Follow These 6 Steps to Bulletproof Your Digital Business Strategy



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The current crisis has forced us to live in a world where we can't go outside. Although this change is temporary, imagine if it weren't — how would businesses survive? What technology could possibly be used to cater to such a world across industries?

As restaurants have proved during the stay-at-home orders, just about any business *can* be brought online. In fact, I believe that by 2030 we could see entire businesses sustained through just mobile orders, whether they're retail, food service or something else. It all depends on how smart the technology medium connecting businesses and consumers is.

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A bonus of all this? By targeting both traditional in-person channels and online sales, businesses that successfully adapt during and after the crisis can potentially double their sales, all while serving their customers better.

The question, of course, is how to create a mirror of your physical presence online smoothly. You can do that by focusing on a few key steps:

1. Decide what you will sell online

First, are you a retail, service or food-service company? This

will dictate what you sell online and how you sell it. Although overall strategies are similar, they are not exactly the same.

For retail, you might want to make all of your in-store items available online. But it often makes sense to focus on specific items, such as customer favorites. If some items aren't practical for online shipping, you still might be able to offer them for online purchase with curbside pickup. Previous sales data and feedback from customers can give you the insights you need to organize your products.

For services, are you able to provide what you do over the phone or through a video chat instead of in person? For something that usually must be done face-to-face, like beauty services, consider offering DIY kits to send to customers and walk them through how to use it on a video consultation.

If you're a restaurant, you might want to make your whole menu available to order from online. Or, if that seems overwhelming, you can do a limited menu consisting of bestsellers and easier-to-make dishes.

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2. Set up packing, shipping and order-to-door services

If your business is smaller, you might be able to handle packing and shipping yourself. Eventually, however, you'll likely want to consider third-party partners. Since higher shipping rates can influence purchase decisions, the goal is to find a partner with the most reasonable fees for consistent, damage-free delivery. Either way, delivery options (e.g., two-day shipping, shipping all items together, etc.) and a clear return policy can help your customers feel more in control.

For businesses like restaurants, you can set up online ordering for pick-up and partner with delivery services such as UberEats or Postmates to ensure you can still operate a successful business whether or not people are dining in.

3. Choose your ecommerce medium

This step encompasses the technology you'll utilize to sell what your business has to offer. It might be ecommerce, a web app, a third-party delivery service or something else. Decide what you need and get it set up. Regardless of what type of business you're in, make sure you're going to get reliable service, support, flexibility and scalability from the medium you choose.

For retail, you can use options like Shopify or Megento, or you can have someone build your site for you. Either way, think of the platform as the foundation for your online store.

The ability to link to other systems (e.g., your POS) is critical, too. Those systems allow options like inventory tracking and payment and also let you enjoy more efficient, automated processes and data collection.

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4. Create your site (including a mobile version)

The two most important things to focus on when creating your site are design and brand. Customers will quickly leave if your setup is not intuitive and easy to navigate, so keep your site simple and make sure shoppers find what they want or need quickly. The design also needs to convey the flavor customers have come to expect from your business, as the familiarity in

style can help customers feel more comfortable and trusting.

Overall, experts predict that ecommerce will value $845 billion by 2022, with almost half of ecommerce sales coming from mobile devices. Designing a mobile version of your website that’s optimized for smartphones ensures you can give customers an incredible experience no matter where they’re shopping from and that you don’t miss out as shoppers look for items on the go.

For both your sites, hone in on your shopping cart (if you need one for your business). Abandoned items are a common issue, so ask yourself what you can do to help shoppers finish their transactions, such as opt-in push notifications.

You’ll also want to invest in good technical and customer support. Even short outages can cost an online company big bucks, so you need experienced people who can address glitches quickly. And the better your customer support is through email, chat or video, the more satisfied and loyal customers will be. Bots can help out some, but maintaining the human touch makes a difference.

Even if your business is a coffee shop or restaurant, decide if you want to sell merchandise, like coffee beans, mugs or t-shirts. If you do, you’ll want to make sure you have both retail sales and online food and drink order capabilities set up.

5. Figure out data and security

As an online company, collecting more personal data from your shoppers will be the way of life. Some of this information is a must for basic transactions, such as credit card numbers. But other data can help you understand customer behavior and who’s actually buying. Customers deserve and expect you to keep this information private and to know how you’re using it. They also need protection against issues like hacking. Using

SSL certificates is an example of a basic precaution you can take.

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6. Design your marketing

The ways you can market an online store aren’t limited to the Internet. For example, you can use traditional print banners and mailings, business cards and coupons or offers included with purchased items when you package them for shipping. Online, don’t underestimate email, which still has one of the highest ROIs of any marketing option. Strategic click ads work, too.

But you’ll also want to give attention to social media. These platforms give you a fantastic way to interact with customers you already have as well as find new ones. Although you can promote events or products with shoppable posts, the focus should be on providing content that creates a real relationship with buyers.

Lastly, think about your in-store experience for new ways to market. For example, if you know that demonstrations have increased sales, you could try marketing with a demonstration video.

After you’ve taken all these steps, it’s simply a matter of communicating your intent to your customers and helping them make the switch in a cooperative way. Alerting them early, soliciting their input and offering regular updates can make them more comfortable. Once customers are buying from your online store, don’t be afraid to adjust your site based on new, post-crisis goals and market shifts, just as you would for your brick-and-mortar.

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Innovating for a permanent crisis

In the end, your success both during and after this time will largely depend on how well you take advantage of the technology available to duplicate your brick-and-mortar online. Not only will it keep you afloat until people are able to and comfortable with the idea of shopping in person, but it might just double your sales — or more.

The businesses that made themselves crisis-proof with the technology available to them, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are the ones that have struggled the least in these times — some have even flourished! If we all innovated like this, we would see some truly amazing technologies and strategies emerge.

So, in the end, the question isn't so much *if* you will take part in the digital revolution, but rather: Can you afford not to?

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