

# Mielie Mailer uses nature to help save the world



By Evan-Lee Courie

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#TheLockdownSeries explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on businesses, how they prepared for lockdown and its impacts on operations and employees, as well as lessons learned that we can take into the post-Covid-19 era.



"South Africa has ground to a halt - what this crisis has given us is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see ourselves and our country in the plainest of views - and it's been illuminating," says Trent Pike, founder of Mielie Mailer.

[Mielie Mailer](#) is a lifestyle-driven enterprise that seeks to help humans make better choices for themselves and for the planet. Their first solution comes in the form of a 100% compostable delivery sleeve which offsets the carbon footprint of any e-commerce delivery in South Africa. Pretty awesome, right?

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, Trent Pike, founder of Mielie Mailer, believes that after the nationwide lockdown, more courier companies should consider looking at sustainable alternatives.

Trent Pike shares with us what Mielie Mailer has been up to during the current crisis...

## ■ **How has Covid-19 impacted your business?**

Covid-19 has had a substantial impact on our day to day business operations. While there have been a few negative impacts such as a slow down in sales, stalled collaborations and thus a loss of income, there have also been a plethora of positive impacts.

Firstly, it's given us the time to slow down and reflect on what we have achieved and what we hope to achieve. As anyone running a fast-growing business can tell you, you're always behind on work. The extra time this lockdown has given us to focus on everything but, the mundane day-to-day activities of running a business has been a blessing.

## ■ **How did you prepare for the lockdown?**

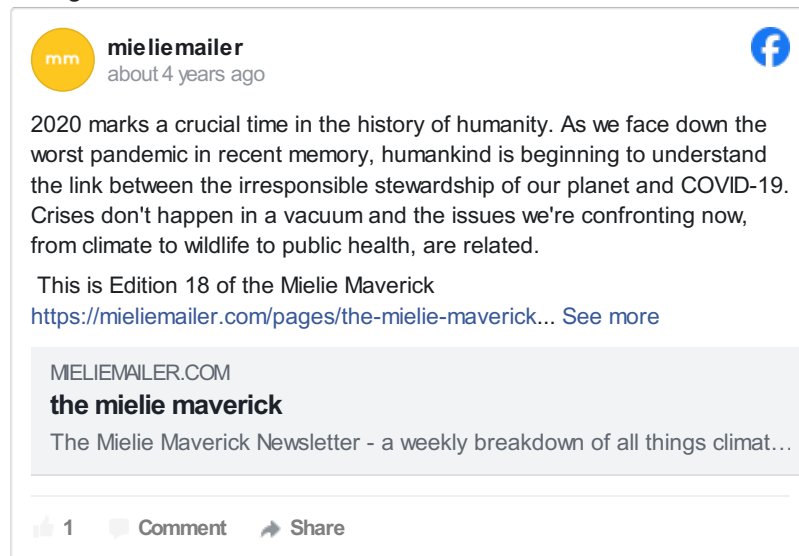
Preparation primarily took the form of packing up and securing our offices. We're based in Woodstock (Cape Town),

which experiences its fair share of crime. Because Woodstock is not a residential suburb, we can't rely on the presence of other people to deter crime.

When an area is essentially abandoned for weeks (and months) on end, criminals have free reign to methodically and without time constraint, indulge in criminal activities. Securing our location was thus a primary concern and formed the bulk of our preparation efforts.

### ▣ **What's the biggest challenge you are facing during this pandemic?**

The loss of urgency and the excuse for businesses to rescind on environmental pledges and action. We're in the business of creating sustainable alternatives to everyday, essential packaging items. Our products are often priced at a slight premium to pollution-causing, fossil-fuel-based alternatives. As such, we rely heavily on consumer sentiment to drive change.



As we have discovered since launch, not many businesses will choose sustainability and a healthier future over their bottom-lines and profit margins. It's incredibly short-sighted, but it is something that we've had to come to terms with. Thankfully, we've had consumers on our side, effectively forcing businesses to be better and to care about things other than profit. But with the world distracted by Covid-19, that consumer pressure has waned.

“ Our biggest challenge has thus been to continue the dialogue with businesses, continue to educate and continue to convince them that going sustainable is not only better from a planetary and humanistic point of view, but also from a profit perspective. ”

### ▣ **What sort of assistance will you need going forward?**

We are lucky enough not to need any assistance at this point.

### ▣ **If you are able to operate, What steps are you taking to continue operating?**

We continue to operate on the customer service, branding, content creation and marketing fronts. We're unable to make deliveries of sales or have face-to-face meetings. Thankfully, tools like Whereby.com (a brilliant video conferencing tool) exist and meetings continue to take place albeit in a different form.

■ **What measures have you put in place for your employees?**

We continue to pay our employees full salaries. We're more interested in looking after our stakeholders and people we have genuine and authentic relationships with, than having a bigger bank account.

■ **Are you communicating with your customers? If so, how?**

We're communicating through social media posts and email.

“ This is Edition 15 of the Mielie Maverick <https://t.co/dJMZPJkXH1#climatechange #globalwarming #climatestrike #climatecrisis #climatejustice #climateemergency #singleuseplastic #plasticpollution #plasticfree #compostablepackaging pic.twitter.com/8eBMu8Eu9n>— mielie mailer (@mieliemailer) [March 27, 2020](#) ”

■ **How are you offering assistance to your customers who rely on your services?**

Many companies who rely on our products are in the essential services industry. As such, they have free-reign to travel during this time. Our homes have become pick-up points for those who rely on our products for operation.

■ **What do you predict the next 6 months will be like?**

Six months would bring us to October this year. Regardless of whether we are facing the worst-case scenario (rampant infection, overwhelmed hospitals, a failing economy and a high death toll) or the best-case scenario (Covid-19 is contained, a fast-tracked vaccine is being widely used and the economy is recovering), the world in six months is not going to be a place we recognise.

At no other time, ever in our lives, have we gotten the opportunity to see what would happen if the world simply stopped. And that's bound to bring some profound change. Because what we are experiencing is rarer than rare, it has brought to the forefront of our consciousness some beautiful and painful truths of how we live.

“ What is happening is alien. We have no reference point to compare this to and so it's uncomfortable. ”

The next six months are going to thus be uncomfortable as we grapple with new ways to do business, new ways to manage our economy and new ways to manage our day-to-day lives.

I can't predict what the next 6-months will bring, but I do know that it's going to be uncomfortable. But, if we pay attention, it

will be a chance like no other to create a better country and a better world.

■ **Now is the time to innovate and experiment. What is Mielie Mailer doing?**

Right now, we're creating content for our newest product addition, our plastic-free bubble-wrap, which we are officially launching after lockdown. We've also been hard at work reducing customer pain-points.

“ We want to make it as easy as possible for businesses to make the decision to use sustainable packaging and then follow-through with that decision. ”

As such, we have been forging relationships with key players in our industry. When lockdown does end, our products are going to be readily available to everyone who wants them.

That being said, we strive to continually innovate and experiment. Only businesses operating with a sense of urgency, constantly evolving to meet customer demands and always open to new ways of doing things, are going to thrive in our more sustainable future.

■ **What has been your biggest lesson from all this?**

Personally, it's made me question why I do a lot of things. Coming from a position of privilege, I have the fortunate opportunity to grow spiritually from this experience.

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As mentioned, it has made me question why I do a lot of the things I do, and often finding no good reason other than 'just because' has empowered me to change. It's made me realise just how often our actions are at the mercy of environmental forces. It's made me think deeply about free-will.

We all like to think we are the master of our own fate and the captain of our own soul. However, we're often so busy mindlessly reacting to outside stimuli that instead of taking charge of life, we let life take charge of us. As a result, we often end up in places we don't want to be. Slowing down has let me consciously assess the state of my life and the direction I'm headed. It's been a great gift.

## ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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