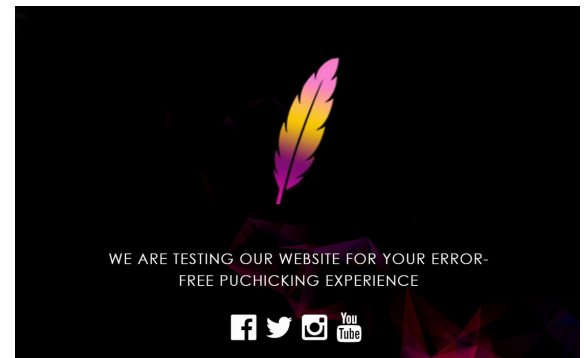


Entrepreneurs Hit Hardest by the Pandemic

Find the Silver Lining

Abu Bakar is the founder of [Puchik](#), the first Pakistani web-space for promoting local artists. Abu Bakar formally launched his business in December 2019 in view that the world is moving towards a digital shift as organizations have started moving their services online. "However, Pakistan being a developing country, people here believe that anything that is being sold and marketed online is fake. This further led us to make the decision of constructing a physical studio with all the necessary equipment required by artists for recordings and podcasts which they themselves cannot purchase.

Furthermore, we had envisioned the studio to be converted into a production house within 10-12 years' time. All this had been planned before the COVID-19 outbreak began. But the pandemic has affected our digital platform to a great extent.



For a startup, it's important that the team be present physically in order to be effective. And being in Pakistan where the internet connection is not stable and absent in many places this has led to us having no proper meetings. Besides this, we were also not able to reach the developer we had hired which led to the delay of our website launch. The lockdown strategy in our country is not well defined, and this has caused us difficulty in finding a studio, as people fear to rent out their spaces during these times. Hence, our team then decided on establishing a studio at our colleague's house. Though it is not seen as professional, it is a milestone we aim to fulfil. The silver lining for us right now is that a few businesses are still operating so why not us."



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The Need to Change Strategies

Entrepreneur Iqra Zaheen provides solar dryers for fruits and vegetables all over Pakistan including dried products like fresh dried mint mix, and dried red chillies through her initiative Fresh Dri. When the lockdown was imposed as COVID-19 was spreading rapidly, marketing became a challenge for her business.

"We have not been able to market our products online; it just seems like it won't work like this. We have also experienced the rate of sale of our products declining. We had targeted selling around 20 to 30 mounds of red chili but were not able to access farmers with the lockdown intact. Then we decided to focus on developing solar dryers but this again resulted in unavailability of labor and raw materials."

Entrepreneurs Hit Hardest by the Pandemic

Defeated by COVID-19

“When my husband passed away 3 years ago, I found myself in a state of depression and anxiety,” explains Ms. Farooq. “My doctor advised me to keep myself busy and develop a passion for a hobby. Having a background in arts and being a painter during my teenage years, within 3 months’ time I started my own painting academy. It’s no fancy business but it helped me improve my mental state. I not only gave painting lessons but would also take orders and sell authentic and professional art supplies that I would have my son send over to me from abroad.

I would have sessions all throughout the week even on weekends with mothers, their children and a few university students would attend. And to me I have believed in in-person learning/teaching sessions, all throughout my life. I never quite understood the need of online learning, hence being a tech illiterate I felt quite satisfied. And it is also true how many people say that older people don’t seem to adopt technical change as well as the young do.

But when the pandemic took over, and business had been put to a halt all across the globe, that's when I realized why it was important to have had some knowledge on using technology. With no one to teach me the step by step process of online sessions, many of my clients and students switched to other alternate options that had transitioned to digital platforms. It's just disappointing how all efforts and heart was poured into this initiative, I don't think I will be able to sustain business back at that level when the pandemic is over, not at this old age that I am in.”



What Steps Can the Government Take:

As the pandemic has left most of us economically deprived, SMEs in Pakistan are also greatly affected being unprepared for such circumstances. According to SMEDA’s survey, “the impact of COVID-19 on SMEs”, 95% of SMEs reported that COVID-19 and the lockdown have caused a reduction of their operations, 92% reported disruption in their supply chain and 23% revealed a 100% loss in their exports.

In response to these crises, government and other private companies should formulate strategies to minimise the negative impact while supporting small businesses who contribute to 30% of the GDP. During this time, the government should help entrepreneurs to take their business online to survive during this pandemic. Along with financial support, the focus should also be on providing technical support as well.

Coronavirus symptoms Include:

- Fever
- Dry Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Tiredness

Contact your doctor or the coronavirus helpline at



1166



Where can I get tested?

Karachi

Aga Khan University Hospital

Stadium Road, Karachi

Civil Hospital

DOW University Campus

Mission Road, Karachi

Dow Medical Hospital

Ojha Campus

Suparco Road, Karachi

Indus Hospital

Opposite Darussalam Society, Korangi Crossing, Karachi

Lahore

Punjab AIDS Lab

PACP Complex

6 - Birdwood Road, Lahore

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital

7A Block R-3 M.A. Johar Town, Lahore

Islamabad

National Institute of Health

Park Road

Chak Shahzad, Islamabad

Rawalpindi

Armed Forces Institute of

Pathology

Range Road

CMH Complex, Rawalpindi

Multan

Nishtar Hospital

Nishtar Road,

Justice Hamid Colony, Multan

For more cities visit the

[COVID-19 Health Advisory Platform](#)

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