Going virtual playbook

A step-by-step guide
to keep your business virtual

AT&T Business

AT&T Business

Going virtual playbook contents

Why should you take your business virtual?

The new world of virtual businesses

A virtual business performs all or most day-to-day transactions and business either online or remotely. As more customers research and purchase online, even companies who have not been virtual in the past have updated their models to be entirely virtual or to include virtual elements. And they've discovered that not only is this model more inexpensive than traditional models, it also provides flexibility. Employees and customers can engage no matter where they are – from their home office to the beach.

Even brick-and-mortar businesses have expanded their customer base by freeing themselves from physical restrictions. Sure, conducting business online isn't new. However, this model used to be for eCommerce-focused companies. Today, innovation in the omnichannel experience – one that integrates online, phone, chat, and other methods of customer communication, has enhanced the customer experience. Omnichannel has made it easier for businesses of all types to create a seamless experience for their customers by giving them a choice in how they interact with the business.

Your customer has changed

Today's customer is used to a new way of doing business. As a result of the pandemic and distanced interactions, consumers adopted digital technologies at an accelerated rate - i.e. buying goods online that they'd not previously considered.

What has this meant for today's businesses?

Because of the benefits to both businesses and consumers, this new trend in virtual purchasing is here to stay. As a result, digital transformation must now be a part of an ongoing business strategy. This new way of doing business has leveled the playing field to deliver what customers expect – a quality experience. Now, small businesses like yours have a greater opportunity to compete and succeed in the marketplace.

eCommerce – creating an online store

Over the past couple of years, customers have genuinely embraced online shopping.
According to the U.S. Department of Commerce data …

online sales were up

50.5%

in 2021, compared
with 2019[2]

Online spending represented

18.6%

of total retail sales in the first
two quarters of 2020[2]

These statistics suggest that having an online store is becoming more critical for a business's success.
To get started, you will have to create an e-commerce ready website, list products, and set up payments.

[2] Digital Commerce 360 analysis, 2022

1. Register a domain name

A domain name is your internet address, typically ending in ".com", ".org", or ".net." Registering a domain name is the first step in moving your business online. Here are some tips to keep in mind when choosing your domain name:

- **Keep it relevant.** Ideally, your domain name will be close to your business name.

- **Keep it short.** Like you want customers to remember your store name, you want them to remember your website name.

- **Keep it simple.** Remember, customers have to type out your domain name. Avoid unusual spellings, hyphens, or other complex characters.

- **Target your locals.** You can use your city or state as part of the domain name to appeal to locals. Also, consider using local extensions, e.g., ".ca."

Once you have a list of domain names to choose from, do a quick search to ensure whether it is available and isn't trademarked or copyrighted.

To use the domain, you need to register it. Registering a domain is like leasing it for a specific time. Domains typically cost $15-$20 per year. You can also check your e-commerce platform provider for registration options.

2. Choose a website platform

A website platform allows you to easily manage your website, marketing, sales, etc. It is the virtual home base for your business.

Before choosing your platform provider, think about what your business is and the expectations you have from your website, because each platform provider has its strengths. Ask yourself some of the following questions to understand the needs for your website:

• Do you want to sell products online?

• Would you like customers to schedule appointments online?

• Will you be writing a blog for your site?

• Will you accept electronic payments?

• Are you going to design the website by yourself, or will you hire a professional?

• What is your budget?

Based on your responses, you can find the best platform to suit your needs.
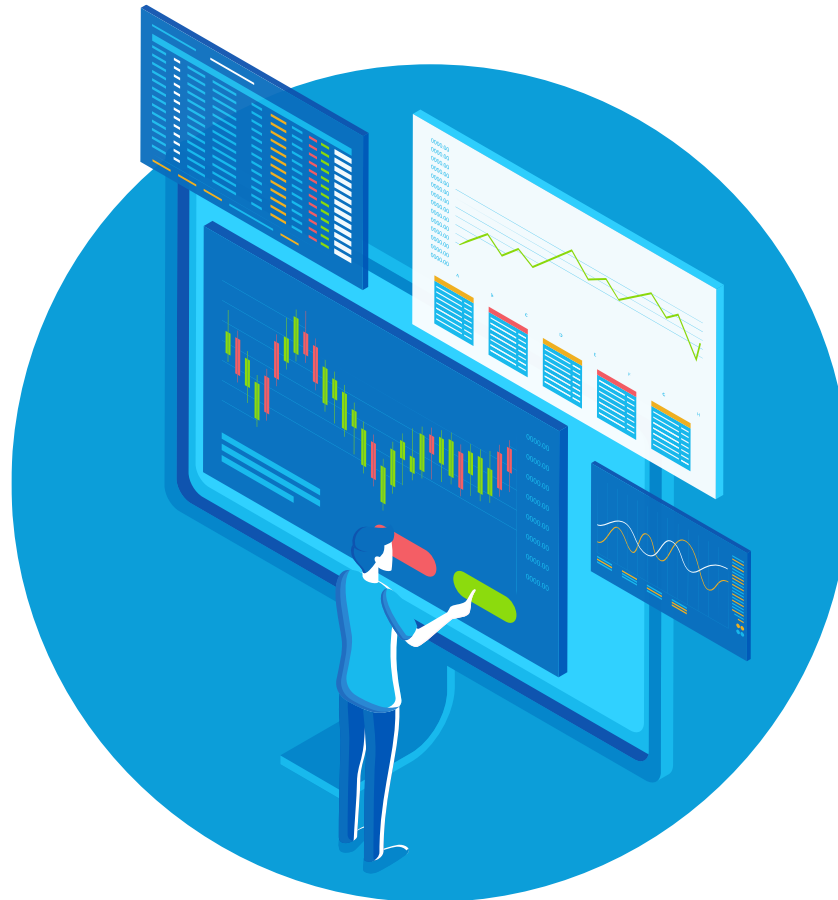
We can help you get the most from your online presence. Build your professional-looking website with our easy-to-use tools, or work with our website design professionals, and we can build a website for you.

• The mobile-friendly website builder makes creating responsive, mobile-friendly websites easier than ever

• It's easy to set up, whether you create your website yourself or you allow us to design the website for you

• U.S.-based technical support is available 24/7

• Get detailed reports about your website traffic through our web analytics

[Learn more]

3. Design your site

It takes only milliseconds for visitors to form an opinion about your website. Hence, it is essential to create a visually appealing site with easy navigation. Whether you are designing the site yourself or hiring a professional, there are a few fundamentals to consider:

Site layout

This is the visual structure of your pages. Based on the purpose of your website, you can decide how much content you would like to include and how to structure it across the website. While each business is different and their needs unique, there is some information that all websites should consider having:

Homepage – This is the first page that visitors see when they land on your website. Keep the homepage clean, eye-catching, and straightforward. It should include who you are and what you do. Make sure this page consists of the most crucial information: the name of your business, your logo, and a button(s) for visitors who wish to browse further.
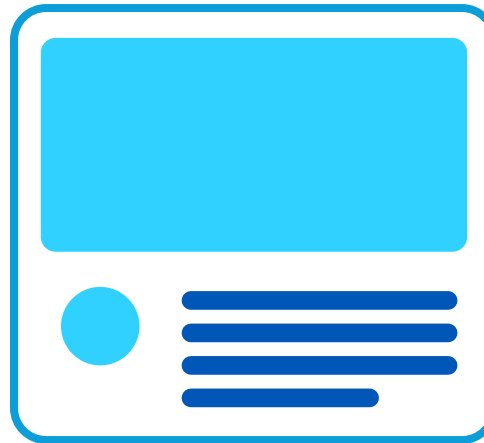
Product/service page – This page defines what you offer and explains why customers should buy from you. On this page, you should include high-quality product pictures, engaging product descriptions, and any additional information relevant for a customer wanting to make a purchase.
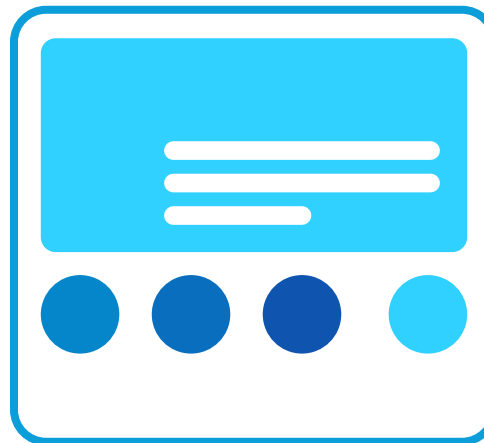
Your story – People buy from people. While you might not be in front of your customer physically, they want to hear your story and your values. Make this page personal and informal. You could even add a picture of yourself or your team! This page is about building relationships from behind the screen.
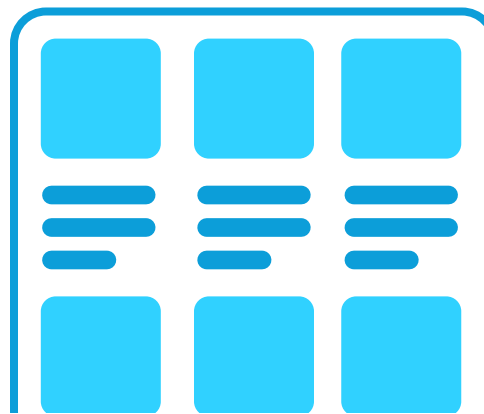
Contact information – You want to make it easy for your customers to reach out. Add your phone number, business address (if you have a brick-and-mortar store or a mailing address), and social media account for customers, so they can get in touch with you. Consider adding live chat options for visitors who want immediate responses.

Content

Your content could include high-quality images, videos, text, and more. You can have a mix of your content and sourced content. Remember that if you use third-party content, you should take steps to confirm that you have the appropriate approval from the third party to use it.

Your website is an extension of your brand, so as you design your content, remember to incorporate your brand look, feel, and voice. Your website should reflect your logo, brand colors, fonts, and style.

Mobile-ready

A majority of users likely browse your site with a mobile device. Therefore, you want to create a positive experience for your visitors who visit via mobile as well as by desktop. Make sure that your small business website is optimized for smartphones and tablets to provide virtually seamless customer experiences. Most website platforms automatically optimize your site for mobile, or if you are working with a professional, ask them to do this for you.

Your website is now ready to be assembled. Once you have the initial design ready, share it with a few trusted friends and family to gain feedback and make relevant changes. **Once you're ready, it is time to launch your site!**

Marketing – driving traffic to your store

You now have a beautiful site setup with high-quality images and great products. However, this is not an "if you build it, they will come situation." You have to find ways to reach your target customer. We will share four practices that can help you drive traffic to your online store.

Social media marketing

Your customers more likely than not on social media regardless of your industry, but they are also using social media to make decisions online to buy. And your competition is on there too![4]

Email marketing

Email marketing enables you to speak directly to your leads and past customers at a time that is convenient for them.

Virtual events

These are more critical now than ever before. Virtual events remove health and safety risks while enabling you to engage with your customers worldwide.

Pop-up stores

These offer low-cost ways to interact with your customers in-person and create an offline experience.

[4] Why Businesses and Brands Need to be Taking Advantage of Social Media. Forbes Sept. 6, 2022

1. Building a social media presence

Chances are, you've already built your company's basic social media presence. But it is time to focus on how this can help you grow in the new socially-distanced landscape. It is important to remember that social media can do more than help your customers locate and contact your business. There are ways to help boost your presence on social media platforms to generate awareness, increase sales, authentically connect with your audience, and ultimately help your business thrive.

Here are five steps to help you establish a strong social media presence:

1 **Develop a social presence –** The first step to creating a social media presence is to conduct basic research. Who are your ideal customers, and where can you reach them? Once you have identified your customers, think about the message you want to share about your business and what tone to use that resonates best with your customer.

2 **Understand social platforms –** The social media world is evolving every day, and with several platforms out there, it can get overwhelming when deciding what is right for your business. There are no one-size-fits-alls in the social media world. Focus on one or two platforms that best suit your business needs.

3 **Create content –** Robust content development is a crucial component of building an engaging social media presence. Content quality and variety has evolved through the years, and today it can include everything from a beautiful picture on or video on various social media platforms. Whatever your content, make sure it lines up with your business goals and that it resonates with your target audience.

4 **Expand audiences –** While you might have great content, you also need an engaged audience to interact with the content. An engaged audience could be the difference between having a customer or having an active advocate for your brand. Advocates can be the voice of your brand, helping to grow your business. Make sure to thoroughly research your audience to understand what they are looking for and what they react to. Once you have identified the right content, you can start developing an online community that appreciates your brand.

5 **Measure success –** The last step is to continually measure your success. Identify the best metrics to help you understand whether your social media tactics have been working. Regularly, look at how your content has performed, which platforms your customers are best reacting to, identify high performing and struggling content, and evolve your strategy to improve your social media marketing.

Helpful tips:

AT&T Business and Fullscreen Media have developed a powerful playbook to assist you with each step. By using this playbook, you can help your small business:

- Develop your company's tone of voice

- Find your competitive positioning

- Build and strengthen connections with a social media audience

- Foster a community of creativity

- Learn critical strategies behind using paid media, and much, much more

Download the social media playbook.

2. Email marketing

Email marketing is a highly effective way to reach your customers and promote your brand, whether you want to sell a product, share news, or tell a story. Effective email campaigns can convert prospects into customers and one-time buyers into loyal fans.

1 **Building an email list –** To send emails, you need to build and maintain a subscriber list. Here are some ideas on how to build and grow your list:

- Create a sign-up form on your website. When people visit your website, they have shown interest in your company and products. The sign-up form gives them the option to stay in touch with your brand.

- Build your list through social media. If you have an engaged social media audience, share your sign-up form through social media channels to grow your audience base.

- Offer a discount. Who doesn't love a good offer? Incentivize people to sign-up for your email list.

- If you have a brick-and-mortar store or hosting a pop-up, put out a sign-up sheet to get contact details.

2 **Choosing an email marketing service –** An email marketing service allows you to create beautiful emails, schedule campaigns, and benefit from analytics.

Helpful tip:
Should you buy an email list?

A word of caution! Purchasing email lists are mostly ineffective. You want to build a list of engaged customers interested in learning more about you and your products. Buying a list could lead to many of the emails being tagged as spam and result in high unsubscribe rates.

Email Marketing

Create effective email campaigns with AT&T Email Marketing, and benefit from powerful tracking tools with our easy-to-use platform. Select an affordable, scalable, business-class email solution with features to match your needs.

- Enjoy a simple-to-use solution with easy drag-and-drop templates

- Plan your email marketing schedule. Pick a time and date of when you want your emails to be sent

- Get detailed, real-time analytics including open and click-through rates

3 **Building email marketing campaigns –** Now that you are ready to send out your emails, here are some best practices to create engaging email campaigns:

• Create a marketing plan

It is always helpful to have a strategy in place for your email campaigns. Think about who your audience is and what they would like to hear from you.

• **Develop a content strategy –** You want your emails to have purpose and value to the subscriber. Research what your customers want to hear about and turn that content into emails. Some email ideas are:

  • Welcome emails sent to first-time subscribers

  • Emails about product releases

  • News of upcoming events

  • Customer testimonials

  • Emails about you and your brand

  • Abandoned cart emails to remind customer to complete a purchase

• **Choose a sending frequency –** Based on your content and your audience, you need to strike a balance on how frequently you would like to stay in touch with your customer and how often they would like for you to stay in touch with them. You don't want to go overboard, and your customer might lose interest or unsubscribe altogether if you send with too high of a frequency.

• **Make a schedule –** Now that you have decided what to send and how frequently, put together a content calendar. The calendar maps out when you will send the email and what content to include. A schedule will help you stay on track.

• Design your emails

Similar to your website design, emails need to be visually appealing. However, you want the main focus to be on your message. Keep your email short and your designs straightforward. You don't want to forget to include your brand elements like your logo, fonts, and colors.

You are now ready to send out your first email!

4

Measure your performance – Your work doesn't end once you have sent your email. Looking at results is essential to helping you refine your strategy moving forward. Here are some results you can track:

- **Opens and clicks –** This is the most common statistic used to measure engagement. You can see how many people opened your emails and how many clicked on the links provided, for example. Compare these statistics to the industry average to see where you stand. Adjust your messaging and subject lines and test again.

- **Conversions –** At the end of the day, you want to drive sales. If your email marketing service is connected to your online store, you can track how many sales were driven from your email campaign.

3. Virtual events

Virtual events were on the rise far before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the post-crisis timeframe has shown an uptick in this space as consumers turn to additional options on how to connect with businesses and brands. Virtual events are an untapped source for marketing and sales. However, there is a lot that goes into having a successful virtual event – planning, promoting, and hosting. Here are four steps to hosting a virtual event.

1 **Determine the type of virtual event to have**
Your virtual event could be live or pre-recorded. Based on the goal of your event, you can choose between the two.

Live-streamed virtual events allow for more human interaction and connected conversations. When hosting a live-streamed event, you want to recreate live experiences like meet and greets, Q&A sessions, etc.

Pre-recorded events provide you with flexibility; you can edit the videos to make them more polished, and your consumer has the flexibility to view in their own time.

Additionally, determine whether your event will be gated or you will be charging for the event.

2 **Prepare with the right technology and equipment**

A virtual event can be anything from a simple video conference or a more complex, planned out event, depending on your audience and the need. The most important thing for virtual events is audio-video requirements. At a minimum, make sure your speakers have a good Wi-Fi connection, a high-quality web camera, and a back-up plan.

A streaming platform is a service that allows you to reach your customers. There are free options in the market like Facebook Live, Instagram Live, or YouTube Live. These options are easy-to-use and straightforward but also come with a few limitations. If you need something more advanced, there are other options too.

When choosing a streaming platform, here are a few things to think about:

- Streaming quality
- Audience size
- Support
- Content management
- Distribution
- Analytics

3 **Create engaging content**

When customers attend your event, they take time out of their busy lives to listen to what you have to say. Make sure you have content they find interesting and valuable!

- Identify the right speakers for your topic. Check their availability.

- Find opportunities to engage your customers throughout your event with:

  - Polling questions or quizzes

  - Free giveaways

  - Gamification

- Offer break-out rooms or networking opportunities for attendees to connect.

- For live events, offer Q&A sessions for attendees to interact with the speakers.

Find voice and collaboration solutions that fit your business needs

[Learn more]

4 Promote your virtual event

Social media promotion

Share the details of your event through various social media channels. You can create a hashtag for your event that allows attendees to engage in the conversation. Based on your budget, you could consider paid social to reach an audience outside of your followers.

Learn more about social media marketing.

Encourage speakers to promote your event

Provide your speakers with branded material to help them promote the event. It is a great way to tap into their network and followers.

Utilize partnerships

Look into partnering with other brands or influencers in your industry to build credibility around your event.

4. Pop-up Stores

Pop-up stores are temporary retail locations that can help a business with increasing brand awareness and cost-effectively driving customer engagement. Pop-ups create a multichannel experience for your business by helping you connect with your customers offline. Lastly, due to the short-term commitments and low upfront investment, they are a good way to test out a physical presence for your store. Here are five steps on how to create an engaging pop-up experience.

1

Design your experience

Before you can dive into setting up your pop-up, it is crucial to think about the experience you hope to provide. What is your end goal from the pop-up, and how will you bring that to life for your customers? Here are a few questions to consider:

1. Are you looking to provide an immersive experience for your customers?

2. Will the pop-up be a booth-like setup?

3. Will you host special events during your pop-up period?

4. What products will you be featuring?

2 **Find the right venue**

Once you have identified your goals and the needs for the pop-up, search for the right location to host your experience. For example, if your goal is to decide whether a physical place is right for you, analyze your current sales data to determine where your customers are. For example, if you are a pet store and are looking for a pop-up for brand awareness, find a location that is pet-friendly so your customers can bring their furry friends.

Another factor to consider when selecting your location is foot traffic. Having a constant stream of traffic will help customers know about the business and bring them into your store. Furthermore, think about the stores nearby. Do they complement your business or compete with it?

Once you have a general idea of what kind of location you are looking for, start the research and meet with a few realtors to finalize on a place.

5 questions to ask before renting a place

1. What is the cost to rent the place?

2. What is included in the rental cost? Are utilities separate?

3. What is the layout of the place? Can anything be modified?

4. Are there any special permits or insurance required?

5. What are you liable for from a cost perspective?

Smart pop-up stores with AT&T Business

A smart pop-up store is just one example of how technology and connectivity, combined with targeted promotional advertising from our data-driven media platforms, will help brands deliver services and experiences beyond just selling a product.

Smart pop-up stores with AT&T Business allow brands to develop new marketing, consumer engagement, penetrate or test new geo areas, and gain exposure to targeted or new audience segments to expand the business.

Technology transforms the way brands interact with their customers and opens up new campaign opportunities to drive awareness and traffic to virtual and temporary commerce experiences. With the combined assets of AT&T Business, Warner and Xandr, AT&T Business can create and deliver a targeted campaign, build the infrastructure, connect the experience, enable the transactions and fulfillment, and then provide attribution of the overall commerce experience.

Learn more

3 **Picking the right technology**

Consumers expect speed, transparency, and convenience from brands today. As retailers compete to survive and grow, it is necessary to partner with reliable technology providers who can understand the specialized needs of the business.

They can help eliminate some of the top challenges such as perceived data security risks, operational risks in scaling projects, providing skilled third-party human resources, and ultimately reducing the overall cost of operations.

Retail leaders have adopted this philosophy and have leveraged their technology partners to move further ahead of their competition.

4 **Promote your pop-up**

There are plenty of ways to create buzz around your pop-up and drive traffic to your store.

Influencer marketing is a growing channel you can use to attract new customers and create awareness. Find the right influencer for your brand and your budget. Make sure they align with your goals and needs. Here are 3 tips to consider:

1. Personalize the outreach for your influencer

2. Give them enough time to promote your event before the actual event

3. Have a launch party or soft-opening to invite an exclusive list of influencers and media

Social media promotion should be utilized before, during, and after the pop-up store event. This helps develop the buzz and keep it going. For more details, read our Social Media Marketing section.

1. Create a unique hashtag for your event

2. Ask influencers to help promote your event

3. Have "Instagrammable" spots throughout your pop-up store, so visitors can snap a pic and post it

4. Leverage user-generated content to help with other marketing collateral

5 **Measure success**

Once the pop-up store event is complete, it is essential to measure your success. This will help you evaluate what to do differently and whether a brick-and-mortar pop-up store is a significant channel for you. A few metrics to consider include sales, foot traffic, brand awareness, leads, etc. Also, measure the success of your marketing campaigns, including social media mentions and engagement.

Operations - fulfilling customer orders

Once a customer places an order, the next step is fulfilling that order. Order fulfillment consists of storing the inventory, packaging, and shipping your products. Order fulfillment is a complex process.

Did you know?

75%
of shoppers expect shipping to be free.[5]

62%
of shoppers expect their orders to arrive in less than 3 days.[5]

69%
of shoppers will avoid shopping the same company again if they have a slow delivery experience.[5]

22%
of shoppers abandon a purchase because delivery speed is too slow.[5]

Your fulfillment strategy should include order tracking options, inventory management, and profitable shipping and return policies.

[5] "38 eCommerce Statistics for 2023" Forbes Advisor Feb 8, 2023

Inventory management and storage

To fulfill a customer's order, you need to have inventory available to pull the products for shipment. There are two ways to store this inventory:

1 **Renting a warehouse or storage location**

If you are the manufacturer of the product or order the product from a wholesaler, you will need a warehouse to store and organize your inventory. When selecting a storage location, consider the proximity from your home-office or store, whether you need a climate-controlled place, and whether your location has the flexibility to scale to meet your needs.

2 **Dropshipping**

Dropshipping is a method where you do not keep the product on hand. Instead, you sell the product and send the information to a third-party supplier to process and ship the order to your customer. Dropshipping takes the risk of keeping inventory on hand; however, you lose a little control over the end-to-end process.

It is essential to evaluate which method works best for your business. This will determine the rest of your fulfillment strategy.

Delivery and shipping

When a customer purchases from you, you need to consider how the product gets into their hands, so they have a good experience and a favorable opinion of your brand. At this point, your customer finally gets to experience your product; hence it is vital to have a good shipping strategy to maintain a strong, positive customer experience.

1 **Shipping rates and methods**

Before you can ship your products, you need to determine how much you will charge for shipping. Here are some things to consider when selecting your shipping options.

Price – Are you offering free shipping, variable shipping based on products ordered, or flat rate shipping? Each one has pros and cons. For example, free shipping tends to lead to more conversions, as there is no additional cost to the customer. However, free shipping means that you take the hit on your margin.

Delivery timeframe – How long will it take customers to receive their orders?

Shipping carrier – Which shipping carrier will you use? Do your research to find out which carrier best suits your needs. Do you need a carrier that offers pick up? Do you want customers to be able to track your products? Does your carrier ship to all the locations you offer?

International shipping – Do you ship your products internationally? If yes, who bears the cost of customs?

2 **Packaging**

Customers today are expecting an "unboxing experience" when they receive their products. It is easy to dismiss packaging due to increased costs or effort. However, post-purchase experiences are just as crucial for a consumer as their pre-purchase experiences. Good packaging experiences can help:

• Tell your brand story

• Increase the perceived value of your products

• Make a great first impression

How to build a good unboxing experience

Branded boxes – The box that holds your product is the first thing your customer sees at their doorstep, and it can affect the impression your customer has of your brand. While plain, generic packages can be cheaper, you miss the opportunity to build a positive brand image and brand recognition. Based on your budget, you could either design a fully branded box or create a sticker with your logo and other details to add to each package.

Product presentation – Inside the box, you want the products to be arranged in an aesthetically pleasing way. Think about the product size and shape and the box it is going inside. Do you need inserts to hold the product in place, or do you need to add tissues, funky bubble wrap, etc.?

Personalization – Personalization makes a customer feel special. You can consider including a handwritten note written just for your customer. While this is a time investment, it provides a personal touch that your customer will appreciate.

Returns

The simple and harsh truth is that not all customers will be satisfied with your products, and hence it is vital to have an explicit return process in place.

1 **A concise return policy**

Having a concise return policy is vital for online orders. As customers are buying before seeing, they want the flexibility to return the item if it does not live up to their expectations. Having a return policy in place creates trust amongst your customers.

Be clear about the terms and conditions for returning products. The return policy should include details such as what products can and cannot be returned, the period for accepting returns, what condition the products should be in, what you offer in exchange i.e., a full refund, an exchange for a similar product, store credit, etc.

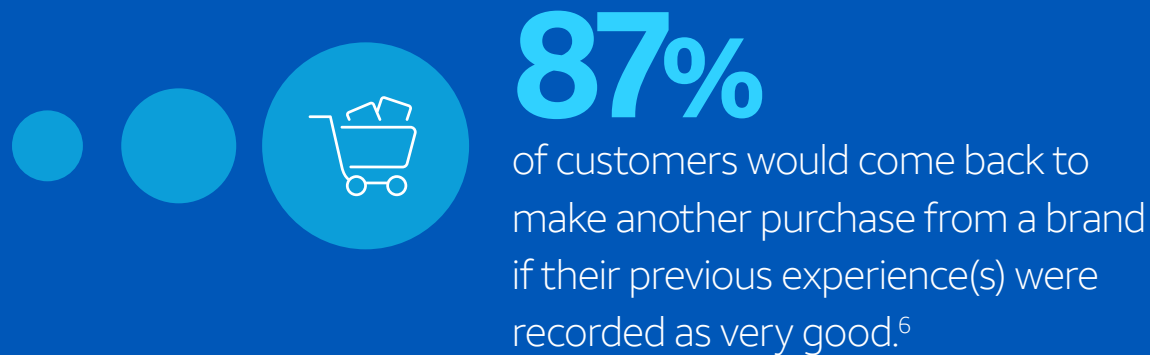**2** **Simplify the return process**

Make the return process as straightforward as possible. Since the return process can be labor-intensive and time-consuming for you, automate as much of it as possible. Automation can include starting the return process, communicating the initial request to your customer, and automated status updates. Automation will save you a lot of time and effort and decrease the return processing time.

Return management is highly important for customer retention. If customers find it difficult to return a product to your store, it will discourage them from purchasing from your store in the future.

Customer Service - creating an excellent customer experience

Customers are at the center of your business, and hence, understanding what makes them happy is key.

87% of customers would come back to make another purchase from a brand if their previous experience(s) were recorded as very good.[6]

70% of customers, excellent customer experience should be fast, convenient, helpful, and must do all of that in a friendly manner.[6]

With an online store, you need to provide customers with ways to reach you if they have questions or need help with a purchase. The customer service approach is slightly different for an online store as compared to a brick-and-mortar location. Since you have to wait for your customers to reach you, you need to anticipate the roadblocks and simplify the user experience.

[6]   "36 Astonishing Customer Experience Statistics for 2023" TechJury Feb 7, 2023

Make it easy to contact you

Each customer is different and may have a preferred method to reach you. Offer your customers various ways to get in touch with your business. This could be a phone support line, online chat, or an email address. Add a page to your online store that shares the 'contact us' information with your customer.

Self-service options

Another efficient way for customers to find answers is by providing them with self-service options. If there are questions your business is getting asked regularly, create a "frequently asked questions" page that customers can read through. This will save both you and your customers' time by providing a place where customers can get the information they need, when they need it.

Loyalty programs

A majority of your customers visit your store (whether physically or digitally) only once. Imagine spending all that money on marketing and driving traffic to attract a customer one time. Acquiring a new customer can cost up to five times more than keeping a loyal customer. Hence, instead of spending all your time and effort acquiring a new customer, you should focus on keeping your customers happy. And one way to do this is by creating a loyalty program.

AT&T Office@Hand

This cloud-based solution provides feature-rich voice and collaboration tools, so you can become more productive. AT&T Office@Hand is an easy-to-use phone, fax, messaging, and conferencing system that enables you to spend more time serving customers, not managing communications.

Learn more

A loyalty program is where a business rewards its loyal customers for an action. Create a program that provides value to your customers and also benefits your business. Here are a few steps to get you started:

1 **Earning points**

Provide your customers with various options of ways to earn points. This will keep them engaged and encourage them to explore your brand. So what actions should you reward? Think about the actions that make sense to your customers besides purchases. How does your customer interact with your brand beyond purchase alone? Some options include rewarding the customer for posting on social media, writing a review, or referring a friend.

2 **Customer rewards**

Rewards motivate customers to engage with your loyalty program and your brands. Make sure the reward is fit for your target audience and is aligned with your strategy. Some examples of rewards can include free shipping, discounts, or free products and branded wearables.

3 **Match the points to the rewards**

Now that you have determined how customers can earn points, you need to determine how many points a customer needs to earn a reward. Try to strike a balance between the reward's value to your customer and the reward's cost to you. Remember, you want your customers to be incentivized to earn points; this is what will drive their loyalty. But you also want to keep your own costs in mind.

4 **Loyalty branding**

Bring your brand forward through the loyalty program and make it easy for the customer to remember. Come up with a catchy name for your program and the points earned. Furthermore, keep the program's branding in-line with your overall branding, i.e., use the same fonts, colors, and brand styles for the materials used to promote your program.

5 **Launch your program**

It is time to go live! Add an explainer page to your website that tells your customers about your loyalty program and directs them to sign up. Before you launch and even after, be sure to tell your customers about it (and what they can earn) through email, social media, and all the other ways you market to them. You can even create in-store signage and apps to promote your program.

6 **Measure the success**

Once your loyalty program is off the ground, make sure to continually measure its success. Decide on a few metrics to track that will help you understand if your program is in fact building customer loyalty. Metrics could include the rate of repeat customers, purchase frequency, or average order value. Compare your results to previous periods as well as to other industry averages, and make adjustments to your loyalty program as needed.

Virtual workspace

As a small business owner, you are always looking for ways to keep your operational costs minimum. A virtual workspace is a cost-effective way to run your business without the high, long-term overhead costs associated with having a large headquarters. Some benefits of working from a virtual office include:

The ability to work from anywhere

No long-term commitments

Access to a larger talent pool

Easy to scale as your business grows

Low over-head costs

Setting up a remote office

1 **The physical space**

A remote office is an office that is located away from your main headquarters or main office. If you are setting up a remote office at your home, think about identifying a room that can accommodate a desk and necessary office equipment. Invest in a good chair, so you can maintain an upright posture through your workdays. Finally, ensure you have sufficient lighting in the room, so you do not strain your eyes.
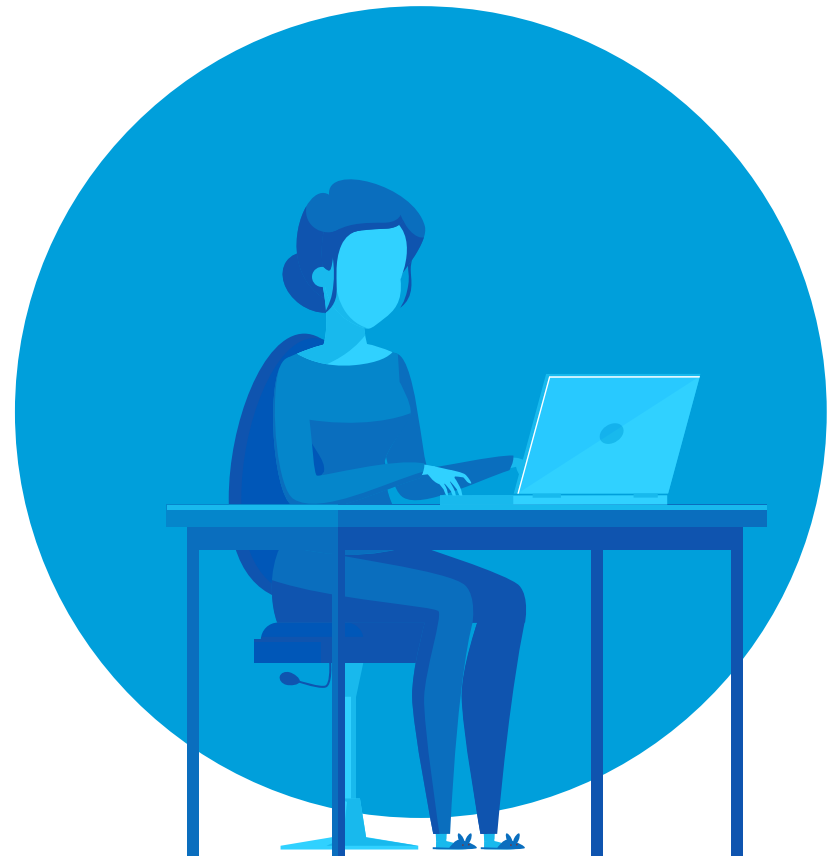
2

The right technology

The right technology will enable you to set up and work from your virtual office. After all, technology is what enables you to go virtual.

Stay connected

Working from home is almost impossible without a reliable internet connection. To stay productive means thinking about the speed, bandwidth, and reliability of your internet service – and beyond it. So, pay attention to the equipment and number of devices you are using. Look for weak spots. And add what you need to strengthen your signal and setup.

To maximize productivity, make sure your internet connection speed and bandwidth fits how you use it. If you transfer large files, stream video or have several devices connected at once, for example, you will need fast speeds.

Communicate

Connecting with key people and critical information is vital to the success of your business. That is true no matter where you work. But, when you work from home, reliable communication and collaboration options are crucial.

Make mobile work for you – A smartphone can bring your work to life no matter where you work. If it is your go-to for work calls, be sure your wireless plan fits your coverage and data needs and your budget.

Have a plan B: the landline – The unexpected has a way of popping up and interrupting your workflow. Damaged or uncharged smartphones or weather-related service interruptions can create problems. If more than one happens at once, you can kiss your productivity goodbye. You can avoid this with a landline. It is a solid alternative to mobile only.

AT&T internet and networking

AT&T Business helps keep small businesses connected by delivering a fast, reliable, secure networking solutions to optimize your business. Choose from our various networking options, including AT&T Business Fiber, AT&T Dedicated Internet, AT&T VPN, and more to find the right connectivity for your virtual office.

Learn more

Mobility rate plans and devices

AT&T Business offers a wide variety of mobility rate plans and devices to help you meet your business needs. Mobilize your business with a broad portfolio of smartphones and mobile phones backed by fast, dependable, and reliable network coverage.

Learn more

Work/life balance

If your virtual office is set up from your home, it is easy to get distracted. Put some rules in place to maintain your work and life balance. Here are a few tips to help you:

1 **Plan ahead**

This is a necessity – especially if you share your home with other people. Whether you have a room dedicated to your office or not, establish your workday rules and stick to them. For example, ask yourself what your work hours will be, where you will primarily be working from, and how your family can reach you when they need you, and more. By answering these questions ahead of time and communicating from the beginning with your family, you will have a better time balancing work and life.

2 **Take breaks**

When you work from home, it is easy to work for long periods without interruptions. You are not commuting, walking to meetings, leaving for lunch, etc. Just be sure you keep this in check. It is good to give your mind a break periodically. Briefly stepping away from an assignment or deliverable means you can return to it with a fresh perspective. And, sometimes, that can mean you finish it faster.

Each one of us is different, so think about what works for you and what enhances your productivity. It may take a while to find the right balance, but give it some time and you will make the right adjustments to suit your personal style.

Employee engagement

The importance of employee engagement cannot be stressed enough. Successful employee engagement strategies can help reduce staff turnover, increase efficiency, and lead to higher customer satisfaction. Companies with highly engaged workforce are 21% more profitable![7]

Employee engagement becomes more challenging when teams are not physically located together. It is easy for employees to feel disconnected and unmotivated. Hence a carefully crafted employee engagement strategy is vital for the success of your business.

[7] "4 Factors Driving Record-High Employee Engagement in the U.S.," by Jim Harter, Nov. 7, 2022.

Managing a virtual team

Without a physical location, you are more than likely to have a virtual team. A virtual team is one that is geographically dispersed but work together and separately on interdependent tasks. To manage a successful team, you need to create a corporate culture remotely and have a strategy for your teams to communicate and foster relationships, from wherever they are.

1 **Define processes**

Different people have different working styles: hence defining some key processes and setting standards can ensure everyone works together well. Standards and processes remove guesswork, and employees have fewer questions about their tasks and can be more efficient. Simplify the work to the greatest extent possible and clarify the roles of each team member. Finally, schedule reviews with team members to understand what is working and what is not, and make adjustments.

2 **Invest in the best communication and collaboration tools**

Effective communication and collaboration are core to a successful virtual team. Communication tools can range from chat applications to video conferencing services. Each tool has its purpose, and therefore, it is beneficial to provide your team with options on how team members can reach each other. For example, a team member can send a chat message for a quick question or get on a video call for more collaborative conversations. Remember that not all employees might be tech-savvy, so find tools and technology that are easy-to-use and highly reliable.
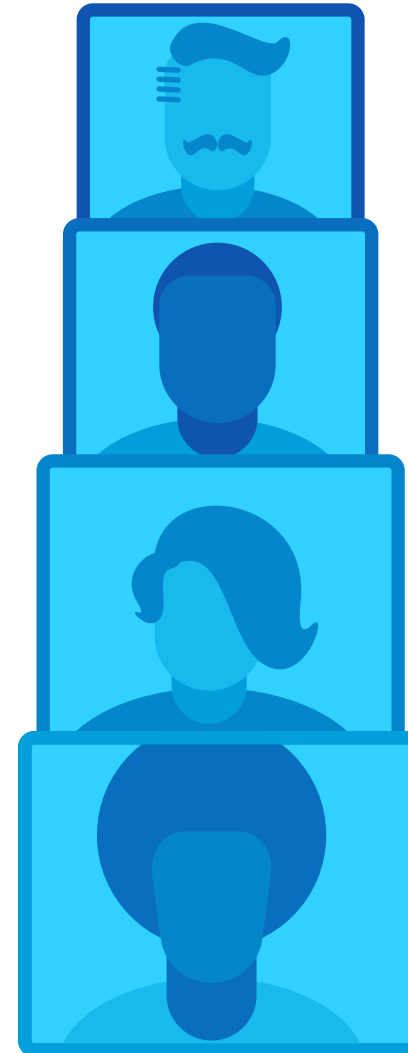
AT&T Business voice and collaboration

Communicate more effectively, reduce costs, and improve productivity by combining voice, video, chat, and presence with shared workspaces, conferencing, and contact centers through easy-to-use collaboration tools with any time and virtually anywhere access.

Learn more

3

Schedule regular meetings

With remote teams, it is easy to feel disconnected from each other. Scheduling regular meetings is a way to check in with the team members and create a team work rhythm. If possible, try to schedule meetings on the same day and at the same time to establish a routine. Video calls are one of the best ways to maximize efficiency and create a more inclusive virtual environment.

4

Create a virtual water cooler

Water cooler conversations are informal interactions between employees that help create a social bond. In the absence of these opportunities to have casual conversations, employees tend to become task-focused and lose a sense of team cohesion. A simple way to overcome this is to schedule a time for team building activities and informal discussions. For example, you can have a virtual coffee hour to check in with the team on how they are doing personally or host a contest for employees to share by video their remote workspaces. Remember how important it is to take time outside of work and have some fun with your team!

5

Do not forget the one-on-ones

One-on-one time is beneficial for performance management and coaching. Have these conversations regularly to check in and provide feedback on their work. One-on-one time is for your employees to ask questions, connect with you, and discuss how to grow professionally.

Even with a virtual team, you want to create an inclusive work culture. Research what works best for your team and implement those best practices into your business.

Find voice and collaboration solutions that fit your business needs

Learn more

Virtual training

Training helps employees improve their job skills and allows them to expand their knowledge base. Despite the cost associated with training, the return on investment is well worth it. To avoid virtual training from becoming just another checkbox to tick off, keep virtual training sessions engaging and interesting.

1 **Set a clear agenda**

Prepare an outline of what will be covered in training and share it with the team before the training session. This will help employees be prepared for what to expect during the training. You could also ask for questions before the session to better understand any potential gaps and address your audiences' needs.

2 **Establish good communication**

Having a two-way conversation virtually is a little more complicated than having one in person. With phones muted and cameras turned off, getting your audience to engage and spurring a productive dialogue can be challenging. Furthermore, when participants are on their computers, distractions sneak in, such as the temptation to check emails or browse the web. Try to build in opportunities for engagement throughout your training session. For example, insert polls where possible or pause to ask questions and open up dialogue.

3 **Build in visual elements**

If you are presenting slides, be sure to break up the slides and other training material with visual elements to keep employees interested and focused. Visual elements can include images, interactive activities, or even trivia.

4 **Collect feedback**

Ask for honest feedback from your employees at the end of your training sessions. Feedback will help you understand what is working and what you can improve. Areas of feedback can include asking about presentation length, engagement levels, interest in the topics, feedback relating to the presenter, and more.

Virtual training fosters connections amongst employees and provides them with the right skills to improve job efficiency and performance. To get the maximum return on investment, keep employees engaged before, during, and after the sessions.

Cybersecurity

Cybercriminals target companies of all sizes. Cyberattacks can put your money, data, and technology infrastructure at risk, which in turn can impact your business. Other consequences of cyberattacks include financial losses from theft or disruption of business, costs incurred in correcting cyber raids, and a damaged reputation. Fortunately, you can take steps to help protect your business.

1 **Update your software**

Hackers target outdated software with known vulnerabilities. Make sure your employees install software updates and patches as they are available.

2 **Use antivirus software**

Deploy antivirus software to help protect your company devices from viruses, spyware, ransomware, phishing scams, and more.

3 **Get extra security through Virtual Private Networks (VPNs)**

Virtual private networks encrypt all traffic entering and leaving your devices. If someone somehow manages to intercept your information, all they will have is encrypted data. Installing a VPN is a great step toward data security.

4 **Train your employees**

43% of data loss stems from internal employees.[8] Employees can leave your network compromised and open to attack. Invest in cybersecurity training for your employees to educate them to help prevent common attacks.

5 **Regularly back up your data**

If a cyberattack does happen, your data could be damaged or even completely deleted. Make it a common practice to back up your information and data. Store your back-up files offline so they are accessible in case of an attack.

[8] "Insider Threats Responsible for 43% of Data Breaches," Info Security, Sept. 25, 2022.

Helpful tip:

Make smart security a part of your regular activities. This includes requiring strong passwords for devices, emails, and other sensitive information, training your staff, and having a plan in place in case of an incident.

AT&T Cybersecurity

AT&T Cybersecurity helps to reduce the complexity and cost of fighting cybercrime. Our mission is to be your trusted advisor on your journey to cybersecurity resiliency, making it safer for your business to innovate.

Learn more

AT&T Business – stand together, stay connected

We believe in small businesses. We want to make it as simple as possible for you to get the tools you need with purchasing options and support specifically designed for small businesses. With a team of specialists across virtually every facet of the technology landscape, we can help you choose the solutions and services that will set your business up for success.

For more resources, click here.

To purchase AT&T Business solutions, click here.