



Gig Economy's 7-Point Plan For Managing The COVID-19 Coronavirus Outbreak

Insights

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Given that the gig economy is a relatively recent phenomenon, the industry has not yet experienced some of the trials and tribulations that more-established business models have survived. Now though, for the first time, gig economy companies are forced to weather the storm of a public health crisis that threatens to upend the daily lives of hundreds of millions of Americans. What should gig economy companies consider in the coming days, weeks, and months to deal with the COVID-19 coronavirus crisis? Here's a seven-point plan you should review and consider adopting.

1. Communicate With Your Workforce

In a crisis, silence leads to confusion and panic. You should get in front of the problem by communicating with your workforce about the common preventive measures they should take to stay safe. [A sampling of messages from some in the industry](#): Grubhub sent a message advising its drivers to practice good hygiene and stay home if they feel sick; Instacart has shared information with their shoppers about the precautionary measures they should take as directed by national and local health authorities; DoorDash reminded workers to wash their hands for 20 seconds, use hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol, and cough and sneeze into their elbow or tissue; Postmates did the same. If you haven't done so yet, the time is now to craft a message for your workers [incorporating advice from the CDC](#).

2. Tailor Your Message Based On Your Business

Although the messages repeating CDC-issued advice is helpful – the more reminders you can get to wash your hands, the better – you would also be wise to craft your message to match the work your workforce is performing. Grubhub, [for example](#), has advised its drivers to clean their insulated delivery bags with soap and water and/or disinfectant after done delivering for the day, not to touch a customer's delivery order, and ask restaurants to tie or seal bags containing food. Think of the kinds of things your workers do and personalize your content accordingly. Perhaps you will advise them not to shake hands with those they interact with. Or maybe they should carry disinfectant with them or offer wipes/sanitizing liquid to their customers. The more tailored to your business, the more effective your message will be.

3. Consider A Communication To Your Customers

In order to keep your workers safe, you may also want to consider a similar message to those customers interacting with your workforce reminding them of simple preventive measures and advising them to follow these steps when interacting with your workers. Ease their fears and let them know you have also advised your workers of these same steps. You may even consider a brief notification tied in with the delivery of your services asking customers if they have washed their hands or taken other simple steps that is sent each time an interaction is about to occur.

4. **Prohibit Discrimination In The Strongest Possible Terms**

Because the virus originated in China, there have been reports of discrimination and mistreatment of those of Asian descent. Tell your workforce they are prohibited from treating customers differently because of their racial background or national origin, and that you will end your relationship with them if they do. Make sure your contract agreement with your workers contains language permitting you to remove them from the list of eligible workers if they violate this basic tenet.

5. **Be Prepared For An Upsurge In Work**

When the virus took hold in China, demand for food delivery skyrocketed as the public was advised to limit their everyday activities. Those workers carrying out the deliveries were hailed as heroes. We may end up seeing a similar dynamic in the U.S. if the virus continues to spread and daily routines are upended. Consider all of the cascading effects of quarantines or self-imposed limitations. If schools close, there will be an increase in demand for childcare services. If people want to limit their time away from home, delivery services of all types will be taxed. Consider adjusting your business to adapt to what may be the new normal for some period of time.

6. **Be Prepared For A Worker Shortage**

At the same time, we may see a shortage of workers if the virus spreads. Those performing gig work on the side to supplement their incomes may decide the risk of human interaction with customers is not worth it for the time being. They may self-quarantine themselves, or find they might not have as much free time as they normally do if their family obligations shift with school closures. Whatever the reason, you may start to see your pool of available workers shrink. You might consider higher pay for performing certain work during critical times in order to induce new workers or to reward those who stick with it during these uncertain times.

7. **Look To The Future**

This last point might not assist you during the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. But given that the gig economy will survive this crisis and face others in the future, the time to plan for future problems is now. In the past few months, companies in China adapted their work to handle more centralized delivery services to reduce human contact, and also began using unmanned delivery vehicles. If you haven't already, you may want to explore autonomous vehicle options as a method for performing your services. Another problem that won't be solved in the coming weeks but needs fixing is the unavailability of portable benefits for your workers. If individuals had the

freedom of establishing benefits and keeping them from gig to gig, the pool of workers available to handle your work would explode exponentially. Talk to your lawmakers and regulators about the need for a portable benefits system for contractors in your state and at the national level, and cite the benefits to both the economy and your workers if such a system were adopted.

We're monitoring the situation and will provide updates as necessary. Our firm's COVID-19 Taskforce has developed [a comprehensive series of FAQs](#) to aid businesses during these turbulent times; feel free to review them for assistance with your non-contractor workforce.

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