

Small Business Pandemic Survival Guide

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Your small business just got slammed shut.

Your profit and loss sheet is in the red.

Maybe you had to lay off or furlough staff.

Maybe you aren't generating any income for yourself and your family.

And let's face facts, the stimulus "relief" is lukewarm at best.

The USA is giving you a loan (if you get any money at all). Probably on top of other loans you already have. Your business is going to be paying that back for a long time to come.

What can you do to save your business? And generate income?

And, just as important, keep your customers engaged and ready to come back when they can?

You, my small business friend, are going to have to get highly creative.

First off, this is what you should not do:

- Panic
- Give up
- Complain
- Take time off
- Defy state and city stay-at-home orders
- Sneak into people's homes to provide services
- Beg your customers to help you out
- Expect doing business as "normal" to return any time soon

As a small business owner, you are a realist.

You understand that building a business and generating your own income takes hard work, focus and tenacity.

You've had setbacks, hit roadblocks, probably had financial worries before.

This pandemic is a completely new experience, but you have the skills to survive.

Below are eleven ways you can grab a life preserver and keep your business afloat during this challenging time.

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1. **Keep working.** Get up every day and go through your regular work-day routine. If you have an office or shop and can be there safely, go there to work. You're not on vacation.
2. **Run your numbers and then run them again.** You need to know where your money is and isn't, how much profit you are losing and what amount of money breaks you even. If you are taking a loan, make sure your business can pay it back, assuming you will not return to your former profit margins any time soon.
3. **Create a product, program, class, system, event that you can offer online.** We live in 2020. People hold mini-computers in their hands 24 hours a day. They can access video, audio, interactive classrooms and PDFs. EVERY business can do this, even service-oriented ones. Hair, nail salons, spas, cleaning services, hotels, restaurants. If you need ideas, we can talk. I've been building on-line businesses for psychotherapists for a decade. People laughed back then...who's laughing now? Every business can offer something valuable online.
4. **Engage your customer base for the long term.** I hope you had a system to maintain a client list. Whether email, social media, snail mail you should have a list somewhere of people who used your services in the past. If you don't, it's ok. You can still generate customer engagement. It's just going to be more work and take more time. But it can be done.

Side note: This engagement is the crux of your strong return to profits when the economy opens again. You want people lined up to get in your doors the minute they are free to do so. Don't let them forget you. Don't let them see you sweat. Always remember, all your colleagues you are commiserating with now, are your competition. You can be nice, but don't be complacent.

Keeping customers engaged and offering online offerings are now your full-time job. We'll talk more about this in future posts.

5. **Give us a distraction.** People are BORED TO DEATH. They've streamed very movie and series they care to watch, they have clapped for healthcare workers, baked bread, whipped coffee. Their kids are sick of them and they are sick of their kids. This is a great time for creative business folks to get our attention and give us some relief. Social media is your friend here. Use one platform and do something interesting, quirky, attention grabbing. This will be different for every business. It should be directly related to what you do and who you are. But, for the love of all the handwashing in the world, give us something to do other than the monotony we are all chafing against.
6. **Give helpful stuff away.** See this "Small Business Pandemic Survival Guide" you are reading for free? Do this for your kind of business. The reasoning is, people like free, they are stressed and confused, they are bored (see #5) and free stuff costs you nothing other than time and is the #1

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way to keep customers engaged and attract new customers at the same time. (Smart business owners will watch what I am doing very carefully....hint, hint).

7. **Sell things.** Again, a pandemic is a crisis and the fall out is tragic. And your family must eat. Going back to #5, people are bored. Americans buy stuff when bored. Be prepared to sell things very differently than you are used to.
8. **Following #7, you need a new business plan.** I know, this is a drag, but it beats starving! You need to have a system to give away information online, sell online, ship things efficiently. If you don't already, you must up your social media game. Waaaayyyy up your social media game. And you need to readjust your profit margins.
9. **Which brings us to...Readjust your profit margins.** This is a big shift. Other people are hurting financially, too, so they are not going to be paying for your stuff the way they used to when the economy was humming along. Create sales, generate packages at reasonable rates. Offer ways to pay overtime (Afterpay?). So many businesses have these sticky-sweet ads on TV and in social media about how they are "doing the best we can to get you through this hard time." But when you really analyze their efforts, nothing has changed at all. They haven't dropped prices, they are selling the same old stuff. Their marketing is still assuming people can pay off all the "relief" they are getting down the line. That is false. It is trickery. And it is dangerous.

Side note: Before you tell me I am full of shit for asking you to cut profits, I'll explain the reasoning. First, you are keeping customers engaged which is worth it's price over the long term. Trust me. Second, any income is better than NO income. Third, if you leverage online marketing, you can really outpace your competition and the *volume* of sales will make up for the lower price point.

10. **Take future orders, make waiting lists.** If you take ONE piece of advice from this article, take this one. Folks, when the economy opens again, in whatever form, people are going to FLOOD out of their homes and will be looking to do business with you. The problem? They're all coming at you at once. You can only have so many therapy appointments, cut so much hair, cook so much food, deliver so many flowers, walk so many dogs, drive so many peeps all over town. You get the drift.

Right now, I want to get on my hair stylist's waiting list...she doesn't have a waiting list...oh, honey, please. What is going to happen when our state opens hair salons? Phones ringing off the hook, email up the wazoo and long waits...ugh. Total overwhelm for you, your staff and your customers. And, what will desperate consumers do if they can't work with you? They will work with someone else who can serve them faster. Don't run that risk. Engage your customers NOW, pull them into your inner-circle of "special people" and give them a chance to sign up to work

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with you, so that when the doors open you have an organized, fair, informed system to get everyone what they need as fast as possible. This will be HUGE. This may save your business. This will be a leverage your competition isn't even thinking about. And it is 100% free to do!

11. **Prepare for this new business environment to last a long time.** Right now, the reality is sinking in that the economy isn't going back to "normal" any time soon. Again, you are a realist. You see the writing on the wall. Politicians are letting us down easy, telling us there is light at the end of the tunnel...maybe in May, maybe in June, maybe in the fall. Nobody has a clue, folks. It's not soon. Your own personal politics aside, customers will NOT be flooding through your doors in the normal way for a long time. And taking out loan after loan after loan is not sustainable. You have two choices: give up, close down, stress out, *OR* pivot and do business differently. The choice is up to you.

You need a long-term plan. You need to dig deep and potentially re-jigger everything about how you do business. Those who adapt survive. Darwin was right.

So, now what?

Pick 2-3 things out of this list and do them ASAP. I highly suggest starting with #10, but up to you.

Follow me for more tips, info and ideas. Best place is Instagram [@susangiurleo](#) (yes, a line on the end). My Twitter is a hot mess I need to fix and Facebook depresses me. I'll be posting all my content on this blog as well. For now, I don't want your email because I haven't set up my capture system yet. When I do, I'll let you know.

Consider working with me. I take my own advice. I'm going to start selling my services soon. These will be individual, personal business and marketing planning sessions. Yes, I will charge for them. No, they won't be crazy expensive, but they won't be free. I'll keep you posted.

Finally, I've hinted at this in various places in my content. I'm building a business right here, right now in front of your eyes. **You may want to watch how this unfolds and take some notes.** Look at what is working and what isn't (I'm ok with failure...we can't be better hitters if we don't swing the bat, right?). Take ideas that work for you and leave the rest. All I ask is, do not plagiarize my content and don't get huffy if something you try doesn't work. Execution is 99% of success. (And I will tell you from experience about 90% of people don't execute and then wonder why they fail....)

Ok, you got stuff to do....Go!