

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Support for Business Program Participant Guidebook



Helping your small business prosper before, during and after construction



You were recently informed by the Milwaukee Department of Public Works (DPW) that one or more construction projects are planned for the area adjacent to your business. This Guidebook will direct you to the tools and services available to you through the DPW Support for Business Program. Your participation is voluntary and is provided at no cost to your business.

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Introduction to the Support for Business Program

The Support for Business Program includes three components: community collaboration, continuous communication and targeted business education.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Engineers, construction managers, entrepreneurs, civic leaders and business support organizations are working together to align themselves with the needs of business owners located near construction zones. The results of this collaborative effort are:

- Business experts lend their knowledge to maintain and grow Milwaukee's small business community.
- Engineers plan construction such that it does not unduly impact normal business operations.
- Business support organizations offer technical assistance to business owners to strengthen their businesses before, during and after construction.

CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

The Department of Public Works will provide project information to you early, often and in multiple forms. In order to facilitate the most effective flow of communication, DPW has assigned a Community Liaison to every construction project in the Support for Business Program.

TARGETED BUSINESS EDUCATION

Improvements to your street bring long-term safety and aesthetic benefits, but they may also bring short-term business challenges. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to mitigate the effect construction will have on your bottom line. The Support for Business Program provides you with quick access to the tools and resources needed to prepare for the construction project, address the impending challenges and create a plan of action.



How to Find Help

AT THE SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS WEBSITE

Visit the Support for Business Program website at www.Milwaukee.gov/SupportforBusiness to:

- See all DPW construction projects planned for this year.
- Receive updates on the construction projects near you.
- Locate contact information for your Community Liaison.
- Find answers to the most frequently asked questions.
- Register for business education webinars and workshops.

FROM YOUR COMMUNITY LIAISON

He or she will assist your business in the following ways:

- The Liaison assigned to the construction adjacent to your business will be your central point of contact for the duration of the project and may provide updates on your construction project in three ways: via e-mail, U.S. Postal Service and on the Support for Business Program website.
- Since one construction project may involve as many as five city departments, your Liaison will address your construction issues and navigate the various departments for you, freeing you to focus on your business.
- Your Liaison will be in constant communication with the construction site manager to provide you with regular progress reports and work to devise solutions that will minimize the disruption to your business.
- Liaisons will address your inquiries about construction, city regulations and the Support for Business Program. They will partner with businesses in the construction area on issues such as temporary signage, business assistance, alternate routes and parking regulations.
- The Liaisons maintain the calendar of planning sessions for the projects coming to your area. You are welcome to attend planning sessions or you may ask your Liaison to advocate on your behalf at the sessions.



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THROUGH SMALL BUSINESS EDUCATION

Places you can access education:

- The Plan For Success section of this guide has tactics you can incorporate into your business strategy for the time periods before, during and after construction.
- Small business classes and webinar information will be posted on the Support for Business website as they become available. Business owners whose businesses are located near the construction area may attend the classes and access webinars at no cost.
- There is a list of Support for Business Key Contact Information on page 12 of the guidebook. This list contains names, telephone numbers and websites of organizations that can provide valuable business information.

PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Investment in the City's infrastructure provides a long-term benefit to your business and the economy in general. Many business owners have found that construction projects can be challenging. The following are tactics that have been found to fortify businesses when incorporated into strategic plans of action. These are offered as suggestions, hopefully you will find them helpful.

A. Preparing Your Business for the Construction

Be proactive

Set short term goals, prepare a budget and devise a plan of action. Entering construction season without a strategy is unwise.

Know your financial situation

Assess your business' situation. A thorough assessment of your business' strengths and weaknesses is crucial. It will help you make the most informed business decisions.

Build up cash reserves

The reality of construction is that walk-in sales will most likely decrease. You will need more advertising and promotions to encourage new customers and maintain existing ones. Start setting funds aside for the increased marketing needs.

Expand your knowledge

Be open to new solutions. Increase your business' capabilities by soliciting aid from mentors, front line employees and business experts.

Identify your most valuable customers

Track the sales revenue from each type of customer. Then segment the customers and focus the majority of your marketing strategies on the most lucrative segment.



Preparing Your Business... continued

Keep your customers in the habit of regularly visiting your business

Offer coupons and gift certificates to be redeemed during the construction period.

Review your accounts payables

Consider possible renegotiation of rates on your business lease, loans, credit cards and supplier terms.

Develop tighter controls over billing and collections

To speed up cash flow, reduce the time between shipping your product and sending an invoice. Consider semi-monthly instead of monthly billing and send second notices more quickly.

Collect past-due receivables

Reach out to customers with outstanding accounts. If you can't collect the total immediately, try to negotiate a payment schedule.

Review your personal and business credit scores

Address all issues on the credit reports. Good credit provides benefits like access to capital and lower interest rates.

Implement new technologies

Consider where you can advance technologically. Think about expanding your web presence by developing social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook. If you already utilize these medias, make sure you are communicating the construction plans with your customers.



Tell customers of the pending construction and the efforts you're taking to ensure a smooth transition for them.

Find new revenue sources

Introduce a new product to existing customers, find a new market for existing offerings or find new uses for existing products.

Create a new way to deliver the product

Deliver your product through a different outlet such as e-commerce, using an alternative retail outlet or implementing a delivery service.

Communicate with your employees

Immediately inform your staff about the pending construction and how you perceive it will affect the business and their jobs. This assures them that you have a plan and their contribution is essential to the business' success.

Preparing Your Business... continued

Cross-train

Use this opportunity to reassign employees to tasks that may have been overlooked in busier times. For example, create a new inventory system, update your website or revamp your menu. This will increase employees' skill levels, give you more staffing flexibility and help you retain good employees.

Reassure good employees

The thought of impending construction can bring feelings of uncertainty and fear. Make sure your high performing employees know that you value them and you want them to stay with the company.

Prepare customers

Plan to communicate with them during construction letting them know you are open for business, alternate routes to reach you if applicable, and where to park.

Update customer contact information

Use proactive communication. It is even more important during construction than usual. You must continue with your newsletters, event invitations and couponing in order to remain relevant to customers.

Start a generous loyalty program

If you already offer one, increase the benefits or lessen the requirements necessary for your customers to receive benefits during construction.

Utilize cooperative marketing

Team up with neighbors to participate in a co-op ad. This will save money and make a stronger impact through larger ad space than if you placed an advertisement by yourself.

Get active in your organizations

Keep abreast of your industry, community and customers through your participation in your chamber of commerce, industry association and local business district.

Identify your key performance indicators

Use key performance indicators. They are a set of quantifiable measures that a business uses to gauge or compare performance in terms of meeting goals. Having these in place allows you to quickly monitor your business performance and identify potential problems.

Evaluate product mix

Calculate the profit margins of each of your products. Give particular attention to low margin products to determine if it is still worthwhile to carry them.

Analyze inventory levels

Determine if any obsolete inventory can be reworked or sold for salvage.



B. Managing Your Business During Construction

While most business owners are passively waiting for the construction to end, the savvy owners are looking past the short-term and are proactively laying the groundwork for future growth.

Closely monitor your financial statements

Increase the attention paid to your three key financial statements to keep you agile and ready to course correct if the need arises.

Focus on customer care

Know that customer loyalty will be tested during construction. As your customers consider your competition, ask yourself, “Do I offer the best value, quality, service and prices? What can I do to make my business more competitive?”

Avoid the temptation to make across-the-board cuts

Analyze and identify which area can be cut with the least amount of harm to the bottom line. Rarely do all areas of the business contribute equally to its success or failure.

Track your ad spending to revenue

Know how much you are earning for every dollar you are spending. You’ll have a better understanding of where to cut or what to focus on. Use promo codes and web analytics to help with tracking.

Outsource non-core functions

Review your management functions, decide what your primary area of expertise is, and outsource other areas such as payroll, benefits administration, or sales. This will allow you to dedicate more time to what will add the most value.

Use your advisors wisely

Keep your accountant, banker, insurance agent, and lawyer informed about your business. These professionals can help you avoid pitfalls when making business decisions.

Stay informed

Attend DPW information sessions, track construction progress on the DPW website and enlist the aid of your Liaison.

Monitor inventory carefully

Review inventory levels monthly and make sure stock levels are appropriate for the season.



Managing Your Business... continued

Refresh your website content

Keep your website current. It is generally the first place potential customers go to learn about your business. It's important for the site's appearance and themes to be current, for your information to be accurate and for your site to be easy to find and to navigate.

Research new technology

Implementation of new technology can greatly help your business. The proper upgrades can increase your efficiency, lower your expenses and reduce down time.

Plan an "Excuse the Dust" sale right after the construction begins

Act fast. A sale quickly gets customers in the habit of coming to your business during construction, before they have a chance to seek out the competition.

Stay Positive

Construction may be the worst thing in your life, but do not complain to customers. Your feelings about construction will pass, but your customers will associate your negativity with your business long after the bulldozers leave.

Accentuate the positive

Never go to the media with your fears of bankruptcy; that rarely draws customers to your door. Always lead with your strengths. Go to the media with solutions. Show how you are using your creativity and business savvy to overcome this challenge.

Acknowledge the construction

Thank each customer for visiting upon arrival. Ask if there is anything you can do to help them through the inconvenience of the construction.

Explain to customers how construction will benefit them

Discuss benefits such as how the new street lighting will make the area safer for them or how the new intersection will make it easier for them to turn into your parking lot.

Subscribe to business publications

Get essential tools for survival by reading the host of print and online publications aimed at small business owners.

Create a strategic alliance

Find a business that serves your target market but is not your competition. Find ways to collaborate, such as creating a referral agreement or purchasing co-op advertising.

Keep customers abreast of the construction

Maintain constant status updates. Inform every customer of the latest construction developments and how to negotiate detours when visiting your business. In addition to your store hours, share alternate routes on your outgoing voicemail. As a new route opens up, include a map on your website. Tweet or update your fan page with the information.

*Explain to
customers how
construction will
benefit them.*

Managing Your Business... continued

Enhance your giving

Partner with a charitable organization. Businesses that rely on local customers benefit from the exposure community-based events bring. Offer your banquet room or board room for community events or meetings. Donate your products/services to silent auctions, or offer your store as a remote location to sell tickets to a charitable event.

Network

Use this time to broaden your connections. Speak to groups, sponsor charity functions, or supply goods/services to a well-publicized organization.

Create news

Use every opportunity to speak to your customers. Updating customers on the construction is a great reason to send out a newsletter. Create construction themed sales, such as “Get 1% off your purchase for every orange barrel on our block.”



Share parking lots

Make an agreement with a business down the street to allow their customers use of your parking lot while construction blocks the business, and that business will do the same when construction moves in front of your business. This guarantees that your customers will always have access to parking and introduces you to potential customers from the other business.

Protect your turf

Honor competitor coupons, deploy a retention marketing campaign, maintain communications with your existing customers and don't be afraid to target new customers.

Research vendors

Conduct a competitive comparison of vendors. Look for vendors with new products, lower prices or better terms.

Resist the temptation to offer deep discounts

Avoid discounting. Discounting can hurt profit and encourage competitive matching. Consider a Free-with-Purchase deal as an alternative. It doesn't affect margins in the way discounts do and customers see it as a valuable deal.

C. What to Do After Construction

The construction crews have left, but you still have work to do. Wrap up all construction related activities, evaluate their success and plan for the future.

Evaluate your performance

Carefully analyze actual operating results against the goals and objectives established in your construction strategy.

Have an End of Construction sale

Don't assume customers will automatically return after the construction leaves. A big promotion will remind customers that it's time to return to normal. Operationally, it's a good way to move overstocked inventory.

Test and measure your advertising strategy

Use web analytics to measure the traffic to your site. Test every piece of your marketing strategy.

Take pictures

Show off your new streetscape by including photos on your website and in your newsletter.

Celebrate

Have a customer appreciation party to thank your customers for their patronage.

Acknowledge your employees

Recognize employee efforts that go beyond the call of duty. There are many free and low cost ways to reward your employees for their loyalty, creativity and dedication to your business.

Plan for growth

If you properly planned for construction and maintained close controls on your business during construction, you now have all the information needed to create a very strong growth plan. New challenges will always be headed your way. The prepared business will always fair better than those without a plan.



You now have all the information needed to create a very strong growth plan.

Key Contact Information

City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works

Cecilia Gilbert, *Permits and Communications Manager*
841 North Broadway, Room 501
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Office: (414) 286-3261 Cell: (414) 708-2295
Cecilia.Gilbert@Milwaukee.gov
www.Milwaukee.gov/mpw
For Support for Business Program Information or Inquiries from Media

Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation

Dave Latona
809 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202
(414) 286-5840
Davelatona@medconline.com
www.medconline.com
Information and assistance in low interest loans

Milwaukee Metropolitan Assoc. of Commerce

Kathy Harrison, *Director of Development*
756 North Milwaukee Street, Suite 400
Milwaukee, WI 53202
(414) 287-4100
Kharrison@mmac.org
www.mmac.org
The Council of Small Business Executives is a part of the MMAC. COSBE's Executive Roundtable program provides small business owners with the ability to exchange ideas with each other in a confidential manner.

WI Women's Business Initiative Corporation

Wendy Baumann, *President/CVO*
2745 North Dr. Martin Luther King Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 263-5450, fax: (414) 263-5456
www.wwbic.com
Business education, technical assistance, and access to capital for entrepreneurs for women, people of color, and those with low income

U.S. Small Business Association

Eric Ness, *District Director*
310 West Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53203
(414) 297-1471
www.sba.gov/wi
Information on small business loans, grants, bonds and other financial assistance

Key Contact Information... continued

WI Department of Transportation (Southeast Region)

Emilyn Grisar, *Communications*

141 NW Barstow Street

P.O. Box 798

Waukesha, WI 53187-0798

(262) 521-5373

Emilyn.Grisar@dot.wi.gov

www.dot.wisconsin.gov/business/engrserv/itt/workbook.htm

The “In This Together” workbook provides specific tools to help businesses thrive during road construction.

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce – Wisconsin

Evelyn Agosto, *Business Support Specialist*

1021 West National Avenue

Milwaukee, WI 53204

(414) 643-6963, fax: (414) 643-6994

Eagosto@wi.rr.com

www.hccw.org

The Chamber creates, expands and diversifies small and Hispanic-owned businesses in Wisconsin, with a strong focus on the Milwaukee metro area

Milwaukee Department of City Development

Rhonda Manuel, *Neighborhoods & Business Development Manager*

809 North Broadway

Milwaukee, WI 53202

(414) 286-2037

Rhonda.Manuel@Milwaukee.gov

Facade Grant information can be found at:

<http://city.milwaukee.gov/facade>

Business assistance for business owners interested in renovating the streetfaces of their buildings

SCORE SE Wisconsin

310 West Wisconsin Avenue, #425

Milwaukee, WI 53202

(414) 297-3942

www.score.org

Non-profit agency whose members are trained to serve as counselors, advisors and mentors to aspiring entrepreneurs and business owners.

Small Business Development Center

161 West Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 6000

Milwaukee, WI 53202

(414) 227-3240

www.sce-sbdc.uwm.edu

The center is focused on helping new entrepreneurs turn their ideas into viable business concepts, and working with established entrepreneurs to improve business performance.



Zeidler Municipal Building
841 N. Broadway, Room 501, Milwaukee, WI 53202

414-286-2489

www.Milwaukee.gov/SupportforBusiness