

Super effort by SuperSpar

The Corona virus pandemic has affected South Africa as much as anywhere else in the world, but both our Government and our retailers had some indication of what was to come. The Government initiatives have been lauded as timely, balanced and necessary and hopefully, over time our infection and death curves will be flatter than other countries.

All retailers have taken very stringent precautions to safeguard the safety of their staff and customers, but one group of stores stands head and shoulders above the rest.

The group of four stores, all based in Gauteng, is owned and managed by George Skoutellas, a leading SPAR retailer that is also a director of the SPAR Guild board. His stores are located mostly in the more affluent areas (Bedfordview, Blackheath in Johannesburg and Glen Acres, Kempton Park,) with one store in a working-class area, North Riding, Randburg.

George's priorities were the health and wellness of his 600 staff members as well as that of his thousands of customers.

In the beginning...

The usual measures were implemented immediately:

- Hand sanitation as the customers entered the store
- Wiping down of trolley handles at the entrance



This outsourced team deep cleans all the stores bi-weekly and the fact is not hidden from the customers, who appreciate the effort.

- Perspex shields to stop cashier/customer infection
- Floor signs to keep the distance of at least one metre between shoppers
- Face masks and hand gloves were also used.



But soon, George realised that these measures were not enough to stop the infection from spreading in his stores. He immediately embarked on a raft of new measures, which included...

- Public address system announcements requesting customers to keep their distance from each other, especially in service areas and at the checkouts
- Hand sanitising stations (altogether 50 of them in the four stores) spread throughout the stores, especially near the service areas
- Temperature reading of all staff members on arrival daily
- An outsourced deep cleaning company was engaged to deep cleanse the stores from top to bottom bi-weekly with food-safe disinfectants that cover a whole range of nasties (viruses, bacteria, fungi and protozoa)
- The local health department was invited to man a special shaded spot at the store entrance, where customers could answer basic questions about their health. Any suspected cases were taken to the specially fitted van, managed by the health department, for proper COVID-19 tests (no infection cases were reported).



Health department officials welcome customers and ask them basic questions about their health. The van is parked nearby for a thorough and professional test to be conducted.



Staff line up before starting their duties to have their body temperature scanned. In the event of a fever, they will be referred to the right clinic for attention.

The customer response

The response by the shoppers was immediate and very positive. Posts by shoppers on the various social media linked to the group were ebullient about the care and attention that George and his team took in addressing this challenge.

The staff also felt that their work environment was a safe place to be working in.

Says George "I was heartened by the amazing level of trust displayed by both our customers and our staff. This emergency has brought out the best in people and the normal happy atmosphere in my stores was amplified by an elevated sense of trust and belonging, as we are in this together."



Some images of the empty shelves after the rush of the day before lockdown. However, very soon, the stores were stocked up to the hilt, with a few exceptions.



These two photos of the receiving area and the storeroom indicate the volume of stock that had to be delivered daily by the Spar DC to ensure that the supply chain continued as normal.

The trends

George is happy to share his insights into the various trends that affected his business before and during the lockdown.

The moment the public understood that the lockdown was imminent, additional purchases were made by all and sundry, but there was no panic buying. The week before the lockdown, sales were up by 20%. However, the day before the lockdown, store sales rocketed to a 300% increase. Like everyone else, stores were depleted of toilet rolls, cleaning products, yeast and long-life products.

George was very complimentary of the SPAR distribution centre capability and the way their stores were replenished quickly and efficiently. In fact, some suppliers quipped that SPAR was better organised for this event than many major chains.



These sanitising stations were specially produced for the store and are dotted around many positions within the shop, especially around the service areas.



Deep cleaning teams in action – every corner is covered and all shelves from top to bottom. Fresh departments are also done as the spray is food safe.



Happy, healthy staff make it a happy and safe shopping occasion.



Both cashiers and customers are well protected by the see-through screens at the till points.

Since the lockdown started (at the time of writing, it has another two weeks to go), sales are still very bullish, but the customer count has dropped by 50% while the average spend per customer has increased by 250%.

Customers pop into the store for their replenishment, while others email an order in advance and collect/pay it later. As the Tops liquor stores have been closed down by decree, the Tops staff are now used as pickers for orders placed by customers. No one has lost their job and the service levels continue to be top of class.

One last point made by George "Instead of using this period to create better margin for my store, I decided to create a 'Lockdown Special' campaign, where a whole range of basic essentials was reduced to cost price and the consumers can benefit from this. My margins may be down, but the goodwill generated cannot be measured in Rands in Cents."

Older shoppers have been catered for by opening specially for them from 7am to 8am each morning to keep them separate from younger shoppers to avoid infection.



SPAR BEDFORDVIEW
 Chr Nicol & Van Buuren Road, Bedfordview.
 Tel: (011) 450-1474
 Trading Hours: Mon to Sun & Pub Holidays
 07900 to 19800

TO ALL OUR LOYAL CUSTOMERS
 The store will be open from
7 - 8am for our
ELDERLY CUSTOMERS

We ask for our other loyal customers to kindly refrain from shopping during this time to allow for this. Whilst we cannot guarantee the exclusivity during this time, we believe it will reduce their risk significantly.

We know that the Coronavirus is more of a threat to older people, and it is thus important that our older customers limit the number of times they are in busy spaces as much as possible.

THANK YOU SO MUCH
 STAFF AND MANAGEMENT



Step one – wash and sanitise your hands many times a day!!!



Cigarette sales have been forbidden during the lockdown, so the store explains the matter to its clients plainly and clearly.

These striking stickers are self-explanatory and welcome the customer as she walks into the store. Store education + government education = a healthier society.





Thank you

As a gesture of gratitude towards the community, George's SPAR group has embarked on a campaign to donate R1 million in essential goods to those who need it around each store.

Posters encouraging the customers to also participate are dotted around the stores and the staff has enthusiastically embraced the project to assist their community. On day one of the appeal, one ton of goods were donated by the public.

Says George "We must never forget those in need at times like these. We all take for granted that we have easy access to food and other essentials, but not everyone is able to do this."



Although there was no panic buying, the week before the lockdown, sales were up by 20%. However, the day before the lockdown, store sales rocketed to a 300% increase.



Customers have also adopted their own personal precautions – here a lady shopper uses her scarf to protect her face while shopping.



A community store looking after its community!

