

Doing beauty differently with Prim-U



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

28 Apr 2020

#TheLockdownSeries 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.



Thuli Hlongwane, managing director of technology platform, Prim-U

Getting your regular beauty treatments such as that monthly neck and back massage or that last-minute manicure is something of the past for many South Africans as the country entered a nationwide lockdown on 26 March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

After working for companies from the likes of Old Mutual, Woolworths and Pearson, Thuli Hlongwane ventured out into the entrepreneurial market and launched two apps, [Prim-U](#) and Primlancer which connects people to the beauty industry.



#StartupStory: Thuli Hlongwane shifts from corporate IT to beauty

Evan-Lee Courie 27 Jun 2019



Prim-U is an online booking hub that connects beauty entrepreneurs in the industry to customers and hundreds of salons, spas, hotels and guests houses countrywide, but with a business model operating solely on physical contact, Prim-U's consumers and beauticians were unable to operate since the start of the nationwide lockdown, which started on 26 March 2020.

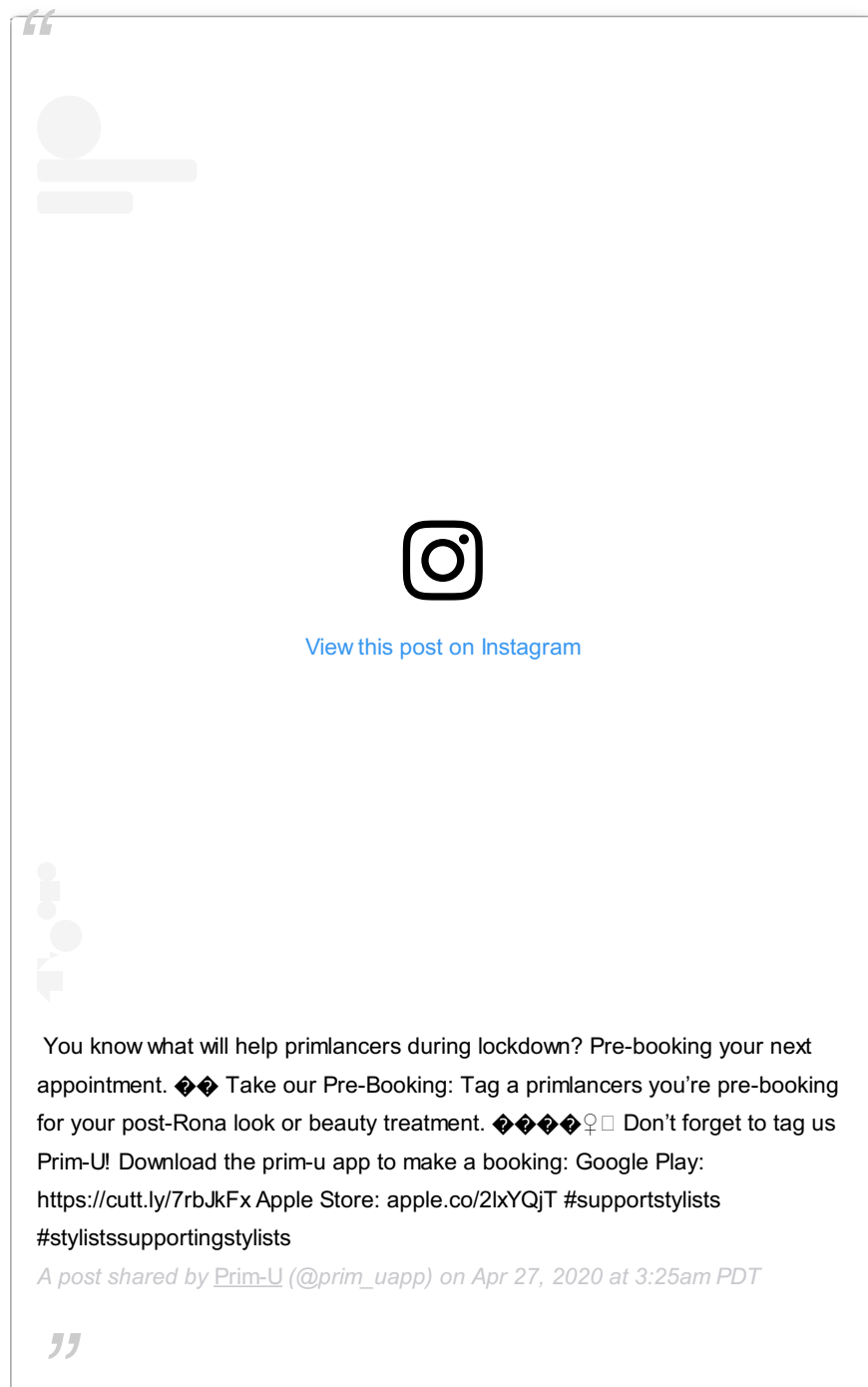
We chat to Thuli Hlongwane, the managing director of Prim-U, to find out the challenges she's had during coronavirus pandemic and the impact it's had on the business...

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

Maintaining social distancing during the lockdown period has certainly restricted the number of times people come into close contact with each other and limiting physical contact completely. Our business model was operating on physical contact only.

📊 *How did you prepare for the lockdown?*

We started investigating reliable and trusted suppliers for products to sell on the platform. We also worked quickly on improving the technology to respond to the challenges and find alternative ways of staying close without physical contact with our clients.



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

Network connections; availability of data is a reality. A lot of businesses have moved online. Communicating with our service providers online has been difficult as most of them are not able to connect online with the platform.

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

We need monetary and non-monetary resources to recover post the pandemic quickly. This will be mainly for training and

supporting our service providers to prepare in terms of tools and information in the "new" world. From a platform perspective, vetting and readiness measures are essential.

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

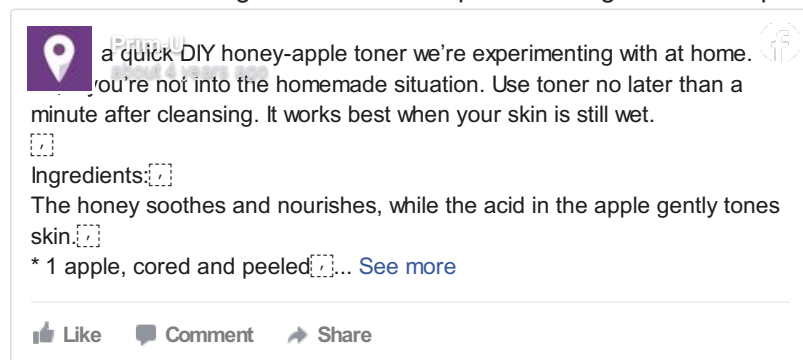
Our service providers are independent businesses and not full-time employees. However, we are feeling the pain that they and the rest of our country is feeling right now.

■ ***Are you communicating with your customers? If so, how?***

We are using our social media platforms to communicate with our customers. #PrimuAtHome

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

We have been using our social media platforms to give survival tips and tricks during the lockdown.



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

The on-demand economy in the beauty industry will be in full force. Most of our customer demands will be online for services and product purchases.

“ GIVEAWAY ”

We're giving away a future massage appointment through Prim U app for you AND 1 of your most supportive friends.

For more information click on the link below. <https://t.co/QZx6FhuTpk#LockdownSA#womenintech#Entrepreneurship#GirlTalkZA#FlattenTheCurve pic.twitter.com/XfFzw7uGNs>— Prim-U (@Prim_UApp) April 24, 2020 ”

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

We are working on growing our partnerships to test our technology assumptions. It is also the right time for us to understand and be ready for the changes in consumer behaviours and demands.

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

We must work on technological advancements as rapidly as possible as we move forward to the 4IR era.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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