



Discussion Purpose

Provide an opportunity for members of the Edgewater business community and residents to share ideas and strategies for moving forward together through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion Topics

- How have you creatively pivoted your core business or business model to:
 - Adjust to new operating realities
 - Take advantage of changed market conditions
 - Respond to new/emerging customer needs
 - Remain viable
- Have you engaged your customers to understand what they want to see from your business during this time? If so, how? What have you learned?
- How/What are you communicating differently to customers?
- As a customer/consumer, what are your biggest concerns and how would you like to see businesses address them?

Ways Businesses Have Pivoted

- Creating Virtual Offerings:
 - A preschool is now offering video lessons for their students.
 - Several businesses have started taking online reservations to shop in store or participate in in-store activities. The intention is to reduce wait times while enabling social distancing and adhering to occupancy requirements.
 - Several businesses that used to do in-store tastings created a virtual tasting option. They schedule a time, ask customers to pre-purchase the item(s) (wine,

- beer, food) and then meet online at a specific time for a presentation and to socialize with other patrons.
- A craft studio has shifted to online art classes using found objects and materials participants are likely to already have at home.
 - An art studio has created packages that patrons can order or pick up to provide them with the materials they need for virtual classes (restaurants or cooking schools could do the same).
 - A dance studio is offering virtual lessons and plans to continue after re-opening. Doing so will continue to address its expanded non-local market/audience and supplement reduced income due to the limitations on in-person class size.
 - An academy that offers special programming at preschool and elementary schools has created more e-learning materials and direct-to-student programs. They are also re-imagining their summer camp options.
 - Web designers, graphic artists and video production professionals expressed that they are busier than ever helping other businesses shift online and to virtual offerings.
 - Performers are working with their traditional venues to reimagine how they continue to share their craft with audiences through online performances that use new techniques. Those looking for inspiration may find it in what others are doing, including TV shows like “The Voice” as well as late night talk shows.
 - Local schools have created virtual plays with each child doing his/her part in costume in their home with pre-recordings of musical numbers. Teachers are also planning virtual recitals with musicians at home connected by listening to each other’s tracks to pace their parts, then combining all into a single recording. Many are encouraging families to watch together in their own homes and share reactions via chat.
 - One museum is offering online educational courses/sessions, another is offering online chats and attracting a global audience.
 - Several theaters are working with playwrights and authors to allow them to re-release their productions via video.
- Reimagining Physical Space/Activities:
 - A gym has moved equipment into the parking lot and is now offering small group classes outdoors.
 - A museum is thinking about using anti-microbial materials and doing special cleaning to continue to allow for handling of interactive displays and portable exhibits.
 - Many businesses are adding signage to comply with local requirements and to help customers understand new protocols.
 - Some businesses are considering temperature checks, health questionnaires, and signing of waivers before allowing patrons (and employees) to participate in order to mitigate their concerns about possible liability.
 - A refuse collection business has shifted operations to address a decrease in usage of its services by businesses, a need for more service at residences, and an increased focus on recycling.

- Shifting Short-term Focus to Non-Revenue Generating Activities:
 - A bar is taking this time to complete renovations that would have required closing during normal operations.
 - Businesses/organizations not able to reopen immediately, have been focusing on remaining relevant and keeping customers engaged through social media, free concerts/performances, sharing information via email, etc.
 - Solopreneurs have shifted networking to online - both one-on-one calls/coffees and group networking events; they are also meeting with clients in open-air spaces such as parks when they need to meet in person.
 - A dance studio's instructors created a kickstart to raise funds to pay the rent during their closure. In exchange, they offered the community free online lessons and the promise of continuing to be there for the community whenever they can reopen.
 - A museum is using available staff time to improve online archives and make them more easily accessible.
 - Some businesses, or their employees, have organized virtual happy hours to allow staff members to socialize outside of the workday as they normally would in-person.

- Exploring New Ways to Connect with Customers:
 - Many businesses have seen, and been intentional about, increasing activity in their social media channels.
 - Some businesses have done demonstrations or behind-the-scenes videos to build customer loyalty and their brand.
 - Several business owners who opened in earlier phases have said that customers have appreciated their efforts to inform and educate about precautions they are taking as well as about what is expected of the customer when they come in to the facility (advanced emails with instructions, clear directions posted on the door, signage throughout the space).
 - Some owners expressed, and appreciated, a dramatic increase in the volume of correspondence from their customers and contacts to check-in, stay in touch, and provide encouragement.
 - Some felt that it is harder to stand out right now via email and have turned to more printed flyers, posters, etc. distributed locally. There is a feeling that this helps connect them to the neighborhood and create a stronger sense of community.

What Consumers Say They Want

- Patrons of salons and spas expressed the expectation that proper protections would be in place to keep them safe, including appropriate PPE.
- Universally, consumers said they wanted to feel safe and protected.
- Many wanted to know that they could count on businesses to enforce the expectation of wearing a mask in their establishments and provide someone to facilitate this.
- Most wanted to ensure appropriate social distancing when they patronize businesses.
- At this point many said they would not be comfortable dining inside restaurants.
- Parents are thinking about how they will engage their children during the summer with school out and fewer options for camps, sports and other structured activities. The need to continue social distancing and the impact that may have on playdates and unstructured play may create opportunities for some businesses.
- Several discussed the distinction between “permission to open” given by governmental authorities and the “willingness to participate” required of individual consumers. They feel the later will require trust and reassurance from businesses.
- Overall, consumers seem to feel that businesses are taking the right steps to protect them and doing the right things to help them feel more comfortable.

Thank You
for sharing your terrific ideas during these sessions!

Should you need additional assistance as you consider how to pivot and plan for long term business success now or in the future, please feel free to reach out to Stephanie at: SKusibab@EssentiamStrategy.com

or

Sign up for a complimentary 45-minute strategy session through July 30th at: <https://calendly.com/essentiam/strategy-consult>