

As a ghost-writer for WooContent, I wrote the below article for Fasthosts.

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How To Prepare Your E-Commerce Business For Covid Times

This year's Covid-19 global pandemic has changed life as we know it. Many businesses have shut down and industries without any previous digital presence have had to move online. We've all made significant adjustments to our lifestyle this year, and this 'new normal' is likely to continue for the unforeseeable future.

Many countries are now going into another round of lockdown in preparation for a second or third wave of the Covid-19 virus. The advent of winter has made it even more ominous. We're left to wonder—what will transpire with the upcoming festive season? November to January is usually celebrated as peak shopping periods across the world with Black Friday sales and Christmas bringing in a large chunk of revenue for retail outlets across the country. What can we expect this year?

As more people are stuck indoors, it looks like good news for the e-commerce industry. As long as you're prepared.

The sudden surge in demand for e-commerce services has transformed the industry dramatically. Let's look at what arrangements you need to consider as an e-commerce business during Covid times.

Service Availability is key

You already know that this year your customers are going to be at home. Your patrons will not be able to (and most likely not want to) push through physical crowds to bag your best deal. What used to be a matter of enticing window shoppers and browsers on the high-street, will now be a case of making sure they've got what they need at home.

The online availability and smooth running of your digital service are vital this year, and with Black Friday right around the corner, time is of the essence. This is your chance [to tool-up](#) and relook at your website capabilities to make sure your e-commerce customers have got everything they need.

Focus on these 4 aspects of your e-commerce business to cope:

Uptime

In today's fast-paced digital landscape a slow-loading website is inexcusable, so you can forget about a website that doesn't even load. You need to invest in the uptime of your website and take its maintenance seriously.

As an e-commerce business, your website is the storefront that every customer will see. It needs to be available at all times and has to work efficiently. Any downtime that your website suffers will have a direct impact on the business it brings in and your reputation. [73% of online users](#) would give up on a slow website and go to a competitor. In today's financial climate, this is not a risk worth taking.

Check the features and functionality of your hosting company to make sure they meet your business's needs. Monitor your website's uptime continuously across different platforms and devices. Online shopping is done across the world and at all hours of the day. Check that users are able to access your site fully from different geographical locations and for every feature. You don't want them to experience downtime during a crucial step like while on the payment gateway.

Performance

Poor website performance will reflect poorly on your e-commerce business. It's not just about speed at this point. You need to do everything you can to keep customers on your website and keep them happy.

Take a look at your bounce rate. Most customers will leave if a page doesn't load fast enough and they won't bother refreshing or browsing a different page on your site. Look hard at your conversion rate as well. Are the CTAs clear enough to get found, and entice a customer to go through with an action? How many steps does it take for the customer to find what they want? All of these factors contribute to the performance of your website.

In the highly competitive e-commerce market, speed and site performance is key. Use high-quality images and text to entice your customer. Focus on a clean and clear site map for easy navigation. Your goal should be to keep the customer on your site, and away from competition, for as long as possible.

Scalability

The future is uncertain, and it's important for your e-commerce venture to be scalable and adaptable. You need to be ready for growth and ready for change. We're anticipating a surge in online demand during Black Friday and the week leading up to Christmas. Your website should be equipped to handle the increased amount of traffic and requests.

This is a time of tough competition between you and the thousands of new brands that have popped up online in the hopes of tapping into the increasing demand in online shopping. Your

database, which is a crucial component of an e-commerce business, should have plenty of room to grow. Look into caching and indexing of common queries to ease the load on your servers. Find out what's trending and look for technology predictions to help scale your website. Use [elastic storage services](#) like cloud servers that offer pay-as-you-go packages that you can upgrade to when required.

Capabilities

To ensure that your e-commerce website stands out from rest you need to incorporate topnotch features and functions to help you stay relevant and competitive. You may sell a great product at fantastic prices, but unless your website is user-friendly and provides customers with the ultimate shopping experience, it will be hard to stay afloat.

Some of the capabilities to consider include:

- **Cross-platform functionality:** [More than 50% of online transactions](#) consist of mobile shopping. Your e-commerce website needs to be responsive and adaptive across all devices. Bonus points if you have your own app.
- **Wish lists:** It's festive season and a peak time for shoppers to browse and exchange gifts. Make sure your wish-list functions are clear and easy to use so customers can bookmark items for later. They are more likely to come back again with easy access to what they like.
- **Search and filter:** These are the basics of an e-commerce website, and you can't mess this up. Rather than wandering through aisles, online customers will be sifting through your extensive web catalogue so make it easy to navigate. Help them sort by price, size, colour, gender, age and popularity depending on your category.

There are plenty more website capabilities to consider such as offering multiple payment options, automatic discount code implementation, social media integration and advanced order management. Use a mix of these that best suit your business' needs and consider partnering with experts when you don't have in-house talent.

Online marketing for the long-term

It's a great time to increase the velocity on your online marketing strategy and think about the future. With more people spending more of their time online, it makes sense to reach your target audience where they are.

Christmas shopping is bound to start much earlier this year in anticipation of delays in shipping. This year has taught customers and businesses alike to prepare well for last-minute changes across all areas of life. More customers are also looking at brands outside their country of residence in a bid to find the best deals available to them online. Cross-border e-commerce brand eShopWorld predicted their average annual sales could rise by 63% through November and December 2020.

This is your chance to stay relevant and stay competitive by focusing on online marketing. Almost [70% of consumers in the UK](#) say that they will be spending the same amount of money as previous years, or more, this Christmas. The business is there, you just need to grab their attention digitally now. Doubling down on your online marketing efforts will help maintain your brand's authenticity and presence in your customer's mind even if they eventually go offline, and will pay off in the long-run.

Here are the key channels to focus on.

Social media

It is a given that everyone, and their cat, have a social media account today. Your e-commerce business needs an engaging and inspiring social media presence to actively entice your target audience.

Post content that is authentic and shareable. It is a busy time for online shopping, and the word-of-mouth marketing that organic posts can bring you is extremely valuable. Customers are going to share what they see, like and love across their social network. Give them what they want using appealing content.

Enhance your social media accounts to include the shopping experience within them. Facebook e-commerce features can be targeted with the CTA you want like 'Book Now', 'Contact Us' and 'Shop Now'. Data shows that 30% of users purchase something they saw on Instagram. Target millennials on Instagram through shoppable posts where you can tag items on a post showcase its price and brand.

The combination of an organic and paid social media strategy is the way forward.

[35% of consumers](#) find new brands to shop from through influencers. Partner with brand ambassadors and invest in influencer marketing early to make the most of their reach when it comes to shopping during the busy period. Collaborate with the right influencer for your market to make sure it's a match. New parents can talk about your home and baby products, tech junkies will sell your gadgets and beauty bloggers will get your makeup to the right hands.

Compelling and genuine brand content on social media will propel you towards a long-term digital strategy for your e-commerce business. Track the ROI any partnership brings you. Keep an eye on your objectives and run different campaigns simultaneously to effectively judge which one is working and which one you can say goodbye to.

Pay-Per-Click Advertising (PPC)

According to Search Engine Land, paid ads on search engines bring in roughly 52% of an e-commerce advertiser's clicks. This is a huge chunk of the online market you don't want to miss. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) ads are the sponsored links that a user sees on their search results

page when they enter a query. Your customer is already actively searching for something. You just need to make sure your ad delivers and results in a click.

Provide as much information as possible using the keywords that your customer is searching with. The more relevant you are, the more likely Google will match your ad to the search query. Use professional images, with clear CTAs to generate interest. Here are our top reasons to use PPC for your e-commerce business:

- You can set your own budget. You won't start paying for your ads until someone clicks on them. That means you will already start seeing results through customer interaction.
- PPC ads are great on mobile. Incorporate high-quality imagery, contact information and links to your website to make the search engine results page enticing (SERP).
- Granular targeting can work wonders for products you want to push. Bid on specific keywords to target those looking for them, and that may go unnoticed on your website.

Video marketing

Research shows that over 70% of video users have got [more traffic to their website](#), increasing the average time spent on their website and more sales. Use videos to:

- **Promote new products** through short, concise and high-quality clips. Talk about what makes the item unique and what benefits customers can get from it. This works for technology like laptops, smartphones and televisions.
- **Teach customers** how to use your item. How-to videos and product tutorials are share-worthy and engaging. Use these for beauty products, hair care and fashion accessories.
- **Show-off your testimonials.** Potential customers are more likely to trust a real face raving about your e-commerce website and shopping experience. Video testimonials are a great way to build trust and stand out from your competitors.
- **Give details about your product.** Online customers are trusting you blindly because they can't touch, feel and physically see your item before they make a purchase. Demonstrate how your product can be used in a real-life situation using real people. This is effective for clothing so customers can see how the garment falls on a person's body and you can provide them with a 360° view of the product.

You're all set

Jobs have been lost and brick-and-mortar outlets have closed down, but 2020 and beyond is looking up as an exciting time for e-commerce. Web professionals, hosting companies and online service providers need to step up their game and stay prepared for what's to come. Online demand is only projected to grow at an alarming rate. [62% of consumers](#) have increased their online shopping after the pandemic with a major fall in foot traffic to physical stores across the UK.

The world has changed and e-commerce is evolving to keep up. Are you?