

Lockdown-inspired digital innovations are here to stay

The impact of the Covid-19 has been hard felt by businesses in the service industry. Local movements have been used to demonstrate the effect the nationwide lockdown has had on the various industries.



Jonathan Smit, founder and MD of PayFast

The new normal, set in place by the pandemic, has presented a unique set of challenges for industries that rely heavily on in-person interaction. As a result, many have had to innovate digitally to survive.

Online payment gateway PayFast has registered over 17,000 new merchants since the start of lockdown in March, far surpassing any of their peak periods to date.

“As providers of online payment solutions, we play a crucial role as e-commerce enablers for local businesses. We want to see businesses succeed as they did before the pandemic,” says Jonathan Smit, founder and MD of PayFast.

The payment solutions company has seen a 160% increase in business account registrations compared to the same period pre-lockdown. “For many businesses that had previously relied on selling their products or services in person, accepting online payments has been a significant help in digitising their business models and offerings,” says Smit.

Here are some digital innovations that are here to stay:

1. **Host classes and online events:** while nothing can ever fully replace human contact, a number of industries have innovated by quickly adapting to online alternatives to deal with the lockdown restrictions.

For example, fitness instructors have been offering online classes to their existing customer base, and have also tapped into a new client base looking for more time-efficient and flexible exercise classes.

The same applies to other industries like events, with people engaging in online quiz nights, concerts and webinars during their downtime. Online ticketing platforms were quick to cater to this new online demand by offering online booking and payment for pay-gated live streams and recordings.

2. **DIY/home-based services:** in response to previous lockdown restrictions some hairdressers were quick to adapt by selling at-home root touch up kits and even took virtual hair appointments where they talked clients through the process. The restaurant industry also brought fine dining into the homes of their customers by offering take out and delivery services in addition to finish-at-home meals, paired with online classes for customers to cook along to.

Although restaurants and beauty salons are able to operate again, those that pivoted their business models to incorporate an online offering now stand to benefit from an additional revenue stream over and above their pre-lockdown income.

3. **Contactless payment solutions:** in response to the pandemic, contactless payment options have been the preferred option for the majority of South Africans, with retail spaces being quick to offer payment options at their physical store checkout, in addition to selling their goods on their e-commerce store with an online payment gateway. Even charities have also benefited through online donations.

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