Reopening the Workplace After COVID-19:
A Checklist for Businesses

As countries, states, and cities begin to ease lockdown restrictions, this checklist for reopening businesses can help you jumpstart your return.

You and your employees have been quarantined in your homes for the past few ~~days weeks~~ months, and now authorities are looking to lift restrictions and open up. You may be thinking, "We'll be back soon, and I can get out of this house!" The problem is, if you just pick up and go, and don't prepare for having people back in the workplace, you may run into issues that could have been easily avoided. **Now is the time to prepare.**

This checklist is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but it can help provide guidance as you look to reopen. It's organized into four sections: People, Workplace, Technology, and Your Customers. Everyone's situation is unique, but evaluating your plan with these components in mind can help you get organized and anticipate obstacles.

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People

Keep in mind that your team may be nervous about returning to the workplace. If you prepare properly, you can alleviate many concerns for your employees, enabling them to focus on the work, not on the global health crisis. You and your employees should expect that returning to the workplace will not be the same as it was prior to COVID-19. The new normal is, and will be different for the foreseeable future.

☐ **Create a "Return to the Workplace" taskforce, or point person.**
> Depending on the size of your business, consider appointing someone, or an entire team, to lead the efforts of assessing and optimizing your establishment for return. They will also help communicate changes and updates to employees.

☐ **Over communicate to your staff about returning to the workplace.**
> Make sure they understand what precautions you have taken, and assure them they can return safely.

☐ **Create a "Return to the Workplace" schedule.**
> Your goal is to manage how many people are arriving and working in your establishment throughout the day and week. Consider developing a profile that assesses each employee based on their need to physically be there, potential COVID-19 exposure, commute methods (do they take public transportation?), and other considerations (such as childcare, for example). Use the profile to build out your priority list for those who are first to return.

☐ **Establish an ongoing Work From Home (WFH) policy**
> This will help to ensure the workplace isn't overly crowded. It will also enable those employees who are concerned about returning to "take it slow," will help you establish safe, socially distanced working arrangements, and will support your employees with children at home due to school cancellations.

☐ **Review and update your policies.**
> Look at sick leave, vacation time, travel policies, etc., and determine if you should make any changes or updates based on COVID-19.

☐ **Encourage appropriate safety practices in your office.**
> Practices include frequent hand washing, use of hand sanitizers, eliminating high-touch areas, and wiping down common spaces.

☐ **Tell employees to stay home if they, or someone they live with feels sick or exhibits any known COVID-19 symptoms.**
> This may seem obvious, but it needs to be explained to your employees.

☐ **Encourage your employees to "ease in", as people may be stressed and tired when they return to the workplace.**
> Expect that your employees will need time to acclimate. Working at home is very different than working in an establishment. Encourage frequent breaks, and expect that people will need to adjust.

☐ **Check with local health officials about health screening recommendations.**
> You may want to consider a daily health screening procedure, such as temperature checks, but make sure you reach out to your legal representative for guidance before you deploy any new procedure.

☐ **Establish an open line of communication with your employees.**
> Create a cadenced stream of communication with your employees and ensure they understand the channels available to them should they have questions, comments, or concerns.

Workplace

While your establishment may be open, practicing social distancing will still be of utmost importance. Be prepared to make changes to your floor plans, conference rooms, and signage to ensure your employees can abide by social distancing guidelines. Your goal is to create an environment that is safe for all employees.

☐ **Perform a thorough cleaning of the workplace before you reopen the doors to your employees.**
Make sure you communicate to your employees the steps you have taken to ensure their safety.

☐ **If you share your workplace with other tenants, ensure they are practicing safe and effective social distancing guidelines.**
If appropriate, post any building management or local health official's notices in visible locations throughout your establishment.

☐ **Ensure your seating and/or workstations are in line with social distancing guidelines, and schedule employees to be in the establishment accordingly.**
In alignment with your WFH policy and "Return to the Workplace" schedule, establish proper working conditions for those employees who do come in. Limit the use of conference rooms if the space doesn't allow for proper social distancing.

☐ **Be prepared to enable social distancing and good health behavior.**
Make sure your establishment is well equipped with enough hand sanitizer, masks, gloves, etc. so your employees can be as comfortable as possible.

☐ **Develop traffic flow patterns in your establishment.**
Just as many grocery stores have implemented during this crisis, consider setting up traffic flow patterns in your establishment. This will help to ensure employees don't "accidentally" bump into others, and will enable proper social distancing.

☐ **Establish guidelines for conducting group meetings.**
This will be especially important if you will be meeting in any conference rooms or common areas. Make sure your employees understand social distancing guidelines. Consider labeling conference rooms and commons spaces with occupancy limits and seating arrangements that allow for social distancing.

☐ **Establish guidelines for any visitors entering your establishment.**
Post the guidelines to ensure your visitors understand and comply. Don't forget to communicate the guidelines to your employees.

☐ **Remind your employees of the recommended social distancing guidelines.**
Place posters throughout your workplace to remind your employees to be diligent with their social distancing.

☐ **Communicate to your employees the steps you have taken to ensure their safety.**
Keeping your employees informed will be absolutely critical to everyone's health and safety.

☐ **Create a reclosure plan.**
Ensure you have a plan in place in the event an employee in your establishment shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, or if officials close non-essential businesses again due to another wave in the global health crisis.

Technology

Returning to your establishment doesn't necessarily mean you will be abandoning all of your WFH set-ups. In fact, for most of you, your workforce will likely consist of remote workers for some time to come. In addition, workstations in your establishment may have been sitting idle while everyone worked remotely. Your technology goal is to ensure your employees have what they need to do their jobs effectively while you ensure and maintain a safe and secure work environment. Contact your Managed Service Provider for assistance with all of your technology needs.

☐ **Schedule a review with your Managed Service Provider.**
Your Managed Service Provider will play a key role in your return to the workplace. Schedule a meeting to review all technology and IT related concerns.

☐ **Evaluate any new technology deployed during the crisis.**
The tools your employees used to work remotely may or may not be required when you return. Create a list, including any new devices, and decide if they stay or go. Evaluate how the new tech was implemented, determine what worked and what fell short, and if you still need all of the licenses you purchased. Examples include new Office 365 licenses, Zoom, new laptops, etc.

☐ **Evaluate any service providers you use to run your business.**
Identify any vendor that was not able to achieve their SLAs, and determine the cause. Pay particularly close attention to those critical vendors and how they performed during the crisis.

☐ **For any employee who will continue to WFH, audit the tech they will be using.**
Determine if the tech is appropriate, secure, and is sufficient to enable optimal productivity.

☐ **Run an audit on any workstations in your establishment.**
An audit will help you determine if the workstations are properly patched with the latest OS and other critical updates. Reach out to your Managed Service Provider for help on this.

☐ **Document a list of those employees who used their personal computers to WFH.**
Develop an appropriate action plan to ensure the ongoing use of personal computers or devices complies with your company's security standards. Consider requiring your employees to change the passwords on any personal devices.

☐ **Catalog items that were removed from your establishment.**
Protect your business and intellectual property by ensuring any devices, technology, files, folders, contracts, customer lists, and documents, etc. are properly returned to the workplace. This list may include electronic files left on the employee's personal workstation or device.

☐ **Conduct a gap analysis.**
Document the technology gaps that were exposed during the crisis and create a plan on how to address them.

☐ **Schedule a review of your Disaster Recovery (DR) and/or Business Continuity plan.**
What can be improved upon? What worked well? Were you able to easily transition from your establishment to WFH? How was your business impacted during this crisis? Update your DR and/or Business Continuity plan accordingly.

☐ **Schedule regular DR and Business Continuity testing.**
This should be a routine part of your business. But given this recent crisis, regular DR and Business Continuity testing will be even more crucial moving forward. Don't be caught unprepared.

Your Customers

From the perspective of returning to the workplace, once your people, establishment, and technology are in order, it's time to focus on your customers. This is where you and your team can play a critical role in helping your customers feel comfortable to conduct business with you now that global health crisis restrictions have been lifted.

☐ **Maintain an open line of communication with your customers.**

Create a cadenced stream of communication to ensure they understand the channels available to them should they have questions, comments, or concerns.

☐ **Create signage with details about entering your establishment.**

Pave the way for a good customer experience by setting clear expectations when customers enter your establishment. Creating signage to communicate expectations will give your customers a good level of comfort knowing you are taking the necessary precautions necessary to keep them and your employees safe. Include details such as business hours and how you will manage social distancing. Also, make sure your customers understand the precautions your staff is taking, including the wearing of masks, washing hands, wiping down and disinfecting common areas, etc.

☐ **Survey your customers.**

Once things get back to a new normal, this is a good time to survey your customers to learn what worked and what didn't. Use the lessons learned during this crisis to update the planning and response process with your customers. Document this and prepare for a future crisis, as something like this may happen again.