

# SMART MOVES

Small businesses that change direction, innovate, and find new revenue streams in tough times, are more likely to survive. Here's how eight entrepreneurs navigated the pandemic

**Holly Harper, head of inspiration and new partners at Not On The High Street, an online marketplace for more than 5,000 small businesses, says:**

*'At a time when most retailers were struggling to stay in stock, adjust their budgets or forecast for the unknown, our community of small businesses utilised their creative genius and entrepreneurial instincts to react, respond and re-plan.*

*By listening to their communities, demonstrating true empathy and connecting with customers to help them through what was an incredibly difficult period – often putting their own personal struggles to one side – they innovated like never before. This combination of creativity and determination has brought new successes and opportunities at a truly unexpected time.'*



## From floristry to food delivery

Emma Soulsby was running a six-figure floral business, Emma Soulsby Flowers, when Covid hit and all her weddings and events were postponed. To survive, Emma started Magnificent Marrow, a food delivery service, with her partner Leigh, also a florist. Soulsby says:

'Leigh and I came up with the idea to offer a food box service at the same time. We realised that people were struggling to get fresh produce and knew this idea would work, but we had to launch immediately while demand was high. Luckily, we already knew suppliers and within a week we had built a website and delivered our first 20 boxes. We offered three options – a fruit box, veg box and salad box, plus eggs – and it was eggs that saved us. People ordered 60 at a time! We worked 18-hour days, picking up produce at 1am, handwriting delivery notes because we couldn't buy printer ink, and packing boxes in our van. At the time, I thought it was just a way to survive lockdown and we'd go back to floristry. Eight months on, Magnificent Marrow is going from strength to strength, we've launched nationwide delivery and opened our own shop. We now offer so much more than eggs! Customers can add deli goods, responsibly sourced meat and fish, cheese and flowers to boxes.'

[magnificentmarrow.co.uk](http://magnificentmarrow.co.uk)



## From shop owner to online consultant

Toks Aruoture was forced to close her luxury nursery boutique, The Baby Cot Shop, in London, during both lockdowns. She adapted by creating an online interior design service and a podcast for mums-to-be. Aruoture says:

'The key is not to panic. I've lost a business before, due to recession, so I didn't fear financial loss. I knew it wouldn't kill me and we could bounce back. Taking our nursery design service online has actually improved it, because we can now see the customer's actual space rather than rely on room measurements and pictures. It has also increased our client base by 30%, as we can help people around the UK, not just those who visit the shop in London. I've even designed a nursery for a mum-to-be in Australia. We also started offering parenting advice on social media and through my podcast, Living Inside Out. I love the way people have responded – that doesn't make us money, but it does grow our community.'

[thebabycotshop.com](http://thebabycotshop.com) and  
[livinginsideoutpodcast.com](http://livinginsideoutpodcast.com)



### From upcycling to TV presenting

Zoe Pocock runs Muck N Brass, a sustainable 'luxecycling' business selling kitsch furniture and homewares. During lockdown, she began doing online craft workshops, which caught the attention of a TV production company and resulted in her co-presenting *The Weekend Workshop* on HGTV. Pocock says: 'I've always been an innovator – it's what my business is based on – but I never imagined it would get me a TV series with Kate Humble in the middle of a national lockdown. I only did upcycling tutorials on Instagram Live, because I wanted to support my customers and keep myself busy. I knew people were bored and keen to improve their homes, so I tried to explain how to do simple projects, such as découpage a chest of drawers. I knew everyone was struggling, so while other creatives charged for tutorials, I did mine for free. It paid off, because the producer of *The Weekend Workshop* saw what I was doing and asked if I wanted to replicate it on a TV show. They sent a cameraman to film me, Kate Humble and Max McMurdo, in our respective homes or studios, and within a month, I was watching myself on TV, which was crazy. Plus, the money I earned as a presenter kept Muck N Brass afloat.'

[mucknbrass.com](http://mucknbrass.com)



### From interactive theatre to virtual nightclub

Brittany Blum and Tessa Whitehead are the co-creators of Eschaton, an immersive theatre company that pivoted from in-person shows to an online space with world-class acts and a choose-your-own-adventure style story. Whitehead says: 'I like to think that during lockdown we reinvented modern nightlife. It's not what we'd planned when we formed Eschaton in 2019, but in many ways, it's more exciting. Now, instead of a real location, we host our events online and have performers, including actors, DJs and dancers, in different 'rooms' that audience members enter via Zoom. Being online opens up more possibilities in terms of performances, with an added element of freedom, mystique and ingenuity. We open on Saturdays for just one hour, with tickets starting at £10. VIP packages grant exclusive access to different rooms and experiences, like in a physical club. For our Halloween event, 'End Times', Broadway and cabaret star Frankie Grande (Ariana Grande's brother) performed and New York nightlife icon Susanne Bartsch hosted an after-party. As overheads are lower than they would be for physical events, we can keep ticket prices accessible. We're reaching a new, global audience with near limitless capacity to scale – and the possibilities are endless.'

[tickettailor.com/events/eschaton](https://tickettailor.com/events/eschaton);  
@\_\_eschaton on Instagram



### From restaurateur to retailer

Chef Zahra Khan had opened two Feya Cafes in London, plus the DYCE dessert parlour, when Covid changed everything. Not wanting to lose her 25 staff, she pivoted to plan B and launched a Feya Cafe retail line offering jams, chocolates, teas and other products. Khan says: 'With my three food outlets closed for five months and an overwhelming number of business and staff costs, I had to take a risk. I could no longer rely on the bricks and mortar restaurants, so I re-evaluated my business model and launched products to develop a new revenue stream. I'd wanted to bring out Feya retail products for a while, but hadn't had time to develop them. Now I did, so I started creating recipes and testing samples as well as working on packaging design. I'm really pleased with the products, and so are our regular customers, who were missing our sweet treats. Amazingly, despite the cafes being closed, our company's annual revenue has exceeded that of previous years, too.'

[feya.co.uk](http://feya.co.uk)



### From complementary therapies to wellbeing subscription service

Rachael Hose runs Atlas Therapies in Glasgow, Scotland, which specialises in aromatherapy, facial massage and reflexology. When she had to stop all face-to-face treatments she launched the A.T. HOME Subscription box so she could still provide wellbeing services, just in a different way. Hose says: ‘My income went down to nothing overnight, and I couldn’t treat people at a time when I felt they needed it most. I wanted to connect with those who felt anxious about what was going on, and came up with the idea of offering a wellbeing subscription box. I would deliver expertly curated products from independent brands and run masterclasses showing how to use them for self-care at home. The response was overwhelming, especially to our first box, ‘Rest | Sleep | Restore’, with a focus on improving sleep quality. My business has just returned to pre-pandemic profit, and I have gained lots of new clients, too, which is amazing.’  
[athomebox.co.uk](http://athomebox.co.uk)



### From spice sets to mask-making

Sanjay Aggarwal and his mother Shashi run Spice Kitchen, a Midlands-based company selling home-ground spice blends. During lockdown, they started Sewing by Shashi, a company that makes and sells masks. Aggarwal says: ‘Mum furloughed herself during lockdown and started to sew free masks for the NHS. She established a team of seamstresses to help out, and used the professional sewing machines and beautiful cottons we already had to make packaging for our spice kits. As soon as we advertised the masks online, we sold out, and what started as a desire to help out became a side business that responded to unprecedented demand. What I’m most proud of is employing 20 seamstresses who were otherwise out of work, and re-investing the income from the masks into Spice Kitchen.’  
[notonthehighstreet.com/spicekitchen](http://notonthehighstreet.com/spicekitchen)



### From bar to at-home cocktail club

Hayley Simpson owns a custom-built cocktail bar that was booked for events throughout the summer. With everything cancelled, she started the at-home Lucky Pineapple Cocktail Club. Simpson says: ‘Lockdown started just before my busiest time of year – but giving up was never an option, and I decided to rise to the challenge. I had a good following online, so I decided to bring Lucky Pineapple to them. I launched cocktail kits, gifts and glassware on an e-commerce site as well as virtual cocktail masterclasses. It took off brilliantly, and I’ll be shipping hundreds of Lucky Pineapple kits all over the UK and Europe in the run-up to Christmas. Things are still tight, but if I hadn’t started the club, I’d be worse off financially and awareness of my brand would have ground to a halt, too.’  
[luckypineapplebar.com/lucky-pineapple-cocktail-club](http://luckypineapplebar.com/lucky-pineapple-cocktail-club)

#### PIVOTING TIPS FROM SMALL BUSINESSES THAT HAVE DONE IT

Work out a daily break-even figure and don’t panic. Once you know the minimum amount you need to survive, it will feel less of a struggle.

Stop, think and reflect. What do your customers need now? What do you do best, and how could you transfer your skills?

Don’t be afraid to move outside your comfort zone. Run small trials first and see what works.

Align your offering to the zeitgeist. It’s easier to create something in demand that sells itself, rather than something you have to market heavily and convince people to buy

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