

Matthew Buckland on reigniting Burn Media

 By Leigh Andrews

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Matthew Buckland is one of the SA digital media's industry's best-known players, having taken home the 'best individual contribution to digital' award at the 2017 Bookmark Awards - with [no entries in the category](#) this year. Here, Buckland explains his latest role change at Creative Spark, what it means for Burn Media going forward, and the biggest digital media trends he's anticipating from 2018.



Matthew Buckland.

A lot can happen in a decade – even more so if you're part of the fast-paced digital media industry. Matthew Buckland, former managing director and founder of Creative Spark, is testament to this. In almost ten years, he's watched Creative Spark grow beyond his wildest dreams.

I caught up with him for a quick chat about his challenges and highlights so far, why it's time to refocus on the Burn Media platforms, as well as what he's looking forward to from the next chapter of his career...

■ **Explain the context of your current position at Creative Spark and the decision to step down as chief executive: digital at M&C Saatchi Abel.**

I have been at Creative Spark for almost a decade and seen the company grow from one employee to more than 70. I felt I needed a change personally and with the arrival of Tanja Lategan as managing director, I felt the company was in excellent hands for the future.



Tanja Lategan appointed as Creative Spark's new MD

14 Aug 2017



It really is more of a role change for me as I will continue to consult to the agency and assist with key clients where needed. Tanja is an excellent advocate of our agency's integrity and innovative culture — and is the right person to lead the agency forward. Tanja has a formidable management team both in Cape Town and Johannesburg that are passionate about our clients and contributing further to their success.

■ **What does this mean for Burn Media going forward – staff and content-wise across the platforms?**

As the agency grew exponentially, Burn Media, our publishing arm and smaller part of our business, got less and less attention. This restructure will allow us to re-invigorate and re-focus on Burn Media to allow it to reach its full potential.



Creative Spark Cape Town in 2015, Buckland far back right.

We are particularly excited about our two leading brands, Memeburn.com and Ventureburn.com, which are documenting the technology and startup revolution on the continent.

■ **Share a few of your biggest highlights and challenges in running Creative Spark over the years.**

Highlights have included opening our Joburg office three years ago, becoming part of the world-wide M&C Saatchi Group two years ago, and bringing in one of the group's largest clients last year.



Burning bright with that special Creative Spark

Leigh Andrews 17 Sep 2015



We have had some major client wins over the past three years, which has contributed to the agency's growth and seniorisation in staff. A big highlight has been watching staff, some of whom have been here right from the beginning, develop with the agency in the past decade.



How's that for growth? The Creative Spark Cape Town and Joburg team, in 2016. Buckland far back right again.

It's also been great to see the agency attract heavy hitters in both our Joburg and Cape Town offices.



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It's been a challenge dealing with rapid growth and digital platform change, which requires constant process evolution in your company.

“ Pretty much the only constant in our company for the last eight years has been change. That's digital for you! ”

■ **That's for sure! Let us in on future plans for your own career, as well as the Burn Media sites.**

Apart from consulting to Creative Spark, I plan to focus my energies on the revitalisation and growth of Burn Media.

Burn Media has a solid core team in place, which we plan to expand in the coming years.



SA digital agency Creative Spark launches new look

M&C Saatchi Abel 26 Sep 2016



I've also been asked to consult to a multinational Prague- and New York-based media fund called the [MDIF](#), helping the media clients it has invested in around the world with their commercial strategies.

■ **Let's end with a taste of the future: What are the biggest digital publishing trends you're most looking forward to from 2018?**

I think there is a quality crisis on the internet, both in content and in advertising.

From an advertising point of view, the rise in programmatic/automated advertising has caused questions amongst advertisers as to where their ads are being served.

From a content point of view, there is more content out there than ever before, because it is so much easier than ever before for anyone to publish: It's the fake news era.



It may be a case of wishful thinking on my behalf, but I suspect we may just see a **movement back to quality**, and that is to content players on the internet that have established themselves as quality brands with high trust from their users.

Users and advertisers will want to be part of this to ensure a quality experience. Also expect more **personalisation**: the paywall subscription model is not suitable for all media, but you may see more publishers requiring registration, as a *quid pro quo* for free usage, to allow for more personalised, targeted content and advertising delivery.

There will also be continued diversification away from some media businesses' original core into other media formats and revenue streams, and into multiple content formats, platforms and non-media activities, like events.

“ *Online publishing is not a happy place at the moment and is still searching for its revenue model, despite unprecedented demand and audiences.* ”

Seems change is indeed the only constant. Get in touch with Buckland [on Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) for his latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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