

Experts Say Retailers Need To Prepare To Open Post-COVID-19

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Right now, many indie retailers are trying to just stay afloat without customers coming in the doors and keeping up with all the online orders. But once the lockdown ends and consumers start going outside again, retailers will need to shift their focus to be ready to service shoppers again in what will be the new normal.

According to many professionals in the industry, retailers should be preparing for the end of the lockdown as soon as possible. "I would not recommend waiting," Tracy Thie, Principal, Co-Founder of agency and distributor [Powerplay Retail](#), said. "Be aware of what is driving consumer behavior and try to adapt, but keep in mind that what you may initially think as being the new normal might end up being just a short-term band aid, such as wearing a mask when in public."

Consumers Eager to Return to Brick-and-Mortar Store

Many retailers are worried about whether or not shoppers will even return to brick-and-mortar stores. A recent survey from [MomentFeed](#) indicates that consumers are ready to return to their pre-COVID-19 routines, but some online preferences could last post-COVID-19. Ninety-one percent of consumers reported that they will return to restaurants, movie theaters, gyms, salons, stores, and banks, with 32 percent saying they will visit these businesses more than before the pandemic.

Taking the Proper Preparation Steps

The fact is consumers are ready to shop in person again, and now retailers just need to prepare for when the lockdowns end. This suggests three steps retailers should take to prepare to open their doors to the public:

- Think about how your space looks and feels, declutter, and clear sight lines. Make those changes now.
- Determine how you plan to follow and execute any new local or national guidelines required to reopen.
- Watch, and train your staff to watch for changes in consumer behavior when you do reopen. Don't be afraid to be flexible and make changes fast.

Gayle Klein, Principal at [McKool Smith Bankruptcy Practice](#), thinks that consumer demand is going to change for certain types of goods once stores are open to the public again. "The spending power is certainly changing, and even for those where it hasn't changed, looking down the road, their purchasing behavior will change because they will want to have a cushion should we hit 2021 in the same position with the coronavirus."

Issues Retailers May Face in the Coming Months

There are many different challenges that COVID-19 has brought upon businesses and consumers everywhere; nobody is left undisturbed in this pandemic. But there are some challenges that experts suggest retailers should take care of now before they open their doors to the public to minimize the impact.

One of the major issues is the Payment Protection Program, which authorized up to \$349 billion in forgivable loans to small businesses to pay their bills and employees during the pandemic, has just ran out of money. Klein proposes that retailers look over their insurance coverage policies. Businesses that have been declared illegal to stay open to the public might be able to get relief to pay rent from the insurance terms.

"To avoid filing for bankruptcy, I recommend hiring a financial advisory firm to help look at the different levers the business can pull to manage debt," Klein said. "Then I would suggest businesses protect their assets to the best that they can. Consider whether or not there are avenues for recovery through litigation, trade secrets, or insurance recovery."

Will We Ever Go Back to Normal?

We may never completely go back to the way things were before the pandemic, and many consumer habits could stay for the long run. "There will be a permanent shift in consumer habits to some extent," Thie said. "For example, we know that ecommerce has increased for retailers that have both formats, but curbside pick-up, while not a new thing, could become table stakes for some retailers."

For the most part, shoppers are excited and plan to go back to brick-and-mortar stores once the lockdown ends. Nothing beats that experience of touching and smelling items in person, and not to mention the top-notch customer service that comes along with it. All indie retailers can do right now is prepare to open again and continue to cater to their customers through online orders.