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Article 27: Preparing your business for an outstanding holiday season

Getting ahead

As we head to the final sprint for the year, this is an ideal time to reflect on the epic journey that has led to this point. It has been a devastating year in many respects, exposing gaps and vulnerabilities in most businesses caught unaware and unprepared for the chaos that COVID-19 would bring. However, in many instances the pandemic has created opportunities for businesses to pivot, adopt digital practices, transform into new markets and implement more effective ways of working.

The year-end holiday season is usually the busiest time of the year for most Western Cape and South African businesses, and this year should be no different. To a large extent, consumers buying behaviour has evolved to more confident levels of engaging and shopping online (globally). In fact, it is estimated that at least 66% of customers are planning to shop *more* during the coming festive season and many start their shopping as early as October or November.

If you have not yet started your business holiday preparation, now is the time to begin. There is a natural 'buzz' in the air, people are starting to feel joyful for their holidays and thinking about the festivities ahead.

10 simple steps to put into action

There are some key steps to consider when preparing your business for the holiday season. While some of these may need to be adapted to suit your business, the intention remains – to increase sales of your products or services. Start by creating a checklist of these steps to help map your business holiday plan, stay organized and ensure that you achieve the goals set out.

1. Allow reflection time. This is a unique opportunity to reflect on the last holiday season, the year that was (so far) and the business goals for the remainder of the year i.e. revenue, market share or social media following etc. Ideally include your staff/team – they will provide invaluable feedback and help to generate some innovative ideas. Arguably they are the 'face' of the business and know your customers best.

Conduct a thorough analysis of any data and market insights you have to provide clarity on what your business should do to generate and support more sales. How is your brand going to serve and add value to customers during the holiday season? What are customers looking for during this time? Perhaps you need to extend your product range or produce products/services relevant to the season. The impact of the lockdown restrictions requires innovation to meet the demand of customers in a competitive space.

2. Order supplies and inventory. Work out what office supplies and inventory are required and order well in advance. Some suppliers have last order dates, so ensure your business has what it needs to achieve its goals. If you have a physical store, decorate the space appropriately – enough for it to feel inviting and cheerful for customers but not too much that it clutters the aisles or hides the merchandise.

3. Create a holiday schedule. Decide on the business operating hours, extended hours and closure days during this time. You and your staff no doubt need a break, so agree on the days of leave, any staff rotation and consider hiring temporary staff if required. Just ensure you onboard and train any temporary staff properly, otherwise your brand and revenue could be negatively impacted by poor performance.

4. Update business website. If you have a website, review the page design, content and product catalogues. Add images and content relevant to the holiday season. Start planning when special deals, festive season pricing or new products/services need to be posted on your website and add this to the checklist. Ensure you include keywords that make your website and content suitable for search engine optimization (SEO). Customers will be doing more browsing during this time and you want them to find your business and product easily, ahead of the competition. Remember to add the new or extended operating hours and contact information.

Your business website should be mobile compatible as around 80% of customers use their mobile devices to browse and shop online. Check that everything is working, i.e. the links on each page, the payment process/portal and that larger volumes of visitors can be handled - fix any glitches well in advance.

5. Plan targeted marketing and communication. Customers are the lifeline of your business so consider how best to reach and attract them to buy. Put your customers' needs at the heart of everything you do and find creative ways to boost your brand awareness. There are many options available such as social media posts, paid advertising, emailers, specific campaigns or even printed collateral (flyers/posters). The key is to ensure any messaging is tactful, clear and concise, appealing to your market and their needs or wants. Be culturally sensitive in your messaging while supporting the holiday spirit, and remember to show appreciation through well wishes and personalized notes.

Think about the incentives you can offer customers such as sales, discounts, free shipping, free gift wrapping, special deals, free recipes, holiday competitions or holiday tips etc. Think outside the box and ensure your business is ready and able to deliver what is promised.

Here are some other creative marketing ideas <https://www.kabbage.com/resource-center/grow/25-holiday-promotion-ideas/>. For great information on how to market your business online, review some of the #GoDigital webinars on this topic: [Digital Marketing](#) and [Google My Business & Google Ads](#).

6. Review budget. Review and prepare the budget required over the period, including remuneration for staff working extra hours, any staff bonuses, payment of advanced supplies and inventory etc. Be clear of the goals and targets for the business and monitor them consistently – you may need to include an *ad hoc* product special or other incentives to help achieve these targets as the season progresses. Ensure all business accounting and administration matters are up to date before the 'crazy' season arrives.

7. Update risk plan. Always plan for the unexpected and have a back-up plan to ensure your customers and business goals are not negatively impacted. For example, staff absenteeism, load-shedding, website downtime or the regression of lockdown levels.

8. Plan staff appreciation. This is the perfect time to appreciate your staff and motivate them for the period ahead. If a physical year end event or financial incentive is not possible, consider offering a 'free' day or two off or half day for personal shopping, or perhaps additional staff discounts on your business products. If you are not able to think of something suitable then ask your staff, they will provide ideas that are of value to them.

9. Take control. Consider integrating a 'dashboard' into your finance and other approaches. Our #GoDigital webinar provides a guide to adding this functionality, allowing a rapid view of the health of your business - <https://youtu.be/Y7g8-KRhA48>.

10. Reward yourself. Don't forget to look after #1 and allow yourself some downtime. You, your family, your business and your customers all rely on your performance. Consider factoring in a break during this time, and possibly take advantage of the great tourism benefits that the Western Cape has to offer.

Additional resources

There are many powerful articles in this series that may assist you even further in areas such as digital marketing, customer relationship management, selling online, using digital productivity tools and many others – click here to find out more about them <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/site-page/godigital-articles>.

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