

Practice generosity and camaraderie within the communications space

 By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

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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.



Lauren Shantall, Scout PR & Social Media director.

Lauren Shantall, Scout PR and Social Media director, shares her lockdown lessons and how Scout is navigating the lockdown in stages by keeping hope alive and preparing for the new normal.

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

Personally, I did not have any expectations, not in the Buddhist vein of avoiding disappointment by evading expectation, but rather because one does not know what to expect from the unknown. The South African government has been modelling some of its responses on how other countries have approached the pandemic, so it is possible to plot some of the passage of the pandemic here by looking at examples from elsewhere. Sadly, I did expect the government to move more rapidly to restore the economy, but e-commerce has thankfully now lifted and Level 3 appears in sight.

In terms of Scout's business response, we have moved into a period of high agility in terms of response time and turnaround. We had to revise all messaging in terms of tone and what was and what was not allowed under lockdown regulations.



#LockdownLessons: This is a golden opportunity

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Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your company or economy as a whole.

As part of Scout's client base is in the travel, tourism and hospitality industries, many of those clients have had to place our contracts on pause. This has obviously affected our income, staff and morale. Despite the blow to our business, we feel more for those clients in particular as their income has flatlined and it appears as though they will be the last permitted to return to trade. I am particularly proud of the team at Scout. We voted to all take pay cuts across the board, including at director level, rather than retrench anyone, and I believe this spirit of solidarity and support will not only get us through the crunch but is the kind of selfless, communal attitude that will aid in restoring our greater economy.

How is your company responding to the crisis?

Currently, we continue to work remotely. We are digitally-forward in terms of our internal organisation (and many of our services), and pre-lockdown all of our systems were online. We have thus had no negative impact due to working from home. In fact, we are thinking of surrendering our office space, as it has become redundant and we could use the money for Capex or to upskill our staff, or donate it to charity.

Comment on the challenges and opportunities.

Well, I believe we are inundated with running commentary on the challenges. I recently did a [podcast](#) on how to communicate in a crisis, which will be useful for anyone who wants tips on how to overcome them. In terms of new opportunities, we are responding to new wants. Clients who are taking services and product offerings online, and how best to communicate them in the aftermath of massive print collapses (Caxton, Associated).



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5 May 2020



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30 Apr 2020



How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned and your clients happy?

This is not an issue for us. We are all working remotely and client meetings and journalist interactions are all electronic and virtual.

Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of the industry in any way?

For the last 10 years, we have understood that the future of communications will sit in the digital and social media spheres and the crisis has accelerated this inevitability.

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

Yes, the predominance of video communication—webinars, live Insta interviews and so on—that allow for connection with

motion and emotional dimension.

■ **Your key message to those in the industry?**

“ Here at Scout, we would like to practice generosity and camaraderie within the communications space. We are happy to share our ideas and learnings or contribute opinions or views to other agencies and practitioners. Anything that can assist anyone through this time. We invite our colleagues to reach out should they feel our insights will be of value to them. ”

■ **What do you predict the next six months will be like?**

I see:

- Even firmer establishment of e-commerce.
- The normalisation of online learning.
- A deeper appreciation of resources.
- Careful consideration of household and corporate spend.
- Commitment to conscious brands that are purpose-led.
- Personal and spiritual re-evaluation.
- Committed attempts to mitigate against the mass poverty.
- Recalibration of the risk management and insurance industries.
- More empathetic banking (ok, maybe this one's wishful thinking).
- Milestone closures of industry titans.
- Nouveau opportunism as small businesses eke out a living.
- A new generation spawned thanks to pandemic pregnancies and children who, although they grow up in a world much altered, may choose to relegate this crisis to obscurity, the way the devastation caused by Spanish Flu was subsumed by the man-made devastation of World War I.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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