

Neil Vlaming - Epic Outdoor

This week we chat to Neil Vlaming the director of Epic Outdoor, an outdoor advertising media owner, which specialises in high-impact outdoor advertising solutions, digital LEDs, and innovative airport advertising services.



Image supplied. Neil Vlaming, director of Epic Outdoor Digital COO advertising

■ *What do you enjoy most about your industry?*

I came late to the industry and over time have been drawn more and more into it. It is fast paced, creative, and full of remarkable people with interesting stories. It is so different from any other industry I have been involved in.

■ *What is a typical workday for you?*

Fortunately, most days are not the same. However, regardless of what's planned, most days I try to do some form of exercise in the morning before heading into the office.

As we run a lean, but highly effective team we all straddle many spheres in the business.

Month-end is full of financial reports, mid-month may be creative discussions about innovation options. Other times it is planning meetings with the site developers.

I am lucky that I get to immerse myself in most aspects of the business and as such remain continually stimulated. The

structure of the day is typically either in the office with the team or at various meetings followed up with tying up loose ends in the evenings when it is quieter.

▣ ***Describe your career so far.***

I have been exceptionally fortunate to have had three separate careers, which have at times overlapped.

I started my career as an early employee with an IT start-up when the internet was taking off in South Africa. I was exposed to many aspects of the IT industry, while at the same time getting to see what it takes to start and grow a young business.

These skills have been invaluable and are drawn upon often and in unexpected ways.

Following my time in the IT industry, I moved into the property industry. Once again, I was fortunate to be exposed to many aspects of what it takes to visualise, plan and create different types of high-value projects and gained a strong understanding of how both the market, and investors understand various aspects of this industry and what it takes to bring them to fruition.

It was during this period that I was first exposed to the Out of Home (OOH) industry which culminated in 2016 with the launch of Epic Outdoor with my partner Rene Hedley.

The initial business concept didn't envisage me being actively involved in the operation of the business, but soon after we started, and with more exposure to what this industry offers I fell down the rabbit hole.

Over the years I have spent (and am spending) more and more time within Epic Outdoors' daily operations.

We have managed to build a wonderful, creative and energetic business, so it's a pleasure to be in and around the people in the office. I'm very proud of what we have managed to create.

▣ ***What are you currently streaming/reading/listening to?***

Streaming – usually not so much a stream but more onto the sports channels.

Reading, I am currently finishing *Surrender*, Bono's autobiography.

It is an interesting read about not only his time with U2, but how he leveraged his worldwide recognition and status to canvas successfully for the largest debt relief initiative, and secondly (prior to the Covid pandemic) the largest worldwide funding to ensure HIV treatment for all. I enjoy biographies and non-fiction.

If I need a little escapism, I generally turn to fantasy novels much to my wife's disbelief!

▣ ***What's your favourite gif?***

Cheesy – but our Epic Outdoor Logo.. I never get tired of seeing it, as I know what it took to get it into the media, online or on one of our Digital LEDs, especially after the initial Covid scare which at one time saw us lose over 90% of our forward contracts... it was a scary time.

▣ ***Who inspires you?***

My parents. They provided me with the perfect example of what a real partnership should look like. I have been very lucky to have been exposed to their example.

▣ ***What did you want to be when you were a child?***

I grew up in a very small town, so I didn't think about it too much. Most of the time I just wanted to be the policeman in the cops and robbers games.

I really didn't know what career I wanted to be in until I was studying a BCom and living in digs with a guy who was involved in the IT industry.

It was the early 90s. The birth (and later bust with the dot com bubble) of big tech companies, and because of these companies and their technologies the world was changing so fast.

Being exposed to some of this, exciting new technology convinced me that it was something that I wanted to be involved in.

■ ***Give three pieces of advice for young people waiting to enter this industry***

- Input does not always equal output, but over time constant input will result in output. At some point your effort will be rewarded, albeit that it's not always in the way you expect.
- Don't underestimate the power of your network. The more people you are exposed to, the more access you have to new opportunities and ideas.
- Learn to sell. Everyone is a salesman, and we are all selling, all the time... you may just not be aware of it at the time

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