10 Biggest Challenges Small Business Owners Face Right Now

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There is not a day that goes by where we don't talk about the COVID pandemic. It is on the news, in our social feeds and it has infiltrated both our personal and professional worlds. Many businesses have shifted employees to a work-from-home routine; changing everything about how the business day works. We've moved from in-person to video. We've adapted to multiple family members attempting to be productive, in the same space, at the same time and we've shifted from brick-and-mortar to a heavier online presence. In the midst of it all, there have been many success stories. Yet, the challenges are ever apparent. Many have lost revenue. Many have laid off employees. Many have had challenges with technology and others have struggled with the limited resources. Many have closed their doors, permanently. The most impacted? The small business.

The small business, in my opinion, is what makes America great. It is not only the entrepreneurial spirit that thrives here, but the ability to make the dream a reality. What was once a sketch on a napkin or a conversation over dinner can actually become something here. No idea is too great. No passion is stifled. No desire to persevere is frowned upon. We have the imagination and the resources to take an idea and make it into something special. But, in the past year our

favorite shops have disappeared. Our friends have lost what they built, from the ground-up, and the hope for the future for many has dwindled, and my heart breaks.

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This is a difficult time, and it is our obligation to help those, as we can. In that spirit, I have asked small business owners about their biggest challenges today. After all, what plagues one, likely plagues many. It is not a sign of weakness to struggle in this time. In fact, it is admirable to acknowledge that these times are difficult, and we need the 'village' to get to the other side. Do you know how to help these small business owners? Do you have resources that you can lend? Do you have advice to offer? Be the 'village.'

Challenge 1: The Ability to Transition to a Digital-First World

Tyler Forte, Owner/CEO of Felix Homes says, "Large companies have the budget to quickly make this transition whether it means building new product features, offering more flexible payment options, or making sure your team stays productive while working from home."

Challenge 2: Lack of In-Person Networking Events

John Pinedo, Founder, Freedom Bound Business says, "In-person networking events were a great source of client acquisition for us. Zoom networking events are just not the same for obvious reasons. Prospects, local business owners, simply prefer face-to-face interactions." Additionally, Sophie Bowman, Founder, Convert Your Followers, agreed. "The complete death of networking events, which are a lifeline for small business owners to expand their brand reach to the local

target market” has been a massive challenge.

Challenge 3: Forward-Planning is Difficult

Jason Lee, Owner, Healthy Framework stated that “COVID is making forward planning near impossible. Without knowing how long it’s going to be here and to what degree, it’s nearly impossible to plan out marketing efforts, gauge staffing needs, or just know what our customers and clients need.” Reiterating this sentiment, Lainey Morse, Founder/President of Original Goat Yoga is in full agreement. “Over the past four years, we’ve expanded to 10 locations all over the USA. in March, we had to close all locations due to COVID. The hardest part has been trying to navigate opening back up at each location, only to be shut down again due to COVID surges. Spending marketing dollars on something that you’re not sure is going to happen has been a challenge and I’m not sure if I should just shut down and wait it out or if I should keep trying to open back up. Financially, it’s been devastating, and I fear if I wait too long, the viral engine that we’ve created will fade away.”

Challenge 4: Leaving Brick-and-Mortar

Adriane Galea, CEO, Beach Bum CEO notes that the biggest challenge is “pivoting business to be completely online. The brick-and-mortar business could not survive COVID, so, I’ve essentially started completely over with a digital business. But clients just aren’t spending money the way they were six months ago, or even two months ago.”

Challenge 5: Lacking WLB

Arnold Chapman, CEO, ELD Focus notes that work-life-balance has become difficult. “Before the pandemic, we can clock in and clock out, then leave all our work-related problems at the office. However, now that we’re all working from home, we are busy with taking care of the family while accomplishing our goals. As a result, it can be easy for us to get burned out for doing everything at the same time.”

Challenge 6: Increased Shipping Costs

Yassine Lamari, CEO, Gentleman’s Guru says, “We have had an increase in the cost of our overseas shipping prices due to COVID’s impact on shipping procedures. In addition, some customers have had to cancel events after purchasing items, and therefore return rates are up beyond normal levels.”

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Challenge 7: Lacking Creativity

Ryan Scribner, Co-Owner, Investing Simple, states, “The number one challenge I am facing with my business is maintaining high levels of creativity in the virtual work environment we are in today. In the past, a lot of our best ideas came from group meetings where we all would meet and share our thoughts. I have found it is much more difficult to replicate this in an online environment. You simply do not feel the same energy over a Zoom call as you do in an in-person meeting.” Echoing this view, Jim Jacobs, CEO/Founder of Focus Insight said that their biggest challenge is “combating Zoom fatigue.”

Challenge 8: Blips in Production

Jessica Hill Howard, Founder/CEO, Sicily Hill states, “A big challenge is the upset in our production. The components of our products are produced in several factories across the United States and Asia. The varying state and government regulations dependent on the location affects the staffing capacities at our factories; thus, negatively impacting the turnaround times on our products. A recent production run took approximately 25% longer to complete compared to similar productions pre-COVID. This challenge led us to encounter significant inventory shortages as we headed into the busiest time of year for product demand.” Similarly, Wayne Miguel, COO/Partner, MightySkins stated, “Maintaining stock of necessary materials to continue day-to-day operations is a major challenge. Due to delays and breaks in the normal supply chain, we’ve experienced longer lead times on most materials out of stock for extended periods from some suppliers. The breakdown in the supply chain has made maintaining the standard increasingly difficult.”

Challenge 9: Pressure to Perform

Malte Scholz, CEO/CO-Founder of Airfocus states that a major challenge is the concern over “the external pressure COVID has put on everyone. People are not just concerned about their jobs anymore, but also about their health. The constant fear has taken its toll and I’ve noticed a drop in performance. The biggest problem is that I don’t know how to respond to this. On one hand, I feel that I need to address the drop in performance if the business will suffer. On the other hand, I can’t put additional pressure on people because I know they’re doing their best at the moment…”

Challenge 10: Long-Term vs. Short-Term Content

Michelle Devani, Founder of lovedevani states, “As someone who runs a business giving relationship advice, I think the biggest challenge that this pandemic has brought upon us is not knowing how much of our content should be evergreen and how much of it should be geared towards the pandemic. The problem with the evergreen content is that people might not see it as relatable, and the problem with COVID-themed content is that it won’t be relatable once the pandemic is over. So, really, the paradigm here is long-term vs. short-term.”

The world is struggling, personally and professionally alike. But, as these worlds collide, the challenges for the small business has been nothing like we’ve seen before. It’s no longer about taking a great idea and putting it into motion. It’s not about building an amazing team and watching it flourish. And it’s no longer about following a dream or taking a chance. We’ve lost great businesses over the past year. Businesses that make our nation unique. Dreams have been lost. Whether challenged by the transition to digital, the lack of in-person networking, inability to manage forward planning, unexpectedly having to leave the brick-and-mortar business model, lack of work-life-balance, increased shipping costs, the downturn in creativity, the blips in production, questioning long-term vs. short-term decisions, or the pressure to perform…we can all nod in agreement that these days are like no other. The one thing we know? It takes a village.

Help your fellow man, purchase from the small business owner, encourage those you know to keep up the fight, and offer advice or assistance when able. Maybe in the end, it is not the ideas that ever made us great in the first place but rather the drive and determination that made it all happen. COVID has knocked us down but it will never take our

perseverance. Be great.

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