

Can digital partnerships enable business development?

By [Kevin South](#)

8 Jan 2021

Gone are the days when small businesses need to sell their products to just the people who live or work in the immediate vicinity. Digital platforms and partnerships are now empowering micro-companies to extend their offerings, opening new doors for business growth and development.



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New business models enabled by emerging technologies are disrupting industries all over the world. As more sectors are evolving and transforming, organisations are discovering how partnering with digital platforms and service providers can help them reach wider markets, provide better services, streamline operations, and access insights that were previously reserved for large enterprises.

While the global business landscape has been unpredictable, 2021 is an exciting time to be forging ahead with business, embracing new opportunities, and innovating along the way.

Going digital

It's common knowledge that smaller businesses have been hit particularly hard by lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. To support struggling retailers, tech giant Google adjusted its Shopping Search algorithm to help make it easier for consumers to find businesses that are typically less discoverable.

Previously, we relied on shopping malls to draw customers to merchants and newspapers to connect readers to advertisers, but now increasingly available digital technologies are empowering organisations of all sizes to tap into mobile, data, and cloud to revamp their business models.

A recent [report](#) from the Facebook and Small Business Roundtable revealed that 79% of businesses have made changes to their operations to accommodate their customers this year, with 35% expanding the use of digital payments. 56% of businesses that use online tools reported that at least half of their sales are digital. It's safe to say that companies that embrace and maximise digital platforms will fare better than those relying purely on traditional means to reach their customers, showing the power of digital partnerships.

In fact, a [Connected Commerce Council](#) study found that small businesses without a pre-existing e-commerce presence were twice as likely to temporarily close during the crisis.

Digital pioneers

Tapping into a growing digital market is a sure-fire way to ensure your business doesn't get left behind. Take it from Darth Kitchens, a Cape-Town-based startup that is on a mission to become South Africa's largest virtual kitchen network. Virtual, cloud, or ghost kitchens were born out of the global explosion of online meal delivery services. These centralised production spaces host multiple "restaurants" and rely on third-party mobile platforms like Uber Eats, Mr D, OrderIn, or Bolt Food to deliver their food to customers.

A prime example of smart innovation and meeting customers where they are while incurring lower overhead costs.

Similarly, farming pioneers Farmers Gate Nigeria and Farm Direct South Africa have built digital platforms to sell quality produce directly from smallholder farmers to consumers, in turn growing the economy and improving food security. Farmers Gate Nigeria even goes as far as outlining a specific mission to "take one million smallholder farmers out of poverty by 2024". As most farmers take pride in their produce but live and work far away from their consumers, these platforms connect micro-businesses to their customers more easily, allowing them to generate more revenue and potentially grow into larger businesses in the future.

The power of teamwork

What about organisations that recognise the benefits of digital transformation, but don't have the skills or capacity to go digital just yet? Strategic partnerships with digital service providers or tech companies can be a great interim solution.

Digital partnerships allow companies to quickly access the expert knowledge they need to expand their business without having to take on the excessive time and money costs of building that knowledge in-house. This means organisations can focus on their core offering while reaping the benefits of the digital economy, and contributing to the growth of the overall economy.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses should consider teaming up with platform owners to offer complementary products and services using application programming interfaces (APIs). Without the constraints of fully funding a platform upfront, these companies can benefit from plug-in, modular, scalable services, and access to new markets and distribution channels.

In a highly competitive landscape with demanding customers, the reality is that data, digital skills, and capabilities are constantly evolving, and active collaborations between organisations to combine digital assets and capitalise on new

opportunities are the only way to win.

However, these partnerships don't have to be complicated – accessing the skills and knowledge your company needs to grow can be as simple as finding a cloud provider, feeding customer data through a CRM system, or even outsourcing your online advertising.

Knowing exactly what your business needs from a partnership perspective is a good place to start. Are you looking for a service provider whose analytics expertise will help you decipher consumer data, a vendor equipped to transform your company into a nimble, cloud-based business, a customer service expert to enhance your offering or a combination of the above? Whatever form of digitisation you are looking at, adapting to be a multi-digital-channel business will ensure your company's continued success long into the future!

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