

Powering Brands With Emotion
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The fashion industry needs to do a better job pumping out lovemarks.

What's a lovemark, you may ask?

It's a term coined by Kevin Roberts, chief executive officer worldwide for Saatchi & Saatchi, the global advertising agency, which describes brands that inspire loyalty beyond reason. Lovemarks reach one's heart, as well as one's mind, and create an intimate and emotional connection to the consumer. Roberts is the author of "Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands" (PowerHouse Books).

Roberts said few brands in the fashion industry truly connect with the customer in an emotional way. "Humans are powered by emotion, not reason. Emotion has driven fashion and will continue to do so."

Roberts explained that reason plays a major role in marketing, and it's time to get rid of it. The major difference between reason and emotion is that reason leads to conclusions and emotion leads to action. "Most of the advertising in the fashion business leads to conclusions, not action and not sales. It's more about the products and the fashion and not about the feelings of the consumer."

Having begun his career at Mary Quant in London, Roberts sees similarities between the fashion and advertising industries.

"At Saatchi & Saatchi, we're in the ideas business. And fashion, after all, is one big idea. The challenge is to make sure that ideas and dreams keep moving forward," he said.

He said fashion is about getting to the future first. "It's not about giving consumers what they want. It's about giving them what they never dreamed possible. Getting to the future first is what it's all about. If you're there second, people don't care."

Two major events occurring in the fashion industry are "the speed revolution," and "the China revolution." Roberts cited quick-turning Zara as an example of how fast products move through the pipeline, and said China is discovering its innate creativity. "They [the Chinese] have extraordinary manufacturing capability and price, but are being boosted now by fantastic creativity. They're coming not just on price, they're coming on fabric, color and style," he said, urging the audience to join them as partners and mentors, not simply as a supplier of cheap products.

The screen is another wave of the future.

“Your consumers tomorrow live in ‘The Screen Age.’ Every one of you here has BlackBerrys, mobiles, your PCs. The screen is everywhere. Catalogues will become online, even to the over-55-year-olds. The Baby Boomers will be the heaviest users of the Internet in the world. That’s their safety net; their information vehicle, and relevance to the world.”

Even through the fashion industry mavens claim to be the gurus of what is fashionable, Roberts pointed out today’s consumer gets her information from reality TV, online and through her friends. “The consumer knows more about fashion than we know about her,” he said.

Roberts said people crave relationships and every brand can be charted on a love-respect axis with high respect and high love being the ideal. Those are lovemarks – brands such as iPod, Giorgio Armani, Yohji Yamamoto and Harley Davidson. He said these are brands that are creative, engaging, stimulating and genuinely loved, and “that’s where your brand wants to sit.”

“Diesel is a lovemark, and Wrangler is just another pair of jeans. Lovemarks inspire loyalty beyond reason,” he added.

Roberts said lovemarks are built of respect, great logistics, distribution and love. “Lovemarks are owned by the people, they’re not owned by the company.”

“Lovemarks can be anything,” continued Roberts, citing his Web site, lovemarks.com, is filled with stories about Gucci, Manolo Blahniks and Jimmy Choos. “Consumers are crazy about everything in their lives. This idea that love is just for your partner, your dog, your country or your football team, isn’t true. There are all kinds of love. People love everything from shoes to cars.” Roberts said the three secrets of lovemarks are mystery, sensuality and intimacy.

Most fashion brands sit in the quadrant of high respect, low love, said Roberts. They rely on ads that use beautiful photography and a model, but consumers have seen them all before and they don’t evoke any emotion.

He said stores can also become lovemarks. Most stores, he said, are operating on one or two senses, but there’s a great opportunity for retailers who can entice all five senses.

“When you walk into Jo Malone on Sloane Street, you feel every single sense being and intrigued simultaneously,” said Roberts.

“Mystery; sensuality and intimacy are equally applicable in turning your stores into a theater of dreams,” he added. “Colette remains seductive, sensuality

embraces the spectacle of Niketown, I love these pop-up stores such as Isaac Mizrahi [at] Target, J.C. Penny and Comme des Garçons. They're very sensual. Intimacy is in the heart of service."

He said most stores offer service that's quite aloof, distant and threatening. "Inspire your people to be the best they can be....We won't take sloppy service or indifference anymore," said Roberts.

Roberts said when he was coming up in the business, his biggest role as a marketer was to make his brand irreplaceable. "Few of us succeeded. It is not enough. Frankly, none of you make anything that is irreplaceable. What you have to become is irresistible."

"The iPod is irresistible. The Banana Republic on SoHo is irreplaceable. I go there all the time, but the Chanel on the Ginza, man, is irresistible. You can't go past that store."

He reflected on his previous jobs in the consumer goods industry and observed how the retail world has dramatically changed over the past few decades.

"When I grew up, I worked at Procter & Gamble for a decade and Pepsico for a decade. Man, I was the man. We had brand power. Do you remember those good old days? We walked into Wal-Mart and Target and they shivered. What happened in the Nineties? We crawled into Wal-Mart and Target, and we begged to be beaten."

He said he recently spent a full day visiting several Targets and Wal-Marts in the Tri-state area and observed, "Power has shifted again. It is fairly and squarely with the consumer. The consumer has the power. The consumer will absorb when she wants and what she wants. It's all about the emotional connection. It's not the right of the brand owner, not the right of the retailer. It's the right of the consumers. We have to engage them."