

# When the Streets Went Silent, Nairobi Shirts Went Online: The Post-Covid Comeback

*An honest story of resilience, reinvention, and how a local second-hand fashion shop turned crisis into sustainable online growth.*

## About Nairobi Shirts

Nairobi Shirts is a men's second-hand clothing shop based at Uchumi House in Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD).

Founded in 2018 by **Kariuki and Kioko**, the shop started with one simple idea, to make quality thrift fashion accessible to young professionals who love looking sharp without spending a fortune.



Surviving-Covid-19 -pandemic

Their first store, located in the uptown part of the CBD, attracted busy customers who would stop by during lunch breaks or on their way home.

By 2020, business was booming. They had opened a second outlet in **Kilimani**, a more upscale area, and were serving about **200 walk-in customers a day**. Things were looking bright.

## The Challenge

Then came **2020** and with it, the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

Suddenly, movement was restricted, offices closed, and most professionals began working from home. Like many small retail businesses, Nairobi Shirts was hit hard.

Kariuki and Kioko watched their once-busy shops fall silent. Hoping the lockdowns would end soon, they used their savings to prepay six months' rent, paid their two employees, locked the doors, and waited. They didn't know for how long.

By **2022**, restrictions were finally lifted. People returned to the city streets, hungry to rebuild their lives.

Excited, Nairobi Shirts reopened and restocked, but something had changed.

Shoppers were walking *past* their store, not *into* it. After two months, sales had dropped by **80%**. The streets were full again, but their target customers, office workers and professionals were still working remotely. Their old business model no longer worked.

## **The Turning Point**

One day, Kioko noticed several of his friends promoting their products on **social media**.

Curious, he called one of them, who introduced him to **Mokua**, a digital-marketing consultant.

Mokua visited the shop and spent time interviewing the staff and researching similar businesses around the CBD. His findings were clear:

- Foot traffic in the CBD had fallen sharply.
- Office workers were spending less time in town.
- Online shopping and home deliveries had become the new norm.
- Many companies were still supporting remote work.

His advice was simple but powerful:

**“If your customers aren't coming to the shop, take the shop to your customers, online.”**

## **Going Digital, Without a Big Budget**

Nairobi Shirts didn't have the money to build a full e-commerce website. But Mokua showed them they already had the essentials:

1. A loyal customer list with phone numbers
2. A smartphone
3. **WhatsApp** and **Instagram**

Together, they created business accounts on both platforms and added their **payment numbers** and contact details to their bios.

Next, they used their existing phone contacts to form a **WhatsApp group** for customers. Every morning for the first week, Mokua visited the shop, took photos of new arrivals, priced them, and posted them on social media.

Customers could browse, ask questions, and pay via mobile money, all from their phones

## **The Results**

Within just a few weeks, things started to change.

- **Sales grew by 300%.**
- Customers loved the convenience of shopping online.
- Feedback poured in through WhatsApp, helping them improve.
- They partnered with **boda boda**(motor bike) riders to deliver orders quickly across the city.

Nairobi Shirts had successfully transformed from a walk-in retail store into a **thriving online fashion brand**. What began as a desperate move turned into a digital breakthrough.

## **Lessons for Entrepreneurs**

Nairobi Shirts' story is a powerful reminder that **innovation often begins with crisis**. Kariuki and Kioko didn't have fancy tools or a big budget, just determination, creativity and a willingness to adapt.

By meeting their customers where they were, **online**, they not only survived the pandemic but built a stronger, more flexible business for the future.

Today, Nairobi Shirts continues to grow, blending online sales with in-person experiences. Their journey proves that even small businesses can thrive when they stay agile, listen to their customers, and embrace change.