



Brands and Love - A Fiat Worth Copying

Enrico Roddolo N. 29 - Friday 20 July 2007

The Fiat 500? "The best Lovemark of the season". Kevin Roberts, international advertising guru, guiding light of fantasy at the service of commerce (he is the world-wide CEO of the leading advertising company Saatchi & Saatchi), speaks to Il Mondo of his own, highly personal Fiat 500. "I fell in love with it - it's fantastic, and I've already ordered one: it'll be purple, because that's my wife's favorite color, and Alpo Elkin has promised us that he'll be able to get one for us in exactly that color."

Question. So brands of 2007 need to speak to the heart to hit their target and convince the consumer?

Answer. Exactly, Lovemark (ed: which is also the title of the book-cum-bible written by Roberts on the advertising world) means a brand worth loving. Because brands need to learn to speak not just the language of reliability, trust and credibility, but need also to succeed in speaking straight to the heart of people. As does the Fiat 500. While on the subject of Italy, I hope that Alitalia succeeds in the same operation: now it's just a brand, but it needs to become a brand worth loving. This is a lesson I learned from Mary Quant.

Q. The woman who invented the miniskirt at the time of the Beatles?

A. Yes, her. I was 21 at the time, and I was sitting in a bar in the King's Road in London. I was chatting with a couple of friends and someone said to me: "Have you heard, Kevin? Quant's looking for people to prepare a launch in the cosmetics business." So I met Mary, and it was she who taught me the power of feelings, the emotive involvement in a brand. Moreover, all my bosses have been women and I've learned a lot from them: for example, that passion and harmony can be combined. We are living in a season of the 'Attraction Economy' in which the consumer is king and wants to be drawn into the advertising message.

Q. But at the last international advertising festival in Cannes, the 'Oscars of advertising', it was the web and the new technological platforms that seemed to dominate everything. Just the opposite to passion, attraction and creativity.

A. No, personally, I don't think much has changed in the advertising world. Great advertising has always been part of popular culture, and it has always been a creative aspect. What has changed over the years, if anything, have been the distribution platforms. From dailies and periodicals to TV and now the web.

Q. Until Second Life. This seems to be the final frontier. Or not?

A. Three months ago, Second Life and its virtual world were decidedly cool. But no longer. But Second Life can be interesting for intercepting new consumers; companies are right to lay bets on it. For example, the boss of Mercedes was speaking to me a few days ago of the car company's projects for Second Life: the idea is that a presence in this virtual world can help the brand appeal to a younger public.

Q. Apart from the purple of your new Fiat 500, there is plenty of green in the new advertising panorama. A green upsurge that has none other than a former vice-president of the USA, Al Gore, as one of its supporters. What do you, who holds a course in Sustainable enterprise at the University of Limerick in Ireland, think about this?

A. On 4th August, I shall be in Singapore to talk about sustainability with Gore himself. And yes, personally, I have been convinced for some time of the importance of sustainability. Not only environmental, however, but social too. And I mean by this the creation of job opportunities, of improved living conditions for all the populations of the planet.

Q. And then you'll be in Milan at the end of October (23rd and 24th) to speak to the World Business Forum. But if sustainability is important, do you mean that the advertising agencies will need to supply themselves with dedicated sustainable structures - just as they have taken on a web division – in order to follow the green themes by example?

A. Yes, exactly. And indeed, before the end of the year, Saatchi & Saatchi will be the first agency to equip itself with an ad hoc structure. Saatchi & Saatchi Sustainability will, I think, kick off in San Francisco with an initial staff of about 50 people. In the future of marketing and advertising, I think that these two themes - environmental sustainability and social sustainability - will be held in great consideration.

Q. As for media, instead, what do we need to keep our eyes on?

A. In Italy, mobile phones, for example. I continue to repeat to our lads in Italy: we need to launch a Saatchi & Saatchi mobile in Rome. In your country, mobile phones are as commonplace as spaghetti. And since the future of advertising also passes through mobile telephony, I believe that the conquest of this new medium needs to start in Italy.

Q. But is it true that there will be more space for advertising services and less for products and consumer goods?

A. There will be more, but not less. Let me explain: there will be more space for the promotion of services (ed: from banking to insurance and savings), but that does not mean there will be less space for mass consumer goods.