

## GOOGLE MY BUSINESS ESSENTIALS DURING COVID-19

This paper will provide some clarity for business owners and managers regarding their options and best practices for using Google My Business (GMB) amid COVID-19 restrictions and shutdowns as well as setting up for success during recovery. *(Last Update April 1, 2020)*

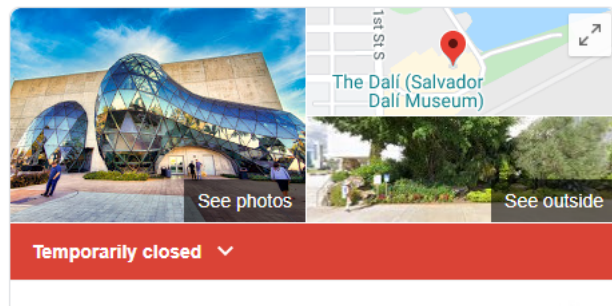
### Should I mark my business in GMB as Temporarily Closed?

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Google has added a new option to your GMB profile to “mark as temporarily closed.” Whether you should use this option depends on the specific circumstances of your business. Generally speaking, **if you know your business will be closed for at least four weeks, and that you won’t be updating your listing during that time you should use the the “temporarily closed” option.**

The easiest way to use this option is through the web version at **business.google.com**. Look for the button in the upper right hand corner of the “info” page (see example.) You can turn your business back on at any time.

If you’re using the mobile app to manage your Google My Business profile, the steps are a bit more confusing you’ll go to the “profile” tab at the bottom of the screen and then click the pencil icon to edit your profile, then scroll down to find the same buttons shown above.

**If your business will be closed for less than four weeks, or you’re not sure how long you’ll be closed, then you should consider** leaving your business hours as they would typically appear and use the “special hours” function to mark each day of the next four weeks as “closed”. You can access special hours in the “info” section of the web app, or the “profile” section of the Google My Business mobile app. *(Note that you’ll*



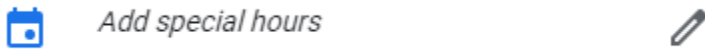
Close this business on Google ^

You can mark this business as temporarily or permanently closed. You can also remove this business from your account.

Mark as temporarily closed

Mark as permanently closed

have to have regular hours entered before you'll be given the option of adding special hours)



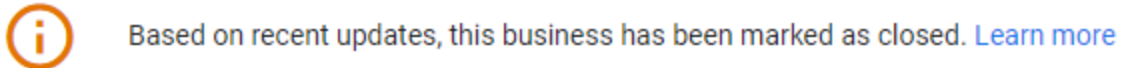
Add a new date at the bottom of the list and mark that day as closed.



Using this approach will mean that your business profile won't display the "temporarily closed" banner, but will accurately show your business as "closed" in the hours section. You should also **add a post (see below) stating that you are currently closed due to COVID-19** restrictions and will re-open when it is safe to do so.

### What if I get a notice from Google that my business has been marked as temporarily closed?

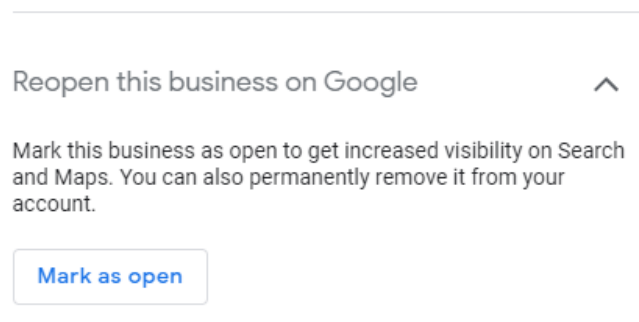
Many regions in the US and around the world have seen periodic bulk updates from Google which automatically mark businesses as temporarily closed. If you see an email about this from Google, log in to your Google My Business account and look for this banner at the top of the "Info" page.



These bulk updates are the result of information coming in from authoritative data sources, including government agencies. Quote from Google's support page on this subject:

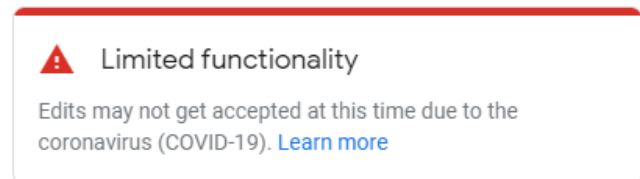
"We rely on authorities to tell us when there are closures in their region. Authorities can provide this through our Geo Data Upload tool. We use data from many types of authoritative data sources, which include national, state/provincial and local governments, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and businesses."

If you receive one of these emails and your listing is automatically marked as closed, know that **you can go in and re-open your business with the "Mark as open" button under "Info" and follow the instructions above to update your special hours.**

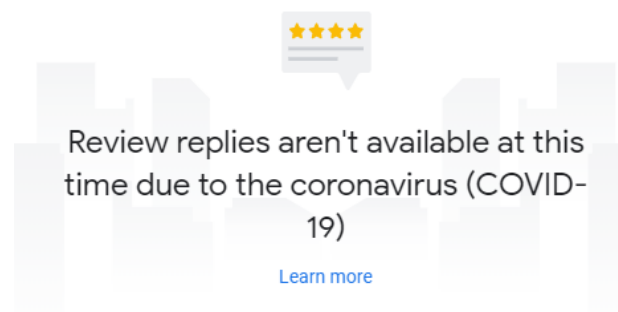


## What features are and aren't available in Google My Business due to COVID-19?

When you log in to Google My Business, you'll note several updates which indicate limited functionality is available. Here's a quick summary:



- **Questions and Answers** have been removed from business profiles temporarily. This means customers won't be able to see existing questions and answers, and can't ask any new questions.
- **New reviews CAN be posted** by customers, but appear to be withheld from publishing for the time being. In our tests we found that the review count and ratings appeared instantly, but the written comment portion of the review was indefinitely delayed. It's unclear at this point whether reviews added during this interim will be published later, or simply dropped.
- **Review Replies from owners are disabled.** Owners CAN NOT respond to reviews, new or old for the time being.



- **Updates to open/closed status and updates to hours are prioritized** for review by Google at this time. All other edits to your profile information - including updating your name, your address, your pin location, categories, etc. will be delayed.
- You may have read a few weeks ago about changes to the moderation process of all photos submitted to GMB and maps. This change was expected to slow the approval of published images, and will no doubt be further slowed by the

COVID-19 crisis. **You should feel free to post photos - but don't expect them to appear quickly.** Reference article: <https://www.seroundtable.com/google-my-business-to-review-all-photos-videos-before-publication-29113.html>

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** During this time, making anything more than minor changes to your business profile may result in your profile being flagged for review. Our best advice for now, is to keep as much of your profile information as consistent as possible. This includes not making changes to:

- Business Name
- Categories
- Pin Location
- Address
- Service Areas
- Phone Numbers
- Websites
- Attributes

### What can I do during this time?

Whether your business is open, partially open or temporarily closed, you should still **use the Posts feature, which is currently operating as normal.** (Note that unfortunately Hotels do not have access to the Posts feature).

Posts are a great way to keep up to date information about your business front and center. For example, if you're still able to deliver some products, or have take out options you can provide that information as a post, or you can simply use the new "COVID-19 update" post type to provide information about the status of your business, or a quick note in support of your community during this time.

**If you've used the "special hours" recommendation above, be sure to add a post saying that you're currently closed due to COVID-19 restrictions.**

Create post

COVID-19 update Offer What's New

**Changes to your business?**  
Let customers know about any changes to your business due to COVID-19

**Update your status**

As per official recommendations, our facility is now temporarily closed. We look forward to welcoming our loyal customers back when restrictions are lifted.

Add a button (optional)

Learn more

Link for your button

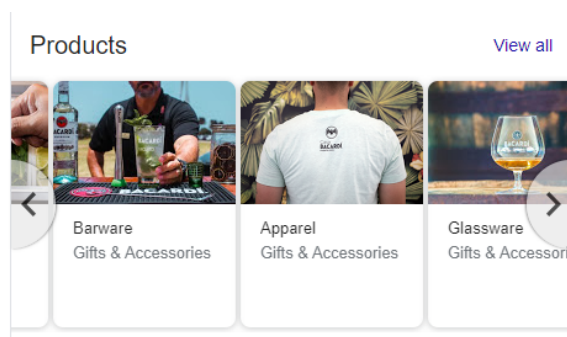
www.yourwebsite.com/covid-19-updates

(Example: google.com)

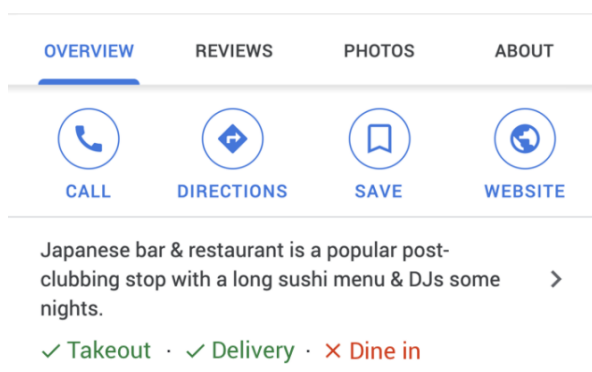
Preview Publish

Keep in mind that posts only stay visible for 7 days, so you should plan to update your post(s) once per week.

This is also a good time to **set up the “products”, “services” or “menu” feature** in your profile, adding categories, photos products and prices. In our tests, products appeared quickly - between 20 minutes and one hour. Even if you don't have products that can currently be purchased, it's an excellent time to get things configured, tested and set up before customers return.



Lastly, Google has just recently announced several **additions to the “attributes” function that you should keep an eye on.** Restaurants have had attributes for takeout and delivery functions for some time but in the next few weeks these and other attributes will be available for all business types. The new attributes include **“Delivery, Pickup, Curbside pickup and No-contact Delivery.”** Look for these attributes to appear in your business profile soon and make sure that you've selected the appropriate ones for your services.



Google is also moving to make these attributes more visible in business profiles (see example above) starting with mobile in the next few weeks.

#### *Further Resources:*

- For more help & information on Google My Business: <https://business.google.com>
- See Miles Partnership's COVID-19 information portal for information related to tourism and tourism businesses: <https://covid19.milespartnership.com/>

*Document from Miles Partnership working in cooperation with Visit Santa Barbara.*