



Retailing in pharmacy as restrictions are eased

In our recent COVID-19 Business Survey, 86% of members reported that their retail sales have decreased, with an average 36% loss of retail to each pharmacy. In the May issue of the *IPU Review*, we looked at *Preparing for the new norm* and touched on some retail elements to prepare for the easing of restrictions and to bring increased footfall to your pharmacy. In this follow-on article, Darren Kelly, IPU Business Development Manager, will give additional advice to members on how to prepare your business for the staggered lifting of the lockdown restrictions and assist you in re-establishing your retail business.





If you are using security pods at the pharmacy entrance

As the staggered release of restrictions happen, you may look to keep using security pods at your front door. This will minimise the impact that your retail space would normally have, but there are ways to highlight some product ranges to your customers as they wait outside the pharmacy.

- Try to change the offers regularly to give a different visual to the customers

Soap.....	1
Moisturiser.....	2
Vitamins.....	3
Toiletries.....	4
Baby Wipes.....	5

By having the products presented in view of the customer and by using the number system, the waiting period will not increase.

As we continue to work through this extraordinary time of crisis and the ever-present threat that social distancing will become the norm for the foreseeable future, what can pharmacy do to prepare for an easing, albeit staggered, of lockdown restrictions in our society?

look at. Look at both options from a retailer's point of view to assist you in developing your own pharmacy's plan to enable you to restart the retail element of your business.

A risk assessment of the retail space will need to be completed and this will look at how you can maintain the health and safety of your staff in any dealings with customers going forward if you wish to reinvigorate your retail business. To assist you in this, use the floor plan that you submitted to the PSI – mark it out and work out how many people you would allow into your pharmacy at a time, taking into account the maximum staff you would have on the shop floor at any one time. Also, allow for fixtures and fittings, and mark the flow of customers, sanitation points, bins, etc.

Minimise impact

Minimise the impact of the emergency on your retail business going forward by developing a retail continuity plan. As part of any plan, you need to look at the retail business realistically; decisions on opening up the pharmacy floor to customers or maintaining social distancing with barriers or pods at your front door should be the first area to



Visual Display

- Maximise the exposure to the customer by displaying products in your window that may be in short supply – soap, moisturiser, wipes, foot care, vitamins;
 - This may mean moving gondolas around, but will help to create additional space in the pharmacy for you and your staff to help you maintain physical distancing
- Put a large number (A4 size) on each shelf offer so the customer can just say “can I have No. 1 please”;
 - POS is vital to highlight the offer to the customer
 - Clear signage outlining the price of product so that you make it as easy as possible for the customer
 - Try to have banded or ‘2 for the price of’ offers, and round the price to a realistic offer

Product mix

The product mix in the example above could be vitamins and supplements, or a mix with the product ranges listed above. You choose what you feel you want to offer to your customer. During this COVID-19 emergency, people have been trying to maintain their health with general keep-fit, walking, running and cycling. As part of your offering for maintaining the health of your customers you can also assist with their wellbeing. You offer a range of vitamins and supplements that people depend on in the everyday life to maintain their own levels of health and we should ask ourselves, where are they getting these products during this crisis? Where are they getting their toiletries and skincare products? You may feel that your energies are focused on different services but continuing to be the primary point for general health and wellbeing is vital to all your community.

"You can adapt/change to suit your pharmacy, but it is important to ensure you are engaging with your customers, so as to maintain the ultimate customer experience for them from your pharmacy."

Online retailing

You may feel that you are too small an operation to offer online sales, but do you offer click and collect for prescriptions in your dispensary, and if so, can you extend it to the retail space? Looking at online retailing is always an option and there will be some costs involved in setting up, but you should look at what the return on the investment will be. There are several providers that can assist in this endeavour if you wish to go down this route. The IPU has just agreed a partner deal with Refill Assistant to offer members website development with online retailing capabilities that would assist in your online retailing journey. Details can be found at www.ipu.ie > Business > Suppliers.

Digital marketing

Are you updating your Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages? Assign a member of staff to ensure that there are regular updates regarding the business. Ensure your customers know if you are closing for lunch or opening early, but also use it to highlight that you offer retail products at great value prices and all the customer has to do is call the pharmacy and they can order and pay over the phone and collect from the pharmacy.

If you don't feel confident with digital marketing, as part of our alliance with Retail Ireland Skillnets, IPU members have access to a free online retail Digital Marketing training (www.retailirelandskillnet.com > Training Programmes > Retail Digital Marketing). You can register for the training by emailing your full name and email address to info@retailirelandskillnet.com.

Staff engagement with customers

If you are continuing to ask customers to call before they collect their prescriptions, build into the call a couple of open questions around whether they need any additional products, such as vitamins, toiletries, skincare, or foot care products. This should be communicated to all staff and they should all be using these questions in conversations with patients, for example as follows: *"Hi Mrs. Murphy, how are you? Yes, we can have your prescription ready for you. While we are preparing your script are there any other items we can get for you today? Would you need any toiletries, skincare, or vitamins as we can have them ready for collection when you call down to the pharmacy?"*

You can adapt/change to suit your pharmacy, but it is important to ensure you are

engaging with your customers, so as to maintain the ultimate customer experience for them from your pharmacy.

If you are using physical distancing of customers into the pharmacy

Physical distancing

As restrictions are slowly released you will need to ensure you maintain social distancing allowing only 1-2 people in at one time. It may be that you need to look at a one-way system in the pharmacy. There are number of providers who can assist with crowd control barriers such as retractable belt systems, but this can also be achieved by moving gondolas to create a wall to direct your customers around the way that you want them to go in your pharmacy. We have several providers of these

products listed on the IPU website that can assist you with this, see www.ipu.ie > Professional > Coronavirus.

To maximise the impact, you will need to look at social distancing floor and hanging signage in the pharmacy. Consumers are now used to queuing and maintaining social distance but once restrictions are being gradually released this may revert to previous times.

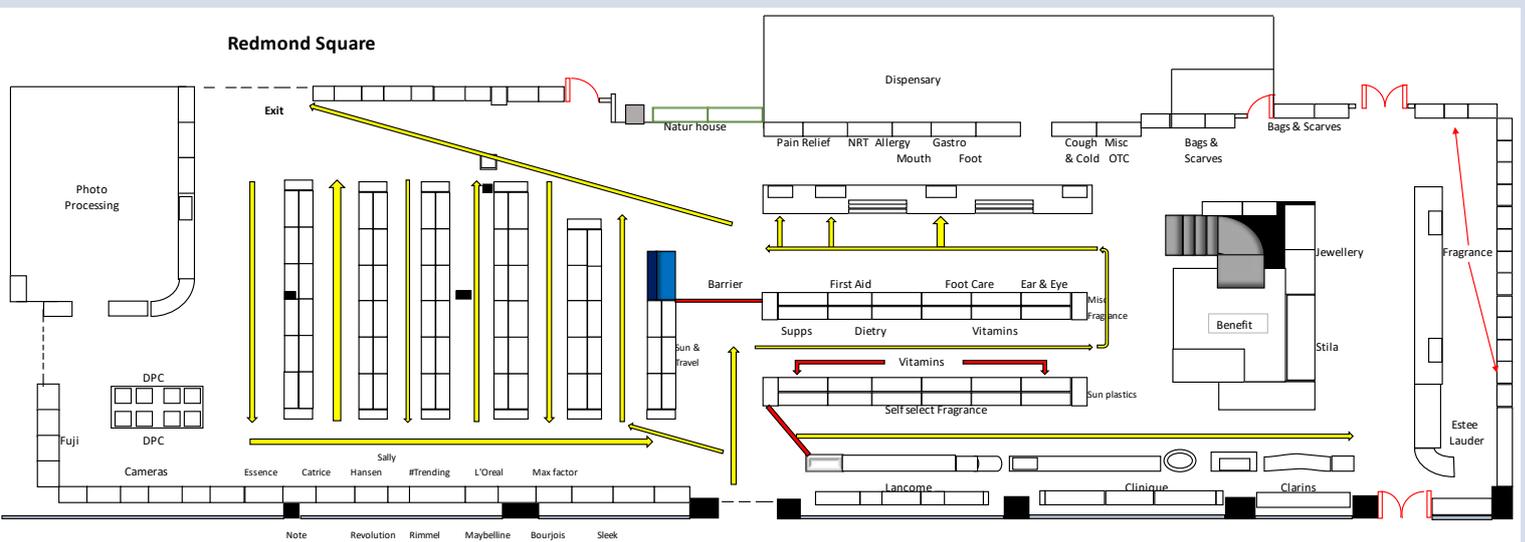
Visual displays

As you might only have a couple of customers at a time in the pharmacy you must merchandise offers in highly visible locations. This is historically on gondola ends but if you choose to move gondolas to assist in floor layout then it may be at the bays nearest the counter or a specific hot spot in the pharmacy. Displays



SOCIAL DISTANCING IS ESSENTIAL
PLEASE KEEP 2m (6.5ft) BETWEEN YOU & OTHERS ALWAYS





should be planned and merchandised correctly. Do not try to overload a display as customers will only have a snapshot of the display as they move around the one-way system.

Point of sale

Highlight offers with signage be they printed in store or from a professional printer but try to introduce colour into any signage as it will catch the customer's attention. We offer great value in our pharmacies, but we need to tell our customers, and point of sale is the safest and easiest option. Whether printed in store, or use a local printer try to develop a consistent message/image that your customers see. Put your pharmacy name and colours on the point of sale and use the same font. If printing in-store, laminate signage to ensure a professional appearance is maintained.

Customer experience

If you introduce a one-way system into the pharmacy, then the staff engagement with the customer will become really important. You may have counter screens but the interaction between your staff and customers will need to return around the pharmacy. Using soft selling skills and ask "is there anything else we can help you with? Customers may be very happy if they can get some

soap, toiletries, or feminine hygiene products while they are getting medication, and reduce what they need to get in the grocery stores.

Online retailing and social media

Even if you slowly allow customers back into your pharmacy the idea of online retailing should still be an option that you look at. As outlined earlier in the article there will be some outlay, but the return on investment can be that you develop a new customer base if you begin to retail online, as well

as maintaining your regular customer base.

You should continue to use social media to update your customers that you are open, but are still maintaining physical distancing in the store. Continue to highlight offers and services regularly.

Summary

As I said in the May issue of the *IPU Review* in the article *Preparing for the new norm*, the situation is so fluid that you must look to revisit your plan regularly. As part of any plan you prepare, communicate

with all your staff on what your plans are for the business as the restrictions are eased. Get staff involved in the plan, take suggestions, and try to implement what is possible at that time. If you are prepared and have a plan, you can provide a customer shopping experience in your pharmacy, which in turn will lead to increased sales.

Keep safe and stay well, and if you need any assistance or further clarification on any of the areas raised in this article, please don't hesitate to contact me directly at darren.kelly@ipu.ie.

