

Surviving construction – tips and tricks for small business owners



Planning/pre-construction

Be proactive – gather information and identify possible impacts on your business

Your business

- Spend time reviewing your business processes; products and services; marketing and communications; finances; staffing and management structures.
 - **Products and services**
Do you know which of your products and services are most profitable? Could you diversify your offerings? Are you able to increase your online presence and boost sales through this channel? Consider what will actively draw customers to your business.
 - **Marketing and communications**
It's essential to keep existing and potential customers updated with what's happening, including that you're still trading during the period of disruption. Check that your website and social media profiles are up to date. As far as possible, plan your communications. This will help you during busy times and ensure you don't miss any key messages. Look for opportunities to target the construction workforce as potential new customers. Boost your marketing spend and efforts by working with other local businesses.
 - **Finances**
Speak with your accountant to plan for revenue changes and how to keep a tighter control on your cash flow. Discuss opportunities to restructure any business loans. If your market rent review is due near or during the project check your lease for options to renegotiate.
 - **Operations**
Consider how access may be affected for your customers, staff and suppliers. Check if your utilities and internet will be affected. Could you change your opening hours or the way you operate?
 - Will parking for customers or staff be more limited?
 - Think about whether staff could work from home, take leave or reduce their hours if needed. Get the right advice before making any changes. Make sure your communication with them is open and honest.
- Join the SBDC's [Facebook group](#) 'I'm a small business owner in Western Australia' to learn from other business owners.
- Get free support from an experienced business adviser at the SBDC on 133 140.

The project

- Discover:
 - who is responsible
 - who the main contacts are
 - how long it will run for and what will happen during the construction period
 - if there will be any long term or permanent changes that could affect your business.
- Sign up to any newsletters or social media groups about the project.
- Attend information or community consultation sessions.
- Express your concerns with the main contacts you have identified about potential impact on your business, and share your ideas; it's important to do this early in the process. Ask questions if you don't understand something about the planned construction.
- Form alliances and networks with other local businesses:
 - join a local business group or chamber of commerce.
 - think of ways to work together to encourage customer loyalty.

Turn to us.



133 140



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Construction phase

This will likely be the most disruptive phase for your business. If you notice a reduction in customer numbers it's time to implement the plans you developed during the planning/pre-construction phase.

Your business

- Regularly monitor your business activity against your plan. Take action and amend plans as your situation changes.
- Even the best laid plans can change – the same goes for construction projects. It's important to be flexible in your approach.
- Allocate additional time for cleaning, in case extra dust is generated by the construction works.
- Boost your communications – use your networks and keep your stakeholders and customers regularly updated during this period.
 - Keep staff in the loop about what is happening and listen to their ideas.
 - Regularly update your website and social media channels. Actively encourage customers to continue to support your business so they don't change their buying habits.
- Let suppliers know if there will be any issues when making their deliveries.
- Check in with other local businesses to see how they are managing and look for opportunities to work together to keep customers coming to the area.
- Maintain good financial records and monitor your financial position throughout the construction period. Keep track of costs, profit levels and customer numbers.
- Keep an eye on stock levels; if you are holding too much can it be reduced?
- Develop a friendly rapport with the construction crew. They are potential new customers, so take advantage of what they normally buy and when.
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The project

- Keep informed about the project during this phase. Speak to the project or site manager or any government representatives involved (eg. METRONET, Water Corporation) if they visit your business. Attend meetings or information sessions and read any newsletters or physical mail they send to you – it may contain crucial information for your business.
- Contractors usually provide signage, but make sure that customers can still find you if fences, hoardings, safety and directional signage is surrounding your business. Is the language or type of signage meeting your customers' needs? While you may need permission from your local council for additional external signage, you are of course free to display information posters within your business.
- Accept what is outside your control and focus on influencing what you can. It's inevitable that the construction phase will be a challenging time for your business.



Project completion

Once construction is over your business could still feel its impact, and your customers may need encouragement to return.

- Celebrate the end of the construction period with your customers and other local businesses. Are there any special promotions you could run?
- Communicate with customers and actively reconnect to let them know the work is over.
- Your customer demographic may have changed over the construction period. Consider reviewing your products and services to meet their needs.
- If you have lost regular customers think about ways to attract them back, perhaps with a loyalty program.
- Consider sending thank you notes to customers who were loyal to you during this time.
- Review and update your amended business plan, including marketing plans. Look for any additional activities, products or services that you could make a more permanent feature of your business. Perhaps there may be operational changes or cost savings that may be worth continuing.
- Acknowledge your staff and how they supported your business during this difficult period.
- Maintain your engagement with local business networks and associations and continue to work together with other local businesses to drive customers to your area.
- Speak with the local council about their plans for activating the area to encourage people to return. Could they organise artwork or develop more green areas, including parks? One-off events such as a street festival at the end of construction could also bring a welcome boost to the area.