

How to adapt to the 'new normal'

As many small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa reel from the financial repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, it is important that they embrace technologies that will help them overcome current challenges and ready themselves for a 'new normal'.



Bridget du Toit, Head of Services at EasyBiz Technologies

From video conferencing tools such as Skype, Zoom and Google Hangouts, to cloud computing networks and servers such as Google's G Suite, business owners can access and collaborate on documents and projects remotely and in real-time. And these are a mere drop in the ocean when it comes to the many digital tools available to SMEs.

Bridget du Toit of EasyBiz Technologies says the digitisation of advertising and marketing channels presents an enormous opportunity for businesses.

"It is not business as usual. We don't know if the lockdown will be extended again or if there will be future lockdowns. The economy has been irrevocably changed by Covid-19 and SMEs need to find long-term solutions to negotiating the way forward for their operations."

Du Toit points to digital and online marketing as essential tools for doing business today and highlights five measures SMEs should consider when planning to market themselves online.

Keep websites relevant

SMEs that don't have the time and skills to look after their websites should consider enlisting the services of an expert to take care of things like search engine optimisation (SEO), which is the process of attracting organic, or un-paid, traffic from the search engine results page.

If an SME hasn't employed someone to look after its websites, it needs to make sure the information is up to date, relevant and reaching the right market. With isolation and social distancing inhibiting travel and personal interactions, having an online store to conduct business is a necessity.

SMEs that are not in essential services should make sure that the messaging on the landing page of their websites alerts customers to specials and their delivery commitments once lockdown has been lifted.

Run specials

The greatest concern for small businesses right now is money. This is why it is prudent for those in the non-essential services game to run specials while in lockdown to encourage people to place orders now. This will assist in ensuring some cashflow for the business.

Du Toit says it might be a good idea for small businesses to strigate their databases and send specialised messages to different customer groupings. "SME's can consider putting specific offerings together for businesses that haven't bought from them in two years and different specials to those who conduct business with them on a regular basis, rewarding them for their loyalty.

"People love a special. SMEs need to get clever with their marketing. Injecting some humour into the situation can also help. There are many options such as offering 'buy one now, get one free' specials. Importantly, if their offerings are non-essential, small businesses need to assure their customers that the services or products will be delivered as soon as lockdown has been lifted."

Social media marketing

Du Toit says more than ever people have time to engage with social media now. "Being stuck at home means there is more time to scroll through Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. If ever there was a time to put blogs on LinkedIn or to start advertising on Instagram, it is now.

"Businesses that have done something special during this time, like donating hand sanitiser or starting a soup kitchen, this is the time to promote it. There is a trend towards companies that care. This is a time where great leadership is being honoured and goodwill acknowledged."

Email marketing

Businesses want their customers to remember them. "At the moment, people have time to read their emails. It's a good idea to consider sending messages that keep their brand top of mind, whether it's a motivational message or a snippet on current trends relating to what they offer. Messages should be succinct and not overly sales oriented. For example, a

business that offers beauty treatments could send clients tips on how to keep their skin healthy during lockdown,” says du Toit.

With South Africa downgraded by Moody’s and battling the Covid-19 virus, du Toit says many business owners are not feeling optimistic. “It is, however, important to acknowledge the positives. For the first time ever, the world is united in a common goal, banks have come to the party by dropping bases points, landlords are offering rent relief. It’s important to harness these opportunities.

“We know that ‘this too shall pass’, but life will probably not return to ‘normal’ as we know it. Covid-19 is most likely the start of a new normal. If this is the case, we need to adjust to it now. This means not making quick fixes, but coming up with long-term fixes that will ensure business and economic sustainability into the future,” concludes du Toit.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>