

# RE-OPENING AFTER COVID-19 CLOSURE

# PREPARATION PLAYBOOK 2020



# INTRODUCTION

This workbook has been developed to help you, as an owner or manager, within the hospitality sector to, create a clear road map and action plan for the operational changes required to adhere to the new, 'here to stay' social distancing rules.

As you plan to re-open your business, the safety of your customers and staff should be at the forefront of your mind, directing the changes that you will need to develop, implement and monitor.

After months of closure we are all keen to get back to business, however, do not think that we are going back to business as usual. Innovation within your business is needed now more than ever. We cannot rely on the out of state visitors to fill our rooms, we cannot rely on weddings and conferences to fill our banqueting halls and we need to face the reality that many people will still be cautious about coming into contact with others. While there may be an initial 'bounce back' upon re-opening, the long-term forecast will almost definitely mean reduced business over the short to medium term until consumer confidence returns.

As government guidance, rules and plans change day by day you and your team need to be able to react quickly to maximise your business sales potential while managing costs very closely, to ensure the long-term success of your business. Now is the time to plan – how you will re-open, how you will manage your teams, how you will ensure the financial stability of your business and how to develop new products and services to fill the gaps.

Crisis always forces change. Now is the time to ensure you are proactive in embracing changes that will make your business more sustainable and successful rather than being reactive due to forced change. What changes can you make that will ensure the sustainability of your business? What new software and systems can you make use of to adhere to mandated changes while enhancing your company's customer service?

Above all communication is everything. Communicating well with your teams, communicating well with your customers and communicating with your new customers. People will remember what action you and your team took to look after them after the Covid-19 crisis of 2020.

Podd Consulting is here to support hospitality, tourism and retail businesses with practical guidance, financial planning and staff training. We hope you find this document useful in your preparation for reopening your business in 2020. Don't hesitate to get in contact to understand how we can support you during this difficult time.

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# OBJECTIVES

This is the optimum time to develop a re-opening strategy for your business with your management team and to set out your clear objectives to inform the creation of an action plan to ensure your business re-opens successfully, that you and your team are able to react and adapt quickly and create new ways to do business.





# CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Review all the elements of your CX, your Customer Experience, to help you and your team bounce back into business, ensuring staff and guest safety while focusing on sales growth, cost controls and customer retention.

Tell your loyal customers and your potential customers about the measures you are taking, the services you continue to offer and how their experience may be different, but no less great.





# HYGIENE

Good hygiene and social distancing practices are very now non-negotiable for both your staff and your customers. All staff should be well trained to understand how Covid-19 is spread, what hygiene practices are now to be implemented and adhered to without fail and how the services offered to your customers have changed. Everyone needs to abide by the mandated hygiene practices across the board:

- Social distancing from others to the distance of at least 1-2 metres
- Coughing or sneezing into your elbow or tissue and wash your hands immediately after
- Handwashing every 30 minutes or after handling money or credit cards
- Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose and mouth) always
- Hand sanitisers and wipes to be made available everywhere for the use of guests and staff members
- Wearing branded face masks or shields as per management guidance
- Scheduled sanitising of all shared surfaces every 30 minutes
- Increased cleaning across the board with a deep sanitisation every 10 days
- All physical contact banned (no handshakes, high fives, fist bumps etc.)

We are all now aware of the need for social distancing in all areas of our own lives and our customers will have high expectations from our businesses and our staff.

Make sure that your staff are aware that guests are very sensitive to hygiene and anything that even looks messy will translate to unclean in their minds, so everyone's uniforms, hair, nails, any surfaces guests can see, it all needs to be tidy and spotless, now more than ever.



# COST MANAGEMENT

## Strategic planning

Now is the time to come up with a robust plan for re-opening your business, while considering the financial impact of every decision. Consider several scenarios and the impact on your business; for example opening with reduced services or delaying re-opening until consumer confidence returns. You should assess the financial impact of all potential scenarios to ensure the solvency of your business:

- Cashflow analysis
- Increased marketing spend
- VAT and Tax deferrals
- Phasing out of the Job Retention Scheme
- Redundancy payments
- Repayment of any loans

## People Management

As your business re-opens, you should consider reducing staffing levels to meet with lower sales levels. While no one wishes to consider making valuable members of the team redundant, you may need to consider reducing your workforce until sales return to pre-Covid-19 levels. Do you have the HR support and expertise to help you make these decisions? You should assess your staff costs as a percentage of your projected sales income while considering the future cost of recruitment when business improves.

On returning to work your employees will require additional training in new procedures and policies and how to deliver great customer service in quite different, socially distanced interactions with guests. You should also consider how you can support and ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of your employees. Good, frequent communication is more important than ever, and you should consider starting the process sooner rather than later.

## Cost Management

Good cost management will be key to ensuring your business survival. Close control of costs will ensure you are able to remain solvent, while maintaining good cash flows. Consider the following to help manage costs:

- Reducing menus and food and drinks stocks required
- Communicating within suppliers to agree costs and new payment terms
- Establishing revised budgets by department or cost (staff costs, marketing, food and drink costs, fixed and variable costs)
- Review your relationships with online travel agents and booking platforms to reduce commission or acquisition costs. Now is the time to negotiate

Access to real time data is also particularly important so you can react to changes quickly so a review of reporting processes is also key.



# THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Review your customer journey and decide on how to reduce the actual 'touch points' e.g. can you offer guests self check-in and out? How can you make the process paperless? Can you take full payment for accommodation sales before arrival? What services should you continue to offer and what should you stop providing?



Follow the guest journey in each department and focus on

- Reduced face to face contact and use of paper and menus as much as possible
- Improved technology and digital communication both before, during and after the guests stay

Can you re-deploy staff members throughout the hotel at peak times to be a guide to guests, offering guidance and reassurance while ensuring social distancing rules are adhered to? Think about the flow of people through the property:

- Lifts
  - Bell hop present on ground floor for information and instruction
  - For use by displayed and older guests only
  - Recommend taking the stairs to all where possible
  - Porter to take luggage to room entrance only
- Stairs: create one-way traffic with left and right sides for up and down (e.g. tube escalators)
- Adopt feet stickers on the floor where possible to direct guests
- Toilets: signage encouraging social distancing, queuing with ground stickers and considering having a staff member present at peak times



# CUSTOMER SERVICE

Looking after your customers in a safe and considerate way is the new customer service. Your customers will expect you and your team to abide by social distancing rules and to take extra care to ensure they can enjoy your services feeling confident about hygiene and cleanliness.

You and your team can deliver excellent customer service by communicating effectively with your customers whether in writing, by video or text message, before and after their visit. As face to face contact is reduced, we must find new ways to demonstrate great customer service.

One of the businesses that have been very proactive throughout the crisis is Dunnes Stores. Time and time again Dunnes have been highly praised on social media, with comments commending the management and the team at our local store due to the high standards of hygiene, the new systems and processes introduced early in the crisis and the positive attitude of the staff despite their continued engagement with the public. Dunnes, through great leadership, have demonstrated how to be a market leader and have gained new customers as a result.

## Customer Service in a Minimal Contact World

- Social Distancing – WHO recommends over 1m (2m by UK gov't)
- Screens or face screens so you can still smile and engage with the customer face to face
- Anti-bacterial sprays and wipes available at all entry points into the separate areas of your business
- Providing your teams with branded face screens or masks which can be sourced from one of the many innovative companies that have just recently started to produce
- Managing bookings and sales with minimal paper use
- Contactless payments for purchases up to £45 or pre-payment facilities

Remember the key elements to ensure you continue to deliver exceptional experiences:

- Get the basics right
- Understand and anticipate your guests needs
- It is the attention to detail that counts
- Every (now limited) interaction with your guest is an opportunity
- Go the extra mile where possible
- Don't overpromise – better to overdeliver
- Listen to your guests, ask for feedback and make changes to improve



# MARKETING

## Comms and Marketing

Start planning your sales and marketing activities now! Who are your key target markets? Initially air travel may be slow to reopen, and consumers may still be concerned about non-essential travel in an enclosed space therefore the short term focus should be on the domestic markets with NI, ROI and potentially GB customers travelling by ferry.

Develop your marketing strategy to include the following:

- Fit-for purpose, customer friendly and booking friendly website where your customers can book accommodation, make dinner reservations, make reservations in your bar or contact your team and get an instant response
- Update your website with information on what steps you and your team are taking to ensure their comfort and safety
- Video has arrived. Put videos of your team members on your website, social platforms, and in marketing and pre-stay emails giving your customers information about products and services and communicating how you are now doing business
- Tell your story. People care about the hospitality and tourism sector and want to see businesses survive and thrive
- Showcase your new social distancing adherence and how you seriously care about not only your guests but also your staff
- What are your unique selling points? Tell your potential customers.
- What can your customers enjoy in your local area while socially distancing? Market your local area as well as your property

## Guest Relations

Consumers will be nervous and will need clear, open communication from your company to reassure them that they have made the right decision to book your property. Once they have made a reservation continue to reassure to build trust:

- Pre-stay emails with details about your products and services and your new way of doing things. Consider links to videos on your website
- Ensure prompt responses by telephone, email or live chat to manage any reservation queries quickly. Every enquiry is a potential booking not to be missed
- How can you communicate well with your guests while in-house? Do you offer a live chat facility? Guests will not want to use in-room telephones to communicate with reception
- Appoint a key person on every shift who is the go-to individual to manage any guest concerns about hotel practices or hygiene fails. These individuals will become your in-house experts
- Continue to seek feedback from your customers, review and implement as necessary to improve your business



# EMBRACING DIGITAL

Now is the time to fully embrace digital. There are many providers of innovative and data driven software that will help you and your teams operationally in 2020. You may already use software throughout your business and now is the time to reach out to your providers to understand how you can use the software to its full potential to support you in your business.

Consider the following solutions:

- Revenue management software to ensure you maximise your rate and access the data that you need at your finger tips
- Property management systems to manage all your reservations, customer information and financial data
- Mobile online check in and check out systems
- Pre and post stay email systems
- Live chat systems for in-house guests
- Using guests own mobile to unlock bedroom locks
- In house communication applications
- POS systems upgrades
- Online rota management and timekeeping systems for payroll control
- Software systems for taking pre-payment
- Covid-19 Business Playbooks for a range of business sectors

Podd Consulting can offer advice on platforms, applications and software available in the market to help you do business better at this time.



# RECEPTION

The front of house team provides the first point of contact for guests visiting your hotel. Now more than ever the reception team are key to delivering great customer service, just in a different way.

In line with retail businesses you should consider screens at reception so reception teams can communicate face to face without the risk of closer contact. Your business should consider adopting mobile technology to reduce the guest interactions at reception for the protection of both guests and staff. Consider introducing the following practices:

- Pre-stay emails for all guests with lots of information about what guests can expect
- Pre-payment taken from guests prior to arrival (with full consent and in adherence to all GDPR and credit card management processes)
- Room allocation should be reviewed daily to ensure the rooms are managed effectively to ensure guests are spread out throughout the property as occupancy levels allow
- If all charges during the guests stay will be allocated to their room how will they pay at check out? Can this be done with contactless payments?
- Locate visible signage with details on new procedures to guarantee guest and staff safety
- Install ground stickers with circles/feet to show guests where they should stand when waiting for assistance

What property management system do you have in place at reception? Contact your provider to understand how they can help you to streamline with customer journey? How can they provide expertise or guidance to help you and your team?

As the face to face interactions are reduced, the reception team can focus on effective telephone or online communication with potential guests.



# HOUSEKEEPING

It is imperative to maintain the highest standards of cleanliness and hygiene to minimize the potential spread of Covid-19. It is important to educate all staff on how to clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. Remind them about wearing disposable gloves and surgical masks where required by management. Instruct them on which cleaning solutions they should use and how to do it properly. These can be, for example, diluted bleach solutions or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol. All staff should agree to wash their hands frequently (every 30 minutes) with soap and warm water for at least 20-30 seconds.

Housekeeping staff should be trained in how to do laundry properly. Suggest using the warmest appropriate water setting and they should also wear disposable gloves when handling dirty laundry.

Introduce the following room cleaning procedures to ensure the safety of staff and guests:

- Cleaning checklist to be completed by housekeeping staff servicing each room
- Maintenance check before guest check in to minimise during stay in-room visits
- Remove all magazines, reading materials and guest information from rooms
- No during stay housekeeping services unless the stay is longer than three nights
- If a during stay in-room visit is required the guests should vacate the room and the staff member should wear gloves while in the room, disposing of the gloves and washing their hands immediately afterwards
- Housekeeping should consider provide sealed hospitality packs (i.e. tea, coffee, milk, toiletries)
- Housekeeping staff can be re-deployed to manage ongoing cleaning throughout the property
- Housekeeping should follow a deep clean procedure after each stay

On-going cleaning throughout the property:

- Daily cleaning checklist to ensure no areas are missed
- All entrance and closed doors to be sanitised every 30 minutes
- Where possible doors should remain open to limit people touching to open (keeping in mind fire safety)
- Housekeeping staff should clean the reception area and public toilets every 30 minutes
- Each department should appoint a specific individual to sanitise all surfaces every 30 minutes

Maintenance should also pay attention to the close management of the air-conditioning system. Monitor the condition of air-conditioning filters and the proper functioning of ventilation, air exchange, and dehumidification equipment, as well as maintain the proper replacement rate of indoor air.



# RESTAURANT

Due to social distancing rules you should make sure that your table and chairs are arranged in a way to maximise covers while adhering to distancing rules. The World Health Organisation recommends that there should be no more than 4 people per 10 square metres. Tables should be arranged such that the distance from the back of one chair shall be more than 1 metre apart and guests face each other from a distance of at least 1 metre.

There it is imperative that you utilise every available space at your disposal including meeting rooms, function rooms and outside spaces. There are several solutions available that may help to create comfortable outside dining spaces including awnings, outside heaters, blankets or specially designed pods (particularly effective during poor weather).

It is important that you develop a customer experience that is fitting for your restaurant and the expected standards however the public are aware that service will change to meet the new social distancing and hygiene rules and they have their part to play.

- Where possible every guest must pre-book their table and sign an online declaration that every guest in their party is well and not showing signs of Covid-19
- Send the guest a pre-visit email outlining menus and new procedures
- On arrival to the restaurant they will be shown to their table by the host who will explain the new procedures in place to help the guests to have a safe and enjoyable experience
- All guests will be asked to sanitise their hands upon arrival
- The table should be sanitised just before the guest's arrival and the table should not be set until after the guests are seated
- All menus should be used once and one per person (recyclable paper)
- The guests should order drinks and all courses at the same time to reduce staff visits to the table
- Staff should wear branded face shields (or masks) so they can clear communicate with the guests
- Reaching over guests and touching clothes should be kept to a strict minimum. Encourage the guests to play their part by passing dirty plates and glasses. Staff should wash their hands after delivery and removal of plates/glasses.
- Do not display flowers, marketing materials or any other unnecessary items on the table
- Remember to sanitise the salt and pepper or remove all together
- Only one payment should be taken per table and should be card only and bill receipts should be emailed to the guests email address

Many restaurants have developed a delivery service to help maximise sales potential. Is this a potential income stream for your business? This will require development including online ordering portal, packaging and delivery services.



## BAR

This area of the business needs careful review and may be the part of the business that needs a new system. Depending on the level of business you expect now is the time to consider:

- Maximise your available floor space by utilising outside space as much as possible while adhering to licensing restrictions
- Adhere to social distancing rules by having maximum 4-6 people in any 10m<sup>2</sup> area
- Consider having a host with a branded face screen to meet and greet customers and to explain the new way to enjoy a few drinks in your bar
- Review the ordering process. Consider having customers order at the bar in one area, with social distance queuing, where staff are protected by a Perspex screen and the order is paid for in full by contactless payment (where possible). Drinks are then delivered to the table by another member of staff. Alternatively, could you provide table service for all drinks orders to reduce people walking through the bar?
- Consider introducing a table booking system where guests can book an area for an agreed length of time e.g. a booth or table for a maximum of six people for two hours (according to demand)
- Guests are required to sanitise their hands on entering the bar
- Think about people traffic flow to and from the toilets. How can you ensure people remain socially distanced when walking to and from the toilets and consider how toilets are managed to ensure adequate distancing is ensured?
- Consider how peak times can now be more spread out over the evening or weekend
- If you provide entertainment, ensure that the entertainer is in a safe space behind screens to reduce contact



# BACK OF HOUSE

This crisis has changed how many businesses work and where many sectors can manage employees working from home, the hospitality sector requires people to be present to deliver the products and services. However, where possible, you should consider having support and administration staff work from home to minimise the number of people on-site in behind the scenes. Examples of employees who could work from home include:

- HR
- Marketing
- Revenue
- Finance
- Procurement

Establish your expectations and clear communication with regular video meetings and calls. For operational employees, which will be most of your team, you should consider:

- Timekeeping systems that are non-touch e.g. face scan, phone scan
- Online rotas and rota costing systems
- Limiting paperwork across all departments which will require improved online systems and softwares
- Computers and POS tills and credit card machines - sanitise and wipe down frequently. Consider providing each receptionist/office worker with their own keyboard and mouse or telephone headsets. Don't share pens or other stationary items
- Ensure social distancing of more than 1 metre is always observed
- Consider introducing screens at reception, till points and other areas where staff are facing guests to complete transactions and interactions

You should also plan how staff can work while adhering to social distancing in all back of house areas including:

- Staff canteens
- Stores
- Kitchens



# BUSINESS PLANNING, MARKETING AND TRAINING

Podd Consulting offer expertise in operational management, financial planning, staff development and training, and developing effective sales and marketing plans to maximise revenues. Podd Consulting can provide various services to support your business and your teams including

- Signposting to national and local government financial support mechanisms
- Expertise on utilising software and systems to inform and guide operational activities while providing key data to inform decision making
- Financial planning, forecasting and budget controls for owners and managers
- Training for management teams on how to lead successfully in times of change and transformation to ensure business success
- Customer experience reviews, management and improvements
- Sales and marketing development plans
- Kitchen reviews, social distancing assessments, development of new kitchen procedures and staff training

Don't hesitate to get in contact to discuss how we can support you better.

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This document has been prepared using publicly available information to provide practical guidance to businesses preparing to reopen after quarantined closure in March 2020. All government guidance, rules and laws will supersede any information detailed above. We will not be liable to you in respect of any business losses, including without limitation loss of or damage to profits, income, revenue, use, production, anticipated savings, business, contracts, commercial opportunities or goodwill as a result of any information provided in this playbook.