

Converting the Covid crisis into digital opportunity

By [Anupam Pahuja](#)

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The world today is a different place from the one we knew before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has changed the way we live, work, socialise and transact.



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Social distancing has compelled consumers and merchants across the globe to adapt to and adopt a digital way of life.

Like many other countries, South Africa did not have a digital-first approach or is not known for being an 'early adopter' of technology.

The pandemic has changed that and while adoption came with its set of challenges, the opportunities outweighed them.

Lockdowns and fear of infection has accelerated the transition from the physical to the digital world and with that e-commerce has grown significantly.

South African consumers are embracing digital to cater to their daily needs now more than ever before. This includes ordering food, buying stationery and other consumables and also for entertainment. Early indicators also tell us that digital is expected to continue to be a way of life even post the pandemic on account of convenience, safety and to save time.

For this trend to continue, there is the need to focus on ensuring security of the transactions and ensure a seamless experience.



Local e-commerce sites need to up their game if they hope to retain customer loyalty

Jenni-Ruth Coggin, BMI Research 26 May 2021



Ramping up digital customer experience

For companies of all sizes, in order to survive, they needed to focus their efforts and budgets on enabling digital transformation. The 'new normal' has dispelled the idea that e-commerce would disrupt the physical retail business by bringing greater competitiveness and pressure on the sector.

The digitisation of retail enables better customer experiences and also business continuity. In order for merchants to convert "visitors" into customers, the end-to-end experience has to be seamless and convenient in order to avoid cart abandonment.

Small and medium enterprises have also accelerated their transition to the digital world. This is not only on account of the closure of physical stores but also to cater to the need and demands of consumers.

A watershed moment for e-commerce in SA

Lauren Hartzberg 18 May 2021





The growth of online

Digital transformation has seen early signs of success in the South African market. According to an industry report, in the last 12 months, internet penetration has accelerated to 64%; and of those, an overwhelming majority (95%+) use mobile internet to buy or order goods or services for personal use, such as clothes, home products, cosmetics or food deliveries, in addition to accessing social media websites.

[A recent study](#) conducted by World Wide Worx, also revealed that the total growth of online retail in South Africa in 2020 was 66%, bringing the total value of online retail in South Africa to R30,2bn. This is expected to grow by more than 30% in 2021.

The best strategies are rather the simplest ones: be nimble and transform the crisis into opportunities.

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