

Business Preparation Tips

“*Encourage staff to maintain a positive attitude about the improvement project. Always talk about possibilities and solutions, rather than potential inconvenience of the project. Customers don't want to visit a business whose owners or staff are complaining or in a bad mood. Emphasize the importance of representing your business and the project positively to business associates, customers and the community in general. Clients prefer to support businesses with positive people and outlooks.*”

Develop Informational Materials

- Provide maps that highlight alternate routes, access points and parking.
- Prepare project FAQ sheets to enable staff to answer questions consistently.
- Establish an information center to provide staff and client/customer with updated information, e.g., a bulletin board, mailbox center, etc.
- Update and maintain your website with maps, directions and current project information.
- Inform and engage with your customers through social media.

Train & Reassure

- Your customers will have questions. Provide your staff with appropriate answers or the means to direct them for answers by informing them of the improvement project, its timeframe and potential effects on your business.
- Post updates in a central location and review information at staff meetings.
- Post resource phone numbers, maps, directions and other talking points near main telephones.
- Encourage the staff to be positive, helpful, reassuring and appreciative. Inform them how to manage their needs during the improvement project.
- Identify alternate routes, carpooling and parking options prior to the project commencement.
- Establish a quiet location for staff to decompress when needed, e.g., a lounge or outside rest area.
- Encourage patience and compassion among staff.
- Listen to complaints and frustrations without offering advice. Rather, encourage independent problem solving while showing interest and understanding.
- Practice active listening and other communication techniques.
See *Communication Tips*.

Consider Alternative Strategies

- Reevaluate and be willing to reallocate your resources.
- Discuss modifying operating hours and staff levels appropriately.
- Reassign staff responsibilities and schedule their hours.
- Reassess cash flow and all fixed and variable expenses.
- Eliminate unnecessary expenses. Ask staff for cost cutting ideas and efficiency solutions.
- Find ways to up-sell, add-on and increase overall transactions.
- Increase or reevaluate advertising budgets to better inform and attract sales.
- Identify and develop potential target markets by modifying your products and services.

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- Employ “guerilla marketing” techniques (unconventional methods that rely on time, energy and imagination rather than a big marketing budget). For example, attract potential new customers by delivering discount coupons to project construction workers at their field office. Or consider taking phone orders and making deliveries to ensure continued business.

Develop a Plan to Communicate

- Train and practice communicating positive aspects of the project with customers, vendors and the public at large, e.g.:
“The improvement project does not prevent you from accessing us if you use _____ Road.”
or *“We’re excited about the project and how it will improve the traffic flow, safety and aesthetics of our area.”*
or *“Come visit us, we have some great promotions!”*
- Encourage staff to maintain a positive attitude about the improvement project. Always talk about possibilities and solutions, rather than potential inconvenience of the project. Customers don’t want to visit a business whose owners or staff are complaining or in a bad mood. Emphasize the importance of representing your business and the project positively to business associates, customers and the community in general. Clients prefer to support businesses with positive people and outlooks.
- Train staff on how to manage and empathize with difficult and frustrated customers.
- Establish a “Go-To” or contingency plan for customers or vendors who need additional assistance. Try posting staff names and special skills or a list of referral numbers and/or websites with project information.
- Inform customers regularly about promotional opportunities, alternate routes, access points, etc. Use direct mail, email, newsletters, the Internet and social media. Maintain communication throughout the project. Your customers will appreciate it and are more likely to continue patronizing your business.
- Track calls regarding customer concerns and the subsequent actions you took. Brainstorm solutions with your staff.

Miscellaneous Tips

- Use positive and accurate terminology related to the improvement project, i.e., say *“transportation improvement”* rather than *“road construction.”*
- Collaborate with businesses in your area and perform joint promotions, marketing efforts, etc.
- Spruce up the interior and exterior of your facility to make it more attractive and inviting.
- Employ signage, banners and special offers to promote your business.
- Participate in community projects and sponsorships to increase involvement in the community. Contributions of time or gifts can result in positive public relations and/or increased business exposure and revenues.

Be Proactive & Stay Informed

- Don’t wait for someone to inform you about the improvement project.
- Understand the potential effects it can have on your organization/business.
- Read all the information that is typically forthcoming from municipalities and other project entities involved.
- Focus on what you have direct control over—your business, not the construction itself.
- Take advantage of the free confidential MainStreet Business Assistance Program services.
- If you don’t understand something or need assistance, please contact your MainStreet business outreach liaison.