



RESERVE  
AND SHOP

MARKETING & OPERATIONS GUIDE  
FOR SHOPPING MALLS:

# Best Practices for Reopening During COVID-19

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## About the Author

**N**athalie Azoulay Singer is the president of Eye-in Media and co-founder of **Reserve and Shop**, a new COVID-19 / social-distancing friendly application for retailers that lets shoppers reserve a spot at their favorite stores in advance or upon arrival.

As a mother of four children, she started both of her businesses from the ground up after having worked several years in California for multinational software companies Oracle and JD Edwards. Nathalie started her career in the retail industry and has since spent years tailoring software and technology solutions towards brick and mortar establishments.

She is a graduate of the HEC Business School at the University of Montreal and previously studied law at McGill University. With her 15 years experience as a serial entrepreneur, she decided to write this guide to help the retail industry overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis.

Nathalie's creative solutions presented in this guide apply to any size of retailer. She presents unique ideas to help you make it through these difficult times and adapt to the post-pandemic new normal.



Photo by Anna Shvets from Pexels

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### TO SUM UP

# Introduction

**A true leader never looks behind, only forward.**

**Now is the time to work together and change our ways for the better.**



Targeted toward shopping malls, this user guide offers recommendations to consider regarding logistics, automation, planning, and more when it comes to being prepared for our new world. Each chapter offers tips for moving forward with reopening including caring for your consumer base, merchants, and employees all through a united ecosystem.

The goal is to create an ecosystem that will get your merchants through this crisis and to emerge even stronger. As expert consultants and fellow consumers, we're here to help you put these measures in place while making sure to take all the necessary precautions.

Remember that the way you react is an indicator of how your tenants and customers will react. Actions go a long way: right now, people need hope and guidance.

As a savvy shopper and expert in marketing and technology, I wrote this to offer advice that will get you through this hurdle and come out better on the other side. Retail needs to be reinvented, but it doesn't need to disappear.

Necessity, passion, and innovation will turn chaos into a new and peaceful reality. We want to help you get back to a better normal.

It's okay to make mistakes. It's up to us to try new things and accept changes. This pause is a time for us to reflect on the need for change. We have to do better for our customers. Our goal is to build for good.

Even though online shopping is a nice alternative during the pandemic, it does not replace the feeling and desire to buy something on site. The touch, feeling, and fit of the clothes make the in-store shopping experience a more impulsive one, where people are more tempted to purchase based on the store layout, branding, and simple desire of seeing something they like that they never thought about buying before entering the store. This can lead to an increase in sales for your establishment. Therefore to succeed, one must consider all of the elements and recommendations that we mention in this book.

# Consumer Needs



- More Time Shopping, Less Time Waiting
- Contact Tracing
- Surveys

## More Time Shopping, Less Time Waiting

Your customers are in a new world where they value the quality of how their time is spent and prefer spending more time with their families than waiting in line to secure goods or products. For the majority of customers, the challenge of social distancing is a real stress factor where people are afraid to approach certain establishments when the line is simply too long and the logistics of the area do not permit the 6-foot-apart safe distance. There are also risk-takers out there who simply do not respect social distancing and place other customers in an awkward situation. Those are the reasons why it is vital for retailers to be transparent and adopt mechanisms to manage their capacity to avoid overflow. For instance, there not only needs to be a maximum capacity of people inside your store but also it is essential to be able to anticipate how many people will be coming to your store on a specific day. Camera count detectors are inefficient in preventing critical mass issues. Their only benefit is for you to know how many people are in the store at a given time, but they do not indicate how many people will be waiting in line to come in and how many people want to shop that day. The influx of people waiting in lineups creates an unenjoyable shopping experience since an endless amount of time is wasted in a precarious situation.



Photo by Melanie Pongratz on Unsplash

## Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is a hot topic because it involves confidentiality and privacy issues. However, your customers will feel more secure to shop at your establishment if you have a plan to protect them and their families in the event of potential contact between a shopper and another infected customer. You can deal with the privacy issue by directly asking your customers before entering your store to consent to sending them an alert in the event of potential exposure. This will bring relief to your employees and your customers since they can expect to be advised in the event where they may have been exposed and this will enable them to protect their family and friends by self-isolating.

Although it may seem like people will not be thrilled to receive bad news, this will demonstrate that your establishment has the situation under control and that you value the safety of your customers above all and are being socially responsible. This will bring a sense of security to your business and push more people to shop there.

Let's not wait on advocacy groups or the government to tell us what to do; they are out of touch with your business and your needs. The government is asking those infected to be responsible for contacting the people they may have been exposed to, which could put them in an awkward and embarrassing situation. Some people may not even mention to others that they were infected out of fear of resentment.

Between the stress and the burden of having individuals call all the people that they have been in contact with, they will very much prefer to have the choice of doing so anonymously and automatically before entering your store in case they become infected or come into contact with someone later diagnosed positively. These customers may not remember all the people they may have come across and will have to put themselves out there, rather than having an anonymous way of contacting people who might have been exposed.

Anonymous contact tracing will make the customers feel as if they are in full control of their own lives and destiny. You might be surprised to see the number of people who will consent to give their personal information out in order to maintain their security and those of others. On top of that, all the information collected will be strictly confidential and in no way will the name of the infected person appear on the notification sent out to shoppers. Rather, the notification will mention the possible areas in the store where there may have been exposure as well as the date and time of such visit.



Photo by Canva Studio Images Pixels

## Surveys

The question that most retailers need to know is what direction they should be taking in the future to make the shopping experience a savoury, safe, and pleasurable one. The key is that you need to constantly be in touch with your customers' desires, needs, and motivations. Therefore, surveys are essential because they permit you to routinely ask your customers simple questions as to what it would take for them to shop in your store. Do they believe you should put up signage for social distancing, should there be a security guard at the door ensuring people are respecting the rules and calling them in, should customers and employees be obligated to put on a mask and gloves, etc. You need to ask these questions yourself and not do it through a third party. You need to ensure that based on the products and services that you are selling, you can cater your questions towards your specific audience based on their age and other essential demographics.

# Merchants



## Things to Consider

- How to Manage Large Banner Versus Small Banner Stores
- Food Courts
- Common Areas

## How to Manage Large Banner Versus Small Banner Stores

In your strategy to help your merchants, you have to address the needs of the large banner stores differently than the needs of the individual stores.

It is important to note that large banner stores will already have established rules and protocols on how to manage their business. Furthermore, unlike small banner stores, the larger establishments likely have e-commerce platforms. To effectively manage your shopping mall, you will need to consult the large banner stores to learn about their protocols and see what they are implementing to properly coordinate your plans for the mall with them. It is of utmost importance to coordinate your plans with theirs to avoid any conflicts on how to manage shopper traffic with your reopening strategy.

Furthermore, you must keep in mind that there are statistically more lineups at the larger stores than at individual stores. A successful shopping mall will take into account that the large lines at some banners can block the accessibility to the smaller stores. One must

be aware of how to manage these large lineups within the mall and how to spread out people in a smart, safe and effective way. For instance, what happens if two large banners are situated across from each other and the lines are to the point where no social distancing is even possible? Or better yet, what happens when these lines block the entrance to the smaller scale stores and discourage people from entering them which could result in a big revenue loss? That is why it is vital to anticipate how many people will be coming to shop at your mall within a given date and time and which stores they will mostly be visiting.

Moreover, these larger businesses typically have e-commerce platforms and some people will want to directly come and pick up their goods that they have preordered online. The role of the shopping mall in this matter will be to coordinate where these pickups zones will be situated so people can come in and out of that area and maintain the social distance. The line and waiting area for physical shopping in the store should be separated if possible from the pickup zone for each store.

Another thing that is important to take into consideration for smaller-scale businesses is that in order for them to pay rent, they will need financial assistance and cost-saving strategies to keep them ongoing. A smart way that the shopping mall can help is to create a partnership and community between all the small businesses. For instance, smaller businesses can share staff depending on the number of people visiting on a given day in their store and based on supply and demand. The shopping mall can have these employees on their payroll and make the small business pay for their salaries based on the needs of a specific day. This employee management approach will help the smaller stores have fewer expenses and save money so they can survive. Furthermore, this ecosystem of small businesses will enable each shop owner to share resources amongst themselves and ideas and strategies on how to survive.



Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash



Also, since many of these smaller-scale stores do not have an e-commerce platform, the shopping mall can help their tenants increase sales by showcasing on the shopping mall's website the popular and most requested items that each store has to offer. Or better yet, encourage your tenants to use Shopify Lite, a simple e-commerce platform for only \$9 a month to help them increase their sales by filling online orders.

In summary, it is important to remember that there are two different strategies that should be implemented for small banner stores and large banner stores. These strategies are essential for shopping malls to survive in this day and age. For example, if your shopping mall belongs to a family of 50 different properties, each shopping mall should join forces that will give these properties a larger negotiating power. We must join forces in these times to survive.



## Food Courts

A survey conducted in April 2020 shows that over 70% of people are not willing to go to a food court to sit down. Shopping and eating go hand-in-hand and the savoury experience of the food court definitely complements the excitement of a shopping experience. Thus, your food court is an important service that represents an important revenue stream for your mall. The question remains as to how you are going to help people overcome their fears and feel safe entering a food court.

It is important to note that in the survey mentioned above, 60% of the respondents prefer orders through an onsite app rather than placing an order at the counter. With this information in mind, shopping malls should create an ecosystem within their food court whereby they could customize an ordering app where the customer can choose to order from any of the restaurants in the establishment.

Furthermore, if a shopping mall has screens in their foodcourt for advertising purposes, a section of these screens can be allocated to displaying orders that are ready for pickup at the counter from the specific restaurant. It is true that these food court chains compete with one another; however, in order to survive in these times, you should consider providing them with a common platform or tools. Rather than thinking of this as a competition, restaurants must think of themselves as being under the same umbrella, and collaborative measures must be taken to attract people to come and eat at that food court reassuringly.

To address hygiene considerations which will be a long-term social preoccupation as a result of the pandemic, measures need to be taken to assure customers that they can feel safe in the food court. Therefore, a system should be created whereby employees are aware of which tables should be cleaned and washed at specific time intervals and have a log of what was cleaned already. Furthermore, this application can be used for table assignments to respect the maximum capacity of the food court and social distancing guidelines. People can reserve their spots to avoid waiting in line if they wish to sit down in the food court. Also, each employee can be allocated to different tasks. There should be a set of employees in charge of just table washing while others can be in charge of removing garbage and other supplies. The delegation of tasks leads to a more hygienic experience. The automated system can be used as a guideline for shoppers and employees to coordinate seamlessly when they will be using the table and when they will be leaving in order to guide the mall as to the frequency that they need to clean the area and the maximum occupancy that needs to be reserved within a given day.

Another consideration in terms of hygiene is to create regulations and guidelines as to how all the restaurants in their food court should operate. For example, the shopping mall could require that they all have a plexiglass counter between the people ordering and the cashier to make their customers and their merchants' employees feel safe. Also, the shopping mall can create guidelines to make sure that employees wear visors and masks while working and implement hygienic rules such as periodic handwashing.

You may be concerned that all these measures might make people feel stressed and unsafe because it can essentially remind them of the pandemic rather than making them relax and enjoy their experience. However, it is likely to do the opposite by making them feel that you are concerned with their wellbeing.

A professional way to go about this is to create brand awareness by branding all of the employees' masks, visors and other protective equipment with the name of your shopping mall or management company. This will provide unity and conformity in the heart of your establishment while providing a commercial and professional feeling. Not having a standard look may seem unprofessional if everyone wears different masks and visors or if some do not wear any equipment at all. It will seem that things are not coordinated and it will appear that the establishment does not have any control of the situation. Therefore, a standard look with a smart marketing strategy will help you overcome these challenging times.

To conclude, shopping malls need to be transparent in their hygienic measures to ensure consumer confidence and attract more people to the food court. Although this will create more operational costs for the shopping mall, in every business one must invest and reinvent themselves to survive. This is a new era, and shopping malls need to adapt to this new reality.

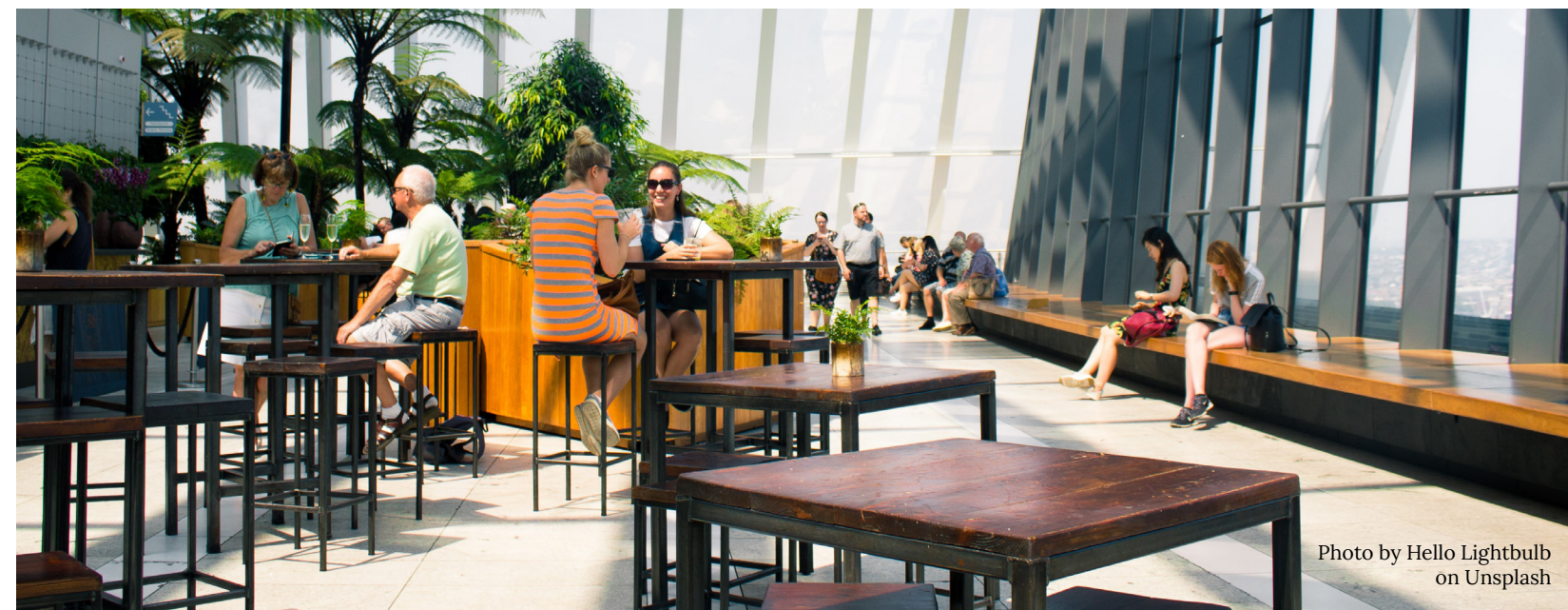


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## Common Areas

**PARKING LOTS.** What you need to consider in your shopping mall is how to respect social distancing in the parking spaces. You must address how much space there should be between parked cars or even if it's possible for you to implement and favour open-air parking lots. It is essential to establish the maximum number of parking spaces that can be attributed on a different day depending on supply and demand as well as safe social distancing requirements so that people can get in and out of cars while avoiding other shoppers doing the same. Furthermore, a section of the parking lot should be allocated for pickup purposes in order to minimize congestion in the parking lot and save operational costs. In cases where payment for parking is required, shopping malls should consider how they can facilitate payment and limit social interaction using contactless credit or debit card readers.

**ELEVATORS.** Much like with parking lots, prioritizing social distancing in elevators is key. Items to consider are to determine how many people can be in the same elevator at once depending on the traffic and social distancing, and to ensure there is enough space for social distancing when people line up for the elevators. If you have office towers in your building, you need to manage the flow of people when they arrive to work to minimize the number of people waiting at the same time for the elevators. This system should take into consideration when people mostly arrive at work, when they go to lunch, and when they leave at the end of the day. Having flexible work schedules and being aware of the schedule of your tenants is vital.

**BATHROOMS.** A more frequent cleaning schedule can also be established and social distancing should be maintained with the number of people allowed to use the bathroom at a given time. Another element to take into consideration is to see if you should remove door handles in the bathrooms and make automatic doors to minimize the number of people touching a specific surface. Automatic soap dispensers, sinks, and flush toilets should be implemented.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE.** The shopping mall should prioritize having the least amount of personal contact possible at customer service. Therefore, a chat or SMS service through an app can be implemented for people to directly ask questions to customer service employees. Furthermore, plexiglass should be installed in front of each kiosk to protect the employees inside. It is also important to note that customer service should play a vital role in informing customers of the new rules and regulations in the mall so that people can respect them.

# To Sum Up



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For all these initiatives, there are software applications and technologies that exist to manage the demand and distance between shoppers, employees, merchant's employees, and tenant's employees.

There are cost-efficient ways to manage all of these elements. In all circumstances, even when this pandemic disappears, these measures and automation should not be temporary and instead become part of our lives in this new normal. This is a new world and we must adapt to this new way of being because we can never afford forced-closures again.

You must remember that if you want to survive and receive rent each month, you need to get involved and help your merchants in ways that were not necessary prior to the pandemic. We live in a new world where working together can mean success for everyone and bring about a win-win situation.

We would appreciate your comments and the feedback that you have. Feel free to contact the author of this book at [nathalie.azoulay@reserveandshop.com](mailto:nathalie.azoulay@reserveandshop.com)

**Reserve and Shop** works to create simple and efficient solutions to reopening the economy and transforming social distancing into 1<sup>st</sup> class shopping. Reserve and Shop offers a unique reservation system to your visitors, allowing them to shop more and wait less. By managing the flux of visitors with automation, Reserve and Shop equips you with the tools to administer the maximum capacity of your center according to the different types of people who will be visiting (employees, customers, click & collect, and delivery collection). To go even further, Reserve and Shop optimizes the capacity of your establishments with a progressive reopening strategy that incorporates tools such as: traffic anticipation, customer behaviour data, contact tracing, and food court table management.

For more information, please visit [reserveandshop.com](https://reserveandshop.com).

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