

Blueprint: Reopening Your Business.

As states across the country lift shelter-in-place restrictions, business owners are navigating the tricky task of reopening their operations. There's a blueprint for a safety-first, and solvency-minded, reopening. To do that, businesses must intimately understand workers' and customers' safety concerns; follow state and public health guidelines; and adopt industry-wide best practices, like technology that helps employees keep a social distance.

Follow local and public health authority reopening guidelines.

Businesses should first consult — and then follow — directives from state, local and national public health authorities, like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), for concrete and comprehensive reopening guidelines to avoid legal and liability issues.

Understanding public health authority guidelines is key to averting liability-related reopening issues. “Don't go by TV news reports — those are just short snapshots.” By making sure “you took reasonable steps to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus [to workers and customers],” businesses can help protect themselves from potential lawsuits. **Tap industry specific resources for best practices.** Industry-specific trade associations are also offering tailored, sector-specific guidance — from manufacturing to retail, restaurants and hospitality — with step-by-step tips on tasks like sanitizing spaces and wiping down equipment. The [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) and [The National Safety Council](#) “also have [reopening] playbooks for businesses.

Consider a compliant-minded ‘five-point plan.’

1. Know the state, local, federal and industry-specific reopening guidelines and standards;
2. Develop your own protocols and get them down in writing;
3. Communicate those protocols to customers, employers and vendors through training and signage;
4. Implement those protocols, which often requires physically restructuring your business with features like plexiglass barriers; and
5. Enforce your rules.

Keep on pivoting to meet the needs of the new normal. *One Example:*

With her Washington, D.C.-based gym shuttered, Maddy Watkins pivoted to online classes. She's now pivoting again as the business reopens, to meet the health needs and concerns of workers and gym members. Now operating with reduced occupancy restrictions, “The biggest thing is to recognize that we're not going back to normal,” Watkins said. To that end, she is introducing new protocols whereby gym members must now book classes ahead of time; all coaches will be wearing masks; the gym floor will be marked by “stations” that are six-feet apart; no equipment will be shared; and “the gym will be deep cleaned and sanitized,” Watkins said. The idea is to “build trust with our members.”

Customer and employee communication:

Share safety-first guidelines directly and empathically.

The pandemic's impact on American consumers and workers is varied, “and they have many different opinions” on what safety means. Businesses must balance accommodating employee and consumer preferences without compromising their safety, “as we want to have customers who think like me, and ones who don't — so you have to make sure they feel comfortable in your establishment.” To that end, businesses should “overcommunicate” their safety rules on their websites, before customers ever reach the premises, and reiterate that message when they walk in with kindness. For example: “We ask that you wear a mask because we want to protect you.”