



Kevin Roberts & Renzo Rosso

Kevin Roberts would never refer to himself as a “branding guru”, but that’s exactly what he is. Worldwide CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi and author of the bestselling book **Lovemarks**, Roberts is transforming his agency into an “ideas company”, while finding time to alert global brands to the fact that consumers are more powerful than ever. In this encounter, he reassures Renzo that **Diesel is, indeed, a “lovemark”**.

Renzo Rosso: I got hold of your book and I must say I enjoyed it very much. But for the benefit of our readers, can you explain what a lovemark is?

Kevin Roberts: The idea for Lovemarks sprang out of conversation with Alan Webber, the founding editor of Fast Company magazine. I was trying to explain to him that from now on, the only successful companies will be those that consumers completely trust. I came up with the phrase “trust marks”, but Alan told me it was boring. His reaction made me feel pretty unloved, so over a bottle of wine that night, I came up with a better word: “lovemarks”. The greatest brands are those that consumers love.

RR: So I have to ask you: is Diesel a lovemark?

KR: Diesel is one of the millennium’s living, throbbing lovemarks. A lovemark has to have mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Those words could have been written for Diesel! In your stores, there’s a sense of involvement, entertainment and fun that’s tragically lacking in most retail spaces. Plus, Diesel stores attract like-minded people, so there’s a terrific sense of community.

RR: We work very hard to make sure Diesel customers feel like they’re in another world when they enter our stores.

KR: I like the fact that you don’t follow fashion. There’s not even a particular Diesel style. Instead of selling customers things you think they want, you sell them things they’ve never even thought of.

RR: We don’t believe in following trends. But we’re the first consumers of what we do, so we know they’ll understand us. Earlier you mentioned that a brand needs mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Is one of the three enough?

KR: No way. This is not a menu: it’s the way consumers feel. They’re driven by their senses. That’s why sensuality and intimacy are so important. I think a lot of luxury brands make a mistake because they’re not warm enough – they keep their distance. To win a consumer’s trust, you have to get close to them. But you also have to retain a little bit of mystery to keep them interested. It’s just like a love affair.

RR: I get the feeling that most brands don’t really know their customers, unless it’s through market research.

KR: It’s so insulting. I make sure I’m often out there on the streets of New York, where I live, in places like Hoboken, Brooklyn and Alphabet City, soaking everything up. I’m always talking to kids and reading magazines. In any case, my attitude to research is that instinct is always better than data.

RR: That’s the way I like to work too. So you don’t think business people have to be rational?

KR: Not at all! The most successful business people on the planet are the most creative. And they all work on instinct. Think about it: if market research was behind every great business idea, everybody would have thought of it. Great ideas come from a creative spark and the willingness to take risks.

RR: We tend to associate creativity with artists. Business people aren’t often thought of as creative.

KR: And yet they’re some of the most creative people around. As Steve Jobs says: “Creativity is just connecting stuff.”

RR: You’ve described your advertising agency as “an ideas company”. Does that mean you’re no longer in the advertising business?

KR: Not in the way we used to be. Today it’s about being a connector. We connect brands with people, people with other people, or brands with each other. But the most important thing we do is inspire consumers. They have so many choices, they don’t need another brand. So we have to convince them we’re worthy of their attention.

RR: Technology has made it even more difficult.

KR: Yeah – and you know what? Most companies don’t understand what’s happening. They all talk about “convergence”, as if we’re all going to run our lives out of one box that looks like a mobile phone. But human beings don’t work that way. They like to have a conversation on their phone and watch TV on their TV. And they still enjoy reading.

RR: I’ve always got a stack of newspapers or magazines to hand. I love technology, but some traditional things remain very enjoyable. Do you think newspapers will survive?

KR: Yes – but they have to get into radical optimism. Nobody wants to read that depressing stuff any more. What newspapers should do is analyse a situation and then tell us what we can do about it. The question I ask myself when I read the newspapers is: “Okay – so what does all that mean for me?”

RR: How do you find time to be a branding guru and run a company?

KR: I don’t really define myself that way. In fact, I’m one of those lucky people who are paid to do something they enjoy. Richard Branson once said: “Find something you’re passionate about, and then figure out a way of making money out of it.” I don’t believe in balancing work and life. I think they go together.



KEVIN ROBERTS

Kevin Roberts is the worldwide CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, one of the world’s biggest advertising agencies, and author of the bestselling book ‘Lovemarks’. He was born in Lancaster in the north of England and began his career at London fashion house Mary Quant. He has held senior positions at Procter & Gamble and Pepsi-Cola (where he was CEO for the Middle East and then Canada), and transformed the fortunes of New Zealand brewer Lion Nathan. He joined Saatchi & Saatchi in 1997 and has a reputation as a provocative and creative thinker in the field of branding.