

Why we should use the e-commerce boom to support brick and mortar stores

By [Chris Zietsman](#), issued by [Irvine Partners](#)

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When the pandemic hit and the first lockdown arrived, everything ground to a halt. Looking at sales volumes from merchants trading on the SnapScan platform, we saw activity plummet by 50%, likely consistent with what the wider economy also experienced. But this plummet of activity didn't last long and with the swift onset of the e-commerce boom by the following month, in May 2020, we were seeing record numbers which have continued to grow month-on-month to date. This is fantastic news for online merchants, but where does it leave traditional brick and mortar establishments, and more importantly, how can we support these smaller businesses and the locals who run them to ensure they thrive?



Home of the Bean



The Bioscope

We teamed up with Airbnb and found the answer lies in personal experience. The campaign - Shop Jozi, Shop local - was inspired by Hosts on Airbnb. Jozi Hosts are known for recommending local shops and services to their guests, and wanted to find a way to continue to support their favourite stores while international visitors were away.

Similarly, when travel was a possibility, I used to regularly visit the city for work. There is always something comforting and enjoyable about walking into the many merchants in the city that use SnapScan, and it's the city's independent community businesses that create an authentic Jozi experience.

These businesses are the ones that are the lifeblood of communities, and they are battling the most to keep the doors open. With the South African government's ambitious plans to have SMEs create at least 90% of South Africa's targeted 11 million new jobs by 2030, more support for these businesses is needed now if we still want these local institutions to be around after the pandemic.

This is why we've partnered with Airbnb and their community of local Hosts to help support Johannesburg businesses through this time. The 'Shop Jozi, Shop Local' campaign is an innovative partnership that rewards local consumers when spending at small businesses using the SnapScan app.

These rewards are funded by Airbnb and come in the form of 'Jozibucks', which can be used as a voucher to further support any of the selected 20-plus local businesses involved. Our hope is that this not only provides a significant economic injection, but also encourages locals to step out and boost their own communities by shopping locally. As these 'Jozibucks' are fully funded by Airbnb, businesses will still receive the full monetary value of their goods or services. The initiative is taking place throughout March, and is being supported by many great partners including IAMJOBURG and South Africa Tourism.

By using platforms like SnapScan and Airbnb, you aren't just staying in a big resort or swiping a bank card in a store, you're directly supporting local people and businesses.

That's why we're so invested in this campaign. While SnapScan is a technology product, we serve both consumers and merchants, and our app encourages users to safely shop at brick and mortar businesses. Similarly on Airbnb, Hosts keep up to 97% of the booking fee, and are known for recommending local shops to visitors, spreading the benefits of tourism throughout the community.

I think what's fantastic is that we know these initiatives work and have an impact. We've seen success with previous partnerships that leverage technology to support people and communities in South Africa, including Support Stellenbosch, and a collaboration with domestic-service booking app SweepSouth.

E-commerce businesses are benefiting from the boom, but we have a responsibility to give back and pump blood into the veins of brick and mortar merchants that have spent many years creating fantastic experiences for consumers. We hope visitors and locals alike are inspired to support their local shops, not just in March, but throughout the year. Find your local and stop in for a tempting snack and a coffee... they taste even better when they're made and served in person!

For more information on Support Jozi, Shop Local, visit airbnb.co.za/d/supportjozi and watch out for the Jozibucks pin on the online map and in-store.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Zietsman is the CEO of SnapScan.

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