

# How to Prepare for Concessions Re-Openings in the COVID-19 Era

AS AIRPORTS RETOOL THEIR BUSINESSES AROUND COVID-19 MITIGATION AND SAFETY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, AIRPORT CONCESSIONS STAFF NEED INTERNAL PROTOCOLS TO ENSURE THEIR TEAMS AND OPERATIONS ARE READY TO PROVIDE PASSENGERS WITH A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE.

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More than ever, airports and concessionaires must forge and fortify a partnership with enhanced levels of collaboration and open, honest communication. It will take a strong team to rebuild consumer confidence, enhance a changed travel experience, and protect profitability.

Ensure that your team—and your airport concession operators—are prepared for this new era of travel. Here are six things you can do now to set your concessions program up to win.

## Ensure Airport Team Education

It is important that airport team members remain updated on all applicable COVID-19 Federal, State, and Local regulations as they evolve. Create a system for communicating new developments and rules.

Some staff may need additional skill training. For instance, as a result of new rules, airport staff will need to be in back-of-the-house concession areas more frequently. Education should therefore include certifications like those required for concessions employees (ex. ServSafe training, etc.).

## Review/Adjust Airport Policies and Procedures Impacting Concessions

Continuously review your concessions agreements and airport policies and procedures to ensure that any mandates do not conflict with the evolving new reality of operating in the COVID-19 era.

Evaluate non-customer facing procedures and/or administrative policies to uncover elements that need to be adjusted on an interim basis—like sustainability practices that are hard for operators to adhere to given the need for elevated sanitization practices (i.e. use of certain cleaning solutions, recycling of certain products, or limiting the use of plastic items).

Also, reporting protocols such as reporting of sales and transactions may need to be increased. Even with potentially reduced manpower, tenants will need to accurately depict the state of their concession as fre-

quently as needed to allow the airport and the concessionaire to react to changing conditions.

## Create a Phased Re-Opening Strategy

Airports want to provide passengers who are willing to travel the level of service and comfort they desire. The reality is that you must scale your concessions offerings around both passenger demand and safety.

Every open concession unit increases the potential for virus transmission. Plus, concessions operators need to know they can operate safely while generating enough revenue to make reopening financially viable.

Your team should analyze numerous factors to determine how much square footage is needed, where it is needed, and what types of uses are most important in providing optimal levels of service.

## Create a Documentation Protocol

Create a file of documentation for each concessions operation that details their re-opening preparation, implementation, and adherence to regulations and protocols to promote safe operations.

Adopting a series of documentation milestones for concession operators provides airport teams with a way to build a diligent and logical rationale on which to base re-opening approvals.

Documents for submission should include full re-opening strategy plans inclusive of employee training, wellness, sanitization and social distancing strategies; COVID-19 testing logs; revised floorplans compliant with social distancing guidelines; and personal protective equipment (PPE).

## Create or Revise Audit/Inspection Procedures and Forms

New norms create the need to revise audit/inspection forms. The heightened emphasis on sanitization procedures, social distancing and PPE requirements, customer flow recommendations and the implementation of protective fixtures (such as plexiglass barriers)

may require revisions extensive enough to warrant new forms and procedures that more accurately reflect the operational realities of business now.

Also, as many dining operations have been dormant for multiple months, specific care must be given to general re-opening procedures such as activating utilities and pest control, for example.

For the foreseeable future, the frequency of audits will need to be increased. Communication around these expectations is a must.

Far from a punitive measure, audits/inspections should be viewed as valuable opportunities for collaboration with operators to ensure safe environments for all airport constituents.

## Have a Concessions Marketing Action Plan

Passengers want to know that airport shops/restaurants are operating with the highest level of attention to travelers' safety and well-being. Importantly, they'll also want to know which concessions are open, and where they can be found.

In addition to pushing forward marketing messages from concessionaires, airports must deploy their own safety messaging campaign specific to concessions via various formats throughout the facility.

Airports should also keep a "finger on the pulse" of passengers and concessionaires to ensure that misperceptions and complaints are addressed quickly. Research can help identify areas of improvement.

*For assistance with addressing these issues, contact [kennethbuckner@unison-ucg.com](mailto:kennethbuckner@unison-ucg.com), or call 312.988.3360. Unison Consulting has been enabling the complex business of airports for over 30 years. Learn more at [unison-ucg.com](http://unison-ucg.com).*

