

COVID-19 Survival Guide For Refugee Businesses

Ahmad Sufian Bayram
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spark



The purpose of this guide is to provide easy-to-apply knowledge for startups and SMEs rather than to provide an analysis of their status quo under the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of this document is to assist startups to survive and overcome this crisis. The information and data used in this report have been collected from sources that are thought to be trustworthy. However, there are no explicit guarantees concerning their application or accuracy. Neither the author nor the contributors to this work are to be held responsible for any inaccuracies of the information in this work or their interpretations. No products or services are mentioned in this report as a form of sponsorship or preference of the author nor it is for advertisement. The views expressed here are subject to change without further notice as the pandemic is expanding rapidly and the information may become outdated within a short period of time.

Design by Joud Tanta

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Ali H. Abukumail

Senior Private Sector Specialist at The World Bank

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The COVID-19 crisis shocks are compounded to affect the supply and demand sides of the business, followed by great uncertainty of future market dynamics.

Startups and SMEs are the most vulnerable, and expectedly the vast majority of them are most affected. The first challenge startups and SMEs are facing is to cope with the crisis or in different words to “keep the lights on,” and extend their runway through cutting unnecessary costs, renegotiating contracts, and investing in digital transformation.

The second challenge is to fit with the new market dynamics post COVID-19 outbreak through tweaking their business models, when feasible. Newmarket dynamics will certainly bring us more virtual activities, higher acceptance for home-based work, and fewer ties to physical working or meeting places.

We can safely assume more uptake for digital payments, e-commerce, eGov, and online delivery activities from this point onward. The new market dynamics will likely provide a window of opportunity in the short term (12-18 months) to provide health, hygiene, and wellness products; and a greater appetite to access regional supply chains for timeliness.

Startups and SMEs should leverage all support opportunities possible today to maintain their operation and gradually re-connect to markets.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of 2020, COVID-19 has been ripping through countries around the world, throwing health systems and economies of all sizes and potential into an unprecedented crisis. With strict movement protocols and stay-at-home orders in place around the world, businesses have been forced to close, flights canceled, and financial markets are in a tailspin.

COVID-19 is not a one-off challenge. We should expect additional phases to the current epidemic and additional epidemics in the future. Researches outlined the effectiveness of organizational responses to dynamic crises indicates that there is one variable that is most predictive of eventual success –preparation and preemption. Preparing for the next phase of the current crisis now is likely to be much more effective than an ad hoc, reactive response when the crisis actually hits.

Prepare for a changed world.

We should expect that the COVID-19 crisis will change our businesses and society in unprecedented and important ways. It is likely to reinvigorate areas like online shopping, online education, and trigger public health investments, for example. It is also likely to change how companies configure their supply chains and reinforce the trend away from reliance on a few megafactories. When the urgent part of the crisis has been navigated, companies should consider what this crisis changes and what they've learned so they can reflect them in their plans.

This guide is intended to provide business leaders with a perspective on the evolving situation and implications for their companies based on the level of the impact that the business had.

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to help you brainstorm and think outside the box as you tackle the crisis that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. To maximize your benefit from this guide, we recommend the following steps:

1) Determine your level of impact:

This is the degree to which the pandemic has affected your business. The levels vary for everyone, and so do the responses. Therefore, this should be the first step in your thinking process. We have prepared examples for each level and strategies that we recommend.

2) Analyze your current strategy:

Before you decide on what to do next, sort out what you are doing now. Having a clear idea of your current strategies for team management, marketing, and finances will save you time and help you avoid applying strategies that may not be in your favor.

3) Understand then apply:

Understanding the significance of each chapter is recommended before learning how to use the tools and strategies related to it. Reflecting on this new understanding and your current situation in terms of each chapter will help you choose the most effective strategy and the tools to achieve it.

4) Use your intuition:

While this guide is structured based on levels, your business may fall into one of the levels or in between two of them. You know your business best and if a strategy that is not explicitly targeted at your impact level seems like a good fit, give it a thought. This is a guide, not a rulebook.

Impact Levels

In this section, we define and explore three stages of impact that the COVID-19 pandemic created for businesses. Each stage has its own unique characteristics and strategies that we will expand on later, and it is important for you to assess the level of impact that your business is enduring to choose the best strategies and practices to mitigate the risks associated with it.

Level 1: Floating Impact

- Business operations are still running
- Small changes in number of customers
- Revenue is slightly impacted
- Business is not much in risk in the near future

Level 2: Medium Impact

- Business operations are still running, albeit with fluctuations
- Major changes in the number of customers
- Revenue stream is disrupted
- Business future may be at risk if you do not act quickly

Level 3: Disruptive Impact

- Business operations are disrupted
- Customer base is rapidly declining
- Profit streams is now negative
- The future carries large risks for the business

Action Items Per Levels

Now that you have determined the impact level on your business, it is time to start thinking about the strategies you can incorporate to mitigate the risks associated with the level of impact. The strategies are divided into three sections: strengthening your team and operations, which helps you navigate your team with the use of technology; improving your marketing position, which helps you reach customers through the internet; and defense against revenue declines, which helps you optimize your spendings and financial projections. We conclude with case studies, using startups that utilized some of these strategies and modification of the business model to learn from them.

Strategies	Level 1: Floating Impact	Level 2: Medium Impact	Level 3: Disruptive Impact
Strengthening Your Team And Operation	Manage Your Team Shifts	Carefully think about your employees	Manage Your Operation Online
Improve Your Marketing Position	Establish Your Online Presence	Rely on Social Media	Go All-In With Digital Marketing
Defend Against Revenue Declines	Shift Spending To Optimize The Current Demand	Implement Aggressive Financial Spending Cut	Consider New Alternatives And Support

Strengthening your team and operation

Your employees thrive when they trust your leadership, and they trust it when they are assured that leadership cares about each individual and its community. Here are some tips to help you manage your team in the changing workplace landscape:

1) Communicate clearly

When considering ways that can reduce spending to avoid a situation where layoffs will be required, communicate your clear strategy for the foreseen future with your employees to foster a culture of comfort in your new workspace. For example, when cuts are needed, consider cutting a percent of all salaries instead of dismissing employees and make sure to broadcast the reasons behind this to the whole organization.

2) Foster a safe working space

It is your responsibility as a manager to keep your employees safe. This means two things: First, complying with government regulations even if it's not easy, and second, making sure that employees feel comfortable. Consider implementing "Red" and "Blue" teams: Split core functions into teams that go to work every other day. This way, if someone gets sick on the "red team," the "blue team" can still function while the other is quarantined. Assure your employees that their workspace is continuously sanitized and build their health awareness.

3) Transition to remote work

Consider moving to remote work as it gives your team the flexibility to work during lockdown and enables you to reduce costs. Remote work will be saving you money on office rent, utilities bill, and other direct and indirect office running costs. This does not end in-person meetings — many remote teams have an offsite for the whole team once a year, but the cost per person is usually much lower.

Companies should build a cross-functional collaborative team culture that leverages virtual environments. Make sure that all team members are connected and familiar with online tools, and get an expert view on the reliability of the business remote working capabilities. To help you with this, we have prepared you a list of the most common remote working tools to save you time and make the transition smoother.



Khaled ElAhmad

Baaz marketing director and author of **Shusmo**

“

At the age of COVID-19 startups need to rethink their strategy. Some started offering theirs for free in an effort to expand their reach and show solidarity. Also going live to educate their followers about their field of work You might not get calls but you will spread awareness about your brand to new territory.

”

Top Tools For Remote Work

Remote work is not possible without the technology. Many businesses now rely on remote work to get things done. Luckily, there are many software tools available for use. There are also thousands of tools that are created for teams with different specializations: applications that allow UX designers to create wireframes to roadmapping tools for product managers, trackers that are specifically created for engineers, and lots more. Here are some software suggestions.



Drive & Dropbox: Online storage for files. Allow you to work with many members of the same files online/offline



Slack: Easy team communication tool that can create channels for teams or topics for group discussion.



Zoom, Skype and Meet: Free video conferencing tools to virtually meet clients and other staff members



Xero: Online accounting software that can easily produce reports and forecasts.



Trello: Project management app that allows for collaboration and assignment of tasks to different team members.



Monday.com: helps you manage your team's workload and improve communication among the members



G Suite: A group of cloud-based collaboration software that can aid with a wide range of operations.



Hubspot: Customer Relationship Management platform for marketing, sales, and customer service.

Useful links about remote working and tools:

[Settings for good use of Zoom screen sharing](#)

[How to use Slack to work remotely](#)

[Trello remote work guide](#)

Manage Remote Work

Transitioning your company to all-remote overnight means a communication whirlpool will inevitably be created where employees used to rely on in-person forms of communication. Use the following hierarchy to organize and prioritize communication:

- **Email:** Non-urgent, long-form communication. Best when multiple stakeholders are involved and there are action items. Expected response time - 72 hours
- **Slack:** Non-urgent questions, virtual watercooler. Best for quick questions or informal chat. Do not leave to-do items in Slack. Expected response time - as needed
- **WhatsApp (async voice):** Urgent, voice communication. Best for complex communication between fewer than 4 people. Expected response time - 24 hours
- **Unplanned phone call:** Extremely urgent - get up from any meeting you are in. Expected response time - immediate, ASAP

Working Hours

Share working hours and respect them as much as humanly possible. We all have different schedules and it's critical when working from home to have a divide between work life and personal life. As a manager, you should always check yourself on what you believe to be urgent before interfering with someone's off-hours. Keep in mind that this is incredibly challenging when working with remote global teams.

Good habits for good remote workers:

Security before everything:

Use Multiple Factor Authentication, and set hard passwords

Sticking to Your 'Normal' Schedule

Sticking to your normal schedule, as if you were going to the office, can keep your work days in order

Be responsible

and trustworthy, stay committed to your team and the mission

How to write a perfect email to help you get what you want

The ability to communicate effectively is one of the most important skills anyone can have, especially in a world that is working remotely. No matter what you're asking or your position is, your ability to communicate effectively is what guarantees getting the response that you seek. We outline the most important factors that effective communication requires, with emphasis on email etiquette.

The subject is key

Your email's subject is the most important part of your message — your recipient will decide to open your email or ignore it based on the subject. Therefore, writing a subject can be more challenging than writing the email itself. The best subjects offer value or entice curiosity. Here are some examples:

- *Have you met them before?* I enjoyed meeting you at [event name] last week
- *Do they know about the topic?* [Person] has referred you to discuss [topic]
- *Do you have a common background/interest/experience?* Do you have some time for a [University name] graduate?
- *Mention one of their accomplishments!* Your article about [topic] has inspired me

The main message

It should be brief (around 250 words) and direct. It should also include a call to action. People nowadays are busy with all the things they have to do, and especially those important people you are trying to reach.

Remember the recipient's share of benefit

If you were to ask something from someone, you should make sure that this will benefit them and add value to their work too. This value may not be direct, but it should be related to their life orientations in general. For example, if you know that I value supporting entrepreneurs, you should probably emphasize that by helping you, the added value to my work is that I will get a chance to help the youth or aspiring entrepreneurs.

Do you really need them?

The first question that you should consider when you email someone is "Do I need their help? Can I do it alone? Is there someone who can help me better?" From a recipient's point of view, one of the most annoying things is receiving a message that includes a question a quick Google search or Quora would have answered.

Make offering their help an easy task

No need for repetition; people are busy. Asking for something that will take a lot of their time is not a good idea. Make it easy for them by adding an easy-to-copy message they can use to connect you with someone, for example.

Following up

Following up is an indicator that you are after something important and that you truly need the recipient's support. I personally notice those who emailed me one time with no reply then followed up. However, be careful not to spam! Give them a few days before you send a follow-up message (and make sure the person you are trying to contact is not travelling at the moment). When done right, your authenticity will show and you will catch your recipient's attention.

Improve your marketing position

People are turning to social media apps to keep them entertained, connected, and informed while they're spending more time at home. Facebook saw a 70% increase in the usage of all of its apps in the month of March, and a similar case is observed over other social media platforms. This only goes to show the importance of leveraging social media platforms and especially during these times.

The amount you spend on online endeavors varies by industry, business size, and how much you want to grow your business. Depending on your business model, you could spend half of your marketing budget on offline methods (print ads, brochures, telemarketing) and another half online (search marketing, display ads, mobile). The more online oriented your business is (or will be), the more you should consider increasing your online spending.

Each company can decide on how heavy they want to invest in Digital Marketing based on their need, our recommendations are as below:

	Level 1: Establish Your Online Presence	Level 2: Rely on Social Media	Level 3: Go All-In With Digital Marketing
Marketing Budget	Focus on high engagement channels	Only necessary	Free growth hacks
Market Messaging	Expand your customer base	Increase customer positive engagement	Focus on sales and deals
Marketing KPIs main focus	Product awareness	Reactions analysis and engagements rate	Conversion rate

Look at your audience with new perspectives

Now that your team is ready to leverage the power of remote work and online tools, it is time to optimize the ways in which you target your customers and communicate with them.

The methods you use to communicate with your customers depend on your business type, your customers' online behaviors, and the message you want to communicate to them.

Prioritize your customer segments

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the ways your customers spend on and prioritize their needs. It is a good idea to reconsider who are your customers, what do they want, their willingness to use your product or service, and how these factors have changed recently. Keep in mind that some customer segments will postpone using your product or service while other segments will completely stop. Some new segments might emerge as well. Your job is to be aware of the changes in your customer base.

Be precise in targeting your segments

While everyone is online now, not all your customers are using the same platforms. Depending on age, gender, interests, and other factors, your customers will be distributed on many platforms. Just like geographical distribution, understanding your customers' digital distribution will help guide your online marketing efforts.

Improve your customer handling abilities

Whether you have used salespeople or WhatsApp customer services before the pandemic, there are adjustments that you need to make. If your customer service channels used to be in the form of salespeople, you should think about digital channels that you will use instead. If your channels used to be digital, you should expect more traffic and ways of handling it.

Once you've amassed all the information needed, you will create your audience personas to reach a better audience targeting.

Online Marketing Plans for each business type

Micro Businesses

A micro business is a business that operates in a small market on a small scale with very few employees.

Your customer base is small in size and your customers are loyal. Now that they are online, you can employ the following techniques to reach them:

- Use Whatsapp broadcasts
- Promote your business on Facebook groups
- Build a customer referral program

Store Businesses

Traditional companies that rely on physical inventory and operations such as grocery stores and apparel. Some marketing plans may includes:

- Promoting your business on customer review sites
- Using social media to connect with target customers.
- Use social media ads to target customers in your geographic area
- Keep your customers satisfied and harness referral marketing

Online Businesses

Online businesses and startups conduct their activities online and can use digital marketing to spread the word about their offerings, stay connected with customers, and keep traffic

Your customer base is not defined by size, but you will be competing to gain your current and prospective customers' attention. Here are some ideas to help you:

- Creating a blog
- Launch a newsletter
- Use growth hacking techniques *A group of techniques focused on massive growth in a short period of time*

1. Facebook

It goes without saying that social media is one of the most valuable marketing tools out there. And it's free you need to focus on those most suitable to your business. Facebook is a viable option for almost all businesses.. Post regular updates – be engaging and exciting, don't be too promotional, and be genuinely interesting.

You can also use Facebook group to build a base for your product and engage with your customer. You can create your own group or search for exciting ones. Many groups have memberships that range from 1,000 to 100,000, but some get even bigger. Keep in mind that most group moderators will remove overly spammy posts and people. The trick to marketing in Facebook Groups is sharing valuable content (which is why a blog is helpful for your website).

2. Instagram

A popular contender among social media platforms, Instagram has an ever-increasing user base. If your business would benefit from a visual presence, then make sure you are dedicating time to building a strong Instagram account. Remember that it's a visual platform, so carefully curated content that looks amazing is key. Canva.com is a free platform allows you to easily design images.

3. Email marketing

You've got the data, now you need to do something useful with it. Start by setting up a free account with Mailchimp, and start distributing those emails. Avoid being overly promotional and always offer something genuinely useful to the recipients. Keep the emails regular but never bombard, otherwise people will hit unsubscribe quicker than you can say 'digital marketing'.

4. Online videos.

Reach new audiences by posting videos on video-sharing sites. The best videos tend to be short (less than three minutes) and have an offer, such as a free copy of a report or a product discount, to motivate viewers to take action. MobileDemand is one of many small businesses with a YouTube channel to help spread company news and information.

5. Build your network on LinkedIn

If your business is a B2B company, be sure to have a strong presence on LinkedIn. It's also a great place for building your network. The same rules apply to LinkedIn as other social platforms – engage with relevant people and offer genuine insight.

6. Referrals Marketing

Referral marketing is the method of promoting products or services to new customers through referrals, usually word of mouth. Such referrals often happen spontaneously but businesses can influence this through appropriate strategies.

7. Contribute to forums, blogs, and discussions

Part of marketing your business online is to establish yourself as a reliable industry expert by taking the time to contribute to relevant forums, blogs, and social media discussions. Offer genuinely helpful insight and answer questions that are being asked. People will appreciate your input and, with any luck, will convert into a customer.

8. Live streaming

is an exceptional way to bring authenticity to your brand. Showcase events that are happening during the day or any cool clips of your business



Dania Ismail

Director of Strategy and Business Development, Telfaz11 & Jusoor Co-Founder

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Make sure you have a mobile and online offering for your service/product and move to provide that immediately even if the technology is not 100% perfect. Reaching consumers right now is more important, figuring out the kinks in real-time is part of the process.

Keep an eye on post-crisis market opportunities and try not to build your entire offering on a response strategy but also have a long term strategy in place to roll out when the window opens up. Have growth plans, but be realistic about achieving them when the environment is better suited for "new" ventures.

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Top Online Marketing Tools

Understanding the usefulness of online marketing is important, but translating this knowledge into benefits for your business requires some work. To help you with this, we have prepared a list of online marketing that can help you set your online marketing strategy, create content for it, track your results, and interpret them in a meaningful way that ensures you are communicating the right message to your customers.



Hootsuite : A social media scheduling tool that saves you time and helps you automate your social media strategy



Canva: An easy to use graphic design tool that can be used to design posters and social media content



Followerwonk: A social media analytics tool that helps you segment your followers and optimize your strategy



Crazy Egg: An advanced website analytics tool that creates heat maps for your website clicks



KISSmetrics: An online analytics and customer engagement tool that helps you quantify which tools are working and what are not



Customer.io: An automation tool that allows you to automate email, SMS, and push notifications



Google Analytics: A free website analytics tool that helps you track website traffic and your website visitors' behaviors



Mailchimp: An email marketing tool that allows you to send promotional emails and newsletters to predefined customer segments

Useful links for more online marketing tools:

[10 Online Marketing Tools You Need When Starting a Business](#)

[17 Marketing Software Apps Used by Today's Top Marketers](#)

[23 Marketing Automation Tools You Need to Use](#)

Track your results

Online marketing makes it easy to measure marketing performance to optimize and enhance the involvement and enables you to see what works, what doesn't work, and to make the necessary adjustments to drive business results. Take advantage of this by closely monitoring the response to your marketing programs. Increase your investment in the programs that work well and revise components of programs that aren't working as well as you would like to see how your program improves.

There are main areas your social media KPIs should focus on based on your type of business:

<p>E-commerce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conversion rate <i>The percentage of website visitors that convert into customers</i> ● Purchases per month ● Average shopping cart size ● Customer acquisition cost <i>The cost of convincing a prospect customer to buy a product or service</i> ● Revenue per customer ● Top keywords driving traffic 	<p>Two Sided Market</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buyers and sales growth ● Inventory growth ● Search engine traffic <i>The number of people reaching your website through search engines</i> ● Conversion funnels <i>The prospect customer's journey through the website that results in conversion</i> ● Keyword ranking changes ● Pricing ● Average session duration
<p>Mobile App</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of downloads ● Frequency of use ● Percentage of active users ● Percentage of paid customers ● Average sessions per user ● Virality 	<p>Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Customer churn rate <i>The percentage of customers who stop using your product or service</i> ● Ad inventory <i>The space you can sell to an advertiser</i> ● Click-through Rate <i>The percentage of ad viewers who click on the ad</i> ● Advertisement conversion rate <i>The percentage of ad viewers who become customers</i>

Social media tracking template

[Click here to get your template](#)



Photo by [Sara Kurfeß](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Bringing it together: your marketing message

After you've considered the changes to your customer base and decided on which value communication channels to use and the tools to optimize it, it is the time to craft your overall marketing message that you want conveyed through your strategy. Here is a summary of big marketing headlines that can give your marketing strategy direction given the new information that you have:

Increase customer positive engagement

If you are transitioning fully or partially to online marketing, it is important to keep your current customers satisfied and engaged. Depending on your business type, your marketing message to your customers should convey trust, safety, and demonstrate understanding of their changing needs.

Expand your customer base

Along with keeping your current customers engaged, you should leverage the power of online media to acquire new customers. Referral marketing does a great job at this, conveying the message of trust, utility, and fulfilling needs that are left with no service or new needs that emerged as a result of the pandemic.

Sales and deal focus

As your customers are becoming more conscious of their health and start to prioritize essential products and services, you should use sales and deals to ensure you keep adding values to their lives even if they do not prioritize it. It is important to communicate your added value clearly and convey a message of social responsibility and understanding of the situation.



Valentina Primo

Founder & CEO, Startups Without Borders



Revisit your brand story and utilize content to create experiences. Do not avoid talking about the pandemic in your messages, but quite the opposite. Focus on philosophy and brand culture. This is the moment to take a stand, build loyalty, and remain top of mind.



Defend against revenue decline

Given the importance of cash flow in times like this, companies should immediately develop a treasury plan for cash management as part of their overall business risk and continuity plans. To achieve this, companies should reduce their burn rate and increase cash flow to become cash positive.

The following strategy provides you with actions that can be taken to support you in this. It is divided into actionable guidelines that fit each of the three impact levels. The guidelines build on each other, meaning that applying an advanced step usually requires the application of most or all the steps before it. However, it is important to note that these guidelines are far from strict and are not set in stone. If your assessment of your business suggests that a strategy from another risk level is necessary, it would be a good idea to take it into consideration.

	Level 1: Shift Spending To Optimize The Current Demand	Level 2: Implement Aggressive Financial Spending Cut	Level 3: Consider New Alternatives And Support
Update Your Financial Projections	Check your projections if they are still valid	Re-evaluate your projections	Build a new plan based on the new reality
Remove Non-Essential Expenses	Think twice before paying any non-essential payment	Reconsider all non-essential costs	Immediately stop all non-essential expenses
Seek Partnership And Collaboration	Look for partnership when possible	Set a new partnership and collaboration plan	Put all efforts on your alliances
Consider Your Financing Options	Consider some cash flow tactics strategies	Introduce some tactics to support your cash flow	Urgently implement new aggressive tactics
Look For New Options To Generate Revenue	Set a up your plan that you can implement if needed	Inject some approach to generate income	Consider all your no-traditional options
Seek Out Government & Organizations Help	Create a list of all currently options	Start contact and conversation with available programs	Hunt all available opportunities

Update Your Financial Projections

The best way to navigate the stressful situation and ensure a successful financial future is to reassess your current finances and plan properly. You should not assume that financial plans you previously had are available or will continue to represent one-size-fits-all strategies. This is the time to look at your financial planning situation with a fresh set of eyes and re-evaluate what you're doing in all aspects of financial planning. Given the magnitude of the pandemic's economic impact, the action steps you take now could reverberate for decades on your financial planning.

Remove Non-Essential Expenses

One of the fastest ways to reduce costs immediately is to support your positive balance by focusing on your fixed expenses. For example, suspend all your travel plans, impose hiring freezes, and place restrictions on any non-essential activities and anything that is not needed to generate income.

Seek Partnership And Collaboration

When possible, you should look for options to explore new collaboration with your company that can help you reduce your expenses. This can include finding trustworthy partners in the supply chain who is willing to reduce the cost and take royalty percentage. Also, you can partner with other SMEs to ship your product together and reduce the delivery cost.

Consider Your Financing Options.

Companies much consider new tactics to generate faster cash flow from its clients. Aggressive techniques include factoring your receivables or offering customer discount solutions for those who are able to pay more quickly.

Look For New Options To Generate Revenue

To maximize working capital, you can not only focus on your operations and sales levels: you need to think about alternative no-traditional options to increase your revenue streams. For example, if you have assets not generate revenue at the current situation, think differently about how those assets can be used to create an alternate revenue source just like renting them. Or if currently, part of Technical teams are not active now, consider outsourcing them to support other companies and provide you with more income.

Seek Out Government & Organizations Help

Local and national governments, as well as international institutions and private non-profits, are stepping in to aid distressed businesses. This may include capital investment, low-interest disaster loans, grants, and other forms of financing. See Appendix for a list of the current options.



Fadi Bishara

Founder & CEO, Blackbox

“

Expect this will be challenging for you and your business for at least one and likely two years and perhaps more. Your primary objective now is to survive these times. Which means cutting costs and focusing on highest value activity/product/service.

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Financial plan template

[Click here to get your template](#)

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Case studies: alter the business model

Case Study Tdallal: Implementing Health Guidelines

Tdallal was established in 2019 as a service that connects users with each other to help with shopping for groceries and other products through environment-friendly services that keep quality and speed.

“We started working remotely since the establishment of the project in late 2019, and the current lockdown gave us the ability to dedicate our time to working on it. The lockdown also had its effects on our customers who are now in need of a delivery service since they cannot leave their houses, leading to a 10x increase in the number in our customers and another 5x increase in completed orders.

This increase in customers and orders was not planned, and we had to act quickly to find the most effective ways to deal with it. Since the beginning of the lockdown, we have been developing a new plan each week that fits the volatile situation.

We have been using the same tools (Facebook, WhatsApp, Trello, Drive) while developing our skills and the ways we work with them to fit the new circumstances. We work hard to make sure that each day is better than the last through learning from our mistakes and looking for the best solutions.

It is important for us to implement healthcare guidelines as the Tdallal Man (our delivery and sales agent) is one of the most vulnerable workers who have direct interactions with people and in markets.

The pandemic has added value to our work, and we are facing challenges such as the many current and upcoming competitors who are observing the growth in this market even after the crisis is over. Keep the team spirit, ask for support when you need it, and support those in need. You cannot face a crisis on your own.



Brief Description

Application that connects people with each other to do shopping and deliver needs in a safe and environmentally friendly manner, while ensuring quality and speed

Website:

<http://tdallal.com>

Location

Erbil, Iraq

Most Recommended

Tools:

Facebook
WhatsApp
Trello
Drive

Case Study Sharqi Shop: Introducing New Products



Sharqi's design team works with artisans to come up with new products that fit the market needs.

Brief Description

Sharqi Shop is an online platform that helps artisans in Jordan market and ship their products online while working from home.

Website:

<https://sharqi.shop/>

Location

Amman, Jordan

Most Recommended Tools:

Chatra
Tawk.io
Asana
MailChimp

"We worked quickly to develop and launch a new collection for products that saw a shortage in the market because of the COVID-19 crisis, such as soap and sanitizers.

We are in talks with humanitarian agencies to provide camps with needed soaps. Also, we are considering helping producing masks and PPE. From the operation perspective, we are currently training our artisans to work from home.

In March 2020, we managed to sign two deals with large retailers in Europe to market our products. However, the orders are now on pause due to the situation.

The situation is worrying because 60% of artisans we work with in Jordan are not able to manufacture their products. This is affecting our sales. We are losing customers by the day because of limitations in producing crafts that require going to workshops. Also, our bulk orders are paused due to the current situation.

We think social distancing will be a way of life for the coming months, therefore, we are working day and night to train artisans and small businesses to digitalize their business models.

I believe that adopting technology as the main driver for your sales is one way to help you cope better and engage in better competition with others in the same field. As an online marketplace, we have more resilience to introduce products and services that resonate with the new status quo. That is one positive side to the story.

Case Study Gharana: Digital Transformation

Established in Lebanon in 2018, Gharna has already been through an economic turmoil and an unprecedented health emergency. Having started as a small shop in the Lebanese capital Beirut, it was clear that a transformation of a digital kind had to be made. A deteriorating economic climate, coupled with limited access and a near-total lockdown, has made management think of alternatives.



"I would always have two plans for any change, but COVID-19 was unlike anything else. My business, like everyone else, was affected. I had to make adjustments when it came to doing business. I saw how little marketing was done for some of the most trademark Aleppo products. It was time to go online.

We studied the markets and decided to target potential customers in Lebanon but also beyond- in the UAE and in Egypt. We joined relevant online public groups on Facebook to start engaging with people. We kept on posting information and talking to people, offering sales appointments. People started making inquiries, then orders. We have already agreed on an annual order to a customer in the UAE.

We started reminding people about the importance of 'going back to the roots'- using organic products. I was surprised by how well that resonated. "Gharna Halabi" offered traditional, organic, and chemical-free products exclusive to Aleppo, but now those handmade craft designs were available to all customers, and they reflected a "back to nature and preserving the environment" message.

Now people started texting us asking to know more. We noticed an immediate increase in sales during the lockdown. Our goal now is to scale up and reach out to new areas.

Social media, needless to say, is the best, cheapest, and easiest way to reach out to people. Obviously, in the lockdown, people are spending even more time on social media. Our Facebook page saw 800 new followers in the short period following the outbreak. Personally, I have dealt with worse situations; during the conflict in Aleppo, for example. It was worse. Technology was not an easy thing to access. That experience guided me to the right decision. I survived with whatever available tools I had; slow internet connection and inconsistent power supply.

We have learned a lot about how to deal with a crisis. It's a valuable experience. The number-one lesson is: don't panic."

Brief Description

Gharna is an online small business for traditional, natural and organic cosmetic products famous in Aleppo, Syria, the birthplace of Gharna's owner.

Website:

www.fb.com/gharna-halabi

Location

Beirut, Lebanon

Most Recommended Tools:

Facebook Group
Instagram Stories

How to successfully run an online store

The popularity of online stores is continuously growing, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are the things you need to know before starting your online store project.

1- The demand of your product

Before you set to launch an online store for a product, you have to make sure that the product is in demand in its market. Look for sales volume to know about the most sold items, as you have to become an expert in the products you are selling sometimes. It would be also beneficial to study small businesses that are selling similar products on Facebook or Instagram.

2- Suppliers

The suppliers of your products are either your best friends or worst enemies. Choosing the right supplier for your products is an essential element to ensure that your products are sufficiently supplied within the prices you agreed upon and in a timely manner.

The importance of suppliers increases if you follow a drop shipping system, meaning that you do not buy any supplies unless you get a purchasing order from a customer.

3- Profit Margin

Entrepreneurs tend to fixate on sales volumes when planning to start an online business, and while sales volume is an important aspect of online businesses, a small profit margin would induce the need for huge sales each month to obtain good returns.

Remember that a relatively good profit margin will give you the chance to offer real discounts which are an important factor in online consumers' decision to purchase.

4- Shipping operations

Despite the advancements in many operational aspects, shipping continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing e-commerce projects as shipping services do not provide the level of quality and convenience that entrepreneurs and customers aspire to have.

It is useful to think of an emergence plan in case a product got damaged or lost during shipping and especially international shipping.

5- Sales do not happen on their own

Just because you launched your online store with a nice domain does not mean that customers will start purchasing. Quite the contrary. This simply means that the journey has just started . You should now develop promotional campaigns to reach your customers and improve their shopping experience. You will need to plan the logistics from wrapping and shipping your products as soon as you receive your orders.

Appendices

CRISIS OR OPPORTUNITY

As many businesses have been impacted due to the COVID-19 crisis including airlines, accommodation like hotels, restaurants and food services, entertainment places, manufacturing, local shops, perhaps even more. However, several companies are not silently watching – they have adapted new mechanisms to the situation and stretched their brand, reshuffled their production lines, and catered to new needs. This outbreak is also providing opportunities for the industries mentioned below.

E-commerce

To avoid being infected by the COVID-19 virus, more consumers are using the online marketplace for online shopping and buying food and groceries. This led many currently small and medium businesses to open online stores and sell their products online, this also helped reaching to new customers and scaling their products.

Communication tools and Video Conferences

Video conferencing has always been a key ingredient in the recipe to success for enterprises hoping to connect with customers, remote workers, etc. And now, those technologies finally get their time to shine, circumstances withstanding. Months after coronavirus emerged as a threat, many video conferencing companies have enacted new work-from-home policies to keep employees safe. Zoom for example added more users in 2020 than it did in all of 2019 according to Bernstein Research

Online education

As many schools forced to close during the lockdown, they have started to introduce online teaching and homework programs for students so as not to delay the teaching schedule. DingTalk, an office software developed by Alibaba group, is widely used by schools and students and has been installed 1.1 billion times during this particular period.

Online Health Care

Growing number of Covid 19 positive cases in India, it seems that people have become more aware of the importance of having healthy life. Some of these solutions are as simple as providing a platform for doctors to conduct secure, virtual consultations with patients in the safe social-distancing environs of their own living rooms—something akin to a Zoom call with a physician.

Delivery

Food delivery services are among the very few businesses that gained benefits from the Covid-19 uprising as the majority of the people are stuck indoors keeping the social distancing. Sources report that many food delivery operators have reported that their workload has increased at least by a 100% since the Covid-19 emergency decree

Online Entertainment

The lockdown has driven not only online shopping but also online games and entertainment. Netflix has more than doubled the number of new subscribers it expected in the last three months as more people signed up amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Online Programs and Competitions

Programme	About	Organization	Location	Link
Startup Roadshow	A competition for Syrian entrepreneurs based in the Middle East.	Jusoor Syria in collaboration with SPARK	Beirut, Erbil, Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Amman	https://jusoor-syria.com/StartupRoadshow/
Startup Weekend	In 54 hours only, at Techstars Startup Weekend, you will be immersed in the ideal environment for startup magic to happen.	Techstars in partnership with Google for startups	Global Battle	https://startupweekend.org/
Arab Startup Competition	A yearly competition, designed to empower entrepreneurs and foster an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship in the Arab Region.	MIT Enterprise Forum Pan Arab	Arab Region	https://www.mitefarab.org/
Techfugees Hackathon	Catching-up with the projects which got ideated, improved, or accelerated during one of its hackathons across the globe.	Techfugees	Global Hackathon	https://techfugees.com/
Startup Battle	showcases the best of regional startups to an enthusiastic crowd of investors, incubators, media and digital professionals, as well as connect entrepreneurs with the digital world.	Arab Net	MENA Region	https://www.arabnet.me/

Resources

[Remote Work Resource Guide | Techstars](#)

[COVID-19 Resources Guide | Techstars](#)

[Ahmad Sufian Bayram Blog | ahmadsb.com](#)

[COVID-19 Managing Cash Flow During a Period of Crisis | Deloitte](#)

[COVID-19: Actions To Take Now | Bain and Company](#)

[The Impact of COVID-19 on Social Media Marketing | Social Bakers](#)

[Coronavirus' business impact: Evolving perspective | McKinsey](#)

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About

Ahmad Sufian Bayram

Ahmad is a social entrepreneur and author. He has more than nine years of experience in business development and building communities and ecosystems. He is focused on support vulnerable communities to access entrepreneurship.

He is the Middle East and Africa Regional Manager at Techstars, the global platform for investment and innovation. Since 2012, he has been helping hundreds of Syrians to gain access to entrepreneurship opportunities and build a supportive environment through program like the Startup Roadshow

Ahmad has advised several international organizations, non-profits, and startups and has been a board member of Techfugees and an advisor for The Human Safety Net by Generali, Spark, Dubizzle, and more.

He also published "Entrepreneurship In Conflict Zones" and "Entrepreneurship in Exile," two books that shed some light on the status quo of Syrian founders in both conflict zones and in their host countries as refugees.

<http://www.ahmadsb.com>

SPARK

SPARK provides access to higher education and supports entrepreneurship development in fragile states so that young, ambitious people can lead their societies into stability and prosperity.

SPARK provides a variety of full-service business and entrepreneurship programmes in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. We believe that sustainable, economic growth is essential for the alleviation of poverty. By offering private-sector development services to young people in conflict-affected regions, we believe that the potential for further conflict is significantly reduced.

<http://www.spark.ngo>

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COVID-19 Survival Guide

Ahmad Sufian Bayram

2020