

# Open Debate

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**Resolved:** *The most powerful way to touch people is through screens.*

**Roberts:** There are three ways to a consumer's heart. Mystery, sensuality, and intimacy. And today it's the screen where they come alive. As we move into an age of mobility, interactivity, attraction, and time stress, we will rely more and more on our screens for information, entertainment, communication, transactions, and engagement. Screens are the campfire storytellers of today. They connect us viscerally and emotionally through sight, sound, and motion. They are within arm's length, all the time, for all of us. And we're lovin' it.

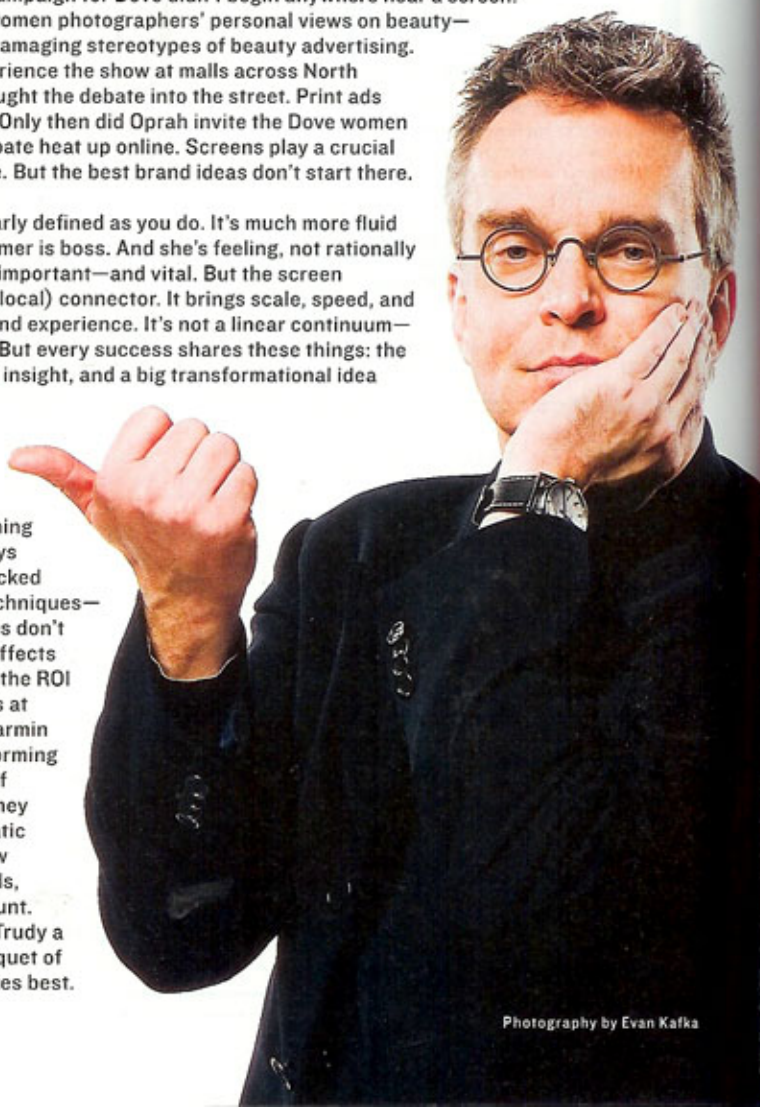
**Collins:** You said it, Kevin: Screens "feel" real. But the best way to someone's heart is by creating real experiences, not only synthetic ones. It takes me only a few seconds to send a text message that says, "I love you." And it lasts only a few seconds before it's replaced by other messages. Sending a dozen red roses amplifies my same message with form, weight, texture, scale, and scent. Design individualizes my message because only I choose those flowers, that vase. Screens may be hypnotizing, but design is humanizing.

**Roberts:** We've moved into the Age of Paradox—no more either/or, no more black/white. It's all and/and. Experience is key; design is core. Emotion is the common thread, and the screen is the most ubiquitous delivery method for making these connections everywhere consumers are. Screens are the new touch points, where the attraction begins—for follow-through in stores, in the bar, at home.

**Collins:** But it's the sheer glut of screens and the ersatz life they offer that makes people respond ever more powerfully to real experiences. Our campaign for Dove didn't begin anywhere near a screen. We started with a touring exhibit of women photographers' personal views on beauty—images that undermined the unreal, damaging stereotypes of beauty advertising. Thousands of people lined up to experience the show at malls across North America. Billboards followed and brought the debate into the street. Print ads placed the story into people's hands. Only then did Oprah invite the Dove women on her TV show. Only then did the debate heat up online. Screens play a crucial role in connecting brands with people. But the best brand ideas don't start there.

**Roberts:** I don't see the world as clearly defined as you do. It's much more fluid and much less structured. The consumer is boss. And she's feeling, not rationally evaluating. Experiential marketing is important—and vital. But the screen remains the fundamental global (and local) connector. It brings scale, speed, and accessibility to the brand's promise and experience. It's not a linear continuum—and it starts anywhere, contextually. But every success shares these things: the consumer at the center, a meaningful insight, and a big transformational idea scaled—ultimately on a screen.

**Collins:** Screens have their own magic. But people stare at them all day long. As this becomes the norm, screens may become the last thing anyone will treasure. Ubiquity destroys intensity. Look, brands are being knocked around by startling new marketing techniques—beyond screens—that companies don't always understand and whose effects aren't easily measured. (What's the ROI on installing superclean bathrooms at state fairs, as Procter & Gamble's Charmin so brilliantly does?) And people are forming new loyalties to brands on the basis of these experiential factors that even they can't always articulate. Broad, emphatic design—not screen obsession—is how an organization should drive its brands, making every customer encounter count. Let's try this: I'll send your assistant Trudy a bouquet of roses. You send her a bouquet of emoticons. Let me know which she likes best.



Read the full text of this email debate at [www.fastcompany.com/keyword/opendebate106](http://www.fastcompany.com/keyword/opendebate106).

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