



Americans' Response to the Coronavirus Will Significantly Affect Local Businesses

Although the coronavirus outbreak is in different stages in different parts of the world and the US, Americans are reacting mostly with caution and preparedness.

An USA Today/Ipsos poll conducted March 10th and 11th reveals many people are almost more concerned about the virus's effect on their finances as their health. With the amount of misinformation and contradictory information, it's not surprising that one-third of those surveyed said they haven't (yet) adjusted their daily lives while another third said they have no plans to change how they live.

Significant percentages are already avoiding and/or plan to avoid many public places and, of course, that includes most of the retail establishments in their communities, especially shopping malls and centers.

Obviously, local businesses are concerned because they would like to maintain some level of revenues during this period – and eventually this will affect their willingness to spend ad dollars, and then affect your station and all media.

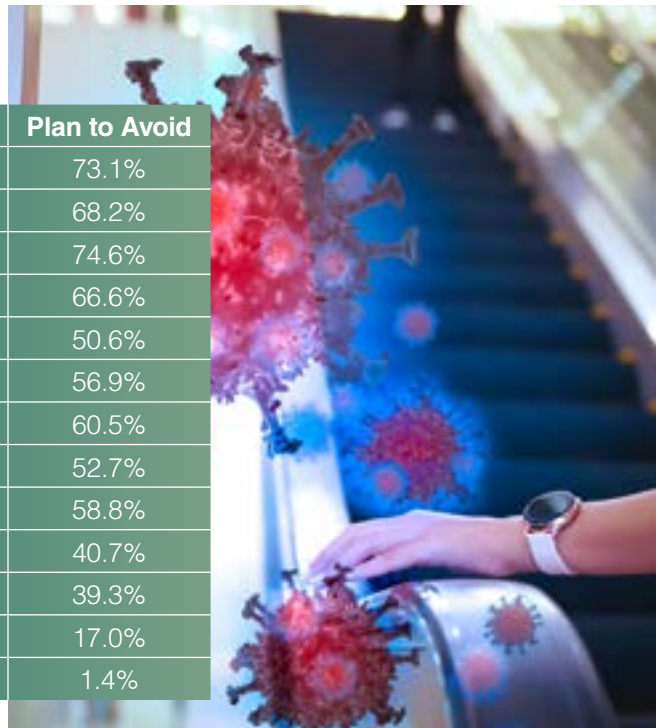
Some stores will probably have to close for some currently undetermined amount of time and shopping centers/malls may be the first. It's important to remember that the virus will unlikely affect all states, cities and community equally, so if your market is less affected, then some level of advertising and retail sales may continue.

Your focus at this point is to help your clients and all local businesses to prepare for the disruption and provide some possible solutions. Media Group Online shares some ideas on page 2.

US Internet Users' Current and Planned Avoidance of Public Places, February 2020

Public Place	Currently Avoiding	Plan to Avoid
Public transportation	49.3%	73.1%
International travel	47.4%	68.2%
Shopping centers/malls	47.2%	74.6%
Movie theaters	41.9%	66.6%
Medical centers/hospitals	38.9%	50.6%
Community centers	35.5%	56.9%
Restaurant/Bars/Coffee shops	35.3%	60.5%
Shops in general	32.7%	52.7%
Sports events	32.0%	58.8%
Other entertainment/leisure venues	21.6%	40.7%
Schools/Colleges	21.1%	39.3%
My workplace	11.1%	17.0%
Other	2.4%	1.4%

eMarketer (Coresight Research), March 2020



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Advertising Strategies in Response to the Coronavirus



Local businesses don't want to shutter their stores/offices entirely and would rather try to maintain some semblance of normal business activity, although it is likely to be limited. Depending on the coronavirus' effect, retailers may have to resort to novel methods, although the logistics will be likely difficult.

- The introduction and growth in local delivery services is certainly a method to reduce the number of people shopping in a store at any one time, which all the health officials encourage. Local businesses can increase their use of delivery services and those that have been hesitant about adding it are likely to be compelled to do so.

Those businesses that paired the delivery option with an online and/or mobile customer-ordering system have an obvious advantage. Those without that online presence may have to resort to taking customer orders manually via the phone or as text messages.

- Extending hours can also help to reduce the number of people in a store, so they are able to maintain the 6-foot separation health officials recommend. It may be possible to incentivize customers to shop during a store's typically off-hours. The severity of the virus may even force local businesses to require customers to make a reservation, limiting total persons in a store during one-hour periods.
- To be frank, some businesses can actually "benefit" from the current situation. Stores that sell products that will help people enjoy the additional time they may have to spend at home have an opportunity. Ad copy would have to be worded carefully, so consumers won't think advertisers are trying to take advantage of a bad situation.
- Retailers of large-ticket items may want to emphasize very low interest rates (as a result of the coronavirus' effect on financial markets) and the savings today versus whenever interest rates increase again. Banks and credit unions may want to promote re-financing mortgages.
- Businesses can record and post short videos on social media showing how they have increased cleanliness and implemented other steps to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, with the aim of assuring people it is safe to shop at the store.
- At the appropriate time in the timeline of the coronavirus, retailers can start to promote events and sales to bring people back to the stores when they feel safe to be in crowds. You can help your prospects and clients make these plans now, so they can leap from the gate when normalcy has returned.

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