

Far apart, but still together with W17.world



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Covid-19 has seen much of the globe encouraged to work from home where possible. With so many people operating remotely during this pandemic, we are all experiencing an unprecedented blend of work and private life.



Paul Keursten, co-founder and CEO of Workshop17

Workshop17, South Africa's workspace solutions provider, has provided a continuum of work environments that blend physical and virtual workspace services.

Paul Keursten, co-founder and CEO of Workshop17, shares more about what Workshop17 is doing about the future of shared workspaces.

■ ***Remote work is here to stay with businesses having to quickly adapt to new ways of working. What are some of the ways Workshop17 has adapted in light of the Covid-19 lockdown?***

As a first, we had to adjust our approach to members in order to comply with the safety precautions around Covid-19. Our members are welcomed at reception daily to undergo a check-in and screening process. This allows us to know exactly who is in our spaces and we can act swiftly should a member test positive by reaching out to the rest of the relevant members who were in the space that day.

We've also removed seats in our hot-desking spaces which allows our members to practise social distancing and our meeting spaces now have restrictions on the amount of people allowed. (See a [full list of steps](#) to keep our team and members safe).

On a more fundamental level, we are adjusting our business to the 'new normal' of work, which is still unfolding. We have launched new offers, we are restructuring our arrangements with landlords, we are expanding our model to accommodate larger companies, and we are growing our network of locations.

■ ***How did the pandemic impact the co-working spaces of Workshop17?***

The pandemic created the biggest work from home experiment one could imagine. It drastically accelerated developments that were already happening in some forward thinking companies, and made remote working and flexible working part of the mainstream of work.

Work will not go back to where it was and remote work will remain part of the mix. Furthermore, flexible office arrangements will be in great demand for many companies. People and companies now know that remote work can be very effective and studies even report increased productivity. But work from home is not a complete solution.

Offices, whether it is a corporate office or a shared facility like Workshop17, will remain important. But the role of these offices will change. People will go to offices to meet colleagues and others, to build culture and synergy, to get inspired and develop new ideas.

Furthermore, we see that people are avoiding city centres and prefer less dense areas like suburbs and rural (beautiful) areas to live and to work. They are also enjoying not sitting in traffic as long as they used to. And it will be hard to convince them to go back in traffic to go to an office if they can also do the work at home.

■ ***Loadshedding has become part of the "new normal". How does this affect Workshop17 and the services offered?***

We have generators in all our spaces that ensure we are never disconnected from the internet, lights will remain on and all plug points in our tables will continue to work. Loadshedding does not affect our members creating a friction-free work environment. Furthermore, we are developing an internet and power solution for the home, which ensures that people working from home stay connected and that their internet is reliable.

■ ***Workshop17 recently introduced the W17.world online platform. Could you elaborate on this?***

The [W17.world online platform](#) was conceptualised by the marketing department with assistance from the location managers.

During level 5 lockdown when we weren't able to open, we found our members still craved the need to feel connected and be part of a bigger community. Within three weeks we created our W17.world platform, aimed at supporting members working from home. While some features are members only, everyone can go onto the platform and use it.

A fantastic new feature we developed was our locally hosted and fully encrypted video conferencing platform, also available to everyone. We were aware of bad press some video conferencing platforms received and the problems associated with using these, so we decided to create our own. People can just visit [meet.w17.world](#) to host their own video conference.

■ ***What has the uptake of this been?***

The platform is open to the public with some features available only to Workshop17 members. The platform grew in popularity during lockdown when people were craving the human connection that co-working spaces like W17 bring to a

community. The platform is still being used by members and the public for online meetings and also as a source of recipes, books to read, the Workshop17 podcast and a list of our favourite apps to name a few.

■ ***What trends can we start to see in terms of co-working spaces in South Africa?***

Co-working spaces have been popular with SMMEs, freelancers etc. for some time. Our industry will also start attracting bigger enterprise clients as the world adapts to remote work with flexible office solutions. Businesses will no longer see the need or justify the expense of signing long leases and big offices when teams can now work just as productively at home or from co-working spaces that may be closer to home. Hours spent in traffic being unproductive will be a thing of the past and the world will start focusing more on a balance between work and life with quality time spent with their loved ones.

■ ***Workshop17 has locations across Gauteng and Cape Town. Are there any plans of opening up more locations?***

We are currently working on opening a new space in Rosebank, in a completely refurbished and beautiful building called 'The Bank', early next year. We are currently negotiating new locations to expand our location network in both regions.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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