



MERCHANT
CAPITAL

BACK TO BUSINESS TOOLKIT

after Covid-19 lockdown

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Introduction

A letter from our CEO about this toolkit

From fast food outlets and restaurants to hardware stores and beauty salons, Merchant Capital has spent years making it our business to know yours.


Covid-19 was a situation that took us completely by surprise, one that no-one expected and even fewer knew how to handle. But as a nation and a community we drew together to support each other through this. Difficult as it may have been we closed our non-essential businesses to the public and as entrepreneurs found new ways to sustain our income and pay our bills.

Now we look to when we can reopen again and without knowing exactly what that will look like we know that “to achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time.” This toolkit is here to assist you with creating that plan. We hope that you find value in it and that it makes the transition, to being fully operational again, a little smoother.

As always, we are here to Serve your Ambitious Growth through the good times and the bad,



Founder & CEO - Merchant Capital



I'm convinced that about half of what separates successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance.

Steve Jobs



PART 1

YOUR EMPLOYEES

Ensuring your staff are motivated and safe
when returning to work



How do I manage my staff?

Understand the uniqueness of their needs

Begin this step by understanding exactly what they need. So instead of applying a blanket approach, it's advisable to have one-on-one consultations with each of your employees. That way you can ascertain what they specifically need. Giving you more insight into a transition strategy that keeps all your people in mind. Make sure that any agreements between staff and management should have clear contracts in place.

Put provisions in place

With the above in mind, some staff members may need be paid an advance so that they can pay for transport to get them to work. In cases like these it's likely that they would like a third of their salary in order to cover any costs. They may also prefer weekly wages (rather than monthly) for the time being, to ensure they can pay their way in the weeks they return.

What protocols do I put in place?

Employee responsibility guidelines

Both you and your team share the responsibility for health in the workplace. So employees should abide by any policies adopted by the employer to curb the spread of the Coronavirus. These should include:

Health and Safety

- Any symptomatic staff members who have been in contact with an infected person are obliged to advise the employer immediately; self-isolate and consult a medical practitioner.
- Employees are obligated to inform the employer, where they have good reasons to suspect that an employee, customer or client may have contracted the virus.
- Insist that all employees who have travelled to affected areas are required to advise the employer, who may then instruct such employees to self-isolate for a period.
- Employers have the right to impose conditions on entry to the workplace and refuse entry to anyone entering the workplace where the health and safety of that person and/or other staff are at risk.
- Where possible, staff placed in the above category must work from home until deemed fit to go back to the office. This will allow them to still earn a salary. This becomes a bit more tricky if they aren't able to work from home. In cases like these staff members will have to (if they show symptoms) take sick leave. If they don't show symptoms, they may need to self-isolate due to exposure, and will not be able to earn a salary or take sick leave. So employer's will have to look at annual leave and unfortunately unpaid leave. You need to decide what you are prepared to offer your staff in order to assist them. Bearing in mind that people also sometimes take their chances and so always insist on medical confirmation.

What protocols do I put in place?

Equipment

Show your staff and customers that (even with the worst being over) you are taking precautions to keep them safe.

- This can be done now by pre-ordering soap, sanitizing gels, gloves and masks where necessary to ensure they are available when you reopen. Also consider adding sanitizer units against wall where doors are most frequently used, as well as around areas like the printer or kitchen.
- Encourage regular and thorough handwashing by staff and visitors
- Clean all frequently touched work surfaces.

Etiquette

- Prohibit handshakes and physical contact
- Encourage the 'elbow cough' and the hygienic disposal of tissues.
- Suggest conference calls instead of face-to-face meetings.
- Even post-lockdown, social distancing should be encouraged. So, meetings, smoke and tea breaks, lunches (etc.) should be limited to two people at a time. This should also pertain to the kitchen or other closed workspaces.

Resources

- Offer the flu shot for free. Covid-19 symptoms are initially identical to flu symptoms- prevent unnecessary worry by immunizing staff against normal influenza.
- Print out clear picture-based infographics for all staff members in common areas, bathrooms, office spaces and kitchens. Educating them on how to protect themselves.

Shop Floor guidelines

- See our Store Layout section for more information on shop floor guidelines

PRINTABLE COVID-19 INFORMATION POSTER

Place this poster in and around the workspace to guide your employees on best hygiene practices at work or home.

[CLICK TO DOWNLOAD](#)



PART 2

HEALTH, HYGIENE AND SANITATION

Now more than ever your hygiene and
cleaning practices need to be optimal



Health, Hygiene and Sanitation

To make sure that this section gives you the most accurate and valuable information possible, we consulted with global leaders **Initial, the Experts in Hygiene**, for their practical and simple-to-implement advice. Here is what they had to say:

Take a 'Back to Basics' approach

Be realistic about what is possible in each of the upcoming sections. Understand that protecting your customers and employees are non-negotiables and then be flexible about the rest. Many advanced systems are not within your budget and there are often more cost effective methods, so stick with these and buy the best you can afford.

Do a touchpoint audit

There are areas of your establishment that are touched more often than others and are therefore higher risk areas for the spread of viruses and bacteria. Do a touchpoint audit of the areas around your store that employees and customers often come into contact with or are exposed to for longer periods of time. Your cleaning schedule should be increased and focused around these areas. In the retail environment this may be areas like your card terminals and trolleys.

Create a cleaning schedule

A schedule gives you and your staff direction and provides your customer with peace of mind. Split your cleaning schedule into tasks that need to be done at specific times of the day and those that need to be done on a ongoing basis. For instance, general surface disinfecting may need to be done every 4 hours but the checkout space should be wiped down between each and every customer. Make sure you mark both these procedures down so that your staff know exactly what is expected of them. This will also clarify what your manager needs to monitor.

Health, Hygiene and Sanitation

Book a once-off disinfection

Ongoing professional services may not be in your budget but a once-off disinfection gives you a clean base to work off. From then, on it's up to you to maintain. Professional providers of this service will also give you a certificate that you can present to show your commitment to your customers and that your business is Covid-19 Aware. **Initial** provides such a service- [click here](#) to visit their page.

Research precautions and implement accordingly

There are a few nuggets of industry-specific information that can help your business maintain hygiene. For instance, if you are a restaurant owner, you would probably want to know that temperatures of 60 degrees or more kills viruses and bacteria, and so your dishwashers should be set accordingly.

Given the heightened interest in hygiene, people are researching detergents that are best-suited to disinfect surfaces and hands. For surfaces; alcohol, bleach, hydrogen peroxide and quaternary ammonium compounds (found in certain disinfection wipes) have all been registered as effective disinfectants against the virus. For staff and customers; set up sanitising stations that are easy to access for all traffic. Keep in mind that the best method of personal protection against the virus is good old soap and water and if possible, this should be prioritised over alcohol-based hand-sanitisers.

The World Health Organisation should be your go-to source of reliable information to ensure that the advice you are following is sound. Visit their website for the most up to date information.

Promote social distancing


Informative floor vinyls are a great way to show people how far to distance from one another. Plus they have the added bonus of giving customers peace of mind that you are taking the right precautions to keep them safe. The suggested physical distance is 1.8m. It's not always possible to enforce this but limiting the number of people allowed in your store at any given time may make this possible.



PART 3

SUPPLY CHAIN AND OPERATIONS

Nothing works smoothly until
your operations do



Supply Chain, Landlords & Operations

Keep important partners informed

To ensure your opening goes as smoothly as possible, it's important to inform your landlord, service providers and suppliers of your opening date and key plans. Do this as far in advance as possible so that if they need to prepare anything on their sides, this will be done ahead of time without it inconveniencing you.

Simplify

After years of owning a business, you may well have become stuck in complex systems that aren't particularly necessary. Meaning that now is the time to simplify. Take this opportunity to streamline your operations and understand the difference between what is being done out of habit and what are really the most important factors or activities required to run your business.

Long-term timetables

Help your staff understand the bigger picture. This can be done by creating a simple timetable for staff to understand the phased approach to reopening. This should include necessary information on what is required by each staff member. For example, give each healthy staff member the opportunity to return to work but if you don't need each employee everyday then don't unnecessarily overcrowd your store. Slowly gear up to full capacity at a pace that you, your employees and your customers feel comfortable with. This plan should be effectively communicated with all your staff.

Supply Chain, Landlords & Operations

Daily communication

Have a daily catch up with all staff on duty. Here you can give everyone the run-down of the day ahead, remind them of new procedures, get them excited about daily trade and run quick training sessions where need be. If you don't have all staff on duty, then allocate responsibilities for important tasks to make up for the reduced staff compliment.

Plan in advance

Place stock orders well in advance. Many businesses in your industry will be reopening at the same time so common suppliers will be inundated with orders that all have to be delivered on the same day. Ensure yours is first on the list by placing orders early.

Get your house in order

It's been a while since you ran your operation in the flesh. So, a day or two before opening, do a dry run to make sure that lights are working, card machines are charged, fridges are stocked, items are defrosted, till floats are ready and shelves are packed. This will make a big difference on the day you open.

Your store doesn't stop at the door

Inspect your storefront: Are your windows and paving outside clean? Have the communal dustbins been emptied? While some of these may not be your usual responsibility to maintain, it may be up to you to sort it out in the interim (while normal services catch up). This is crucial as it will drastically affect how your business is viewed by your customer.



PART 4

SALES AND MARKETING

Bringing your business back up to speed
as quickly as possible



Sales

Take yourself back to when you first opened the business. If that initial strategy worked; this is your starting point as a re-opening strategy. The things you did then have already been tried and tested. Meaning that whatever worked can be re-implemented now and whatever didn't, should be avoided.

Specials

While you may be understandably hesitant to offer discounts post-Lockdown, remember that your customers may not have received full salaries for some time and will only be able to support you if it makes financial sense. So opening specials will entice your customer engagement and is likely to seal the deal.

Product offerings

Make sure that you offer products and services that will make your customers feel safe. For example, restaurants that are only open for takeaways should continuously communicate your health & safety measures. Don't just keep them behind the scenes.

Where possible, also offer home delivery services and online shopping. This is because when lockdown is over, it's likely that people will still be cautious, and many customers will be reluctant to return to their normal purchasing habits. So, make sure you cater to different types of customers which will maximize opportunities for sales.

Tap into events

After not being able to treat themselves or their loved ones during lockdown, customers will be looking to make up for lost time. This is where you can make your products relevant. Offering products, experiences or vouchers for events like birthdays that happened during lockdown, Mother's Day or Father's Day will help you boost turnover.

Marketing

Social media

This remains the most cost-effective 'paid' marketing channel. It also allows for a hyperlocal strategy so you can cater to the customers in your immediate surrounds. Social media marketing should start one week before reopening (if you have enough notice) but really, it's never too late to start.

Target location

Keep in mind that people aren't going to be travelling far. General sentiment will be that customers will want to focus on supporting local businesses wherever possible. So, focus on areas that are close to your establishment. If you are targeting correctly, you should see a return.

Tap into your existing customer base

Use what you have at your immediate disposal like cell numbers or email addresses of your existing customers. Contact your customers directly and let them know you are open for business. Platforms like Mailchimp are free for up to 2000 contacts and allow you to create professional mailers. Another option is Bulksms.com which is a pay-as-you-go service that allows you to start off with purchasing 200 sms credits.

Marketing

Encourage customer-promotion

Get your customers to promote for you by encouraging likes and shares on social media. Ask for reviews and then share them widely. If your customer knows you, they will be inclined to support you. So, ask them to show that support by sharing your posts and reviews on Whatsapp and social media. It will cost them nothing and has the potential to really grow your audience in a meaningful way.

Simple works

There's a reason restaurants and local stores have used chalkboards outside their establishments for years -because it works! Locals will (literally) be looking around for specials and announcements. This is a simple way to speak to them and if they are driving past, they may well quickly pop in and purchase there and then.

Clear and careful messaging

At all points in your communication strategy, your message should focus on:

- Your location
- Your offering or special
- Your opening date
- How you are keeping your customers safe

Don't forget to bring some joy back to your messages. Everyone understands the seriousness of the situation but with very little human contact and even less positivity it's a great time for you to bring some happiness to your customers.



PART 5

STORE LAYOUTS

Simple ways to promote safety and social
distancing in your establishment

Store Layouts

While most of your customers will be cautious in your establishment it is still important to set guidelines up front, make them aware of the precautions you are taking and let them know what is expected of them in every situation. Your store is unique and not every store layout suggestion will work for you so we've laid out a few options for you to choose from.

Signage is key

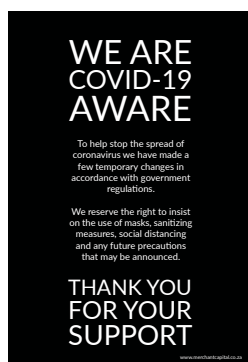
Some stores are small enough and have lesser foot traffic to allow staff to verbally communicate the guidelines. But this isn't always the case. To ensure your guidelines are clear it is best to use signage to keep customers informed.

To help you with this we have created a simple wall poster and two floor graphics that are printer ready. You can click on the image to download them below and send them to most printer companies who know the best printing specifications according to their application.



Floor Decal

to show customers where to stand at counters and in queues



Wall Poster/Window Vinyl

to outline your policy in store for customers entering the establishment



Floor Decal

to place at the entrance to your store

Store Layouts

Keeping your distance

Maintaining social distancing in confined spaces can seem difficult but there are a few ways you can ensure the safety of your employees and customers that are simple, inexpensive and allow you to fall in line with the 2 metre physical distancing suggestions.

Limiting the number of people allowed in the store

This can be done in two ways; either based on the square meterage or as a percentage of how many people are usually accommodated.

Option one means that you determine how many people are allowed in the store at one time based on how big your floor space is. The suggested limit is your square meterage divided by 6. So if you have a 200 square meter store you would allow 33 people in at any given time.

Square metres ÷ 6 = Capacity

200 square metres ÷ 6 = 33 people allowed in the store

You can monitor how many people are in your store by using a bidirectional counter held by a staff member at the door. These types of counters allow you to move the number both up and down for people entering and exiting. Many businesses have opted to hand out items to people coming in and take them back as they leave but this could increase the rate of potential infection if they aren't cleaned properly and the item could also get lost so a counter is a far better and safer option.

The second option works for industries like hair and beauty where a certain number of seats are used for trading. In this case the guidelines are often set out by the government, but if your industry has not been mandated, rather stick to a 50% capacity rule. If you had 8 stations then limit it to 4. And ensure a safe distance between them if they were placed close together before.

If you have unused space in your establishment now is the time to use it. This could allow you to maintain a profitable number of customers without compromising safety.

Store Layouts

Creating a specific traffic flow

Sometimes limited the number of people in your store isn't financially feasible but you still want to remain responsible, right? Creating a specific flow of traffic may be the answer for your store.

Create an entrance that is separate from the exit and flow your customers in a single direction through the store and towards the cashiers and the exit. You can use floor stickers or even posters to show customers which direction to walk in. This type of social distancing measure works well for businesses like cash and carry's, butcheries or grocery stores.

In places where people gather, like a meat counter at a butchery, ensure you have specified where people need to stand. This includes indicating the distance from the counter as well as a safe distance between customers.

This safe distance should also be enforced where customers queue. Outline your social distancing measures by indicating where people should stand while queueing by marking the area on the floor.

Placement of tables

Restaurants can utilise a number of the techniques outlined above to encourage social distancing but need to be aware of how their sit-down tables are placed too.

Many restaurants are getting creative with how they are servicing sit-down diners, including building dining pods, but if these innovations are not a cost you want to incur at the moment then a simple redesign of table placement is the answer.

A 2 metre space from the back of each dining chair (not from the centre of the table) is ideal. If you don't have space to store the extra tables and chairs you can leave them in place and mark them as "closed tables" so that customers don't seat themselves there.

Customers who feel safe in your establishment are going to want to support you in future which makes these measures the perfect retention and marketing tool.

YOUR RE-OPENING CHECKLIST

Make sure you tick all the boxes relevant to your business and get one step closer to a successful reopening

- ☐ Select your reopening date and time
- ☐ Plan the stages of your re-opening
- ☐ Inform your staff, landlord, suppliers etc.
- ☐ Set up and share an employee work schedule
- ☐ Put together orders for all suppliers
- ☐ Add soap, sanitizer, gloves and masks to orders
- ☐ Plan opening specials or special product offers
- ☐ Prepare realistic sales targets
- ☐ Create your marketing plan around sales targets
- ☐ Schedule social media posts and adverts
- ☐ Book a once off disinfection of your store
- ☐ Schedule further deep-cleans if necessary
- ☐ Set aside time to analyse your operations
- ☐ Make operational changes if necessary
- ☐ Do a touchpoint audit of your establishment
- ☐ Create a cleaning schedule
- ☐ Place social distancing indicators
- ☐ Determine the new capacity of your store
- ☐ Set aside time to train staff on new precautions
- ☐ Soft/mock opening 1 or 2 days before opening
- ☐ SMS/Email your base to encourage foot traffic
- ☐ Deep clean/disinfection 1 day before opening
- ☐ Set up a sanitising station/s
- ☐ Check/clean outside your store front
- ☐ Set specials on your POS system
- ☐ RE-OPEN

THE BOTTOM LINE

The transition from lockdown levels to trade will be a slow and challenging process. But by anticipating some of the hiccups, you may avoid a lot of unnecessary stress down the line.

So, follow these guidelines and get ahead of the pack. This will allow you to focus on the prospect of trading and all the exciting opportunities ahead.

Merchant Capital wishes you all of the best in this next phase and if you need any help getting things off the ground, you know where to find us.



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info@merchantcapital.co.za
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