

Brands and businesses can keep evolving in a changing world

As part of their ongoing efforts to help South African SMEs navigate the post-pandemic "Great Staggering" back into the new post-normal, post-lockdown world, Bronwyn Williams, partner at Flux Trends, interviewed Bradley Kirshenbaum, at the Alinea Retail Master Class to find out about future retail trends.



Bradley Kirshenbaum is a Johannesburg-based creative professional, known for his collaborations with Market on Main and Black Coffee, who has vast experience in the advertising and marketing industry. In 2005, he created a stylised graphic of Johannesburg's skyline which launched the Love Jozi brand.

Love Jozi started as a side hustle then got registered as a business in 2008 and extended into select gift and product ranges and design services. As such, Kirshenbaum is the perfect person to ask about re-inventing - pivoting and pirouetting - a creative retail business to keep up with the changing environment.

■ **You must pivot your business model numerous times over the years. Most recently, you have migrated to a fully online presence for the first time. Was this in response to the Covid-19 crisis? Or was this something that you have been planning to do for some time?**

Covid-19 and the lockdown was the catalyst for something that we have been planning on doing, but just had not quite gotten there yet.

Since we started retailing both of our brands - Love Jozi and Black Coffee - together in 2009 we've always had different retail stores, and we've moved from different kinds of retail centres many times over - but we've never been in a mall or a mainstream brand - we've been on the fringe of the retail, and fashion and design scene. And that is always where we invested our, our time and our energy. But, over the last, say, year or two, we really were questioning the brick and mortar idea.

“ *The retail industry has taken many hits, and we were aware of how we had to strengthen our online presence.* **”**

At that time only Love Jozi was available online, and the online offer was quite secondary, we had to focus our time and our energy and our work into the physical store.

But after lockdowns happened, we made the decision in April 2020 to take the plunge and accelerate the process of developing that online store.

The change in our dynamic and the products we are selling, and the relationships we have with the clients has been quite profound.

■ One of the trends we have noticed is that as much as lockdown has been devastating for small businesses, it also opened up opportunities from a “borderless geography” point of view, and exposed African businesses to an international audience on a much more level playing field - is that something you can agree with or disagree with in your own business?

I absolutely, absolutely agree.

“ *Love Jozi has always been a very Jozi-centric brand. It appeals to tourists and people who want to promote Johannesburg.* **”**

This year is the first time we have had people in Cape Town that are ordering our masks - and overseas orders. I mean, we have had orders from such random places for luxury products now - Hawaii, Russia, California - it is fun. It is exciting.

■ It is interesting to note how what we perceive to be a constraint can turn into a creative opportunity if we just think about it in a little bit of a different way. What advice do you have for other online retailers on how to generate sales from an online store?

So, a weekly email newsletter, I would suggest that. I do not think we would have managed without the newsletter.

“ *Email communications is something that in previous years, we did not do regularly enough. It is unbelievable, the effect of the newsletter.* **”**

I think we depended too much on social media before. In addition to being able to own our own relationships with our customers - the weekly newsletters also forced us to add new content and update our website and to create new products to talk about.

I think it is creating content and communicating constantly that is helped us survive and succeed. You really need the complete package of social media for noise and newsletter for sales.



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■ ***Do you think some of your customers miss the bricks and mortar retail experience? Your brick and mortar retail stores were very conceptual and experiential.***

Yes, our retail spaces and pop ups had hidden studio space where customers would get personal attention. We are going to have a Black Coffee studio space again where we can produce manufacture and have meetings with clients. But the primary contacts are going to be online.

We are going to continue doing this ourselves, exploring new spaces and new ways of engaging with customers online and offline.

This interview was part of the Flux Trends Alinea Mini Masterclass Series dedicated to helping South African entrepreneurs and SMEs use trends as business insights to get back to work after the manifold challenges of 2020.

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