

# How to Market and Communicate Your Business' Reopening

*by Megan Shroy, Founder + President of Approach Marketing*

Business owners across many industries are working tirelessly to adapt their operations to the fluidity of the global pandemic. Each day reveals new guidelines requiring immediate attention and implementation—on top of other regular duties. Public health and safety standards are evolving, and it's anticipated that many states will begin the slow shift toward reopening over the next few weeks.

When it does come time to declare “the doors are open,” brick-and-mortar companies will undoubtedly face a new consumer environment. It's possible the public may remain timid even after stay-at-home measures lift, but advanced planning by business owners will go a long way toward calming fears and restoring normalcy. Organizations can shift slowly and safely back to business by including thoughtful communication and marketing measures meant to build trust and engagement.

For over 15 years, we have specialized in working with businesses of all sizes to build, promote and protect their brands. And while we're all navigating a post-pandemic strategy for the first time, we know that applying a balance of industry best practices with fresh marketing considerations will get businesses through this crisis. To provide a jump-start, I'm sharing tactical tips you can consider adding to your pre-opening and reopening strategy.

# THE WAY FORWARD

# Pre-Opening

1

## Communicate First to Your Employees.

Even though many businesses have been open for mobile ordering or curbside pick-up, there could be some rust when returning to “normal.” What are your new expectations of your staff? What are the most common questions you feel you will get from customers? Prepare a script and practice with employees—just as you would for a new product, service or promotion—to make sure they are delivering the messages appropriately. Make sure to focus on your customer-facing employees, including those who answer the phones. You might also practice service in the new environment to expose any flaws before potentially subjecting your customers to them (e.g adding Q-tips near touch pads, wiping down credit card machines, or wearing masks and gloves). This will all go a long way toward instilling customer confidence and encouraging positive online reviews.

2

## Overcommunicate Your Plans and Policies Publicly.

Increasing communication across online and offline channels is key to building consumer confidence. Patrons want to hear your detailed plans for keeping them safe. Beyond state guidelines, what measures will you implement when doors open? Will your hours or services change? What protocol do your customers need to follow? These elements should be shared frequently and appropriately with your email subscribers and social media followers and posted in high-traffic areas. Extra communication now can help level-set consumer expectations for your opening and pave the way for positive experiences.

3

## Update Your Imagery to Reflect Reality.

Refresh the imagery on your website, social media channels, newsletters and other marketing collateral to follow proper guidelines and meet consumers where they are. Consider showing your new seating arrangements, guests practicing social distancing, and potentially even staff in masks to give your audience a glimpse of what they can expect upon visiting. Be sure to keep your imagery updated as restrictions change along the way.

4

## Consider Procuring Branded PPE.

Masks, gloves, hand sanitizer and other personal protective items don't have to be boring. Since many businesses are required to utilize this gear, branding the pieces can make them fun and help remove any negative stigma. Try customizing these items with your branding or color scheme—which doubles as a marketing tool.

5

## Prepare for Future Scenarios.

Even in the best of times, every business benefits from planning for safety, personnel or customer issues. Now is the time to plot out policies, public statements and answers to common questions. This could include anything from communicating about employee illnesses to participating in possible contact tracing and beyond. When scenario planning, we spend time thinking through as many conceivable and inconceivable situations as we can, then develop a detailed solution for each. Are there steps you can take now to create a playbook for later?

# THE WAY FORWARD

# Reopening

1

## Pursue Strategic Partnerships.

Continue building equity with the community while benefitting from cross-promotional opportunities by leaning on smart collaborations. This could include “Buy One, Donate One” promotions with local nonprofit organizations or dine-in fundraisers for struggling youth groups. If you use a locally-based cleaning service, you could publicize the steps you’re taking together to sanitize your space. Neighboring businesses can also help share about each other’s opening offers.

2

## Find Your Influencers.

Word of mouth is by far the strongest marketing tool. Research shows we trust influencers nearly as much as our own friends and family. Influencers – and more specifically the highly-trusted “micro-influencers” who have between 1,000 – 10,000 social media followers, serve as a great resource for sharable content, authentic recommendations and reviews. Identify hyperlocal influencers who can help increase your visibility and share about their experiences. You can re-post their content on your channels. Influencers could participate in an early “VIP” night to be one of the first to visit again. They can also participate in your new photo shoot.

3

## Encourage Employees to Share.

Just like influencers, your staff members are some of your biggest ambassadors and can help to publicize your reopening and special offers on their personal social channels. Hiring is proving to be a major challenge for many businesses right now and your employees can support your recruitment efforts by sharing about their positive work experiences, hiring perks, culture benefits and career opportunities among their inner circle.

4

## Turn Up the Social Media Advertising.

Competitors’ social channels may still be fairly quiet as many businesses have gone dark. This presents an opportunity to own the narrative and capture market share early. Social advertising is a highly efficient and effective investment which allows you to target your ideal customers with announcements and offers, as well as publicize your reopening.

5

## Personify Your Business through Storytelling.

People are drawn to the personal stories and human element behind the brands they love. There’s little most of us control right now, so people genuinely want to shape the immediate future by helping those who need it. Through social content, you can highlight your ownership story, community involvement and the team who makes your business so special.

## THE WAY FORWARD

# Reopening

6

### Pursue Earned Media.

As the pandemic narrative evolves, media will be looking for reopening stories, which can drive content and awareness for your business. Advanced planning for your reopening will allow you to alert print, broadcast and online media reporters to the ways you plan to safely re-welcome customers.

7

### Continue Offering Multiple Options.

Every customer will have varying comfort levels as we begin the slow climb back to normalcy. Continuing to offer a range of services will give customers options for re-engaging at their discretion. Present these choices proactively and repeat the options often in your marketing messaging.

"There is still much we don't know about life after this pandemic, but what we do know is that strong communication, assurance-building tactics and a steady marketing presence will collectively help to bring traffic back through the door."

—Megan Shroy

