

The path forward for retail in 2021

 By [Matthew Leighton](#)

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A high-level look at how innovation and agility could reshape one of SA's juggernaut industries.



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Well thank goodness 2020 is in the rearview mirror. It doesn't matter who you are, where you live, or which *Star Wars* movie you think was the best, what you had planned for 2020 and what you actually achieved in 2020 were two completely different things.

And yet, in the most upside-down and unstable year in recent human history, certain trends have stood out as areas requiring focus and importance.

Some of these were borne out of the need for an immediate response to the pandemic (limiting numbers of in-store shoppers and social distancing went from alien concepts to the norm within just a couple of months) but others are socio-economic, and the disruption brought about by 2020 has served to push them further into the spotlight.



So what can retail stores do about this, and how can they forge a path forward in a climate as uncertain as the one we're currently experiencing?

1. Support local initiatives

The importance of supporting local businesses has been brought to the forefront by the economic impact of the pandemic. The series of events that led to an unavoidable lockdown meant that an overwhelming number of people lost a significant portion of their income.

This lack of cashflow – oversimplification notwithstanding – highlighted just why purchasing from local businesses is so necessary.

“ At a time where substantially less money is changing hands, it is imperative for the funds that do circulate to stay within, and stimulate, the South African economy. ”

To analyse this at a more granular level, the financial implication of the lockdown most drastically affected the smaller and independently-owned local businesses. This stands to reason, as these businesses simply don't have the capacity or resources to weather an extended amount of time out of operation.

For this reason, those within the retail industry with the means to extend support to small local businesses in need have a social responsibility to do so.

If the scale still needs more tipping (in other words, if your job title is chief financial officer), bigger brands should take pause before overlooking the value of offering consumers the opportunity to support small local businesses.



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2. Maintain focus on environmental sustainability

Credit where credit is very much due, many South African retail stores have made changes with carbon footprint reduction in mind – the option of paper or reusable carrier bags instead of plastic bags is a great example of this. This echoes the sentiments in the change of the consumer's mindset.

Though operational change doesn't come without costs, and often a fair amount of trial and error tactfully disguised by the

phrase "research and development", the retail industry stands to gain from continuing to invest efforts in achieving long-term sustainability.

3. Appeal to the consumer's sense of convenience

On the opposite side of the same coin that is Points One and Two, the retail industry should pay attention to the consumer's growing want for convenience.

A knock-on effect of the pandemic and lockdown was that many consumers turned to purchasing goods (both essential and non-essential) online. For some, the experience of shopping in store and being able to see and feel their purchases is preferable, but for many others it's not.

A strong argument can be made that many of the inconveniences of shopping – looking for a parking bay and paying the resultant tariff and standing in queues, all over and above making the trip to and from the store itself – can be avoided. To that end, the fact that delivery fees are a widely accepted thing indicates that people are willing to pay more for convenience.

Now more than ever, retailers should look to maximise the convenience factor of their shopping experience.



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4. Leverage underutilised touchpoints

In a way, this goes hand-in-hand with convenience. Marketing tactics and methodology changes constantly, and retailers need to keep their fingers perpetually on the pulse if they're able to successfully employ every marketing opportunity.

For the retail industry in particular, the current flavour of the week is curated video content.

“ Brands can benefit from harnessing the unparalleled power afforded by video marketing – which ranges from television right through to TikTok influencers – and use this to offer consumers a more well-rounded overall shopping experience. ”

Of course, the difference between video marketing and successful video marketing is gargantuan. Retailers need to ensure they understand the consumer's perception of their brand, and use this alongside data analysis to guarantee what they offer is relevant and appealing to their target market.

ABOUT MATTHEW LEIGHTON

Matthew Leighton is the Creative Director at OneDayOnly.

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