

Burn Media to embark on aggressive growth after deal to go solo - Buckland

By [Stephen Timm](#)

7 Jun 2018

The Burn Media Group, a media stable with publications that include Ventureburn and Memeburn, has broken away from M&C Saatchi Abel's digital agency Creative Spark and has embarked upon a new "aggressive" growth curve, says Burn Media's founder Matthew Buckland.



Burn Media's founder, Matthew Buckland.

Buckland, the former CEO and founder of Creative Spark, this week announced the conclusion of a deal with M&C Saatchi Abel and the formation of Burn Media Group — an independent digital media company.

The deal with advertising company M&C Saatchi Abel was concluded on Monday (4 June). It follows Buckland's exit in April from Creative Spark — the company he founded in 2010 and which he subsequently sold to M&C Saatchi Abel in 2015.

Buckland says when he founded Creative Spark and Burn Media in 2010 the intention was that the two would be separate companies.



Matthew Buckland on reigniting Burn Media

Leigh Andrews 24 Apr 2018



"We however decided to keep things simple and keep the companies combined as they worked nicely together. The digital agency exploded in growth, whereas Burn Media struggled, and naturally the focus of the company became mainly the agency," he said.

But he said as a stand-alone entity Burn Media can now get the focus, attention and investment it needs to “grow it aggressively and reach its full potential”. “The Burn brands are amazing brands, but we can do so much more with them,” he added.

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– Matthew Buckland ”

While Buckland would not disclose the details of the deal with M&C Saatchi Abel because of a confidentiality agreement, he was able to say that the sale was in exchange for his remaining equity stake in Creative Spark. Ventureburn believes this stake to be 10%.

He described the sites’ current performance as “under potential from a traffic point of view” with some stand-out performers, most notably Ventureburn which has built a loyal community around it.

“Ventureburn has emerged, in a short space of time, as the top startup and entrepreneur resource in the country and continent,” he said.

He said the sites are also currently undergoing a redesign.

“We want to shift the focus to Meme(burn) and Venture(burn). We will consolidate on a tech, CMS and possibly a domain level — but we will keep the brands distinct for now as they are part of the DNA of the group,” he explained.

‘Cannot exist on advertising alone’

Commenting on where digital media is at present, he said in terms of new revenue streams, media cannot exist on advertising alone.

“Media companies need to be multi-platform, multi-formatted content creators both, online and offline, with diverse revenue streams,” he said, adding that followers of the sites can expect more events and media products launched around Ventureburn and Memeburn that serve those sites’ respective community and readership.

“There is so much more we can do in the startup ecosystem to support and tell the stories of entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, private equity players, startups, incubators, co-working spaces and more,” he said, adding that Burn Media plans to move more into the rest of the continent and grow its presence in Lagos and Nairobi.

‘Not concerned of competition’

While the technology publications market in South Africa has seen the emergence of a whole number of players, Buckland says he isn’t concerned that perhaps the market is too saturated.

“I never worry about the competition, that’s out of my control. The competition must do what the competition must do.

“Together with our talented and committed team, I am focused on building a solid, quality digital media business with our own approach and flavour which involves quality journalism that serves and connects the community of readers around it.

“There is an exciting entrepreneur and startup story developing in South Africa, Africa and the world — and we form part of the ecosystem as media to tell that story and accelerate the growth of the startup industry as a whole,” he said.

How then did the sites shift from essentially being blogs to what one could consider are perhaps fully-fledged news sites?

“In my view a blog is just a format. From the very start, we were always a commercial media company that just used the format of a blog.

“Burn Media started selling advertising and job listings in the first month of its existence.

“Although we are a commercial media company, retaining our ‘blog’ heritage from a cultural point of view is important — ie we will still retain our irreverence and informality in terms of our approach to content, but without ever sacrificing our commitment to quality, balanced and critical journalism,” he pointed out.

Plan to triple size of company

Buckland said his team includes some long-serving staff members, such as Andy Walker who has been with the team for more than five years

He said while the company’s team of journalists reside mainly in Cape Town, the commercial team, under Carl Davis (the company’s general manager) operates from the company’s Johannesburg office.

“Under Carl, we are working on a new strategy to triple the size of the company in the next few years and we have some exciting proposals which we are developing together,” he said.

Davis said he’s excited by the prospect of a stand-alone company, that will allow him and his team to make decisions in “real time”. “It will also allow us to explore more commercial opportunities and aggressively expand our offering and drastically improve revenue,” he said.

For now the next few months will see Buckland and his company effectively going back into startup mode again — back to the early days of Creative Spark that he still remembers fondly.

But he’s looking forward to it. After all, this he says will provide him and his team with the freedom necessary to reshape the company and its culture.

These, he says, are “exciting times”.

Republished with kind permission from Burn Media Group founder, Matthew Buckland.

ABOUT STEPHEN TIMM

Stephen Timm writes on small business in emerging economies through his regular blog Small Business Insight. He is currently a writer and editor for Ventureburn.com
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