

The solopreneur has entered the mainstream

By [Colleen Mansour](#)

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Eight years ago, a US company operating in the changing workforce space, specialising in talent and management within the 'independent economy', released a research report titled *State of Independence in America*. They predicted that by 2019, there would be 40 million independent workers in the US.



Colleen Mansour, chief operating officer of XtraSpace Self Storage

Fast forward to 2019, and MBO Partner's new report revealed that 41 million Americans were building businesses either full-time or as 'side gigs' to boost their incomes.

These 41 million people, many of them 'solopreneurs' (an entrepreneur who prefers the freedom to run a business without any employees, according to the Solopreneur Institute), "are a powerful economic force, generating \$1.28 trillion of revenue for the US economy last year", it reported. "Even amidst record low unemployment and the strongest jobs market in decades, independent work remains a viable and desirable career path."

They are consultants, freelancers, on-call workers, contractors, and solopreneurs...

The rising power and presence of millennials

It's a fact that globally, ways of working are changing, driven by necessity in many cases after the global economic downturn of 2008/2009, by massive innovations in technology and of course, the coming of age of Millennials and Generation Z, digital natives who demand more flexibility and autonomy in the way they work, as well as Generation X wanting a degree of independence in how and when they work.

And everyone needs more money, so it's not surprising that the numbers of 'side hustlers' have risen. MBO Partners reported that in 2019, these "occasional independents" rose in ranks 6.3% to 15 million.

"These shifts are influenced by the rising power and presence of Millennials," the report noted. "With each passing month, Millennials account for a larger share of the workforce. And just as with consumption, popular culture, and leisure, their habits and characteristics are shaping the workforce. Millennials are digital natives, people who came of financial and economic age after the recession, and who are more comfortable with social media and technology."

Added to this is the fact that companies are developing a greater tolerance for and reliance on independent workers. These independents are "reaping the benefits of working in an increasingly networked world".

As mentioned earlier, the rise of the solopreneur has been enabled by technological innovation, grounded in internet access, a laptop and a smartphone. Setting up a basic website using a platform such as Wordpress delivers a 'storefront', while social media gives any number of direct sales opportunities and the ability to connect to networks of people, potential clients and customers. Whereas 15 years ago or so, these tools cost a fortune, nowadays, they are affordable.

The rise of coworking spaces

If there are any drawbacks, one of the main ones is that the life of a solopreneur can be lonely. But the growing number of coworking spaces around the world – the annual Deskmag survey found almost 2.2 million people are expected to work in over 22,000 coworking spaces worldwide by the end of 2019 – this too has benefitted the solopreneur in more ways than simply having company during the working day (and night, for many solopreneurs!)

Coworking allows solopreneurs to separate work from their personal life, while giving them a community that offers networking opportunities. Most have boardrooms or meeting spaces in which to meet clients, and many are in upmarket locations that would normally be unaffordable for one-man (woman) businesses.

Speaking to solopreneurs, it is evident that the choice to work this way has benefits other than flexibility and growing ones income. Some say their skill sets have expanded as they have to solve problems for themselves, a growing and empowering experience for most.

There is also the fact that they are not responsible for employees, which can be liberating. They are more productive without having to sit in endless meetings or writing reports, and are able to concentrate on what their business requires, not somebody else's. They are agile, able to respond quickly to issues or requests or a required change in strategy. They are the brand, the person responsible for their public face.

With South Africa's economy being as shaky as it is, and with the workplace changing as much as it is, it is more than likely that like the US, we will experience an upsurge in solopreneurs. Going solo can be scary, but also liberating.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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