As states begin to grapple with different timelines for reopening their economies – whatever the impact has been on your business – it’s important for business owners to start to plan for what post-COVID-19 small business life is going to look like.

And while, right now, it might be difficult to get in the mindset to plan ahead, those who do will have a real advantage once their businesses begin to reopen (in whatever way they can).

In this guide, we’ll walk you through some steps that your local business can take now to make sure you’re as ready as possible when the time comes.
Safety First

Safety has to be your first priority — for obvious medical reasons and because it’s top-of-mind for everyone surrounding your business — your employees and customers alike.

As local economies begin to reopen, some social distancing rules will almost certainly continue to be enforced. That means that the number of people allowed into your place of business will likely have to be limited, or, if you’re a go-to-them service provider, you’ll need to consider the best way to keep a safe distance from customers you encounter.

It also means that the way your business is physically set up may need to change. Desks, displays, workspaces, and more may all have to be re-thought with your local social distancing guidelines in mind.

You should be sure you have hand sanitizer and soap on hand, and take extra care in shared spaces — cleaning more often, conspicuously and with extra attention to detail will have to become the new normal.

Staying vigilant and taking extra precautions may create additional costs for your business in the short term, but doing these things will not only keep your employees healthy, it’ll help customers feel more comfortable doing business with you, and hopefully help your doors remain open.

If your business can be made safe and clean and visibly open, that will be attractive to potential customers when the coast is clearer.
Get the Word Out

Once you have your safety procedures in place, it’s critical to communicate openly with your customers about the status of your operations, what protective measures you’ve implemented, and how they (as customers) will be protected when they visit your business.

Update your website
Hopefully, you’ve already been keeping your customers updated on the status of your business on your website. If not, that’s okay — now’s the time to start by adding a notice letting people know that you’re back and ready for them to return.

Get social
Share a similar message to the one you added to your website to your social media pages. If you’ve updated the layout of your business to accommodate social distancing or have new sanitation stations, take pictures and share those with your followers. The more you can do to show that you have their safety in mind, the more likely they are to come back to your business.

Look over your listings
Don’t neglect to make sure your hours are up to date on places like Yelp or your Google My Business page. When customers go searching to check on the status of your business, you wouldn’t want them to come across inconsistent or incorrect information.

In addition to letting people know about your business’ status, don’t miss the chance to also share your sincere appreciation for your customers. If you were still able to operate in some capacity, thank people for their support. If you had to close up for a stretch, let your customers know how much you’ve missed them and that you appreciate their patience during these challenging times.
Spread the Word Even More

A lot of businesses will be looking to save money by pulling back on their marketing budget because they believe that, given the current climate, it’s an expense they can afford to cut.

This line of thinking couldn’t be further from the truth. In reality, now is the time for you to invest anything you can afford to maximize your visibility online.

Instead of choosing to make cuts to your marketing budget, think about growing your way out of this crisis. Every cut you make is going to hinder your ability to generate enough business to keep your doors open, which is not something you want to be doing right now. What’s more, the less visible you are online the more visible your competitors will be.

Your customers in quarantine are building up demand for many anticipated needs and wants (does anyone else badly need a haircut?). Right now, they’re being forced to put off current purchases.

As state and local governments begin to lift their shelter in place orders, the demand for the products and services small businesses provide should start to increase. But it will be the businesses that appear at the top of search results, and who have ads where their customers spend the most time who will be able to reap the most benefit from this demand surge.
While we’re all eager to get back to life as it was before the outbreak, SMBs have to avoid jumping back to business as usual at the expense of the systems and processes they’ve put in place in the last few months.

If you’ve been able to successfully pivot parts of your business to accommodate your local social distancing guidelines, think about keeping those processes in place. It’s probably something a lot of your customers are still going to be looking forward to even after you open.

Just because your government has taken steps to reopen the economy doesn’t mean consumers will be ready to come out of their homes. Keeping some of your digital offerings in place so that you can move at their pace will be key.

What your customers may want from you going forward will likely look different than what they wanted from you before the pandemic.

**Think about keeping some of these features if you have them available today:**

- Offering delivery
- Online payments
- No-contact service
- Online scheduling
- Virtual Consultations
- Special packages/deals

The behavior of some of your customers stands to shift dramatically, influenced by weeks of social isolation, shopping online, working from home, and in some cases, not working at all. By staying flexible, you can position your business to meet your customers’ needs no matter where their comfort level is.
Keep in Mind...

It’s not just your customers who might not be ready to come to you once you reopen. Even if your local government has given you the green light, the vendors in your supply chain may not be as lucky.

Research whether you’ll be okay with the vendors you currently use or if you’ll need to find new vendors in the interim.
Prepare For More Disruptions

Though it’s an inconvenient truth, even if your local government is cautiously reopening, there could come a time where shelter-in-place orders are put back into effect.

For better or worse, you have one thing this time that you didn't have last time. Experience. You've gone through this before, you’ve come out the other side and have a better sense of what you need to do to be ready for anything like this in the future.

Your customers have also gone through this before. They will know what they want, how to get it and have new expectations — as well as less tolerance for mistakes.

Staying on your toes and being prepared to adjust quickly to the evolving situation will put you in a better position than businesses that took their eyes off the ball. Take a critical eye to your successes and failures from the past weeks and adapt accordingly.

**Ask yourself:**

- What worked well?
- Where could I improve?
- What do my customers expect from me now?
- Are there any solutions I could invest in now that would better prepare me for if this happens again?
Stay Safe. Stay Calm. Stay Ready.

We will get through this. Little-by-little the country will open up for business again locally, regionally and nationally as our government and health officials feel it’s safe. Take things one step at a time, and you’ll be ready to welcome your customers back before you know it.

If you already work with an online marketing agency, like Hibu, it’s likely they can help you with a lot of what we’ve outlined here. If you’re a Hibu client, we can definitely help. We’re here to help you get through this any way we can. Our teams are actively working right now with hundreds, if not thousands, of local businesses that are taking some or all of these actions. You don’t have to do it all on your own.

If you are tackling this yourself, just remember, when in doubt, put yourself in your customers’ shoes. Think about how you would want a trusted local business to act — then do your best to meet their expectations and deliver what your customers are looking for.

**It’s time to get ready to get back to business. It’s going to feel good.**
Better results working together

Why work harder when you could market smarter? At Hibu, our goal is to help you achieve your goals, by building you a complete digital marketing “solution” — a custom, interconnected digital marketing campaign that works to maximize your results and deliver what you want. Tell us what you want to achieve – more visibility, more visitors, more leads… or all three — and we’ll build you a smart, easy digital marketing solution designed to deliver the results you want.

Visit Hibu.com to learn more or talk to us today at 855-727-1889 to take the first step towards smarter digital marketing.

About Hibu

Hibu is a leading provider of managed digital marketing solutions for small to medium-sized businesses, providing local business owners with a truly integrated, smart digital marketing program designed to generate leads by driving visitors to your website and increasing your visibility online where it matters most – on search engines, in voice search, and on social media sites like Facebook.

Hibu makes it easy for you to get everything you need to advertise your business online – all from a single partner – saving you time, money and frustration. Hibu is a Facebook Marketing Partner, Google Ads Premier Partner, Google My Business Partner, and Microsoft Advertising Select Channel Partner. Hibu – Smart Digital Marketing Made Easy.