

OPENING UP ALABAMA

How your business can *win* with the right *marketing strategy*



Opening up Alabama– How your business can win with the right marketing strategy

Coming out of coronavirus isolation will most likely be a gradual state-by-state, region-by-region experience. Even if governors give the ok for retail businesses to reopen, that doesn't mean they will or that shoppers will be willing to risk getting out with the same shopping enthusiasm they displayed pre-pandemic. So, when will normal activities that occurred pre COVID-19 resume? According to data collected by Media Post that compares today's sentiments to post-9/11 and the recent Great Recession, we are likely to see a slow and gradual increase to normal activities.

“Not all activities will recover at the same time. The data show that once the necessary assurances are in place, movie theaters and live sports events face an easier recovery. But a majority of respondents would return to all of these activities within three months after credible assurances are made.”
(Last, 2020)

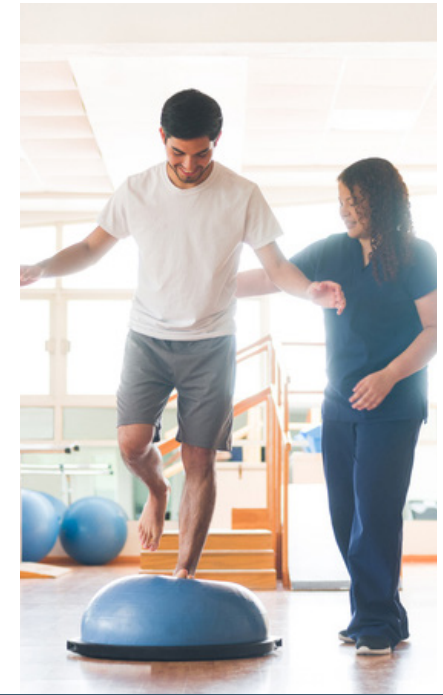
The federal government has unveiled Guidelines for Opening Up America Again, a three-phased approach based on the advice of public health experts (The Whitehouse, 2020). These steps will help state and local officials when reopening their economies, getting people back to work, and continuing to protect American lives. Here's a rundown of the phases and what businesses can do in terms of marketing in each once the specified criteria are met.



Phase 0

Stay in Touch with Customers

As of late April, we're in what we call *Phase Zero* - the green light to open specified criteria isn't met just yet including fewer flu-like and COVID-19 cases over 14 day period, robust testing in place for healthcare workers and no crisis care patients in hospitals. Businesses should not stop marketing, but the focus needs to be on reengaging their customers with appropriate messaging. While some firms are announcing permanent closures, many have just paused or significantly reduced operations to delivery, e-commerce only or curbside services. Even in shut-down mode, businesses that stay engaged with customers will be the first to see them return to the store when the economy restart begins.



Don't Go Dark

Former Proctor and Gamble CMO and podcast host Jim Stengel advises businesses how to stay strong through a crisis:

"To the extent you can within your business situation, it is time to keep the money going, obviously with a different voice. Pivot and adjust to be relevant now as behavior has really really shifted quickly." (O'Reilly, 2020)

Cost effective marketing tactics to take advantage of right now are social media, email and content marketing. Tell stories about how your business is helping people in need, supporting local charities or going above and beyond to support your employees. Use blog posts coupled with organic and paid social media to reach your customers and increase your base. In an environment of always on COVID-19 news, the appetite for good news and positivity is huge – even from brands and businesses.

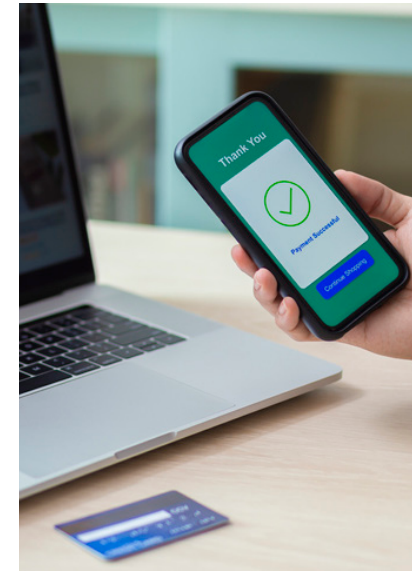


Plan and Prepare for What's Next

Business in the months after shutdown will look different. And customers will want assurances about your store environment. While your physical store may open up again, they may still want curbside pick-up options and online virtual tools that will help them minimize browsing time in-store. **Phase 0 is a time to plan and build out these new services.** It's never too late to investigate adding an e-commerce checkout system to minimize barriers to purchase for more vulnerable customer segments. Check out options available from your point-of-sale (POS) vendor or easy-start services like Shopify.

Opening Up Alabama PHASE 1 For States and Regions that satisfy the gating criteria

As we discuss how to market through the reopening of the economy, it's important to remember that the federal guidelines don't specifically address every type of business and industry. State by state, governors are taking the lead to determine what firms can open and what stages. Whether you're a healthcare practice, a clothing store or a furniture store, you'll need to pay close attention to what's permitted in your state, county and city going forward.





HOW WE WORK

- Continue to **ENCOURAGE TELEWORK**, whenever possible and feasible with business operations.
- If possible, **RETURN TO WORK IN PHASES**.
- Close **COMMON AREAS** where personnel are likely to congregate and interact or enforce strict social distancing protocols.
- Minimize **NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL** and adhere to CDC guideline regarding isolation following travel.
- Strongly consider **SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS** for personnel who are members of a **VULNERABLE POPULATION**.



HOW CONSUMERS CAN DO BUSINESSES WITH US



HEALTHCARE - ELECTIVE SURGERIES

can resume, as clinically appropriate, on an outpatient basis at facilities that adhere to CMS guidelines.



SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE

Closed



ENTERTAINMENT - LARGE VENUES

movie theaters, sporting venues - can operate under strict physical distancing protocols.



CHURCHES

can operate under strict physical distancing protocols.



WELLNESS - GYMS

can open if they adhere to strict physical distancing and sanitation protocols.



VISITING SENIOR LIVING FACILITIES & HOSPITALS

should be prohibited. Those who do interact with residents and patients must adhere to strict protocols regarding hygiene.



RESTAURANTS

can operate under strict physical distancing protocols.



BARS

should remain closed.

HOW OUR MARKETING SHOULD SHIFT

As restrictions start to ease, you should ramp up your marketing as well. Don't default back to pre-pandemic messaging though. Strategize with your marketing experts to understand what your customers need right now and what will motivate and engage them now. Digital display and content marketing distributed through social media will keep your brand in front of consumers. **NOTE:** as of this writing, we're unclear whether larger retailers like furniture stores, malls and big-box retailers will be included in the "large venue" category.

- Are your doors open to the public at this phase? Let them know on social, your website, digital display and email. Update your business listings page to show new open hours.
- Showcase what you are doing differently to keep customers safe - curbside, e-commerce, cleaning policies and limitations on store capacity. Will you have shopping times reserved for at-risk segments?
- Make the buying experience as virtual as possible with short videos and product demos on social and your website
- Earning the trust of your customers will be the most important factor to getting them back to your restaurant, medical practice, church or gym.
- Keep marketing messaging more about your brand than aggressive calls-to-action.
- Offer Relief For Those Affected - Discounts and special financing offers for those who were significantly financially impacted by the pandemic can stimulate increased sales while helping out those in need.



PHASE 2

For States and Regions with no evidence of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a second time



HOW WE WORK

- All previous guidelines remain in force **EXCEPT** Travel restrictions are removed

HOW CONSUMERS CAN DO BUSINESSES WITH US



HEALTHCARE - ELECTIVE SURGERIES

continue with same guidelines as Phase 1



SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE

can reopen



CHURCHES

can operate under moderate physical distancing protocols



WELLNESS - GYMS

GYMS can remain open with same guidelines as Phase 1



ENTERTAINMENT - LARGE VENUES

movie theaters, sporting venues - can operate under strict physical distancing protocols.



RESTAURANTS

can operate under moderate physical distancing protocols.



BARS

may operate with diminished standing-room occupancy, where applicable and appropriate.



VISITING SENIOR LIVING FACILITIES & HOSPITALS

Those who do interact with residents and patients must adhere to strict protocols regarding hygiene.

HOW OUR MARKETING SHOULD SHIFT

Phase 2 recommendations don't offer many changes on their face. But as time passes and COVID-19 doesn't rebound, consumers will regain confidence and venture out more than before. Customer safety will still be a priority, but customers could feel more comfortable with larger crowds. Leverage email and social media to distribute your blogs, videos, product demos and expert advice while continuing brand awareness tactics.



First make it a priority to reinforce what it's doing to keep your space clean and safe for those who enter. If you were closed under Phase 1, prioritize "reopening" messages. Some consumers have pent-up demand and will be ready to shop and spend again on non-essential products, so don't hold back on marketing.

Stronger calls-to-action should be tested. Sales and discounts will be needed to pull in buyers on the fence about whether to start spending again on non-essentials. Continue to offer special programs, financing and discounts to furloughed and displaced workers. Stay plugged in and partnered with local charities. Customers will gravitate to businesses that are helping their communities get back on their feet.



PHASE 3

For States and Regions with no evidence of a rebound and that satisfy the gating criteria a third time



HOW WE WORK

Resume **UNRESTRICTED STAFFING** of worksites.

HOW CONSUMERS CAN DO BUSINESSES WITH US



VISITING SENIOR LIVING FACILITIES & HOSPITALS

should be prohibited. Those who do interact with residents and patients must adhere to strict protocols regarding hygiene.



ALL OTHERS

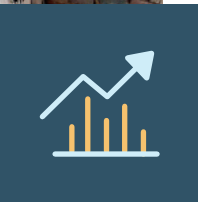
Resume operations with limited physical distancing protocols and standard sanitation protocols.

HOW OUR MARKETING SHOULD SHIFT

Staying Safe - show the public you're still focused on keeping them safe with the appropriate sanitation and physical distancing protocols. If your industry was at a complete halt due to COVID-19, you should implement the plan you made during Phase Zero.

Back to New Normal? - The economy may never return to a pre-corona virus normal, and that's ok. Firms have to stay close to their customers monitoring what they want and how they prefer to shop. Businesses need to do more than advertise sales and push products. Through social media, blogs, email and sponsored content, they need to go deeper with product demonstrations, how-to videos, and interactive content. Inviting and sharing customer generated content is a part of that too. Customers will gravitate to stores that create community around their brands and listen to their clients.

Thoughts on Stimulus Checks - Many who received stimulus checks needed them to offset job losses and wage reductions. But some families may be in a position to use those checks to help others. If your business has an appropriate service or product, you could offer buy one/give one special offers and partner with community organizations to help families in need. This promotion could work for restaurants, shoes, apparel, or even services.



The Road Ahead

The global pandemic has changed our economy in ways that we won't discover for some time. We can predict the recovery won't be sudden and will be faster in some areas than others even within our state. To be successful, our marketing strategy has to be adjusted based on a number of factors – but the most important will be consumer sentiment. Comparing attitudes in September 2001 and July 2009 to today, “there is more consumer hesitancy now about returning to [normal] activities.” Media Post writes.

“But the silver lining is the willingness of a majority of customers to return to airplanes, hotels, casinos, theme parks, cruises, movie theaters, and sporting events once multiple conditions have been met.” (Last, 2020)

A MDRG COVID-19 Behavior Tracker from the April 21st also stated, “consumers are cautiously optimistic about a return to normalcy” (MDRG, 2020).



Alabama Media Group is here to help you in this time of need. We'll work with you to create the right plan for your businesses at every stage of the pandemic. **Tap into our experts now.** Consultations are no-strings-attached and absolutely free of charge. While we're dreaming of a time when we can be back with you face-to-face, in the interim we're available through **live streams, Zoom meetings and conference calls.** Alabama Media Group is a digitally focused news and information company. As both a digital marketing agency and a publisher, we drive daily conversations and engage millions through stories that are crafted to inform, entertain, or inspire, stories that connect our communities to the world around them.



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