

Episode 112: 2020 Year in Review

- Bill Walton: [00:08](#) Hi, this is Bill Walton. Welcome to the show. Well, 2020 is a year I think we can all agree has been among the most catastrophic in history. I'm sure there are worse, like maybe the day Rome fell, or 1789 when they pulled out the guillotine in Paris, but maybe even those were not as bad as 2020. But I am a silver lining guy, I always see the glass half full. While we focus on the distancing and the masks and a lot of the destruction of small business, there are a lot of positive things that can be taken from what we've all gone through. I think these are positive things that we ought to reflect on as we go into 2021, which I expect will be a better year, a different year, but better.
- I wanted to talk with the team that I work with to help make this show, Brian McNicholl, Frank Wazeter, Alyona Wazeter, and Rich McFadden, because we got to kicking this around earlier in the week, and they had a lot of good ideas, and I thought we'd dive right into those. But I guess, before I do that, I just found out when we were getting ready to do this, Brian had COVID this year, and so did Frank and Alyona. And so as I joked, I can't wait to get it next so I can be member of the new club, the in guys.
- So Frank, why don't you kick off with what your takeaway is and what your year's been like and what you see could be a positive going forward?
- Frank Wazeter: [01:56](#) Yeah. Well, I think number one with this year is that you see the indomitability of the human spirit. You see that although a bunch of businesses have gone out of business, is that you've seen record numbers of new businesses coming about. So people are kind of taking the chance to engage in their freedom and build things up and to say, "Hey, I got nothing left to lose. Let's get rolling with that idea. It's a new opportunity rather than a bad thing."
- Bill Walton: [02:26](#) Rich?
- Rich McFadden: [02:27](#) I would probably say that even though we are being forced into a lot of situations that we don't like right now, that coming out on the other side, we're going to end up with some really cool advances, and specifically, I'm watching my kids with their virtual learning. The teachers hate it, the school systems hate it, the students definitely hate it, the parents definitely hate it.

And it's hard. Our kids are being used as Guinea pigs and out of necessity. But you know what, in three, four years, they're going to figure this thing out. It's going to be a tool that provides people with educational opportunities that they've never had. It's going to be a tool that provides kids with experience that they would not have had, and it's going to make them more resourceful and it's going to teach them how to figure things out.

While it just stinks for everybody right now, I think in the end, for most people, they're going to come out on the other side and really have some tools that they didn't have in their tool bag before. Some will be hurt by it, but I think in the main, we're going to end up ahead of where we were.

Bill Walton: [03:53](#) Yeah, I agree. I think we're all ultimately very resilient. Alyona? Alyona, you had an interesting take on families.

Alyona Wazeter: [04:03](#) As Rich was saying, although we're forced to stay in, so many people actually stayed out for the first time, maybe in years. Going out on the bike trails and hiking and enjoying the weather, enjoying the weather with our families, with our kids. Every time we'll go out and take a hike, it's packed with people. That's one of the things that I think a lot of people are missing out on in their lives, is to actually pause and look around and see the beauty in the world. That's one of the biggest things throughout the summer.

Now that we're in holiday season, people are joining their families through Zoom. Zoom been around along Skype, along WhatsApp for years now, but now it actually got triggered that, "Hey, we actually can have a conversation with the whole entire family on Christmas day through Zoom," and all of a sudden we have the whole entire family joining and reuniting.

Bill Walton: [05:20](#) Yeah. My one-year-old granddaughter is pretty cute on Zoom. I think we should get her on YouTube pretty soon, but I think all grandparents with one year olds think that is probably true. Brian, why don't you jump in with the intro, and then we'll just kind of play jazz and people weigh in on various aspects of what could turn out to be good about this year?

Brian McNicoll: [05:44](#) Okay. Well, one of the things that goes to what Alyona was saying is golf has made a huge comeback this year. Golf was really on the ropes in terms of people belonging to golf courses, paying greens fees, buying equipment and so forth. But COVID, golf was one of the first sports we were allowed to go do. In fact, my golf course here by me never shut down. So that was a

sport that we could go play that was pretty socially distanced. And like you were saying outside, enjoying the weather and the courses were packed, the ones that stayed open.

Other things like medical advances, we have telemedicine now, it's going to be a lot bigger part of our lives and should have been a long time ago. One of the things that's happened under this, a lot of regulations got moved out of the way. People like the FDA and so forth, got kind of a kick in the butt, so to speak, to speed up, do things quicker. Medical machines, we had a need to measure people's temperature because now, there was a study out yesterday that there's no asymptomatic transmission or essentially no asymptomatic transmission. You're not showing symptoms, you cannot give coronavirus to anyone, which means these temperature checks become real important.

Now you've had a lot of innovation the temperature checks started out as using an old fashioned thermometer, and then we got the electric things to go across your forehead. And now there's these thing, you just walk up and stand in front of them and they point something at your forehead and they know your temperature in about... You barely stop walking. So those are pretty exciting things and it's a pretty cool way around a pretty serious problem.

Bill Walton:

[07:37](#)

So I can see there's going to be a big market in portable and these thermometers. So the economist in me, the finance guy thinks, okay, well then, what I'm hearing is that there are a lot of winners. There are a lot of industries that are big winners, and we're reading a lot about the losers, which are the small businesses, the restaurants and the service businesses, and those that are undeniably getting clobbered. But people are figuring out other things to do, and maybe even the restaurant owners may be figuring out new things to do when the veil, when the curtain lifts. Frank, you mentioned something about entrepreneurship. Thoughts?

Frank Wazeter:

[08:18](#)

Yeah. So what you've seen is you've seen people that have been forced to adapt and and evolve. They say suffering is the mother of all innovation, and especially in the digital realm on a small business level, the ones that are thriving, the ones that have gone through, and the ones that have come through that are now expanding their business in ways that are profoundly different than the way they were doing business a year ago. Whether that's online deliveries, whether that's doing more meetings digitally or remotely, and that when you get this momentum to catch back up as come out of this thing, that's

not going to go away. And they're going to continuously expand through that.

Bill Walton: [09:01](#) Well, yeah. You mentioned the freedom word. Once you've had your business crushed, you have freedom. We joke. Yeah. That's the Kris Kristofferson line in his song, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." But as an entrepreneur myself, you tend to get crushed doing certain things, but you learn a lot from it. Maybe you're in a restaurant, you had a good menu, but not a great location. Well now, with everything empty, there are going to be a lot of great new locations available. So, I don't know.

Frank Wazeter: [09:35](#) Probably pretty cheap rent too, because they'll be like, "Hey, come back."

Bill Walton: [09:39](#) Yeah. Yeah. Hey, Rich, you mentioned digital media. What's happening there?

Rich McFadden: [09:44](#) Yeah. It's not a bad year to be creating content for people to consume when they're stuck at home or out walking or not in bars, not in restaurants. They're looking for something to engage in and digital content, podcasts, radio have all had a good year. It's been tough on some people, but people, they don't just want to sit around. They want to be doing something. And when they're walking, when they're exercising, when they're cooking, when they're out with the dog, when they're golfing, they're going to wear some ear buds and be listening to some content to keep them entertained and informed as to what's going on in the world around them. And so podcasts, talk podcast, the spoken word have done really well.

And so being in that business, we've seen a nice boost this year. And the talk radio side broadcast is strong, very strong this year. So people are looking for information and they're finding new ways to get it, and we've been able to deliver it to them and it's been a good year for it.

Bill Walton: [10:56](#) Yeah. That's Radio America. You and I have talked about this before. There's this big word I learned, actually just this morning when I was thinking about this show called prosody, which is where there are people who believe, I believe that the ear, the fastest, most effective way to communicate is through the ear and through speaking. And of course, you think about Shakespeare, that was written for the ear in the audience, and sermons didn't use to be written down, they were just delivered to an audience. I think that this lousy pandemic has caused people to move towards that. I think that's a great outcome.

Brian McNicoll: [11:39](#) I think it's been a Bonanza for cooking. Grocery store sales are up almost 30%, and cook books, things like that are flying off the shelves.

Rich McFadden: [11:52](#) The cooking channels, the cooking apps, they're all killing it. Yeah.

Brian McNicoll: [11:57](#) The modern cookbooks. I don't know too many people that flip the old pages anymore. So I think we're getting better food out of it because people are saying, because I know personally, I do the cooking around here and there's been more opportunity to take your time and make something good as opposed to just throwing something together. So I think-

Rich McFadden: [12:21](#) Brian, you had mentioned a little while ago that golf has made a resurgence. And it's funny, you look over my shoulder, I'm a horrible guitar player, but really enjoy it, played it all my life. And guitar gods, your Eric Clapton, your Stevie Ray Vaughans, all these guys are just waned over the past decade and a half. And guitar's really not a big part of pop music anymore. Well, let me tell you something, there are millions and millions of kids sitting at home in front of YouTube, learning how to play the guitar this year. [crosstalk 00:12:57] It's an explosion that is not going to go away for the next generation or two.

Brian McNicoll: [13:01](#) And I'll tell you what, it's not just kids. I have three women friends who are all 50 or over, who have taken up guitar and really gotten passionate about it and gotten pretty good at it.

Rich McFadden: [13:15](#) Yeah. Which is great, but that's not going to keep it around for another generation. You're right, that's absolutely has happened. But the thing I'm so excited to see is 15 year olds and 13 year olds discovering the guitar, so that it's around for... because think about it, what would rock and roll be without guitar? So what would rock and roll be in the next 50 years without any kids learning how to play the guitar? So I'm pleased to see that, really pleased.

Brian McNicoll: [13:42](#) We've had a comeback of that kind of music. Right? People are listening to the old... Like at the school where I coach there's a rock and roll club where they're studying Led Zeppelin and stuff. I can help you with that.

Bill Walton: [13:58](#) Wait, wait. Where is that school, Brian? I may want to audit that class.

Brian McNicoll: [14:04](#) Alexandria.

Bill Walton: [14:05](#) Okay. That's pretty close.

Rich McFadden: [14:07](#) Well, another upside I'll tell you is online music. So all of these acts that I used to go see when I went to Jazz Fest in new Orleans every year and all the concerts that I've seen over my life, they're now performing on Facebook and on websites. And so I can see all the bands that I love to go see any Friday or Saturday night, right on my computer screen. Whereas before I would have to travel somewhere, to New Orleans or Nashville and go see them or wait for them to come here. Now I can just see when their next online concert is. So that's really been a neat, neat thing this year to be able to enjoy.

Alyona Wazeter: [14:49](#) There were a lot of people and a lot of pop stars and rock stars that are famous, that would actually hop on Facebook Live and whatnot, and just do their concert.

Rich McFadden: [15:01](#) They had to figure it out just like we did. And one of the things that they did that's neat is... And the ones who've really done this right and figured it out, they created a tip jar. So you could tip them through YouTube chats or through PayPal or Venmo. And they've figured out how to make a living virtually. Good for them. That's neat.

Bill Walton: [15:22](#) I don't want to be the skunk in the party, but I will a little bit. We're making it sound like the best thing that ever happened is this pandemic and the lockdown. And I absolutely agree, we're not going to go back to an old normal, we're going to go forward to a new normal and it'll have all these different aspects and that's going to be a very good thing. But what do you think have been the social, the psychological costs of people walking around with masks and shoving people off to be six feet away?

Rich McFadden: [15:52](#) I don't think masks are ever going away. I think that you will have people that are scared to death to ever not wear a mask again. And so, I think that there's going to be a small percentage of people that still wear them. But I don't want to focus on the downs, but I think masks are here to stay for a small percentage of the population.

Bill Walton: [16:16](#) Well, as long as it's a small percentage and it's a voluntary, I'm all for it. But it's the mandatory part that I want to get us free of. Alyona, what do you think of the social cost of people wearing masks? Where'd you grow up, which country?

Alyona Wazeter: [16:36](#) Kazakhstan.

Bill Walton: [16:38](#) Kazakhstan. So you're coming to America from another culture into our culture, and then we've got American freedom, which was very, very attractive to you and to me and to all of us, but yet we're now mandated masks. How do you see this?

Alyona Wazeter: [16:54](#) Well, let me tell you, it's definitely better than back in Kazakhstan. I still talk to my family on a weekly basis and they have penalties and fines that they have to pay if they're not wearing a mask, walking outside.

Bill Walton: [17:11](#) I keep forgetting, this is worldwide. People have been imposed, these mask requirements have been imposed everywhere.

Alyona Wazeter: [17:19](#) Correct. Yep. So every time my grandmother walks her dog, she has to wear a mask. And right now it's cold. So it's great. It helps. But throughout the summertime, it was horrible.

Bill Walton: [17:36](#) I wonder if a ski gator would qualify as a mask.

Frank Wazeter: [17:42](#) Well, you were talking before too, how when they go on lockdown, they lock you down block by block with police barricade and don't let yet you come back, and they still have the resurgence and things like that going on.

Alyona Wazeter: [17:55](#) Yep. So it's basically, the whole city's divided and I think nine little areas and each one was locked down and each area will have their own stores and all of that, of course, but you weren't able to walk from area one to area two without any actual urgency and actual emergency that you have to go there.

Bill Walton: [18:23](#) Well, and they locked down New Zealand and Australia almost as tightly. So what I'm hearing, and I agree with your assessments is we've adapted, we're doing new things and many of us are thriving, but yet I think we got to get out from under this government mandated lockdown, [crosstalk 00:18:45]. But I don't see how. Let's run the risks of being prognosticators here. It's the beginning of 2021. How do you guys see this lockdown unfolding and how quickly can we go back to the new normal?

Brian McNicoll: [19:04](#) I think that one key thing that happened a couple of weeks ago over in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, the restaurants closed, and the restaurant owners went to court and said, "You need to prove that restaurants are causing these cases. Because if we're not the cause of it, then we shouldn't be shut down." And the evidence is that only about 2% of the cases are caused by or generated in restaurants. So a judge overruled the county

government that wanted to close the restaurants and forced them to let them reopen.

So I think one of the big things you're going to see, and I think it's a very good development, is some real street fighting type battles over civil liberties, and what is the extent of our rights and what is the extent of government's power to do things like this to us under the rubric of it being an emergency and what constitutes an emergency and are we still in an emergency? I think all those questions are about to get a fair hearing and it's way overdue.

- Rich McFadden: [20:14](#) I think, Brian, to follow up on that, I think you look across the board, you look at the election, the political stories that we've watched this year and COVID, and I think there's a whole lot of, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore." I think that's where people are, where they're not going to be pushed down by the government anymore. They realize that they don't have to be forced to do this. And so whether it's local government or the federal government people, aren't going to sit around and just say, "Okay, if you say so. They're going to fight back."
- Frank Wazeter: [20:50](#) I think the biggest threat is fear. Nobody makes a good decision when it's based in fear, and I think you got this widespread fear going on, whether there's truth in things or not. You see like Britain says, "Oh, there's a new strain," and everybody freaks out all of a sudden, like, "Oh my God, we're going to be here for the next however many years, or it's going to keep going back again." You'll be very conscientious of what decisions are being made based on this fear that may or may not have a basis behind it.
- Rich McFadden: [21:24](#) Well, government lives on fear. And so they see this as an opportunity, but the fact that people have had to live through this is going to be their opportunity to say, "No, I don't think so." [crosstalk 00:21:37].
- Brian McNicoll: [21:34](#) We can see a level of fighting over this we haven't seen in our whole lives.
- Bill Walton: [21:40](#) Well, the government and media lives on fear.
- Rich McFadden: [21:42](#) Yes. Yep. Absolutely.

Bill Walton: [21:45](#) Even Fox News is falling into the trap of telling us all the horrible stuff. Somebody mentioned last night, this might last 10 years. I don't think so.

Rich McFadden: [21:58](#) People aren't going to put up for it for 10 years.

Frank Wazeter: [22:01](#) You got to look at history. This has happened before. It's not like this is the first time this has ever happened in human history. It's actually been a fairly regular occurrence. It's surprising that it didn't happen sooner. So I don't know, if you look at the Spanish flu [crosstalk 00:22:15].

Bill Walton: [22:16](#) But it is the first time in human history that we've locked down like this, in the face of a virus or whatever. It's always been take the people who are vulnerable, isolate them, protect them and let everybody else go on living to develop that horrible word, herd immunity. God, I wish we can come up with a better term. And that hadn't happened here. So this is the first time we've locked down worldwide this way. You look at evidence from places that have had tight, tight mask restrictions and those that have had almost none, and there's no evidence that the mask reduced the incidence of the illness. As a matter of fact, there's some evidence that it might even be less likely to get it if you're not wearing masks.

Alyona Wazeter: [23:05](#) I think fundamentally, people will stop sitting in their corners and not expressing their opinions anymore, like we saw during the election. I think that's going to continue on because people are done. They're fed up with not being heard and I think it will continue, and we'll see more people actually joining the ranks of those who care.

Bill Walton: [23:31](#) Well, this could be, and here's a real silver lining for me, the silver lining guy. This could be a new birth of freedom. People recognizing that they've got to assert their rights to be free, and that's a very good thing.

Brian McNicoll: [23:47](#) Yeah. You're going to have to go defend it. It's been a given all of our lives. Everyone that's on here right now, the length of our lives, it's been given that we are free. And now it's been challenged in a way that it has not been before. And so you're starting to see like the Anna Rundle County, you're starting to see some clawbacks, Some people say, "Hey, wait a minute. Unless you can prove this is a silver bullet against the disease then you're encroaching on rights you don't have the power to coach on."

- Bill Walton: [24:23](#) What do you think happens to the churches? I've been disappointed that they've just rolled over under these mandates. And I think our right to the assemble to practice our religion is such an essential.
- Brian McNicoll: [24:39](#) Well, I think the same group of people that you're talking about are going to wear masks forever, are not going to go back to church. There was people we were talking about this the other day. There are people that we have not seen at our church since March. They can't risk going inside of the church and you'll just not see them at church anymore.
- Rich McFadden: [25:01](#) How many people are going to church now because of this virtually that have not gone to church before? So if there is an upside to that situation, it is that churches had to figure out how to be virtual, and they possibly are reaching a new audience that they have not been able to reach before.
- Alyona Wazeter: [25:21](#) I've read an article just recently where one of the parishes was talking about it, that so many churches went online, actually majority of them went online and they see people that they've never seen in the building itself and might never see them. But as long as that continues on being online streamed, when the lockdown is off and we're all back to normal, they might be still going, although they will never show up at the building.
- Brian McNicoll: [25:56](#) Yeah. Another thing on that though, the other side of that is the governor of Virginia, he increased our lockdown a few weeks ago. One of the things he said, he goes, "Hey, you don't have to be in a church to worship." That's like, you know what? I don't need advice from you, Mr. Governor, about where I need to go worship. I have the right to [crosstalk 00:26:17].
- Rich McFadden: [26:15](#) I don't need to be in a church to worship, but if I want to be, you don't get to tell me no.
- Brian McNicoll: [26:22](#) That's correct.
- Bill Walton: [26:26](#) As I said, you're making me feel like this was all a very good thing, except for those 40 million small businesses-
- Rich McFadden: [26:35](#) You know the way I look at it, Bill, I look at it like war. Out of every war comes some amazing technology and amazing advances. Horrible, horrible situation that you would never want to see happen ever in your life or anybody's life. I wish we could all get rid of war, but unfortunately to this day, it's a fact of life, but you know what, a lot of really cool things come out

of the other side of it. And if you can focus on some of those things, there is at least a small upside.

- Bill Walton: [27:04](#) They're just watching us all on Zoom now. The workplace is going to change. I'm not sure I want out on office buildings in Manhattan, but you look at what we're doing right now. We've got six of us on the line here, and we're a workplace right here and we're creating something and we're all in different states and different places. In some ways, I think we're more effective in this mode than we might be trying to get to one place to sit in a room together.
- Brian McNicoll: [27:37](#) That's true. And also the thing about the office space, I think you're going to end up with different occupants and who will occupy those offices in Manhattan. They're not going to knock those buildings down, but the rent, we'll price it in a different neighborhood. You'll get a different kind of business using that kind of office space. You could be smaller, more agile and be able to afford Manhattan office space now because the traditional commercial real estate customers are drying up, reducing their footprint, et cetera.
- Rich McFadden: [28:18](#) We're going to see a pivot there like you've never seen. I can't imagine when my lease is up on our radio studios in another four years that I'm resigning the lease for the existing square footage that we have. I don't need it. This whole thing has created a situation where even if people do need to be in the office, they don't need to be in an office five days a week. I just don't need this kind of space anymore, and everybody is seeing that right now. And so you're right. Commercial realtors are trying to figure out what their pivot point is going to be.
- Frank Wazeter: [28:55](#) I think you'll see a lot of smaller communities in probably these areas that we've been seeing a drain towards the big cities over the past couple of decades have a resurgence because people can suddenly live where they want and still have a good job or still run-
- Rich McFadden: [29:10](#) There's walkable communities where you can walk to the town square and all the restaurants, they are going to explode and people are going to be working from home, or like we work situations where they have a central office where you go in as needed. Shared space.
- Frank Wazeter: [29:28](#) Little meeting space going.
- Rich McFadden: [29:28](#) Yep.

- Brian McNicoll: [29:31](#) What Frank said, the city I'm from in Louisiana is one of the biggest population losers of the last decade. And part of the reason for that is creatives have congregated in certain places and creatives are not congregating there. So now you could be a creative person and live in Shreveport, Louisiana, Alexandria, Louisiana, which is even smaller and deeper in the woods, because if I can turn on my computer and get Zoom up, I can meet with people all over the world.
- Bill Walton: [30:09](#) Michael Porter, the business strategist from Harvard wrote a book and part of it was industrial clusters. And he talked about the advantages of Silicon Valley and Hollywood and Wall Street and the places where people have to go physically to collaborate and bounce ideas off of each other. You're right, this may bust up the clusters in a way that diffuses that talent around the country and makes it a very interesting and lively place. I like that scenario.
- Rich McFadden: [30:42](#) Do you also think, Bill that it could break up the tribalism that those groups create? So the Silicone Valley tribalism?
- Bill Walton: [30:52](#) I do. I hope so. I hope so. We know they're a monolith of cultural and political views. It could break it up. They could get to know people like us.
- Brian McNicoll: [31:04](#) The [inaudible 00:31:06] are all in trouble because there are so many ways to challenge ideas now. There are so many new ways to get your view into other people's minds.
- Rich McFadden: [31:18](#) Well, back to the Fox News and CNN versus the podcasts like this, conversations like this are growing and people are hungry for conversations like this. They don't want to be talked at anymore. They don't want to be spoken to anymore by somebody sitting in a big glass desk, in a big, expensive studio. They want to have real conversations like this. I think all of this is creating that situation where you're about to see the CNNs and the Fox news really be minimalized and conversations like this grow and grow and grow like they have been over the last couple of years.
- Bill Walton: [32:02](#) Rich, that was great. Thanks. Brian, that's great. Alyona and Frank, very interesting. I think let's keep in mind reconvening to come up with other positive things we can all look forward to. So anyway, thanks everybody for joining, and you and I, we will all be talking soon. Take care.

Speaker 6:

[32:25](#)

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