

THREE WAYS CUSTOMER SERVICE BUSINESSES ARE

Pivoting to Weather COVID-19



Over the last decade, customer service businesses in the restaurant, retail, and wellness industries have triumphed over a lot of change. From online shopping to mobile ordering to digital community-building, there's not much these companies haven't done to stay connected with evolving consumer behavior.

As it turns out, that was good training for what was to come. COVID-19 has quickly made its way across the globe and has had a profound impact on the American economy. Customer service-focused industries have quickly pivoted and adapted to a new reality where customers aren't able to or interested in shopping or sit-down dining — and do what they can to weather what will hopefully be a short-term downturn.

Today we want to highlight some of the inspiring and surprisingly successful ways businesses are staying agile in the market and discovering new channels of connecting with customers that — we think — are going to stick around a lot longer than the pandemic we're facing today.

Pivot #1: Restaurants and Franchises Pivot to Curbside and Delivery

Practically overnight, restaurants and franchises across the country had to change the way they work from the ground up. While some restaurants have closed because this is not a sustainable model for them, [many more](#) have stayed open and transitioned to online orders, curbside pick-up, and delivery services.

This sudden switch has created several kinds of challenges for restaurants used to operating with customers in-house. For starters, there's now far more pressure on the company's IT infrastructure, making sure orders and payments are processed correctly and captured by the correct store, then completed and given to the correct customer. It also puts pressure on the human resources needs of each location. Whereas pre-COVID-19, there might have been more people needed on the floor to serve customers than in the kitchen to prepare food, those requirements have now flipped.



Bluestone Lane has kept 12 of its 52 locations open for contact-free to-go orders. Bluestone founder Nick Stone [told the *New York Times*](#) that the transition, while difficult, was necessary for the health of his business and the communities in which Bluestone operates.

“We wanted to make sure we could still provide an escape for our locals. If they’re stuck in their apartment all day, they’re going to deteriorate mentally,” Nick said. “We wanted to demonstrate that we were still remaining optimistic and positive that we will get through this.”

Pivot #2: Retailers Also Hop on the Curbside Bandwagon

Along with limiting store hours and sometimes the number of customers allowed in a location at once, retailers are following the example of the restaurant industry by embracing the curbside channel. Big box retailers like Kohl’s, Best Buy, and Target may have already had curbside pick up built into their delivery systems, but they’ve seen a surprising [87% jump](#) in these kinds of purchases since the same time last year.

Retailers face the same technology challenges as restaurants and franchises, but with an added twist: in-store inventory must be kept updated in real-time as hundreds of customers attempt to purchase products in-store, at home, and on the go. In order to provide the best possible customer service during a stressful time, employees fielding phone calls and managing the customer service desk have a much stronger need than before to be connected to current information about products.



Pivot #3: Exercise Studios Build Community With Online Classes

Exercise studios comprise another customer service industry heavily impacted by COVID-19, with popular clubs like [Orangetheory, SoulCycle, and Equinox](#) all announcing closures in mid-March. Businesses like these face two challenges: first, that their communities are typically built on a thriving in-person relationship, and second, that moving their businesses online puts them in competition with incumbent exercise studios that have been building digital brand awareness for years.

Fortunately, pivoting to online community building is going well for many of these brands. The three brands mentioned above are all releasing [free online streaming content](#). Smaller brands like owner-operator Crossfit gyms are also experimenting with loaning out gym equipment and sending workout suggestions to members by email while operating on a reduced monthly gym membership fee. And niche exercise studios like [Barre3](#) and [Pure Barre](#) closed in-person studios and ramped up online classes, offering one or two week passes at a free or reduced rate.

Innovation and Agility Mark Winning Business Models During COVID-19

Restaurant, retail, and fitness businesses are no strangers to the ups and downs of running a business. But COVID-19 has introduced an unprecedented and unpredictable situation that's been challenging for even the most forward-thinking organizations to navigate. We hope these examples of businesses re-imagining how they serve their customers can inspire you as much as it's inspired us.

