

Nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide

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By Paul McIntyre
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Who would have thought Kevin Roberts, the one-time blokey beer boss at Lion Nathan and machine-gun-toting Canadian Pepsi marketing chief, would go all green and socially concerned.

Roberts is worldwide boss of ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi, and says he's seen a new consumer trend coming. It's the "triple bottom line", which aims to have companies act more transparently and responsibly about their environmental and social impact - not just the balance sheet.

His new view probably has something to do with Saatchi's biggest international client, Toyota, making a move to more "sustainable" cars. And that Roberts sees a significant revenue potential for his "international ideas company".

"The opportunity for creative companies as a result of the increased interest in sustainability is the best it's ever been, because the only solution to it is communication," he says. "You can no longer hide and bullshit. You can't hide behind your ads, you can't hide behind your brand or your slogan because consumers go right behind all that.

"Because the power has switched to consumers, if you don't get sustainability right, they will, and do, punch you. They're asking, 'Are you socially responsible, are you in a sweat shop business, because if so, that pisses me off?' They're saying, 'Are you busy screwing up the environment or are you like a Toyota Prius, where you're trying to do something about it?' "

He says "it's a beautiful thing" for the communications business because creativity and ideas will be vital in the emerging arena of sustainability. It might be commercial, but there's little doubt Mr Roberts has gone green.