



'One of the best leaders I've dealt with': Industry reacts to the changes at Seven



by Alisha Buaya
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Mat Baxter, Stephen Wright, and Ben Shepherd on the Seven network shake-up.

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Seven's confirmation of the departures of **Kurt Burnette**, **Melissa Hopkins**, and **Lewis Martin** has surprised the industry.

This has been compounded by the news of **the network's** refreshed operating model, a slew of leadership promotions in the wake of redundancies, and reportedly around 150 roles.

Stephen Wright, global media business director of TrinityP3, told *Mediaweek* "It's no secret that television is facing headwinds, both cyclical and structural, and Seven is responding to those market conditions sensibly by seeking to reduce cost."

"With Meta withdrawing from the news media bargaining code and an increasingly competitive streaming landscape radical medicine is needed to treat the patient."

"The challenge for Seven will be that Kurt, Mel and Lewis are all well regarded veterans of the industry who each held key relationships for Seven and trust throughout the market. Marketers will be seeking reassurance about the audience strategy and Seven's ability to deliver for brands in the wake of these senior departures."

Meanwhile, **Ben Shepherd**, CEO of Schwartz Media, had nothing but kind words for Burnette. He told *Mediaweek* "Kurt Burnette is one of the best leaders I've dealt with in business and his departure is a complete shock to me and I imagine the rest of the industry. Exceptional talent is rare and Kurt is one of those."

Mat Baxter, CEO of Mutinex, told *Mediaweek* it was "interesting to see stable, credible, trusted people leaving."



Kurt Burnette

On the outlook for Seven, he said that the network's future comes down to who they will interface with at a market level, who will cheerlead the brand and represent them to the top CMOs in leading blue chip companies across Australia.

On Burnette's departure, Baxter said: "He's a consummate statesman. He's well-regarded and well-respected, and he knows the brand inside out. He's got trustworthy and long-term relationships with advertisers."

Speaking broadly on the leadership stability Seven needs after a turbulent couple of months, Baxter said: "There has been a recent tendency for companies to look to financial leaders to take broader stewardship of the wider company and the strategic direction of the business."

"One of the challenges that sits historically in the finance function is a very short term view



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on immediate performance and short-term margin as opposed to long-term strategic direction, and often the investment that's required to realise those opportunities.

"So my concern always when I interface with businesses that have a financial leader, directing the wider organisational mission and charter is often quarterly performance trumps long-term vision, direction and sustainability.

"You can juice an orange only so much quarter by quarter, and then if that's at the expense of longer term planning and vision, inevitably you run out of steam."

"Right now, it seems like they've extracted the market interface that they need to re-energise the revenue that they're short off. I think that's what everyone's going to be waiting with bated breath to see."



Melissa Hopkins

On Wednesday, Seven West Media managing director and CEO, **Jeff Howard** said: "I'd sincerely thank Kurt, Lewis, and Mel for their contributions to Seven and they leave with our best wishes for the future.

"Combined they represent more than 65 years of experience at Seven and it is always very disappointing when such changes have to be made. Our focus, however, is on ensuring Seven West Media's structure matches our strategy to optimise television, deliver our digital future, find new revenue streams and manage our costs responsibly."



Seven's head of sport Lewis Martin

In addition to the redundancies and departures of Burnette, Hopkins and Martin, the network revealed its new operating model which sees Seven have three divisions: Television, Digital, and Western Australia.

Howard said: "To build a better media business and to make the most of the opportunities ahead of us, we need to change the way we think and operate. That includes changing the way our executive team is structured and how it works together.

"We're setting up new, accountable and transparent profit centres for our Television and Digital business units. The dedicated, end-to-end digital business unit will make sure we capture all the growth digital is going to deliver. Television and Digital will work very closely with our content teams to ensure we maximise the digital growth opportunity as it develops. We're also appointing a Chief Operating Officer to drive continuous improvement and efficiencies.

"We now have three clear divisions covering Television, Digital and WA. They will be supported by executives and teams working across all three to achieve stronger cooperation, consistency and the best possible results for everyone," he said.

See also: Seven West Media: New divisions and leadership roles in wake of redundancies

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Top image: Mat Baxter, Stephen Wright and Ben Shepherd

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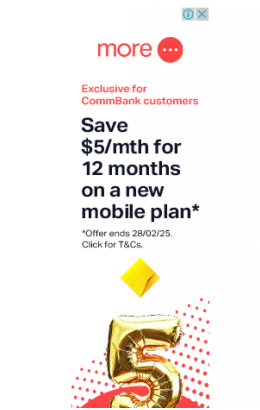
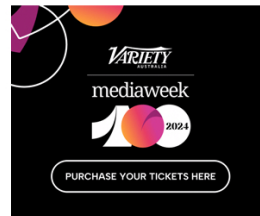
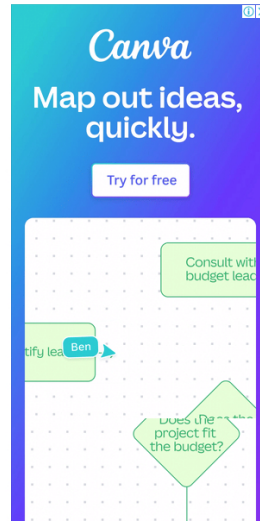
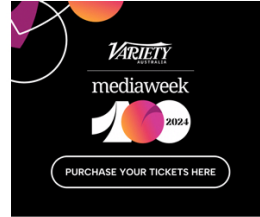
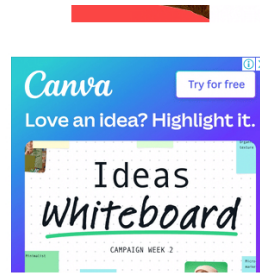
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Melbourne's The Fox appoints three new members to content team



By Jasper Baumann
Posted on 27 June 2024



Brad Wood, Gemma Prendergast and Emily Allen are joining.

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The Hit Network head of Hit Metro content and Fox content director, Amanda Lee, has made three new appointments to The Fox.

Brad Wood is joining The Fox as afternoon announcer and operations manager.

For the past seven years, Wood has worked with the Hit Network's B105 Brisbane as the Workday announcer, accomplishing several no.1 ratings results in the role as well as contributing to the station's strategy and programming.

Gemma Prendergast joins The Fox as new senior producer for the Breakfast show Fifi.



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