

Burning bright with that special Creative Spark

 By Leigh Andrews

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They're five years old, have [just opened a Joburg office](#), and have international presence in their sights (and sites!) Here's what's really going on at Creative Spark and Burn Media...

"As an industry, South Africa is still feeling its way around digital."

"What works internationally doesn't necessarily work here."

"You can't share a banner ad."



Matthew Buckland, MD and founder of Creative Spark

Nodding your head in agreement? These are all insights from the super smart Creative Spark team. I got more detailed insights from the likes of Managing Director Matthew Buckland, Financial Director Desmond Jacobs, Operations Manager Carla Dos Santos, Head of Digital Marketing and Johannesburg office, Melissa Chetty, and Senior Strategist Catherine Murray...

1. When and how did the agency get started?

Buckland: We started the agency about 5 years ago. I started it together with Burn Media, an editorially-independent publishing division of the agency, after leaving 24.com.

Since then we've gone from strength to strength, growing exponentially each year. It's been a crazy, but extremely rewarding ride so far.

2. Explain the agency name.

Murray: We are an innovative, thinking, analytical agency, with a focus on looking forward towards the next big thing.

Buckland: Creativity is defined as the use of imagination or original ideas to create something. It's at the root of all innovation, disruption and inventiveness. Creativity solves problems and is the core trait of all great businesses today, especially recent disruptive digital businesses like Uber, Airbnb and Dropbox, which have defined completely new business models.

3. What's the basic work flow or creative process in the agency?

Dos Santos: Our basic workflow is process-driven, starting with a kick-off meeting between the heads of the required departments. From there, creative ideas and strategies are discussed internally as well as with the client. Once we are all agreed on the approach, the work is briefed into the CSI studio. Work is checked iteratively along with our client, based on the scope.

4. Tell us about key account wins this year that have made an impact on your portfolio...

Chetty: Our four major, most recent, wins for us have been Philips (full service), Edgars (strategy, content management and project management) Gautrain (design and development) and Kimberly Clark (social media, web design).

5. List any exciting new developments in the team that have enhanced your overall skillset.

Buckland: In the last few years we have seniorised the team and now have a strong, tight-knit, multi-disciplinary management team to help us with our next phase of growth.

Dos Santos: We have added interactive designers with print experience as well as new development skill sets, including apps and Sharepoint.

Chetty: We've officially opened our Joburg office and the expansion has led to a stream of new business opportunities. We've also boosted our skillset on FMCG, consumer-driven social media work with the addition of Kimberley Clark brands such as Huggies, Babysoft and Kleenex as well as Quaker Oats (Pepsico). Our social team has boosted our social customer service offering on our Philips account, which recently grew from two social media accounts to five in the last three months, to include large consumer lifestyle communities. Our recently concluded Philips Healthcare Media campaign has also expanded our B2B/B2G bought media skillset and boosted our Africa footprint and publisher relations with campaigns executed in SA, Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana in highly specialised healthcare markets.



One of the agency's mobile app developers hard at work

■ 6. *Sounds like it's been a great year of growth. What's your overall agency highlight?*

Buckland: Launching our Joburg office via a strategic alliance we have with M&C Saatchi Abel and reaching the 40-45 people mark.

Chetty: Separating our business into two sections: The BUILD department with digital designers and developers and the DIGITAL MARKETING department offering social media, community management, content marketing, bought media and strategy.

■ 7. *Explain your strategy, what makes you stand out from the rest?*

Murray: We position ourselves as an innovative, strategic, analytical and driving agency with a strong content and publishing heritage. We are not just brief takers - we prefer to be part of the strategic conversation and add value on a digital strategy level. We also run our own award-winning, editorially independent digital media properties that reach over 300k users per month, catering for a multi-cultural, worldwide audience. These sites are Memeburn.com, Ventureburn.com, Gearburn.com, Motorburn.com and Jobsburn.com, which publish news and information on digital trends across a variety of sectors. We also build, maintain and run high-profile, content-rich websites, which require robust, long-lasting content management systems and server infrastructure, which can scale and grow quickly and flexibly - this also differentiates us from more traditional creative agencies, and enables us to understand content from the "back-end" as well as the front-end.

■ 8. *Wax lyrical on recent awards you've won.*

Murray: We've won several Bookmark awards that we're proud of, for both our own Burn Media digital publishing properties and for clients, most recently for eTV - a vibrant, colourful, canvass site built on a Drupal back-end. It has been a great client to work for as they are happy to push the boundaries, and are fun to work with.

■ 9. *Talk about the state of the local advertising awards industry...*

Buckland: In traditional media segments we are comparable, especially TV advertising. In digital, however, I feel we have some way to go as a local industry. I guess that is OK, because it is a relatively young industry. There is also massive platform fragmentation (and with that new opportunities, complication and confusion) and literally every five years the landscape changes: We have been through the search era, web 2.0 era, open source era, social era, mobile era and smart era. These have all brought fundamental changes to the way companies and users interact and use digital platforms. With this comes new learnings, new methodologies, and even the arrival of new, specialist companies to take advantage of the changes these new platforms bring. So digital is still evolving. I'd be very surprised at anyone or any company that claims to have it worked out.

Jacobs: We are yet to see work with digital at the heart leading the campaign - strategically and creatively. A digital agency is also yet to win an ABL client that will add greater gravitas to the industry and so ignite change in the awards industry.

Murray: We're also finding that there is still a lot of misunderstanding about the digital marketing landscape in South Africa, and the rest of the continent, and have a responsibility to help educate our clients and the industry about what it all means for us locally. What works internationally doesn't necessarily work here. We, as local industry, need to get a handle on the fact that what works internationally doesn't necessarily work here, and to think more creatively and "out of the box" to produce award-winning, innovative work that makes sense for our market.

■ 10. *What's next for your agency?*

Buckland: 100 staff members, overseas offices. We also need to be more of a presence at the Loeries. As a digital player, the IAB/Bookmarks has been our hunting ground, but as we have got bigger, I think it's time to expand our horizons.



A shot from Creative Spark's Cape Town office, based in Woodstock at the Old Castle Brewery

■ 11. *What trends do you see as the biggest still to come in 2015?*

Chetty: I'm particularly interested in the way retail is going to change in terms of social commerce and hyperlocal marketing, using beacons in store to transmit in-aisle related content while shopping. This is going to be competitive space. I also think the rise in healthcare startups is something to watch as wearables become another channel and platform to connect to people.

Murray: I'm looking forward to the day when banner ads are truly a thing of the past, and we're all marketing through interesting, relevant and entertaining content that adds value. Gawker is really getting this right at the moment. You can't share a banner ad!

Jacobs: Ecommerce and mobile as entry-level smart devices become far more accessible to the masses.

Certainly lots to think about and a bright future for those who keep ahead of these trends. View the video embedded below for more about the Creative Spark team:

You can also [follow their Twitter action](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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