

5 lessons in adaptability entrepreneurs learned in 2020

While 2020 has been a tumultuous year for businesses around the world, those who have adopted swiftly agile business strategies to meet the changing economic landscape, have seen their businesses soar and were able to make a difference in their ledgers but, also as employment creators.

Here are some ideas which a few African entrepreneurs adopted to achieve the successes they saw in an otherwise grim year for most.



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1. Working from home is not the answer, a hybrid model is

It has become evidently clear that the novelty around working from home or, WFH as it is more commonly known, has started wearing off. Video calls are exhausting as many now long for face to face, human connection with the professionals in their teams. But with social distancing measures likely to remain in place for a while still, simply going back to the office is definitely not on the cards for anytime soon.

David Seinker, founder and CEO of The Business Exchange, believes the solution lies in a flexible, hybrid model that allows staff to work from the office on certain days of the week and remotely on others - as is offered by a serviced office

solution.

This model also offers significant benefits for companies concerned about being tied down by long, inflexible leases in the current fast-changing reality. Seinker explains: “If they choose the option of a flexible office and co-worker solution to pursue this hybrid approach, they will save on rental costs through more efficient usage of space, IT costs and the like which comes with a commitment to a long-term building lease or, building purchase.”

2. Now's not the time to cut back on marketing and advertising

In times of economic upheaval, it can be tempting to cut marketing and advertising spend. The internet as a whole, has received more traffic than it previously did, and with social distancing measures likely to remain in place for months to come, we can expect the online space to continue servicing key human needs such as being the meeting place for our virtual communities, providing us with a source of entertainment and, our 'office space'.

Shaune Jordaan, CEO of Hoorah Digital, believes that there has never been a more crucial time to get an aggressive and intentional digital marketing and advertising strategy in place.

“Reaching people is key, and where they're at presently is on the internet. I recommend using this time to build and cement a digital presence online. The starting point for this is in building relationships with clients in the digital space,” he says.



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3. Empathy

One of the most overlooked entrepreneurial attributes is empathy. 2020 has been a difficult year for the masses globally - the stresses the year has brought on has increased as we head into the festive period – most are struggling mentally and emotionally, with a good few of the population grieving personal loss coupled with financial uncertainty.

Entrepreneurs this year learned to listen to their staff and met with them on a personal level to gauge levels of mental health. This approach proved positive as the workplace has been reshuffled to allow for support systems and shared workloads versus pre-pandemic when the demands of the workplace were often shouldered by one person at best.

If you haven't adopted this approach as yet, it's not too late to reassess the culture of your business and make the necessary adjustments. The current global employee component has need of emotional safety, confidence and team support.

As a leader, you can demonstrate this through keeping the communication lines open - hear your staff out and offer sound advice to formulate solutions. Well looked after employees return this level of attention with company loyalty and great work.

During national lockdown earlier this year, SweepSouth showed huge support to the domestic workers using their platform for earning opportunities, by launching a fund to help provide food and other basic essentials. With most domestic cleaners (over 70%) single mothers, and many (over 80%) primary breadwinners, SweepSouth co-founder and CEO, Aisha Pandor appealed to the public for help so that these SweepStars and their children wouldn't face worsening poverty and debt.

With around R4m a month needed to ensure SweepStars and their families would be able to eat and provide day-to-day living essentials, SweepSouth themselves seeded the fund, and secured a R6m contribution from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. The response from the public was extremely positive, with over 40% of customers continuing to provide to SweepStars, and making extra financial contributions.

4. Pivot

Most businesses will have to pivot their offering in one way or another, which presents a huge opportunity for those who can think out the box. Entrepreneurs and business owners must now come up with new products and fresh innovations to ensure they remain relevant. This process starts with closely examining the marketplace to understand the gaps and find innovative ways to fill these.

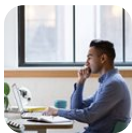
Yebo Fresh adopted this approach during the height of lockdown. Pre-2020, their main focus was on delivering groceries and other household essentials to private homes in Cape Town townships, but the pandemic saw them having to pivot their operations in order to stay afloat.

“During the months of April to July, we worked together with many community action networks and NGOs to ensure that people living in destitute conditions were able to have at least a warm meal every day. We went from a small company delivering a few hundred orders a month, to processing over a thousand orders a day,” says founder and CEO Jessica Boonstra. “It made us realise very quickly how resilient and adaptable one has to be in order to ensure the sustainability of an organisation.”

Yebo Fresh was able to deliver over 85 000 food parcels to people in need during the initial lockdown, and since regulations have been relaxed, they have still managed to maintain the relationships they formed with community organisations.

5. Resilience

To say that Covid-19 has been disruptive is one huge understatement. But disruption, particularly for an entrepreneur, isn't necessarily a bad thing as it forces them to find ways to meet growing demands which would not otherwise have been considered.



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Lee Naik 11 Nov 2020



“Resilience may not be quantifiable but it is that all-important characteristic that is almost inherent to an entrepreneur - this characteristic is what keeps us moving forward, by finding ways to keep the business afloat and grow whilst achieving this momentum,” says Philani Sangweni, managing partner, Entrepreneurs for Entrepreneurs Africa.

He adds that this year has highlighted the importance of resilience, and demonstrated that making it through tough times is as important a marker of a successful business as being able to ride high when times are good.

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