

How to stay connected during COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis can make real connections challenging — we've spent much of 2020 six feet away from other people. These four steps can help you stay connected and build new relationships when face-to-face contact is limited.

Step 1: Go digital

People are logging on more frequently during the crisis:

+50%

Messaging via Facebook and Instagram¹

+73.3%

Traffic on Nextdoor²

+55%

Usage of LinkedIn³

Action: Make sure your business's social media accounts are up to date, and don't just post about products and services. Comment, send personalized messages and engage informally, too.

Step 2: Build a network

To get the most out of your connections, choose a platform best suited to the relationship.



Your macro network of suppliers, partners, employees and clients

› LinkedIn or other professionally focused sites

Your neighbors and local connections

› Nextdoor, Front Porch or local groups and pages on LinkedIn and Facebook

Your acquaintances including casual friends and your word-of-mouth network

› Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or generalized sites with broad audiences

One-on-one connections like friends, employees or anyone you work with closely

› Skype, FaceTime, Zoom or other video chat software, even phone calls

Action: Make a list of the people you deal with regularly, using the categories above. Then search for them online and reach out.

Step 3: What to say

Be strategic with your first message, particularly if you are connecting with someone for the first time. Think about the best way to build trust, since people may have their guard up during a crisis.⁴



To start the conversation...

- › With new customers, include a personalized note to welcome them.
- › With vendors, distributors and partners, call just to check in throughout the crisis.
- › With existing clients, email them to say thank you and consider loyalty rewards.
- › For the first time, make it clear why you're reaching out and why you picked them specifically.

Action: Lead with empathy. Before reaching out, ask yourself: "What is this person going through, and will they appreciate this message?"

Step 4: Build the connection

As communities rebuild, meet your digital connections in person and make sure to connect digitally with new people. To help transition between online and face-to-face, consider arranging digital events that translate to real-life events, and vice versa.

Host a digital cheese tasting

Host a happy hour

If you like to network over food, simulate the setting online, then invite the same people to an in-person event.

Create a how-to video

Organize a workshop

Consider pairing a tutorial video series with in-person classes (it may even develop into a revenue stream).

Start a social media group

Create a local club

If you connected with peers during the crisis, consider formalizing the group. Likewise, create a digital version of any in-person groups to stay connected.

It can feel challenging to build connections in a socially distanced world. But if anyone can do it, small business owners can. As leaders who bring people together every day, owners can use digital tools to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones.

¹ Keeping Our Services Stable and Reliable During the COVID-19 Outbreak, Facebook, March 24, 2020

² The Virus Changed the Way We Internet, New York Times, April 7, 2020

³ LinkedIn's Making Its Recruitment Tools Free to Those Fighting the Coronavirus Pandemic, TechCrunch, April 1, 2020

⁴ Is a Sense of Sameness Plaguing COVID-19 Ads?, Ace Metrix, May 15, 2020