

# Staying Connected With Customers Through the Coronavirus Outbreak

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Over the last several weeks, consumers have grown increasingly panicked about COVID-19. Store shelves are depleted of goods like toilet paper and hand sanitizer. Schools are closing, offices are urging employees to work from home and small businesses that rely on foot traffic are seeing their in-store sales take a hit.

If you've noticed a drop in patrons, you're not alone. According to the [NFIB Research Center](#), nearly one-quarter of small business owners say the coronavirus outbreak is negatively impacting them in the form of slower sales (42%), supply chain disruptions (39%) and sick employees (4%). However, in our digital world, there are plenty of ways to stay connected to your customers through this pandemic and keep your business going through it.

Here are a few smart strategies for brick-and-mortar businesses looking to keep their audience engaged and in the loop, even if they're self-quarantined or avoiding public places.

## **Let customers know what you're doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19**

Send an email to your customers and post signage in your store to assure them that you're doing everything you can to protect their health when they visit your store. Share any increased cleaning, disinfecting and hygiene protocols you're following, and let them know that you are enforcing self-quarantine among any employees who might be experiencing symptoms. If you are altering your hours or closing your store for a deep-clean, you should let your customers know that, too.

## **Increase your social media presence**

Your customers are already on social media, but these days, they are likely checking in much more frequently to get the latest updates on the virus. Whether you're posting about the virus specifically or trying to offer light, positive content to help take people's minds off the panic, it can be helpful to increase your posting frequency to ensure you are showing up in their news feeds.

## **Offer online deals**

If your business already has an e-commerce component, remind customers that they can still shop for their favorite items on your website. It might even help to offer a coupon or discount to encourage online shopping while your customers are staying home anyway.

If you operate a service-based business like a restaurant or a salon, you may want to consider offering online sales of gift certificates. Encourage your customers to buy a certificate now, so they can treat themselves and redeem it when the virus outbreak has slowed and their self-quarantine period is over.

This can help maintain sales for you, while giving your customers something fun and exciting to look forward to.

## **Stock up on sanitizing products and make sure people know where to wash their hands**

For those customers who do come into your store, it's important to enforce good hygiene practices and encourage everyone who passes through your doors (customers and employees alike) to follow the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendations](#) for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

If your store has a restroom for customer use, put up extra signs pointing them in the right direction to wash their hands, and post the CDC's guidance in the restroom. If not, you may wish to offer hand sanitizer near the front of the store for customer and employee use.

## **Focus on serving your customers through digital channels**

You may already offer phone and email support to your customers, but now is the time to increase your customer service capabilities and ensure your patrons can reach you — no matter where they are. Social media is a good place to start, as you can offer the option to chat via Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and other instant messaging platforms. You can also offer video conferencing options through Skype or FaceTime, so your customers can get that "face-to-face" feel without actually being there in-person.