

Connecting people to more than just food - the Uber Eats journey

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Tapping into the physical space of taking the restaurant seamlessly into homes with the use of technology, Uber Eats has been revolutionising its virtual marketplace ecosystem to connect people to more than just-food. We chat with Daniele Joubert, eater growth lead, for Uber Eats South Africa ahead of Ecom Africa, which takes place at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) from 4-5 May 2022.



Daniele Joubert, Eater Growth Lead, Uber Eats sub-Saharan Africa

Here, Joubert, who will be speaking at this year's event on 'Sustainable innovation in virtual restaurants', delves into how Uber Eats technology made the restaurant experience seamless, why industry disruption is a necessity, and how innovations have changed the brands' offering and business model.

■ ***Creating the future of food delivery takes empathy, innovation, and an appetite for complex logistical challenges. Tell us how Uber Eats has been doing this?***

Our mission is to turn Uber Eats into a technology platform offering the best service and value to all its users. We've already built an efficient platform across the globe, and now we're focused on transforming it into a vibrant marketplace ecosystem to connect people to more than just food. We connect people to a range of convenience goods including beauty, alcohol, and gift essentials.



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I am exceptionally proud of how far we have come as a business, having increased our footprint in South Africa in 2021, despite the continued uncertainty brought on by the pandemic. We understand that each country and their subsequent economy work differently, and thus certain practices are tailored to better suit the uniquely South African flavour. We pride ourselves on thinking locally while building globally.

Uber Eats cultivates empathy and innovation by understanding our customers and their ever-changing needs; solving problems they might even know they have; and by testing solutions to adapt timeously.

■ ***What are some of the challenges that you have faced and what were some of the steps you took to mitigate this?***

I am responsible for growing the business efficiently by generating demand for the platform. One enduring and certainly exciting challenge has been getting into the hearts and minds of 'eaters' on the platform, while also navigating the uniqueness of working in a technology company that has a three-sided marketplace. Matching demand and supply as effectively as possible to ensure a good customer experience is certainly one of the most challenging and exciting tasks we face daily.

I am extremely excited and passionate about the Uber Eats business and our journey in South Africa, which dates to 2016. By combining efficient technology with great people, we can mitigate this challenge and transform the way people eat and acquire goods - for all occasions, across many locations, at the push of a button.

■ ***Tell us how Covid impacted UberEats and what was its response like? What sort of innovations did UberEats implement to navigate this response? And how have these tied into the overall business of what Uber Eats does?***

There is no denying that the pandemic has provided businesses across the world with some valuable, albeit often hard to swallow lessons. When the lockdown was announced and all restaurants had to be closed, our business was unable to operate (like most other businesses in South Africa and across the globe).

This resulted in perhaps the most worthwhile of these teachings being the importance of diversification – or at least, the ability to diversify and adapt quickly. This proved the value of our business model and our operations as a way of securing business sustainability and success in an increasingly fast-changing global business environment.

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Uber Eats was fortunate to have forward-thinking leadership and a very agile business model, which allowed us to quickly pivot our offering to mitigate the potentially massive risks that Covid-19 would otherwise have presented had we been unable to adapt. This includes adding product lines to meet the consumers' changing needs, changing operations consistently based on each country's own set of regulations and effectively allowing our users to get what they need in a

hassle-free manner.

The significant, positive performance we have achieved through this diversification strategy is testimony to the value that diversification can bring to any business and our ability to implement such changes quickly. Arguably, the most valuable lesson we have learnt over the past two years is that a willingness to 'let go' of rigid business beliefs and diversify the value propositions offered to customers is possibly the most effective growth strategy any business could adopt.

This strategic execution was driven by a recognition that we had to take decisive action to keep ourselves, our partners, and delivery people 'in business' when the world went into lockdown. We responded by pivoting our operating model to go far beyond app-based food deliveries to also provide a range of other household essentials.

■ ***How has Uber Eats technology made the restaurant experience seamless and being a digital-first brand, how is it business-critical?***

Data science and machine learning are built into our DNA. It helps us become better at moving millions of people around the world with a push of a button as well as transforming the way they get goods.

For example, in South Africa, we use data to improve the user experience. Whether it's using traffic and weather patterns to update the ETAs to customers or working with restaurants to optimise food preparation time to ensure an order arrives hot and fresh.

We believe the key to success lies in our ability to utilise our technology to continuously improve the experience of eaters, delivery people and merchants on the app. Therefore, we put emphasis on effective search functionality.

A great example is how we're using data to help merchants identify new business opportunities, receive data-driven insights on their performance on Uber Eats and receive real-time feedback from their customers. Merchants have access to a Restaurant Manager portal which provides them with access to information about the performance, growth tactics that will increase their sales, their customer satisfaction, and key operational metrics. This is business-critical as we are empowering our merchants.



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■ ***Can you share some of the trends that helped shape this business model?***

When Uber launched initially, the team created a technology that specialises in moving people from point A to point B in a hassle-free manner. The increasing need for on-demand delivery resulted in the team running different tests using this technology on other challenges. If we can move people surely, we can move goods.

On-demand food deliveries were the trend that shaped the Uber Eats business model originally. People who wanted the convenience of restaurant food in the comfort of their own homes or workplaces at the click of a button - whether it was to relax and binge on their favourite TV shows after a long week or provide working parents time with their children instead of needing to be in front of a stove - Uber Eats was giving people time back in their day. When Covid hit, consumers' needs expanded far beyond just food.

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The stellar growth in overall delivery services of household goods and groceries that we are seeing currently confirms

that consumers have fully adopted this way of shopping. They enjoy the ease and convenience, and we believe they are unlikely to revert to previous shopping behaviours and habits. In the food delivery sector specifically, we welcome this significant growth trend, even though it means Uber Eats will face growing competition in the coming months and years.

Another key trend that formed this business model was the introduction of the gig economy, where earners wanted the flexibility of earning on their own terms. Uber Eats is building an earner platform that allows delivery people to earn an income while managing their own time.

■ ***Why is it so important for industry disruption to take place and where has Uber Eats found itself on the playing field and what can we expect from the company?***

Radical changes in industries are critical for everyone involved, it allows new businesses to enter the market by providing consumers with unique or untapped alternatives that can improve the way they live. It also pushes existing organisations to innovate and continuously re-evaluate their offerings and it opens the doors for technical advances.

Uber Eats was one of the first global on-demand food delivery services that changed the way consumers ordered and enjoyed food, which is delivered to their doors. Since launching in multiple cities in South Africa and diversifying our offering, this on-demand service is becoming more and more lucrative for consumers, which has resulted in multiple new entrants to the market.

We welcome such competition because it ensures that customers enjoy the best possible quality, both in terms of the food they purchase and the service they receive. For us, competition is also a valuable way of keeping us focused on what has made us a preferred food delivery platform until now, which is providing the best selection, with the most efficient service offering. At Uber Eats we will continue to listen to our consumers, innovate and expand our offering to meet their ever-changing needs and improve their experience on the platform.

Ecom Africa returns to the CTICC in Cape Town from 4-5 May as a hybrid event, with two full days of in-depth keynotes, and panel discussions, networking and live Q&A sessions. For more information and to purchase an Expo Pass or All-Access Pass conference ticket, visit the [Ecom Africa website](#). Bizcommunity is a proud media partner of the event.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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