HOSPITALITY – TAKE TIME, TAKE CONTROL
Foreword

It’s difficult to talk about the personal impact of coronavirus without sounding or feeling selfish – after all, I’ve not lost a loved one. Yet as a small business owner, I have felt its financial impact – and I hope that by sharing my experience, I can help others who are struggling to keep their livelihood intact.

I run a pub with a bar and restaurant in the countryside. We’re small, with a garden, a 300-year-old building and loyal local clientele. We have a small team. Several of them have children; some have mortgages to pay; but all need food on the table and a roof over their heads. They rely on my business to provide that in exchange for their hard work.

Like many small business owners, I value being my own boss because it gives me more say over my work and personal life. Yet the pandemic has left so many of us feeling lost, questioning “What now? What next? How do we not go bankrupt?”

In the past seven months, I have more than once hung my head in my hands and asked myself, “Is it worth it?” “Yes, it is!” my conscience tells me. And so, I return to the Excel sheets, pick up the phone, discuss ideas with my partner and look for new ways to do things.

This guide includes tips from 11 business owners like me. We hope it will provide a little bit of support to our fellow hospitality owners and help them to take back control of the things that are within their power during this difficult time.

The pandemic has not only affected owners’ purse strings, but in some cases, it has also taken its toll on their physical health and mental wellbeing, so we’ve included some personal ways we try to deal with the stress of our jobs. It’s important to share your experiences with others if you feel able to – you will find you are not alone.

Despite onerous restrictions, difficult trading conditions and an uncertain future, I feel thankful every day that I can unlock my doors and safely welcome guests again. Long term viability is anyone’s guess right now, but we’ve done enough to give us hope. Whatever the future holds I am certain the independent hospitality sector has the creativity, drive and talent to find its feet again.

Merlin Griffiths
Publican and TV’s favourite barman

35% of owners said one of their favourite aspects of running their own business was a better work life balance.
Taking control of your business in an uncertain time

The run-up to the new year is typically enormously profitable for the hospitality sector, but this year is incredibly uncertain.

As we approach the winter period, the biggest cause for concern for small businesses in the industry is lack of confidence leading to less money being spent than last year (35%). In fact, over a quarter (27%) of owners are worried their business will not survive beyond Christmas.

This guide brings together tips from leading figures in the hospitality industry. It is intended to help small business owners identify ways they can react to recent changes, find new or altered methods of doing business and take back some control of the things that are within their power during this difficult time.

The total value of the sector to the UK economy at the end of 2019 was £133.5bn

The hospitality industry contributes 5% of national GDP and accounts for 10% of employment in the country.

The rolling annual value of the hospitality sector has now dipped below £100bn

27% of owners are worried their business will not survive beyond Christmas.

Just 27% of UK consumers feel confident eating in a restaurant, and 23 per cent would be comfortable visiting a bar or pub as of late August.
Alix Caiger, Founder and Exec. Chef, Caiger & Co. Catering

Alix trained at Leith’s School of Food and Wine. She now runs a successful London-based catering company focusing on providing bespoke and personalised menus, using local and seasonal products.

Share your story and experience
I find it helpful to talk to other business owners – especially those in the industry – and share our experiences. Knowing you’re not the only one struggling can take a weight off your mind. You often also get some great advice on how to tackle specific problems. Find your community and reach out to them.

Consider different price points
In this market, you have to be able to adapt and probably price more than one version of your product or service. Think about stripping products back, and then offering ‘add ons’. This might even allow you to approach different markets with the product as well.

Dr Hilary Cooke FIH, Founding Partner, Merlin Consultancy

Hilary is an award-winning executive coach, leadership trainer and facilitator and Fellow of the Institute of Hospitality. She recently wrote ‘Picking up the Pieces’ – a toolkit for hospitality managers on how to create a resilient leadership for getting teams back to work.

Use your network
Take the time to maintain, and contribute to, your business relationships. This will not only mean you can give and gain support, but also save time and energy in making decisions. If you aren’t sure of something, pick up the phone and understand how other operators have tackled specific problems.

Apply the 80:20 rule
Strangely, the Pareto Principle works in all kinds of weird and wonderful ways. Use it to focus on the 20% of effort or action that will get you 80% result – whether it is a particular market segment, customer group or items on the menu. The 80:20 rule also helps to identify potential quick wins and focus your attention on short-term priorities.
Peter Ducker FIH,  
Chief Executive,  
Institute of Hospitality

The Institute of Hospitality is the professional body for individual managers and aspiring managers working and studying in the hospitality, leisure and tourism industry.

Over-communicate with your customers
Clear and accurate messages across all your available channels will help customers understand what to expect and retain their loyalty. Consider all aspects including how you manage bookings, cancellation charges and gift voucher redemption; what to expect in terms of check-in and check-out procedures; and what measures are being taken to protect them during their stay.

Make it a team effort
Give your staff the opportunity to play a part in the recovery, include them in decision-making where feasible, seek their input, and invite their practical feedback on suggestions. It is also important to bear in mind that they are all individuals and are very likely to have been touched by this crisis on a personal level.

Merlin Griffiths,  
TV’s best loved barman and Publican

A bartender and mixologist for more than 25 years, Merlin is often referred to as the King of Cocktails. He is also the owner of a country inn in Northamptonshire.

Trade adjustments
We are often taught in hospitality to “sweat” a venue in terms of operating hours and offering - an “open all hours” approach. With the changes we are seeing in guest behaviour, maybe now is the time to review your operating hours, staff costs, the size and scope of menu offerings, to create a leaner and more profitable operation that also provides more time off for staff and owners. Now that’s a win-win!

Take control of your energy costs with a smart meter
Utility bills represent one of the highest costs to hospitality operators. In order to maximise any marginal gains from managing your energy consumption you need to know exactly how much you’re using, and when. Smart meters provide this control over your business’ energy spend, and they also give you accurate bills, so each month, you only have to pay for the energy you actually use. I encourage all my fellow business owners to contact their energy supplier to see if they are eligible for an installation.
Hospitality – Take Time, Take Control

Sarah Lemanski,
Co-owner and Creative Director,
Nova Bakehouse

Sarah’s name has become synonymous with quality and innovation within the baking industry. She took the Young British Foodie Award for Baking in 2014 and won Baker of the Year in the Olive Magazine Chef Awards in 2018.

Remember your mission
Revisit your mission statement. What is the overall mission of your business and are you still on the right path to getting there? You’ll find this gives you a starting point from which to prioritise the areas that need attention in order to keep you in control and stay on route in unpredictable circumstances.

Go back to basics
Streamline your day-to-day processes and product lines to improve efficiency. A back to basics approach will give you more time and energy and make the business more resilient. The pandemic has taught people the value of the simple things. Providing these to a high standard in an uncertain world is something customers will appreciate.

Mark Lewis,
CEO, Hospitality Action

Hospitality Action was established in 1837 and has since offered vital assistance to all who work, or have worked, within hospitality in the UK.

Safety net your team
Taking care of your staff has never been more important. The best way to do this is to invest in an Employee Assistance Programme. For a small outlay per staff member, you can provide them with access to a 24/7 helpline for “in the moment” support, counselling, addiction support and services such as debt or legal advice, relationship and parenting support.

Don’t forget you’re also important
As a leader, it’s very easy to prioritise the needs of others ahead of your own. If you’re good at caring for others but less focused on your own self-care, have a think about how you would support a friend going through similar circumstances. Ask for help in the face of adversity – drawing strength from others can prove particularly valuable.
James Lohan, MBE, Co-Founder, Mr & Mrs Smith

In 2003, James and his wife Tamara kickstarted a boutique hotel revolution by launching the innovative, market-leading travel club Mr & Mrs Smith. They now have 1,400 hand-picked hotels across the globe and over a million members worldwide.

Strip back any complexity
Of course, companies grow organically, but they can often start to drift, adding too much complexity and brand baggage along the way. This is the perfect time to challenge yourself on whether you are focussing on the right things – and have the team structure to deliver the right offer – in what is now a more agile world.

Check your ‘brand purpose’
Will your ‘brand purpose’ still be relevant in a post-COVID world? I’d personally like to think we’ll all make some sort of positive change when we get through this. I think people’s appreciation of companies that are decent, kind, diverse, open, inclusive and sustainable will be heightened and they will increasingly look to spend their cash more positively.

Reza Mahammad, TV Chef and Author

Reza is known as the Prince of Spice. He ran the iconic Star of India on the Brompton Road for many years, having taken over suddenly when his father died.

Offer an early dinner set menu
An early bird menu from 6pm-7.30pm can be a great way to entice people who want a change of scenery having worked from home all day. As ‘Eat Out to Help Out’ encouraged people to try different restaurants, it may also bring in new customers (as well as regulars).

Offer a discount for direct orders
While home delivery companies can expand your reach, they often take a significant cut of your profits. Offer discounts to customers who order directly and are willing to collect. Offering home deliveries could be another long-term business option.
Kenny Tutt, Chef Patron, PITCH Restaurant and Cookery School

Former Bank Manager Kenny was crowned MasterChef Champion in 2018. He opened his first restaurant and cookery school, PITCH in his hometown of Worthing in May 2019. He most recently launched Tutt’s Truck in response to COVID-19, which can currently be found along Worthing seafront.

Reflect before you look forward
With big changes to industry guidelines, it’s tempting to jump head-first into making new plans. Instead, take some time to think about what has worked really well for your business. In that same vein, be honest with what could have been done differently. What would you change to make things either easier or more impactful? What feedback did you receive that could help you be more successful?

Know what support is available
It’s important to know what Government help is available, and what can best be used for your business. Spending time really looking at the business support section of the.gov website is key as there are now many ways to bolster your business - from grants to low cost business lending as well as staff retention schemes and tax reliefs.

Mich Turner, MBE, Founder, Little Venice Cake Company

A qualified Food Scientist and former Bakery and Patisserie Buyer at Harvey Nichols, Mich is founder of the prestigious Little Venice Cake Company and author of seven internationally published books.

Compile a social content calendar
Social media is a great way to engage with people but can seem daunting at first. Creating a content calendar allows you to plan out what you want to say. Videos are a great way to deliver messages that resonate with your customers on an emotional and logical level and can be filmed simply on your phone.

Find co-branding opportunities
Join forces with another brand or business - this can be in a similar or complementary field. This strengthens your brand, increases how many people you can reach and instils a message of confidence to employees, customers, community and other businesses.
Mandy Yin, Owner and Chef, Sambal Shiok Laksa Bar/ Nasi Economy Rice

Mandy cooks some of the best Malaysian food in the country from her two small restaurants on London’s Holloway Road.

Retrain your staff
Sambal Shiok never previously offered takeaway because we were so busy with in-house diners that we didn’t need to! But now my kitchen team can take orders, pack deliveries and manage front-of-house – as well as cook delicious food.

Review your suppliers regularly
Don’t be afraid to ask for better deals or do the additional legwork of getting quotes elsewhere. I’ve set up relationships with a couple of new suppliers since reopening and this has helped my bottom line.
Looking after your mental wellbeing in stressful environments

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only had a negative impact on business owners’ purse strings, but also on their mental health – with a lack of customers (30%), working longer hours (24%) and having to furlough staff (21%) having the biggest effect.

For many owners, the situation has left them feeling out of control, with 32% reporting disturbed sleep; 27% feeling worried, anxious or fearful, and 28% saying they have seen an increase in stress levels.

Our industry leaders have shared the personal ways they try to maintain a healthy balance in stressful times.

Alix Caiger

Take a break from social
It’s not always healthy or constructive to be online all the time, so see if you can set times to be off your phone and away from social media. Concentrate on yourself and how you feel and allow this to inspire you instead.

Dr Hilary Cooke (FIH)

Don’t label your emotions
All our emotions are valuable sources of information that can guide our behaviour and actions once we are aware of them. Giving them “positive” or “negative” values puts extra pressure on you to buy into a false story of how you are “supposed” to feel, or that “negative feelings” are bad in some way, or that you should be “positive” all the time.

Peter Ducker (FIH)

Access external resources
There’s lots of free information available, offering tangible advice on topics addressing hardship, unemployment or mental health. It’s just a case of finding the right topic for you. The Institute of Hospitality is working with other organisations to create a “hub” where we’ll soon be sharing our resources to help as many of our colleagues as possible at all levels.

Merlin Griffiths

Do one non-work activity that brings you joy
Hospitality operators seem to be hardwired to work 24/7! But it’s important to try and do one thing that’s just for you - however much you convince yourself there isn’t time. I try to cycle at least once a week: I find it really helps me unwind.

Sarah Lemanski

Acknowledge that you have finite energy resources
At a time when we are forced to rethink and control expenditure, it is vital that you recognise that your mental and physical energy are of the utmost importance to your business. Be comfortable and realistic with the fact that your own ability to contribute maximum energy relies on you finding the time to plug in, recharge, download and update yourself.
Mark Lewis

**Don’t suffer in silence**

If you’re concerned about your own mental wellbeing, or that of a colleague get in touch. Hospitality Action’s Advice line is free of charge and open 24/7: just call 0808 802 0282. We also have lots of practical information on our website covering mental health, addiction, employment and family issues all freely available at www.hospitalityaction.org.uk/advice.

James Lohan, MBE

**Spend time outside**

I’m increasingly enjoying a spot of gardening while listening to podcasts. The combination of a proper distraction from work, getting my hands dirty and hearing or learning something new really helps me reset if I’ve been having a stressful day.

Reza Mahammad

**Focus on your breathing**

When I am really stressed, my ability to concentrate on anything is limited. When that happens, I take a short 15 minutes to meditate. While meditation may feel strange at first, focusing on just breathing in, and out, can give you clarity.

Mich Turner, MBE

**Follow a daily routine**

I plan out each day with time assigned to the mind, body and spirit. Devoting specific time to each of these areas offers a holistic and 360-degree approach to my overall wellbeing. Physical exercise, creative time and mental stimulation are all necessary to harmonise and balance my wellbeing.

Kenny Tutt

**Set clear working times**

And do your very best to stick to them! Ask yourself “can that call wait?”, or “do I really need to respond to that email straight away?” Know it’s ok to let go of work - even under the most difficult circumstances. No matter how you choose to spend your spare time, you will be more effective when you get back to it.

Mandy Yin

**Leave your premises**

I always try to take a day when I’m not physically present at the restaurant. I use the time to catch up on life admin or have dinner with my friends. Giving yourself a break to catch up on the important things in your personal life is key to keeping you motivated enough to keep pushing things forward for the business.
Taking control of your energy spend

More than four-fifths (81%) of small business owners in the hospitality sector said having more certainty about their businesses estimated costs, such as energy, would help them feel more in control. Smart meters give you accurate bills for your business, so each month, you only have to pay for the energy you actually use. To see if your business is eligible for a smart meter installation, contact your energy supplier.

Wheelies Café

Emma and her sister Lozzie are co-owners of Wheelies Café in Portslade, which has been serving nearby workers for 12 years. They decided to have a smart meter installed in their premises two years ago in order to have more control over their business’ energy spend and to ensure they received accurate bills.

“As a small business we’re always on the lookout for ways to manage our costs and keep our overheads to a minimum. Two years ago, while switching energy suppliers, we were offered the option to have a smart meter installed in the café and I leapt at the chance. I already had one installed in my house so I was confident that it would help us to identify energy savings in the café and reduce our bills, just as it had at home.

The smart meter had an instant impact – because our bills were no longer estimated we began paying for exactly what we were using, which is a huge help when it comes to our budgeting. It also means I no longer have to remind myself to check my meters anymore, as my smart meter sends my readings to the supplier automatically. Although it was a small chore it would often get forgotten while I was managing my café during the day, so it’s been great to get rid of this extra monthly task.

The smart meter has also helped us to become more energy efficient in the way we run the business, which in turn has helped us to control our energy spend. When we were forced to close for an extended period due to the lockdown – something we had never really done before - we tracked our energy usage on our supplier’s website and realised exactly how much it was costing us to leave all our appliances on overnight. Now that we have reopened we always switch off our appliances whenever they aren’t in use. It helps us to save money and has made the café more environmentally friendly as well.
Although lockdown was extremely difficult, with constant worries about how long we could survive while closed down, the business has bounced back well. We’ve brought our staff back from furlough, and although there have been challenges around the new rules we’re really happy to be back in business and serving customers again.

Although there is still uncertainty around our future we’re staying optimistic and focusing on making the business work as well as possible. The smart meter means that energy bills are something we no longer have to worry about, as I know they are accurate and the readings are submitted automatically. It’s always useful to have visibility over your businesses’ expenditure, but in times of huge uncertainty it becomes a real necessity.”

“The smart meter had an instant impact – because our bills were no longer estimated we began paying for exactly what we were using, which is a huge help when it comes to our budgeting.”

Wheelies Café
Sources

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(Source: UKHospitality. ukhospitality.org.uk/)

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(Source: UKHospitality. ukhospitality.org.uk/news/news.asp?id=504592&hhSearchTerms=%22tracker%22)

Just 27 per cent of UK consumers feel confident eating in a restaurant, and 23 per cent would be comfortable visiting a bar or pub as of late August.
(Source: EY Future Consumer Index, 27 August: cityam.com/uk-hospitality-firms-predict-41-per-cent-drop-in-summer-sales/)