

What is a Safe Space, and Why Do Businesses Need One?

By Laura Davis-Taylor

Forget everything you thought you knew about customer experience and safety protocols. It's anything but business as usual as customers and employees start to venture back out into the world. In today's landscape, there are a lot of unanswered questions out there, like:

- How can businesses make customers feel safe enough to come back in?

- How can you keep employees safe, and minimize risk if COVID strikes?

- Is it enough to follow government mandates?

The truth is, there are a lot of unknowns, and the information is changing by the minute. The only way for a business to minimize risk is to cover its bases by creating a safe space that both employees and customers can feel good about. But what, exactly, does that mean?

A "safe space" is essentially a place where a business has implemented protocols to ensure that the people within its walls have mitigated their health risk as much as possible. And yes, sometimes that means going above and beyond government mandates (which change almost hourly).

Businesses need to do the best they can, given factors like how people interact with their space, how long they stay and what their potential risk is if the worst-case scenario were to happen.

How Do Businesses Create a Safe Space?

The specifics of what a safe space looks like will vary from industry to industry, and there are various proactive steps that businesses can take to create a comfortable, risk-reduced environment. Below are some of the common ways businesses are creating peace of mind for their patrons, all of which can be provided via manual or digitally-based methods:

Occupancy Counting

These days, most businesses are limiting how many people can be within their walls by monitoring how many people enter and exit. Once inside, many businesses also encourage and enforce social distancing.

Operational Adaptations

A variety of new procedures and standards are being adopted across the board to limit contact with other people, as well as high-touch surfaces. These protocols may include using no-touch screens, contactless payment and curbside pickup.

Recent Exposure Inquiry

Another common tactic involves a simple Q&A to determine if an individual may have been exposed to the virus. These questions may be presented at entry, or before a person arrives at the location.

Cleaning Protocols & Compliance

Businesses are naturally creating cleaning requirements for the surfaces within their facility, most often based on time blocks. An even better approach is to do this based on human usage—as in how many people were in the space and what traffic thresholds trigger a cleaning alert to staff.

Physical Symptom Screening

Screening for virus symptoms generally includes a temperature check, either at the business or before an individual comes in. If a business opts for the latter, employees are asked to take a picture of their results and upload it to the cloud. If completed upon arrival, a business may scan individuals with a handheld thermal gun or use thermal camera technology for contactless screening.

"Safe Passes"

In campus settings, there's a need to not only screen who is on-premise, but also make it easy to access multiple locations with a specific time frame. Think about any place that has more than one building—do you want to make people re-screen at every entrance? Probably not. A mobile safe pass tied to an app streamlines this process and can also be synced with building or gate access systems.



CHECK
Q&A Screening
Mobile or Kiosk



SCAN
Temperature



COMMUNICATE
Digital Display



CLEAR
Mobile App
or Badge

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Why are Safe Spaces So Important?

Employees and customers alike have different comfort levels when it comes to going back into the office — or the store. Businesses would be wise to cover their bases by catering to those with the most anxiety.

Many customers are basing their decision to go into a store or business on their perception of safety. In this landscape, the business that has done its due diligence to set up a safe space that the individual is comfortable with will win the business. And it's not just customer comfort that matters. Not doing enough to make employees feel safe can affect employee retention, and may lead to workers comp claims or even a lawsuit.

Businesses must also consider their brand's reputation — and the damage that a bit of bad feedback on social media or negative press can inflict. We're in uncharted waters here, and more often than not, perception is reality. The bare minimum simply will not suffice. This ties directly into "duty of care," which is an organization's legal obligation to take all reasonable measures necessary to prevent harm (in this case, the spread of COVID). Creating a safe space is a crucial part of doing what's reasonably expected.

Key Considerations When Creating a Safe Space

Whatever steps a business takes to create a safe space, it's crucial to think about the workflow for each protocol and involve both human resources and legal in the decisions on what to do, and how. Both privacy and personal safety issues are paramount, yet they often point to conflicting protocols, which is why you need the perspectives of both teams.

How to handle protected personal information (PPI) and health data that may be collected in safe space screenings is another important consideration. Businesses must be aware of and follow several best practices for data retention. The key is to have protocols in place to track compliance and prove that individuals have been screened, while also protecting privacy.

Businesses must also consider user experience, and what safe space protocols are communicating. Safety screenings are somewhat akin to TSA checks, which have a negative connotation for many. Businesses must ensure that the message individuals receive from the safe space experience is that the business cares about them, is taking these steps with their safety in mind, and is trying to limit hassle and disruption as much as possible.

When choosing a safe space platform, flexibility and workflow-based customization are key. Businesses must be able to pivot and adjust as needs and mandates continue to evolve. For efficient management, enterprise enablement is another important factor. Centralizing control of a network of constantly evolving safe spaces from a single platform makes maintaining safety protocols easy to manage and update at a moment's notice.

In the end, creating a safe space is all about mitigating risk for people, but more importantly, for the business. With little known facts and legal precedence not yet cemented, it is the only way to proactively protect what matters most —the bottom line.

Our Learning Center is committed to sharing important guidance to help the industry navigate the complexities of the ever-evolving Safe Space landscape. The information shared is informed by experience working with client stakeholders, as well as independent research.

For more on how our Safe Space Solutions can help return confidence to your enterprise Please connect with either Beth Warren [beth.warren@cri.com] Laura Davis Taylor [ldt@inreality.com] for strategy and use cases.

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