

STEM must go on in lockdown



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.

[AstroComms](#) is a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Consulting and Communications company headed by Dr Tana Joseph and seeks to assist STEM practitioners, institutions and policymakers to effectively leverage STEM as a driver for economic and social development.

Dr Tana Joseph, who is actively involved in outreach and science engagements at various astronomy institutions, says that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the business. She shares with us the impact of the coronavirus on AstroComms...



Dr. Tana Joseph, founder and director of AstroComms

■ ***How has Covid-19 impacted your business?***

The biggest impact on my business has been the cancellation of speaking engagements and other in-person events. Since schools and other educational institutions are some of our main clients, the closure of these organisations had a big impact on our work.

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

Since AstroComms doesn't have any physical offices and most of our work can be done remotely, we didn't need to prepare very much to adjust to the lockdown conditions.

■ ***What's the biggest challenge you are facing during this pandemic?***

Staying motivated and optimistic in these troubling times. Since we work remotely much of the time, and we are all familiar with remote working options, like Zoom, Skype, Google Docs, etc. The main challenge has been structuring the working day around challenges such as child care, etc. as we all have significant changes to our work/life balance during this lockdown period.



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

Support for lost revenue, perhaps changes to the tax requirements, allowing us to pay later, etc.

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

We are continuing to operate, but of course, business is slower than usual. As I said before since we do so much of our work remotely and online already, the operating capacity of the company hasn't been severely impacted.

■ **What measures have you put in place for your employees?**

Since all of AstroComms employees work on a consulting basis, we are still able to operate mostly as normal. We continue to communicate via online resources like Skype and Slack as necessary.

■ **Are you communicating with your customers? If so, how?**

We have continued to communicate with our clients and followers via social media as we have always done.

■ **How are you offering assistance to your customers who rely on your services?**

Since we are not an essential service, we are not under the same pressure as other companies in that regard. We continue to work consistently and communicate with our clients as needed, adjusting deadlines, payments, etc. as necessary.

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

The next six months will be filled with increasing stress and restlessness for those in lockdown, as well as increased financial stresses if people are not able to return to work. This will, of course, have a significant impact on businesses and we must all be ready to adapt to this new normal.

“ In business terms, more and more companies who are able will be moving to remote working and online resources to keep things going. In South Africa, this could cause it's own issues since we have high data costs and constrained infrastructure for internet connectivity. ”

■ **Now is the time to innovate and experiment. What is AstroComms doing?**

AstroComms is actively involved with initiatives such as virtual conferences and social media engagement during this time, replacing our in-person speaking engagements with online ones. We have also increased our social media activity.

Lastly, we are using this time of increased latency to attend to issues that haven't been given priority, for example, forging new collaborations with other companies in our sector.

■ **What has been your biggest lesson from all this?**

This global pandemic has shown us that businesses and society in general, have to be able to adapt quickly to changes in order to survive. Of course, not everyone will be able to, but those who can will have the opportunity to thrive and in turn, support those who are struggling. By working together and implementing new ideas, we can support each other through these uncertain times

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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