

Winning hearts of consumers

By Eric Pfanner

LONDON

Money can't buy you love, but love can buy you money (or, at least, increase your company's sales).

So says Kevin Roberts, chief executive of the Saatchi & Saatchi unit of Publicis Groupe, who stopped at the London Book Fair last week to publicize a book he has written under the touchy-feely title "Lovemarks."

In a Saatchi & Saatchi booth modeled on the bedroom in his Manhattan loft, Roberts explained the idea that led him to write the book, a red-bound volume full of typographical

devices, brand names and sound bites. Brands are dead, he said, unless they learn to make an emotional connection with increasingly jaded consumers, inspiring "loyalty

beyond reason." In that case they become, you guessed it, "lovemarks."

Adidas, for instance, is a lovemark. (Roberts said that he recently visited the Adidas Concept Store in Seattle with no intention to spend and emerged with \$880 of cool stuff for himself and his family.) Nike, however, is just a brand, as the emotional drawing power of Michael Jordan has worn off.

Lovemarks don't have to be products. They can be people, too. David Beckham is a lovemark, Roberts said, with a marketing value that exceeds his soccer skills; his wife, Victoria, is not, though.

"Branding is all about the brand; lovemarks is all about people," an on-message Roberts said. "Mass marketing is a thing of the past; now, it's about the market of one."

His ideas may sound a bit sappy or, worse, like just more marketing buzzwords. Love has become a popular theme lately in advertising, as marketers seek to make an emotional connection with consumers worried about terrorism or the economy. McDonald's last year started a global advertising campaign around the "I'm lovin' it" slogan.

Olay — a Procter & Gamble brand handled by Saatchi & Saatchi — advises women to "love the skin you're in."

But there is some hard-edged business reasoning behind Roberts's message, too. Many people in the advertising industry, and many of their clients, do worry that brands — from packaged foods to luxury goods, from cosmetics to cars — have lost their hold on consumers, who are exposed to several thousand commercial images or messages every day. With media choices proliferating and fragmenting, too, target audiences are harder to reach. And with new technologies empowering consumers and providing them with greater choices, the balance of power in the marketing equation has shifted.

"The point of a lovemark is, you can charge a premium for it," he said.

Dressed in a black T-shirt and black jeans, with close-cropped gray hair, the 54-year-old Roberts is a persuasive spokesman for change.

Yet P&G, one of Saatchi & Saatchi's biggest clients, says advertising agencies have been slow to respond, sticking with the tried-and-true television advertisement as the answer to every marketing problem.

"There must be life beyond the 30-second spot," P&G's chief marketing officer, Jim Stengel, said last month during an advertising industry conference. "But our systems still revolve around that. Today's marketing world is broken. We are still too dependent on marketing tactics that are not in touch with today's consumer."

Roberts acknowledged that ad agencies had been slow to adapt to changes in technology and consumer behavior.

"Clients get it," he said. "It's hardest to explain to agency creative departments. They still see the 30-second spot as the answer to everything."

TV spots aimed at mass audiences do not work in part because consumers the world over increasingly connect with local rather than global messages, said Roberts, who is British by birth, is based in New York and keeps a home in New Zealand, where he used to live.

"Globalization is dead," he said. "Europe doesn't exist. The Germans think they're German, the French think they're French."

Even love apparently knows its limits.

■ Nestle is conducting a review of its global media-buying account, which handles spending of an estimated \$1.5 billion a year.

■ Publicis has named Steve King, 44, the chief executive of its ZenithOptimedia media-buying unit. King, who has headed ZenithOptimedia's Europe, Middle East and Africa operations, succeeds John Perriss, who stepped down this month.

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Kevin Roberts