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Trading our way out of COVID-19

COVID-19 is the economic tsunami that continues to hammer Tasmania's business community, with many small and medium operators forced to make dramatic changes to their operations.

Now University of Tasmania retail expert Dr Louise Grimmer has launched a statewide survey to hear from those at the coalface of the pandemic's impact, and to learn about strategies and resources that business owners are using to try and survive.

"I've been researching retailers and small firms for the past decade, and it was clear, even prior to COVID-19, the retail sector was struggling, and Tasmanian retailers and other small businesses were not immune," Dr Grimmer said.

"A flat economy, minimal wage growth, diminishing discretionary household spending and low levels of consumer confidence were all impacting a sector that was also grappling with large international entrants, changing consumer demands and a rise in online shopping. These factors were certainly affecting large retailers, but they were much more challenging for the survival of small local stores.

"Now with COVID-19 added to the mix, Tasmanian retailers are grappling with a health and economic pandemic and having to drastically adapt the way they 'do business' to try and survive."

Dr Grimmer said the obvious winners throughout 2020 have been those retailers deemed as 'essential' - supermarkets, pharmacies, hardware stores, office and furniture suppliers, and fitness and leisure stores.

But the real winners have been those bricks and mortar retailers that were also selling successfully online prior to the health and economic crisis, according to Dr Grimmer.

"COVID-19 has shone a very bright light on how important it is now for retailers to provide consumers with online shopping options. The shift over the past few months has been seismic, as many stores scrambled to either start selling online or to drastically improve their existing online operations," she said.

"If the retail, hospitality and service sectors are going to survive and thrive, we need to support them, but we need to hear from them first. I want to find out exactly how Tasmanian retail, hospitality and service businesses are coping and

the type of support they think will be vital for recovery and survival of their business.”

Dr Grimmer has launched **Doing Business During COVID-19** - an anonymous online survey that aims to help the Tasmanian business community chart its collective way out of 2020 and make recommendations to government about the best approach towards supporting local businesses.

If you are a Tasmanian retail, hospitality or service business and you'd like to be involved in the study, please complete the anonymous online survey at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/doingbusinesscovid19>

Louise Grimmer is available for interview. Images are available.

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