

People are realising the importance of saving for a rainy day, says Llewellyn Allen

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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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.



Llewellyn Allen, head of marketing, Metropolitan

Llewellyn Allen, Metropolitan's head of marketing, explains how the financial services giant is navigating the rapidly changing world we find ourselves in.

Talk us through a typical workday in the life of the lockdown

For most people who work in an office, the shift to a solitary day working from home is more of an adjustment. Days are now spent on Zoom or the like - perhaps in sweat pants or even half dressed-up - in an environment that may have always been your sanctuary away from work.

I believe the bigger shift happened in our sales and service environment, where - BC (Before Covid-19) -our employees worked from branches and external sites spread across SA. Our personalised approach to client service is something that has always differentiated us. And despite all the challenges and changes, it is something that we refuse to let slip because of lockdown. The key difference now is that this dialogue is taking place virtually.

We have made a number of new channels available that will enable financial advisors to stay in contact with colleagues and clients, and to submit documentation digitally. This includes the establishment of new interaction channels such as WhatsApp and Zoom – while this may seem passé to most office dwellers, when your work day was previously spent interacting on a face-to-face basis, it presents an entirely new way of communicating.

For financial advisors, their ‘new normal’ day may begin with reviewing leads from a remote leads system, followed by contacting clients via phone call, WhatsApp or email to check in with them; ascertaining their needs with regards to policy updates and cover.

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

I don’t think anyone expected such a massive impact to the way we do business, the disruption to our economy and our very way of life. We have had to pivot rapidly, to allow our business to continue delivering on its mandate to our clients and stakeholders.

The safety of staff and clients is our priority, and thus we began preparations for a remote working scenario at the beginning of March. We achieved this by equipping the majority of our business with the necessary equipment & data where needed, and promoted alternative contact channels to our clients.

The result was that when the hard lockdown came into effect, we already had many of the necessary systems and processes in place to ensure our people were safe, and that we could continue servicing our clients.

However, it is a scenario that moves rapidly, and we are navigating new challenges - while also discovering new opportunities - every day. We’ve had to remain agile as a business.

■ ***How is your company responding to the crisis and current lockdown?***

We’ve chosen to view Covid-19 as an opportunity and not an obstacle.

Many of the initiatives we had in place prior to the crisis have, in essence, become more relevant; however, the urgency to get them ready for market has allowed us to accelerate their roll-out. Our new generation solutions, sales and service approach couldn’t have had a better stress test. It is fair to say that it has passed, with a couple of important lessons and tweaks along the way. Many of the benefits built into these solutions have demonstrated their value and forward thinking.

We have also made a conscious decision to maintain a “human” tone in all internal & external communication, and have increased the frequency of this communication. It’s important for our clients to feel connected to us and aware of what is going on; particularly as a business that considers personal interaction and the elimination of uncertainty as part of its very DNA.

■ ***Speaking of opportunities, the world has really turned to innovation during this time. Why do you think this is the case and what does this mean for the industry, your company and the economy?***

Crisis is a catalyst for innovation, and businesses will have to adapt or risk closure. When the stakes are high, we often see incredible things.

Moving forward, I believe that people will increasingly seek security and stability as a result of the crisis, and will prioritise financial planning and savings. I suspect we may see a continued decline in ‘non-essential’ spending, as South Africans realise the importance of ‘saving for that rainy day’. I also predict that we will see more and more people establishing alternative revenue streams, either to supplement their existing income or to replace an income lost as a result of retrenchment. I think we will see a lot of creativity and the rise of more entrepreneurs and micro-businesses.

We will also see many businesses evolving their product or service offering. With consumers under increased pressure their needs have changed, and businesses will need to diversify accordingly.

The dramatic switch to digital - both for the consumer and business alike - has highlighted two critical areas:

1. Consumer preference - as everyday life and spending have had to move online, the trackable behaviour of the consumer is now more apparent, especially in those who may not have previously engaged through this channel. This allows for greater insight into their needs, wants and preferences.
2. How businesses internalise this information to adapt, evolve and innovate their digital strategies and overall UX is going to be exciting. The rise of consumerism is well known; however, this coupled with an environment of uncertainty and a far more selective (prudent) consumer may drive many businesses to reassess priorities such as brand visibility and relevance, as well as their overall customer experience.

■ **What are you busy working on? Any initiatives relating to the coronavirus?**

We know that money (and the lack thereof...) is on everyone's mind right now, so during lockdown we have been running a free, zero-data [financial literacy course](#) in partnership with FunDza to help people manage their money better.

From a group perspective, we have extended our HelloDoctor platform to all South Africans. Those concerned about Covid-19 now have rapid access to a healthcare professional, through their mobile phones. The service is endorsed and approved by the NICD, is free of charge (no airtime required), works on any mobile device, and is available 24/7 from anywhere in South Africa.

There has also been a great deal done from a CSI perspective. In addition to the R5m which Momentum Metropolitan Holdings has committed to the Solidarity Fund, a further R4,7m in emergency funding has been made available by the Momentum Metropolitan Foundation, in order to buoy and supplement community-focused interventions. We've partnered with those organisations closest to Metropolitan's communities, so that we can offer support where it is most needed, in line with our promise that 'Together We Can.'

In addition, we have also set up a Covid-19 testing station in partnership with Gift of the Givers at our head office in Cape Town, and our Group CEO, Hillie Meyer, has committed to donating a third of his salary for three months to the Solidarity Fund.

These are just a few of the initiatives we have implemented that relate to Covid-19 - there are also several other larger national plans in the pipeline which will be rolled out over the next few months, closer to the projected peak of the curve.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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