Visualsoft

COVID-19 Merchant's Guide

Version 1 Friday 20th March

www.visualsoft.co.uk

The situation in relation to COVID-19 is continuing to develop and we appreciate that this may be placing challenges on the day-to-day operation of your business, as well as on yourself and your family.

Since our inception, we have been lucky to be part of a great community that supports each other's business success and the wellbeing of clients. For this reason, we felt it necessary to offer guidance to the eCommerce community regarding how to navigate the current uncertain landscape.

I hope you find this guide useful.

Dean Benson, Visualsoft CEO



What do we predict?

- Throughout the initial stages of the outbreak in the UK, shoppers will lean towards only utility and essential products online.
- However, following the initial stages and as consumers begin to self-isolate, more non-essential items will see increases, such as:
    - More luxury foods, and the use of home-delivery services such as Just Eat
    - Loungewear and bedding
    - Cosmetics and health products
    - Office furniture and home decor pieces
    - Sportswear and home workout equipment
    - Laptops and desktop computers for longer term home working
    - Entertainment items such as video streaming services and board games
    - Educational and arts & craft material to keep children occupied
- Free shipping will become the norm and could be the difference between a transaction or not. We expect to see an increase in free returns over the coming months, to provide added benefit to shoppers.
- An increase will be seen in the number of online shoppers that fit into the older demographic, meaning retailers may need to evaluate on site UX more than ever before.
- Longer term, this may drive shoppers to make more environmentally-conscious choices in the future based on an underlying sense of identity and feeling of obligation to improve world health. It also may predispose them to increase luxury purchases to boost self esteem.



What should you be doing with your marketing channels?

While businesses that are perceived to exploit the current global situation will struggle to succeed, retailers should realise the opportunity available and must switch the way regular consumer demands are met.

As the majority of the population begin to self-isolate with only access to online retailers, a number of Visualsoft clients have already seen an increase in sales. In addition, industry leaders, Amazon, are reportedly investing in a time of uncertainty by hiring an extra 100,000 employees to be able to meet the increase in online transactions.

What should you be doing with your marketing channels?



Increase your online focus

In line with the Government's recommendations, as more of the population begin to self-isolate, physical retail stores will see a decline in footfall and dependent on future updates, may need to close completely for a certain period. Increase emphasis on your online store, to continue to provide your customers with what they require.



Keep your customer base informed and reassured

Alongside your regular brand-building emails, ensure that you are communicating with your customers through retention channels, remarketing and retargeting about how you are reacting to COVID-19. This is a great way to offer comfort and support. Specifically, update your consumers on stock levels, logistics plans, delivery updates and how you are taking preventative measures during handling and packing, to be as transparent as possible and to offer reassurance on their order status. A COVID-19 web page explaining your stance on the situation could also add value and reassurance to your customers.

What should you be doing with your marketing channels?



New customer trust preparation

There is likely to be an increase in new customers online, and potentially from new demographics. To increase trust, ensure that your website messaging caters for any potential new users, and make contact information is clearly visible. Wherever possible, consider the addition of a live chat feature, manned by staff to provide advice and assistance with any transaction - just as they would in store.



Maintain your visibility

While it is tempting to pull back on ad spend in the current uncertain climate, this could have a considerable impact on your visibility that may have an adverse affect in the coming months. As the market becomes less saturated, there could be opportunities for cheaper clicks, so maintaining your ad spend across social media and SERPs is more important than ever, with specific focus on your brand building, retention strategy and specifically stock visibility.

What should you be doing with your marketing channels?



Put a heavier emphasis on your longer term acquisition channels

Keep a strong focus on marketing channels such as SEO (Search Engine Optimisation). Longer term strategies will pay off later in the year, so any spare resource internally could be shifted into these channels as a focus.



Become more socially active than ever

Self isolation and social distancing pushes the population towards social media more than ever before, in order to remain connected and informed. Review content and any scheduled posts to ensure that they are sensitive, appropriate, considerate and helpful where COVID-19 is concerned.

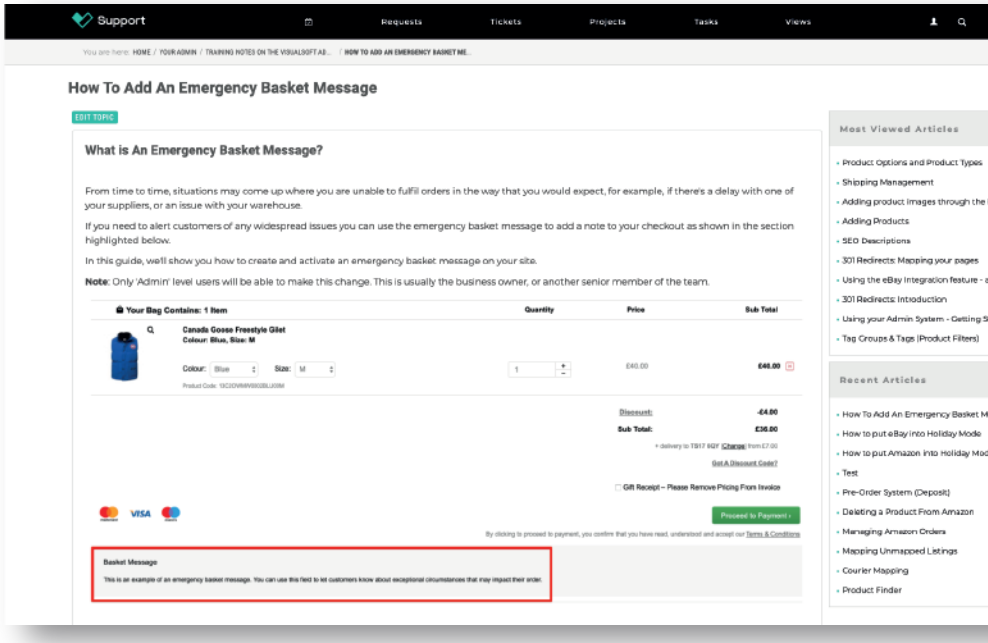
Platform updates: keeping your website agile

As the situation with COVID-19 is continuing to develop, there are plenty of actions you can take to keep your customers informed regarding your own operations, with particular focus on processing and managing delays.

Platform updates: keeping your website agile

Add an emergency basket message

If you are unable to fulfil orders in the way you would expect (e.g. for any supplier or warehousing issues), alert your customers to any changes from the norm ahead of time by using an emergency basket message to add a note to your checkout, meaning that it will be seen before anyone proceeds to purchase.



Add a shipping holiday

If you anticipate shipping delays, are struggling with processing or cannot deliver orders on certain days, adding a shipping holiday is an effective way to keep consumers informed. Adding a shipping holiday this means that the system will not class this day as an active processing day (across all couriers) meaning the delivery estimates are automatically increased, quickly setting expectations.

Platform updates: keeping your website agile



Update your courier processing days

From conversations with your couriers, if you expect increased demand will impact on the normal delivery expectations, increasing your courier processing and shipping days will provide accurate delivery dates. This is useful where your international deliveries may be delayed, but local deliveries are unaffected, as you can update courier processing days on a per-courier basis.



Update your automated emails

Each of your automated emails will already contain content relevant to the subject; but you may want to tweak the content for order confirmations, stock notifications, account registration and more, so that it better reflects your business and the current climate.

Platform updates: keeping your website agile



Add holidays into your eBay and Amazon stores

Your eBay and Amazon stores come with a number of options to help you manage the way that you sell. If you need to take a break from your store, there are options available which will allow you to put your stores into holiday mode.

Please note that this information was correct at time of writing, however as it relates to 3rd party functionality, this could be subject to change.

- For eBay advice you can visit eBay Seller Central.
- For further guidance on managing your Amazon shop, visit Amazon Seller Central.

Platform updates: keeping your website agile



Edit your promo images on site

There are a number of types of promotional images that will be available on your site. This can include your main banner, checkout trust builders, on-site banners and more depending on your site layout. Make sure to amend the promotional images that appear around your site, in order to present shoppers with key information, updates on the situation and relevant offers.



Delivery instructions and terms

Customer delivery notes allow your shoppers to add a message to their order with any special instructions. When this option is enabled it will allow your customer to add messages such as; ''Please leave outside', noting a safe space where their parcel can be left. Many retailers are already beginning to extend their returns policies, to demonstrate their increased flexibility to their customer base.

Courier Guidance

The landscape for couriers is changing daily and for this reason, we recommend checking the website of your courier to keep up to date on all communications.

The majority of couriers have created a dedicated COVID-19 page, detailing precautions taken by their own staff and how consumers can also follow safety protocol based on Government advice provided in these uncertain times.

Courier Guidance

The links below will direct you to the courier specific COVID-19 pages:



[Royal Mail]



[DHL]



[Parcel Force]



[DPD]



[FedEx]



[Ups]



[Hermes]

Where can I get support?

We are providing regular updates on our specific COVID-19 web page, to keep you in the loop: www.visualsoft.co.uk/coronavirus

The below resources will also be incredibly helpful in the following weeks or months:

- World Health Organisation
- Gov.co.uk
- Guidance for employers and businesses
- Support for businesses
- Guidance for employees

Our team is always on hand should you need any further information, you can reach us using 01642 633 604.

Alternatively, submit your query online via our website and one of our specialists will be in touch: www.visualsoft.co.uk/contact