

Google searches from South Africans reveal they are uncertain. Here's how tech can help

By [Alistair Mokoena](#)

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I've seen a few periods of global uncertainty, including the 2008 financial crisis; increasing frequency of climate-related disasters, and a global pandemic in the eight years since I joined Google. Each brought its own degree of uncertainty - and each time, people turned to Google to seek out information and help them make decisions.



Alistair Mokoena, Google South Africa country director | image supplied

We're once again seeing search trends that show people are feeling unsure about the world around them. Fortunately, a lot has changed in the past fifteen years that can help. In 2007, only 20% of the world's population had internet access. Today, 80% of South Africans and 60% of the world are online: with all the information, skills and support that technology can provide.

Technology cannot solve all of the concerns and anxiety that these trends show - but it can be used to help.

Here are some search trends we've seen in South Africa this year and how technology and business can and should intervene.

Concerns about Covid and the climate aren't going anywhere

As economies re-open, it could be tempting to think that the uncertainty of the pandemic is behind us. Search interest in coronavirus hit an all-time high worldwide in March 2020 - but it is far from leaving people's concerns entirely, as searches have changed to reflect new phases of the pandemic.

In South Africa, in the past 90 days, searches for 'current Covid symptoms' have tripled in search interest, while searches for 'latest Covid stats South Africa' have increased by 160%. Google will continue to provide accurate and timely information on everything from symptoms to vaccines as people strive to return to everyday life.

Additionally, search trends show that apprehension about the climate crisis has continued to grow. Searches for climate change in South Africa reached an all-time high in February 2022 while searches for other environmental issues including 'pollution' and 'global warming' by South Africans reached an all-time high during the same period.

Given these concerns, businesses need to help customers make small, meaningful changes and walk the walk themselves, reducing emissions and cutting their footprint.

Creating technology to help achieve this is a key part of our role. Google wants to help one billion people make more sustainable choices by the end of this year and is making changes to our most popular products to help make sustainable decisions easier.

Cybersecurity and privacy online have never been more important

With more people using the internet to manage their daily lives than ever, it's no surprise that there has been an increase in searches about cybersecurity and privacy.

South African searches for 'what is phishing' increased by 80%, while searches for 'phishing attack' increased by 70%. Additionally, search interest around private browsing increased by 20% since this time last year, while searches for privacy have increased by 30% since this time last year.



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People want to embrace technology - but they want to know that their personal information will be safe. To help with that, Google has built many of the internet's first tools to manage confidential data – like the Privacy Checkup, a central place which allows you to review your key privacy settings, and takeout - where you can download or delete your Google data.

We are also working with the industry and regulators to make changes across the board - prioritising users' privacy and security.

People want to understand the wider economic uncertainty - and are keen to save

As our CEO, Sundar Pichai said recently, we face 'an uncertain global economic outlook'. Search trends show that people want to better understand what's happening and how they can manage it.

Searches for "how to make money" have been the top "how to make" search in South Africa in 2022, while 'how to make money fast as a woman' has increased by 90% . Searches for 'how to start a business from home' also halved in South Africa from H1 2022.

We've seen this before. During the pandemic, businesses that adopted new digital skills built 'a digital safety net'. Working in partnership with governments and other organisations, Google has helped 10 million people to find jobs, digitise and grow across the region - and we stand ready to support them again now.

These trends show people feel uncertain about what lies ahead, but no matter where we head, I'm hopeful that technology will form a part of the solution. Our mission at Google to make information accessible and useful has never been more important: and we're here to help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alistair Mbkoena is Google South Africa country director.

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