

Online retail beyond the pandemic, with OneDayOnly's Laurian Venter

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Having worked at OneDayOnly for nearly a decade, sales and marketing director Laurian Venter is a key part of the e-tailer's growth story - from an aspirational startup operating at a time when e-commerce was the exception rather than the rule in South Africa, to the country's foremost daily deals site in an online retail market that's hotted up.



Laurian Venter, sales and marketing director at OneDayOnly. Source: Supplied

E-commerce is now commonplace and an essential sales channel to remain competitive. This of course means that consumer expectations have heightened and even digital-native brands like OneDayOnly need to have their finger on the pulse of what online shoppers want to remain competitive and top-of-mind.

As one of SA's leading women in e-commerce and having intimately witnessed the evolution of the local e-tail landscape, Venter will be among the host of experts sharing their insights at the forthcoming [Ecom Africa conference](#), when it returns to Cape Town from 4–5 May.

We chatted with Venter ahead of the event to find out her predictions for e-commerce beyond the pandemic and how OneDayOnly is adapting its approach to keep the customer at the centre of the business.

■ Laurian, now that the pandemic is subsiding (fingers crossed), what do you predict the trajectory of e-commerce growth will look like over the next few years, following the crisis-driven spike we've witnessed?

The pandemic has established and cemented e-commerce as an always-on player in the retail landscape – it's now part and parcel of our retail repertoire, not just an in-case-of-emergency alternative. It will continue to grow although from what we've seen, more steadily and stabilised i.e. not at the same crisis-driven rate at we saw in 2020.

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■ ***On the back of pandemic-led online growth, has OneDayOnly noticed any significant changes in customer behaviour over the last two years - changes in basket sizes, product mix, customer demographics, etc? If so, what do think this says about evolving customer needs?***

The pandemic has in a sense seen a re-programming of behaviour where previously considered shopping norms have been completely uprooted. And we've had to adapt accordingly. For example our product mix has changed in line with what customers were seeking - selling more apparel, homeware, exercise equipment than ever before.

Wine and now travel have also grown as a category, plus we went from introducing essentials (cleaning products, toiletries, health and beauty) for 24 hours to having them as on-going deals on our site all contributing to an increase in basket size.

Customers have become more discerning, wanting more choice, convenience, platforms of choice, payment options, etc. and their needs (and therefore behaviour) will continue to evolve in line with changing retail landscape - including new players entering the market as well as new technologies and innovation.

■ ***How is OneDayOnly, a digital native business, working to remain competitive in a market that's seeing more and more brands gravitating online and launching direct-to-consumer offerings?***

With increased competitor activity and increased contention for share of wallet:

- Competitors are upping their game with good deals, added value, faster delivery and even free shipping
- Customers have the upper hand with more choice and options open to them
- There are more opportunities to switch
- Customers have more power to influence a business through social media, online reviews and word-of-mouth and more weight is placed on the overall experience

Our competitive edge lies with our excellent deals, varied product mix and 24-hour time limit to shop.

But taking the above factors into consideration, we've made (and are making) considerable changes (based on research and insights) to improve the overall end-to-end shopping experience to maintain our edge amid the market proliferation.

A few highlights over the past two years include ODO launching:

- A more modern and contemporary looking website (better shopping experience)
- Our app (choice of platform)
- A new CRM platform (personalisation, preferences, better targeting)

- Self-service returns (customer empowerment)
- Dynamic, search-enabled Help Centre (information at fingertips, less need to ask for help, customer empowerment)
- Everyday Essentials permanent shop (always-on necessities)

We've also done a complete overhaul of our customer service department to reduce waiting time on queries (down to 18 minutes), migrated to the cloud/cloud hosting (for scalability/speed/agility/growth) and are continuously making improvements to enable a better experience.



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■ ***What does OneDayOnly consider to be the cornerstones of a positive customer journey online? And how has this evolved during your decade with the company?***

Cornerstones of a positive customer journey:

1. Customer understanding (deep insight into wants, needs, perceptions and expectations)
2. Deliver on brand promise / no experience gap (i.e. no gap between what we promise to deliver as a brand and what we actually deliver) – this will not only ensure a more positive journey but is key to building trust/loyalty/advocacy

ODO has evolved over the past decade from being more operationally focused in the startup years – getting the business off the ground, establishing the brand – to now being more customer focussed.

In the beginning (2010) when e-commerce was still in its infancy here in SA, customer expectations and competitor benchmarks were not yet established, so it was much easier to go according to our own plan and customers would follow and adapt.

With the explosion of e-commerce in the past five or so years (so not just since pandemic) we've had to adapt our approach. Over the last three years we've conducted more user research and taken on board more customer insights than ever before in the business, which has led to reframing our view on the customer journey, putting our customers at the centre and making operational decisions based on customer needs.

■ ***What have you found to be the most successful channels and strategies for marketing the OneDayOnly business and its offerings?***

User acquisition (filling the funnel) and customer conversion (getting them to shop) are key strategic pillars.

Search, social and paid media continue to be our major focus in the business, as the digital channels give us an immediate return on ad spend, as well as great results.

Brand building continues to grow in importance for us. Once people have heard about OneDayOnly, we need to use various customer journeys to educate them about who we are as a brand, and take them on a journey to show them how we work, and try to get them to open our site/app on a daily basis, to ensure they don't miss out on any unbelievable deals!



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■ ***With Ecom Africa expected to deliver 40+ speakers and attract over 1,000 physical and virtual guests from various corners of the broader e-commerce landscape, can you speak to the value of knowledge sharing and collaboration in driving a competitive e-commerce sector on the continent?***

The last two years or so have been the most exciting times for the e-commerce market, with massive growth for all players in the e-commerce landscape. Whilst competition is always challenging, the exciting part about knowledge sharing and collaboration is that as one player grows, the whole market grows.

The more we can educate people on the benefits and convenience of shopping online, the better it is for the market. The more we all educate the public on safe secure shopping and handling of customers credit card details, the better it is for all e-commerce sites.

Ecom Africa returns to the CTICC in Cape Town from 4-5 May as a hybrid event, with two full days of in-depth keynotes, panel discussions, networking and live Q&A sessions. For more information and to purchase an Expo Pass or All-Access Pass conference ticket, visit the [Ecom Africa website](#). Bizcommunity is a proud media partner of the event.

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