

The entertainment industry's new normal - Q&A with One-eyed Jack

 By Ruth Cooper

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We chat to Darren Sandras, director and co-owner of entertainment marketing and communications agency One-eyed Jack about how he, his company and the SA entertainment industry, in general, is navigating and responding to the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent nationwide lockdown.

■ What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different from what you expected?

These are strange and unprecedented times. I have never experienced anything like it in my lifetime – and I hope I don't again.

Initially, it was a little surreal. There was a certain novelty to it, an odd excitement, coupled with nervousness and anxiety. But that quickly wore off as the reality of what the lockdown meant professionally and personally set in.

Professionally, as a way of working, we weren't too disrupted. Being in the events and PR industry the team is accustomed to working remotely, being on the move and adapting to get stuff done quickly.

Personally, carving out a productive home office space, establishing a routine of sorts and making sure to change out of my PJs were important.



Darren Sandras

■ Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the SA entertainment industry as a whole.

It breaks my heart to see how badly the entertainment industry has been hit. When all gatherings were prohibited and events, festivals, concerts and the like were cancelled or postponed, we really saw just how far-reaching job creation in the industry goes. Over 10,000 people are employed across the industry, many of them paid per event. With no events, they don't get paid.

■ ***How is One-eyed Jack responding to the crisis and current lockdown?***

Being a specialist marketing agency for the events and entertainment industry, we saw a lot of the exciting projects we'd pitched, the new business we'd won and been planning to roll out, dry up. It's a shock and nothing like we've ever seen.

Like so many others, we are constantly looking for opportunities in this new normal; how technology can empower and enable us and the industry to do what we love and give back to those in need.

We love our clients and the industry, all of whom have really come together to think of innovative ways to keep the industry going while staying safe.



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■ ***What sort of assistance will you need going forward?***

We're taking things day by day, but also thinking about what the next two, three, six months will look like. As a business, we don't want handouts; we want to get back to doing what we love and keeping the jobs we have and contributing to the economy.

It's not just us going through this, it's everyone. That gives us some comfort knowing we're in this together – and it's from that mindset that many in the industry have come together to start making a positive change to those hit hardest.

■ ***Comment on the challenges and opportunities.***

The challenge is that with a ban on large gatherings, our industry can't do what it does.

Opportunities lie in creativity and technology and how we merge these two to make for new and interesting ways of bringing large events to people. We've seen this already with Global Citizen on a large scale. Here at home, partners and clients like SkyRoomLive and Safe (South African Fund 4 Entertainment) are working with comedians, artists and entertainers to create a platform that can entertain and try to make an income so people can keep jobs and feed families.



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■ ***How has the lockdown affected your staff?/What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?***

As I mentioned, we're used to working remotely. But we do miss being together, sharing ideas, laughs and drinking lots of coffee. It's hard to motivate and brainstorm via video call or telephone. We love this industry because we love being around people, something we can't do right now.

We are following all the government guidelines and regulations to ensure our team is safe. We check in all the time and know that it's important to give a little more leeway and be more understanding as we all navigate this weird time.

Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of the arts?

I read a lot generally. Recently, I have been reading a lot more: how countries, governments, institutions, corporates and individuals have been handling this crisis around the world and at home.

I am very proud of how our president and government are handling this crisis. They've been quick, decisive, accountable and communicative. Those are the things that citizens are looking for now – and trust.

My view of the future is uncertain but hopeful. Short term, I want to be able to pay my bond and buy food. But I also want to ensure our business and the jobs we create are sustained. I have faith in our industry and the arts that we will find new ways to adapt and thrive.



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Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?

What I think this crisis has done is show us, collectively and on a global scale at the same time, both the wonder of humanity and its evils.

We see and hear stories every day of how people are coming together to care for those in need. But we also read about how much cleaner the seas and rivers and air are from just a few weeks of decreased human activity.

Your top tip for staying sane during the lockdown?

Be kind to yourself and to those you're locked down with. And don't put pressure on yourself. If you don't learn a new language, repaint your house or get that six-pack during the lockdown, you haven't failed. You're doing the best you can in very strange times.

How do you hope the entertainment industry and humanity, in general, can come out of this pandemic better and stronger?

There are a lot of initiatives in the entertainment industry to minimise its impact on the planet; this crisis should hopefully propel those initiatives forward and remind us how important it is to keep ourselves and our planet healthy.

I also hope that event-goers will see the impact that the industry has on people's lives and the economy and this prompts more people to support the entertainment and arts world.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

Ruth is the production manager at Bizcommunity. ruth@bizcommunity.com

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