



Navigating your retail business through COVID-19

A guide to help retailers and brands
adapt in a dynamic environment

As communities around the world respond to concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, we know that this time presents unique challenges for retailers of all sizes and the people that they assist. With many physical shops shut, retailers are faced with tough decisions – closing their shops, fluctuating supply chains, protecting employees – all while ensuring that public health is the cornerstone of these decisions. At the same time, digital commerce has become a lifeline for retailers and [we see](#) millions of people carrying out product-related searches on Google every day. We know that many retailers have the items that people need in stock, but are less discoverable online.

Connecting people with information is what Google does best, and in my time here I've been focused on how we can create an ecosystem where consumers can find the products that they need from anywhere, regardless of whether they're sold at their local hardware shop or on their favourite brand's website or app. That mission has never been more important than it is today.






No one has all the answers, but through the tools, new product solutions and strategic insights that we've brought together in this guide, we're here to help, no matter what's next.



Bill Ready

President, Commerce, Google

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Using consumer insights to guide your approach



COVID-19 has changed life as we know it – and as we do everything that we can to keep each other safe, our routines have fundamentally shifted. The necessary measures taken to manage the pandemic have disrupted the global economy and altered consumers' expectations, habits and purchasing behaviour. Here are three high-level consumer behaviours that we've seen, based on how people are interacting with technology.

1. Consumers are using multiple devices to go online at unprecedented levels

Connecting with the world online is more important than ever at the moment, with at-home media consumption increasing dramatically and permeating all aspects of life.



The UK's coronavirus lockdown has roughly **doubled** the UK's internet usage during the day, according to Virgin Media.



Consumers across the globe are downloading and spending **20%** more time using apps than they did a year ago, according to App Annie¹



2. People are searching for information and content to meet essential needs

With retailers adapting to delivery or online models, people are looking for clear, specific information about where, how and when they can get what they need.

↑ 100%

Searches for **curbside pickup** and **home delivery** have grown by **70%** and **over 100%**, respectively over the week ending March 28th March²

↑ 56%

of UK consumers searched online for what's open near them³



3. Consumers are adjusting their routines to be Internet-first

As routines and schedules change to meet the demands of isolation and new realities, so have online habits.



In the UK, e-commerce usage has increased **70%** as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak⁴



Searches for **“groceries delivery slots”** have grown globally by over **300%** from the week of April 4 to the week of April 11⁵

As we work with retailers around the globe, we know that you are making changes to adapt to these new realities. While no one can predict exactly how things will develop, we're here to support you. This guide should help you prioritise recommendations to help manage your shop front as needs evolve, evaluate and adjust your marketing, and help your customers in new ways.



Managing your shop front as needs evolve



Be current and transparent

In a rapidly changing environment, your customers are looking for real-time updates on how your business is doing – especially when it comes to your shops and product availability.

56% of UK consumers searched online for what's open near them.⁶

Update your business information

- ✓ Use a [COVID-19 post](#) in Google My Business to share timely information, such as safety precautions that you're taking to prepare packages, inventory updates and how you're keeping employees safe
- ✓ Edit your [Business Profile](#) to provide the latest information or manage your shop's [temporary closure status](#)
- ✓ If you have 10+ locations, you can make shop edits [in bulk](#)
- ✓ Manage your [delivery options](#) to show whether your shop offers click & collect, delivery or collection
- ✓ Indicate whether your shop offers 'click & collect', 'collection' or 'in-store shopping' through your [Google My Business attributes](#)

Managing your shop front as needs evolve

People are trying to get the things that they need – Searches for “in stock” have grown globally by over 70% from the week of March 28th to April 4th.⁷

Keep your inventory up to date



Use **feed uploads** and **automatic item updates** to keep your online product data fresh. For in-store items, use **incremental feeds** in your local inventory ads



Use **feed rules** to make quick updates, such as product availability in your **primary feed** or shop closures in your **local inventory feeds**



If items are running low, set a **purchase_quantity_limit [purchase_quantity_limit]** or mark them as **'out of stock'** for online items. For in-store items, mark them as **'limited availability'** or **'out of stock'**



Make sure that your **dispatch** and **delivery information** is accurate



Find additional resources for small businesses to help get your retail business through this challenging time

Consider flexible delivery options

As consumers show more interest in safer shopping methods like home delivery, collection and click & collect, consider trying contactless shopping options and letting your customers know.



Searches for '**home delivery**' have grown globally by over **100%** from the week of March 21st to the week of March 28th⁸



Searches for '**curbside pickup**' have grown globally by **70%** from the week of March 21st to the week of March 28th⁹

Optimise your e-commerce experience

With hundreds of millions of shopping searches on Google each day, it's crucial that retailers are connected to the customers searching for their products. Once customers are on your site, offering simple, easy-to-navigate web experiences will help them to find the information that they're looking for and improve their shopping experiences.



Optimise your site for **mobile** and **test** your mobile site speed



Evaluate and improve your digital shopping experience with **Grow My Store**



Promote your app across Google with **App campaigns**

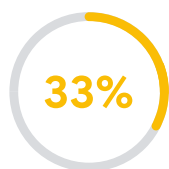


Evaluating and adjusting your marketing



Find the insights that are relevant to your business

Today's rapid market changes and abundance of data can make it hard to know which insights you should use to inform your marketing strategies. These tools can help you cut through the noise and identify how your customers' shopping behaviours and needs are changing.



About a third of Brits expect to spend more on having meals out than they did before lockdown according to YouGov¹⁰

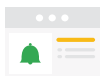
Understand demand in real time



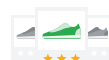
Google Trends provides access to real-time search requests across Search, YouTube, Shopping and Images to understand changing consumer behaviour



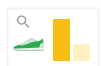
Retail category reporting lets you know what your customers are searching for across your Search and Shopping campaigns



Google Alerts lets you set up custom alerts for topics that you're interested in to help stay informed



The **best sellers report** helps you identify the most popular brands and products used in Shopping ads



The **rising retail categories tool on Think with Google** surfaces the fastest rising retail categories in Google Search



Auction insights for Search and Shopping indicates whether dynamics within your auctions have changed



Price benchmarks for Shopping ads show you how other merchants are pricing the products that you sell

Evaluating and adjusting your marketing

As you identify how demand is changing in real time, focus your inventory and marketing strategies on the products that your customers need today. You can [add products](#) directly in Merchant Centre.



With salons closed, searches for **'nail kits'** and **'hair dye'** have grown by over **100%** and **60%**, respectively from the week of March 21st to the week of March 28th¹¹



Depending on your marketing strategy, audience insights can help you focus on critical audiences to achieve your marketing goals or expand to new audiences for greater reach or increased conversions.

Understand your existing customers and find new customers



Audience reports in Google Analytics can give you a deep dive into who has visited your website, including their interests and behaviours



Find My Audience helps you understand who your most valuable customers are on YouTube so that you can reach similar audiences with relevant messages



Audience insights can help you find new customers by revealing valuable insights about the people in your remarketing lists



Reach planner can help you find audiences and understand the reach of your video campaigns

Adjust your marketing campaigns

As your business responds to quickly changing markets, flexibility in your marketing approach is key. Update your marketing campaigns so that your approach is aligned with the new climate.

- ✓ Use **location exclusions** to exclude your ads in regions where you can't operate, such as areas where your supply chain is disrupted or conversion rates are impacted
- ✓ Enable **ad scheduling** to control when your ads appear and adjust bids accordingly
- ✓ For products that are affected by supply and demand issues, consider **pausing ad groups or ads**
- ✓ Set **content exclusions** and **placement exclusions** to limit where your ads appear to remain sensitive to customer concerns

Optimise your marketing campaigns using real-time signals

Under changing conditions like these, using [automated bidding](#) can help you quickly adjust your marketing to the current situation, even if you were previously bidding for shop visits. Implement automated bidding like [Maximum conversion value](#), [Target CPA](#), [Target ROAS](#) and [Smart Shopping Campaigns](#) to make real-time bid adjustments to meet consumer behaviour. Monitor your [optimisation score and recommendations](#), which reflect new ways to improve campaign performance based on shifting demands and market changes.

Review performance metrics and be willing to pivot



Use [Performance Planner](#) to reallocate budget to the most efficient campaigns and optimise your bids and budgets to capture new opportunities



Implement [shared budgets](#) to automatically allocate budgets to campaigns that are performing better



Apply [RLSA](#), [Customer Match](#) and [similar audiences](#) with [Smart Bidding](#) to identify and optimise bidding for your most profitable audiences

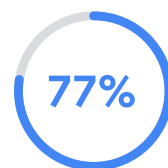
Helping your customers in new ways



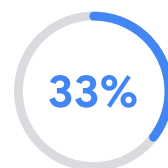
Let customer needs guide your response as you adapt

In these changing times, being flexible with cancellations, refunds and customer service can go a long way towards building customer trust. [Turn on messaging](#) in the Google My Business app and extend your customer service phone hours to be there for your customers when they need your support.

Above all, remember that your customers' lives are changing rapidly, too. Many retailers have changed how they operate in order to sustain business and help customers in new ways.



of consumers say that brands should talk about how they are helpful now¹²



Over one in three have started using a new brand because of the innovative or compassionate way that they have responded to the pandemic¹³

Adjust your creative and media campaigns for context and tone

As the situation evolves, continue to reassess the context and tone of your marketing messages. Conduct a creative review of your ads and landing pages to gauge whether the language and imagery are appropriate. Make sure that you're sensitive to how certain words could make your audience feel, especially those with double meanings like 'protection', 'check-up', 'prevention' and 'virus'. For international campaigns, be aware of local terms that have been used to reference COVID-19 and regional disruptions.



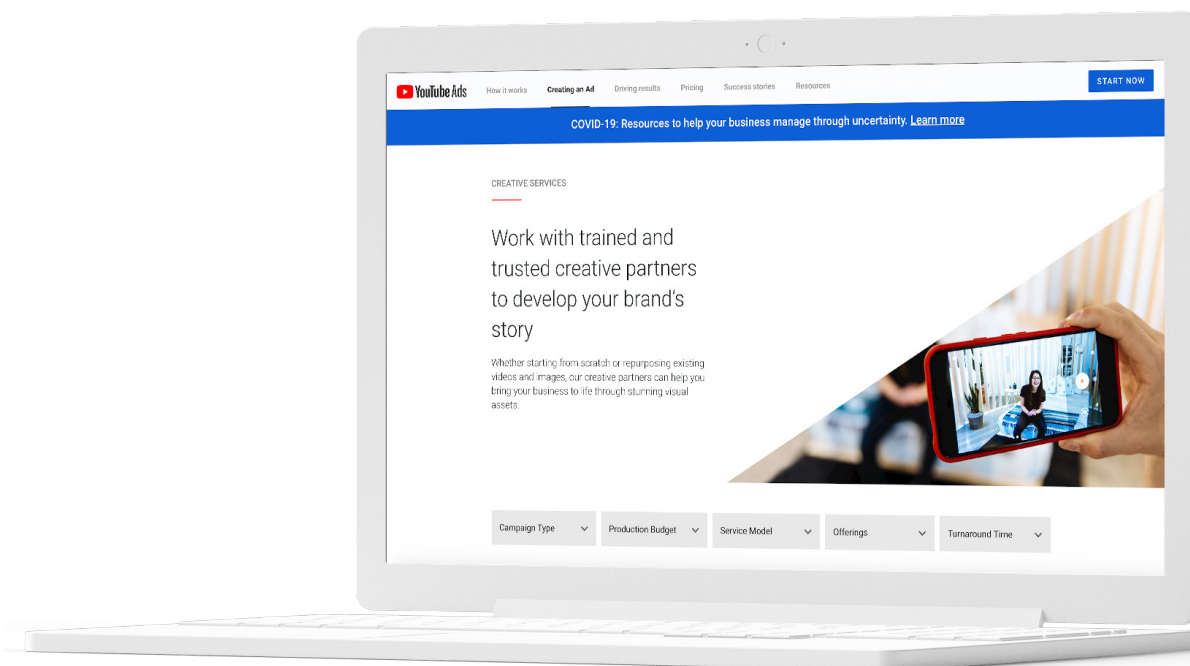
Consider incorporating the five principles that we've been using to guide our media into your marketing plan

Helping your customers in new ways

With an increasing number of consumers staying at home, YouTube is filling a vital role in entertaining and educating people. If it makes sense for your marketing strategy at the moment, consider creating video content to reconnect with your customers.

Create video content from home

For help with re-editing existing footage, developing fresh animation from scratch, or product shots from afar, take a look at our creative partners on [YouTube's creative directory](#). You may be surprised by what you can create from your laptop in a few short minutes with a few [creative best practices](#).



See examples of [brands responding to coronavirus](#) on YouTube

Preparing for what's next



Communicate business updates and shop reopening

As you prepare for shops to reopen, continue to be transparent and communicate with your employees and customers. Create a [COVID-19 post](#) in Google My Business to let your customers know that you're responding to local conditions and government guidelines.

If you have multiple shop locations, you may be considering a phased approach to reopening. In Google My Business, you can [reopen a location](#) or multiple locations with the [Google My Business API](#). You may want to consider reactivating your paused [Local campaigns](#) and [updating your ads](#) with updated business hours.

Adapt to lasting consumer behaviours

When we look at past crises, the businesses that weathered uncertain times stayed in contact with their customers, acted fast and invested in preparing for recovery. According to a Deloitte study on the 2001 and 2008 recessions, e-commerce grew during both periods and continued to grow in their aftermath.¹⁴ In China, the 2003 SARS outbreak led to the birth of some of China's largest online retailers. Even as shops begin to reopen, online shopping will likely keep growing.

Planning for recovery will require adapting to long-term changes in consumer behaviour. For example, social distancing could accelerate the trend of home as headquarters – which makes it important to stay up to date on the latest consumer trends. While we don't know when the disruptive shifts of this crisis will be resolved, we do know that remaining flexible is the key to staying connected with customers and giving them the support that they need. Only time will tell if certain consumer behaviour shifts are here to stay, but the result will be a lasting increase in the move to digital.



➔ Visit our COVID-19 hubs on Google for Retail and Google for Small Business for the latest tools and resources

Sources

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