

RETURN TO BUSINESS WORKBOOK



Alameda Chamber of Commerce

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Dear Business Owner,

2020 has tested each of us in different ways. Some industries geared up due to extreme demand for their services, while others were asked to shut down in order to help assist with public safety. If you were one of the latter, you are undoubtedly anxious to begin again.

But our “return to open” requires a lot more preparation than simply flipping the closed sign to open. We are all charged with maintaining public health and safety as we enter our new normal.

This Return to Business “workbook” contains:

- **the help and resources you need in order to safely reopen**
- **the steps that should be taken for future success**
- **information on how to assess your business needs**

It’s likely, even amid openings, that things will never return to pre-COVID times. But that doesn’t mean there isn’t an extraordinary opportunity for success. Business has changed. We spent months working from home. Virtual meetings and social media became our ways to stay connected. This has been uncharted territory for you, your employees, customers and community.

The State of California and the City of Alameda have given careful thought and consideration to the safety of our people and balanced that against the importance of maintaining a strong economy. Additionally, if we want to protect the health and the economic vitality of our region, we must consider and balance the needs of those who depend on our businesses for employment and those who rely on their products and services.

Your opening will set the tone for our future and it must be done by leveraging the most up-to-date information and resources.

As you peruse this workbook, you’ll be prompted to consider the following areas of need:

- **Inventory, supplies, and equipment. You will likely require items you haven’t needed before like masks. You may also need larger quantities of items you’ve used in the past.**
- **Monitoring and implementing feedback from employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders.**

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- *The ripple effect. Some of your key customers and/or suppliers could be struggling. How will that impact business?*
 - *Sanitation and disinfection. How will you ensure your employees and customers remain safe? How will you balance sanitation and one-time use items? How will you train your employees on the new processes?*
 - *Health assessments of your employees. Who will do it and what protocols will you have in place for sick employees?*
 - *Social distancing measures. How will you implement them? What will your employee rotation look like? Who will return to work and who will remain furloughed or working from home?*
 - *Communicating your new protocols. It's essential that you make the public aware of how you are protecting their safety and the safety of your employees, contractors, and vendors. How will you market and advertise your reopening? What online updates and notifications will you be implementing?*
 - *Pivoting. Do you need to change the way you do business to reach your customers or maintain their safety? Will reducing your overhead make your business more sustainable in the long run. For instance, does it make economic sense to return to the way you've always done business or have you discovered a new way to provide goods and services for less, increasing your potential profit?*
 - *Technology. What, if any, enhancements do you need to make to your POS system or other technology you're currently using?*
 - *Application. What have you learned from how you operated during this pandemic? For instance, did you engage your followers in a more genuine and transparent way? How can you leverage that for future success?*

Lastly, we compiled this report using current suggestions, resources, and data from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the US Chamber of Commerce, the State of California, Alameda County and others. It's important to realize that this situation is currently evolving and this workbook should be used as a guideline.

After reopening, it will be necessary for businesses to maintain an agile and flexible outlook to ensure that they are able to flourish in the fluidity of COVID-19 guidance, orders and regulations.

At the time of this writing, these best practices indicate the ideal on reopening. However, this workbook should be used as a beginning point for discussion and implementation.

As always, the Alameda Chamber of Commerce is here for you and we look forward to what we can continue to accomplish as a community. We're about to experience a rebirth and with any "birth" there will be struggles and pain. But together we have the opportunity to change how we do business and redefine a business environment that better suits the employers, employees, and customers.

"To meet our collective responsibility to safeguard our communities and manage this pandemic in the long run, we have to move slowly and incrementally." -Colleen Chawla, Health Care Services Agency Director.



Laying the Groundwork for Reopening

The State of California along with local and county government will likely follow the lead of other states and select a phased opening of businesses. Business owners will need to prepare for these days and it is not too early to begin now.

When will we reopen?

When will depend on the nature of the business. Since this is a fluid target that could be impacted by further virus testing of the population, it's best to sign up for updates on the [City's](#) (which draws from [County](#) information) or [Chamber's website](#).

The city (under the county's guidance) has issued recommendations that will be in effect when businesses open and that's a good place to start when considering what will be required in order to open.

Opening Requirements

When businesses reopen, they will need to plan for:

- Physical distancing for employees and visitors
- Administrative controls to stagger employees' shifts, breaks, and continued teleworking for those who can work remotely
- Training for employees on limiting spread of COVID-19 (temperature and/or symptoms screening, hand washing technique, face covering requirements)
- Disinfection protocols for routine and deep cleaning

The following workbook pages provide detailed steps/courses of discussions.

Reopening Worksheet

This worksheet can be used as a discussion point on how to reopen business. These are suggestions and will not fit every business or may need to be modified for the business. When possible, creative solutions or ideas are provided as illustrations.

Most businesses will need to create plans governing these areas and allocating for the following resources:

Cleanliness and Hygiene

Businesses will be expected to conduct the following safe practices and have:

- ✓ Completed a deep clean of premises in order to reopen.
- ✓ Masked employees.

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- ✓ Hand sanitizer available for employees, customers, vendors, and others who come in contact with the business.
 - ✓ Signs encouraging proper hygiene and any processes that have changed due to these concerns.
 - ✓ Social distance rules and marked spaces to ensure compliance. Remove seats, tape them off, or place them 6 feet apart.
 - ✓ Surfaces often touched by customers covered with table cloths or paper that can be easily removed between guests.
 - ✓ Protocols for cleaning frequently touched items like keypads, menus, pens, card readers, etc. Some of these will disappear completely and be replaced by single-use items as in the case of single serving condiments; while some items will require cleaning between each use like wiping down a card reader. Consider implementing technology that allows for single use or often touched items like encouraging tap card payments or using table tents with QR codes to electronic menus.
 - ✓ Branded masks or hand sanitizer for customers.
 - ✓ Consider plexiglass shields and purchasing thermometers.
 - ✓ Improved ventilation or air purifiers.

Additionally, businesses should consider:

- ✓ Removing items from the business that encourage lingering. Also removing any non-essential materials such as brochure racks or magazines.
- ✓ Discouraging employees from congregating less than 6 feet apart, especially in forward-facing roles.

- ✓ For dressing rooms or other publicly-accessible place, creating a plan on how to clean between each use.
- ✓ Removing mints and gum machines.
- ✓ Creating an aggressive bathroom cleaning schedule.

Alternative Ways to Meet the Needs of Customers

Businesses will not open the first day in the exact same way they opened before the virus. The opening may become a soft one that allows for limited contact with the public. Consider options for:

- ✓ Curbside pick-up.
- ✓ Contactless delivery.
- ✓ Car waiting rooms (asking clients to remain in their cars until their turn).
- ✓ By appointment only services. Speak with customers ahead of their appointments to better understand their needs and save time with them physically in the location.
- ✓ Concierge service. Customers could work with a personal shopper who brings the items they need to the front. This keeps guest interactions with goods to a minimum and helps businesses maintain a more pristine environment.
- ✓ Online appointments. Many businesses are offering consultations online instead of in an office or showroom. These can be conducted over a virtual meeting or through a go-live or meeting room on Facebook.
- ✓ Limited menu or service offerings. Choices were plentiful before the virus. Consider a temporary limitation that will help with better hygiene practice or help save money.

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- ✓ Limiting hours. The increased cleaning requirements, social distancing, fewer customers, and possible employee outages due to the virus may require limiting business hours. Make sure everyone is aware of the change.
 - ✓ Contactless payment. Eliminate the need for signatures whenever possible.
 - ✓ Customer-led payment. Let customers swipe their own credit cards or scan their own merchandise. Some businesses have also gone to a cashless environment to limit the exchange of money.
 - ✓ Increase outdoors. Offer outside services or makeshift carry-out windows. Keep windows or doors open, if possible.

Online Presence and Technology

For businesses waiting to open or for those that want to increase revenue before they are allowed to reach full capacity, consider the following:

- ✓ Planning and implementing ways to reach the business audience online.
- ✓ Providing online resources for the audience. This could include tutorials or different ways to use the product or service.
- ✓ Building an online following on the social media channels that are popular with your target market.
- ✓ Creating flash incentives that drive emotional purchases.
- ✓ Leveraging text/SMS alerts.
- ✓ Using chatbots/messaging for quick answers that won't create phone queues.
- ✓ Update your website with the newest information about openings, delays, changes in the buying experience, etc. Potential customers rely on these things. Communicate these changes to the Alameda Chamber and other business

organizations so that they can update their information on the business listing and/or referral information. Make sure the business' Google listing is up-to-date with hours and offerings.

- ✓ Bring the “cash register” to the client. Some restaurants are implementing card readers at the table to cut down on the number of hands touching the payment.
- ✓ Provide all the information a person needs to do business with you on your website. When potential customers are referred to other sites for reservations or wait times, they are more likely to go elsewhere. Remove the friction from the sales process whenever possible.
- ✓ Share popular types of posts that focus around education, inspiration, and entertainment. Create behind the scenes posts, safety subjects, and employee spotlights. This is an excellent time to build engagement and a personal connection. Be transparent and gracious. Become known as a problem solver. Whenever possible, be transparent about business practices and share struggles (but with a positive light) as people will identify with them.
- ✓ Implement touchless technology. Not all technology is in the form of computers and devices. This may be an ideal time to implement no-touch technology for things like sinks, doors, and/or commodes. The danger behind this virus is likely to continue for some time and these types of items can help keep employees and customers remain safe.
- ✓ Join local Facebook groups. There are several groups for people who live in Alameda. Join them and monitor the conversations. Give input, provide resources, and be helpful. Where appropriate, make suggestions to help other businesses or provide reviews of others.
- ✓ Take online polls or ask opinions of others to ensure the right business track. Online groups and streams are an ideal place to gauge the efficacy of what's been done and to monitor public opinion. While business owners are eager to open, it's important to realize that many consumers are hesitant to patronize

businesses that aren't clearly communicating their safety and hygiene precautions and protocols.

Marketing and Communication Platforms

Customers tend to buy more in frictionless environments. Make it easy for them to get the answers they need and purchases they want.

- ✓ Remember a closed business doesn't mean social media has to go black. Stay in touch with followers and spend time adding to the following by posting valuable content.
- ✓ Create large signage regarding open status and buying options. Many people are driving around as a form of entertainment. Providing easy-to-read signage will draw more customers in.
- ✓ Post your new normal for doing business so customers know what to expect and can appreciate your efforts. Remember, as of this writing, all businesses are required to post a Social Distancing Protocol document on premises. (The health department has made that easy with a form that can be found in the [appendices section here, under Appendix A.](#))
- ✓ Offer specials hours or thank you discounts to in-need populations/demographics and industries such as senior hours to allow them to shop before the store gets crowded or first-responder discounts/savings. Communicate these accordingly.
- ✓ Communicate guest expectations ahead of time. Some people may assume that reopening means business as usual and may be surprised by something like a lack of dressing rooms. Use indoor signage and employees assigned to guest relations to improve guest experience.
- ✓ Use posts to allay fears. Communicate what the business and employees are doing and how it will keep customers safe. Use image quotes from employees expressing the importance behind their actions on behalf of the customers.

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- ✓ Increase content creation and use multiple forms of media to communicate safety processes for customers and employees. These may include newsletters, emails, social media posts, blog posts, video messaging, and others.
 - ✓ Find out what other businesses are doing and decide if it makes sense to create partnerships. The chamber can help put business owners in touch. Source needed items from local vendors, when possible, as they are more likely to be practicing similar precautions.
 - ✓ Create signs that discourage unintentional touching of products. Touching should be saved for buying, not browsing. Encourage potential customers to work with a salesperson to address their needs.
 - ✓ Use teasers and countdowns to build excitement around the reopening.
 - ✓ Post appreciation and thanks for support the business has received.
 - ✓ Tell the business story and that of the employees. This is a powerful way to engage an audience.
 - ✓ Express a feeling of connection and a strong positive outlook on the future. A positive outlook is contagious. People want to be part of a solution.
 - ✓ Play up aspects of the business that fit the current reality. For instance, talk about how the business fits into a healthy lifestyle or how the products help families spend time together.
 - ✓ Contact suppliers/vendors and others who may be wondering about business status. Have conversations about their business, delivery schedules, capacity, etc. It may be necessary to get back on their schedule or supply chain. Advise them on changes to the current business needs.
 - ✓ Consider marketing techniques that may work better now than they have in the past. People are at home and on their electronics. What method works best to reach them? Social media ads? Postcards? Use this time to experiment with cost-effective options.
 - ✓ Monitor return on investment. Pay close attention to the numbers. How have they changed? Make notes as to what seems to alter revenue streams and adjust accordingly. It will be a while before businesses have a good handle on how exactly the virus has changed the face of business.

- ✓ Call loyal customers. A phone call is one of the most personal forms of communication next to in-person meetings, which are not possible at this time.
- ✓ Hosting contests can also be a strong way to re-engage your following. When the business is open, consider posting “flash” sales or offers (good for a very limited time and exclusive to users of those platforms) to social media pages or newsletters. This will give people a reason to sign up and read/open the communications.

Return to Work

With return to business comes a return to work for staff. There is no fixed picture of what that looks like for businesses. Here are some options that may warrant consideration:

- ✓ Keeping employees on the same shift so that the same people work together. This is not the time to get creative with a schedule.
- ✓ Stagger bringing employees back to the office or business. It may be best for some of them to remain at home initially.
- ✓ Continue with an entirely virtual workforce.
- ✓ Bring in employees on a part-time basis or reduce the operating hours or days the business is open.
- ✓ Assign employees to roles that make sense for the current state of business. For instance, you may need more cashiers so there are fewer lines or you may decide to use concierge salespeople to reduce the time in the showroom. Use employees in the way that makes the most sense for their safety and that of your customers.
- ✓ Speak to each employee to find out if there are any medical provisions or precautions that need to be taken to ensure additional safety. For instance, if an employee with a forward-facing role wishes to spend less time with the public, do what you can to accommodate that. Seek assistance from an HR or legal professional to better understand your legal obligations and [privacy protections](#).

Employee Education and Protocols

For non-healthcare businesses, employees will likely require training in best hygienic practices. These may include:

- ✓ Proper wearing and removal of masks and gloves.
- ✓ Optimal handwashing techniques.
- ✓ Protocols for calling out.
- ✓ Health checks prior to working.
- ✓ Best practices for wiping down surfaces/cleaning and disinfecting in the workplace.
- ✓ Keeping hands away from mouth, ears, and nose.
- ✓ Instruction to minimize touching and touchpoints.
- ✓ Education on symptoms so employees can monitor themselves and those they're in close contact with. Establish protocols behind employer notifications of illness. Eliminate penalties that make employees fear calling out.
- ✓ Proper use of disinfectants. Some chemicals, when mixed, can cause problems and health concerns. Make sure employees know what to use and that those items are within easy reach for them at all time.
- ✓ Communicate that safety trumps convenience. For instance, wiping down surfaces between customers is more important than the line that is forming. Additionally, create protocols for lines and customer crowding such as pulling employees from other areas to process orders or split up groups.
- ✓ Physically walk employees through the customer experience. Note physical touchpoints and exchanges. Brainstorm ideas on how to limit those. When creating employee/customer exchange and safety protocols, keep in mind how that will affect the business and flow. How much time does it inject into the process? How should the business adjust to the increased time it takes to disinfect, for instance.
- ✓ Create a protocol for crowd reduction. This plan will need to be adjusted as capacity restrictions change. Make it as easy as possible to follow by ensuring every employee knows the codes and capacity. Decide who will limit the number

of shoppers or guests. Make sure that person feels comfortable with the role of enforcer.

- ✓ Stagger employee breaks and discourage congregating or “going to lunch together” unless they remain 6 feet apart.

SWO(T) Analysis

This is an evolving situation. Prior to opening, businesses should revisit how they *did* business against how they *will do* business. Performing an informal SWO(T) Analysis is a good way to do this.

SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. 2020 has made business owners quite aware of the threat part of the analysis. Instead, concentrate on the SWO part. Look at the business strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities with a creative eye. How can they be leveraged and what opportunities have yet to be explored?

Management should perform the analysis, but employees should be asked for their insights as well. The frontlines could provide a very different perspective.

Then, decide if the following business strategies still serve the business:

1. Are the marketing strategy and channels still relevant?
2. Is the inventory or offerings fitting for the new business landscape? Adjust accordingly.
3. What does the customer need most right now? How can the business adjust to meet those needs and solve the customer’s problems?
4. What organizations, like the chamber, exist that can help amplify the business message and help reach a larger audience?
5. Are there any untapped markets that could serve the business better giving the current situation?
6. Are there funding avenues that haven’t been explored like grants? Keep in touch with the chamber to uncover these opportunities.

7. Is there a component of the business that has the potential for exponential growth right now? Is there one that should be sunsetted, at least temporarily?
8. Does it make sense to move to a virtual environment or alter the way you serve customers in the future like permanently eliminating the dine-in option.
9. When discontinuing a service or aspect of the business, consider the ramifications/impacts to the business. For instance, if dressing rooms are discontinued will the return policy change to accommodate the inability to try things on?

Finally, keep in mind that all business is predicated on people. During this tumultuous time, business owners should be carefully considering the health and well-being of customers, employees, suppliers, and the community at large. An ill-conceived decision can have a ripple effect on all of Alameda.

The choices of business owners will not only affect health and well-being but future revenue and recruitment as well. Customers want to do business with people they know, like, and trust. Business owners who make decisions based solely off of revenue, will likely sacrifice like and trust in customer relationships. This will impact revenue as well as their ability to hire in the future.

Alameda, this first step of reopening is an enormous one. Let's get it right so that we can all thrive in the future.

Resources

The following is a list of resources used to compile the information in this workbook. Since these questions and best practices are constantly evolving, it is highly suggested to review these links periodically.

Health and Government

- [Essential, Outdoor, & Additional Businesses in Alameda County by the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency.](#) Colleen Chawla, Director Public Health Department

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- [Health Officer Orders](#) from Alameda County
 - [Alameda County Health Department](#) (helpful resources, statistics, and templates)
 - [Industry-specific Guidelines and Checklists for Opening](#) from the State of California
 - [Coronavirus-2019](#), State of California (sign up for the GO-Biz newsletter)
 - [Alameda \(City\) COVID information page](#) (sign up for alerts)
 - [Coronavirus: Small Business and Loan Resources](#). Small Business Administration
 - [Small Business Resources](#). Office of Small Business Programs, Department of Justice

Business Best Practices and Resources

- [Alameda Chamber of Commerce](#) (sign up for the newsletter and business alerts)
- [Helping Your Business Through COVID-19](#). Google
- [Resources for Small Business](#). FedEx
- [Coronavirus Business Center](#). Small Business Trends

Human Resources and Legal

- [Coronavirus: Returning to Work FAQs](#)
- [Coronavirus: Guide for Employers](#)