

SUBSCRIPTION

MAY 2020

(COMMERCE TRACKER®)

BREWING USER INTEREST IN COFFEE SUBSCRIPTIONS

– Page 7 (Feature Story)



More consumers turn to streaming services, piggybacking on someone else's account

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Retaining customers in a post-pandemic world

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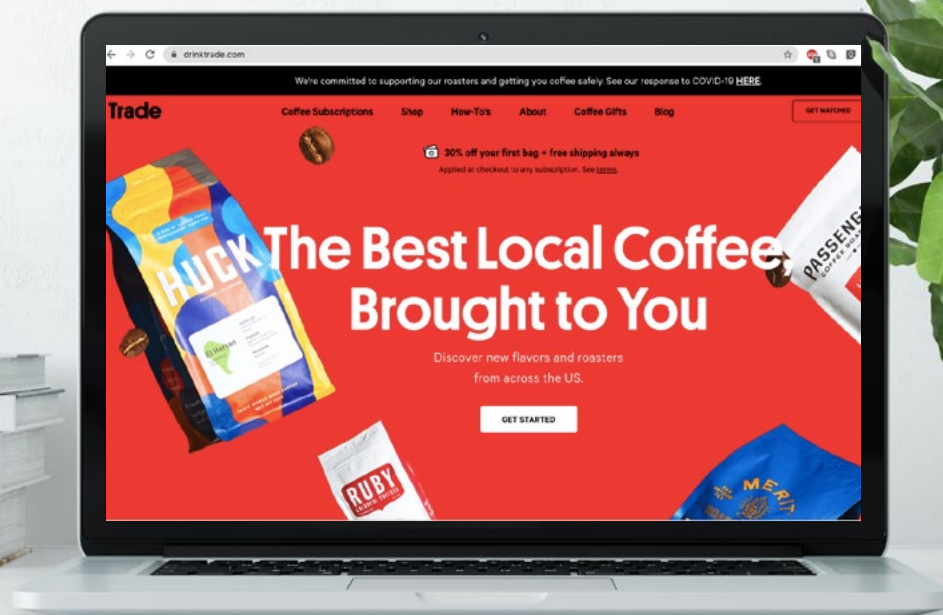
WHAT'S INSIDE

Consumers are looking for comfort, value and convenience in a world that is quickly changing because of COVID-19's spread. A growing share are turning to subscription services to help fill the void created by social distancing guidelines and government-mandated closures which limit or forbid access to movie theaters, retail stores, grocery stores and schools.

Many subscription services are thus seeing a surge in demand. Online streaming subscription company Netflix, for example, [reported](#) adding a record 15.8 million new subscribers during the first quarter for fiscal year 2020, largely due to the lockdown in the United States and abroad. The company's

revenue increased by 27.6 percent year over year, nearly doubling from \$344 million to \$709 million.

More consumers are turning to subscription services but are also becoming conscious about spending within their means. This means many are resorting to either piggybacking on their friends' or families' accounts or canceling subscriptions that they do not frequently use. The latest Consumer Subscription Retail Services Report [shows](#) that merchants can retain wavering customers with a three-pronged approach: allow customers to pause their subscriptions, offer them more economical plans and expand free trial periods.



■ WHAT'S INSIDE

Enabling these key features represents an opportunity for subscription services to give subscribers some financial breathing room and build trust that will last well after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

Around the subscription commerce space

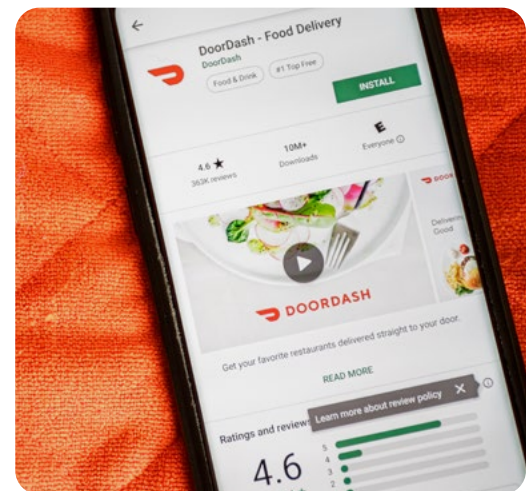
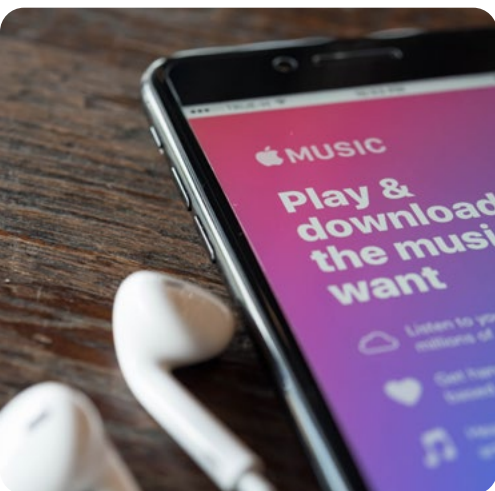
Media and video streaming services have become essential for many consumers who have found themselves under stay-at-home orders. They are leaning hard on these platforms during the pandemic — not just for accessing the latest news, but also for entertainment and work. Eighty broadband and telephone companies have thus **pledged** not to disconnect consumers during the lockdown, according to Ajit Pai, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Some companies are using their platforms to connect businesses that have been particularly affected by the virus, such as small, independent restaurants. Food delivery platform DoorDash has **added** 100,000 independent restaurants to its

subscription offering, DashPass, without charge, for example. DashPass enables consumers to place orders from eligible restaurants without paying typical delivery fees. Adding a slew of new restaurants into its rotation will hopefully boost DashPass sales and give the service a better chance at survival. The addition of more restaurants may also entice customers to try out DashPass, especially as food delivery services continue to see more use during the pandemic.

Many food-based subscription businesses are also seeing a rise in demand, with meal kit providers such as Blue Apron, Freshly and HelloFresh all experiencing an uptick in orders. Freshly delivered 5 million meals in March 2020 but anticipated delivering just 3.5 million.

This growth in demand for subscription-based services is being observed across the board. One report **found** that 22 percent of subscription firms





across multiple industries have seen growth in their subscription rates since the pandemic began.

For more on these stories and other recent subscription headlines, read the Tracker's News and Trends section (p 12).

Trade Coffee on personalizing subscriptions and engineering trust

Consumers are turning to online subscriptions to get their caffeine fix now that cafés across the country are closed for business. Engaging coffee aficionados and winning their loyalty takes more than just delivering to their doorsteps every month, however. In this month's Feature Story (p. 7), PYMNTS spoke with Mike Lackman, CEO of the New York-based subscription provider Trade Coffee, on how personalization has become key to winning consumers' trust, the value of giving an

almost in-store like buying experience and why offering promotions does not always pay off.

How pause features can help subscription services fight churn during the pandemic

Consumers who are hunkering down to comply with stay-at-home orders are turning to subscription companies to access products and services that they would typically purchase in stores. Subscription providers across the board are seeing a surge in demand as a result, but they are still challenged by consumer churn. This month's Deep Dive (p. 17) takes a data-driven look at how pause features can be effective in fighting churn and help subscription services retain customers in a post-pandemic world.

5 FIVE FAST FACTS

47M

Projected number of additional streaming video subscriptions by the end of 2020

75%

Increase in gaming usage during peak hours under stay-at-home mandates

64%

Share of millennials who used someone else's account or password to access subscriber-only content

\$7.8B

Projected value of the subscription market by 2025

£60

Amount U.K. consumers spend on subscriptions annually



FEATURE
STORY

BREWING USER
**INTEREST IN
COFFEE
SUBSCRIPTIONS**

■ FEATURE STORY

The subscription market creates comfort and value for subscribers who want flexibility in the way they receive products and services. The COVID-19 pandemic has further ramped up this need as consumers abide by stay-at-home mandates and crave normalcy in their daily routines, wanting once-regular experiences like enjoying a morning cup of freshly brewed coffee.

Trade Coffee, a New York-based personalized coffee subscription company, is one such player working to ensure that customers who subscribe to its service are connected with more than a steady supply of specialty goods.

"We're making it a lot easier to create comfortable experiences in a way that is entirely customizable and ... gets the morning started right," Mike Lackman, the company's CEO, said in a recent interview with PYMNTS.

Lackman believes coffee gives customers a sense of partnership with their community, particularly when subscribers are struggling with pandemic-related disruptions. Trade Coffee reported in late April that it was serving four times the number of subscribers and shipping twice as many coffee bags as before the pandemic. This

boom in subscription sales comes as Starbucks **experiences** a 10 percent decline in same-store sales, with the chain feeling the pandemic's impact in both the U.S. and China.

"Our business is about the uptick in demand for the comfort one can get from the café culture, which has been removed from their daily life," he said. "We bring an ecosystem of craft roasters to a nationwide audience. More than ever [there is a] need for us to bring demand from all these consumers to those roasters."

Understanding customer preferences

Subscription providers can benefit from developing a deeper understanding of their customers' preferences. Trade Coffee has found that its subscribers, who range in age from 25 to 40, want variety more than anything else. The company sought to personalize its experiences by developing a way for its subscribers to describe how they want their coffees to taste.

"Each of our 400 varieties of coffee has 20 points of metadata based on the way we physically taste [each, whether] in our company process here in our office today or at our director of coffee's





department,” Lackman said. “So the data we ascribe to each particular roast goes through a very specific and proprietary process that allows us to match people to ... flavor profiles that we think will be perfect for them.”

The company’s website offers guidance on coffee-making methods and provides questionnaires to help subscribers determine how they like their coffee. Trade Coffee uses a proprietary system to send customers’ orders to one of 50 roasters in 38 states. The two-year-old company was initially developed to be mobile-first but now supports a variety of digital channels to offer convenient ordering anytime, anywhere.

“If I opened my phone when I was in front of the stairs in the subway, I could actually order the

coffee before I lost service going underground, and I think people don’t want to jump through 50 hoops,” Lackman said.

Building community

Subscription-based companies also benefit from creating a sense of community among their customers. Trade Coffee subscribers can choose to buy from someone right in their neighborhood or from a roaster in another part of the country that they may want to support.

“One of our most popular roasters is a coffee called Red Rooster from Appalachia,” Lackman said. “They’re in southwestern Virginia; they are a really interesting small American business [and] a critical



employer in that part of the state. ... So, when we can, we bring them volume.”

Connecting consumers with roasters they want to support is even more significant now, as small businesses struggle to stay afloat during the economic downturn.

“Now, [the] COVID-19 [pandemic] is putting a real spotlight on that component of our marketplace ... helping consumers have a partner in coffee, especially if they are able to replicate the experience of going to the café and supporting their local baristas,” he said.

“

Companies have taken the approach of making it too hard for people to cancel. ... When we looked at what we wanted to do, it was just about building trust.

”

Building trust

Many American consumers are experiencing financial strains because of pandemic-related unemployment, however, and subscription-based businesses are allowing them to pause their subscriptions as a result. Unemployment, emergency medical bills and falling victim to fraud are just a few reasons why consumers may shift their financial priorities. Pausing is an appealing option to consumers and is something Trade Coffee currently offers to its subscribers. The recent increase in demand means that the company has not seen an uptick in requests to cancel or pause subscriptions.

“We’ve had four times as many requests to increase the frequency or amount of coffee as we

have requests to slow down or stop the flow,” Lackman said.

Offering promotions is one of the other approaches subscription companies rely on to engage new customers and gain their trust. But Lackman claimed that angle is not always the most organic way of developing a subscriber base.

“We don’t typically do the ‘first bag free’ kind of promotions and we definitely don’t do anything to force the customer into things that they don’t naturally want,” he said.

The company’s delivery schedules are entirely customizable rather than monthly, and Trade Coffee made the cancellation process easy should customers ultimately decide they no longer need the service.

“Companies have taken the approach of making it too hard for people to cancel, and that’s something that’s as old as the old Columbia House records model or the old jelly of the month club. ... When we looked at what we wanted to do, it was just about building trust,” he said.

Allowing customers to sign up, pause and cancel their subscriptions will not only help firms develop a continued following but also will increase the odds they win consumers’ loyalty during and after times of hardship.



NEWS AND TRENDS

STAY-AT-HOME ORDERS BOOST STREAMING SUBSCRIPTION USAGE

Streaming service providers are experiencing a boom amidst stay-at-home orders implemented to slow the spread of COVID-19. A recent [survey](#) of 2,000 U.S. consumers suggests that subscription streaming service usage has increased in recent months, particularly among consumers hunkered down at home. The survey found that 78 percent of all consumers subscribe to at least one streaming service — up six percentage points from 2019. Subscription rates are highest among self-isolating families with children, 94 percent of whom use subscription streaming services. This number was 82 percent for self-isolating consumers

without children and 61 percent for those not actively self-isolating.

The findings correspond with recent PYMNTS [research](#) that found that family members frequently share streaming subscription accounts. One out of five subscription service users do not pay for their own subscriptions, and those who use streaming platforms, such as Amazon Prime Video, Hulu or Netflix, are the most likely to piggyback off of families' or friends' accounts, at 22.2 percent.

Subscription firms relax user access restrictions during ongoing pandemic

A range of subscription services concerning everything from communication to education to entertainment are [softening](#) the challenges that come with the COVID-19 pandemic. Ajit Pai, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), recently [announced](#) that some 80 broadband and telephone service companies pledged to "Keep Americans Connected" during the crisis to ensure subscribers do not lose access to their broadband or telephone services if they cannot pay their bills.

Participating companies will not terminate residential or small business customers' services over a 60-day period. They will also waive any late fees incurred because of customers' economic circumstances and provide access to Wi-Fi hotspots.

Telecommunications company Charter Communications is assisting its customers by partnering



with school districts to offer free access to its Spectrum broadband and Wi-Fi for 60 days for families with children aged K-12 and college students who are now participating in remote education. Many other players in the education space are also making efforts to improve access to their services. A number of online education subscription services have expanded their free trial periods from seven days to 30 days — or even three months — according to [Recurly](#), which manages 25 million monthly subscriptions across a range of industries.

Independent restaurants added to DashPass for free

Food delivery subscription providers are also looking to offer unrestricted product access to their customers, with third-party delivery company DoorDash adding 100,000 independent restaurants to its DashPass subscription service for free. It is also not charging commission fees for the first 30 days restaurants are on the service, according to a [press release](#). The company also waived commission fees on pickup orders for DoorDash's and Caviar's restaurant partners. Uber Eats made similar efforts by waiving delivery fees for independent restaurants, while Grubhub has discontinued commission fees for independent restaurants across the nation.

These companies have also rolled out new processes to reduce physical contact and help curb COVID-19's spread. The new system, which DoorDash, Grubhub, Postmates and Uber Eats have adopted, involves the carrier dropping off food at customers' doorsteps.

Demand for subscription boxes soars

Twenty-two percent of subscription firms have observed increased subscription adoption since the beginning of the pandemic, according to a recent [report](#). This is especially true for subscription box companies that send everything from education-related products to pet supplies.

Education subscription boxes have witnessed increased orders as children stay home from school and parents take on responsibility for their education. Kid-focused subscription box company KiwiCo, for example, witnessed a huge spike in demand for its science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)-based monthly subscription materials and eCommerce sales, according to Lisa Horn, the company's chief product and merchandising officer.

Pet subscription offerings from companies such as BarkBox, Chewy and Petco are also seeing a [surge](#) in demand as consumers prioritize pet care among their expenses during the pandemic. Many such players are thus adding more staff and implementing new protocols to safely deliver customers' packages. Chewy is hiring between 6,000 and 10,000 employees at its fulfillment center to keep up with growth in demand, for example. The company is expecting first quarter sales to reach \$1.5 billion — a 36 percent increase compared to Q1 2019.

Food box subscriptions step up where grocery delivery falls short

Some of the other in-demand services include meal kit subscriptions, which have experienced significant growth as consumers limit the trips they take to grocery stores. One such player is Freshly, which [expected](#) to deliver 3.5 million kits in March but ended up delivering 5 million. Other

subscription meal services, including Blue Apron and HelloFresh, have reported spikes in new orders as well.

Some grocery stores have made acquisitions in the recent past to find their footing in the meal kit market. Players such as Albertsons and Kroger acquired meal kit companies Home Chef and Plated, respectively, for example. Other grocers such as German chain Aldi are taking a page out of meal kit companies' playbooks and offering grocery boxes containing meal prep ingredients. Aldi's boxes are only available for online customers and are limited to one per person.

Subscriptions in motion

Uptick in extended carsharing bookings in Australia lead to hoarding issue

The ongoing pandemic is having an unintended effect on the car subscription space, with a growing number of consumers **seeking** more flexible options because of pandemic-related unemployment fears. Car subscriptions allow users to return their cars within four weeks if their financial situations change. This model is beneficial from a business standpoint as it helps generate revenue on cars that would otherwise be out of service because of decreased business and holiday travel, said Chris Noone, CEO of Collaborate Corporation, which owns car subscription service Carly.

Consumers are leaning more heavily on car subscriptions during the pandemic, which is leading to "hoarding" behaviors. Australian vehicle sharing and subscription companies have **witnessed** an increased number of customers holding on to their vehicles or extending carshares for the long term. Car Next Door, a national person-to-person

(P2P) auto sharing program operating in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, observed the stockpiling phenomenon when the level of extended reservations reduced availability for some of its subscribers. Will Davies, CEO and co-founder of Car Next Door, said the portion of extended reservations for the fleet jumped to 20 percent — a significantly higher level than average. A Car Next Door survey of 400 users revealed the cause for the long-term bookings: 75 percent of respondents regularly used to use public transit but many now opted against it for health and safety reasons.

Subscription offerings hold future for in-car infotainment

In-car infotainment adoption is **expected** to get a boost from subscription-based services in the coming years, according to Pranshu Gupta, CEO and founder of Haryana, India-based Trak N Tell, which recently released its IntelliPlay system at the 2020 Auto Expo. Subscription offerings are expected to help automatically update systems and offer improved or additional services to users, including reliable hardware, improved cloud offerings and 4G and 5G connectivity. Such subscription-based models are already being deployed by car manufacturers like Tesla, which is allowing access to installed hardware for a fee, such as the ability to play Atari games on the dashboard screen.

Technology and entertainment

Microsoft is rolling out software subscription plans for consumers

Computer software giant Microsoft is hoping to expand its Microsoft 365 user base by **rolling out** new subscription offerings for consumers. The

company is providing its personal plan for \$6.99 per month and its family plan for \$9.99 per month. Microsoft 365 subscriptions grant consumers access to the entire Office suite, including Word, Outlook, Excel and PowerPoint, as well as Microsoft Editor, an AI-powered app that provides writing and PowerPoint presentation tips. This cloud-based subscription offering will eliminate the need for consumers to periodically upgrade their operating systems.

Microsoft is looking to further entrench itself in consumers' lives with the launch of its Microsoft Safety App to keep families safe online and offline and Microsoft Teams to spur collaboration between friends and family members.

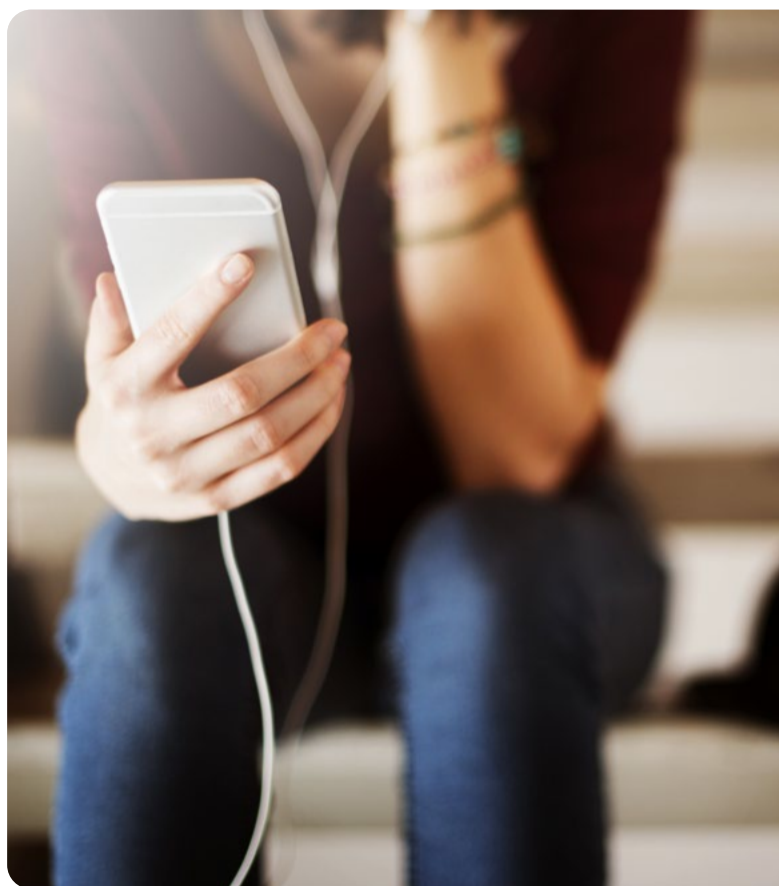
New York City performers to receive assistance from Trickle Up video subscriptions

Recently released subscription service Trickle Up is **offering** a mix of streaming video productions and performances to support original content from New York City artists. The company plans to give earnings from the offering to artists in financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. Subscribers pay \$10 a month to access smartphone videos that local artists have created. Some 50 performers have contributed at least three videos each and these users can select funding recipients. Performers include puppeteer Basil Twist and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwrights Suzan-Lori Parks and Annie Baker.

The New York Times Company snaps up subscription audio app Audm

The New York Times Company is **acquiring** Audm, a subscription-based audio app that turns in-depth

journalism into professionally narrated audio — a well-timed acquisition as consumers remain cooped up at home looking for avenues of escape and entertainment online. The app is available on both iOS and Android devices and features audio from some 2,000 articles published by The New York Times, the Atlantic, Wired, the New Yorker and Vanity Fair, with more content added daily. Users can listen online or download stories to listen offline, and subscriptions start at \$7.99 per month. The New York Times Company did not reveal the number of Audm subscribers but noted it has a strong following.





Market developments

Subscription billing management market predicted to reach \$7.8 billion by 2025

Increased interest in subscription business models is leading to a growing need for subscription and billing management software. The industry is predicted to rise from \$4.1 billion in 2020 to \$7.8 billion by 2025 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14 percent, according to a [report](#). Companies across the business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) sectors are continuing to adopt subscription models, prompting a need for them to optimize pricing packages, learn how to better retain subscribers, maintain compliance standards and improve outdated billing systems. This is driving demand for subscription and billing management software. The trend toward improving customer experiences and transitioning from manual to automated accounting and financial back office procedures is rapidly

pushing adoption of cloud-based subscription and billing management software among small to mid-sized operations.

Subscriptions evolve in the UK

Subscription services are [flourishing](#) in the U.K., with the average consumer spending £60 (\$75) annually on interests such as fashion, leisure, style and technology. This growth is largely fueled by demand for streaming and subscription box services.

Nearly half of U.K. homes subscribe to streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, and one in four U.K. residents subscribe to subscription box services. Male grooming products are one of the fastest growing segments within the subscription box market, with an estimated 2 million men projected to be using them in the next two years. The overall subscription box market in the U.K. is estimated to be worth £1 billion (\$1.2 billion) by 2022 — a 77 percent increase in market size since 2017.



DEEP DIVE:

How Pause Features **Can Help** Subscription Services Fight Churn During The Pandemic

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is having wide-reaching effects on the broader subscription industry. Subscription businesses everywhere are witnessing a surge in demand for food deliveries, educational tools and other items. This growth in demand underpins a shift in consumer behavior — a result of stay-at-home mandates. Many consumers are limiting trips to grocery and retail stores, making food and beverage subscription companies that provide fresh ingredients to doorsteps appealing options. Subscribers are also streaming more content such as exercise videos and movies as fitness and entertainment venues remain closed.

Subscription businesses are still challenged with reducing churn despite this growth in demand. Many consumers sign up for subscription services and cancel their plans as soon as the free trial periods run out. Recent PYMNTS [research](#) found that approximately 27.4 million consumers are likely to cancel at least one of their services in the near future. This month's Deep Dive examines how the subscription economy is faring amid the COVID-19 pandemic and what strategies businesses must

deploy to not just survive but also thrive — despite the disruptions.

Global impacts

Some subscription businesses, such as food delivery, digital content, gaming and streaming services, are benefiting from a surge in sales, while department stores, clothing chains and restaurants are suffering because of consumers' changing habits and government-mandated business closures. Consumers are adjusting to ordering what they need online because most physical stores are either closed, have long lines, operating with curbside pickup or offering delivery-only options.

Streaming services are fast gaining new subscribers. Many consumers are spending most of their time indoors and at home, which is projected to cause a 5 percent spike in global demand — the equivalent of 47 million subscriptions — for streaming services by the end of 2020. The pandemic had Wall Street analysts [revising](#) their outlooks for Netflix [following](#) a surge of binge watching during the first quarter as subscribers followed stay-at-home protocols. Disney+ has similarly [expanded](#) its subscriber base to 50 million in just five months since

its launch, with analysts suggesting that the pandemic has played a major role in its rapid rise.

The cancellation of major sports events to curb the virus's spread has left streaming companies to fill the entertainment void with content for their viewers, and they are seemingly prepared to continue to deliver engaging content over the next few months. Netflix **reported** in its latest quarterly earnings call that it was ready to supply ample content and would not run out in the near future, even though productions have been put on hold.

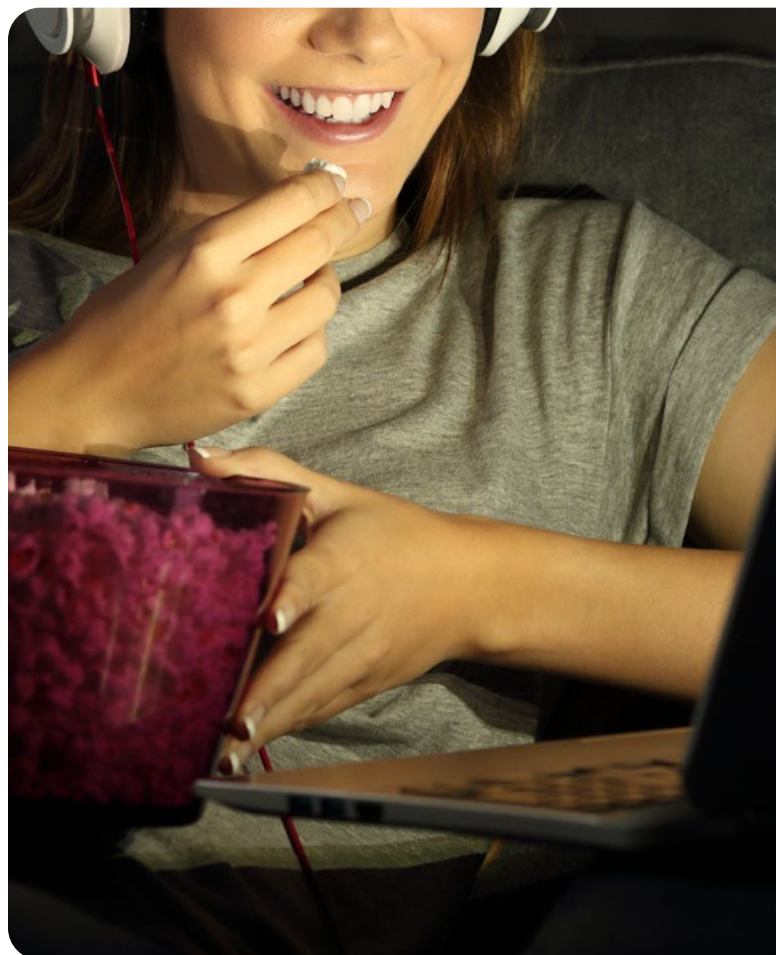
The benefits of pausing versus cancellation

The greatest challenge for those in the subscription market is avoiding disruption to their fundamental business models as the pandemic's spread takes its toll. Subscription businesses need to continually deliver value for their customers and avoid any hiccups in service while also retaining subscribers who may be looking to save money due to a volatile job market. **Pausing subscriptions** is one option that allows subscribers to temporarily suspend their subscriptions until they are more comfortable financially. A subscriber is likely to pause a subscription rather than cancel it when they are getting value from the product or service and simply need to take a break. Pause capabilities cannot fix a retention issue that is rooted in service dissatisfaction, however.

Pausing is preferable to canceling for providers because it retains subscribers for the future. Recent PYMNTS **research** found that 51.7 percent of consumers — approximately 14.2 million people — who are likely to cancel their current subscriptions would use pause features if they were available. This could lead to as many as 9.5 million subscribers keeping

their subscriptions. The opportunity for an increase in pause feature adoption is especially apparent among customers who use digital media and streaming products. PYMNTS research indicated that 27.7 percent of digital media subscribers and 23.7 percent streaming offering subscribers would be “very likely” to use the pause features.

Pause features are simple to execute and are less expensive than efforts to acquire new subscribers or win back those who have canceled. Pausing may be one effective tool to help subscription businesses emerge on the other side of the pandemic in financially stronger positions.



ABOUT

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Recurly

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We are interested in your feedback on this report and where we take it over time. Please send us your thoughts, comments or questions to SCCI@pymnts.com.

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