

Business unusual for small enterprises on the road to recovery

By [Ameen Hassen](#)

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The Covid-19 pandemic has hit South Africa's small business sector hard and there are grim statistics to bear this out. Those statistics will not be repeated here. After all, if you are a small business owner setting out on the road to recovery, the last thing you probably want is more details of the toll the pandemic has taken on small enterprises. Far more useful would be some good, solid tips on how to build back better after any business setbacks.



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Having scanned the small business landscape, it is evident that many small businesses in South African will need to revisit their business models in the light of the pandemic's impact and other factors.

Questions that come to mind are: Are my products or services still relevant in the post-Covid-19 environment? Do I just need to tweak my offerings a little here and there, or do they need a complete overhaul? How have my customers' needs changed and what do I need to do to satisfy them? Do I have skills that could take my business into new directions? And what new skills do I need in this new normal? Are there inefficiencies standing in the way of business profitability? Crucially, am I using technology optimally?



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Sharpen skills and technology acumen

The question of skills and technology are key for small business owners at this point in time. In terms of skills, it has never been more important to understand the basics of business management, including accounting, finance, management, marketing, planning, sales, and production. There are many good business management short courses on the market that are well worth the investment in time and money.

Keeping up with technology should also be a priority. Brick-and-mortar businesses are unlikely to disappear altogether, but online shopping, trading, and marketing are growing exponentially and small businesses that do not have a digital strategy and tools may lose any competitive advantage they currently have.

Many small businesses would like to invest in new ways of working, producing, and selling, but the cost of creating a digital presence may be holding them back. While a business struggling to make ends meet might understandably be reluctant to invest in new technology or other innovations for business growth, postponing change might not be best for the business's survival.



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Pay as you trade or earn

In any event, funding should not be an obstacle for any fundamentally sound small business, given the range of good financial products on the market tailored to their needs. One example is our collaborative Merchant Capital Advance offering, which is a working capital solution specifically for retail businesses. The Shari'ah compliant offering is a first of its kind in the Southern African region.

With this offering, the retailer can qualify for up to 100% of the monthly card turnover, with funding available within 48 hours and no interest payable or hidden costs. This is a pay-as-you-trade solution, with the funding paid back as a percentage of every card swipe through the retailer's card terminal.

With the funding needs taken care of, business owners can turn their attention to the many other important aspects of running a business, such as satisfying their customers, attracting, and retaining the right employees, connecting with

suppliers and distributors, keeping a close eye on what competitors are up to and constantly assessing where and how markets are changing.

All of this takes time, and plenty of it, which means business owners must use time wisely, not on mundane or routine tasks that anyone could do but on areas of the business where it adds the most value. Learn to manage your time efficiently and come to terms with the fact that you cannot do everything yourself. Delegating may not come easy but come it must.

With a clear plan of action, access to resources and confidence in your business's ability to adapt and adjust, the road ahead should look a lot less bumpy.

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