



SAIW appoints Vicus Burger as Executive Director

The Southern African Institute of Welding (SAIW) has announced the appointment of Vicus Burger as its new Executive Director, an appointment that marks a significant step in the SAIW's ongoing strategic renewal plan.

Vicus Burger joins the SAIW with a wealth of experience, a strong commitment to excellence, and a forward-thinking vision that aligns seamlessly with the Institute's core values of speed and customer centricity. His approachable leadership style and innovative mindset are expected to propel the SAIW into its next chapter of growth and success.

SAIW President Joseph Zinyana says, "Vicus's appointment is proof of our commitment to operational efficiency and excellence. His leadership will be instrumental in implementing our strategic initiatives, such as the integration of Artificial Intelligence into administrative processes and the upgrading of operational systems to meet the latest standards."

A timely revival

The appointment takes place against the backdrop of the SAIW's 78th anniversary and commitment to expanding its presence in Africa, making courses more affordable, and introducing subject matter experts for specialised subjects. As a result, Burger's leadership will be crucial in driving these initiatives forward, ensuring that the SAIW continues to evolve into a modern, fit-for-purpose service provider for the welding

and inspection industry.

"The SAIW has historically stood at the forefront of the welding industry, both locally and globally, representing a benchmark of technical excellence, innovation and professional development. As we step into a new chapter, I am committed to building on this proud legacy and igniting a bold renaissance that will position the Institute once again at the apex of global leadership in welding science, skills development and industrial impact," says Burger.

With a career rooted in transformational leadership, Burger also brings a proven legacy of turning organisations into high-performing, future-ready enterprises. "My leadership philosophy is anchored in a passion for empowering people, a relentless focus on exceeding customer expectations, and an uncompromising pursuit of operational excellence, innovation, and sustainable growth," he adds.

Digital prowess

Burger notes that digital transformation will play a vital role in the Institute's future: "Central to this revitalisation journey will be the deployment of innovative digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and automation, to revolutionise



Vicus Burger, SAIW Executive Director.

internal operations, member engagement and skills development platforms. This digital transformation will not only modernise the Institute but will also unlock new capabilities, increase productivity, and enhance the value we deliver to our stakeholders, locally and abroad."

Beyond organisational goals, Burger sees a broader national mission. "This renewal represents a much larger ambition: to contribute meaningfully to the broader transformation of our country's industrial base and the revitalisation of Johannesburg's Central Business District.

"By developing world-class technical skills and fostering inclusive economic growth, we aim to become a driving force in South Africa's journey toward industrial excellence and social progress. Together with our stakeholders, partners and the wider welding and manufacturing communities, I look forward to shaping a future of strength, innovation, and pride in the South African Institute of Welding," he concludes.

www.saiw.co.za

Vicus Burger: from mechanical engineer to AI-leader

After graduating from the University of Stellenbosch in the mid-1990s, Vicus Burger began his career as a mechanical engineer, initially with the mines and later with Smiths Manufacturing in Pinetown, KZN, as a test engineer for automotive air-conditioner designs. While at Smiths, Burger developed a world-class air-conditioner/heat exchanger performance test facility. "That is where I first learned how to program. I coded that whole HVAC facility using Visual Basic," he tells AF.

In 1996, Burger joined the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) company, Unilever. As a project manager in the Soap factory, he was responsible for replacing a 9.0 m shell-and-tube heat exchanger. He also developed a system for managing drawing office resources and job scheduling. On becoming the assistant factory maintenance engineer for Unilever's Personal Products Factory in Durban, he implemented maintenance projects and

developed the batch logging systems required by the Medical Control Council. Then in 1999, he became the factory engineer for Unilever's largest aerosol filling operation in Africa. "Unilever had an excellent professional development programme for engineers, and the FMCG industry is continuously changing," he says.

From 2000 to 2005, he joined South African Breweries. "My most senior position there was as the Group Engineering Manager for Maltings, where I was responsible for managing multiple sites with large capital and maintenance programmes. The SAB Caledon plant, one of the largest Malt-planting plants in the southern hemisphere, was under my care," he adds.

He then entered the world of business development and began to do turnaround projects: transforming customer service and logistics at Mondelēz; resolving capacity constraints at PepsiCo manufacturing plants without capital investment, while

delivering the best Q4 results and reducing workplace injuries by 80% and consumer complaints by 25%; and as Manufacturing Director for Africa at Reckitt, he implemented service level improvements and increased performance from 85% to 97% in just four months.

In 2015, Burger joined Cell C, where he developed expertise in data science and big data. "I had to lead a massive information-based transformation programme for the business. After two years, I was moved to the strategy department to lead the commercial network strategy.

After a few more years working for hospitality solutions provider Thyme Global, transforming their enterprise reporting to include data-driven decision-making through advanced business intelligence, Vicus Burger decided to focus full-time on his own AI-focused SR71 Consult business, which he founded in 2020.

www.linkedin.com/in/vicus-burger-8527ab5