

# What helps businesses thrive during COVID-19?

While many businesses, especially restaurants and small retailers, have seen their revenue drop because of COVID-19, others have thrived.

Some business failures are due to circumstance and public health regulations, such as lock down orders and capacity restrictions. But in some cases, businesses failed because they were unable to respond to the new situation.

## **Not adapting to the situation:**

I know a small, local gift store carries an item I was shopping for. I went to Google and found the store has no website. According to the Google business information, this store opens weekdays at 10:00 a.m. I headed out to the store on a Wednesday around 2 p.m. I found a handwritten note on the door listing the shop's (reduced) hours, which said the store opens Monday through Thursday noon to 4:00 p.m. However, the lights were off and the store was closed, and I was not able to buy what I needed.

To recap, this store has:

- No website (and thus no way to shop online)
- No updated Google business information
- No social media

## **Making the best of the situation:**

Then, because I still needed this item, I checked out a larger gift store within 10 miles of the small store. This other store does have a website, with online ordering, so I was able to determine whether they carry what I am looking for. It also has updated its Google information, which reflects that it provides curbside pickup. I explore the website, and I find

out exactly what COVID measures the store is taking (i.e., requiring masks, providing sanitizer, restricting the number of people in store, widening the aisles to allow for social distancing, and increasing the air circulation).

This second store has:

- Updated website that includes COVID-specific information and the ability to order online
- Updated Google business information
- Social media, with a robust Facebook presence that includes videos and special deals.

**How do businesses thrive during COVID? Here are three must-dos:**

**Embrace digital more than ever.** Restaurants and small retailers embraced online ordering (just as the big box stores have done for years). My local library switched to an online ordering and appointments-based way to get books. Successful organizations use all types of digital presence:—social media, websites, Google profiles, e-newsletters, etc.—to communicate with customers, clients, or donors. With many people choosing to stay home or working from home, the internet has become even more important.

**Be aware of the situation and explain how you are responding.** Do you understand how your customers feel? Are they anxious about getting the virus? Do they want to shop safely? Do they want to save money? COVID has changed the reality for everyone. You have to make changes, and more importantly, you have to make sure your customers know what you are doing to respond to the situation.

**Go virtual and like it.** Many organizations and businesses use events to drum up support and sales. In 2020, events went from being in person to being virtual. Using a virtual format is not the same as being in person, but to succeed, organizations need to embrace this reality and adapt to it. Churches and

synagogues started using Zoom and other livestreaming software to provide religious services to their congregants. Associations moved their annual meetings to be virtual. Some stores, such as the second example above, switched their product demonstrations to platforms such as Facebook Live.

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The bottom line is that to thrive during COVID, businesses have to adapt. Failure to adapt will also mean failure to thrive.

Have you seen good examples of adaptation? Please share in the comments.

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## **What works and what doesn't in our COVID-19 times**

EDITOR'S NOTE: This post has been updated to reflect AP Stylebook guidance on how to write COVID-19.

Marketing and communications go on, but as discussed in the last blog post, not everything is the same in the world where COVID-19 has sickened many, scared more, and generally, upended what we consider normality. That said, some marketing works better than others.

**Let's start with what doesn't work.**

Here's an email that I received from a real estate agent (someone I met at a networking event and added me to her list without my express consent, but that is another story).

*Hello.*

*Your health and safety are important to me. That's why I'm reaching out to let you know that we're doing what we can to provide the best service possible during this time, and that means being here for you.*

*Please reach out with any questions that you may have, or if I can be helpful in any way.*

*We will get through this together.*

*If you want to keep up to date on COVID-19, visit the CDC's website.*

*Stay well,*

*[Name]*

Why is this so bad? First, the sender claims that my health and safety are important, but provides no specifics about what she is doing. Second, she is placing the onus on me to contact her. And third, she says I can visit the CDC website, and she doesn't even provide a link in her email. To me, this email shows that this real estate agent does not have any type of communication strategy or understanding, and to make matter worse, she doesn't know how to use communication tools effectively.

## **What does work?**

### **1. Specificity and relevance**

What is your company or organization doing *specifically* because of or in response to COVID-19.

This full page ad from LIDL is exactly right: it tells you what specific actions its stores are taking to deal with the virus and the associated issues.



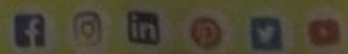
# we're looking after the shelves

**SO YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES**

**Lidl is here to support you and the needs of the community. See the updates we're making to our stores and policies:**

- additional cleaning in high-touch areas
- open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily
- increasing product deliveries
- installing protective barriers in all checkout lanes
- social distancing signs hung in stores
- temporarily limiting purchases of select items

**visit your local store** or connect with us at **[lidl.com](https://www.lidl.com)**



## 2. Segmentation

If you have an email marketing strategy, it should include the ability to segment your list into different audience types. The idea is to not send the same email to everybody on your list, but to be more targeted. For example, Boston University (where I went to grad school) keeps sending me updates, including updates about campus being closed. Well, as an alum, this is not exactly relevant to me. I am not a parent of a student or a student, so why do I need multiple emails about campus operations?

### **3. News/real updates**

I got an email from a local bookstore that tells me that it has established a partnership with a national service in order to be able to deliver nationwide. That's news. On the other hand, Delta has sent me the same version of an email regarding how its handling COVID-19. Nothing new, no reason to keep sending me the same email. If Delta were to add or delete flights or routes, then yes, tell me. But telling me its hard on Delta's bottom line, over and over, is really self-serving, which brings me to the next point.

### **4. Audience-centered**

What does your audience need or want right now? My undergrad university, Brandeis, did something really smart. Brandeis figured out that its audience is probably getting a bit bored being inside, so it sent out an email with suggestions for movies and television shows to watch, all featuring an alumni connection. There was no other reason for the email but to provide some relief to its audience. That is how you put your audience first.

What have you seen that works and that doesn't work? Please share in the comments.

