

E-commerce is key to business survival

While there is a lot of uncertainty around the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak, one thing that is certain is that it will change the way we do business in the long-term.



Source: pixabay.com

People are moving from offline shopping to online, and the habit is unlikely to disappear when the pandemic is over. Implementing e-commerce technology could be the key to retaining customers and leveraging changing consumer behaviour moving forward.

“Over the past few years, South Africans have come to rely on the convenience of online shopping; and now with the onset of the Covid-19 outbreak, it’s to be expected that the reliance on online shopping will be intensified,” says Jonathan Smit, managing director of PayFast.

“ *Self-isolation and consumer worry about public places means that local businesses are being forced to find quick and innovative ways to adapt to the current crisis.* ”

The use of online payments and home delivery for day-to-day consumables have already been established as the new norm by companies. In response to Covid-19, retailers have upped their game by implementing ‘no contact’ deliveries to minimise human-to-human contact and maximise sales opportunities. This is a useful model to follow for other South African businesses, who are grappling with ideas on how to best manage the pandemic.

Although it’s impossible to know exactly to what extent South African businesses will be impacted, it is likely that consumers who start making online purchases now during the outbreak will continue to do so going forward.

“People will spend more time shopping online because they are avoiding public spaces. The long-term effect is that they will become accustomed to browsing and buying online, and not visiting physical stores as often,” says Smit. “If businesses can provide customers with a positive online experience, the short-term losses that brands may experience now could lead to their long-term gain.”

For example, older people who are the most susceptible to the virus have been advised to avoid public spaces, including shopping centres and malls; “This could mean wider adoption of e-commerce, an area that older individuals have historically avoided, mainly due to mistrust of online platforms,” says Smit.

“While undoubtedly a great challenge for the world at large, and a test of the viability of many businesses, we need to continue with business as usual. As with any obstacle in the business world, we cannot allow things to grind to a halt. This is the time to adapt, to evolve and to move forward” says Smit.

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