



BEST PRACTICES TOOLKIT
COVID-19

RETAIL SMALL BUSINESS

This toolkit will guide how to protect your staff and customers, communicate effectively with your clients, and boost your business in the 'new normal' economy.

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

Retail small businesses are dealing with restrictions imposed since the lockdown, including not allowing customers to try on or sample products, temporarily suspending their return policies, and limiting the number of people allowed on the premises. The massive disruption wrought by COVID-19 has left an indelible mark on customers as well. Buying behaviors have shifted as customers exercise caution about where and how they make their purchases.

The Women's Venture Fund shares ten practical tips that retail small businesses can use during these challenging times. Get started today and keep your business thriving.



GET FEEDBACK FROM YOUR CUSTOMERS

Small businesses must navigate the rapidly changing landscape and re-adjust marketing plans. Begin by asking these questions:

- How will uncertainty affect the customer's buying behavior?
- What should an adjusted marketing budget look like?
- Without live events or trade shows, what channels should you focus on for marketing?

The best strategy is to lean into customer feedback. Conduct surveys, ask for online reviews, and engage with customers to discover their concerns and expectations regarding safety during the pandemic and beyond. Their feedback will help you learn about their journey past the COVID-19 horizon, and prepare marketing strategies to address any assumptions about the "new normal."



LEARN HOW TO:

1 Think Local and Collaborate

2 Be Flexible and Transparent

3 Manage Safety Protocols

4 Manage Disruptive Behavior

5 Be Creative with Signage

6 Use Positive Messages

7 Operate Fitting Rooms

8 Handle Return Items

9 Adapt New Ways of Sampling

10 Succeed in Virtual Business

HOW TO THINK LOCAL AND COLLABORATE

It is a great time to identify opportunities to connect with other local businesses. If your business is located near other retailers, try coordinating a weekend sidewalk sale to boost sales and allow customers to shop outdoors.

If a nearby business offers goods or services complementary to your product offerings, create ideas to cross-promote;

- For instance, if you sell beauty products in your store, a clothing boutique could complement your business.
- You can coordinate with such enterprises to feature each other's products in-store.

Be sure to build goodwill and give back to your area as well.

- Consider offering a discount to healthcare and emergency workers in your community.
- Find community fundraisers your business could participate in.



HOW TO BE FLEXIBLE AND TRANSPARENT

Be transparent about your business's limitations, for example, low inventory. Do not over-promise or suggest any changes are permanent. Be sure to keep up with the latest CDC guidelines and local government restrictions; and adjust your store policies accordingly.

Leverage all channels to keep your customers up to date on changing policies.

- Update store hours on Yelp, Google, Direct to Consumer (DTC) sites, and store signage.
- Use email, text, and social media to communicate new cleaning procedures and social distancing measures.
- Leverage text messaging to alert customers of new stock or low inventory.



HOW TO MANAGE SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Standards and procedures continue to evolve. It is essential to ensure that customers are aware of and adhere to these regulations.

Consider the steps below:

- Ensure that there is ample signage in your storefront, alerting customers to mandatory safety precautions.
- Have an associate stationed at the entryway to ensure all customers put on a mask before entering the premises.
- Make sure the number of customers does not exceed your new store capacity limit.
- Keep a supply of masks (and disposable gloves, if appropriate).
- If the customer refuses to wear the mask, politely deny entry. Let the customer know they are welcome to utilize curbside pick-up service or order online (if available).
- Create a catalog or menu of in-stock products for customers to browse if they cannot enter the store.



HOW TO MANAGE DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Tensions can mount with customers fighting over ordinary staples, voicing frustration over long lines, demanding products in short supply, or being non-compliant about wearing a mask.

If a conflict arises with customers in the store, follow these measures:

- Listen and show empathy in your response. Avoid going on the defensive.
- Be clear about what you can and cannot do to resolve the issue.
- When appropriate, apologize for the situation.
- If possible, avoid handling such situations on the sales floor – direct customers to an area of the store isolated from other customers.
- Conduct the conversation in a low voice.
- Accept a customer's claim that he did not see your sign. Repeat the policies that are laid out on the signage.
- Do not make exceptions to your rules.

If the situation goes beyond your control, politely ask the customer to leave. Be ready with a backup plan, for example, politely call the security or local precinct.



HOW TO BE CREATIVE WITH SIGNAGE

The key for businesses is to make signage clear, concise, and easy to read.

Use signs to help put customers and put their minds at ease while shopping in-store.

- Use sign toppers and tabletop signs to reiterate simple, clear messages.
- Use larger signs to explain all safety measures.
- Advertise curbside pick-up through signage.
- Use floor decals to mark out where customers should stand.
- If you have a large store, consider implementing directional signs.
- Rethink your window displays. Include more items to show window shoppers a greater variety of goods. Add a sign suggesting, "See something you like? Text or call X to place an order for curbside pick-up or delivery."



HOW TO USE POSITIVE MESSAGES

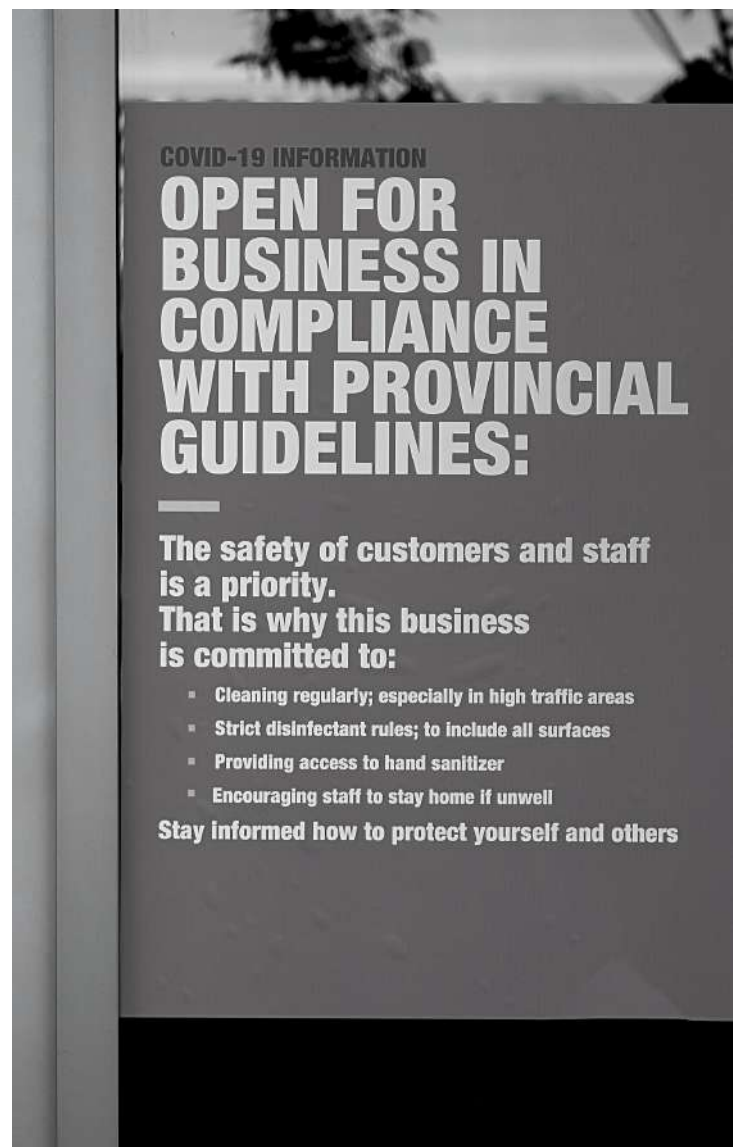
From messages about social distancing to messages of gratitude, signs can help businesses make customers and employees more comfortable.

Not all COVID-related signage needs to be cautionary. Be sure to include messages such as:

- “Welcome Back; We’ve Missed You!”
- “Your Health & Safety is our Top Priority!”
- “We are all in this together; thank you for helping keep [business] safety.”

In addition to signage, consider a few other in-store adjustments to create a safe environment for associates and customers.

- Add hand sanitizing stations by the front door. Ensure your hand sanitizer is not on FDA’s list of products you should not use.
- Install a hands-free, foot-operated door opener.
- Put up plexiglass barriers in front of the registers.



HOW TO OPERATE FITTING ROOMS

Ensure allowing customers to use the fitting room does not interfere with social distancing efforts and increase the possibility of direct transmission.

If you choose to reopen fitting rooms, follow these guidelines:

- Reconfigure the room to ensure social distancing.
- Have an associate on duty to manage the rooms and cleaning schedule.
- Limit the number of items a customer can try on.
- Hold all tried items for at least 24 hours and steam before putting them back on the floor.

If reopening fitting rooms is not the best option, consider the alternatives:

- Flexible return policy.
- Booking appointment to use the fitting room.



HOW TO HANDLE RETURN ITEMS

To reduce indirect transmission of the virus, decide which products are low or high risk as return items and inform customers through signage.

Consider these safety precautions when handling returns:

- Clean and wipe down returned items.
- Quarantine returned apparel for up to three days and steam before putting them back on the floor.
- Be transparent about your return policies before customers make their purchase. Let customers know about processing delays, if any.
- Use signage, receipt messages, and website banners to advise customers of the updated policies.



HOW TO ADAPT NEW WAYS OF SAMPLING

Sample Packaging:

- Focus on individually-sealed samples and scent strips. Be sure to consider sustainable materials for this packaging, such as glass jars and recyclable test blotters.
- Consider setting up a “beauty bar,” where customers can order samples.

Demo Cards:

- Create demo cards with a blank face. Associates can apply the product on the card to get a feel of the look or texture.

Sample Clubs:

- Particularly for beauty businesses, think about offering a “sample club.”
- Customers can pay a fee to receive a small assortment of new products each month.
- You can set a spend threshold for customers to earn a free box of products. For example, “Spend \$250 with us, and receive our Beginner Beauty Box; Spend \$500 with us and receive our Deluxe Beauty Box.”



HOW TO SUCCEED IN VIRTUAL BUSINESS

Virtual Styling:

- Curate an assortment of products tailored for individual customers.
- Send these customized “look books” to customers with products available to purchase.

Virtual Consultation:

- Book appointments via video call for customers at home to virtually go through their current closet, home décor collection, skincare routine.
- Provide product recommendations based on their individualized needs.

Virtual Masterclasses:

- Offer online masterclasses such as “DIY beauty treatments,” “At home facials,” etc.
- Offer “masterclass kits” for purchase for customers to pick up or have delivered in advance of the class, with all of the products they will need to use to follow along.

Virtual Product Launches:

- Build up anticipation for a new collection or product launch by promoting a “reveal video.”
- Offer a discount or gift to be announced during the video to entice customers to tune in.
- Walkthrough the features and benefits of the new items and reveal a promo code that customers can use when they buy the product to receive either a discount or free gift with purchase.

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