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Kevin Roberts, the big boss of the Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency preaches love via brands.

Supermarkets are the next mass media. By David Haeberli.

Black t-shirt and an easy laugh, Kevin Roberts is pretending to be the big boss of the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi. In reality, he is really a preacher. His big speech is taken from Lovemarks, his latest book. "To survive, brands must create loyalty beyond reason [...] The secret to get there? Be surrounded by mystery, sensuality and intimacy." Those who will succeed will become Lovemarks. Love and respect, he insists, are the key for businesses of the future. Discussion with an enthusiast who firmly believes that businesses can change the world. But only if they work with him.

Le Temps: You say that supermarkets are the next mass media. What do you mean by that?

Kevin Roberts: 85% of purchases are decided inside supermarkets. And, 80% of those are made in 40 seconds, on impulse. The interaction between the supermarket and the consumer must therefore be as strong as it has been between the reader and the newspaper. I have been told that this link, today, is being built by Internet, word of mouth and direct mail. I don't believe it. The deciding factor today and for the next ten years, will be the proliferation of the screen. In our hands, under our noses, they will always be with us. The challenge is therefore to transform this permanent dissatisfaction that shopping in department stores brings into a positive experience. That stores become theatres of dreams.

The price of gas is exploding, households are counting their pennies and you are speaking of love and respect. Do you really think that this is at the heart of current problems?

Not only at the center of business but also political and economic progress. As long as we have not obtained inclusive capitalism, and not one of exclusion, we will make insignificant progress. The role of business is not to generate profit for shareholders. This is a myth. The real objective should be to create profitability and not only economic but also social, cultural and environmental. And emotions are at the center of all of this: 80% of decisions that we make are linked directly to these issues.

Is Love synonym of money in the business world of the 21st century?

Yes. Are you ready to pay a bit more for something that you love? The iPod costs more than the competition but it is a lovemark that has conquered the loyalty of its consumers.

Cheap product lines are polluting the market place. Does this not contradict your schema?

The brands that want to obtain the respect of consumers must include a number of characteristics, including price competitiveness.

However, iPod, as we have just seen is more expensive than the competition...

Apple approached the question of price by creating more options stemming from its original model. There has been the mini, the Shuffle and today the Nano. Have you seen the Nano? It's incredible. I already bought 5 for my children. Respect such as I define it in my book is a value that the consumer puts into an object, more than price, services, distribution, etc.

Don't some commodities remain directly linked to price? I use Skype, the software that allows you to call for free over the Internet, specifically because I save money and not because I'm attached to it.

I have been in Geneva for less than 4 hours and you are the 3rd person to talk to me about Skype. You do it because you are an educated consumer someone who is avant-garde. If Skype was only cheap you wouldn't talk about it. Two years ago if someone had spoken to me about their attachment to Google, I would have thought them to be crazy. Today, it is part of the Lovemarks list as defined by Internet users who have nominated Google on the Lovemarks web site.

Do we read « 20 Minutes » for love?

Do the quality of information and entertainment suffice to create confidence in its readers? It is possible that these publications will fall like a souffle. The love and respect concerning a brand can take time to develop. Who is talking about Britney Spears or Ugg boots anymore? But these free newspapers are also a sign of the mediocrity of traditional media. Anyone who thinks that newspapers today are made to inform the public, is asleep. Television and mobiles are there for that. The media must concentrate on commentaries and decoding. The media is the only way to help the consumer to understand the significance of events.