International Social Skills Academy

10 WAYS

how your pre-school survives the pandemic

For most of us 2020
started like any other year

We had plans for the future and preparations for those plans were well underway. Before the reality of **COVID19** hit us, and the rest of the world, our team at ISSA were in the preparation phase for a whole range of activities scheduled all across the year and all across the world. Of course, the events that followed meant our plans changed and all our hard work leading into 2020 was forfeited. We, like everyone else, had a journey to undertake in 2020 that we had not expected or prepared for. It was hard and it was frustrating, but it was also necessary and rewarding, and we would like to share it with you.

This E-book represents

the key ideas and learnings that helped us guide our own business around the challenges and towards the opportunities thrown into our path in 2020. We appreciate that every business and indeed every individual will have had a unique experience, but part of our business model has always been sharing best practices and working with great partners, so hopefully everyone can find a little something to benefit from in our experiences.

To that end, here is our contribution towards the recovery process

10 THINGS

that you should consider for your business post COVID19

1

There are **four I's** that we fund invaluable for focusing our energy and ideas during a time of unexpected and enormous change.

We phrased each of them as a question that we wanted to answer, and in each case we discovered potential and opportunities.

1. INNOVATE

Ask yourself:

what new products and services could be interesting for my current or prior customers?

The good news about innovation is that we all do it every day, but normally we don't have the time or energy to take action on the ideas we generate. How many good ideas have you had for your business that you never pursued? How many of those ideas could work in the current situation?
If you have a strong returning customer base, what else might those customers be interested in? How have their needs changed and how can your business change to meet those needs?

Innovation can occur both in terms of what you offer customers and also in how you offer it. With many businesses having failed in 2020, there are now many new potential customers for every business that has survived. These could be new customers for new products or for your classic services. The companies with the will and ability to adjust and adapt have the best chance to survive and thrive.

2. IMPROVE

Ask yourself:

what new skills would help my business in the future?

An area that often gets sacrificed in the normal course of operations is business improvement. At a time when maintaining engagement with our current customers is paramount, what better way to do so than to let them know that you are offering something new, or have received a new qualification that will in turn benefit them.

Help your customers to visualize a future with you that is even better than the one they had a year ago.

3. IMAGINE

Ask yourself:

what would my business be like if there was no global pandemic? How can I get back to that and improve on it?

It is easy to forget that there was a plan. It was a good plan and one that we believed in. So maybe it's time to look at how much of that plan is recyclable. With the benefit of hindsight, what elements of that plan can be, not just be salvaged, but improved upon? Visualize what the business will look like a year from now and incorporate the best of what you are now and what you want to be.

4. INCREASE

Ask yourself:

how to increase your reputation and revenue by introducing new options that create opportunity and security for you, your family and your company.

New qualifications, new products and new collaborations are all great opportunities to build your brand credibility, personal reputation, and most importantly, drive increased profit.

2

Focus on growth and innovation.

Companies need to inspire their customers. The best way to do this is to show them that you still have a ***'thrive' mindset*** even when in reality it may be closer to ***'survive'***

FOCUS ON GROWTH AND INNOVATION

New products and services are a great way to grow revenue and reputation. Look for new courses that add real value in the short term, but also enhance your business in the long-term. Think, 'what are the services your customers will look for from other providers' that you could add to your own business. Identify what products and certifications can best add to your business reputation and help you to attract new customers.

" Standing out from the crowd is important, but the bar for this has been raised. In 2020, online classes became the new normal. It is no longer enough to sit in front of a laptop and send it out to the world. Content and context matter, to stand out you have to offer something new and something different"

Online, like offline, learning must be an engaging experience. These disruptive times require us to focus on how to create that engagement over a new format. You need to help your customers to interact and engage with you and your material; and you must find ways for participants to interact with each other in order to facilitate personalized educational experiences. Otherwise, you run the risk of being exchanged quickly as people will look for better, more engaging options.

3

It's time to develop a 'Mighty' mindset!

One of our most popular programs is ***'Mighty Kids'*** which can best be described as being a launchpad program for preschoolers. It is really never too early to start children on the right path, after all "building strong children removes the need to repair broken adults." 2020 has taught us that a ***'Mighty'*** mindset is not just for the children we teach, but is also a core part of our success and hopefully of yours.

IT'S TIME TO DEVELOP A 'MIGHTY' MINDSET!

Having a 'Mighty' mindset means having and using the mental and emotional resources to face challenges with courage, to turn problems into opportunities and to see potential in situations where others only find frustration.

People with the 'Mighty' mindset excel in problem solving, interpersonal communication, emotional regulation, attitude, emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication and many other competency areas. In 2020, perhaps more than anytime since he first spoke them, the words of Churchill seem appropriate: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."

'Mighty Kids' have a high self-esteem, are lively communicators, think creatively and embrace positive core values (integrity, life-long learning, everybody is okay, I can achieve everything, curiosity, and creativity). There is nothing on that list that wouldn't help most business owners in their own endeavors in 2021.

The 'Mighty Kids' program is an ideal springboard for developing and mastering the 4 'C's of future success (creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration). In this respect, it is perhaps the most important thing that we do. The hidden benefit in the chaos created by 2020 was that we were able to spend more time on and give more focus to this program. ***What product do you already supply that would benefit from more attention in 2021?***

4

It’s time to accept that life and business may never be the same again

Our understanding of ‘normal life’, personal relationships and business connections have changed significantly throughout the COVID-19 crisis. This has led to problems for many businesses, but it has also spurred many businesses to change, evolve and improve for the future. Our focus was on the structural changes to our market, with online becoming the main delivery method, and on building our inter-business relationships

IT'S TIME TO ACCEPT THAT LIFE AND BUSINESS MAY NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN.

The online education market grew exponentially in 2020 and will grow further in 2021. For us, this meant our cancelled (offline) Sports Collaboration programs were replaced with 10 week online masterclasses. Our 'Mighty Kids' program was redesigned for online delivery and through this evolution we started to offer program franchises for the first time (which for now we will support online). These changes will likely remain, at least partially, in the future.

Customers will no doubt look to return to the personal experience of live programs in the future, but many will also want to retain the flexibility they have enjoyed from the online experience. We therefore choose not to look at these changes as a burden, but rather an opportunity to develop new distribution methods for our future.

One of the keys to the success of this has been collaboration with other businesses. We are all going through these changes together and when you are travelers on the same journey, it is often more efficient to work in cooperation than to work in competition.

Not all our collaborations paid off, but every single one of them has been worth the time and effort. We are all in the business of relationships, and the most important thing in any relationship is to know that people care. Not one of our collaborations has started with the question, **"Do you want to work together on X?"** Most, if not all, of our collaborations came about because we reached out to contacts and former collaborators to find out how they were, how was their business and if their family is safe, and to let them know that once this was over we would still like to work with them.

Very soon we started to hear from them with ideas for adjusting during the pandemic, and even the ones who lost their current businesses (in fact especially them) were thinking hard about how best to survive and thrive going forward. Before long we were working as hard, if not harder, than before and with new partners to motivate and reflect with.

With our university partners we made plans for the 2021 intake year and accepted that 2020 was not going to happen, but we also added an English certification and extended the scope of our social skills programs for them.

With our high school clients we took the time to find out what they thought we were missing in our offering up until now, and together we built something new which will launch in **September 2021.**

And of course, with Kindergartens we offered franchises for the first time, and discovered with every new partner came new ideas and more feedback that could help us improve even further.

Take action and do it soon: contact your friends, colleagues, even rivals. Check they are ok. Hopefully find out how they have survived and thrived, share your own experiences, and see if there is the potential to do something to support each other. The results will amaze you and your new colleagues will be amazed by you.

5

How and when to restart or re-open your business

HOW AND WHEN TO RESTART OR RE-OPEN YOUR BUSINESS

Not every business stayed open through the pandemic period and so for many of us big decisions need to be made about when to get going again. For us, this decision will be around our sports and residential education programs, but for others, it was a choice to stop trading completely for a period of time. Business owners who made the decisions to shut down or suspend trading need to consider the following factors around restarting or re-opening their businesses:

1. **When is the optimal time to re-open?**
2. **What will be different about my business now compared to before COVID?**
3. **How can we make the best out of this difficult experience?**
4. **Where are my customers (both geographically and emotionally)?**
5. **Who can help me get back up and running efficiently?**
6. **Why will my old customers return and how can I find new ones (what makes me special)?**

Part of the 'Mighty' mindset is looking for new ideas, seeking out expert advice, and making the changes that will drive your business forward effectively. Always remember, one of the best resources we have at this time is each other; those phone calls you made after reading section 4 will pay dividends when the time comes to restart your business.

6

Make a plan for your marketing post COVID

don’t miss the perfect moment! Focusing on your marketing now will attract more clients later, focusing on your marketing later will help your competitors, so there really is no time like the present.

MAKE A PLAN FOR YOUR MARKETING POST COVID

Marketing doesn't't need to be expensive and many forms of marketing are free. Social Media Marketing — content creation (blog articles, podcasts, posts on Facebook, Instagram, etc.) – is great marketing that costs time but not money.

Don't be afraid of giving something for free, make it easy for new and old (returning) customers to engage with your business. Trust in the law of reciprocity: that people will remember and will look to repay the people who treated them well in difficult times.

Develop relationships with experts in your field. This increases your credibility, and most importantly it increases your access to knowledge. There is no reason you should not also become recognized as an expert yourself. Our President, Johannes Poscharnig, has been interviewed many times as an expert in the field of education and skills development, and while he can't say yes to every interview he is asked for, every one of them is another source of free marketing.

Every expert learned from someone else and normally from many others before becoming recognized as an authority themselves. Like everyone else, Johannes had to work hard for his knowledge and then for that knowledge to be recognized by others. A number of his teachers are still involved with us today, ome as customers, some as collaborators and even a few as board members. Everyone of them is a free and unlimited source of positive marketing for Johannes as an individual and for the business as a whole.

7

Searching for new collaborations

is so valuable that it is worth its own section, so while you will have heard a lot of this already it is really worth highlighting again.

SEARCHING FOR NEW COLLABORATIONS

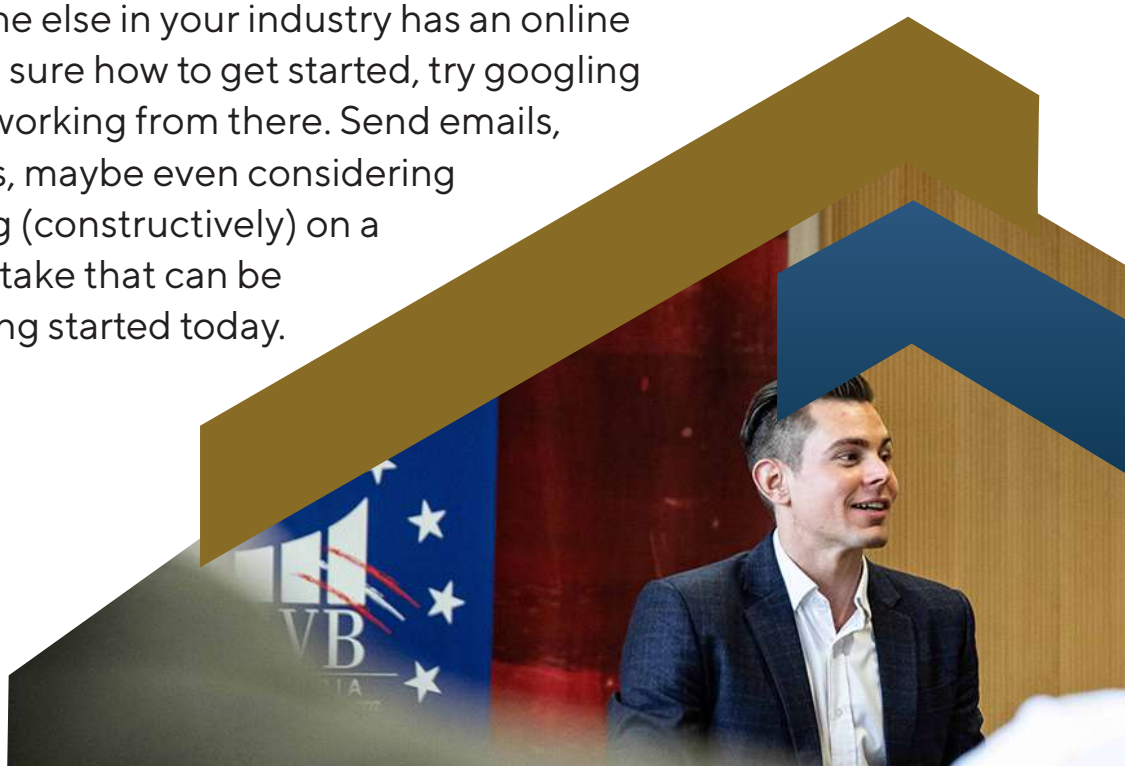
This is a great time to look for new collaborations, with so many other business owners sharing similar experiences. It will really help you to have a clear idea of what you are looking for in a partner. Being specific from the start can save you a lot of time in the long run.

Know what you have to offer and how you will add value to the partnership. The only real mistake you can make is focusing only on your own needs and in doing so missing the chance to work together on solving one of theirs.

Social Media is full of opportunities, (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) but don't be anti-social on social media! When you contact the interesting individuals directly, do it with a personalized message (no one wants to receive a copy and pasted message). Let people know your name, why you contacted them, and what you might be able to offer each other.

Pro tip:
Mention an interesting post that you have wrote or make a comment on something they posted; people are interested in people who are similar to themselves, but even more interested in people who are interested in them.

Finally, almost everyone else in your industry has an online presence. If you're not sure how to get started, try googling some keys terms and working from there. Send emails, write posts into groups, maybe even considering writing or commenting (constructively) on a blog. The only real mistake that can be made here is not getting started today.



8

Be aware of your direct and indirect competition

BE AWARE OF YOUR DIRECT AND INDIRECT COMPETITION

Direct competitors are the companies that do the same business as you in the same field: for example, two preschools in the same area (both targeting the same customer base with similar products). Think about what makes your business unique and what makes it better than the direct competition.

Indirect competitors are the companies that solve the same problems but in completely different ways. You own a pre-school and there is an APP offering learning programs for pre-schoolers. How can you persuade a parent that your option is superior, especially given the situation where children have had a year of exposure to online learning and parents have gotten used to the lower cost and greater flexibility it offers? If you can identify the pains and needs of your customers as well as empathizing with their situation, it is inevitable that they stay your customers

Pro tip:
Some indirect competitors have huge potential as collaborators as well.

From our own experience, now that conditions are stabilizing, we are hearing from many vendors who previously passed on our programs because what we have to offer helps them win back customers by supplementing their regular programs with something new and something flexible. In fact, the reason we added the learning APP is specifically to service this need amongst our current and new customers.

Pro tip (Expert Level):
some of your direct competitors have huge potential as collaborators.

This is a bit more complicated, but no two businesses are exactly the same. There is a lot of potential to share learning and experience. In businesses where your customer maximums are met, there is a lot of added value in cooperation. Some of our best referrals in the early days came from competitors whom we had a great relationship with, and we are always keen to return the favor when the opportunities arise.

9

What has been learned by yourself and by others during the COVID pandemic

that can give you a direction and competitive edge in the future? What changes have you made that you want to keep and what will you abandon?

WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED BY YOURSELF AND BY OTHERS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

How did your competitors position themselves in the marketplace and are they likely to stay this course or amend it? Can you position yourself differently from competitors by offering different products or similar products in a different way?

Can you look at what others do well and try to deliver a better or higher quality version at the same or a lower price point? The best example of this strategy is the supermarket giant Walmart.

Customers make buying decisions based on quality, availability, price, and by how much they like the person selling to them. Which of these areas have you already improved and which can be worked on further?

Finally, in the modern market place, novelty and credibility are big influencers. There is a reason companies like Apple are always innovating. They have the credibility to offer novelty and they make a lot of money doing it.

10

Our Mighty Mindset

OUR MIGHTY MINDSET

If there is one question we ask each other more than any other it is this:

What will be the problems and obstacles faced by children over the next 10 years?

That's not a recent thing and it has nothing to do with COVID19, but it is important because it is at the core of everything we do. The answer is always changing, and because we keep re-asking this question, so are we.

Predicting the future is critically important for every business to both survive and thrive.

We try to imagine what the future labor market looks like with Artificial Intelligence, Augmentation, Virtual Reality and Machine Learning. We accept that most jobs will be different from now and others will not exist at all. Of course, it isn't all bad news with the global consulting firm McKinsey predicting 9% of future jobs don't currently exist in todays marketplace; however, the good news comes with a catch – no one knows what they are yet!

The workforce of the future will need to accept that most of the middle-skill jobs we are currently preparing children and young adults for will be more efficiently achieved through AI, machine learning, and robotics. This means that the skillsets needed for the jobs that remain will be stacked towards management, decision making, and communications, but also towards marketing, sales, and research and development. Top companies are investing more and more on recruitment that focuses on soft skills, social skills and key business competencies.

One of the top AI researchers in the world recently explained that machine learning and robotics are already capable of replacing middle management level lawyers and factory technicians, but they are nowhere on teaching a robot how to wait a table in a restaurant. It is the tasks that require the most human interaction that will be hardest to code for, so while humans are still the customers, there will always be jobs for humans to do in providing products and services. In short, social skills which have degraded across the last 20 years will once again become an education priority.

We are just one of the organizations that got in at the start of this market, but what sets us apart is our philosophy of collaboration. We have never tried to reinvent the wheel and we are not interested in competing with established businesses when we can all benefit far more by working together. ISSA is an organization that provides existing companies with the tools to Innovate, Improve, Imagine, and Increase within their own businesses.

Successful providers in the education market of the future will be those who can offer these new social skill oriented meta competencies: the traits, skills, and characteristics that we have come to know as the Mighty Mindset.

GIVE US A CALL

if you want to increase the admissions for your preschool or kindergarten

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Beyond an ordinary education