

Looking back on a year of lockdown

By [Gerrit van Loo](#), issued by [Heineken South Africa](#)

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This time, exactly one year ago, none of us could have imagined just how dramatically our world would change. The arrival of Covid-19 in South Africa was met with an announcement by the national government that the country would be locked down on 28 March 2020, initially for a period of 21 days. Businesses were closed, people were confined to their homes - many without any income - and alcohol and cigarette sales were banned.



Photo by Allec Gomes on Unsplash

It was a dark time for South Africa. And while most of us appreciated the fact that lockdown was protecting our health, we had no idea that the challenges we were facing, as individuals and businesses, would still exist a year later.

As we approach the one-year 'anniversary' of that first day of South Africa's hard lockdown, it's a good time to look back at these challenges, especially the one that has had the most impact on our industry, our business and people, namely the alcohol bans.

The various alcohol sales restrictions have meant that alcohol manufacturers including Heineken South Africa have lost a total of 19 weeks of sales and production over the past year. That's almost five full months out of the last 12 that we were unable to generate an income, not to mention the massive impact of disrupted production and exports.

Recent research shows that these bans cost the alcohol industry overall around 30% of its sales opportunities in 2020, worth an estimated R36.3bn. This cost the SA economy over R59bn and, perhaps most worrying of all, it placed over 200,000 jobs at risk. We were not insulated from these employment challenges, and we had to retrench some of our valued employees. This was obviously a very difficult action to take, but it was unavoidable in the circumstances.

While all of this paints a bleak picture of a very difficult year for our industry, as we commemorate day one of the first lockdown on 28 March 2020, we can also celebrate the strength, resilience and pure grit of our company and its people. Yes, it's been a very tough 12 months. And we have no way of knowing what further challenges await us in 2021. But we're still producing winning products and, thanks to your hard work and commitment, we're on track to grow once more.

It is clear the virus is not going to disappear and we have to vaccinate ourselves out of this situation. But for the moment, we celebrate being able to gradually return to the workplace.

About Heineken South Africa:

Heineken South Africa is a key player in the beer and cider industry in the country, with an impressive portfolio of brands, including Heineken®, Sol, Desperados, Windhoek, Miller Genuine Draft, Amstel, Strongbow, Fox, Soweto Gold, and Tafel. Heineken South Africa is a joint venture between Heineken N.V. and Namibia Breweries.

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