



LOVEMARK THINKING - September 08, 2006

Challenge is to create advertising that inspires loyalty beyond reason. In other words, make the consumer fall in love, writes Diane Francis.

Kevin Roberts is chief executive of Saatchi & Saatchi global advertising operations with 134 offices in 84 countries and 7,000 employees. But he and his family live in New Zealand, "on the edge of the world," as he puts it.

Mr. Roberts is hard to pin down. He lives in airports and hotels more than anywhere else, which is why his assistant suggested an e-mail interview be best. He responded to my questions within hours on a myriad of topics.

Saatchi & Saatchi was launched in 1970 in Britain by brothers, Charles and Maurice, and at its height was the world's biggest ad agency with more than 600 offices. It pioneered public ownership of an industry that had been characterized by entrepreneurship.

In 1995, the brothers were ousted after a boardroom dust-up, and five years later, their namesake firm became part of The Publicis Group holding company out of Paris.

Mr. Roberts entered the agency business late and at the top. He toiled on the client side of advertising going from Mary Quant to Gillette, Procter & Gamble and Pepsi. In 1997, he joined Saatchi. Since then, it has been one success after another. This week, Mr. Roberts is credited with closing a US\$250-million deal with J.C. Penney.

One of his trademarks is "lovemarks" and "lovemark thinking," which he defines as brands that inspire loyalty beyond reason. In other words, the challenge is to create marketing/advertising that gets consumers emotionally attached, or in love with, products or services.

To promote "lovemarks" all media must be brought into play and this won't change in future.

Q. What is your background?

A. I grew up in Lancaster, in Northwest of England. I was kicked out of school when I was 17 but was lucky enough to get a job with Mary Quant in the swingin'

London of the '60s. As a brand manager for Mary Quant cosmetics ["Makeup to make love in"], I learned about creativity, connectivity, emotional leadership and collaboration ... working for mega-talented, highly creative women. My father was an orderly in a hospital; my mother worked in a shop.

Q. Are you optimistic about the future of advertising and media?

A. I'm a radical optimist. Advertising's never been more fun. We live in the Age of the Idea ... and the consumer is boss. Mass marketing is dead. Creativity rules, OK!! It's the most exciting it's ever been. Our challenges are twofold: a) Keep attracting the bravest and most innovative; and b) Have the courage to unleash and inspire them by getting out of their way!

We believe in a future beyond brands -- lovemarks. See the book. See the Web site. We believe in Sisomo: The future on screen. See the book.

Q. What's the future of the media?

A. No one medium will replace another. The consumer wants "and/and," not "either/or." All four media [print, radio, television, Web] will be interactive. All will be consumed on the go. All will be idea/content driven. All will have some digital component. All will engage not just inform.

Q. What will the ad agency of the future look like?

A. Agencies will be full of connectors not directors. They will be fast, not slow. They will be 70% female, will be full of inspirers not managers, will be partners not servers, will be diverse, will have lots of anthropologists/sociologists on staff and will be full of noise, fun, passion and success.

Q. Is Google friend or foe?

A. The secret to Google is "co-opetition" [not competition].

Q. Do famous peoples' endorsements still sell products?

A. Celebrities sell magazines and reality TV shows, that's for sure. But products? Less and less ... consumers are confident in their own judgment. They're more convinced by a friend than a celebrity.

Q. Is advertising getting better or worse?

A. Clients get the advertising they deserve. You see bravery everywhere from Procter & Gamble to Wal-Mart. From Toyota to Honda (even from Detroit). From Sony to Samsung. Clients are on the move. They get it.

Q. Where is the best advertising coming from these days?

A. New Zealand! I live there. Great ideas come from the Edge. Brazil, Argentina, Thailand are very hot right now. The U.S. is doing some great stuff -- especially in new media -- and the best ad in 2006 came from the U.K. (Fallon -- Sony Balls).

Q. Is the role of public relations becoming more important?

A. Public relations is usually the extension of the equity and the idea. Great ideas come from anywhere ... the client, the agency, the media agency, the consumer ... it's about getting around the table together, at briefing time and developing a holistic consumer-driven idea together -- then figuring out how to emotionally engage with the consumer at every touch point ... in new, exciting ways. As partners.

Q. Is advertising growing?

A. The industry's growing 6% per annum and great talent is still signing on.

Q. Is television finished?

A. No. It changes. TV will adapt.

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