

## TOOLS FOR BUSINESSES RECOVERING FROM COVID-19

*This document will provide some clarity for business owners and managers regarding best practices for using Google My Business (GMB) and other free tools while navigating varying levels of COVID-19 restrictions and re-opening.*

### What should businesses be focused on right now?

There continues to be a lot of uncertainty about the novel coronavirus, and many questions remain as communities across the U.S. begin to re-open. It's important to recognize that this global event has impacted people in different ways, and potential customers for your business may exist across a spectrum of behavior (ranging from those eagerly leaving the house after months of restricted movement to those who continue to have concerns about safety).

What seems to be fairly consistent based on recent research about consumer sentiment and the recovery of travel is that many consumers will be acutely aware of information that businesses provide about health and safety, including measures taken to keep guests and employees safe. According to recent data from Destination Analysts, **79% of prospective travelers will be looking at how destinations and businesses are responding to COVID as part of decision-making.**

With this in mind, we would suggest that businesses follow specific steps to help inspire confidence with locals and travelers alike:



1. **Improve Safety:** Take concrete steps toward improving the safety of your customers and staff by following scientifically-based guidance from authoritative sources, including the CDC, US Travel Association and state or county health departments.
2. **Share Information:** Use free tools in platforms such as Google, Facebook and Yelp in order to share information about your business with the general public, especially if you have made changes to operations, services or sanitation practices in response to COVID-19.
3. **Grow Visibility:** Take advantage of opportunities to further market your business and increase visibility online by following best practices.

## What can you do right now?

### Share Information

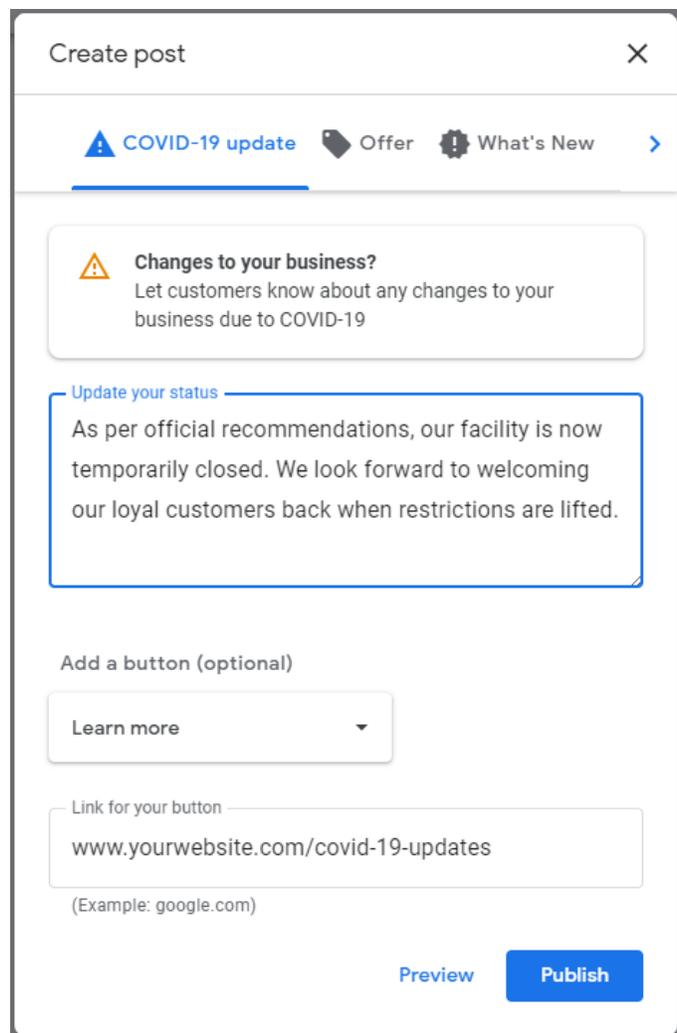
**It's vital to share information across multiple platforms** so that people can find what they need to know wherever they are. There are several tools you can use to increase the visibility of updates to prospective customers across popular platforms.

According to data from Destination Analysts, information about local businesses, including hours of operation, available services and restrictions will be among the pieces of information prospective visitors are searching for most often as communities re-open (43.6% of survey respondents).

### Google Posts

Whether your business is open, partially open or temporarily closed, you can **use the Posts feature in Google My Business** to communicate relevant updates to the public. The tool is free and can be accessed by businesses that have claimed and verified their listing in Google. (*Note: Hotels do not have access to the Posts feature*).

The content you share via Posts will be visible whenever someone views your business listing in a Google product, including search results and Google Maps, among others. In March, Google added a "COVID-19 Update" to the Posts feature, which allows businesses to share short updates and link to more information. This is a great opportunity to let people know about current circumstances and what they should expect.



The screenshot shows the 'Create post' interface in Google My Business. At the top, there are navigation options: 'COVID-19 update' (highlighted with a blue underline), 'Offer', and 'What's New'. Below this is a section titled 'Changes to your business?' with a warning icon and the text: 'Let customers know about any changes to your business due to COVID-19'. Underneath is a text input field with the placeholder 'Update your status' and the text: 'As per official recommendations, our facility is now temporarily closed. We look forward to welcoming our loyal customers back when restrictions are lifted.' Below the text field is a section for 'Add a button (optional)' with a dropdown menu showing 'Learn more'. Underneath is a text input field for the 'Link for your button' with the example 'www.yourwebsite.com/covid-19-updates' and a note '(Example: google.com)'. At the bottom right, there are two buttons: 'Preview' and 'Publish'.

There were additional updates in May that allow businesses to promote sales of gift cards, or accept donations supporting staff while businesses get back up and running. For gift

cards/donations, you can link to your website, or use one of the approved providers. (Note: This functionality is only available for businesses verified before 03/01/20).

**If you've made changes to hours, business practices, sanitation, or products/services, be sure to add a post in GMB sharing that information with consumers.**

Keep in mind that posts only stay visible for 7 days, so you should plan to update your post(s) once per week whenever possible. It's ok to re-run the same content from the previous post, if you don't have anything that's changed but will continue sharing safety information.

#### Donation providers

Provider	Supported URL formats
<a href="#">GoFundMe</a>	<a href="http://www.gofundme.com/f/...">www.gofundme.com/f/...</a> <a href="http://gf.me/u/...">gf.me/u/...</a>
<a href="#">PayPal</a>	<a href="http://www.paypal.com/biz/fund?id=...">www.paypal.com/biz/fund?id=...</a>

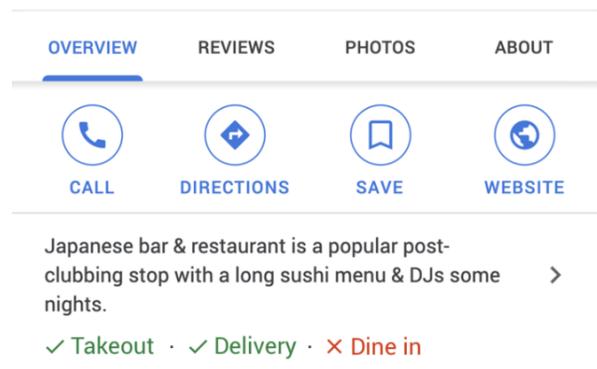
#### Gift card providers

Provider	Supported URL formats
<a href="#">Square</a>	<a href="http://squareup.com/gift/...">squareup.com/gift/...</a>
<a href="#">Toast</a>	<a href="http://toasttab.com/...">toasttab.com/...</a>
<a href="#">Vagaro</a>	<a href="http://vagaro.com/...">vagaro.com/...</a>
<a href="#">Clover</a>	<a href="http://clover.com/...">clover.com/...</a>

**TIP:** *Yelp has added a "COVID-19 Advisory Alert" feature that is available for businesses to use to communicate information to users of the popular review site. You can access that tool at [biz.yelp.com](http://biz.yelp.com) once you've claimed your business listing. Facebook has added a special "COVID-19 Post" feature along with additional business resources, which are accessible to Business Page owners once they've logged in. Make sure you're sharing updates across several platforms to ensure people are finding the information they need.*

## Business Attributes

Google has recently announced several **additions to the "attributes" function that you should keep an eye on.** Added since the rise of COVID, new attributes include **Delivery, Dine-In, Curbside Pickup** and **No-Contact Delivery**, as well as expanded service offerings for **Online Classes, Online Consultations** and **Online Estimates**. These attributes align with the information users have been searching for most frequently during the pandemic, and they will have increased visibility on your business profile, especially on mobile devices.



To access the attributes section, sign into your Google My Business account and navigate to the "Info" section. There, you'll have the ability to edit your attributes and amenities. Making sure this information is up-to-date isn't just about the needs of customers. **Google's algorithms use**

**attributes and amenities information to determine the relevance of your business for different kinds of search results.** If someone searches for a keyword like “stores with curbside pickup near me” then the algorithm will return listings that include the corresponding attribute information.

Beyond the COVID-specific attributes that have been added recently, there are lots of different amenities and attributes that vary by business type. While you’re in there, make sure the rest of your information is correct and comprehensive. Information about wheelchair accessibility, atmosphere, service options, and other features can help ensure your business is being seen by the people who are looking for exactly what you have.

## Business Hours

**If your business hours have changed, it’s important to make sure they are accurate online.**

There’s nothing worse for a customer than choosing your business because it looks open online and then arriving to discover that the information was out of date! In the Info tab of Google My Business, the Hours information is the essential representation of when you’re open and closed. If you’ve decided that you’re no longer open on Mondays, for example, you’ll want to make sure that’s been changed to avoid confusion.

If you need additional flexibility because you’re limiting hours while initially re-opening or due to local restrictions, then you can represent changes such as closing for a few days, or keeping limited hours on specific dates by using **the Special Hours feature** below the normal hours in GMB. This will allow you to indicate specific hours for specific dates. It’s also helpful if you’re closed on a holiday weekend, for example.

**Google added a new, custom hours feature in June** that may be helpful to some businesses. Under More Hours, you can indicate whether your business has specific times for certain groups (like grocery stores with special times for seniors, for example) or service times (happy hour, brunch, etc.). These can provide more robust information to people who are looking at your business listing online.

	Sunday	9:00 AM–1:00 PM 5:00 PM–8:00 PM	
	Monday	5:00 PM–8:00 PM	
	Tuesday	5:00 PM–8:00 PM	
	Wednesday	5:00 PM–8:00 PM	
	Thursday	5:00 PM–8:00 PM	
	Friday	5:00 PM–8:00 PM	
	Saturday	5:00 PM–8:00 PM	
	<b>More hours</b> <i>Add hours</i>		

## Growing Visibility

Once you've re-established a baseline of normalcy to operations and have ensured that your information is up-to-date and accurate, the next step forward will be further increasing visibility of your business with potential customers. The decision about when and how to resume marketing your business is complicated and **there isn't a single "right" way to restart advertising and promotions**. Public health considerations, local restrictions, consumer sentiment and many other factors should be considered. It's likely that you will need to reconsider ad creative in some cases to ensure that messaging doesn't strike the wrong chord with customers. Some businesses may be able to resume normal marketing operations sooner than others. It's quite possible that you'll need to lean on social media and online reputation management (monitoring and responding to reviews) in the near term until you have a better sense of what will be right for your business.

Based on recent research, **following best practices for managing your profile in Google My Business and other platforms will help to increase the visibility of your business** with consumers in the near-term. Here are a few things to consider:

- Having business hours listed in Google My Business can increase your visibility when consumers search for businesses "open now" because that query is directly influenced by the information businesses have added to their listings.
- Having a high-quality photo as the cover of your business listing in Google can double your engagement rate (this translates to a 50% increase in likelihood to visit in-person).
- Adding 4-5 photos per month to your business listing in GMB can increase exposure for your business by 10-30% compared to your baseline visibility.
- Having comprehensive amenity and attribute information listed for your business in GMB can increase your visibility in long-tail search terms (more specific searches like "vegetarian-friendly restaurants open now" compared to "restaurants near me.")
- Having a consistent name, address and phone number on your website and high-visibility web platforms like Google, Yelp, Facebook and TripAdvisor can support better performance in search results for business listing and website.

For more help & information on Google My Business: <https://business.google.com>

*Document from Miles Partnership working in cooperation with your destination marketing organization.*