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4 Owners Saving Their Business With A Quick Pivot!!

Your Customer Fulfillment system—the way you deliver your product or service to your customers—is an essential part of every business. I talk often with my clients about how their fulfillment system is more than their product or service: It's the promise they make to their customers, the experience they come to expect from you, consistently and reliably.

The pandemic has made it difficult, if not impossible, for many business owners to deliver on that promise as they normally would. But when changes in the external environment affect the habits and needs of your customers, you have to be ready to change, ready to take aggressive, immediate action. You need to pivot, rapidly shift direction, to find new ways to deliver your promise and create a contingency system that not only serves your business in the moment but can become a part of your long-term strategy.

So many businesses have done an amazing job of this: innovating to create a new service or delivery model, exploring different markets and communication plans, meeting their customers where they are. I continue to search the internet to find examples of companies that have taken fast, massive action to save their companies. Below are four examples of companies successfully changing some aspect of their strategic plan to protect revenues and their team during this ever-changing time. Hopefully some of these examples will continue to give you inspiration!



Create a new delivery model: The Music Rooms

When the government ordered businesses to close several weeks ago, Rodney Beggs lost all opportunity to deliver his service. His business, The Music Rooms, is located in the outskirts of Belfast, Northern Ireland, and consists of three small music shops specializing in instrument sales

and music lessons for students of all ages. But with strict community-spread prevention measures in place, Rodney was looking at a 100% loss in revenue if he didn't come up with a quick solution.

Up to this point, all music lessons were delivered face to face by Rodney or his staff, mostly in the shop or in local schools. How could they still achieve their Brand Promise of delivering "a journey to musical heaven" for every student, every lesson, without being in person?

Rodney quickly came up with a solution: live lessons delivered by WhatsApp. While only half of his young clients have laptops, they all have a phone—and they all use WhatsApp. Within the last three weeks, The Music Rooms has managed a complete shift in providing unique and immersive video lessons to students. And while he's lost the revenue from instrument sales, Rodney has only lost 30% of revenue generated by lessons—and he hasn't had to let go of any staff.

In just two weeks, he launched a totally new product, went live and sold lessons. But that's not to say it's been easy. It took creating a new delivery model, setting up the basic technology and communication needed to deliver it, and being in a constant process of troubleshooting. They're literally problem solving all the time. They're getting feedback from

the teachers about the issues ... trying to figure out online ways of sharing sheet music and online ways of developing curriculum. They're trying to figure out how to create a perfect online lesson.

The work that The Music Rooms is doing now to improve this delivery model—developing promotional videos, improving the customer experience, and marketing—has future vision: It's giving Rodney a wider market so he can serve students across the globe.



Exploring alternative markets: Special Occasions

Depending on your product or service, changing your delivery model may not be an option. Such has been the case for event suppliers like Kyle

Tegner at Special Occasions in Corvallis, Oregon, who, after the state required cancellations of public gatherings, lost all his business for the foreseeable future. But he quickly came up with a solution.

When he lost all his primary market customers, he dug deep. He knew that he could rent his tent to things like wineries or construction companies during certain seasons. It was a profitable option that he hadn't truly explored because it wasn't his primary market. He realized that there was an immediate need for hospitals and clinics to have supplies for pop-up facilities to service the influx of patients—so he started to reach out, to connect with a different set of customers and create business channels to keep his business going during this moment. And this approach does more than just support his business in the present.

With the expectation that Kyle's entire primary market might be gone for the next 6–12 months, he knows that they'll have to pivot to their secondary and tertiary markets to keep business running. Having that thought process already going has reinforced the support of his creditors as he navigates changes within his market starts moving to other markets.



Find new sourcing opportunities: Village Beach Market

In mid-March, business at Village Beach Market was running as usual, serving the community in Vero Beach, Florida, like it has since 1951. A fine food and wine shop, Jason Keen's family store specializes in fresh foods, wine and beer, and gourmet products, along with everyday grocery items. But when the coronavirus caused so many food-related businesses to close, including local restaurants, consumers started buying up supplies quickly.

After the first week, they were selling out of everything. His store went up in business by 50–75% within the first week or two. With that quick uptick in demand, Jason couldn't get the food supplies he needed to meet it. That's when he turned to other vendors. With the restaurants in the area closed, Jason started working with their vendors—a different distribution channel than small grocers use—and purchased the inventory that the restaurants could no longer use.

Rather than the meat spoiling because the vendor couldn't take it to the restaurants, they all banded together. And it wasn't just helping the businesses involved, it was helping to save the community and to prevent a lot of waste.

When the chips were down, nothing stood in Jason's way to change. Because of this moment, he's upping his game in the online market. He's offering home deliveries which will now be a permanent part of his business going forward. Jason is doing things now that have been part of his business' long-term strategy, but he's been forced to jump on them sooner than he'd expected—or had been ready for. He has fast-tracked his vision in a way that wouldn't have been possible otherwise.



Change your product or service offering: **First Street Cafe**

Of all business industries, food service has been one of the hardest hit and forced to become innovative during this time. In areas where they've been forced to close for service, many have kept things going through online ordering for pickup and delivery—like First Street Cafe in Benecia, California.

Prior to COVID-19, they were a full-service restaurant in downtown Benicia. They served breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days per week, and also offered catering and a variety of live music, jazz, trivia and comedy. On March 17, when all restaurants closed, Mark and his team—including his wife and daughter—knew they needed to find a way to keep the doors open for his employees—some of whom had been with them for almost 20 years.

Mark and his team started with drop-in service hours, then shifted their delivery model to doing online ordering, takeout and delivery. At that time, they had nothing in place for online ordering. They worked with their POS vendor and support people to get an online ordering system up and running within the first three days. It's now accounting for about 40% for our business.

Aside from the dramatic change in their delivery model, they're changing what products they offer. They're paying close attention to how customers are buying and refining their menu to reflect that. They are removing items that don't sell as well or that require ingredients that they don't use for any other purpose. They hope to continue to refine and reduce the menu to help them control costs, reduce inventory and simplify the operation. And for the first time, First Street Cafe is creating meal packages that customers can order in advance. That way they can plan better, only bring in the necessary supplies at the last minute, reduce inventory and provide customers with choice—along with the customer experience that their customers have come to expect.

I hope you are inspired by how these business owners are pivoting in the face of such immense challenge. I would love to hear your story and share your innovations so that we continue to inspire other small businesses. If you have a story of a small business that is attacking this challenge head on or has pivoted in a remarkable way, please let me know.

Dream Big!!!

Mike