

# Lessons from doing business 2020 style. Is it still relevant?

By [Burt Rodrigues](#)

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This time a year ago no-one was prepared for what would become of our working lives. Working from home, continuous Zoom meetings from, constant mask wearing and sanitising - and many businesses being forced to close their doors, some permanently. So what have we learned from the past year?



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## Working remotely has mixed benefits

What were considered dirty words a year ago, 'working from home' has become the status quo for many organisations. It has not always proven as effective or as highly productive as we thought at the start. While many employers were initially frightened their staff would skive off if they weren't at their normal desks, it's been found that with fewer colleague interruptions during the day and no travel time, in some cases work output has increased. But in other cases these interruptions have been replaced with online meeting fatigue (from 07:00 to 19:00 - with one merging into the next), stresses around juggling kids, schooling, load shedding (South Africa), internet connectivity issues and isolation, sometimes leading to clinical depression.



### 3 business lessons 2020 taught us

Jason Mellow 15 Jan 2021



While it's highly unlikely things will go back to pre-Covid days, some major South African companies are rightly or wrongly permanently closing large amounts of office space. In South Africa, with high levels of inequality, expecting people to work from a home office can be another form of discrimination – not everyone has dedicated space or infrastructure at home to be able to work comfortably or effectively.

Remote working fits in with his way of doing business. At Biodx, we don't have a hierarchical system. There are no managers or deputy managers. Everyone has a specific job to do and is expected to meet their goals, whether they're working in the office or remotely. I feel my way of managing a company is finally being listened to. I expect each employee to treat their job as though they're running their own business, using their own timetable. But what's interesting, is that most come to the office every day anyway.

Companies have had to relook at how they do things, with many now looking at the New Zealand model of working fewer days per week or incorporating Fridays into the weekend.

## **E-commerce and innovations**

2020 was the year that saw e-commerce really come into its own with a worldwide spike of around 50%. For industries such as the hospitality and events sector, innovation was the key, with many quickly devising different ways to reach their clients. It was also a year for entrepreneurial spirit – thinking about solutions people needed and making them happen.

## **The year of online meetings and get-togethers**

Those weekend drinks and family dinners online may have died down but online meetings are still very much a reality and one thing we have learned is a certain amount of etiquette here. Like making sure you know when to press the mute and video buttons. And of course trying to keep kids and animals firmly locked out of your home office, not to mention checking who used your computer directly before you, as in the cat filter that saw an American lawyer presenting a case to a judge this week talking through a cat's face. Luckily the judge knew immediately what was going on and had a good sense of humour. Others have not been so lucky and have been caught out doing slightly more unsavoury things on camera.

## **Online etiquette**

Now we all know it's very tempting to stay in your PJ's all day when working from home but don't let professionalism go completely. How would you normally dress when you're meeting clients or having a board meeting? It shouldn't be any different for an online meeting – at least from the waist up and for ladies make up and a bit of jewellery won't just look good but make you feel good also – even just for a little while.

A great tip from US fashion designer Tom Ford is to put the computer up on a stack of books so the camera is slightly higher than your head. Then point it down into your eyes, and put a tall lamp next to the computer on your 'best side'.

## **Controlling the meeting**

A problem many people have found is different people wanting to talk at once or one person dominating the conversation and at the end of an hour very little has been decided. So a good idea is to arrange a shorter meeting with a firm agenda which everyone has beforehand, and stick to this. One expert suggests calling people out by name so they know you're addressing them and that way everyone gets to be heard. A UK farmer has even offered to lend out his goats to sit in on meetings to make sure everyone is 'paying attention' during the call.

We now have to not just look at changing the way we do things but to find ways to rebuild and reshape our economy. Resilience and innovation are the keys to success.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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