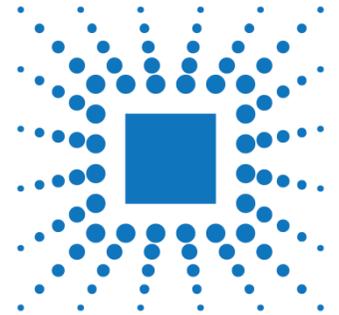


CASE STUDY

**City of Chicago PPE Market: Using principles of circularity to equitably distribute COVID-19 resources**

**Rheaply**

Submitted by: Thomas Fecarotta, VP of External Affairs



**SUSTAINABLE  
PURCHASING  
LEADERSHIP  
COUNCIL**  
CASE STUDY  
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## Abstract

The sharing of resources & materials between and within local businesses presents an enormous business and environmental opportunity. It's also incredibly timely and necessary today, as cities and organizations look to curtail discretionary spending and cope with the challenging financial and operational circumstances of the pandemic world in which we live. For Rheaply (a B2B climate tech software) the concept of the circular economy – where material outputs are put into consumer flows instead of being dismissed as waste – must be put into practice in response to Covid-19 resource shortages.

Equally important is how we apply these principles to address a massive problem facing us today: the sourcing, transparency, equitable distribution and sharing of available reopening supplies (aka, personal protective equipment such as face coverings, protective shields and sanitizers).

Balancing these needs against the fragile supply chains pushing essential workers to wear masks and gowns for sometimes longer than a week, the City of Chicago had to come up with a way to ALSO support small business (SMBs) and nonprofits in need of affordable PPE during reopening. The City of Chicago and Mayor Lori Lightfoot's office turned to Rheaply to completely design, implement, launch, manage, and maintain an online, local PPE exchange marketplace in late May of 2020.

## Summary

Goals	Strategies	Results
Provide accurate visibility into the supply of readily available reopening supplies	Ensure all listings available for purchase by suppliers are uploaded with corresponding specs and price	100% of assets posted involve regular audit scheduling by Rheaply staff
High rate of asset fulfillment	Ongoing supplier support to ensure fulfillment and workflow completeness	Rheaply is equipped with a dedicated help and messaging center to better connect suppliers to SMB's to coordinate pickup and payment
Asset compliance and offer compliance	Admin access and training for ongoing monitoring	Secure onboarding and authorization of city-vetted suppliers + admin approval

		teams to monitor offer workflows
Equitable Exchange	Quantity/Offer restrictions to ensure city-wide participation + to avoid reseller markups and price gouging	Rheaply configured the offer page to have purchasing restrictions
Co-Marketing and Communication	Collaboration with public servants and community leaders (World Business Chicago, consulates, clergy, and education hubs) to announce a community-driven effort toward PPE distribution and sourcing	City of Chicago's Press Release ( <a href="#">link</a> ) City of Chicago's Press Conference with Rheaply's CEO ( <a href="#">link</a> ) Rheaply's Press Release ( <a href="#">link</a> )

## Goals

There were several initial goals to address the City of Chicago's request for a more connected & local PPE Marketplace while also remaining vigilant against a challenging and PPE market. First, as the city prepared to enter the next phase of reopening, many businesses were faced with the challenge of affordably acquiring supplies to help protect their workers from contracting or spreading COVID-19 upon returning to work. Rheaply's authentication system would have to ensure the City would have clear visibility into supplier participation, with the authority to remove or dismiss suppliers from the platform. Additionally, the platform must guard against defective and/or unusable items from entering the platform, and allow for users to source resources closest to them first on a timely basis. This temporal and geographical focus on sourcing PPE would not only position the city to support small businesses and NFPs worried about acquiring the necessary reopening, but additionally help other local businesses who may have shifted manufacturing production to address the PPE gap.

## Lessons Learned

### How the PPE Market creates an inclusive & cohesive sharing environment

#### As a SMB/Nonprofit:

- You can explore the marketplace, make offers, and communicate with suppliers for payment and logistics.

#### As a Supplier:

- You can manage posts and inventory, view offers, complete transactions, and communicate with businesses through messaging.

#### As an Admin:

- You can invite or delete suppliers and small businesses as well as manage all posts and transaction data on the platform.

## Strategies and Actions

Rheaply worked in coordination with World Business Chicago, the Office of the Mayor of Chicago (Lori Lightfoot), and the Deputy Mayor of Chicago to allow SMBs to gain access to Rheaply's virtual platform and source PPE from a pool of city-vetted suppliers. Rheaply's support team ensured all items contained the proper description, tagging and quantity allotment, as well as clear photographs, enabling purchasers to make the best possible decision when choosing a PPE supplier. Additionally, Rheaply's platform enabled real-time communication through a dedicated messaging center, immediately alerting SMBs and non-profits when supplies in need became available. To facilitate equitable exchange and avoid price gouging, businesses are only able to purchase a maximum quantity of the PPE found on the platform.

Vetted suppliers are able to manage posts and inventory, view offers, complete transactions, and communicate with businesses through messaging.

### Testimonial

I want to express my gratitude to our entire city, especially local businesses such as Rheaply, for their commitment, dedication, and sacrifice during these past few months.”

- Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot

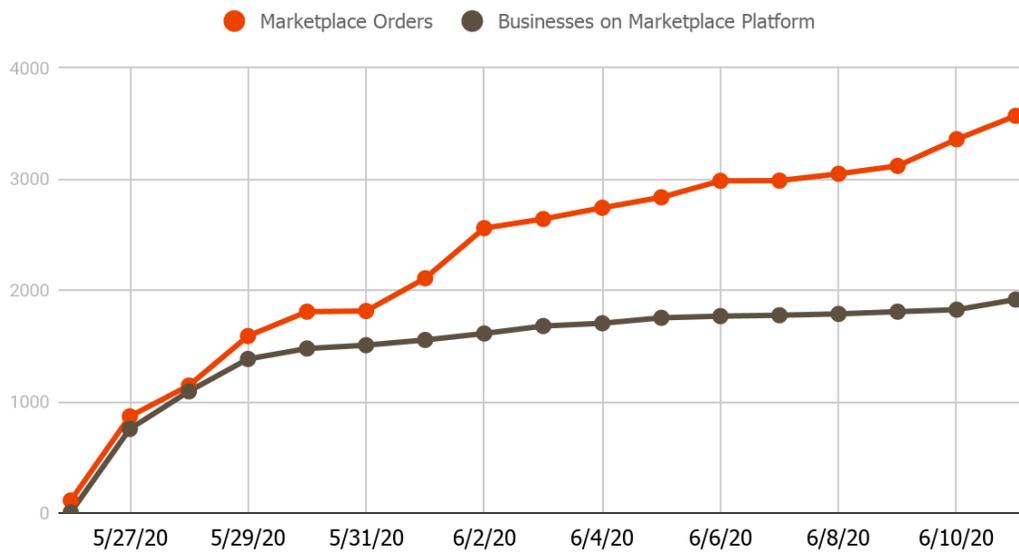
## Financial Information

Due to privacy agreements, we cannot provide detailed budgetary information, however Chicago’s public-private economic partners (World Business Chicago) paid Rheaply a monthly hosted service fee that allowed an unlimited # of registered SMBs and nonprofits to access the platform for free without a user seat license. By sourcing locally, SMBs were able to save on unnecessary shipment costs in addition to saving thousands of dollars by avoiding high-priced overseas suppliers.

## Results

The marketplace has successfully balanced supply-demand and PPE inventory volume has steadily risen, while keeping PPE prices low and transparent for SMBs and NFPs. The Chicago PPE Market has facilitated over 35000 PPE orders, across 2000+ verified Chicago-based small businesses and not-for-profit organizations (see Fig. 1), with 613k listing units available.

Fig.1: Orders on Chicago PPE Marketplace Platform



## Benefits

The Chicago PPE Marketplace powered by Rheaply has been an extraordinary success and was designed specifically to support businesses as they reopen and find/source needed personal protective equipment (PPE), with the goal to monitor the distribution and use of basic PPE, and make sure nothing goes to waste.

## Lessons Learned

### The importance of co-marketing for efforts

#### Aligning early on PR and marketing efforts around PPE Marketplace Launch

- By working with public-private partners in promoting the marketplace, Rheaply was able to successfully garner interest and awareness among the SMB community eager

#### Pre-launch communication to important State stakeholders

- Rheaply coordinated with SMBs leaders: Chamber of Commerce & Small Business Administration to align on missions and key functional OKRs for the PPE Market

## References and Additional Resources

- Chicago PPE Market
- How we can fight the pandemic by embracing circularity
- [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2020/may/EarlyJuneReopening.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2020/may/EarlyJuneReopening.html)
- <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/circular-economy-principles-are-alleviating-covid-19-shortages>