

# 7 SMART STRATEGIES

## TO BUILD AND ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMER BASE

A bit of background: Consumer behavior is still settling into a new normal as the realities of living with COVID-19 take root. They are engaging in what researchers call “mindful shopping.” Consumers are thinking carefully about where they spend their money, value for the money and taking time to research before they buy, according to data from McKinsey & Company. They need a reason to visit your shop, restaurant or attraction before they leave home. Those changes can be capitalized by pivoting your business practices and using innovative strategies to engage customers. Here are a few proven tactics:

**1 Optimize your website.** Keep it updated since it will often be a first point of contact for potential customers. They’ll land on your site looking for detailed information on what you offer before they decide to visit your physical location. Consumers are not shopping as a pastime or randomly popping into a restaurant. They make up their mind about what they will buy/do before they arrive. More purchases are being made online, too. This is the time to offer online retail sales and to not only talk about what you have, but to show it as well.



**Local success:** As a result of COVID-19 Patina’s, Trinkets and Coyles created online stores. Combined with their social media inspiration (linking to their stores) encourages sales online – but also in store. Allowing people to browse online will increase sales on-line and in the shop. If you don’t have an online store, create albums on social media showing what you have in stock! This tactic does work – with both Dwell and Scotch and Lace selling out of items through social media promotion.

**2 Seize the season.** Make the most of significant events, like back-to-school, and special occasions days like Halloween. Restaurants and food vendors can tap into special days, like National Cheeseburger Day (September 18) or World Bread Day (October 16) to create a reason why customers should make purchases. (A full list to annual food days here.) Offer a pre-order option for any specials you create to help with cash flow and inventory management. Plan for Christmas right now and provide pre-ordering. Create urgency to buy before a pre-set deadline. Likely we will see fewer, in-person impulse purchases done as part of a pre-holiday rush.



**Local success:** Habitual Chocolate, Chocolatea and Coyle’s Country Store sold Easter kits to reach families at home.

**3 Support at-home entertaining.** People will continue to go out less to eat and to socialize with their friends and families. They are more likely to host very small gatherings at home. There’s an opportunity here to support that through having pre-prepared items, like tea party kits, meal kits, or individualized cheese trays, available for pick-up or delivery. Beyond food, businesses can make available kits themed around family games night, crafting, household cleaning/organizing/decluttering, science/history lessons, quick home spruce ups, road trips, etc. Promote your offerings as a potential gift that consumers (including out of town ones) can purchase and send to loved ones in the community.



**Local success:** Six Thirty Nine offered gourmet meal kits for home. The Rose and Daffodil Bakery offers Tea Kits to make entertaining easy. Big D’s Sandwich Shack and Louie’s Pizza and Pasta offered heat and serve family meals.

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**4 Entice customers with the unique and exclusive.** Even though your clients are being strategic about their spending, something truly, unusual, and fun will grab their attention to stop by.



**Local successes:** Habitual Chocolate offered a new ice cream flavour each week – incentive to come back and try the latest creation. Early Bird Coffee has a limited supply of scratch-made desserts. Customers know these can sell out early, which makes the treats even more coveted.

**5 Partner up.** Oxford County has a rich diversity of businesses, many of which may be complimentary to yours. Reach out to fellow owners and create something that you can both benefit from. Sell one another's products and include links to what they offer on your site and on social media to raise the profile of your partnership.

**Local success:** Gunn's Hill Artisan Cheese has started offering Good Bread Company bread made with their cheese.

**6 Make payment easier.** For consumers who have made the decision to buy from you, a complicated, time-consuming payment system kills the buzz. Email bank transfers or having to call someone with their credit card information is a turnoff for customers. Have credit card payment and tap debit options available. COVID-19 is accelerating a decade-long shift away from transactions done with cash, according to the Bank of Canada.



**Local success:** Patina's has created an online shop. The shop allows them to reach locals for browsing, pick-up or customers from further away for online purchases.

**7 Highlight your localness.** Consumers aren't as willing to travel very far to shop. Data from research firm Leger shows that many shoppers are seeking out local businesses more than ever before and sometimes for the very first time. Brag about your roots, ties to Oxford County, your commitment to the community, and how you support other businesses in the area. Don't be shy about flaunting your street cred. Consumers want to hear about it.



**Local success:** Upper Thames Brewing celebrates the different local products you will find in their beer. From local coffee, Hops to chocolate.

**Tourism Oxford**

*Our rural roots are showing*

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For detailed information about safety protocols for businesses, refer to  
Southwest Public Health Workplaces & Employers Resources:  
<https://www.swpublichealth.ca/WorkplacesCOVID19>



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