

Communication tips and guidance if you have to close your business

If you are advised (by your local Health Protection team) to close your business due to an outbreak of COVID-19 you will need to inform a number of different customer groups, including staff and suppliers. How you communicate with your various stakeholders during this time, will have a big influence on the recovery of your business, once you are able to open again.

Here are some tips on communicating your way through your closure to help maintain confidence in your business to protect your reputation and ultimately, your bottom line.

1) Be proactive

The key thing to remember is to have a 'customer first' approach.

Inform your stakeholders straight away. Saying nothing or hearing the news from a 3rd party will damage your reputation and leaves space for people to fill the information gap with their own version of the truth.

Keep them regularly updated. If they don't know what is happening and don't understand what is going on, it will undermine confidence in your business with the potential to seriously impact reputation and trust.

Your staff are your most important stakeholders whether you have one or 100 plus. They are ambassadors for your business in the wider community so make sure they feel informed and confident about the actions being taken to get your business back on its feet.

2) Be honest and open

Be honest and open and show you're in control, by explaining:

- You've had to close
- The actions you are taking to ensure your business remains Covid-secure e.g. the required cleaning after confirmed positive cases,
- Operational changes that may be required when you re-open e.g. enhanced hygiene measures
- Links to the latest government guidance/public health information

Regular communications could also help you gain the attention of potential new customers once you're able to reopen.

3) Be consistent

Ensure all your stakeholders are equally informed. Communicate one consistent story.

4) Communication channels

Continue to use the same channels that you would usually use to communicate with your key stakeholders

It may be email, phone or if you have a website you can direct people there. This is an efficient way to ensure everyone consistently receives the same accurate information. Make sure your messages are prominently displayed on the home page.

Social media is also a great way to keep connected with your customers. Use these channels to drive people to your website for the latest information, as well as positive messages on progress. Photos and video are effective ways to engage your customers.

5) Keep it simple

Ensure your messages are simple, short and easily understood. Avoid jargon, keep to plain English and keep sentences short.

6) Show you care

- **Be empathetic** – your customers/suppliers/stakeholders are all going through the same uncertainty as you are, with worries about their friends/families/communities. Show you're aware of that and you're guided by doing the right thing for them.
- **Be human** - this is an unprecedented time, so any decisions that have been taken are out of necessity. Don't be too corporate but be sincere about how these decisions are making you feel. All of this will lead to better relationships down the line.
- **Be confident** – provide reassurance that you're in control

7) Use the time to listen

Listen to your stakeholders and adapt your messaging accordingly. Invite feedback/ideas on how you could create an even better business.

7 point checklist

- Be proactive
- Be honest and open
- Be consistent
- Communication channels
- Keep it simple
- Show you care
- Listen and respond

Useful web links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reporting-outbreaks-of-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-early-outbreak-management> Early outbreak management

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings> cleaning guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19> Working safely - sector guides