

Your Guide to Reopening:

4 Ways to Get Started

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Introduction

In mid-March, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept through the United States, businesses across the nation were forced to close. As restrictions are lifted and the “new normal” begins in many places, businesses are rethinking operations and preparing for their new future.

“Every business will face tremendous challenges as our nation begins the path to recovery, while still facing the public health threat of the virus...The businesses that will survive and thrive are the ones that can be flexible and adaptable to consumers’ new and evolving needs. You’ll need to plan carefully and understand not only what may need to change about your business, but what new growth opportunities may exist for you in a post-pandemic world.”


—US Chamber of Commerce

The pandemic has forced businesses to adapt more quickly than they would like, especially in how they connect and maintain relationships with customers.



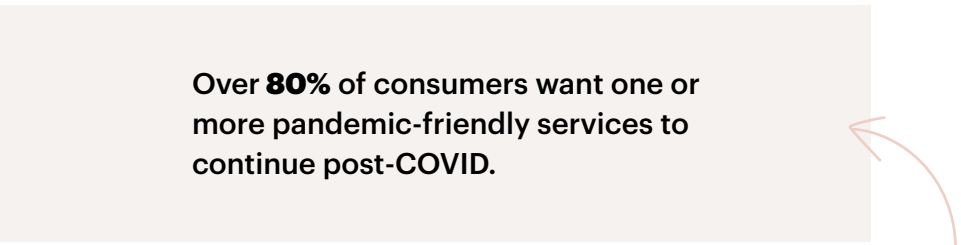
Now, more than ever before, businesses need a texting solution.

The new normal involves more and more mobile interactions, contactless payments, and the convenience of mobile communication. In fact, 42% of respondents in a recent survey said they were more interested in texting with local businesses now than they were before COVID-19.² And it's not just limited to millennials. Texting is preferred by all age groups, including consumers over 60 years old.³



42% of respondents in a recent survey said they were more interested in texting with local businesses now than they were before COVID-19.

Over **80%** of consumers want one or more pandemic-friendly services to continue post-COVID.

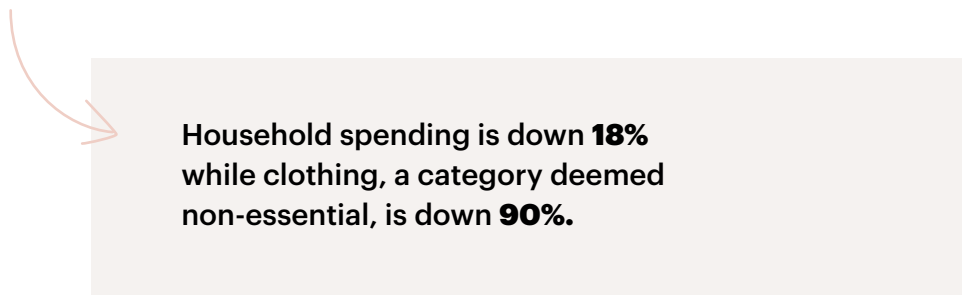


COVID-19 has also forced customers to reevaluate what's most important to them. While price is still at the top of the list, contactless services, including curbside delivery, are a close second.⁴ Customers are interested in maintaining safe distances and will continue to visit businesses that offer what's most important to them in the reopening phase.

More than 80% of consumers say they want pandemic-friendly services such as curbside delivery, contactless payments, and mobile communication, to remain even after restrictions are lifted.⁵ 89% say they are likely to return to a business they first visited because of pandemic-friendly services.⁶ And small businesses are listening. More than 80% report that they will make or are making changes in their business in response to COVID-19.⁷

In this guide, we'll highlight four key steps to take as you reopen and prepare to reopen your business to the public. While new restrictions may be difficult to navigate, you can prepare yourself to maintain excellent customer service, keep your customers and employees safe, and thrive in this new environment.

But first, a note about staying profitable during a global pandemic. It can and will be challenging. Even if your business is deemed essential and your operating hours are not cut as drastically as others, consumers' wallets aren't as open as they were months ago. While grocery bills are seeing a 13% increase, household spending as a whole is down 18%.⁸ Even more impacted are purchases categorized as non-essential, such as clothing, which is down 90%.⁹



Household spending is down **18%** while clothing, a category deemed non-essential, is down **90%**.

To help you navigate this historic economic downturn, the government has provided a number of financial resources. Programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program, Employee Retention Credit, and the SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, provided in the CARES Act, are examples of relief that may be available to your business. But there are a number of state and local programs available to help you too.

If you haven't already, take advantage of government programs available to your business. Research small business relief programs from the federal level.

[Check this list to see if you qualify or can apply for federal relief.](#)

And don't forget to research your state and local relief programs as well.

[Check this list to see if you qualify or can apply for any state or local relief.](#)



☛ Reevaluate your operations

As you consider what changes to make in your business and what steps to take as you reopen, consider this list:

01.

Reevaluate your operations

In the reopening phase of COVID-19, businesses will need to ask, “Does my business model still make sense?” “Has my customer changed?” and “Do we need to alter our product or how it is delivered in any way?” Small cosmetic changes likely won’t be enough to survive the pandemic and the economic downturn. Many businesses will need to make significant changes in order to survive and thrive in the new normal.



If your business model pre-COVID involved only in-store shopping, it’s time to consider increasing your online presence. And if the transition from online to in-store wasn’t seamless, reopening your business is the time to smooth that process over. We know that curbside pickup and delivery are expectations customers will still have post-pandemic. Is your business set up for those services?

Apart from how they get your product, customer expectations are also shifting to favor contactless payment options. Nearly 80% of consumers hope to see businesses continue to offer contactless payment as they reopen and in the future, post-pandemic phase.¹⁰



Nearly **80%** of consumers hope to see businesses continue to offer contactless payment as they reopen and in the future, post-pandemic phase.

What you can do now as you reevaluate your operations:

Establish curbside pickup

If you haven't already, establish curbside pickup. The best processes allow online ordering from a website, a quick check-in text when the customer arrives at the store or location, and then an employee runs the order or product out to the customer, still sitting in their car. The benefits of curbside pickup go beyond safety during a global pandemic. It's faster, easier, and more convenient for the customer to order online, stay in their vehicle, and communicate with a business via text.

Reevaluate your operations

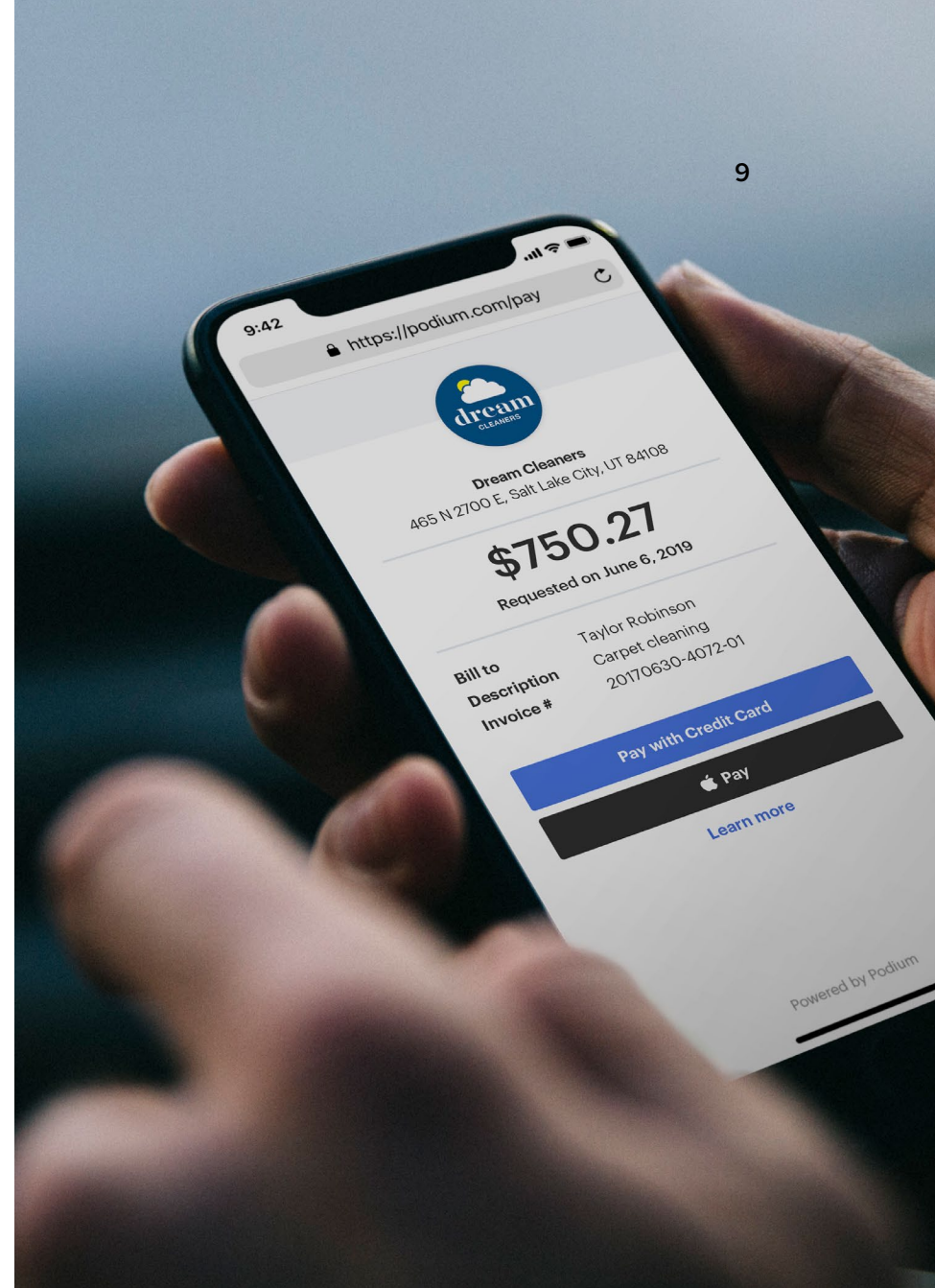
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Offer contactless payment

Add a contactless payment option for your curbside, delivery, and even in-person purchases. It will keep your customers and employees safer and add convenience to the entire checkout process. Use a platform that enables this via text and a direct link and you'll be meeting customers where they want to meet you—on their phone.

Consider local delivery

If you don't offer it already, consider adding local delivery to your list of services. Along with contactless payment, local delivery (especially when the product is left on the porch) is a safer, more convenient option for your customers.





Implement appointment scheduling

Consider implementing appointment scheduling if your business model includes a storefront. This will limit the number of customers in your store at a time, keeping your employees and customers safer. It will also allow you to offer more one-on-one time to your customers, personalizing the overall buying experience.

Offer video consultations

Move in-person consultations online with a video chat tool to limit contact with customers and offer a more convenient channel of communication. Many platforms offer easy scheduling and are simple to use. Onboarding your customers or clients should be seamless.

02.

Decide what your new normal looks like

Deciding what your new normal will look like is an important step in your reopening process. There are so many guidelines and considerations to take from all sources, including what your customer expects. With local restrictions in place, you likely won't be going back to business as usual.

Before you reopen, make sure you have a plan for what the new normal looks like in terms of employee count, customer accommodations, symptoms or positive/negative test rules, etc. Every business will be different, so make a plan and communicate the new rules and guidelines to both customers and employees.



We've got to start thinking about how we start planning for the spotty, sporadic opening and how we reach across to our vendors, our customers, and our employees to begin to function again.”¹¹

Marilyn Landis, CEO
Basic Business Concepts



What you can do now to decide what the new normal looks like:

Determine your capacity

Decide how many employees you need to run your business and how many customers you can accommodate in your building. With your numbers in place, make sure the updates are listed and well known. Once you reach maximum capacity, whether it's what your state or city requires or your own guidelines, a maximum capacity sign can alert patrons outside your store.

Establish your new health rules and guidelines

Determine the new health rules and guidelines for each employee and customer—temperature checks, symptom questions, quarantining rules, hand sanitizing or washing requirements, and cleaning standards. If your state or city requires anything specific, post those requirements in your building and on your website.

Make a plan for new payment options


Offer a contactless payment option by text or mobile device—cash is dirty¹² and credit card payments still require some contact, even when the customer is swiping or inserting their card and removing it themselves. Determine what software and hardware (if any) you will need to provide a contactless payment option. Customers will need to be informed of any updates, including a mobile payment option, at the time of purchase.

03.

Continue to deliver safe, convenient customer experiences

American consumers have made it clear that speed and convenience are top factors in a positive customer experience.¹³ And during a global pandemic, those factors have only increased. Many of the changes required and implemented by businesses during the pandemic are made to keep people safe and protected. But the reason those services and offerings will stay? They're more convenient.

It's faster, safer, and more convenient to place an order, make a payment, and communicate with a business from a mobile phone. And customers will continue to expect the same level of convenience as you reopen or fully open your business. In fact, 85% of consumers say they expect local businesses to offer even more convenient communication and services than they did prior to COVID-19.¹⁴ And 65% say texting makes working with or buying from a local business more convenient.¹⁵



85% of consumers expect local businesses to offer more convenient communication and services now than they did prior to COVID.

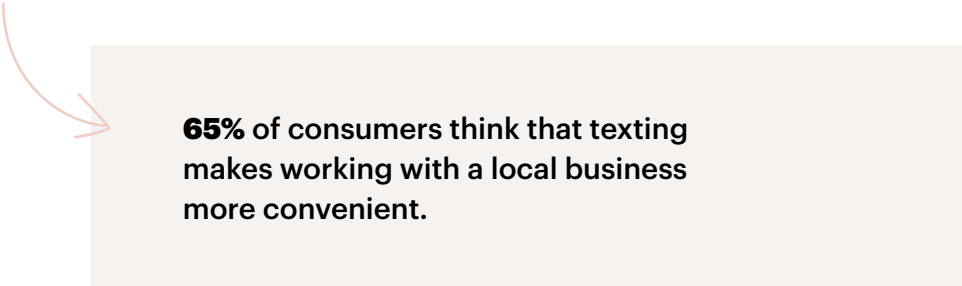
What you can do now to deliver safe, convenient customer experiences:

Offer text messaging

Continue to or start offering convenient communication and services to your customers and leads—this includes updating your Google My Business listing and website with texting options to capture leads in the channel they prefer.

Add video to your website

Improve the online shopping experience by adding video to your website—it's proven to increase sales and can help bridge the gap if your store only has partial open hours or customers prefer to stay home and shop.



65% of consumers think that texting makes working with a local business more convenient.

Implement a web chat feature

With more and more business generated on a mobile device, consider adding a web chat feature to your website. 50% of consumers expect to see a chat option when they're browsing on their mobile device.¹⁶ And reports claim a 30% increase to conversion when the live chat option is available.¹⁷ With fewer people in store, making your online experience easy, convenient, and personalized is critical.

04.

Become more efficient to keep costs down

Before your business is ready to partially or fully reopen, you will need to evaluate and decide if there are areas to cut. Consolidation of headcount, marketing spending, and other expenses will likely come up first, but consider the consolidation of processes and systems to see what else can save you and your business time and money.

Is there duplicative work that can be cut? Is there a process that can be added to another task, saving your team time and effort? Are you wasting time and money on multiple communication channels to ensure you're meeting your customer where they want to engage?



What you can do now to be more efficient and keep costs down:

Cut or eliminate expenses

Identify where you can cut or even eliminate expenses—your budget should be a reflection of how profitable you are and with household spending down, your budget should reflect the change.

Consolidate processes and systems

Find areas where you can consolidate processes and systems—do more with fewer systems by clearly understanding the capability of every platform, process, and person on your team, such as redeploying in-store employees to service curbside pickup and delivery services.

Move communication channels into one platform

Consider consolidating all communication—texting, feedback, reviews, payments, ordering, web chats, and more—in one, easy-to-use platform. It'll be easier for your employees to manage and your customers will enjoy faster response times.



Conclusion

As you reopen your business and adapt to the new restrictions and changes of our “new normal,” it’s important that you remember to be open to even more change. We are still in the early stages of recovery and as we learn more about the virus, the pandemic as a whole, and how to meet changing customer expectations, the key to success will be agility. Be prepared to pivot as needed as we strive for a healthier, safer future.



Press send and let Podium help your business reopen

Podium offers a number of tools to help you deliver safe, convenient, contactless interactions with your customers. And with Podium Starter, you can try it out for free. With Starter, you can answer questions, coordinate appointments, and stay connected through text. Connect remotely with website visitors by moving online communications to a text conversation. Send payment requests via text to get paid quickly and safely from anywhere. It's the simplest way to connect to consumers by pressing send.

- Press send to **attract more leads** with frictionless communication
- Press send to **retain customers** by providing a modern, convenient customer experience
- Press send to **save time** by making work more efficient for you and your team

Try Podium Starter for free

¹ <https://www.uschamber.com/co/start/strategy/small-business-coronavirus-reopening-guide>

² The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

³ The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

⁴ The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

⁵ The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

⁶ The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

⁷ <https://www.uschamber.com/report/small-business-coronavirus-impact-poll-june>

⁸ <https://okcfox.com/news/coronavirus/household-spending-declining-during-pandemic-magnifymoney-reports>

⁹ <https://okcfox.com/news/coronavirus/household-spending-declining-during-pandemic-magnifymoney-reports>

¹⁰ The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

¹¹ <https://www.inc.com/graham-winfrey/reopening-business-after-coronavirus-ppp-eidl.html>

¹² <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/07/tech/mobile-payments-coronavirus/index.html>

¹³ <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/advisory-services/publications/consumer-intelligence-series/pwc-consumer-intelligence-series-customer-experience.pdf>

¹⁴ The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

¹⁵ The State of Local Business: COVID-19 and Local Consumer Behavior, <https://learn.podium.com/eb-state-of-local-business>

¹⁶ <https://acquire.io/blog/7-studies-prove-live-chat-boosts-conversion-rate/>

¹⁷ <https://acquire.io/blog/7-studies-prove-live-chat-boosts-conversion-rate/>