DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS PROGRAM

Participant Guidebook

Helping your small business prosper before, during and after construction.

CITY OF MILWAUKEE 1846 DEPT. OF PUBLIC WORKS

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.

Support for Business Program seminar coordinated by Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC), facilitated by Top Floor Technologies, an internet marketing company, in cooperation with Historic Third Ward.

HOW TO FIND HELP

Online

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 (FAQs).
- Register for business education webinars and workshops.

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 issue 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.
- Your Liaison will address your inquiries about construction, city regulations and the Support for Business Program. S/he will partner with businesses in the construction area on issues such as temporary signage, business assistance, alternate routes, and parking regulations.
- The Liaison maintains 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.

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.

Your Liaison will address your construction issues and navigate the various departments for you, freeing you to focus on your business.

- There is a Support for Business Key Contact Information list located on page 9 of this 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.

PREPARING YOUR BUSINESS FOR CONSTRUCTION

Be proactive

Set short term goals, prepare a budget and devise a plan of action.

Prepare your customers

Plan to communicate with customers before and during construction, to let them know you are open for business. Advise alternate routes to reach you (if applicable) and where to park.

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.

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

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.

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 any increased marketing needs.

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 mediums, make sure you are communicating the construction plans with your customers.

Communicate with your employees & use down-time for cross-training opportunities

Immediately inform your staff about the pending construction and how you perceive it will affect the business and their jobs. Make sure your high-performing employees know that you value them and you want them to stay with the company. This assures them that you have a plan and their contribution is essential to the business' success.

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 broaden employees' skill levels, increase staffing flexibility, and help you retain good employees.

Case Study: YWCA of Southeastern Wisconsin

When Paula Penebaker, President and CEO of the YWCA of Southeastern Wisconsin, learned of the King Drive construction project, she was pessimistic. "Being located in a high traffic area, I was worried about the project's new traffic patterns causing confusion and congestion. I was concerned that the people we serve would be adversely impacted, that they would have difficulty accessing the building," explained Penebaker.

Prior to project launch, Penebaker attended Support for Business Program information sessions. There, she learned the time line for the project, details on the resurfacing process, and was informed of changes that could impact the organization and the people it serves—including bus schedule alterations.

"Of all the services the City provided, effective communication was the best—it was excellent! The stakeholders meeting provided me with all the information I needed to be comfortable with the impact on our agency and the people we serve. As it was, I really think the impact was minimal," Penebaker stated.

Often, we think things are going to be worse than they actually are. It's the fear of change—the unknown. The truth is, there's no telling just how much construction will impact your business. But it's inevitable that it *will*. Before the project begins, be informed, develop a plan of action and communicate with your Community Liaison.

PREPARING YOUR BUSINESS FOR CONSTRUCTION (CONTINUED)

Review your accounts payables

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

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.

Encourage customers to regularly visit your business

Offer coupons, Groupons, Living Social deals and gift certificates to be redeemed during the construction period.

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.

Expand your knowledge

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

Collect past-due receivables

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

Create a new way to deliver your product

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

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.

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.

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.

Get active in local organizations

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

Implement a cooperative marketing strategy

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.

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.

MANAGING YOUR BUSINESS DURING CONSTRUCTION

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

Monitor inventory carefully

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

Network

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

Implement creative, low-budget marketing strategies

Construction will impact your bottom line. With your staff, brainstorm ways to communicate to passersby that you are open for business and implement them.

Stay informed

Attend DPW information sessions, track construction progress on the DPW website and enlist the aid of your Liaison. Subscribe to niche small business publications to get tips and essential tools for small business survival.

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.

Case Study: RCB Awards

Curt Denevan, owner of RCB Awards on Capitol Drive, was anything but excited about the upcoming construction project. "My first thought about the construction project? Impending doom! We are a retail business—the thought of our street torn up for nine months brought nightmarish thoughts of lost customers and a drop in revenue ... The loss of passing traffic and access to our parking lot and front door were major concerns for our business."

Denevan had legitimate concerns. But because of the relationship he built with the Support for Business program, the construction project was not nearly as painful as he had anticipated.

"The most important service the City provided was communication," Denevan stated. He explained that the town-hall-style meetings led by the Support for Business Program Liaison and communications staff kept him informed on the project's progress and provided him with resources on who to contact with construction-specific needs.

Denevan identified several instances in which he contacted the City and received timely service, including a parking lot access ramp and directional signage.

Staying on top of your construction project and building a relationship with your Community Liaison is crucial. Stay informed, ask questions, and build a relationship with your Community Liaison. Together, we can make construction manageable.

MANAGING YOUR BUSINESS DURING CONSTRUCTION (CONTINUED)

Use your advisors wisely

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

Plan an "excuse the dust" sale right after 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.

Avoid making across-the-board cuts

Analyze and identify which areas 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 your focus should be. Use promo codes and web analytics to help with tracking.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Research vendors

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

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.

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.

Protect your turf

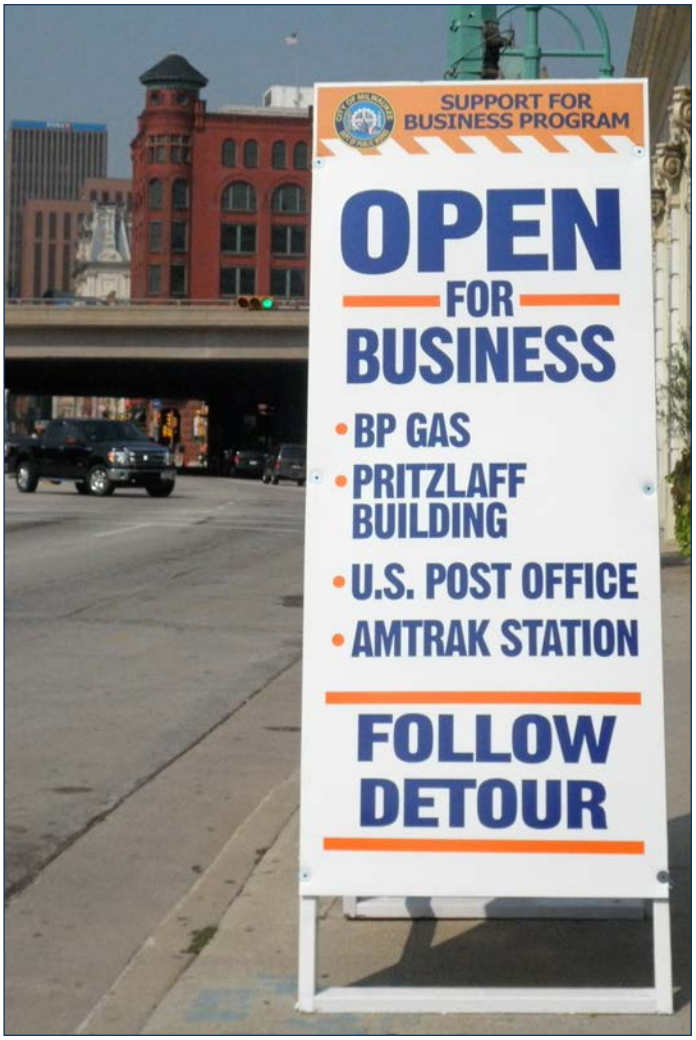
Honor competitor coupons, deploy a retention marketing campaign, maintain communications with your existing customers, and don't be afraid to target new customers.

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."

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?"



Resist the temptation to offer deep discounts

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.

Keep your customers informed

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 Facebook page with the information.

Share parking lots

Make an agreement with a business down the street to allow their customers to use your parking lot while construction blocks their 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.

MANAGING YOUR BUSINESS AFTER CONSTRUCTION

Celebrate

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

Take pictures

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

Test and measure your advertising strategy

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

Evaluate your performance

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

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.

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.

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 fare better than those without a plan.

KEY CONTACT INFORMATION

CITY OF MILWAUKEE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Megan O'Connor, Support for Business Liaison
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Milwaukee, WI 53202
Office: (414) 286-3318 Cell: (414) 708-1433
moconnor@milwaukee.gov
www.milwaukee.gov/mpw

Brian DeNeve, Marketing and Communications Officer (Media)
841 North Broadway, Room 501
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Office: (414) 286-3261 Cell: (414) 708-2386
bdenev@milwaukee.gov
www.milwaukee.gov/mpw

MILWAUKEE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Dave Latona
757 North Broadway, #600
Milwaukee, WI 53202
(414) 269-1445
david.latona@medconline.com
www.medconline.com
Information and assistance on low interest loans.

METROPOLITAN MILWAUKEE ASSOCIATION OF COMMERCE (MMAC)

Mary Steinbrecher, Executive Director, MMAC's Council of Small Business Executives (COSBE)
756 North Milwaukee Street, Suite 400
Milwaukee, WI 53202
(414) 287-4128
msteinbrecher@mmac.org
www.mmac.org
COSBE is a part of the MMAC. MMAC's COSBE 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

Amber Miller, Project Director
1533 North Rivercenter Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(414) 395-4545
amber.miller@wwbic.com
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, State Director
310 West Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53203
(414) 297-3941
www.sba.gov/wi
Information on small business loans, grants, surety bonds and federal contracting.

WI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (SOUTHEAST REGION)

Michael Pyritz, Communications
141 NW Barstow Street
P.O. Box 798
Waukesha, WI 53187-0798
(262) 521-5373
Michael.Pyritz@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

1021 West National Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53204
(414) 643-6963, fax: (414) 643-6994
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

Kenneth Little, Commercial Corridor Manager
809 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI 53202
(414) 286-5617
kenneth.little@milwaukee.gov
Façade Grant information can be found at:
http://city.milwaukee.gov/facade
Business assistance for business owners interested in renovating the street faces of their buildings.

SCORE SE WISCONSIN

310 West Wisconsin Avenue, #585
Milwaukee, WI 53203
(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 53203
(414) 227-3240
www4.uwm.edu/sce/dci.cfm?id=15
The center is focused on helping new entrepreneurs turn their ideas into viable business concepts, and working with established entrepreneurs to improve business performance.

The City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works established the Support for Business Program (SFB) to help minimize the impact of capital improvement projects citywide.

SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS PROGRAM

Megan O'Connor
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www.milwaukee.gov/supportforbusiness

The City of Milwaukee cares about its business community. Investment in the City's infrastructure provides a long-term benefit to businesses and the economy in general.

City of Milwaukee

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www.twitter.com/milwaukeedpw

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