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Sales Small Business

## How to keep customers coming back post lockdown

Alan Manly  
October 7, 2021



Post-COVID-19 freedom days are approaching throughout Australia, hailing the dawn of the next business era. It has all companies pondering how to retain customers as the country reopens.

One of the biggest challenges for business is encapsulated in that delightful [quote from Greek philosopher Heraclitus](#) dating back some 2,500 years: "the only constant in life is change".

Or a more recent reiteration comes from another famous businessperson, scientist, and statesman, one of America's founding fathers Benjamin Franklin: "When you are finished changing, you are finished".

### So, what has changed?

"There is a retail revolution taking place as more and more shoppers learn about the benefits of e-commerce," Kogan.com co-founder and chief executive [Ruslan Kogan recently told investors, after delivering a 56 per cent increase in net profit in FY21](#).

Kogan excelled at what it already did, but few would have imagined, for example, that [top restaurants would embrace home delivery](#).

The latter shows businesses adapting to changed market conditions. But customers also changed: they too have gone digital.

Before COVID-19, there were two clear types of customers:

- **Digital natives:** people who have been familiar with computers, the internet, and other digital technology from a young age. Post-COVID, these folks have only known online purchasing. For instance, an 18-year-old would have spent the period from their late teens to adulthood making all purchases online.
- **Digital immigrants:** individuals born before the widespread adoption of digital technology. Digital immigrants are the opposite of digital natives, who have been interacting with technology from childhood.

However, a third term – **digital convicts** – was coined by [Emeritus Professor Greg Whateley in 2020](#): those individuals "...suddenly transported to an unfamiliar cyberland by government decree..."

The concept of digital convicts applies to all businesses who find themselves thrust online.

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This brings us back to the original question – **How to keep customers coming back?**

## Know who they are

The COVID experience is the rare occasion when suppliers' products may not have changed as much as their customers.

Ensuring repeat business in the post-COVID/post-lockdown world will ultimately depend on your customer's experience when interacting with your company.

And doing so means catering to those three customer types: digital natives, digital immigrants, and digital convicts.

For digital natives, computers, the internet, and other digital technologies (such as AI, product recommendation engines, live chat, and multimedia) are not just familiar concepts but expected components. They anticipate using the latest technologies across all facets of the business – user-friendly web pages, ordering systems and delivery logistics – regardless of whether contact is face-to-face or online.

Digital immigrants, meanwhile, are accustomed to having to adapt to technological change. For them, continued dealings with a business may rest on how well it demonstrates that its staff have been empowered to use newly implemented digital tools. Well-trained staff that may be cautious but competent with the technology.

As for the digital convicts, this may well be the graveyard of businesses who survived the pandemic but relied on everything going back to the way it was pre-COVID. Sadly, the new world and new way of doing business will likely wipe them out.

## Forget tech for tech's sake

Understanding that change has happened (and will continue) is one key factor, as is understanding that your business is in a race to adapt to the new reality of digital customers in one of three camps.

However, the ultimate test for every business will not be in the technology itself but rather how it is applied. That is, your customer experience (CX) – everything related to a business that affects a customer's perception and feelings about it.

"Customer experience is the sum of all the interactions that a customer has with an organization over the life of the relationship with that company or with that brand," [according to Annette Franz, founder and CEO of CX Journey.](#)

With that in mind, the quote from Chinese entrepreneur Jack Ma, who was head of the Alibaba Group, comes to mind: "Forget about your competitors, just focus on your customers."

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