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30 November 2023

Momentum Investments and Stellenbosch University partner in machine learning research

Momentum Investments is proud to announce the creation of the Momentum Investments Research Chair (Professorship) for research into machine learning in finance in conjunction with Stellenbosch University.

At Momentum Investments, we place a significant emphasis on the value research insights bring and pride ourselves on our heritage founded on the principles of innovation, interrogation and constant improvement. Machine learning is a rapidly growing field that offers many potential applications in the investment management and related financial services fields. Stellenbosch University has committed itself to this field of study through its creation of the School for Data Science and Computational Thinking under the direction of Professor Kanshukan Rajaratnam.

Prof. Evan Gilbert, Research Strategist in the Research Hive at Momentum Investments, will be seconded to the School to supervise research projects at the Masters and PhD level on machine-learning based research topics applied to the financial services context. These projects will provide the basis for academic research papers in local and international research journals and the insights to drive the impactful application of machine learning techniques in financial services.

"Momentum Investments has always had a strong research culture, which is entrenched in the business. The intent with the Research Chair is that we generate useful research insights for the broader Momentum Investments business, while helping the university deepen their research capabilities and produce new researchers and papers in this area," says Gilbert.

"Machine learning offers the potential to significantly improve our ability to navigate the continually challenging world of investment management successfully. It can help with many significant decisions, such as asset allocation and asset selection. It can provide a solid, data-driven basis for improving our abilities to segment, understand, and guide our clients' investment behaviour. It can thus also really enhance our ability to successfully implement our 'investing is personal' strategy."

Following the completion of his PhD at the University of Cambridge in 2000, Gilbert worked for a major international strategy consultancy for two years, followed by an eight-year period in academia before joining the investment management industry. He has worked at Momentum Investments since 2015 in various

portfolio management and research capacities, and he is currently part of the Research Hive at Momentum Investments.

"The Research Hive was set up within Momentum Investments to provide subject-matter expertise on technology trends, knowledge and strategic innovation management, and industry-specific insights and to facilitate active knowledge transfer between researchers, business experts and other areas of the investments business for the benefit of our clients," says Eugene Botha, Deputy Chief Investment Officer and Head of the Research Hive at Momentum Investments.

To enhance our research proposition, we have collaborated extensively in the industry to ensure that we remain relevant in the market. We have partnerships with industry bodies like the Association for Savings and Investment South Africa, The Financial Planning Institute of South Africa, and The South African Finance Association. Our close connection with research brokers and academia (through our university relationships and sponsored research projects), as well as global research providers and asset managers, ensure that we are at the forefront of research and trends in the industry from a technical, academic and practical perspective.

"Research is important for innovation, which is essential to growth, generating ideas for new products and solutions, and advancing existing solutions in the investments business. Ultimately, the aim of our research is to help people achieve their personal financial goals effectively. Because with us, investing is personal," concludes Botha.

Gilbert will work with Prof Kanshukan Rajaratnam, Director of the School for Data Science and Computational Thinking at Stellenbosch University.

"We are excited by this endeavour to bring into our ecosystem a researcher who not only has specialised training in the fundamentals but also deep experience in the current needs and context within this space. This partnership has the potential to bring change in line with the School's mission to be a high-rise in the AI/Data Science education landscape," says Rajaratnam.

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