



EVENTS INDUSTRY PREDICTIONS POST COVID-19

As the world welcomed in the new year, 2020 was optimistically called 20-Plenty. It was going to be a year of opportunity and bountifulness. Who could have predicted that the pneumonia-like outbreak in Wuhan, China, that was reported to the WHO on 3 January would bring the world to a screeching halt? Who knew that the world as we knew it, would not be the same again for a very long time – if ever?

In an effort to contain the virus and prepare medical facilities, the South African government declared a state of national disaster and the country went into a hard lockdown on 21 March. Fear and uncertainty were felt by many and the economy came to a grinding halt.

In South Africa, the events and entertainment industries are without doubt some of the most affected, as most of the industries are made up of freelancers who are not able to benefit from UIF. No work, no pay. In the lockdown levels proposed by government, live events can only kick in from level 1 (and even then, with restrictions).

The Openfield Insightopedia team have conducted a dipstick survey to find out how people and businesses have dealt with the coronavirus pandemic and what their thoughts are on how the industry will bounce back on the other side.



While many initially used lockdown as an opportunity to refocus and reinvent, the reality is that the lockdown has killed many small and large businesses. One only has to look at the auction sites where many décor companies are trying to liquidate their assets. Of course, the biggest casualty in all of this

are the people. Branding and Event Support company ADD-X CEO Eben Human shares, "As with so many others, we are going through our fair share of hardships. We have cut salaries to the bone, we have retrenched employees and good friends, and have even cut out the good old cup of coffee around the office. Too many good partners, suppliers and friends have already closed their doors."

Wynand du Plessis and the team from Extreem Kwizeen event caterers in Cape Town, while also hugely negatively impacted stepped up to help the hungry event industry colleagues with daily soup portions. This has since grown to include anybody who is in need of a warm meal and to date have fed 757 080 grateful people.

The lockdown has also brought some opportunities to the fore. DJ Luis Almeda says, "Partying on live streams are novel initially but the novelty eventually wears off. There is an upside to this though. In terms of advertising and reach, live streaming is the way to go, you have the world as your base, it's no longer just SA, so yes, I see it as a window of opportunity going forward. I have tried advertising on my live streams and my reach has been incredible." For an artist though, the downside is that copyrights come into play as material is readily available and owners need to be on guard to prevent any infringements.

David Sidenberg, CEO of BMi Sport Info and SS Network shares, "in this lockdown, with no fans at the stadium and corporate hospitality (as we know it) on the backburner, technology and content delivery have taken centre stage in terms of connecting with consumers and enhancing the fan experience. We are in an era where a fantastic piece of shareable content is just as likely to come from a brand as it is a media network. There is no reason why that short video featuring a celebrity, athlete or team that people are sharing should not be coming from the brands they love. Digital activations and improved storytelling, largely through increased player access, has to varying degrees been embraced by pro-active rights-holders keen to retain their existing partners. However, in my opinion, more still needs to be done, especially here in South Africa.

Arguably, even for those getting it right, what's still required is a far more collaborative approach involving partnership with all key stakeholders, and ultimately with the fans in mind."

However, if investing in digital content, Rozanne McKenzie of Rozanne McKenzie Media cautions that the production value of filmed inserts needs to be excellent to keep people watching and engaged.



Seseki Itsweng, MD of Openfield Marketing is of the opinion that COVID-19 will still impact our industry greatly, as we are seen as "nice to have" and the industry is often taken for granted. Says Itsweng, "The impact of the sporting, eventing and sponsorship industry is far reaching – think about how many international tourists visit Cape Town during December to attend the Cape Town 7s. They don't only come to the stadium, but they are staying somewhere, they then generally stay in SA for at least a week, generating an income for other industries. All that is gone. The knock-on effect is huge. No fans at the stadium equals no car guards. It also extends to the vendors inside the stadium, who are now unable to produce and sell food, memorabilia and other items. No fans mean's no need to go to Greenpoint for the majority of usual attendees and that means all those restaurants in town, Sea Point and Greenpoint do not have the usual volume of customers – the waiters suffer. The impact is massive. It is not anything that we can change, but I do wish those who make the decisions do not undervalue the contribution our industry makes to the economy and general state of the country."

The overwhelming feedback however is that we are social beings and while the virtual world has been

fun, it will never replace live events. Sylvia Brummer, a freelance event specialist shared her thoughts. "I don't believe that virtual events on their own are sustainable and that we will in future see a hybrid emerging which will include live events with digital components. People still yearn for the human touch and although networking is possible within a virtual space, it's not ideal. In other words, where live events and virtual events were previously very distanced, I see the gap narrowing with loads of interactive digital elements within live events and even personalised content to specific audience segments or individuals."



This is supported by Lucilla Booyzen, Founder of SA Fashion Week. "Let's face it, no video production can surpass the excitement, electricity and immediacy of a live performance. COVID-19 has forced industry players to rethink how the fashion collections can be shown so as to capture the excitement of the shows while effectively displaying the designs to buyers, agents and the public alike. The advantages around the virtual event hinges around the positives of reaching a much wider audience, thus giving sponsors wider reach and designers, huge exposure. After COVID-19 is over and we will be able to return to live events, the takeaway of the post-COVID era will be a combination of the live with the virtual. It will take the designer led fashion industry into a totally new place."

But the hosting of live events will come with their own challenges and additional costs. These include the compliance to post-COVID-19 protocols (provision of hand sanitisers and handwashing stations, reduced capacity and social distancing), and increased public liability insurance. Jannie du Plooy of Bodyguard Tourism Services says, "live events may be smaller in attendance - health and safety officers will now play an important role at future live events in consulting & advising event coordinators, and enforcing strict measures around crowd control and safety. Live Event Protection will see the implementation of digital screening measurements in the forefront whilst virtual events, will enforce stricter and more broad-based cyber security analytics to prevent vulnerabilities in critical infrastructures."

To end on a positive note, Jaco Beukes CEO of SAIL says, "I believe that the events and entertainment industry will certainly have a much longer lag on recovery than most other industries, however, I am confident that it will recover, albeit with a bit of a "face lift", made up of scars from C19 and the ability to adapt through innovation and creativity. In the long term the "new normal" will look different but not as different as people want to believe"

The events and entertainment industries, and the people who work them, have always been resilient. The pool of partners and suppliers may have significantly decreased, but like a phoenix, we will rise from the ashes and conquer again.

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