



The Chocolatier's One-Stop Shop

Selling successfully online through COVID-19 and beyond: A guide for chocolate businesses

A Keylink White Paper
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“As we continue working under lock down conditions in the UK, it's worth taking a moment to reflect on the situation we find ourselves in, how it may evolve in the weeks and months to come and most importantly, what we can do to position ourselves from a business perspective.

Last week, a few countries in Europe took their first tentative steps towards a partial easing of restrictions and the outcome will no doubt be monitored very closely. In the UK, our government has set 5 tests that need to be met before restrictions can be eased.

The fifth test, being confident that any easing will not risk a second peak, is the one that could actually keep us in at least partial lockdown for some time yet because it is such an unknown and will likely remain so until we have a vaccine or a treatment.

When the lockdown first started, sales dramatically plummeted overnight for most of us as bricks and mortar chocolate shops were closed for all but takeaway sales under the rules of the UK lockdown. For those of you without websites, your connection with your customers was probably severed without warning!

Over the past few weeks, we have watched and listened with admiration to your stories of how you have risen to the challenge and managed to adapt and even thrive in the lockdown. The level of innovation and resourcefulness we have witnessed has been truly inspiring, especially with so many of you also managing to support your local communities and charities in the process!

As a result of the comments and questions we have been receiving, we have put together this document to help you take full advantage of all the online opportunities available to you. No matter how quickly the current restrictions end, building resilience into your business by having the ability sell in-store and online is essential for a future in which 'social distance shopping' could be a recurring theme.

This document is broken down into the following sections and you can read it all or just click directly on the section that is of greatest interest to you!

Section 1 – Will people actually buy chocolate online?

Section 2 – What products should I sell?

Section 3 – How do I set up an online shop?

Section 4 – How do I promote my business?

Section 5 – How do I deliver my orders?

Section 6 – Strengthening bonds with your customers

As always, the Keylink team is here to support you, to advise you, to get you what you need or even to just chat over a virtual coffee! We are all in this together and by working together, we can all come through these challenging times. If you have questions you can call us as always or you can interact with us on Instagram or Facebook.”

Sanjeev P. Ramchandani

Managing Director

Section 1

Will People Actually Buy Chocolate Online?

During these times of long supermarket queues, financial uncertainty and limited opportunities to pop to the corner shop, it's easy to think that few will be prioritising buying chocolate during a global pandemic.

However, the opposite is true. A quick web search will bring up any number of articles about how much chocolate sales actually skyrocketed through the 2008 recession, and this latest crisis is no different. In times of hardship, we seek comfort in chocolate. It's a permissible luxury. Cheaper than a bottle of wine, it's a treat we feel we can justify, whether we are celebrating, commiserating, or just getting by.

Aside from treating ourselves, chocolatiers tell us that chocolate is proving so popular right now because it's the perfect way to show someone you are thinking about them when you can't be there. At a time when we're unable to be with family and friends to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, births, weddings and achievements, or to comfort them on the really tough days, people are sending chocolate gifts just to say, 'I'm there in spirit'. Easy to post and loved by all, there is a great market for online chocolate sales - now and always!

There is no shortage of chocolatiers selling their wares successfully online and quite a number have only recently got to work by setting up a website very quickly.

Renowned chocolatier, Paul A. Young is one example; since his two London shops were forced to close under Covid-19 lockdown rules he has set up an e-commerce site and is seeing enormous success.

Lastly, don't underestimate your customers' desire to support you. Everyone from hairdressers to restaurant owners have shared that since the pandemic hit, they have been receiving messages from loyal customers, asking how they can help them keep going. Your customers want to see your business survive as much as you do, because they value your product, and you. It pays to find ways to communicate with them and ask for their support during this time, and most importantly, keep your products available to them.

As to the question of whether people will actually buy chocolate online, consider the following statistics from before the lockdown:

- **Almost 20% of total retail sales in the UK happen online**
- **But online grocery shopping so far only accounts for 7-8% of total sales**
- **By 2021, 93% of UK internet users are expected to do online shopping**
- **A survey in 2015 showed that 66% of UK consumers had not bought chocolate online but the main reason was that it was so easily available in shops...**

The undeniable truth is that the ratio of online sales to bricks and mortar sales has been growing steadily and the lockdown has only accelerated this trend.

Section 2

What Products Should I Sell?

Selling online alongside everyone else can seem pretty intimidating with so many others out there trying to do something similar, but it's all about who you're selling to, what to sell and how!

First consider that when it comes to chocolate, there's a lot of nostalgia involved. The chocolate we plump for when treating ourselves is often what is most familiar to us. Familiarity also helps us strengthen bonds with those closest to us. So if your biggest seller in your shop is a milk chocolate bar with caramel crunch on top, you should really think about making it available online. It's clearly already a hit with your customers, and those shopping with you online will be looking for the treats they regularly buy in your shop.

A craving for familiarity also comes in the form of national favourites – sticky toffee pudding flavour, rhubarb and custard and bars decorated with favourite childhood sweets, to name but a few. There is a reason why vanilla ice cream is so enduringly popular! We all take comfort from flavours we can rely on to transport us back to more secure, safer times. Isn't it great that you can be the person to give that to someone?

When it comes to choosing what to offer online, take the following into consideration:

- a) Which of my products do my customers really like best?
- b) How wide a range can I realistically produce and make available online?
- c) Do I have a way to conveniently pack the products/bundles I want to sell?
- d) How easily and cost-effectively can I deliver my orders?

When it comes to setting yourself apart from the competition there are lots of things you can try. Here are a few ideas:

- **Offer working from home packs.** A large percentage of the nation's workers have swapped their office for their spare room. Working solo can be quite lonely and self-motivation is key, so ordering a pack of chocolate treats, whether for oneself or a colleague, can be a nice way to keep motivation high or thank an employee for their hard work. You can be the one to bring it to them!
- **Make 'sorry I can't be there' chocolate gift sets.** Life is on pause right now and we're all missing out on occasions we would normally spend with loved ones, from visiting care homes to attending weddings, celebrating birthdays to sitting with someone who isn't well. There is a sizeable market for customers looking to send chocolate gifts in their place, so think about how you could put this together. Could you offer options for personalising the chocolate?

- **Start a tasting club.** Make say, 20, of a new flavoured bar, and invite customers to sign up to be among the first to buy one. In return for this exclusive treatment, you can ask them to send you their feedback or post on social media about it. As well as new sales, you get valuable feedback on your products and some free marketing too! This can also make your customers feel really valued.
- **Create chocolate kits to enable families to enjoy making chocolates at home.** Lots of families are seeking ways to keep children entertained and educated at the moment. You can create your own kits or buy Keylink's 'Chocolate At Home' lollipop and truffle making kits at wholesale prices.
- **Leverage social media to ask customers what they want.** Then sell that. Social media is a great way to find out what your customers want from you (more on this below), so ask them the direct question. Then you can manufacture safe in the knowledge you are making what your customers want to buy.
- **Team up with other local sellers.** Could you work with other local businesses and sell their products on your website? Or could you put together gifts or hampers containing complementary products? Perhaps you could approach a local honey farmer or florist, a local beautician selling gift vouchers or a garden centre selling plants or seeds. Working with the idea that locals want to support their local businesses, this is a brilliant way for you to all benefit, not just now but in the future. Many local businesses are forever battling the competition of the major supermarkets, so offering locals a chance to easily buy something unique from independent shops could be a very wise long-term move.

For some easy additions to your existing product range of bars, slabs, pralines and truffles, take a look at the following ideas (visit our website : www.keylink.org).

- **Bags and bows.** You could simply bag up the chocolate you use to make your creations, or to add variety we have the coloured and flavoured range of chocolates. Simply choose a designed or plain bag from our bags section. Our bags in size 100 x 220mm are suitable for 150g/250g of products depending on what you are packing, and you can finish with a ribbon or a twist tie bow. There are many other products you can bag up in this way, including all our chocolate hearts, Chocolate Sensations, physalis, coffee beans, sugared almonds and much more. See our full retail section or chocolate novelties.
- **Make your own lollipops to sell.** Using our transfer sheet ranges you can pipe your own chocolate discs onto the transfers, (As a guide use two tablespoons of chocolate), add the lollipop sticks into them and leave in the fridge to set. If you can then add lollipop bags, SPT3600/3600p – Lollysticks SPM5000 and a twist tie to finish.
- **Create your own hamper offerings.** With our hamper trays, you don't have to wait until Christmas to put hampers together. Arrange a combination of your chocolate creations plus retail packs easily into our hampers and make great gifts. You can use tissue paper to pad out the tray and cellophane to wrap up your treats and finish with ribbons from our selection.

Section 3

Setting up an Online Shop

Did you know that setting up an online shop from scratch can be done in as little as one hour?

If you already have a website and it's built on one of the more popular platforms such as Wordpress or Squarespace, there are a number of reasonably simple 'plug-ins' that you can use to add an online shop to your website. Each will require a bit of set-up (things such as order confirmation emails and listing the types of payment you are going to take), but it's pretty straightforward.

If you don't already have a website, then setting one up can be a very quick and easy process on platforms such as Shopify, Wordpress, Squarespace and Wix. They all provide online guides and video instructions as well as hundreds of pre-built templates, so it's quick, easy and you don't need to have any design skills or programming knowledge!

Whichever option you choose you'll need the following for your site:

- 1. Domain name:** If you don't already have one, this is the bit after the "www". It generally helps customers if it's easy to remember and perhaps describes what you are selling - an example could be daveschocolates.co.uk. Sites like 123reg or GoDaddy can help with finding the right domain and let you know if the one you want is available.
- 2. Product names and descriptions:** customers need to know what they are buying.
- 3. Pictures:** one or more really good pictures of your product - it's no use spending all that time creating a masterpiece if it doesn't look good online. But, modern smartphones and some simple lighting can be really effective.
- 4. A payment provider:** How will customers pay you? Providers like PayPal and Stripe are great starting points (they take a small percentage of each sale, so you will have to take that into consideration when doing your pricing). Platforms such as Shopify and Wix will take you through the process of adding payment processing to your online shop.

Here are some useful links:

<https://wordpress.com/>

<https://www.squarespace.com/>

<https://www.wix.com/>

<https://www.paypal.com/uk/home>

<https://stripe.com/>

<https://www.123reg.co.uk>

<https://uk.godaddy.com/>

If you want to take your website to the next level, you may need a web designer to help you. Just give us a call and we'd be happy to point you in the right direction.

Using Third-Party Websites

If you don't want to create your own online shop or if you just want to enhance your online presence, you can also use sites like Not On The Highstreet or Yumbles. They will promote your products (for a fee) but you still have to handle the order fulfilment side.

Section 4

How do I Promote my Business?

When your website is up and running, the first thing you need to do is to tell people it's there!

Whether you are appealing solely to a local customer base or you are happy to post your chocolates nationwide, it's time to use some basic marketing techniques to tell the world you are here. The internet is by far your most powerful tool for doing this.

It may sound like a cliché but it's important to remember that it's not just your products you are marketing but you; the unique, talented person behind the products, and your unique story. People buy from people they know, like and trust, so don't be afraid to include your personality in your marketing.

Online Search

Submit the site to Google (their search robots will come and index the site after a few weeks). Make sure you include some descriptive text on the site that your customers may search for, an example may be if you have a **chocolate shop in Northumberland**, make sure those words are included in the site. But don't worry if you're not at the top of their listings straight away – it takes time and some perseverance, but many of the techniques described below in Social Media can be used with your website to increase its visibility to the major search engines and help with its organic rise up the listings.

Social media

Whether you have never used social media before, or tried and just feel you never really got to grips with it, it can seem a little daunting. It's easy to feel that using it can mean having to share too much of yourself online, open yourself up to criticism, ask people to buy your products (cringe!), take amazing photos, be a slave to it... the list goes on. Actually, investing some time and effort in social media will be one of the strongest business decisions you can currently make.

Social media remains the best tool at your disposal for marketing your business, but it really isn't about overtly selling – in fact the clue is in the name. Social media is about building communities of people who like you, like what you sell, and want to hear your business story. The bonus is that this leads to a whole tribe of people who love to champion what you do... and that, in turn, leads to those precious sales and repeat business.

Tips for new users of social media:

- **Don't try to do it all.** Pick just one platform to begin with; Facebook or Instagram are ideal because they are both visual, which is ideal for chocolate, and good for building communities. If you use social media personally, pick whichever platform you are most familiar with.
- **Don't let photography be a barrier.** Most phones these days have cameras that knock the socks off the digital cameras of a few years ago. You will find your photography improves the more you post. If you're not sure where to start, make yourself a cuppa and search for 'simple social media photography tips' and you'll find plenty of articles to help. Or search on YouTube if you prefer video tutorials.
- **No followers?** Even the top social media influencers had zero followers once. Just keep posting and don't worry too much about follower numbers in the beginning. It's better to have 5 people who champion your brand and engage with you regularly than 100,000 followers you never interact with at all. And yes, it is okay to ask all of your friends and family to help you out by following you!

Establish yourself in your local online community:

As mentioned earlier, connecting with your local community can be very powerful. The Covid-19 crisis is really bringing communities closer together as we all work to protect our own and pool resources. And pandemic or no pandemic, locals love to buy from local businesses. You just need to reach out to them.

- **What's a hashtag?** Hashtags (which look like this **#**) are simply a way of cataloguing content under one common, clickable link. Search for **#rainbowofhope** on your chosen social media platform, for example and you will see posts featuring the rainbows people are displaying in their windows during the crisis, all in one place.
- **Use local hashtags on social media.** Now try searching for your local town or city as a hashtag, so, **#lincoln**, for example. Search again for a locale, such as **#tealby**. Does much come up? If there are more than a few posts there, then start using these local hashtags in your posts. Other people searching for the same locations will be drawn to your content. You are able to follow hashtags on social media too, so that anything posted with that tag will appear in your feed. As you're looking up some of the above, take a look at the "suggested" tags that Instagram will offer up above your results. This can be a great place to find new hashtags you might not have known about. These suggested tags only show up when you're using Instagram on your phone. You'll see them along the top when looking at the photos inside a tag. If you find other local businesses through hashtags, take a look at the hashtags they are using, then use them too!
- **Try geotagging.** It sounds like a new form of extreme orienteering, but really, it's just a simple way to tag your location onto your posts, and most social media platforms have this feature. Again, it tells customers where you are, and users searching for this location will see your posts.

- Do all you can to promote other local businesses, whether they relate to what you do or not. It's important to put in as much as you take out and shouting about other local brands helps show how community-centric you are. Plus they will be happy to help you out in return.
- Many chocolatiers want to make their location part of their story, because of course where we live can be a big influence on what we create. So if **selling locally** is your goal, don't be afraid to post photos of your local area on your social media too. Chocolates of Glenshiel, for example, whose very strapline is, "locally inspired chocolates" is a business based in the stunning Scottish Highlands, and this backdrop really inspires the products business owner Finlay crafts. Elements of his community, the landscape and how both inspire him regularly appear on his social media feeds, (**@chocolates_of_glenshiel**).
- If using Facebook, look for **local groups**. By searching for your local area on Facebook you can often find groups for local communities and businesses. Again, be sure to put in more than you take out, network, and help promote other businesses.
- Try the **Nextdoor app**. This is a local community-based app that has become particularly popular since the Covid-19 outbreak as neighbours seek to stay in touch remotely and support one another. There is a business section on there where you can build a profile for your chocolate business, collaborate with other businesses and let locals know you are there. Look out for other local apps and groups in your area – lots have been springing up since the pandemic began, allowing you to receive orders online and then use a driver network to deliver locally.

General social media tips, for when you're happy to post nationally:

- **Post regularly;** every day if you can. This may seem like a big ask but think of it as an investment in your marketing strategy, and remember it doesn't have to take long. A photo of the chocolates you just made, an update on new flavours, a behind-the-scenes photo of your workspace – all take five minutes and help remind your followers you are there and still available to them.
- **Make it easy for people to order.** Tell them what you sell and tell them how they can buy from you!
- **Show behind-the-scenes of your chocolate making.** The art of chocolate looks like alchemy to the uninitiated. The skills you think are everyday, such as tempering, joining two halves of a chocolate egg and using transfer sheets are a mystery to them. Show them by making quick videos as you work. They would love to know how a filling manages to get inside a chocolate!

- **This is our most powerful tip: tell your story.** What makes your business unique? (*hint – it's you!*) You might be a little camera shy or think there isn't much of interest you can say about yourself, but trust us, there is a story there and telling it will really help people invest in you. Grab a pen and paper and note down answers to the following:
 1. Why did I start my business? Why chocolate?
 2. What did I do before chocolate? Was there a career U-turn in there somewhere?
 3. What makes my chocolate special? Ethics? Flavours? Bars with swear words on? Do I fill a gap in the market in some way?
 4. Where do I operate my business? What can I say about my own background and where I live now?
 5. Does my chocolate work for a cause? Sarah's Creative Kitchen, mentioned above, for example, uses her products to raise funds to help couples pay for IVF. Others donate a percentage of their profits to charity. Some want to support cocoa farmers through the chocolate they use.
 6. Do I have anything else interesting or quirky I can use to tell my story? (For example, at Keylink we have a customer who runs marathons, another who is registered blind, one used his passion for motor racing to build a business selling racing-themed chocolates, and a chocolatier couple with backgrounds as scientists!)

Remember your answers don't have to be particularly ground-breaking or unique, but this is your individual story. Use it to help your customers get to know you. If the most interesting thing you can think of is that you started your business to give you more time with your children, then great! You will find many thousands of parents who will relate to and love that about your business, and want to support you in your venture. You just have to tell them about it. Don't be afraid to share content that isn't directly related to chocolate. It all helps your customers to get to know you, like you, be inspired by you, and trust you. (And if you have a cute pet, that always helps, we find!)

Customer Success Story: Sarah's Creative Kitchen

Essex-based Sarah sells her chocolate ranges exclusively via her website and uses Instagram to interact with her vast customer base, sharing previews of the products she will be adding to her website and life behind the scenes for her and her team. She started out making treats at home for herself, and literally overnight set up an online shop, selling over 2000 packs in her first release.

To date Sarah has 99,500 followers on Instagram. Her online community is very responsive and love to hear about new and returning products – which regularly sell out within minutes of being posted on her website! Outside of lock down conditions Sarah has the 'Eatery' where she runs chocolate classes and customers can buy products off the shelf. Since the pandemic hit she has adapted the business to offer local deliveries, bringing tasty treats to people's homes, on top of online sales. Sarah also uses her platform and her popular products to raise money to help couples pay for IVF treatment.

Section 5

How do I Deliver my Orders?

There are a number of options depending on your situation and your sales strategy:

1. Use Royal Mail
2. Use a national carrier, such as DPD or fedEx
3. Do your own local area deliveries
4. Team up with other local suppliers of groceries, fruit & veg, flowers, wine, etc. to share delivery costs

The key to ensuring that your fulfilment method is both easy to operate in practice and most importantly, cost-effective, is to ensure the following:

1. Basket Size. Make sure that each order is large enough that the delivery cost is only a small part of the total cost. You can do this by selling your chocolates in bundles rather than individually, eg. a box of 6 snacking bars or perhaps a hamper containing a box of pralines and two slabs.
2. Packaging. If you are using Royal Mail or a courier, design your product bundles to fit together inside a postal box. If you're doing local deliveries, you can get away with selling individual items, gift boxes or hamper trays.

We've put together a few ideas below to help you get started thinking about how to package your products and deliver them to your new (or existing) customers.



Postal box
SPM5131



Postal box
SPM5131



Hamper Tray
SPC1401



Postal box
SPM5220

Section 6

Strengthening bonds with your customers

If you love your customers through the tough times, they will love you back forever!

As well as selling delicious chocolate products, there are lots of ways to add value to your sales during the pandemic and beyond. Here are some we have seen online:

- **Free notes** – many people are buying chocolate as gifts for people they can't be with right now, so a thoughtful note included in the order can make all the difference. You could offer to write a personal note in your best handwriting for the recipient.
- **Free gift wrap** – in a similar fashion, in this makes the recipient feel all the more valued and brings a sense of ceremony to their gift.
- **Support a cause** – if you can, donate a small percentage of your sales to a cause you care about. You could also sell products specifically to raise funds – lollipops for NHS charities, for example, or donate actual chocolate to key workers. As well as the obvious good it does, this helps show your customers that you really care.
- **Prize draws.** Include a note with your orders and post to social media letting customers know that if they post a photo of themselves enjoying your chocolates on social media, and tag you, they will be entered into a prize draw to win a treat. Customers love to participate in things like this, and while the kids are at home, it provides them with an activity, too! When your customers post, all of their social network will see the post and hear about your products, too.
- **Let customers choose.** Use social media to ask customers what you should make for them. Ask their opinion on flavour ideas, décor ideas and new products. Again, they will love that you are asking their opinion, and who doesn't like to chat about chocolate? Instagram Stories has a simple poll feature you can use to get followers to vote between options, then you can see your responses at a glance.
- **Free delivery.** Price your chocolates or offer bar bundles, for example, priced so that customers can buy with postage included. This makes the buying decision easier, and they are likely to buy more from you in one go, rather than buying little and often and pushing up your delivery bills.
- **Community spirit.** If you are making local deliveries, ask your customers' permission to photograph the delivery (from a safe distance, of course) and then share these photos as part of your story online. This helps build a sense of community.

We really hope you've found this document interesting and helpful!

Please do stay in touch with us via our social media channels, or call or email us if you need any further help or advice.

The Keylink Marketing Team