

MAKING A MARK AND PUTTING LOVE INTO YOUR WORK

ProDesign Magazine, September 2004

I don't think anyone in the branding business could claim that they hadn't heard of Kevin Roberts's *Lovemarks* (ISBN 1576872041). The Saatchi & Saatchi head, who grew up in Lancaster, has probably been the most single minded individual in putting the concept of New Zealand creativity on the global map. And by using that same genius to push *Lovemarks*, just as he had with co-founding *The New Zealand Edge* with Brian Sweeney, he could possibly create a very positive, human movement in branding.

Those of us who work in branding have a love-hate thing with Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (Picador, ISBN 0312421435). Yes, Klein was right to raise the issues. But what of the answers? My colleagues and I at the Medinge Group decided we would answer them, so in 2003, a bunch of us came up with *Beyond Branding* (Kogan Page, ISBN 0749441151). The idea was to present a book that took branding to the next level, answering Klein and making the world a better place.

So when I noticed *Lovemarks* was subtitled "The Future beyond Brands", I thought: hang on, this sounds familiar. Is Kev going to step on my toes? Not really. This is a great book that's been written from the heart – but it won't satisfy those involved deep in branding. It's not supposed to. *Lovemarks* has been written to be easily digested, by everyone, and that sets it apart. If branding authors are talking about making brands more relevant, then why do so many write like nerds? Roberts writes like a normal person.

Roberts begins with a trip down memory lane in an autobiographical chapter, then why brands, as we know them, are dead.

There are two problems. The book is a visual mess. In recent years, book designers have been getting more creative, so I don't object to magazine techniques such as callouts appearing. *Managing Brand Me* (ISBN 1843040174), by Thomas Gad and Anette Rosencreutz, employs some. But while *Managing Brand Me* is restrained, *Lovemarks* shouts. Over and over again.

Pedants will notice that among the Adobe Garamond text, someone doesn't know the difference between en and em dashes. So typographically, Roberts's friendly tone is lost, for someone has indulged in the PowerPoint school of design.

In fact, that's not too unfair a comment. Kevin Roberts is, from what I know, a talented and sought-after speaker. These feel like mini-presentations – not that there's anything wrong with that. Each spread is a little gem unto itself and you can glean a sight bite that can be extrapolated into something useful.

The second problem is the premise that *Lovemarks* has decided to take by the end of the second chapter: "RIP Branding". This is a gloss, and it's not supposed to be subjected to academic scrutiny, but brands aren't.

The tack that Roberts continues to take in following chapters relies on the same process that "branding" has used: the establishment of a vision, the development of a

strategy, the communication of the ideal – all for a positive image. Branding in fact is not dead, but decent visions, the American obsession with quarterly reporting and the smart consumer are all chipping away at how we should think about it.

Valueless? Buy *Beyond Branding* instead? No. Despite these – and Roberts's erroneous submission that HAL was a Stanley Kubrick dig at IBM in 2001 (it was a book, of course, and it stood for heuristic algorithmic) – this is still possibly the most valuable book on branding this year.

Roberts begins his journey only in earnest in Chapter 4. Love is a wiser emotion to build brands on than the old currencies of money and selling. So what is this thing called love?

On the branding world surface, it's what makes people create feature films using Lego bricks or why Zippo lighters and Apple computers are forgiven their quirks. Branding academics can probably turn this into a brand equity discussion. Roberts prefers a more human explanation, living what he preaches.

I am not sure how the Toyota Camry – the car that makes it into one of our publications' worst lists annually, from a company devoted to making things "everyday" – can be considered an object of desire. After reading Roberts's words, I am still unsure.

If Toyota was such a great firm that got close to its consumers and their lifestyles, surely there would be a station wagon version? Thankfully, the Prius – a car that embodies the qualities he writes about – also makes it in.

Love, explains Roberts, works with respect on an X-Y axis: a true lovemark has both maximised. Love can be broken down into individual emotions of mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Mystery includes storytelling, one thing that always marks out a great brand and a great company. Sensuality describes how each of the senses should be raised with a great brand and something that many get wrong (especially conservative political parties, no matter where you go). Intimacy, finally, is entering into a two-way relationship with consumers, becoming practically one with them – though not forgetting the necessities of empathy, commitment and passion.

To discover more, we need to research this properly, but revamp the old methodologies in favour of measuring emotion. And to prove it's all real, Roberts includes several Saatchi & Saatchi case studies in his penultimate chapter, although the lack of space he has means that they aren't as deep as they could be. (Plus one of the brands is Lexus. The fictional Alan Partridge drives a Lexus. You wouldn't do that to a brand with love. To be fair, Roberts writes about Lexus in the United States, not elsewhere.) The final chapter is about corporate social responsibility (CSR).

As I write this, I am reminded of past Medinge Group conferences where a good deal of this has been explored. *Beyond Branding* itself talks about transparency instead of intimacy, but there are parallels.

Chris Macrae, Alan Mitchell and William Gordon, for instance, have a book called *Mapping Intangible Assets* that's being published by J Wiley & Sons this year on rethinking valuation. We are not alone: there's Stefan Engeseth and his *Detective Marketing* (ISBN 9163113899) and one principles (possibly one of the few books more accessible than *Lovemarks*); there are those ideas about relationship marketing that have been bandied about the Nordic countries for a generation. The sort of

corporate-sponsored social justice in Chapter 15 and how CSR can actually aid an organisation's bottom line has been covered not only in *Beyond Branding*, but Simon Anholt's *Brand New Justice* (Butterworth-Heinemann, ISBN 0750656999).

I have not yet read the Macrae et al book but I can bet now that it's not as accessible as *Lovemarks*. *Detective Marketing* was big first in Scandinavia. *Brand New Justice* sold for a ridiculous 25 Pounds in the UK. Reed wants less than \$50 for *Lovemarks*, so it'll be bought, majorly.

Don't read into what I'm saying for a second that I think Kevin Roberts has pinched ideas. He hasn't. He has been so close to this world that he, like the rest of us who've come up with branding books of late, has been able to feel the pulse of what's going on. Here, the genius is not in the pricing, nor even the friendly tone. The genius of *Lovemarks* is in the exercises, disguised as Post-It notes, that he has at the end of a lot of his chapters.

You can imagine setting *Lovemarks* as a text for company VPs, assigning them a chapter a night, and going through the "Five Things to Do Tomorrow" for homework. They are not onerous, but once conventional VPs and managers and department heads begin thinking about each of the love dimensions, the company itself can begin changing for the better. If enough people did it, then companies themselves can come together for a greater collective change.

As much as I want to dis this book by taking a swipe at ad agencies and how they all look the same, I can't. Roberts' aim is too noble. The future that *Lovemarks* – and related titles – can create is within reach right now. I never thought I'd say this, but an ad man and I are on the same side.

Jack Yan (jack.yan@iyanet.com) is CEO of Jack Yan & Associates (<http://jya.net>), a communications firm with offices worldwide, headquartered in Wellington, New Zealand. He is the only active Antipodean member of the Medinge Group (www.medinge.org), the high-level branding think-tank. He co-authored *Beyond Branding: How the New Values of Transparency and Integrity Are Changing the World of Brands* (ISBN 0749441151, Kogan Page, London, 2003), edited by Nicholas Ind. His personal site can be found at www.jackyan.com