

Pitch perfect or tone deaf, how are you talking to your clients?

 ByDi Brown

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In a recent webinar, Professor Shabir Madhi stated "this infection is going to be with us at least until 2021 or 2022."

"There could be three or four waves of infection, roughly 60% of the population could get infected. Citizens need to take responsibility for their health"



Stockpic via [Pexels](#)

For anyone in the tourism industry, this statement is scary. You can pull the duvet over your head and scream, or watch cat videos for five hours on YouTube, but did you know, people are spending on average 70% more time on social media during lockdown?

You have a captive audience if your messaging is right.

Even if your business is closed, you need to be talking to your clients.

There is more noise than ever on social media, but if your content is resonating with people, you will be heard.

According to Stats SA, in 2018 South African residents spent a whopping R84bn travelling abroad.

With borders closed, international travel is as unattainable as a legal cigarette and a glass of wine at your favourite eatery in the foreseeable future. Domestic tourism is it for the next while, so adjust your business accordingly.

A large percentage of that R84 Billion is still in play and can be spent right here, providing a much-needed boost to our domestic tourism market. It is up to you to find and engage with locals right now.

Apart from those who usually travel abroad but now are confined within our borders and need a holiday, there are other emerging markets that can be tapped in to.

The Cityscapers who are yearning for a break away from the urban buzz, the StayCationers who want to get to know their own backyard, the fast-growing work from homers, who want a change of scenery as they can work from anywhere. The final market is one that will probably grow extremely fast in the next few months, the self-isolators and quarantiners.

As our infection numbers continue to rise towards the peak estimated to be around August or September, the demand for an accommodation facility to cater to self-isolation or quarantine will increase.

Five tips on talking to your audience during lockdown:

1. Gauge the landscape of the day and adapt your messaging accordingly

Make sure you are sharing content that is relevant to the time. The Covid landscape changes daily and sometimes there is a hot topic that drowns out all other conversation.

Spend a short time connecting and checking in on friends and colleagues on social media, then read online newspapers and thought leader opinions from respected people in your industry. Social media does not give a balanced view.

Those Facebook groups for your industry are great for moral support, but you can also get sucked into a spiral of negativity if you have people complaining, bashing the laws day in and day out and competing with sad horror stories.

Your business is too important to base your decisions on information gained in an echo chamber.

Be the change that you want to see. You can be the positive voice in the sea of negativity and frustration so evident on social media.

2. Don't try to sell

Right now, don't try to sell. Don't even try to get people to dream, just be real. Remind everyone that you are still here, still standing, but locked down like everyone else. Pitching in with the right tone you remain front of mind with the consumer, and all they need to know is you are doing your best.

3. Empathise

We are all in lockdown together and while the bricks and mortar might be different, many of the feelings are the same. Tell your audience about your reality right now. What are you feeling, share the good days and the bad ones. Everyone has fears, be real, be brave and acknowledge yours.

Entertaining and homeschooling kids, exercising in a short window period, these lead to frustration and joy, often more weighted to the frustration end of the scale. Be real, ask for tips, share your tips. This is not the time for a

#LivingMyBestLife approach and only posting pics of your bread baking, closet cleaning, family walks and learning Italian together fakery.

4. Inform

Now is a perfect time to allow people to get to really know you and in particular, your business/brand. Forget Press Release style copy, rather use your own words to share your story. Compile fun facts, relate lighthearted anecdotes, introduce your staff, provide insight into your area, and make people feel like they already know you and your business. Share the dream you had and how you made it a reality.

Tell your audience what you have changed at your establishment, allow them to imagine what it will be like visiting you in the new normal. People will be very nervous to travel; you need to reassure them that they will be safe with you.

5. Question

This is your chance to get free market research. Ask questions, what do guests want, what concerns and scares them. Acknowledge their fears, ask for their advice and really listen. No suggestion is too crazy to contemplate.

Lockdown level 1 seems a bridge too far for most in the business of tourism or hospitality.

We have just entered Level 3. As a tourism service provider, you are still unable to re-open, but you can still talk to your fans, clients, and future clients in a way that they can hear. One of them might just have a solution for you.

ABOUT DI BROWN

Di Brown is a freelance travel writer based in Cape Town. Part of the tourism industry for the last 20 years, Di is a supporter of responsible tourism, advocates for animal rights in tourism and is a keen amateur photographer.

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