

# This is a golden opportunity

By  Juanita Pienaar

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*As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.*

We chatted to Nevo Hadas partner at Dydx to get his take.



Nevo Hadas, partner at Dydx.

## ■ ***What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different to what you expected***

Initially I was really worried about not being able to go anywhere but it's been really easy to adjust and not actually go anywhere. I'm probably going to the local shops more than I really should and not cleaning the house as much as I should.

## ■ ***Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the agency and creative industry or economy as a whole.***

We have been working remotely with international clients for the last five years. Unlike many other businesses that have suddenly had their world transformed and are struggling to adapt to a no-office environment, our business hasn't really been impacted too much, if at all.

“ I do think that the impact on the industry will be a shift in how companies are working, looking at more automation and changing the structure of agencies. Marketing departments will also understand the benefits of adopting better process

management tools to improve their effectiveness and management capabilities. ”

#### ■ **How is the agency responding to the crisis and current lockdown?**

Effectiveness is really good and everybody seems genuinely ok, even though there are mutterings about how much booze is left. The biggest business issue has been one delayed project, but we have grown during this period with new projects kicking off.

The team at the moment is around 32 people, spread out between Cape Town, Johannesburg, the UK and the Netherlands. We have added three new interns (one is a reforming lawyer, one is a re-emerging educationalist and one is a surf instructor/musician/organisation psychology major) during this period.

#### ■ **Comment on the challenges and opportunities.**

The opportunity is to double down on remote delivery and use this time to increase our effectiveness in that area. With a weakening rand, agencies that can work internationally can do so more effectively now than before.

The challenges lie in recreating physical experiences and human touch in this world.



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In our design thinking and service design projects we normally facilitate physical workshops. Day-long events requiring teams to work together in one room. That clearly could not happen. As part of a 10-week certification course we co-developed with Red & Yellow, we had to deliver a full-day workshop for a group of 22 from Dimension Data.

There were four teams, each working on different projects – challenging enough in a face-to-face workshop and even harder virtually. We had to rethink and redesign the workshop process, delivering two fast-paced, highly collaborative workshops. Each was three hours long but because of the time pressure and interactivity, they felt energetic and engaging.

Similarly for Mediamark, in a 'Future Ways of Working' workshop, usually delivered as a half-day physical event for leadership teams, we had to move it all online. We reimaged processes using Zoom, Miro boards and Google Docs, changed the agenda, and had a successful outcome.

#### ■ **How has the lockdown affected your staff? What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?**

Our systems are built for a digital-first organisation so the remote working has had no impact on us. We have very little

email and most of our communication is focused on projects in slack channels. There are almost no meetings. We don't use video calls. Our work is done in online collaborative workshops, and they are either really short (dealing with blockers in projects, i.e. less than 30 minutes) or long workshops where we collaborate as a team and complete key tasks.



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### ■ ***How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned and your clients happy?***

This will definitely sound weird but we really don't try to keep our team close knit. Our teams use culture canvas to create psychological safety (which we do with clients too) and that keeps us very tightly aligned towards a common outcome. We follow an X-teams (externally focused teams) approach which means that there are different teams on projects and some folks have never even met each other (virtually or otherwise) that work with us, because we don't have offices everywhere we are.

We did have a team yoga class led by one of our team who is also a yoga instructor which was fun, but our culture is really much more about autonomy, great ideas and execution. We are doing a virtual chocolate tasting for SA with Honest Chocolate.

### ■ ***How have you had to change the way you work?***

90% of what we do hasn't had to change at all. The biggest impact has been on workshops and redesigning those.

### ■ ***Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of advertising/marketing in any way?***

Not really.

### ■ ***Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?***

Agencies have learned to trust their staff a bit more.



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### ■ ***Your key message to fellow industry folk?***

My message to the industry and agencies is that this is a golden opportunity. You are thrust into change and it hurts, but it is beneficial pain. Stop lamenting the death of what came before (which most people whined about) and see the opportunities presented by new ways of working.

## ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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