

# Moving Forward: Tactics to Consider When Reopening Your Business

By Melody Yuan (/ReachFurther/Author/melodyyuan) May 18, 2020



Some practical things to keep in mind when the time comes to reopen your doors. (Photo credit): Gettyimages.com/andres

## ***How to reconfigure your business game plan for the new normal***

Much of the U.S. is still shut down in a concerted effort to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, and it has wrought havoc on the economy, businesses and workers. According to the **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics** (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>), a record 20.5 million jobs were lost in April, tipping the unemployment rate to over 14 percent. For comparison, the past two months alone have been more devastating than the 2008 recession, which resulted in **8.7 million jobs lost** (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/08/economy/april-jobs-report-2020-coronavirus/index.html>). With no income and bills piling up, people are anxious to get back to work. Yet, what we know is that COVID-19 is here to stay until the world develops a viable vaccine or cure. So, how can businesses navigate this situation safely and strategically?

“I think to move forward, we need to start moving away from the negative thoughts of all the hardship we’ve been through and start getting pumped up to reopen our businesses,” says Dan Jablons, owner and retail consultant at Retail Smart Guys, a retail business consulting firm in Los Angeles. “There are a lot of practical ways that we can keep our people safe.”

Some U.S. states like Georgia and Tennessee have already begun to ease lockdown measures and have allowed some “non-essential” businesses like hair salons and tattoo parlors to reopen their doors.

“It’ll be a strange feeling to physically go back into work,” says Jillian Keeler, a fitness instructor and athletic trainer based out of Nashville, Tennessee. She had been teleconferencing and meeting with her clients via video for the last two months. “We send out a training plan to our

athletes every week, catered to the current situation and items they can use at home,” she says.

Given that their training facility is commonly used by many athletes and trainers, everything from cleaning regimens to training schedules will have to change moving forward. “I don’t know what the new protocols are going to include yet,” Keeler adds.

The city of Los Angeles recently entered stage two of their stay-at-home order in an attempt to taper restrictions. “We won’t be rushing back to something that we once knew for some time. It’s going to be tough for a while. This is hard. This hurts. But this is our new normal,” said Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti in a **press briefing** (<https://ktla.com/news/local-news/mayor-garcetti-to-give-update-on-l-a-s-coronavirus-response-as-the-state-looks-toward-reopening/>).

Here are some practical things to consider when the time comes to reopen your doors.

## Physical store layout and purchase options

Everything from having a spotless storefront to welcoming signage and hand sanitizer at the door can boost traffic to your business. “Let’s talk about the physical look of your store,” says Jablons, “and I’ll start with the front of the store, specifically windows. What you want is people from the outside to see that your store is clean, safe and open.”

When thinking about a store layout, be sure to put the items most likely to sell on the right side. “Now, the immediate right when you first walk into the store is your most important real estate, because it’s proven that shoppers typically go right,” continues Jablons.

Once potential customers are in the store, having markers along the pathway that mark 6-foot distances can be helpful. Putting stickers on the floor or even some small signage sends a message that your store is taking safety seriously. “It’s also an opportunity to upsell by putting you in control of your floor plan and guiding your customers on where to go and where to look,” says Jablons. “So, put items near the signage that you want to sell most.”

Getting creative with displays that make merchandise pop is going to be an important asset. Jablons stresses that retail stores can take a light-hearted and playful approach with their signage to help their customers feel at ease inside the store. In addition to the visual cues, it’s helpful to have audio cues being broadcast periodically on safety protocols such as cleaning and social distancing. “Keep it safe, but fun,” he says.

Managing the register while customers shop will also be an important factor to consider. “This is usually the part that brings problems on the floor,” says Jablons. “Make sure you don’t have a long line, and ensure that your customers can check out with the least amount of physical transaction possible. If this means installing Google Pay, Apple Pay, PayPal, Venmo, Samsung Pay, you name it—make it work within your point of sale.” There are a variety of **merchant payment processing**

(<https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/en/News/Article/Finding-the-Best-Merchant-Payment-Processing-Options-for-Your-Business>) options that your business can use, and finding the most suitable option requires research. To protect the wellbeing of employees, it may also be worth considering investing in plexiglass to shield their faces at the cash registers.

If your physical store is unable to accommodate customers, there are still other options to sell and generate revenue. Alternatives include: curbside pickup, in which customers order products online to pick up at the store; scheduling appointments after hours; delivering products directly to the homes of customers; and selling on existing digital social platforms like Instagram and Facebook Live. “The time to embrace new technology is now,” says **Dustin Sullivan** (<mailto:dustin.sullivan@eastwestbank.com>), vice president and GTS merchant sales manager at East West Bank, pointing to a variety of **virtual merchant payment** (<https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/en/News/Article/Merchant-Payments-in-a-Socially-Distanced-Environment>) options that allow for transactions in a socially distanced environment.

Another option is to **list on e-commerce sites** (<https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/en/News/Article/From-Offline-to-Online-Leveraging-Digital-Commerce-During-COVID-19>) such as Amazon, Etsy and eBay, but these platforms generally take a percentage of the sale. Since not all stay-at-home orders have been lifted, for businesses that are still unable to open, planning a soft opening and then a grand opening can generate positivity not only for yourself, but also for employees and customers.

**Google** ([https://smallbusiness.withgoogle.com/news/resources-for-smbs-impacted-by-coronavirus/?zippyExpand=true&utm\\_expid=.ZNWUKCwxSmSr6gqI0A5nSQ.1&utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F#!/](https://smallbusiness.withgoogle.com/news/resources-for-smbs-impacted-by-coronavirus/?zippyExpand=true&utm_expid=.ZNWUKCwxSmSr6gqI0A5nSQ.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F#!/)) has also revised its array of digital tools and resources to help small businesses. From readjusting budgets on Google Ad campaigns to **updating business profiles** (<https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/en/News/Article/How-to-Make-Your-Google-My-Business-Listing-Work-for-You>), there are many ways to inform customers and drive sales. “If your area is green-zoned to reopen, but your store isn’t ready yet, be sure to go on Google and disable their new store shopping attribute,” says Krystal Taing, director of global strategy at Rio SEO.

Given the many changes businesses have had to communicate to users, Google has implemented new ways for small businesses to organize information. “Add important things like when your store is planning to reopen. And if you’re offering alternative sales, provide links that direct customers where to go to still shop. This makes it clear to users and customers what your locations are offering,” says Taing.

Google is also allowing businesses to list products on Google Shopping for free. “This is a cool move on Google’s part, and if you’re a mom-and-pop reseller that maybe isn’t considered essential and can’t operate, this is a great way to still sell your products,” Taing adds.

## **Messaging and digital marketing**

With more brick-and-mortar stores selling online than ever before, the digital space is getting crowded with advertisement and marketing. “The digital space may very well become your bread and butter now and even moving forward,” says Taing. “First of all, is your store listed on Google? And if so, is the information on there current?”

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Since most people search for things on Google, store hours and location changes must be up-to-date on the search engine. “If you’re closed, you can even publish a future opening date on Google and it would display,” says Taing. “So, be sure you’re double-checking the status of your business locations and have special hours, info and messaging on Google for your customers.”

The messaging itself should invite your customers to re-engage and look at your store’s new merchandise and services. Discounts alone won’t entice customers to engage with the brand. “Big chain stores may be able to offer bigger discounts, but you as a small business are going to need to find a more compelling message,” says Jablons.

Encouraging people to support their local retail stores and making them feel included in helping the community goes a long way. “You want the message to sound like you’re welcoming back an old friend,” says Jablons. “Good to see you again, hope you’re doing well, we’ve missed you and we’re still here. Look at all the steps we’re taking to make sure you’re safe and taken care of, and look at all this new cool stuff that we’d love to share with you. That’s the type of tone that will resonate.”

Another thing to leverage is to create a sense of excitement with re-emergence. While leveraging Father’s Day and Memorial Day are good strategies, pegging your messaging to unusual holidays will also diversify your messaging mix and make your brand stand out more. **Holidayinsights.com** (<http://www.holidayinsights.com/>) lists less conventional holidays listed such as “Hug Your Cat Day” (June 4) and “National Ice Cream Day” (July 19.)

“Email marketing is important, but you should look at other creative ways to deliver that message through platforms like IGTV (Instagram’s live video channel) or Facebook Live,” says Jablons. “Doing those live events feels more genuine for customers, and you’ll be able to engage with them more.”

To help your brand rise above the chatter, you should utilize email marketing two or three times a week, combined with daily authentic social media postings using mixed media such as video. “And when you’re posting on social media, be sure to hashtag smartly,” says Jablons.

Cross-promoting with other local businesses can not only increase your brand visibility, but it will also support theirs and create a supportive community. Jablons asks, “If you’re a restaurant, for example, could you feature some ice cream from the local ice cream parlor to promote their store? If you’re a hair salon, could you feature a local pet grooming facility to your customers as well?” Doing this encourages a network of support that all small businesses could use right now.

## **Best way to engage with your customers**

With the dangers of venturing outdoors still fresh in their minds, consumers may be apprehensive about going back to their favorite restaurants, cafes and venues. “People may have developed different habits, and people may not feel comfortable coming in,” says Suzanne McGrath, a SCORE mentor at the Washington, D.C. chapter. “The question then becomes, where are your customers now, what is it that they’re looking for, and how can you deliver to them wherever they are in the moment?”

For retail veterans like Jablons, it’s all about keeping the conversation light and positive. “Do not spend a lot of time talking about the coronavirus,” he says. “Instead, ask your customers what’s happening with work now and what they have to look forward to in the future.” The key is to look forward and not look back.

Jablons also reminds business owners to remain consistent with their behavior toward customers. “Some people will be scared, so to those folks you can be gentle and reassuring, but some people will be too brave and want to come hug you when they walk through the door,” he says. “Imagine if you’re the scared customer and you see the store owner hugging another customer! Be sure to reiterate to everyone that you are practicing social distancing in your store.”

Practicing social distancing doesn’t mean that there is emotional distancing, though, and Jablons believes that positive verbal communication, robust digital marketing strategies and a warm, welcoming retail experience will go a long way in encouraging customers to come through your doors.

***For more tips go to our [business continuity toolkit with the latest resources on how to deal with the pandemic \(https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/News/Business-Continuity-Toolkit\)](https://www.eastwestbank.com/ReachFurther/News/Business-Continuity-Toolkit)***