID SWEENEY

To recall his company's best year in the past decade, Atlas Tool & Die Inc.'s Zach Mottl doesn't have to dredge up spreadsheets from 2005 or '06. He just has to grab his most recent numbers.

Mr. Mottl, director of development at the Lyons-based manufacturer, says 2010 was Atlas' best year since 1999, as orders increased more than 25%. The 65-person company hired four people and invested more than \$600,000 on new laser-cutting equipment.

Mr. Mottl expects to boost his headcount and capital spending further in 2011.

"We finally feel good enough to say, yes, (the recovery) is here to stay—let's spend some cash, let's

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A win-win

New federal law promises a double boost for manufacturers. **3**



DOWNE FROM CANADA

CEO of Harris Bank parent wagers on Wisconsin's M&I

BY STEVE DANIELS

Bill Downe runs a Canadian banking giant, but if he looks like the guy next door, it's because he actually is.

A longtime Chicagoan who maintains a North Shore home despite his job as CEO of Toronto-based BMO Financial Group, Mr. Downe engineered BMO's biggest deal since it purchased Chicago's Harris Bank in 1984, just a year after he joined BMO as a credit analyst.

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CRAIN'S ILLUSTRATION; GETTY IMAGES AND STEPHEN J. SERIO PHOTOS

Rowe feels gas pangs

In course change, Exelon chief on hunt for gas utility takeover

BY STEVE DANIELS

How hungry is John Rowe for a major acquisition to cap his tenure as CEO of Exelon Corp.? He's looking for deals among slow-growing natural-gas utilities.

Mr. Rowe, 65, told investors at a private meeting Dec. 14 in Chicago that Exelon, the country's largest operator of nuclear power plants and owner of electric utility Commonwealth Edison Co., strongly considered bidding for Nicor Inc., the suburban gas utility that recently agreed to be acquired by Atlanta-based AGL Resources Inc. for \$2.4 billion, according to a person who was present. Concerns about the political ramifications of such a deal in Illinois led Exelon to take a pass, Mr. Rowe told the group.

But he made it clear that Exelon is still interested in buying a gas utility, a major change of direction. Until now, Mr. Rowe has pursued power generators that could sell electricity on the unregulated, wholesale market like Exelon's nuclear plants already do in Illinois and the Mid-



John Rowe

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FUELING WORD-OF-MOUTH

Free stuff draws fans

Case study: Wow Bao, a three-location, fast-casual Asian eatery, Chicago

Revenue: Nearly \$3 million

The social-media strategy: Wow Bao has a social-marketing mission: give away as much of its product as possible. On Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, you name it, the goal is the same. "What better way to get people excited about your business than to give them your product?" says Geoff Alexander, managing partner of Wow Bao and a vice-president at its parent company, Chicago-based Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises Inc. "That way, we can educate them about our product, get them to like it, and it makes it fun for them to try it."

So on "Secret Word Wednesday," visitors to Wow Bao's Facebook page can learn a secret passphrase that will earn them a free bao at the restaurant. Visitors to the restaurant who "check in" using the location-based social-media platforms Foursquare or Facebook Places are eligible for a buy-one-get-one-free offer. The first time customers check in using Scvngr, a new location-based platform, they receive a free bao. The person with the most Foursquare check-ins gets a free six-pack of baos—as often as they stop in. (Mr. Alexander says that, so far, no one has abused this privilege.)

The location-based services appeal to Mr. Alexander because he figures his restaurant's unique cuisine is a conversation-starter. "Most of the people on Foursquare have their accounts tied to their Twitter accounts, and their Twitter accounts are

tied to their Facebook accounts, which are tied to their blogs. When somebody checks in, it goes viral on these different (platforms), and you start a conversation. First, it's 'Hey, I'm at Wow Bao'; then, 'What's that?' Then, 'I love it—have you tried it?'"

That's where Bao Mouth fits in. Bao Mouth is an anonymous Wow Bao employee who monitors various social-media channels for conversations about the restaurant. Bao Mouth has carte blanche from Mr. Alexander to reward Wow Bao loyalists, make amends with unhappy customers or chat up potential diners.

Paul Templer, 34, heard about Wow Bao from friends on Twitter. Mr. Templer joined the conversation, saying he'd have to try a bao sometime. Soon, he received a Tweet from Bao Mouth offering a free lunch. Now, he walks a mile from his Streeter-ville office to the Wow Bao at 1 W. Wacker Blvd. once or twice a week in nice weather.

"Wow Bao has a cult following" on Twitter, Mr. Templer says. "I'll walk in and other customers will say, 'Hey, Paul! I recognize you from your Twitter picture. It's great to finally meet you!'"

Mr. Templer has noticed that the online community of Wow Bao followers is growing, and he considers it mostly good news. The only drawback is that he seldom earns the free baos that come from recording the most Foursquare check-ins.

"Everybody's battling," Mr. Templer says. "These days, you probably have to go twice a day to get it."



Geoff Alexander, managing partner of Wow Bao, says the eatery's unique cuisine lends itself to social media.

ERIK UNGER

BACK-SEAT DRIVER

Jess Loren, founder, Chicago-based social-media marketing and design firm Mix Media Solutions LLC

Something to copy: They have an "order online" feature on Facebook that I really like. It's an awesome call to action, and it

pulls off their whole strategy. (Mr. Alexander says online orders are up 10% since the feature was added in September.)

Something to tweak: The first post I saw on the Facebook page said, "Sorry to self-promote, but . . ." I

would never apologize for that. If you can promote your products in a way that people can relate to—for instance, if it's lunchtime and they're hungry—don't be sorry. They know you're a business, and they're going to eat somewhere, so it may as well be with you."

STAYING TOP-OF-MIND YEAR-ROUND

Using tools to build buzz even in

Case study: Windy City Ski LLC, which organizes trips from Chicago to area ski resorts

Revenue: About \$200,000

The social-media strategy: Marketing Director Jake Strom has Tweeted more than 3,000 times from his @WindyCitySki account since the company hosted its first ski trip last winter—an average of about eight Tweets per day. Sometimes he's overtly marketing, telling the world what a great time he's having on the way to the slopes; more often, he's starting or joining Twitter conversations about anything and everything, then gently steering the discussion toward skiing.

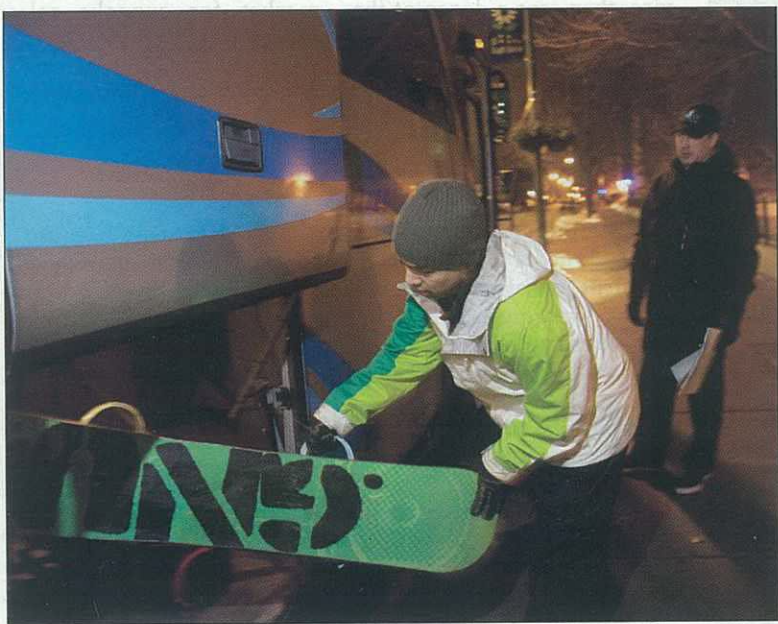
Eight Tweets per day is a lot for most of us, but not enough to impress a serious Twitter user. But when you consider that Mr. Strom, 29, is a part-time employee of Windy City Ski (he sells commercial real estate by day), and that, in addition to Twitter, Windy City Ski maintains a presence on Meetup, Foursquare, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, Flickr and LinkedIn . . . well, he's dedicated.

The idea is to help this seasonal business stay relevant with its customers year-round. With that goal and the natural sense of community formed by a business like Windy City Ski (customers make friends during the long drives to

and from the ski resorts), Mr. Strom decided that social media was a perfect fit.

Last winter—its first—Windy City Ski hosted 14 trips and, at first, its 53-seat bus was only half-full. By the end of the season, the bus was sold out, and the business had acquired 2,300 followers on Twitter, in addition to hundreds on Facebook and Meetup. This year, the company has scheduled more than two dozen trips and says it's seen a social media-fueled spike in advance bookings.

"We've been able to create a buzz for this season," Mr. Strom says. "I've just tried to constantly remind people that we're out



ERIK UNGER

David Knight, right, co-founder of Windy City Ski, checks people in for a trip. The company says it's seen a social media-fueled spike in advance bookings.