

Virtual shopping with Under Armour

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

27 Jul 2020

When non-essential retailers were forced to temporarily shut their doors during South Africa's strict Level 5 lockdown, Apollo Brands, the distributor of Under Armour in SA, put the time to good use and developed a host of new methods to help customers shop safely during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Lorriane Cloete, head of marketing for Under Armour SA explains that soon after the nationwide lockdown was announced, [Apollo Brands MD Gareth Kemp](#) challenged the team to look at solutions to the new retail limitations set on South Africa and the world. The brief encouraged a quick turnaround and for the team to utilise existing business structures and tools.

The result of this brainstorm was [four new ways to shop](#) Under Armour: a private in-store shopping session, an at-home service in the comfort of one's own space, a corporate shopping experience using an Under Armour mobile store brought to one's office, and a personal virtual shopping consultation with an Under Armour retail assistant.

Under Armour South Africa was the first brand team to conceptualise and rollout these retail methods, and since the launch in May a few other markets have followed suit.



Apollo Brands revamps Under Armour retail offering during lockdown

26 May 2020



Online shopping versus virtual shopping

Apollo Brands also launched the anticipated Under Armour South Africa [online retail store](#) in May. At an [event earlier this year](#), the team announced plans to launch the local e-commerce platform in 2020, but the pandemic amplified the need for it and fast-tracked its development.

I was invited to try out the virtual shopping service recently, which gives the customer a one-on-one consultation with an in-store Under Armour retail assistant or ‘tech specialist’ using a video teleconference tool like Zoom. When I discovered the SA Under Armour online store had launched as well, I questioned whether there was a need for both.

However, it’s important to note that unlike run-of-the-mill apparel brands, Under Armour is hyper-focused on performance wear, so it’s valuable being able to engage with a specialist on the brand’s various textile technologies and the benefits they can provide athletes and fitness enthusiasts.

Cloete explains further, “Under Armour is a technical performance brand which means not only is it required to look good, but to make athletes (customers) perform better. This is critical in the purchase decision, and it can be very intimidating to a customer on what is the correct technical solution for their requirement.

“Our store staff are more than sales consultants, they are tech advisors and so virtual shopping facilitates this technical advice experience which is limited on an e-commerce platform. So, with virtual shopping, you get the service level of a full retail experience, but online.”



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Virtual shopping walkthrough

Under Armour’s virtual shopping service is booked via the [UA Bookings platform](#). Once selecting the ‘virtual shopping’ option, you choose your preferred Under Armour store, a date and a 30-minute time slot for your shopping session.

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VIRTUAL SHOPPING	PRIVATE STORE	SHOP @ HOME	SHOP @ WORK
LEARN MORE	LEARN MORE	LEARN MORE	LEARN MORE
Avoid browsing time in store and book a virtual walkthrough with a Tech Specialist who will assist you to select all the gear you need. All from the comfort of your couch. Sales can be collected from the store or collection points in the centre.	This is A VIP's dream come true: you can now book the entire store for your own shopping pleasure!	Armed with the greatest gear we have to offer, we'll despatch one of our Tech Specialists to your house for a personal shopping experience second to none.	Companies who really care about the well-being of their teams can now book our Mobile Shopping Unit to visit their offices for a tailored brand experience and the opportunity to purchase then and there.

[click to enlarge](#)

You then fill out an online form with some basic personal details including contact info and sizing, as well as your gear requirements. Are you looking for apparel or footwear focused on running, training, or another sport? If you’re in the market for running shoes, what sort of cushioning do you need? Do you prefer mid-rise or high-rise leggings? What about colour preferences? And price range? It’s beneficial to be as detailed as possible during this step.

Thirty minutes before your shopping session is due to begin, the Under Armour tech specialist will call you to confirm your requirements. Under Armour encourages customers to use Zoom for the consultation, but Microsoft Teams is also doable. The meeting link is sent through just before the session is about to begin.

Your tech specialist will be set up in store with a personalised, merchandised display of recommended gear based on your requirements, and they will talk you through each item to gauge your interest.

Currently, there's a R5,000 deposit to use the Under Armour virtual shopping service, which forms part of your purchase. That may sound like a handsome sum, but consider that the brand's suite of high-performance HOVR running shoes retail for between R2,000 and R3,000 and you'll realise R5k isn't difficult to spend.

Importantly, you're not obligated to spend the full amount during the session, and the balance will be loaded to a voucher for use at another time.



Under Armour V&A Waterfront

During my shop I gravitated towards some UA track pants and a pair of Charged Bandit Trail Running Shoes, which were then kept aside for me until the agreed upon collection date that coming weekend.

Purchases can be collected from the selected Under Armour store or from a designated collection point near the entrance of the relevant shopping centre.

Upon collection from the V&A Waterfront store in Cape Town, I was also told by the tech specialist assisting me that they're also willing to deliver virtual shopping purchases to one's car if they're told the location of one's parked car.

Any additional payments can be made with the tech specialist who'll be equipped with a mobile POS device, or the balance of your R5,000 deposit will be handed to you on a gift card.

Safe, personalised, human-centric

In review, Under Armour's virtual shopping service succeeds in delivering its main objective: reducing dwell time in store, thereby reducing the possibility of exposure to the virus, all while keeping the shopping experience personalised and human-centric – which is especially welcome during this time of isolation.

To avoid in-store collection it helps to have shopped from the brand before so that you have an understanding of your sizing. However, fitting on gear is permitted in store to quell any sizing concerns.



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One area that needed improvement, judging from my experience, is the quality and clarity associated with the webcam used, though the in-store lighting would have an effect here too. Things were a bit blurry so finer details on items of clothing and footwear were lost, even when they were held closer to the camera.

That said, Under Armour's virtual shopping feature is a simple, effective idea launched quickly. It's a solid base to work from and according to Under Armour SA's Lorrienne Cloete, that's exactly the plan.

“Speed to market really was the essential driving factor of this innovation ... There are many elements we will add to streamline and enhance the experience going forward. We look forward to launching the 2.0 and 3.0 version with all the bells and whistles,” she told Bizcommunity.

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