

Keeping spirits lifted while working from home

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.



Kemble Morgan

Young Living Essential Oils opened its South African office just 7 months ago, and now, like many of us, the local team is having to adapt to do business under lockdown.

The USA-headquartered company's core business is the distillation and sale of high-end and concentrated essential oils. Secondary to this is the entrepreneurship opportunities it offers through its network marketing structure.

Founded by Donald Gary Young in the late 1970s, the company now boasts enjoys a locational presence across in more than 30 countries across seven continents.

Here, Kemble Morgan, Young Living Essential Oils general manager for Africa, chats challenges and opportunities brought on by the pandemic and how the company is keeping its staff motivated.

■ ***What was your initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic and has your experience of it been different to what you expected?***

I think in general, my response throughout this entire experience has mirrored that of any business owner. Concern for employee health and safety, business continuity, fear of low to no sales and how to keep my staff's livelihood safe and secured as the world – and this country – navigate through this difficult time.

■ ***Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Young Living Essential Oils and the economy as a whole.***

As we all know, the Covid-19 pandemic has drastically impacted the global economy, with [Martin Kingston of Business for South Africa](#) (B4SA) stating that in South Africa, the GDP in 2020 will decline between 10% and 17% and in addition, between 1 million to four million jobs are at risk.

Thankfully, a few days before the SA lockdown was initiated, we managed to secure an essential service certificate from the CIPC. This granted us the legal rights to continue servicing our Young Living members and future interested parties during lockdown.

So, at the moment, each member of my staff continues to diligently go about their respective jobs from home and members/customers are able to place orders online and receive delivery of their favourite Young Living essential oil products.

■ **How is your company responding to the crisis?**

In light of the circumstances, my team is coping relatively well.

“ The management team tries its best to keep staff engaged, in good spirits and empowered. Part of the way we do this is by continuously seeking their counsel on high-level challenges as well as inviting them to be part of member-driven training sessions that we host daily during the week. ”

■ **Comment on the business challenges and opportunities that you're seeing right now.**

Our biggest challenge at the moment is selling a niche product to a worried, anxious and sceptical market. As a new company, we have the challenge of securing buy-in for our premium products and in a time such as this, it can be difficult for people to immediately see the benefits of trying something new.

However, on the upside, the business opportunity has become a real game-changer for individuals who have lost jobs or taken major pay cuts. Although the media continues to put a negative spin on this, I believe this opportunity could be a blessing for many of those who have been negatively impacted by the SA lockdown and Covid-19.



#LockdownLessons: Puma SA's Luke Barrett-Smith on the new retail reality

Lauren Hartzenberg 14 May 2020



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

We have a sturdy work-from-home policy which helps us keep our team engaged and driven during the work week. From a company culture perspective, we do our best to keep the environment fun, dynamic and transparent with employee engagement activities such as internal cooking challenges to quiz days.

So, so far, we've managed to remain in good spirits but as a close-knit team of 22, we miss ordinary days in the office.

■ **How have you had to change the way you operate?**

The only real change has been learning the art of successful Zoom calls. As a new company with a growing team,

challenges and solutions arise by the dozen, and being in the office allowed us to easily pop over to a colleague's office and chat through specific ideas, challenges and strategies that needed urgent dealing with.

Now that we are all working remotely, we have learnt to strategise more effectively.

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

New business acquisition through online platforms has far exceeded all expectations in an industry that is largely driven by face to face meetings.

“ *Many people are looking for their side hustle to supplement income due to a reduction in salaries or job losses.* ”

▣ ***What do you predict the next six months will be like?***

I don't believe we will return to normal as we know it for a long time. The new way of doing business will take precedence over face to face engagements. I believe we have a tough six months ahead of us to reshape the economy and pivot the business through novel and niche marketing mechanisms.

We have to be more agile than ever to remain relevant and provide real solutions to support the people of Africa through our wellness products and a viable entrepreneurship opportunity.

▣ ***Your key message to those in the sector?***

Now more than ever, the world and its economy need you.

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