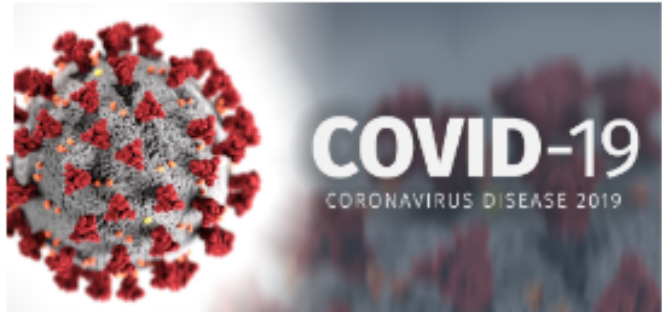


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Apr. 20, 2020



In a continued effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, local and state governments have issued orders for nonessential businesses and establishments to close their doors. These orders, combined with the lack of consumers making their way into physical stores, have had a major impact on small businesses across the country. Many brick-and-mortar small businesses have determined the only way to remain

open and serve customers is to transition operations to online ecommerce, which is

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## 1. Set up an online platform

The first step for any business owner considering ecommerce is to research the platforms available to determine which best fits the needs of your client's business and budget. There are a number of cost-efficient ecommerce providers that allow small businesses to get up and running in a matter of minutes. A full list of the ecommerce providers Avalara works with can be found [here](#).

When evaluating ecommerce platforms, there are a number of factors to consider, including multiplatform operations, shipping and fulfillment features, security measures, and compliance capabilities. If your client is transitioning to online for the first time, simplicity in functionality both on the back end and customer-facing features will likely be top of mind. Most ecommerce platform providers have several different plans from which to choose. A good rule of thumb when deciding which plan is best is to keep in mind the following:

- How many products will be sold online? If products sold are limited, a simpler plan with lower rates may be suitable. There is no product limit for many providers' main plans.
- What features are needed? If your client wants a site that enables customers to view products and make purchases, a simpler plan is likely the best fit. However, many businesses find it's beneficial to include additional features that contribute to positive customer experiences, like customer loyalty plans, abandoned cart recovery, and more.

Note that during this time, your client's business may not have the luxury of conducting extensive research on multiple platforms, and instead may need to rely on something that works now. Fortunately, there are providers that offer out-of-the-box functionality that will enable them to get their basic store up and running

quickly. Meghan Stabler of ecommerce platform BigCommerce provided this

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way to stay connected to your customers and continue driving revenue. While it may feel overwhelming to move online so quickly, this an easy business decision that will pay long-lasting dividends.”

Once your client has identified a best-fit ecommerce platform, they'll need to register their domain name and get an account set up — all of which can be done from any connected device. Once established, they can start customizing their website features.

## **2. Determine which products will be sold online**

Given the necessary timeliness of efforts to transition store functions to ecommerce, it's important to prioritize which products will be sold online, so the most profitable and in-demand products are available for purchase as your client's website is launched. It can feel like every product in the store should be available immediately, but by prioritizing the most popular products first, your client can get online operations up and running, then begin fulfilling orders while adding additional inventory.

## **3. Diversify payment methods**

Advising your client on setting up accepted payment methods is a crucial part of converting a browser into a buyer. Help them determine which payment methods are the most commonly used and accommodate for the largest number of customers. Fortunately, most ecommerce providers offer integrations with the most common payment methods like Visa, Mastercard, PayPal, Apple Pay, and more. If you're still unsure of which payment methods to accept, a good rule of thumb is to incorporate the same payment methods offered through your client's in-store point-of-sale system.

#### 4. Set up shipping and returns functions

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like ShipStation, which helps automate shipping for merchants of all sizes, and offers small businesses discounted shipping rates with USPS, UPS, and FedEx.

If your client is concerned about how to fulfill orders or that their current warehouse might be unable to fulfill orders, consider using an outsourced provider, like ShipBob, which processes orders for thousands of ecommerce brands. It's also worth pointing out that the storefront can serve as a temporary fulfillment center during this time: It serves the dual benefit of getting product to your client's customers quickly while simultaneously ensuring all that in-store inventory doesn't go to waste. This is a model that works quite successfully for big-box retailers like Target.

Shipping costs are often something brick-and-mortar retailers haven't had to consider when it comes to pricing, so be mindful of a product's shipping cost and be sure it's clearly displayed in the shopping cart. Ensure your client is transparent about shipping costs throughout the shopping experience and avoids the risk of having customers abandon their cart if they discover a shipping cost "gotcha" at checkout.

#### 5. Planning an online marketing strategy with social media

Perhaps one of the most important steps in this transition for your client is communicating how their business will now be selling. This is where social media posts and advertising come into play to be certain that customers are in the know about a new online strategy. On the upside, most brick-and-mortar shops are already using social media to market to their customers. However, it's critical that businesses over-communicate the change in operations to ensure regular customers are aware of the new selling channel, and to capitalize on the expanded customer audience that can now be reached.



Social media can be used to promote this new online presence and as a platform to

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longer just an avenue to increase brand awareness, but an opportunity to connect with customers and make sales in the social threads customers are already sifting through.

Comment selling platforms are blending content and commerce to convert social media comments into sales and automatically invoice shoppers from their social media timelines. By leveraging this method of “headless commerce,” or separating the front end and back end of an ecommerce application, businesses can easily combine their social media marketing and online selling for quick sales conversions and limited friction throughout the browsing and shopping experience. Through social selling capabilities, businesses can save customers time they would otherwise have to spend sifting through websites to find the items that best fit their wants and needs. Andy Smith, COO at CommentSold, an Avalara partner, has this additional insight:

“Captivating shoppers online can be increasingly difficult as more businesses turn to online during this time, so reaching customers where they are is more important than ever before. Social selling platforms allow retailers to connect directly with customers via live video and product content on Facebook and Instagram. Creative tools, like instant comment purchasing and real-time live sales events, can help retailers grab and keep their online customers’ attention.”

## **6. Preview, test, and publish your store**

The final step to your client bringing their store online is to ensure every function of site site is operational. Ensure that they double-check each function by providing this checklist of questions and follow-ups:

- Does my checkout work? Make sure orders work across all payment methods; your shipping options and charges are correct and visible; the items and price in your

cart are correct; discounts/promotions apply correctly; and tax is calculated once

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Businesses work on various channels and through various devices. Consumers want to access products online whenever they choose from whatever device they are on. Testing your online site for functionality across channels is important to ensure that you're not turning away potential customers who are unable to access your site.

At a time when more and more small businesses are at risk of closing their doors due to uncontrollable circumstances, ecommerce provides a viable alternative that, if executed on quickly and decisively, allows business owners to keep their operations up and running. You can help your small business clients to take advantage of this unexpected time to explore new selling opportunities and ways to further serve their customers — something they might have otherwise not had the opportunity to do. Fortunately, technology that exists today allows even the smallest of businesses to quickly ramp up online operations, reaching a broader audience, and incorporating all the necessary functions needed to provide a comprehensive, frictionless online shopping experience.

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