

Practical ways SMEs in hospitality can navigate ongoing water restrictions

Issued by [Business Partners Limited](#)

7 Dec 2022

The water crisis that is currently affecting several parts of the country including Johannesburg and the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality will have an inevitable knock-on effect on small businesses whose operations rely heavily on the consistent supply of clean water.



Kevan Govender, regional investment manager at Business Partners Ltd

As the country gears up to welcome the usual year-end influx of local and international tourists, hospitality will undoubtedly be among the sectors most at-risk to suffer the impact of ongoing water scarcity and restrictions.

The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance calculates that tourism-related businesses use more than eight times more water per person than is used by the average population. Given this immense volume of water usage, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across the hospitality value chain have an important role to play in practicing and promoting responsible water usage, not only to prevent the impending drought but as a long-term solution to water scarcity across the country.

A crucial part of learning how to become a successful entrepreneur in South Africa is finding creative ways to fulfil the changing demands of customers, the environment, and ultimately- your bottom-line.

Reflecting on these challenges, and what businesses can do to work around them is Kevan Govender, regional investment manager at Business Partners Ltd. He points to some simple yet effective ways that SMEs in hospitality can become more water-wise in the face of current water restrictions:

1) Embed water conservation tips into your communications strategy

One of the key lessons that the Thebe Tourism Group garnered from the Cape Town water crisis of 2018, was that guests who were well-informed of how they could contribute towards saving water, had no problem complying, and welcomed

being part of the solution. Clear communication that emphasises the need to be proactive and practical about conserving water without causing panic, will go a long way in inviting guests to do their part and understand how their travel behaviour impacts the SME and the industry.

As Govender suggests: “This kind of messaging can be incorporated into welcome leaflets, in-room service brochures, bathroom signage and digital marketing campaigns, and can be framed as part of the broader goal of environmental awareness and conservation.”

2) Install water tank systems

The installation of water tanks can serve as an effective method to mitigate the impact that abrupt water restrictions and outages can have on small businesses in the hospitality sector. Govender argues that this is of particular importance for SMEs operating in the restaurant, food and catering businesses.

“As these industries all rely heavily on access to sufficient volumes of clean water to prepare and execute high-quality dining experiences for visitors. Water tanks will also optimise the overall experience that international and local guests have when visiting one of our country’s many B&Bs, lodges or boutique hotels by ensuring they have access to clean tap water for bathing and drinking purposes.”

In the hospitality sector, it is imperative for SMEs to give their customers the best possible experience to ensure repeat business and contribute to effective ‘word of mouth’ marketing to their friends and family upon their return home.

While water tanks are known to be relatively costly, suppliers such as JoJo water storage tanks have products such as the JoJo 750-litre Slimline water tank, which is one of the most affordable home-use and small-scale business use storage reservoirs in its class, starting from just R2,000. Govender asserts that this solution is perfect for SMEs in the sector that continue to operate on tight budgets but need to ensure access to consistent water supply. Specialised finance is available from banks and Business Partners Ltd for SMEs planning to go green via this route for their businesses.

3) Opt for indigenous landscaping

Govender advises that maintaining well-manicured lawns and flourishing gardens is often an important part of providing a world-class hospitality service. Unfortunately, this process can be extremely water intensive. The best solution is to install rainwater tanks, a greywater irrigation system or a series of boreholes that can be used exclusively for maintaining gardens.

“In addition, indigenous fynbos does not need a lot of water to thrive – there are thousands of beautifully blooming species that are commercially available from nurseries and cultivars.

Fynbos species are particularly rugged and well-adapted to harsh climate conditions such as extreme heat and turbulent wind. Not only are indigenous gardens less ‘thirsty,’ they are also the perfect way to capture a piece of South Africa’s biodiversity and use it as an attraction point for your hospitality offering,” he concludes.

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