6 Predictions for How This Crisis Will Impact Small Businesses Long-Term

Whatever the new normal becomes, small-business owners will be at the forefront of shaping life as we know it. Some trends will prove durable long beyond this time.

Grow Your Business, Not Your Inbox

Stay informed and join our daily newsletter now!

May 20, 2020 6 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Tigers now have kings. Grandmothers are requesting video meetings. Masks are a fashion statement. Changes are coming quickly, somehow happening for all of us at once, despite our population never being more physically distant. It is a dizzying time. Among the groups most challenged by this torrent of societal shifts are small businesses. Doors have been closed, and some may not reopen. These, however, are some of the most resilient and creative people on the planet. Whatever the new normal becomes, small-business owners will be at the forefront of shaping life as we know it. To help stoke those masters of ingenuity, here are some current trends I think will stick around.

1. Printed materials will face

greater headwinds.

People have been predicting the downfall of print for decades. That is not the prediction here. Print has remained a key part of many small-business marketing playbooks even as digital and social content has taken off. The physical nature of a brochure that can be picked up and explored creates a visceral experience that digital content has yet to replace. It is precisely that visceral aspect that will make printed materials more scrutinized even after we emerge from the worst of the crisis.

That stack of brochures in the doctor's office might start to seem unhygienic. Print materials that are literally handed from one person to another – like business cards or certificates – will be hit the hardest. Items that are viewed from a distance like posters and signs should see less impact. Adobe Spark, a product I help lead at Adobe, is already seeing drops in search demand by as much as 75 percent for some forms of print output.

2. Digital channels will become a core marketing tactic for new businesses.

Brick-and-mortar small-business owners are often reticent to spend their small amount of free time learning creative tools or how to build a successful social media strategy. The stay-at-home order has created both the time and the need to lean far more heavily on digital marketing.

Some might expect staying at home to drive people toward a full "Netflix and chill" approach to spending their time. There has actually been a surge of creative activity, especially around creating videos, banners and other digital marketing content. Spark has seen a rise in search demand by

as much as 75 percent for social content. If Grandma can learn Zoom, small-business owners can learn how to post to their Instagram story.

3. Building a customer email list will be even more vital.

The sudden nature of this crisis made it challenging to communicate with customers. Business owners who had invested in developing customer email lists or methods for direct communication, such as social media groups, were in a far better position to maintain those relationships and manage demand as they came up with new ways to provide their goods or services.

Web sites, ecommerce, email lists and loyalty programs were wise strategies prior to now and will gain even more prominence. We might also see increased interest in developing custom mobile applications and personalization to form even tighter bonds.

4. More team collaboration from a distance.

Staying in touch with customers is critical, but they are not the only people you will need to communicate with from afar. Companies that already had ways to coordinate work with their employees online were in a better position to maintain operations than those who were completely reliant on face-to-face collaboration. Videoconferencing has been one of the clear beneficiaries as people from all walks of life are finding new ways to leverage the technology to stay connected. Conversations, though, are time-consuming.

The wisest businesses will take advantage of remote collaboration platforms that allow employees to work with each

other asynchronously. Slack and Microsoft Teams have seen dramatic rises in usage. We have also seen an influx of new users in Spark who are taking advantage of the ability to allow businesses to set up their brand online and collaborate with others on branded digital content. Many of these products can be used for free, and given the likelihood that this situation may go on for a long time, there is every reason to get set up with them now.

5. More businesses of one.

Not every business can be done remotely. Technology has not enabled remote deck cleaning or massage services. That is causing many people to explore alternative sources of income. At the same time, we are seeing a huge rise in demand for remote experiences. People are turning to online fitness and cooking classes. They are picking up a guitar and taking online lessons. They are watching online concerts and performances.

The combination of skilled people at home needing to make money and bored people at home looking to enrich or entertain themselves is a recipe for a booming population of micro-entrepreneurs. One person with a skill in demand can find an audience. It may, or may not, surpass the earning potential of whatever the person was doing before, but it will open many people’s eyes to new possibilities.

6. Creating ongoing value that makes sense to sell as a subscription will be a major advantage.

As micro-entrepreneurs find their niche outside of the structures that usually helped them get paid, they have a

unique opportunity to set their own prices and set up their own monetization structures.

This has the capacity to greatly destabilize how we value certain kinds of work or online experiences. It puts the power (and the responsibility) in the hands of individual creators, coaches or experience-makers. Savvy entrepreneurs could see greater income and stability by turning to subscription models and leaning into both live online experiences and asynchronous income sources.

This crisis is creating a strong incentive to push past any hesitation and build out an online aspect of how to operate. Many small businesses will be forced to have two business plans: one that operates when social distancing orders are lifted, and one that they can flip on when people are ordered to stay at home. These need not be mutually exclusive. The backup mode of operation can act as a way to augment existing business, even while people are allowed to physically enter the shop.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/350549