

BBB rises to the pandemic challenge

The world may be a different place from a year ago, but we know that the hearts of Texans remain the same. Like BBB, people in our community value trust, honesty, integrity and transparency. That's why, now more than ever, people rely on BBB.

Whether in the office or working from home, we are dedicated to creating an ethical marketplace for buyers and sellers, from the oil fields of Midland to the sandy shores of Corpus Christi. But it is here, in the capital, where our roots are firmly planted.

We have been operating in Austin for 70 years, and we have grown up alongside each other through the decades. This shared history with the city means we know it well – the businesses and the people.

Both have been challenged over the past several months. We have heard stories of perseverance from Accredited Businesses and consumers alike, and we are proud that our programs and services are helping them during these trying times. Programs like Get A Quote – where consumers can send quote requests straight to the phones of Accredited Businesses – have helped businesses generate leads while helping customers make informed buying decisions with businesses they can trust. Tools like Scam Tracker give people a platform to report and avoid scams in their area.

We help build better businesses and, in doing so, help Austin consumers make more confident buying decisions. And people are taking notice. In the Austin area, year-over-year visitor traffic to BBB.org increased 43% from 2019 to 2020.* This increase shows that Austinites see BBB as a trusted resource for local businesses' education and information.

What makes BBB stand out from the crowd are the lengths we go to. We vet every customer review to ensure what you see on BBB.org is based on a verified transaction. We go well beyond accepting complaints and offer robust resolution services to resolve marketplace disputes. We do not just send the media alerts; we send them straight to your inbox. We analyze BBB Scam Tracker reports and investigate patterns of unethical marketplace behavior. We stand ready to walk the extra mile for our businesses and consumers.

Working for BBB means being a champion for communities and helping them thrive. BBB encourages employees to give back directly within our communities through volunteer events and activities. In fact, BBB provides staff members with 16 hours of paid time off each year to work with charities serving our area.

BBB serving the Heart of Texas shares the same dedication to its employees as it has to the community. Our efforts are reflected in being recognized as a Top Workplace by the Austin American-Statesman six years in a row.

Our employees are the soul of the organization, and they live out our organization's values through their work, which is why we prefer to promote from within and invest in

our team. We pride ourselves on our family culture, and we take care of each other. BBB has excellent benefits that include 100% employer-paid PPO medical plan, life insurance and long-term disability benefits. Plus, we make sure that even once our employees move on, they have security in their future by offering a safe harbor (immediate vesting) 401(k) plan with a 5% company match.

From our employees to small businesses and savvy consumers, BBB offers value to everyone. We are so thankful for the opportunity to build lasting relationships with every Texan. As we work through our new normal and find our way back to how things were before the pandemic, remember: BBB is here to help.

*From BBB web traffic data between Jan.- Sep. 2019 and Jan.- Sep. 2020.

Cybersecurity and your business

If you are worried about your business's cybersecurity, you aren't alone. According to an SBA survey, 88% of small business owners felt their business was vulnerable to a cyberattack.* Many small businesses lack an IT department, have limited time to devote to maintaining their cybersecurity, or feel overwhelmed and don't know where to begin. Here are a few tips on how to get started.

Learn

To protect your business, you need to know what to look out for. There's a long list of cybersecurity threats, from phishing scams to ransomware, but there are a few universal signs that can alert you to a possible scam.

- **Errors in email.** Many scam emails contain spelling errors or address you by an incorrect name. They may use a logo that isn't quite right or format the email differently.
- **The wrong email address.** Many scam emails will look legitimate but come from a different email address. Sometimes these email addresses will be off by one letter or character. Verify web addresses before downloading email attachments
- **Asking for sensitive information.** If someone is asking you to provide sensitive information over the phone or by email, think twice. Many establishments, such as banks, will never ask you for sensitive information over the phone. Take your time to ensure the person you are communicating with is affiliated with that company.

Assess

Once you understand what to keep an eye out for, you can assess your business's current IT status and where it might be vulnerable. If you're still feeling out of your element, don't be afraid to reach out to a business specializing in IT services and have them evaluate your network. Outsourcing your IT is worth the investment if it means keeping your business safe.

Take Action

Now that you know what you need to do, be proactive, update passwords and keep your computers clean of viruses. If you see steps to take to secure your business, take them. It's much less stressful to protect your business than to piece it back together after a cyberattack. You can find a helpful list of tasks and resources for business owners from the Federal Communications Commission.

The cybersecurity of your business is something worth prioritizing; don't wait until it's too late. For more tips on how to spot business scams, check out "Spotting Scams and Knowing What to Do About Them" in the Fall/Winter 2020 edition of Trust Talk and keep an eye on BBB.org for the latest alerts.

*<https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/manage-your-business/stay-safe-cybersecurity-threats>

Preparing for the new year

After a year like 2020, planning for 2021 can seem daunting. With so much uncertainty looming, having a plan will add a sense of structure and comfort in your day-to-day operations, especially for your employees. Your employees need a leader who has a plan, even if it's flexible and changes as the year progresses. Ready to get to work but don't know where to start? We have a few ideas for you below.

Reflect. You don't know where you need to go until you look back on where you have been. Figuring out what worked and did not work for your business in 2020 will be one of the best ways to make decisions this upcoming year. Conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. SWOT is a popular, useful tool to evaluate and develop a plan of action. Use the following SWOT graphic to start thinking about how to improve your business.

Ask for feedback. Getting feedback from your customers and your employees is vital to see where your business has room to grow. Send out an email survey to your customers asking what did and didn't work for them. Do something similar internally with your employees. Getting both opinions will lead to a more holistic understanding of your business and what needs to improve.

Keep the survey between 3-5 minutes, or around 15 to 20 questions, for the best response rate. Also, remember to avoid asking leading questions that could influence respondents' answers. For example, rather than saying, "Do you think 2020 went well for us?" ask, "How do you feel 2020 went for us?" It will help you get more honest, accurate answers.

Refresh. Now that you know what you need to do, it is time to put your plans into action. This can be as broad as implementing structural changes in your business to changing your marketing materials' look. The start of the new year is a perfect time to do something new, and if one of your new changes isn't working, you have plenty of time to set things straight again.

Track. The best way to tell if something is or isn't working is to track your data. Keep organized throughout the year, track and analyze data to see if adjustments need to be made. However, don't jump to return to your old ways if the numbers seem off for one month. You'll want to give your new ideas time to take hold. If something isn't working after a quarter, then consider changing your plans.

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While criticism can be hard to face and change can be intimidating, both will ultimately help you take your company to new heights. You need to do what is best for you, your employees and the health of your business. For more tips on how to prepare for the new year, check out "Navigating Your Business's New Normal" in the Fall/Winter 2020 issue of Trust Talk Magazine.