

Collaborate and communicate, says Apollo Brands' Gareth Kemp

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.



As managing director of Apollo Brands, the official distributor of Under Armour in South Africa, Gareth Kemp is responsible for keeping the company's wheels turning, a job description perhaps all the more challenging during a global pandemic.

Under Armour's popular athletic apparel is sold in over 200 sports retailers throughout South Africa, and Apollo Brands has been steadily growing the footprint of Under Armour standalone stores in the country since 2016.

Of course, South Africa's level five lockdown regulations called for a complete shutdown of the rag trade (other than for baby goods and PPE), but Kemp maintains he's been busier than ever.

Here's how he's maintained some semblance of order during lockdown – in life and business – and what his thoughts are on what lies ahead for retail post-Covid-19.

■ **To kick things off, what was Apollo Brands' initial response to the Covid-19 crisis, and how has the lockdown affected your operations both as an Under Armour distributor and retailer?**

With such a new virus, the global medical fraternity didn't have much information about this disease, so our initial concern was the safety of our employees and our families. We have had to learn quickly how to be efficient on VC tools to continue being collaborative and communicate efficiently both with our teams locally and with our suppliers.

Our business is in a complete lockdown at the moment, we are eager to get back to work, start trading and building our business again.

■ **Walk us through your typical work day under lockdown right now.**

One would think that I have experienced a slowdown in my day, but in fact, I've been busier.

“ We are having to stay very fluid in times like this and communicate regularly so everyone is aware of how we are reacting to this situation. ”

After getting up in the morning I try to do some exercise in, feed the kids and check my diary to prepare for the day. My work day starts around 8am and is quite jam-packed with phone calls and VC calls till 5/6pm. I try to switch off a bit after this to spend some time with the family, contribute to cooking and doing some chores.

There is the added complication of also trying to home-school 3 young boys, so we are extremely grateful to have access to technology to help our kids continue their school year.



Kemp and team at the Apollo Brands HQ pre-lockdown.

■ ***How is Apollo Brands navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned and your clients happy?***

It isn't easy and I am really looking forward to the day when we can all be in the same office again doing what we do best, but for now we are using digital tools to stay in touch. It has been a lot better than expected, but obviously not ideal.

We are not an essential item, so we are unable to sell our world-class performance apparel, accessories and footwear to our customers and athletes. We will hopefully be able to do this soon, but for now we are engaging with our consumers through all possible marketing channels to motivate and inspire our community to stay strong and healthy.

■ ***What do you predict the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will be on SA's clothing retail industry?***

This is a very difficult question, but without a doubt, the impact is massive and will be far-reaching!

“ It will take our industry years to recover and to get back to where we were before this pandemic hit, and this is only possible if all stakeholders in our industry work together and collaborate to find solutions to the crisis we all find ourselves in. ”

Without this, there will be many casualties along the way.

■ ***With lockdown restrictions firmly in place, how are you maintaining the elusive 'work-life balance'?***

What is that?

Just kidding. It's easy to slot into a rhythm where there are no boundaries and one day blurs into the next, but it is very important that one develops a routine and sticks to it.

Set an alarm, get up in time to do what you need to in the morning, be productive in the day and then invest some time in yourself and or your family. I think it's a bit easier having kids as they are aware of my routine and they simply don't allow me to run overtime :)



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■ Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of retail in any way? Any opportunities you think will emerge as a result?

Absolutely, retail will definitely change into the future, how exactly no one can honestly say, but whatever it is, we need to be proactive and quickly adaptable, those that are able to do so will be more successful.

“ One thing that is certain for me is the relevance of technology being extremely important in our lives and e-commerce becoming more of a contributor to global and local retail. ”

■ To conclude, do you have any encouraging words for industry peers navigating business during these uncertain times?

There is a lot of uncertainty at this time and it is pointless to try to sugarcoat the situation we find ourselves in. We have been thrown the biggest challenge of our working careers, we have the opportunity to rise up and meet these challenges, adapt and find a way through this storm, and when we are successful, the time will come to celebrate once again.

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