

GROW » CUSTOMERS

5 Ways to Retain Your Customers During the Coronavirus Outbreak

Even if you need to close due to health and safety concerns, there are ways to keep serving your customers during the coronavirus outbreak.

By: Emily Heaslip, Contributor

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From promoting gift cards and discounts to holding online events, there are several ways small businesses can hold on to and engage with their customers during this difficult time. — Getty Images/PredragImages

Social distancing, while good for public health, is bad for small businesses. Foot traffic has dropped steeply since the coronavirus outbreak as more and more customers stay home and self-quarantine. Many business owners are worried that the impact of COVID-19 will be deeper and more long-lasting than anticipated. As a result, merchants in every industry are looking for ways to keep their customers during the coronavirus lockdown. Here are some tips to keep your employees and customers engaged from a distance.

[Read more: [The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Coronavirus Toolkit](#)]

Communicate proactively with your customers

channels, through email and on your website. If your store is staying open, describe the steps you're taking to mitigate risk. Download our customizable flyer that you can fill out and hang for customers to see.

[Download: [Coronavirus Prevention Flyer](#)]

Beyond letting customers know the logistics of your approach, give them a way to stay connected. Customers spending more time at home will still need to shop for things. Direct consumers to your [e-commerce store](#), take orders over social media and be prepared for more people to view your website than in previous months.

[Read more: [Staying Connected With Customers Through the Coronavirus Outbreak](#)]

Promote your gift cards

Gift cards provide you with an [immediate infusion of cash](#) and guarantee that a customer will return to your business in the future. At restaurants, where margins are already notoriously thin, gift cards can help you stay afloat until the crisis passes.

For example, [customers in Seattle](#) are going out of their way to make sure local cafes, bars, and eateries don't go under, and gift cards provide an easy way to keep cash flow moving. Offer an [e-gift card program](#) to reduce the risk of human contact, or work with a third-party delivery partner like Uber Eats to accept their gift cards at your location.



Recognize that most consumers are craving entertainment while being quarantined at home.

Coronavirus Guide for Small Businesses

CO— is working to bring you the best resources and information to help you navigate this

Stream or video chat your services

Go digital with your services to continue to provide access to your customers who are sitting at home, wishing they could support your business. Tutors, personal trainers and even therapists are making themselves available virtually. Use a free tool like Google Hangouts, Skype or Zoom to offer your services remotely.

If you're in a service vertical that doesn't lend itself to live videos, consider starting a [Vimeo channel](#) that allows customers to pay for videos with commonly requested information. Vimeo uses a paywall to give customers access to your content for a fee. For instance, an accountant can post a video detailing how to start a tax return (using a free tool like [Loom](#) to record their screen) and share it to their email list. A salon owner can post a video showing how to do in-home root touch-ups for customers that dye their hair. You may not be able to charge as much as your regular services, but it at least helps with cash flow in the meantime.

Hold an event online

For some merchants, the biggest pain point has come from canceled events. “[Lobo is] turning six years old this summer and we were looking forward to planning our party, and now, so quickly, a wrench got thrown into that,” one [business owner in Baltimore](#) said.

Recognize that most consumers are craving entertainment while being quarantined at home. This is where Facebook Live or Instagram Live can come in handy. If you had a store opening, product launch or anniversary celebration planned, move it to one of the live streaming social media channels. It's a great way to keep your customers engaged and build goodwill, as well as to sell your products. Offer a special discount code to the first 100 people who stream your live event, or create an “exclusive” behind the scenes look at a new product to customers on your email list. Get creative with how you can make customers still feel invested in your brand and engaged with your content from a distance.

Use discounts to your advantage

Now is a good time to entice long-term purchases with discounts. If it aligns with your business model, encourage customers to lock in a one-year membership now at a cheaper rate. Gyms can offer a discount for memberships starting after the virus has passed. If you have a retail store, consider offering [free or discounted shipping](#) for online orders. Help other small businesses in your area by offering a 10% discount if a customer brings in a recent receipt from another [small merchant](#) (other than your competitors).

Policy for COVID-19

Staying Connected With Customers Through the Coronavirus Outbreak

Coronavirus Concerns: What to Do If Employees Can't Work Remotely

For more resources from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce:

Check out the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Loan Guide.

To help you manage your business through the coronavirus crisis, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has created a toolkit for businesses and a customizable flyer for businesses to communicate their coronavirus efforts to customers.

For more information pertaining to your specific location, you can find your local Chamber of Commerce here.

CO— aims to bring you inspiration from leading respected experts. However, before making any business decision, you should consult a professional who can advise you based on your individual situation.

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Published March 16, 2020

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