



Julia Baker

# The survival of stationery

As the world of stationery is continually evolving into a dynamic

fusion of innovation, artistic expression and sustainability, it begs the question ... Is digital becoming more prominent, and how much longer will there be a market for 'good ol' stationery?

The South African stationery market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 3.4% during 2023–2029, with a market valued at more than USD1.25 billion in 2022.

As the economy grows and consumer confidence continues to increase since Covid-19, there is fortunately still an inclination for spending on stationery products both for personal and professional use, according to actualmarketresearch.com.

Independently, the government 2030 Plan for Basic Education aims to uplift the education sector, ensuring rising spend on basic and higher education, this is expected to contribute to the Stationery Market Growth in South Africa in the coming years. Because of this concerted push to further education, the growth in enrolment is projected to reach 13.4 million by 2030 which is a 1.2 million increase from 2021," according to 6Wresearch.

Over and above statistics, Jaydean Spangenberg from Butterfly Stationery, who has a fine under-



Giuseppe J. Ramos, www.canva.com

standing of the stationery world, when asked if she finds continued growth in stationery says, "Absolutely, stationery is a big staple in South African homes, be it the avid collector or school requirement, there's a big place for it. Most sales are families with school going children and students, and office essentials are fast movers too."



Mervin Govindan

Freedom Stationery is in agreement, "Traditional materials are still the medium of choice as modern-faced platforms pose electricity and connectivity challenges. Also associated with high costs for students, is the device costs that come with going digital and maintaining these mediums," says Mervin Govindan, National Sales Manager.

## Back-to-school target market

Millions of people every year, from toddlers to university students, are either skipping with joy or being reluctantly dragged back to school, either way, stationery is a necessity that can't be avoided. Quality and quantity brand staples are a must for "learners of all ages and demographics, trying to

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save money whilst still having the value, the basket and trend factor in place,” Govindan has found.

For many, back-to-school can be stressful, the costs are not always easy to carry but for many, “It is exciting, because let’s be honest who doesn’t love new stationery, young or old, we all have love for it. Students want that fancy new pencil case that embodies their new style and people returning to work for the most part. It’s a whole new year, it’s a whole new me, there’s nothing better than new stationery that embodies this, am I right! The clean new book covers, the new smell of paper or pencil cases, something about it sparks joy and creativity and learning,” says Spangenberg who’s trendy, bright and practical back-to-school supplies are a firm favourite with scholars.

The trick is to tap into the back-to-school market by following upcoming and current trends, worldwide and locally.

## Digital integration

The move toward digital technology is revolutionising the way we work and learn. In some cases, it is causing debate specifically within schools, as it has been known to have significant negative implications for memory retention, creativity, personalisation and critical thinking.

Many parents would want to improve their child’s hand-eye coordination as well as creativity and imagination, rather than destroy their eyes with a small screen. The choice then goes toward colouring and activity books.



Cats: Carol Ain. <https://in.pinterest.com>  
Pencil: Opening Gate, [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com)

### The science:

Research suggests that the physical act of writing, compared to typing, activates different regions of the brain, enhancing memory and comprehension. When it comes to education, writing can facilitate a deeper understanding of a subject and longer retention of knowledge. Professionally, writing enhances clarity of thought, problem solving, and is mentally therapeutic. Doodling, free form writing and sketching fosters creative thinking and boosts imagination.

People are starting to feel ‘digital saturation’ and are looking for a more rounded lifestyle by limiting their amount of digital consumption, leading to more use of analogue stationery. Digital has become a huge part of society, but it has not replaced the need for stationery essentials.

## Going digital

Not all is lost with the move toward digital, even with the increase in remote work and learning, consumers still need essentials for home organisation, like planners, desk organisers and storage solutions to create efficient and productive workspaces.

Paper-based products are still expected to hold the highest market share in South Africa’s stationery market due to the continued demand from the education, business and government sectors.

Paper is still mostly used for official letters, forms, reports and memos, along with exam sheets, question papers and assessments in educational institutions.

## Stay ahead of the game

There is an inevitable mad rush before the school gates open for consumers to buy all the necessary school supplies needed, so being prepared in advance of the rush is paramount.

Retailers can take advantage of parents doing top-ups at new school terms like Parrot Products



Clever Art, [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com)

which have a back-to-school discount campaign in July to ‘refresh and refocus’ students after a cold winter.



The National Retail Federation (NRF) has a few tips to keep you ahead of the stationery game ...

- keep track of client's previous buys to choose your next bestsellers
- ensure a well-stocked inventory
- keep abreast of rising retail trends
- simplify the shopping experience by creating shopping guides and online buying
- announce promotions early, customers are happy to wait a few weeks for specials.

Not to stress, though, there is always last-minute shopping as almost half of parents have not received their school stationery list.

### Trends written on the wall

There's something comforting about having a document on hand; a notebook, a handy pocket file or a sticky note, rather than electronic items where there is always a worry about the computer crashing, being hacked or stolen, the list goes on and on. What are the trends that are keeping the stationery market steaming ahead?

### Stokvels

Stokvels are seen as a disciplined savings measure through a group setting to reach specific savings goals, which is quickly becoming a way of life for many in South Africa. Not only do they help with a financial boost when needed most, but also provide an opportunity to strengthen community relationships.

Zodumo Mncwango, a teacher in Johannesburg, benefits from Stokvel to pay for back-to-school

expenses. She says, "As a mother, I am never found wanting or left without any options when it comes to buying stationery and all the back-to-school needs. It gives me peace of mind because, rest assured, whatever my daughter needs, I am going to afford it come January."

Retailers make use of stokvels by offering deals tailored to maximise the collective buying power of stokvel groups that come in various forms, such as exclusive discounts, bulk-buy promotions, special pricing and loyalty rewards.



### Back-to-school impact

Back-to-school season is one of the busiest seasons for retailers – it is the second biggest event on the retailer calendar, after the December holiday and festive season.

Govindan relates, "in terms of transactions assessed, one could safely say two-thirds of all stationery related business is transacted in this period," leaving a healthy one-third throughout the rest of the year for office essentials and mid-year term school top-ups.

Mass produced stationery is still the leader for back-to-school, it remains popular due to its affordability and accessibility, catering to a wide market, especially for everyday use. These products are typically more budget-friendly and readily available, making them suitable for families and students.

### Online shopping

We all know how Covid-19 changed the world, and it is not going to slip backwards any time soon. Leading e-commerce platforms are becoming the norm in the larger cities and towns and is constantly progressing. It's allowing customers to browse through a larger range of stationery products, allowing price comparisons and convenient delivery, saving time and money. It also makes life much easier for consumers to shop around for the prices that suit their budget.

More than just the major stores like Pick n Pay, Shoprite Checkers, Waltons, Makro and Takealot are utilising online shopping.



Independent companies like Stateman Stationery, Office Gear and Stationery Net are adding to the ease of shopping online. It pays for any retailer to provide online shopping for consumer to price shop around and enjoy the ease of delivery.

## Greeting cards

When asking people if they still buy greeting cards, the general consensus was a simple 'no', or very occasionally, as sending a digital card is becoming more common.

With that said, UK based Card Factory paid £2.5 million in April last year to acquire SA Greetings, the leading greeting card publisher and card retailing group in South Africa, well known for their Cardies stores, who supply to over 6 500 stores in South Africa.



Darcy Willson-Rymer

Darcy Willson-Rymer, Card Factory's CEO says, "We will closely collaborate to further enhance and develop opportunities for SA Greetings businesses." That is positive news for the greeting card industry and it is not going anywhere soon.

## Sustainability

Sustainable stationery is the harmonious fusion of sophistication and accountability. Environmentally aware customers have a growing desire for high-end stationery that not only showcases elegant designs, but also reflects their commitment to sustainability. With options such as recycled paper



featuring refined touches and plant-derived inks, the blending of lavishness and eco-friendliness has a niche position in stationery.

Currently, the negative side to eco-friendly product is that it tends to come with a higher price tag, which is not within the realm for those who are tightening every aspect of their back-to-school stationery budgets. With time, there is hope that eco-friendly technology and machinery will improve soon, so that this trend can start tilting in the other direction.

## Go bespoke

Personalised stationery has become a platform for showcasing distinct identities and creating lasting bonds. Why settle for a generic notebook when you can have one that is tailored to your liking? They also make fantastic gifts for colleagues and clients.



Bridget Richardson

Bespoke or personalised stationery is popular for gifting. Bridget Richardson felt a gap in the industry 15 years ago and created Love Letter Stationery, "While hunting for a very special personal gift, it became clear there was

a gap in the market for bespoke stationery and original paper products that have a personal touch." Their goal is to produce products that are fun and original to the South African market.

"When I started out there were no businesses offering bespoke stationery – we now sell more and more personalised stationery each year." Sales are exceptionally busy toward the end of the year and "January and February are also quite busy due to the start of school."

'Unique' is what most of Richardsons clients are looking for, "My corporate clients usually purchase gifts for either internal or client-facing events, when they want to gift something a bit unique, and not the normal kind of corporate gift." Notebooks are proving to be the most popular, from personalised moleskine to pencil and notebook sets.



Though not to rival traditional back-to-school stationery, bespoke stationery is a growing and expressive stationery trend.

**Branding**

One trend that will never lose popularity is branding, specifically through the use of logos and company names. This day and age is flooded with marketing, so branding is a huge focus anywhere for companies aware of the importance of marketing and branding.



**Fun back-to-school**

Long gone are the boring brown paper book covers and plastic wrapped books. The new trend is colour, bright, playful, creative and fun – anything from a fluffy pen to a race car lunch box, back-to-school is fun. Yokico, a new chain store in South Africa, is

jumping on that trend and is selling popular, bright and playful school items and stationery.

A firm favourite for trendy stationery are the sequined and glittery, goofy, fun and colourful pencil cases. Added to shopping lists are bright book covers, pocket files and trendy lunch sets, where bold and vibrant colours take centre stage.

When work and study is done, after hours and after school still draws in the crowds when it comes to keeping busy and creative. Crazy Store, which is spread nationwide, is keeping ahead with stationery items like novelty pens, 'colour your own bag', activity and colouring books, plush animal cover notebooks, foam and sand glitter and a range of quality art supplies for adults and scholars alike.

There can never be too many colours and patterns in life or in stationery. Stationery is fun!



<https://sageclinic.org>

**Stationery – Good for the soul**

Stationery isn't just about pens and paper, and work and school. Through art people can achieve improved mental and physical well-being, releasing endorphins and serotonin. The act of creating with various forms of stationery can be incredibly therapeutic, allowing individuals to express their emotions and thoughts in a tangible form. Physically, art has been known to alleviate pain and assist children cope with pain in child cancer patients, according to Michigan State University.

Next time you pick up your favourite pen or coloured pencils, remember that you're not just making pretty (hopefully) pictures – you're also nurturing your mind and body through art therapy disguised as stationery fun!

So, apart from these fun bits, the demand for practical writing instruments and stationery will continue to rise as the emphasis on education and literacy continues to grow. **SR**

**Sources:**

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- <https://fitsmallbusiness.com/back-to-school-retail/>
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