

Offer customers value for money, says The Crazy Store's Kevin Lennett

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.



Kevin Lennett

Discount retail chain The Crazy Store boasts an expansive Southern African presence, with almost 400 stores spread across South Africa and a growing number of branches in neighbouring Botswana and Namibia.

The nationwide lockdown instituted in South Africa at the end of March meant that The Crazy Store had to close its local stores for a month, a period that managing director Kevin Lennett describes as a "devastating blow" for the retail industry.

As the retailer moves from selling essential goods to its full range of products as permitted during alert Level 3, Lennett shares how the in-store environment has needed to change to prioritise health and hygiene, and why offering shoppers value for their money is more important than ever.

What was The Crazy Store's initial response to the Covid-19 crisis, and how has the business had to adapt operations under the various levels of lockdown?

We had to implement various safety measures immediately in line with government regulations, ensuring the safety of our staff and customers. We closed all stores from Friday 27 March and were unable to trade during the month of April. We were, however, able to trade with essential goods from 1 May in all stores, making sure we implemented all government regulations.

As we move to Level 3 of lockdown, we will be able to sell our full range of products so customers will be able to purchase all their Crazy Store favourites again.

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■ ***Has the company experienced any major disruptions to its supply chain during the pandemic?***

Yes. The movement of non-essential goods was not allowed during lockdown. The supply chain was disrupted on multiple levels – importation, delay in production of goods and the inability to transport non-essential goods. This meant that previously packed and invoiced orders had to be cancelled to make way for distribution of essential goods.



■ ***What are The Crazy Store shoppers spending their money on during the lockdown?***

“ The most popular product categories are personal care and hygiene items (such as sanitisers, handwash, etc.), pets, winter essentials such as blankets, everyday consumables and of course arts and crafts to keep the kids busy. ”

Our huge range of affordable products meant that our customers were able to continue shopping during lockdown.

■ ***How do you think the in-store environment will have to evolve taking into account consumers' heightened awareness around hygiene and safety, and physical distancing?***

Safety and hygiene in our stores will be our top priority for some time to come - keeping our stores clean for our staff and customers' safety is of utmost importance to us. We have increased our already rigorous cleaning measures.

We have also put the following measures into place: Our staff will be sanitising customer's hands upon entering our stores.

No customer will be allowed to enter the store without a face mask. We're limiting the number of customers allowed into stores at a time. Stores also have floor signs/stickers reminding customers of the 2-metre safe wingspan they need to keep when queuing at the till points. We will continue to take whatever actions are necessary to ensure that customers and our store teams are kept safe.

We had established (prior to the pandemic) an exercise in increasing shopping space in our stores to improve comfort of shopping. This will become even more relevant now in the months to come.



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■ **Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your company, and retail as a whole?**

Naturally being closed for a month was a devastating blow to us all in the retail industry. Simply put, all touchpoints are affected – from landlords to suppliers, to customers to staff. It has been traumatic to say the least. It was, however, our responsibility to immediately begin planning for the future and a return to trade – no matter in what form or fashion. Our team has been fantastic and has pulled together to ensure the long-term survival of our business. We missed our customers and they missed us!

At The Crazy Store we are all about value. We have the widest range of products at ridiculously low prices. We know that times are tough for everyone at the moment, therefore we will continue to keep our prices low and our stores fully stocked with everything our customers need.

“ Retailers need to be understanding of the challenges that consumers are facing, many have lost their jobs or have had to take a reduction in pay so it's important that all retailers, The Crazy Store included, keep offering customers value for their money and great customer service. ”

■ **How have you had to change the way you work?**

Like everyone else, we had to introduce a work from home policy for most of our employees. Those that need to be in office come in on a rotational basis. We are also limiting travel to stores and are more conscious than ever about consumer needs.

Our staff on the sales floor are very much in the front line, and as such we implemented high hygiene levels prior to our return to work. This focus will have to continue, as well as a continued encouragement of changing of habits around staying 2m apart, not eating lunch at the same time, wearing masks, etc. Importantly staff need to be aware of their health and notify us of any symptoms no matter how severe they may or may not be.



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■ **Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of retail in any way? Any opportunities you think will emerge as a result?**

Naturally there is lots of talk about online retail, and there is no doubt that e-commerce will be boosted permanently by this pandemic. However, what no one is talking about is how people miss being 'out and about' and being social. It is noteworthy how busy stores were once we moved down to Level 4 of lockdown.

I was struck by how many of our staff said they missed seeing their regular customers – people are social creatures. The really pleasing thing is our customers said the same to our staff – we had missed each other!

■ ***Do you have any encouraging words for industry peers navigating business during these uncertain times?***

While these are very distressing and stressful times, I have been struck at how resolute people are. South Africans seem to be able to adapt to so many challenges. While we have many tough days, weeks and months ahead I believe the power of the human spirit will overcome this.

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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