

Pandemic prompts support for small businesses from Facebook

By MIRANDA JETTER

Among the most visible victims of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has wreaked havoc across nearly every facet of society in the past months are small business. Main streets and downtowns bear shuttered storefronts hung with signs and posters scrawled with well-wishes for customers and promises to return. In the midst of this crisis Facebook has developed new features to try to help these hard-hit small businesses.

According to a press release from the U.S. Small Business Administration, small businesses account for 44% of all economic activity in the U.S. It is clear in a survey conducted by Goldman Sachs on small business that COVID-19 is taking a toll. Sixty-four percent of respondents said they had cash reserves that would last them less than three months. In addition, 93% of respondents said that COVID-19 would have a long-term impact on their business operations.

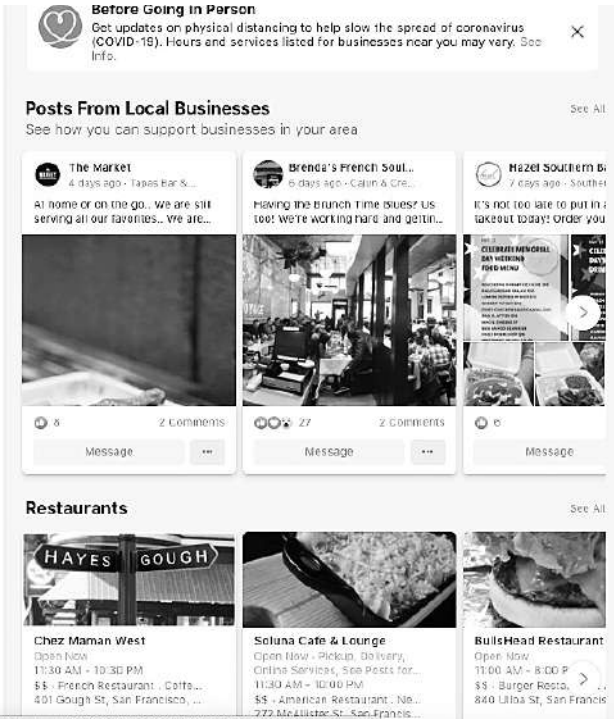
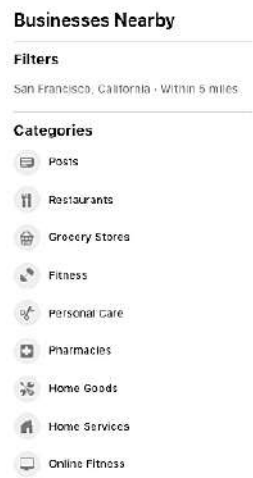
One of the tools touted by congress to help small businesses is the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Designed to incentivize keeping workers on payroll, they are loans meant to alleviate some of the stress placed on small businesses during this time by providing funds to cover employee’s wages and overhead fees. The loans are forgiven if certain

parameters, like using 75% of allotted funds on employees, are met.

However, PPP has been dogged by issues and controversy. According to an article in The Atlantic several large businesses like Shake Shack and Ruth Chris’s Steak House were roundly criticized for taking PPP loans when they are by no means small businesses. Only 29% of those approved for PPP funds had received them, according to the survey and many have found the guidance on how to apply and receive loan forgiveness overly convoluted and confusing.

This is where Facebook comes in, unveiling a new product called Shop. The Shop feature allows businesses to design a “virtual store front” said Diana Doukas, a policy manager at Facebook. In particular the feature is useful for retail and restaurants, sectors which have been acutely struggling without foot traffic. This new product comes in addition to other features that can be used by small businesses like Fundraisers and Gift cards and resources on the Facebook website like business resiliency toolkits and digital marketing training.

The Shop feature is accessible through a businesses’ Facebook or Instagram page and differs from a business’s public page on the website by allowing for everything from browsing products, to contacting sellers, to ordering and tracking products.



All of this can be done on one platform without the need to toggle between different sites, said Doukas. Businesses can customize their shops with their own branding and aesthetic, ideally to approximate the experience of a real-life store as closely as possible.

They’ve also released a “Support Small Business” sticker on Instagram, a tag that can be inserted into an Instagram story. The sticker is meant to encourage people to shop local by creating awareness of small businesses, said Doukas. The hope is that the sticker, which allows users to tag a small business they support, will galvanize others watching the story to check out the business mentioned.

Businesses Nearby is another tool that Facebook is rolling out which compliments the Shop feature. It helps users find businesses in a 1-500-mile radius around them. Doukas said that this allows users to discover and engage with new small businesses in their communities. The Shop and Business Nearby tools are

features that businesses have to opt in to, said Doukas, and they do come with a price. Each feature requires a one-time processing fee for operations but that there are no ongoing charges.

These new tools are part of an ongoing effort by Facebook to become an integral part of conducting business. They already derive much of their advertising revenue from small and medium sized businesses. Since 2016 they’ve created surveys and reports with the World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Small Business Roundtable. In April of 2020 they announced \$100 million in grant funds for small businesses globally. “We have long been in the business of small business,” said Doukas.

To learn more about Facebook’s small business features visit www.facebook.com/business.

Union City City Council

June 9, 2020

Announcements:

- Union City Council Mayor Carol Dutra-Vernaci read a statement about George Floyd, whose death in Minneapolis May 25 set off a wave of protests, civic discourse and discontent across the world. She said the city grieves for Floyd and his family and called for a minute of silence in his honor.
- Later, the city manager provided a summary of events in Union City in response to Floyd’s death, including: a message from the city’s police chief condemning police action in Minneapolis (May 30), countywide curfew enacted (June 1), mayoral public message stating the city’s commitment to dismantling racism (June 3), Virtual Town Hall (June 4), Black Cowboys Horse March (June 5), Inspire Church prayer protest and Black Lives Matter protest (June 7). The mayor also signed support for former President Obama’s Commit to Action to address police use of force policies.
- Dutra-Vernaci noted that

the City’s police force is under immense pressure and stress and that good officers get painted by the same brush as bad. The Council unanimously voted to form a joint Human Relations Committee and Council sub-committee to determine how to move forward with community engagement.

- Melissa Schuen Mallory, chair of the Human Relations Committee, commended public works staff, police and fire departments for their response to the looting in Union Landing.
- Police Chief Jared Rinetti said that the police “love this community, we are public servants,” and he believes in care, compassion and empathy for policing, and is eager to dialogue with the community to improve.

Public Hearing:

- Rate Increases in Solid Waste and Recycling Services: The Council held a Public Hearing and discussion regarding two resolutions related to increases in solid waste and recycling services and extending the recycling processing surcharge to Tri-City Economic Development Corporation (Tri-CED).
- The City received 337 protests, but this does not constitute a majority protest.

The Council unanimously adopted the first resolution. For single family households, weekly curbside garbage, organics and recycling collection will increase by \$1.42 monthly starting July 1. Multi-family households will see a rate increase of \$1.10 per month for garbage and organics weekly collection. The Council postponed voting on the second resolution until July 13 so it can receive further financial planning documents from Tri-CED.

- Exclusive franchise agreements between the City and Republic Services and Tri-CED specify that solid waste, organics and recycling rates must be adjusted annually. Republic and Tri-CED submitted rate adjustment applications for fiscal year 2020-21, seeking increases due to inflation and increased disposal costs, as well as adjustments to city fees.
- David Watley, member of the public, questioned the timing of this rate increase considering many people are suffering financially due to the COVID-19 crisis. Later Watley spoke about the need for more input in the governmental decision-making process from all protected classes (minorities, disadvantaged, disabled and others).

Business Survey:

- City Economic Development Manager Gloria Ortega discussed a business survey on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting Union City’s economy. Of the 27 businesses that responded, 10 non-essential businesses were temporarily closed, 17 businesses were open (seven of these businesses were non-essential but shifted to virtual/remote work) and 10 business were deemed essential.
- The survey cited employee layoffs (657 as of May 15, at nine businesses with more than 75 employees); loss of sales tax revenue to the city; the public’s concern about recommended safety measures (masks, social distancing); and the many factors affecting how the city revives its economy. Concerns include re-establishing cash flow, paying rent and utilities, and re-establishing customer bases.
- Ortega also noted that in the “Tri-City area” (Union City, Newark and Fremont), 85 businesses had laid off 17,618 employees; and in Alameda County it’s been reported that 351 businesses laid off 31,098 employees. Her full presentation can be found at the City Council’s website in the agenda packet,

here: www.unioncity.org.

Urgency Ordinance:

- Adopted an Urgency Ordinance of the City of Union City authorizing the zoning administrator to issue temporary use permits and waive requirements of Title 18 of the Municipal Code to facilitate business operations impacted by the novel coronavirus.

Consent Calendar:

- Approved the minutes of the special and regular City Council meetings held May 26, 2020
- Adopted a resolution calling for and giving notice of a General Municipal Election for Tuesday, November 3, 2020
- Adopted a resolution authorizing the city manager to execute the first amendment to the consulting services agreement between Union City and Dyett and Bhatia, Urban and Regional Planners, to increase by \$49,000, for a total contract amount of \$231,369 for additional work associated with a specific plan update for the proposed project located in the Station East Area.

Mayor Carol Dutra-Vernaci	Aye
Vice Mayor Emily Duncan	Aye
Pat Gacoscos	Aye
Jaime Patiño	Aye
Gary Singh	Aye

EARTHTALK

By RODDY SHEER AND DOUG MOSS

Dear EarthTalk: How are we doing in the battle to stop or slow deforestation, especially in the tropics where forests store so much of the world’s biodiversity?

-- M. Lark, Neptune, IA

In short, not so good. Global Forest Watch, a project of the non-profit World Resources Institute (WRI) which uses satellite data to track global forest loss, found that the world lost some 3.8 million hectares of tropical primary forest (defined as forests of native trees undisturbed by human activities) in 2019 -- equivalent to

one soccer field every six seconds and an area about the size of Switzerland in total. One particularly nasty side effect of all this forest loss is the release of more than two billion tons of carbon dioxide, the leading greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere as the trees came down in 2019. (To put that into context, this is more emissions than caused by all of the vehicles on the road in the United States during the same 12-month stretch.) The tropical primary forest loss in 2019 is the third highest amount in recorded history, behind only 2016 and 2017.

While deforestation is an issue everywhere, it is particularly problematic in the tropics where the majority of the world’s biodiversity lives. Another leading conservation group, WWF, points out that some 17% of the forest across the Amazon has been cut down over the last 50 years, mostly to make room for cattle ranching -- so we can enjoy our steaks and burgers. The group warns that if nothing is done to stop it, some of the world’s most iconic and biologically diverse forest landscapes

could be lost to deforestation, including primary habitat for iconic wildlife species like orangutans, tigers and elephants. “The hot spots are located in the Amazon, the Atlantic Forest and Gran Chaco, Borneo, the Cerrado, Choco-Darien, the Congo Basin, East Africa, Eastern Australia, Greater Mekong, New Guinea, and Sumatra.” reports WWF. “Up to 420 million acres of forest could be lost between 2010 and 2030 in these ‘deforestation fronts’ if current trends continue.”

Brazil suffered the largest total primary forest loss of all in 2019, with deforestation for agriculture and other new land uses increasing rapidly through that country’s vast stretches of Amazon rainforest. Meanwhile, neighboring Bolivia experienced the largest surge in primary tropical forest loss, where rampaging wildfires, most likely set intentionally to clear land for farming, reduced 80 percent more tree cover than in previous years.

On the bright side, Global Forest Watch reports that primary forest loss was

reduced significantly in Indonesia, where a recently imposed government moratorium on clearing land for palm oil plantations -- along with beefed up enforcement -- has reduced annual forest loss to levels not seen for 15 years (before the palm oil craze swept the region). Primary tropical forest loss was also down some 50% in both Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire.

What’s the solution? Frances Seymour of WRI tells The New York Times that she’d like to see the international community address the problem through economic incentives that encourage forest protection. She adds that governments should focus on preventing forest burning, increasing monitoring and enforcement to stop encroachment while providing the poor with alternatives to forest exploitation.

EarthTalk is produced by Roddy Scheer and Doug Moss for the nonprofit EarthTalk. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org.