

Members Article

CONNECT, LEARN & SHARE

September 2021

By Reidar Skorpen, General Manager at Seeyou

What did we experience from Covid 19

Covid 19 has been our biggest business challenge so far. From one day to another, business changed dramatically, I think we have all experienced the same. The big question is how we best can use the last 1,5 years to benefit and become a better partner for our clients and build our companies to be stronger.

The biggest challenge going forward is to convince media agencies and retail customers that great customer experience is one of the most important factors to succeed in retail.

What did we experience in our local market?

When Covid 19 really hit our nation, we faced a situation not similar to anything we had experienced before. On one day I had client after client calling me to stop surveys and postpone work until further notice. It was not that they were dissatisfied with anything, they just experienced that all their customers disappeared, and so did we. Expected turnover in the months ahead suddenly disappeared, we simply had to take action to save the company.

**I do not think we have lost 1 customer due to the pandemic,
but we are uncertain on when they will come back.**

For the company to survive through this crisis was immediately our first goal. Through board meetings and financial calculations, we found out we only had one choice, we had to put a lot of our staff on leave for a period until surveys started again. What lay ahead was very uncertain; how long would this pandemic be, when would businesses start again and be financially strong enough to start surveys with us again?

We also saw some competitors immediately going bankrupt. I felt sorry for them, it was bad for the Mystery Shopping business, and I feared what that would mean to us.

Members Article

CONNECT, LEARN & SHARE

September 2021

By Reidar Skorpen, General Manager at Seeyou

What saved us?

I think there were 2 factors that really saved us.

1. Norway is a rich country
2. Diversification of products

We received a lot of financial help from our government, fast. Financial support was given to companies in an easy way, approved, and paid out immediately. Financial aid was not only for our company, staff on leave also received enough financial aid to get through.

With all this financial support some businesses have really bloomed over the last year. People's financial situations has been good, and businesses in industries such as furniture, house and cabin building, home supply of all kinds, have exploded. Businesses in sectors such as travelling, restaurants, tourism, hotels etc. have hit rock bottom, but are now on the way up again because more Norwegians are having a vacation domestically.

We had always been worried about being too dependent on only Mystery Shopping surveys. That was why over the years we have developed our Mystery Calling business and The Customer Service Prize. Luckily, we had just finished the big survey for 2020, and sold a lot of reports based on that in the spring of 2020. Covid changed retail, and developed it more toward e-commerce and so the customer center became a lot more important to retail businesses. We must take note of that going forward, retail is changing fast, and we have to follow that development with our products.

What do I worry about going forward?

There are several factors that I am worried about going forward.

1. **I am worried** about losing key personnel. As we are a small organization, each person is important for us, it takes time to educate them, and we must build a business that they experience is solid and interesting for them going forward.

Members Article

CONNECT, LEARN & SHARE

September 2021

By Reidar Skorpen, General Manager at Seeyou

2. **I am worried** about losing customers. Some businesses have become stronger through the pandemic, some not, and some might want to change focus on marketing spending to raise their business again.
3. **I am worried** about the power of media agencies to steer marketing spending away from customer surveys. More and more clients become very dependent on their media agencies, they decide how to spend their marketing budget and I am concerned that a key focus in years to come will be to drive traffic rather than developing quality in the customer meet/experience.
4. **I am worried** about a shift of measuring customer experience. More and more retail customers have digital survey providers and stop Mystery Shopping surveys. We experience a lot of retailers substituting Mystery Shoppers with short and insufficient surveys which are mostly just a glimpse of reporting if you are happy or not, but do not give any insight to why and what to work with to get better. As a business we have to educate retail businesses that these surveys are just a supplement to deeper insight surveys such as Mystery Shopping surveys, that will help them improve in giving the best customer experience.
5. **I am worried** about new companies attacking our local market. We now see fewer local companies offering Mystery Shopping surveys and foreign companies being more visible in our local market. And the major challenge, they operate with gift certificates and payment through Pay Pal without reporting income to our tax authorities. This undermines our whole local business; it means unfair competition. When I see big retail brands using these companies, I am also worried about the quality of the surveys as they are executed from abroad with no local office and without local knowledge.
6. **I am worried** of us being able to deliver needed quality in our surveys. Clients will demand more from us, there is a shift among Mystery Shoppers as during this period they have been without jobs from us and many of them change jobs. By losing good shoppers we

Members Article

CONNECT, LEARN & SHARE

September 2021

By Reidar Skorpen, General Manager at Seeyou

must build our base up again to meet expected standards. We have not experienced this in a major scale, but it could be a challenge for us.

7. **I am worried** that as an industry we are not developing our business fast enough to become more than just doing customer surveys. We have some of the most important insights in retail, and we give that away to other consulting companies who become advisors to the companies and then do the education of staff. This is where the big money is, and we do not take any benefit from that. That is why we have developed SeeYou Consulting as a new product, but we acknowledge it will take many years to build this up to be a good business for us, but we are underway and see some results already. The biggest challenge will be to be able to find and employ the right people and have the financial strength to develop this.

8. **I am worried** about a possible change of the retail business from stores to stores in combination with e-commerce where we will not be a chosen partner. We must immediately develop our expertise in this new retail landscape, survey methods and products. If not, we will give away this new opportunity to others.

We must develop and diversify our product portfolio to meet the new retail landscape and not only be a Mystery Shopping company.
