

Cobus Heyl announced as director, chief product officer of Burn Media

Cobus Heyl has been announced as Burn Media Group's new chief product officer.

Heyl has also taken an undisclosed share in the company, which was founded in 2010 by media entrepreneur Matthew Buckland who passed away last month.

Burn Media Group, which publishes Ventureburn and its sister site Memeburn, was part of digital agency Creative Spark, which Buckland founded in the same year until he sold his remaining share in the digital agency in June last year in exchange for taking Burn Media with him.

Significantly committed

Heyl, whose appointment was announced by Buckland to staff in March, declined to reveal to Ventureburn the size of the stake or how much he had invested in the company, other than to comment that he is "significantly committed" in Burn Media.

At the time of Heyl's appointment in March, Buckland commented in an email to Ventureburn that the appointment was part of a new product and revenue diversification strategy that the company had embarked upon.

"Cobus brings more than 20 years of digital media experience to the business. He has worked for Naspers across the African continent and has consulted to media CEO's and management all over the world for the past 10 years. I could not think of a better person to join us to further grow our vision," Buckland said at the time.

Heyl and Buckland first met in the early days of online media in the late 1990s and early 2000s when he was with News24 and Buckland at *Carte Blanche* and then *Mail & Guardian*. The two remained close during the years and had often discussed media and related developments and opportunities but had different things going on much of the time.

"We started talking about Burn Media around June or July last year again and this time the proverbial stars aligned. I have immense respect for what Matt has achieved and as I got to know more about the plans and the team behind Burn Media it seemed like a no-brainer to get involved," commented Heyl.



Cobus Heyl is Burn Media Group's new chief products officer.



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Heyl currently shares his time between global media association FIPP and Burn Media. At FIPP, Heyl is a chief content officer and tasked with, among others, building FIPP's international conference programmes.

"The two roles actually work well together, to the benefit of both businesses. Through my work at FIPP, I engage with international media leaders virtually daily and see developing trends first-hand. My involvement at Burn Media, in turn, will allow me a closer connection with developments and contacts in sub-Saharan Africa – also a region in which FIPP has members."

Experience in Kenya, Nigeria

Apart from general strategic input across Burn Media, Heyl will assist commercial product and service development, including cross borders.

“My experience of living and working in Kenya for several years and also working into Nigeria and other African countries gave me extensive insight into the intricacies – and potential – of those markets. Again, this along with my network of contacts will hopefully benefit Burn Media as we build out the business,” said Heyl.

He said over the last six or more years he has had the privilege to be witness to media and tech-related developments around the world and has developed a global network of contacts invested in the sector and learnt a lot from doing global events — which he believes will help build Burn Media.

“My experience of living and working in Kenya, in particular, for several years and into Nigeria further gave me extensive insight into the intricacies – and potential – of those markets. Again, this will hopefully benefit Burn Media as we build out the business,” he said.

While media, in general, operates in a tough business environment, Heyl sees opportunities in some areas.

“Not all media is created equal. In addition, people should look beyond the ‘media’ aspect alone. If you see media as the ‘vehicle’ for development rather than the end product, you start to see opportunities in other areas. This is especially true in special interest categories.”

Adds Heyl: “To operate in this kind of environment, people, culture and nimbleness are important. I saw all of this in Burn Media. Nothing comes easy but Burn Media is in my view well positioned to thrive”.

New site designs

The announcement of Heyl as chief product officer comes after the Burn Media Group last month unveiled the new design of its sites - Ventureburn and Memeburn.

The new sites which have a spacious design and simpler navigation, consolidate Burn Media brands into two entities: Ventureburn and Memeburn. Previously there were separate sites for Jobsburn, Gearburn and Motorburn. These three have been collapsed under Memeburn.

Commented Burn Media Group general manager and director Carl Davis: “The new improved website design allows for bigger and better premium ad slots like our 970×250 and 300×1050 units. The mobile site is more responsive and can handle way more traffic.

“SEO and overall site improvement within Google ranking. This means we can offer our readers and advertisers enhanced experiences on our platforms,” said Davis.

The company is also set to relaunch its Memeburn newsletter with an enhanced design soon, also adding a Ventureburn newsletter to the mix.

‘Buckland’s loss a hammer blow’

Heyl described the loss of Buckland in April to cancer as a hammer blow but said the entrepreneur put the building blocks and a good team in place to carry his work and ideas forward. The company will make further announcements about the structure and director appointments in due course.



RIP Matthew Buckland

29 Apr 2019



“For now the focus is on operations and sticking to our timeline for developments we planned to implement through the year,” he said.

Heyl and Davis are currently in talks with Buckland’s wife Bridget Pringle over the late founder’s stake in Burn Media Group.

Pringle confirmed to Ventureburn that her late husband’s share in Burn Media will come to her, but that with his passing she has not yet had time to consider the ramifications of this as yet. She added that she is expected to deal with this in the weeks and months to come.

“What I do know, is that Matt always acted very strategically — particularly in his appointment of Cobus. I know he had the highest regard for Cobus, and together with Carl, I know he believed the company would be in good hands if cancer got the better of him — although he obviously hoped that it wouldn’t and that he’d be a part of Burn Media’s future as well.”

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