

Zeelo makes travel safer for essential workers

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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#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.



James Champion and Andrew Roberts, general managers of Zeelo SA, before 'social distancing'.

[Zeelo](#) is a shared transportation service that was launched in South Africa - it's first overseas market after the UK. Since the coronavirus pandemic, their transportation services of commuters were put on hold and their priority turned to transporting essential workers on a daily basis.

Andrew Roberts and James Champion share the challenges of being at the driver's seat during the nationwide lockdown.

How has Covid-19 impacted your business?

As a bus-sharing company, Zeelo provides transportation services for daily commuters, events and private charter.

Initially, the pandemic had an impact on our events transportation business, as all public gatherings were postponed or cancelled, meaning that our event services all had to be put on hold. As the situation worsened internationally, and within South Africa, we saw a massive drop in demand for private charter and eventually cancellations of pre-booked services, after the announcement of the nationwide lockdown.



#StartupStory: Zeelo launches in South Africa

Evan-Lee Courie 19 Aug 2019



The lockdown had a major impact on our commuting services, traditionally our biggest focus as a company. Pre-Covid-19, we focussed on working with companies with large staff compliments driving to work each day, with the aim of getting these people out of private cars and into shared transport.

When Covid-19 struck, we had to pivot and launch a proposition aimed at essential workers, many of which traditionally use public transport, as opposed to driving to work each day. Our essential staff transport solution adheres to strict social distancing measures, with vehicles only being filled to 50% capacity. All drivers wear PPE and vehicles are sanitised before and after each service.

“ *Zeelo launches critical-worker commute offering, to help essential service providers beat Coronavirus*

Zeelo is working with a number of businesses to help ensure employees are still able to get to and from work safely during this stressful time. <https://t.co/VAbKqdSeU1>— Zeelo SA (@gozeelo_sa) [March 18, 2020](#) ”

■ **How did you prepare for the lockdown?**

From a team perspective, we looked to ensure all staff could work from home and were all well-equipped and comfortable working in this environment. We set up processes and routines to assist with this, such as daily stand-ups, regular check-ins regarding work but also to encourage watercooler conversations, and the Friday afternoon team drinks session was moved online.

From a business perspective, we kept our customers informed about the suspension and/or cancellation of certain services due to the lockdown. We also focused on identifying opportunities for Zeelo to be able to assist and continue to operate during the lockdown period and immediately started putting these plans into action.

■ **What's the biggest challenge you are facing during this pandemic?** *Uncertainty is one of the biggest challenges we are facing during this time, as no one is sure how long the pandemic will go on for and how great the impact will be. This makes it difficult to plan long term and prepare our business for when things return to 'normal'. The services we are providing during the lockdown period are also presenting their own challenges, as we are working with different markets in different areas than we are used to. As a result, we have learnt to adapt quickly to these changes and to the regulations which need to be followed.*

For example, certain essential businesses asked Zeelo to provide services within areas governed by various taxi associations. Initially, this was a challenge for us as we knew we couldn't compete with the taxi services in these parts, however, we soon came up with a solution to work with the taxi associations and utilize their vehicles and drivers for these jobs, which resulted in a win-win situation for both parties.

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

We will need continued support from the team we work alongside in the UK and the investors who have helped to guide the business through this difficult time. Any support from the government for SMEs will go a long way in helping businesses see out this lockdown period and ensure they are still around when the pandemic comes to an end.

■ **If you are able to operate, what steps are you taking to continue operating?**

Firstly, we obtained a permit to be able to offer transport services for essential workers, from the Companies & Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC).



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Zeelo launches critical-worker commute offering, to help essential service providers beat Coronavirus The safe movement of staff has never been so important and with public transport services closing down and causing a risk to employees wellbeing we have decided to dramatically improve our service standards to be able to support the healthcare food, utility or critical logistics industry. Zeelo is working with a number of businesses around the UK and SA to help ensure employees are still able to get to and from work safely during this stressful time. If you work or know someone in the healthcare, food, utility or critical logistics industry feel free to get in contact with us.

A post shared by Zeelo SA (@gozeelo_sa) on Mar 30, 2020 at 6:05am PDT

city in each vehicle is capped at 50%, to help

The services we provide are all fully sanitised before and after each trip. Drivers are protected against the spread of the virus with necessary PPE equipment, and for passengers, we have a no contact on board policy and provide hand sanitiser on all services.

📊 What measures have you put in place for your employees?

Employees have been asked to work from home and abide by the lockdown regulations. Flexible working hours are in place to assist with this, as it can be difficult to balance personal commitments at home with work, especially for those with children.

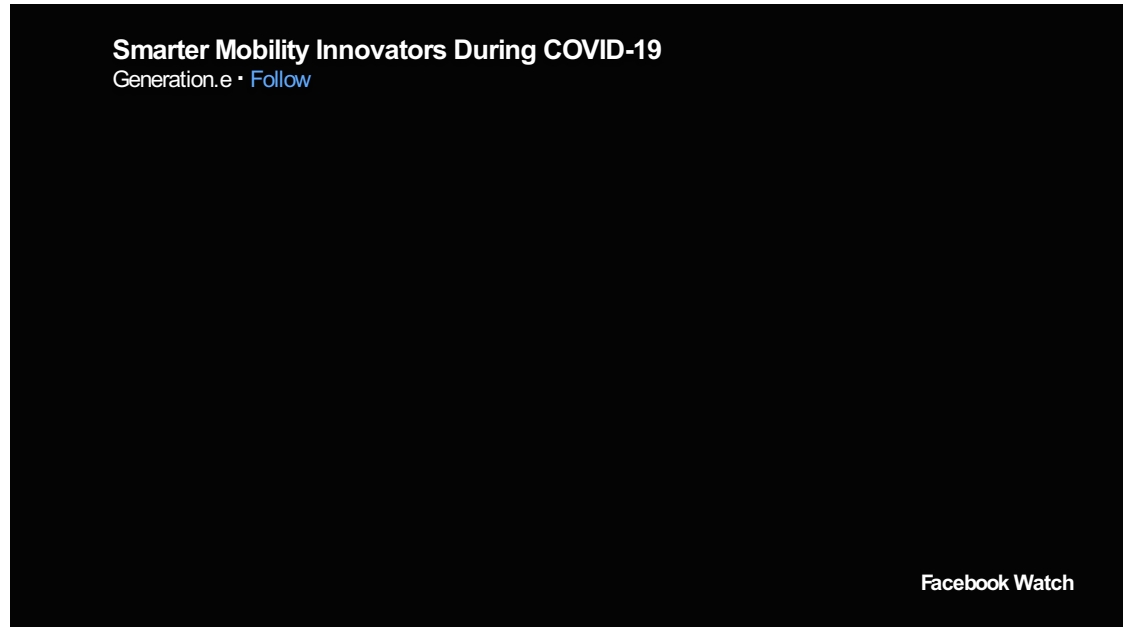
📊 Are you communicating with your customers? If so, how?

Yes. We are active across our social media platforms and have created Covid-19 specific webpages, banners and pop-ups on our site to keep customers informed. Where services have been disrupted, we communicated with customers via email or over the phone, and our 24-hour customer care centre has remained open to answer any questions via live chat on the website or over the phone.

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

At this point in time, it is very difficult to predict what the next six months will look like, as a lot will depend on the government's plans and the measures put in place to combat the pandemic. We don't believe this will all blow over in the next six months, but rather we will have found the most effective ways to deal with the pandemic, with the least possible impact on the economy and our daily lives.

We feel that a wider range of industries should be given permission to go back to work towards the end of the lockdown period. This will allow us to get the economy back up and running and allow people to provide for their families once again. At the same time, we feel that the vulnerable people within the population should still be protected and social distancing should still be observed.



As a business, we feel that more and more companies will place emphasis on the well-being of their employees and put measures in place to ensure the health and safety of all of their staff. We are expecting a lot of these companies to reach out to us to provide a dedicated staff transport service for this reason.

🔴 ***Now is the time to innovate and experiment. What is Zeelo doing?***

As a tech company, we are programmed to be nimble and adapt to the ever-changing environment around us. During this time, we have experimented with offerings that are outside of the services we usually provide. In doing so, we have identified ways in which our technology can be applied differently in different situations or adapted to fulfil different needs.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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