



ALPHA



White Paper

---

# What every eCommerce company needs to do in the world of Covid-19

**ALPHA LTD**  
St Andrew's House  
St Andrew's Road  
Cambridge CB4 1DL  
United Kingdom

 @thisisalphalive

[alphacrc.com](http://alphacrc.com)

The world is in flux right now, and the eCommerce sector is faced with a unique set of both challenges and opportunities.

We look at some actions that every eCommerce company should be considering right now, and provide a few suggestions for ways in which to turn a crisis into a success.

---

## Keep supplies coming

The first simple question to ask is, simply, are my supply chains secure? No matter where your supply chains are, how far your raw materials, component parts and finished goods have to travel, there are checkpoints you can implement to safeguard each step of your business.

And having an online business, rather than a bricks-and-mortar store, won't shield your logistical process if your goods or supplies still have to travel from the other side of the world. No part of the retail industry is immune to Covid.

As every country deals with the Coronavirus pandemic in their own ways, whether they are at different stages of lockdown, or have logistics restrictions in place, it is important to check how each country's new laws affect the movement of your products and, crucially, what the relationship is between the governments involved – including your own.

If cross-border movement is subject to a variety of different measures, from territory to territory, it may be simpler to switch to a local supplier or a supplier in a more accessible country. In pre-pandemic times, this might have been too costly a practice but compared with the amount of money lost due to logistical hold-ups or even loss of goods, looking closer to home could now be your best option.

Even in these dark times, there are silver linings: using local suppliers will reduce your business' carbon footprint, as the delivery distance for supplies is shortened. Moreover, it could give a boost to the local economy.

---

## Transform your chain into a web

It's hard to think ahead at the moment, especially as both domestic and business situations can change rapidly, but adopting an agile, solutions-based strategy to get you through the next few months, if not the rest of the year, is paramount. If your business model works along the lines of on "just-in-time" manufacturing, the sudden announcement of a 14-day quarantine or factory shutdowns will cause problems.

One way to avoid this is to diversify your supply chain to include a number of alternative suppliers. Again, before Covid, this may have seemed an unnecessary, and costly, step to take, but it could now provide a lifeline to your business when your usual supply routes become blocked.

Small volumes of supplies coming via different routes might seem complex to manage at first. However, a constant source of supplies, however limited, will keep the lights on and your business ticking over.

---

## Stay informed

As the situation evolves daily, you need to have regular up-to-date information coming in. Make sure you know about any changes in your target markets, as well as the countries of origin of all your products. And keep your customers in the loop by posting the latest information about how your services are being affected on your website. An informed customer who is forced to wait for their goods, is a lot more patient and understanding than one who is 'kept in the dark' while you try to carry out damage limitation behind the scenes.

There is the possibility that you might lose customers in the short-term but, ultimately, it will save you time and energy dealing with refunds for products that have become stuck in customs or indefinitely delayed. This is the time to implement excellent customer service at all points of your business.

---

## Adapt your refund and return policies

Right now you need to be flexible. Make sure it's easy for customers to contact you, and always respond. If they can see you are trying your best to ensure customer satisfaction, they are more likely to be patient, and to use you again.

The issue of returns is a little tricky. The question here is one of safety. Some companies are only accepting returns if the product itself is faulty, in which case they have a legal obligation. Companies that are allowing returns are often quarantining items for up to 72 hours.

Ultimately, it is up to you and, of course, how much warehouse space you have to spare. Any kind of quarantine for goods is going to lead to huge ramifications for your inventory process, and complications in terms of tracking stock levels.

---

## Protect your staff

In addition to your customers and suppliers, you need to take care of your staff. Many of your office employees will be able to work remotely from home, but you also need to think about your warehouse staff. You need to look at the logistics within your enclosed spaces and set out clear guidelines accordingly, as well as supplying any necessary PPE, cleaning, and sanitizing products.

If you are seeing fewer orders, or have less stock, reducing the number of staff is a straightforward solution, and fair to everyone if you can change working hours across the board. If you run a round-the-clock business, then shift work won't be new.

Nobody likes making 'worst-case scenario' plans but, in the current climate, you have no choice. One case of Coronavirus amongst your workforce could send a large portion of your staff into isolation for anything up to 14 days. Preventative measures, such as strict social-distancing, will work out more cost-effectively in the long run. It may even be necessary to close your business temporarily. Such a measure is a financial hit that you may well need to accommodate within your annual budget for the following year.

Other short-term solutions include hiring temporary staff to cover sickness. To facilitate this, all of your processes, training and workflows should be updated, well documented and ready to implement at a moment's notice.

Most of your office-based operations can be done remotely. Marketing, sales and advertising, social media and even networking and conferencing events can all take place online. For the retail sector, as lockdowns have imposed restrictions on peoples' movements, online shopping is one of the few pastimes they can still enjoy safely. And this boost in online spending is being seen across every continent worldwide.

---

## Get support

Furloughs, bailout schemes, state-funded loans: governments across the world are strategizing and building ways in which they can keep their industries, and economies, afloat. But where your business sits in the pecking order can affect what you might be eligible for – or sometimes, whether you are eligible at all. If you run a large global concern, you may very well have more financial options from a wider variety of sources, globally, available to you.

At the other end of the scale, if you are one of the many single-person enterprise which are hosted on a much large eCommerce platform, your business could be in real jeopardy.

Professional support can be found in a number of different places, not least your own government's website. But there are simple things you can do for yourself, including being flexible and keeping your options open. Communicate well, not only with your customers, but also with your suppliers and business partners. Finally, be prepared for the long haul. The world will get back to something resembling 'normal', but it might take a while, and your business should be prepared to go the distance.

### Found that interesting?

If you're not already signed up to our newsletter, register on our [News](#) page to receive lots more great articles that will help you on your journey to going global.