

Wavemaker South Africa pushes global mobility as digital lead heads to Tokyo

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On 1 February, Wavemaker South Africa's digital lead and business unit head, David Shields, started a new position at the Group M and Wavemaker Japan offices in Tokyo. The move embodies Wavemaker's prioritisation of global mobility within its business and is part of its vision of creating a truly diverse network of people across its international offices.



David Shields, digital director at Wavemaker Japan

Shields became a permanent part of Wavemaker South Africa in 2019, first as a digital strategist and later as a member of the account management, business development and business unit head teams.

“My growth at Wavemaker has been immense,” Shields says. “The executive team has taught me so much about being a team player and how to lead and mentor. I’m so proud of the many first-to-markets we’ve achieved and I’m grateful that I’ve had the chance to work with clients like Netflix and Astron Energy, which has pushed my skills to new heights.”

Shields’s move to Tokyo, he says, was partly prompted by the pandemic. “With Covid, something shifted in my and my partner’s minds about the kind of life we want to lead. We realised that we wanted to challenge ourselves personally and professionally and taking a new opportunity in Tokyo sounded like a great way to do it.”

While Shields will be missed by his South African team, they also support his move. “We are sad to see David go but are pleased that he will still be part of the wider Wavemaker team,” says Wavemaker CEO SSA Merissa Himraj. “We have no doubt that he will be a rich asset to our colleagues in Japan.”

“David has a great blend of platform knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit,” says Michael Beecroft, Group M CEO, Japan. “Injecting him into the Wavemaker Japan team will bring fresh ideas, perspective and energy.”

Tokyo brings with it a promotion for Shields. He’ll be a digital director at Wavemaker Japan and will be responsible for a larger team with more international clients, which he’ll be helping to penetrate the Japanese market. While Shields is aware that learning about this new market will likely involve a steep learning curve, he believes that the media industry is about human connection. “Once you’ve got that right, everything follows”. His experience with Wavemaker Global’s Provocative Planning operating system will also stand him in good stead.

“I’ll still be drawing on inspiration and methods from different parts of the world,” he says, “and I have no doubt that my experience in South Africa will prove invaluable.”

“As GroupM and Wavemaker Japan grow, we need to ensure a great balance of local knowledge, culture and connections, but also international best practice, learnings and innovation,” adds Beecroft. “Global mobility gives us and our people a huge opportunity to share our unique experiences and knowledge, and to provide the broadest spectrum of solutions for our clients.”

Shields’s work has begun remotely for now and he and his partner will move to Tokyo as soon as current Covid regulations permit it. While his new position is permanent, Shields says that South Africa will always be home. He looks forward to

returning one day with new insights, experience, and skills on how advertising and media can be used to promote hope and conscious consumption the world over.

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