REOPENING & OPERATING FACILITIES IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

By Kay Yoder

Companies across every industry have had to quickly adapt when facing this pandemic, making critical decisions that safeguard employees while taking proper steps to mitigate supply-chain disruption and ensure that customer needs are met.

While many businesses have reopened their doors, some are still in the planning phase and others are shifting to a hybrid or completely remote business model.

For those businesses preparing to broadly reopen, several general best practices and guidelines can help streamline the process.

The New Normal

One thing we can all agree on these days is that a great deal has changed in just a few months' time. As an essential business, like many in the food and beverage supply chain industry, Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits, a beverage alcohol distributor, has continued to operate throughout the pandemic with specific safety protocols in place. The company's crisis management team, along with its entire professional, committed and caring workforce, played a critical role in the coordination and implementation of all new processes and procedures, including the reopening process for all of its facilities.

Tollgate Requirements: "The Checklist"

Just as a baby must take its first steps before it can eventually take off running, companies must take small, calculated steps to enter the new normal both safely and effectively. The first step is to develop a comprehensive and systematic reopening plan that includes a list of tollgate requirements. The tollgate approach ensures that teams do not advance to the next phase or checkpoint of a project before they meet a set of predetermined criteria. In the context of reopening in the age of COVID-19, this means that before receiving permission to reopen, an office location must implement its company's designated set of guidelines that meet CDC standards.

So, what exactly should a checklist look like? Whether the facility is an office or a warehouse, a checklist should address several areas.

Government Requirements

Ensuring that the company is permitted to reopen is the first order of business. If the company's state or local government has relaxed or lifted stay-at-home orders for nonessential personnel, you can confidently check this box and and move on to the next key action items.

Temperature Screening

A temperature screening process using either a noncontact thermometer or a thermal screening camera must be in place upon workers' entry to the facility. In accordance with CDC guidelines, if an employee's temperature is higher than 100.4 °F, the individual should be given detailed guidance on how to self-quarantine and asked to return home and call the human resources representative. All employee results are to be kept confidential.

Office Configuration Requirements

Maintaining physical distance of 6 ft while working is paramount as we enter the new normal. For this reason, space requirements must be determined for all facility spaces, from warehouses and office spaces to meeting and common areas. When addressing general space require-

ments, in addition to the 6-ft-apart rule, traffic flow patterns must be placed throughout the office to help ensure that the proper distance is maintained. This also applies to traffic patterns upon entering and exiting a facility.

For office spaces, the following specific requirements are key:

- Cubicle occupancy must allow for 36-sq-ft of space per employee with 5-ft high walls between each cubicle. Offices with multiple employees must be configured to meet the 36-sq-ft space requirement.
- Cubicles that are closely configured in attached rows, such as in call centers, must implement staggered occupancy (a worker in every other cubicle) to meet the minimum physical distancing guidelines.
- In cases where these changes cannot be made, it will be necessary to rotate work schedules or bring back certain percentages of employees at a time.

Most meeting rooms will have to be reconfigured as well. Meeting rooms should be structured to limit in-person meeting attendance to a maximum of 10 people. Remove and store any excess chairs and tables, and post maximum occupancy signage for meeting rooms. Whenever meetings

A temperature screening process, such as a thermal camera, must be in place where workers enter the facility. Workers undergo screening with an infrared camera that translates data into an electronic image. This displays the core temperature of each worker.
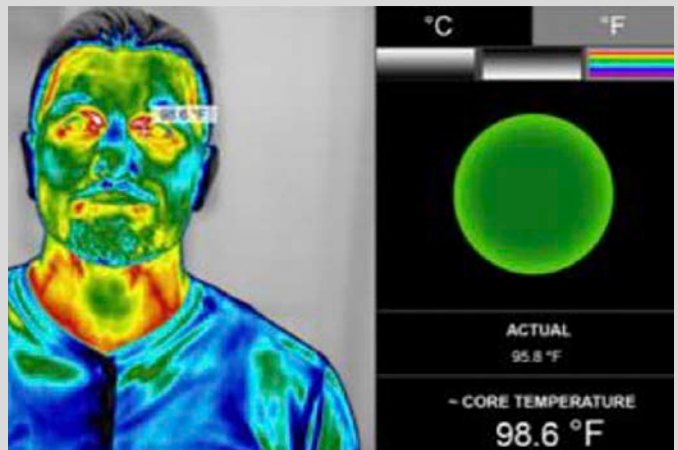
of more than 10 people are required, continue to leverage virtual conferencing tools.

Common areas are no exception. They, too, must be reworked to ensure that physical distances of at least 6 ft are maintained. If outdoor patio areas are available, they can be configured to create breakroom space. Facilities with elevators should limit elevator capacity to two to four people at a time.

Lastly is a quarantine area. Designate a quarantine area near a facility entrance away from employee work areas that can be used if a COVID-19 positive case is identified and temporary isolation of an employee is needed.

Signage

Communicating all of these changes to employees is perhaps one of the most important steps involved in reopening. Post high-visibility signage throughout the facility to promote safety and hygiene practices. To help eliminate any ambiguity, continue to reinforce good hygiene protocols such as proper handwashing and wearing face coverings in any shared spaces.

Training

Part of delivering effective employee communications includes training. Asking employees to complete an online training program that details all of the changes is a great way to clearly set and manage expectations. Developing frequently asked questions and answers, and providing regular updates to employees through an emergency notification service with voice, text messaging and email capabilities are other helpful methods of communicating important updates.

Supplies & Hygiene

Ensure that a 30-day supply of cleaning supplies and PPE is available and maintained on site. Place touchless hand sanitizer dispensers in all high-traffic areas, and communicate with the company's cleaning or janitorial service regarding more frequent and thorough cleaning protocols.

Incident Response

Lastly, designate an incident response team that will make sure escalation protocols are in place so that any incidents can be expediently reported, investigated and remediated by the local incident response team.

Spaces in the workplace must be configured to remind workers to maintain a physical distance of 6 ft while working. Stickers placed on floors (above) help remind workers to maintain a 6-ft distance in enclosed spaces. When employees gather for preshift meetings (top right), lines on the floor show them where to stand to maintain proper distance. Common areas such as conference rooms (bottom right) should be reconfigured to allow employees to sit 6 ft apart.
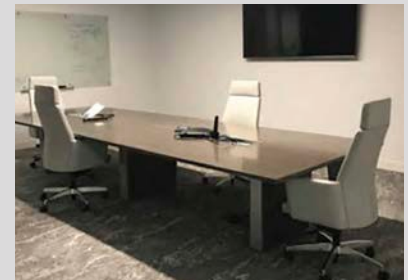
Beyond the Four Walls

Businesses that operate their own supply chain and fleet have additional elements to consider. "Drop and go" delivery procedures, for example, should continue to be implemented because they help protect drivers and customers by minimizing contact. Such a policy includes not requiring customer signatures on invoices to reduce contact with paper and other devices, identifying a dedicated delivery location and clear 10- to 20-ft radius around that area, and maintaining the CDC recommended 6-ft social distance guidelines. Vehicles should continue to be cleaned daily, and more aggressive cleaning and sanitation protocols within warehouses should remain a top priority.

No Turning Back

As many businesses determine the best way to bring employees back to the workplace, one thing is certain: There is no going back to the ways of old. According to a McKinsey study, as early as April 2020, 62% of employed Americans worked at home during the crisis (Boland et al., 2020). In that research, 80% of people questioned reported that they enjoy working from home; 41% said that they are more productive than they had been before and 28% said their productivity was at the same level as before.

This extended period spent away from the office has cast a light on the many different ways that employees can effectively and efficiently accomplish their work. Organizations must now evaluate ways to reinvent roles, create better experiences for talent, improve collaboration and productivity, and reduce real estate costs. The companies that focus on a transformational approach during this pivotal time are the ones that will progress and outpace the competition. **PSJ**

References

Boland, B., De Smet, A., Palter, R. & Sanghvi, A. (2020, June 8). Reimagining the office and work life after COVID-19. McKinsey & Co. www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-office-and-work-life-after-covid-19

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