

Uncharted waters: Our new normal and adjusting to it

 By Brian Eagar

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All organisations (businesses, companies, non-profit organisations and more) have been dealt a tough blow this year. None of us expected what 2020 had in store for us, but we all adapted (or didn't) differently. At the same time, the new normal has meant different things for different people and for different organisations, therefore reinforcing different responses to it. The truth is that it has impacted many more aspects of our lives than we had anticipated - family lives, work lives and social lives. Let's look at just a few ways in which working and leading were impacted.



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Sinking

Certain sectors were obviously hit harder than others during the various lockdown levels – think of those such as restaurants, gyms and nurseries that were without any income for a long period. Although there was some assistance thanks to TERS and rent relief, this simply wasn't enough for everyone.

Some leaders could have chosen or been forced to give up, and many did: “We will never survive this financially.” “We can't adapt to what has been thrown at us.” “Sorry all – this just isn't financially viable anymore.” Many were forced to close or to file for business rescue. Brands such as Associated Media and Edcon are well-known examples. While their demise was not necessarily due to Covid-19 alone, it could be considered the proverbial nail in the coffin.

No doubt that we will hear of many more in the coming months.

Floating

Other leaders did what they needed to do to keep afloat (or treading water at least) and alive in the minds of consumers.

With the alcohol industry hit particularly badly, producers really needed to think outside of the (wine) box. Deetlefs is a great example of this. They introduced [virtual tastings](#) which included having a selection of wines delivered to your door (when allowed of course) at 50% discount and a link to a Zoom session to explore the different wines with a Deetlefs team member.

[Reach For A Dream](#) relies heavily on its Slipper Day fundraiser to enable the organisation to keep fulfilling the dreams of children with life-threatening illnesses. As this usually takes place in May (and is heavily supported by schools which were then closed), they had to adapt their event to a virtual version with support from one of the organisation's retailer partners. Virtual Slipper Week was held in August with much fanfare and support from all walks of life.

Skiing

Launched shortly before the onset of Covid-19, [Checkers Sixty60 has been a great success](#). With food delivered to your door within 60 minutes from placing your order, they not only helped with flattening the curve thanks to fewer of their customers doing their shopping in-store, but they saw phenomenal increases in sales. They were kept so busy while in the thick of it that at one point they were able to provide only same-day delivery. They also gave back by not charging for delivery for a large part of lockdown.

Andrea Foulkes and the team at [Dish Food & Social](#) are used to catering for large-scale, upmarket events. Suddenly they found themselves unable to cater for such events at all. They had to think quickly. They introduced daily cooked meals which they delivered to people's homes. They were very soon inundated with orders from across the peninsula and have not looked back. The menu grows on an almost weekly basis and they had event meals e.g. Father's Day, Christmas in July and Heritage Day. Some people even made use of them for Zoom-based lockdown birthdays. Foulkes says that while she didn't think they would ever do home deliveries of meals, she now cannot imagine not doing it. Their business has grown from strength to strength thanks to their new way of working. And they have gained large amounts of new loyal clients.

There is no doubt that the learnings from this time will be carried forward for many years. While the latter examples obviously had advantages over the others in terms of being able to operate during more lockdown levels, their leaders thought innovatively, acted with agility and communicated openly. The result? Team members who bought into the reason for what they were doing and why things had to be done differently. Leaders who provided clarity and certainty in a time of uncertainty successfully navigated these uncharted waters. As it has been said: *In the face of adversity, those with resolve stand tall.*

If we can all do this, we will certainly see a change for the better.

ABOUT BRIAN EAGAR

Brian Eagar is the founder and group CEO of TowerStone. From being voted as the naughtiest kid most likely to fail at school, Eagar found success in the information and technology sector as a young sales and marketing executive, culminating in an executive sales and strategy role for one of the Siemens businesses based in Germany. On his return to South Africa, his passion to inspire leadership led to the creation of TowerStone Leadership Centre in 2006.

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