



Are you still marketing your business in the same way you were prior to the virus? I'm not asking about the content you post or what's in your ads. What marketing channels are you using? If your business is still open, and you want it to remain so, you may need to change your marketing channels. Or at least reassess them.

The marketing channels that are most effective for you now might not have worked a few weeks ago and vice versa. It's time to take a closer look as to whether your audience is still attuned to the same things they were in February. It's likely their lives have changed drastically and that may have altered where they are and what they're paying attention to.

Where Is Your Audience?

Unless your ideal market is first responders or essential businesses, there's a good chance your audience is sitting at home. If they're at home, they're spending a lot of time online. Figuring out where your audience is and what they're doing is important at any time but during the virus it's essential to ensure that they are seeing your message.

Online Is the Place to Be (But Not the Only Place)

Again, unless your target market is still going to their place of business every day you have a lot of people who are online and on social media. If you're not investing in social media ad spending you are missing a golden opportunity.

What's the one obstacle keeping you from getting someone's business, assuming they have a need for what you sell?

No one will buy from you if they don't think about you. For instance, if you sell takeout food, when is your customer most likely to buy? When they're hungry, right? When they're on the couch craving something for dinner and they're tired of the pasta and rice from the pantry. But for you to be a consideration, they need to *think about you*.

Let's assume due to past experience your customer does think about you. But now they're facing another obstacle. They don't know if you're open. If you make something that is craveable, they may pick up that phone and either call you or look online to see if your website has been updated. But what's likely going to happen while they're doing this is that they get distracted by another restaurant that's looking to earn their business.

Most people will go with the option that's right in front of their face. That's why social media ads are incredibly effective. Since most people access social media from their phone, if you take an ad out on Facebook that links straight to your ordering page, you are removing the friction in getting their order.

People need things to be **as easy as possible** right now. We're all dealing with a lot of anxiety and stress from jobs, working from home, kids at home, and not being able to see friends and family. Many people have gotten the message about supporting local business, but the difficulty lies in communicating to everyone that you're open.

Here are a few ñmust-useö marketing channels during the pandemic:

1. **Social media.** Get your message to them where they already are and yes, you will have to pay for that.
2. **Ramp up your online business.** Look for ways that you can sell your products or service online then run ads on social media talking about your new offerings.
3. **The chamber of commerce.** People turn to the chamber of commerce as a resource to understand the state of business in your community. People will naturally check their website to see which businesses in your town are open or not. The chamber is also an excellent way to get your message heard in your area. Check with your chamber about ways they can help with marketing such as newsletters, emails, and social media.
4. **Signs outside your business.** While local ordinances may limit some of this, whenever possible create and mount easy to read signs about how you're doing business. If you're taking orders online include your URL. If you're taking phone orders with no contact delivery put that on the sign. There are a lot of people driving around these days as a form of entertainment. You can capture business from that by telling them how you're doing business.
5. **Proof of life.** Make sure you have your open sign turned on. If possible, bring some things out on to your sidewalk. Make it evident to anyone driving by that you are open for business. If they can't physically come into the business, create a sandwich sign by the parking spaces that allows them to easily place orders that you can then bring out to them. If you look closed, people will keep driving.
6. **Use email.** Target your email list with flash sales or special offerings. Incentive to sign up is key!
7. **Use postcards.** People have more time now to read the mail. Sending a postcard of a special you're offering or to remind people that you are there to address their needs can be a very strong way to drum up business.

It's difficult to do business during a time when people are afraid to leave their homes. That's why you need to *change the way you market to them*. You'll likely find them with more time on their hands. They may be on social media, driving around, or looking for things to do. If your message can reach them at a time when they are thinking about the types of goods or services that you sell, you can remain a strong business presence. But doing so requires reaching them where they already are.

Finally, if your business is temporarily shut down it's important to stay top of mind even if people can't order from you or buy your services. Some professionals are offering online classes for free. Others have maintained their social media postings so that people keep hearing their story and remember that we're all in it together. Many small businesses are getting a lot of social media shares of feel-good content like inspirational quotes. Even if your doors aren't currently open, you can build a strong following that can help you in the days to come.

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