

# U-PARTY is tackling the experience economy

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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#LockdownLessons explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on businesses, how they prepared for lockdown and its impacts on operations and employees, as well as lessons learned that we can take into the post-Covid-19 era.



Craig Green

Craig Green, events manager and small business owner, shares some insight into how Covid-19 has impacted [U-PARTY](#), one of his many small businesses, that aims to raise funds through school community events as well as under-18 socials.

*Update (13 May 2020): U-PARTY continues to help schools daily in other ways. With the current Health and Safety Measures set out by the government, they are now providing schools with their compliance services to assist with reopening - such as risk assessments, screening procedures and Covid-19 training*

## **How has Covid-19 impacted your business?**

The events and entertainment industry came to a complete standstill when the government announced the state of disaster a few weeks ago. U-PARTY is a division of our events brand that, since 1998, has been helping schools fundraise.

So, with schools being closed, U-PARTY has had to push pause until social events are able to take place. The sooner the lockdown ends, the sooner we can get back to work; focusing on helping schools where we can.

When an economy hits a recession, schools are also hit very hard as some parents default on school fees or they send their children to more affordable schools. Parents also pull back on extracurricular activities and when this happens, U-PARTY literally comes to the party to help schools make as much money as they possibly can. So, for us, the impact of Covid-19 has been tremendous.

▀ ***What's the biggest challenge you are facing during this pandemic?***

As a core, we focus on helping schools raise funds. These funds are used for a number of different things - upgrading facilities, matric dances, sports fields, new computers, etc. The lockdown means that schools are closed and that the traditional style of fundraising events cannot take place.

If I add up the potential funds that would have been raised at our events between the announcement of lockdown and the date I predict that things will return to "normal", I estimate roughly R2m. This, for me, is a huge challenge. To think that schools have lost out on the potential of such high numbers for something that is completely out of their control is scary and daunting.

▀ ***What sort of assistance will you need going forward?***

We play in two fields of industry, both of which have been nailed in this lockdown period; Schools and Events. We produce social events that take place at schools which, by sheer nature of definition, require various people to gather and experience what we produce, together.

The assistance that we require is an understanding of the extent to which the government is going to impose and extend social restrictions and regulations, essentially understanding where our playing field starts and where it ends.

The events industry, unlike many others, cannot function in isolation and in a state of lockdown. As an industry, in order to continue, we need clarity and an understanding of the extent to which the government is going to restrict our "together" so that we can ascertain if we can continue to function within the norms that we have come accustomed to or if we need to jump on the bandwagon and embark on a drastic movement to redefine the industry in totality, removing the "together" out of the experience economy.

▀ ***What measures have you put in place for your employees?***

We deal with youth daily and because of this have always translated our youthful interactions into the daily runnings of our business. I have always encouraged staff to work in their own time. My staff don't need to apply for leave to go to home affairs and I certainly don't expect a sick letter when they stay and work from home for the day. Over the past 22 years, we have built a foundation of trust and commitment that will see us through these tough times. We have always worked online. We video call. We WhatsApp. We Zoom. We haven't had to put any measures in places to see us through this hard time.

“ We simply keep on keeping on the way we always have - with a lot of commitment and a lot of trust. ”

■ **How are you offering assistance to your customers who rely on your services?**

Having been in contact with schools during the course of the lockdown period we have seen how badly they will need our assistance over the next two-four years. With this in mind, we have taken a different approach to other business and have since been in contact with our extensive database of event specialists and have decided to grow our team, having more hands available and on standby to help schools from the minute we are allowed to continue serving our purpose.

■ **What do you predict the next 6 months will be like?**

The experience economy has very minimal barriers to entry and has, because of this, seen a lot of fly-by-nights come and go. Some have been successful but unfortunately, most haven't.

My prediction is that if you are able to weather the storm and see it to the end, you will see yourself soar to the top quicker than you would have. The experience economy will shift. The regulations will tighten. The JOC process will have many extra steps added that will force event companies to be more law-abiding which in the end will only make things better and safer for everyone.

■ **Now is the time to innovate and experiment. What is U-PARTY doing?**

Six years ago we saw a noticeable shift in the experience economy and because of this we diversified our company structure and launched several other brands that have, since then, soared. If you are only now finding a reason to differentiate your offering to cater to the crisis then you are too late. It has been documented on all of my social media channels, When is the time to start? yesterday!

Yes, the pandemic has ushered everyone into a corner and forced them to innovate, but if that is your only reason for experimenting and redefining your paradigm then I don't believe that it will be successful.

■ **What has been your biggest lesson from all this?**

My biggest lesson has been the reminder of how important your values and ethical business practices are in helping you to weather to storm.

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