

A photograph of two women, likely florists, in a shop. They are both wearing dark aprons over their clothing. The woman on the left is holding a tablet and looking at it with a smile. The woman on the right is also smiling and looking at the tablet. They are standing behind a wooden counter where a large bouquet of orange roses is being prepared. In the background, there are shelves with various plants and flowers, and a wooden door or partition. The lighting is warm and indoor.

How a popular
online florist went from
expendable to essential
with the lockdown
clock ticking

ZenSar



Retailers must act fast when customer buying habits change practically overnight. At the onset of **COVID-19**, our client's sales dropped to a mere 10% of its pre-pandemic norm. We helped our client **reinvent itself** as an essential business and increase its **revenue by 50%**.

Summary

The appearance of COVID-19 caused consumers around the world to reassess their buying habits. Whether a financial crunch, the need for contactless shopping, or job insecurity, shoppers were immediately – and understandably – cautious about spending. Wants and whims moved to the end of the list, and customer spending was driven by need and availability. Our client, NetFlorist, had to find its place in the chaos and fight for its survival.

About NetFlorist

NetFlorist is South Africa's largest online gift and fresh flower delivery service. They are also South Africa's oldest e-commerce company, founded by 3 friends in 1999. Over two decades, this online retail experiment has grown to handle over 0.7 Mn orders in a year.

NetFlorist makes use of world-class technology and global sourcing, allowing its customers to send floral arrangements and gifts for special occasions to recipients in South Africa and around the world. NetFlorist's track record of quality and same-day delivery make the online retailer a preferred choice.

Objective | From expendable to essential

While social distancing, job insecurity, and shelter-in-place mandates put extras and nice-to-haves on the backburner, groceries, toiletries, and household supplies became the priorities for consumers. Flowers and specialty items were considered frivolous. It came as no surprise that NetFlorist's orders dropped to a mere 10% of their regular volume just a day before lockdown.

NetFlorist had two very urgent needs:

- **Establish a secure future** during these unstable times for its employees by safeguarding business and revenue
- **Become relevant to its customers**, who now had different, more pressing needs

These reasons motivated NetFlorist to **risk its brand reputation and successful business model**. In the early days of the pandemic, customers needed flour, not flowers. They sought to endure, not celebrate. NetFlorist utilized its large fleet and same-day delivery service to bridge the gap between homebound customers and essentials needs. We stepped in to build that bridge.

Challenges | A forced shift in behaviour

Offering essential items for sale meant a steady flux of orders, as opposed to the predictable, holiday-driven surge for flowers and specialty gifts. It also meant a critical change in the delivery system, as the person ordering was also the recipient. Expectations of customers would be starkly different, and NetFlorist had to consider – and cater – to those increased expectations.

The first major hurdle to overcome was the disorganized, cumbersome connection between NetFlorist and its community of partners. Communications were outdated and unreliable and would have to be overhauled before a modern customer experience could be put into place. Given the need to survive as a business, time was of the essence. And NetFlorist had to provide a practical, dependable, and helpful customer experience from order to delivery.

To build this new experience, numerous changes to front-end assets (such as the website), back-end processes, and applications were required. This meant

that systems might be temporarily offline, and with call centers non-operational as a result of the lockdown, this further complicated the project.

Solution | Bridging the gaps

Customer experience, application management, and supply chain management were the key areas of change that we had to connect, to create a new framework for our client's application landscape. Using this framework as a guide, we moved quickly to catalog vendor products, price items, update inventory, and other information on NetFlorist's website. By **re-engineering the application landscape and developing reliable API integrations** we were able to sync inventory data from vendors with payment systems, so that customers can be notified of items running out of stock. Refunds, if any, would also be initiated automatically. This created a **seamless buying experience** for NetFlorist's customers. **The payment process was also modified** to revise delivery charges from per-item to per scheduled delivery, considering the new pattern in the flow of orders.

We also put in place an **agile and effective email support system** to bridge the gap caused by the lack of a functioning call-center.



Our Impact | 360 degrees in 36 hours

There was a great deal of work to accomplish and a limited amount of time to work. We reworked our client's digital façade, including front-end assets like the website, and core systems, including their backend applications, so they could serve their customers in a meaningful way. We accomplished this shift in roughly three days – from announcement of the impending lockdown to the lockdown's actual start. We worked rapidly and closely with our client to launch a new business model, enabling NetFlorist to accept its first order of groceries within thirty-six hours.

We continued this momentum immediately after launch, focusing on **quality of experience** rather than quantity of orders. In four days, NetFlorist had regained **50%-60% of its pre-lockdown order volume**. Even with the added complexity of both teams working from home, we were able to quickly achieve a new business model for NetFlorist.

Zensar and NetFlorist | Why it worked

We've been a **technology partner** to NetFlorist for **over seven years**. During this time, we **incrementally built the foundation for an agile set-up**, allowing NetFlorist to adapt quickly to dramatic changes in customer behavior. NetFlorist strengthened its customer loyalty by **taking action to meet essential customer needs** under **extraordinary circumstances**.

Zensar Technologies

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