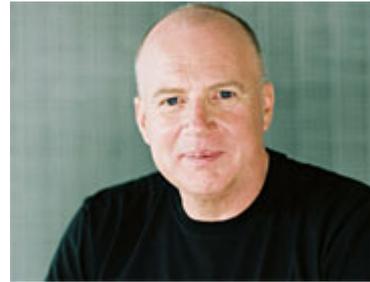


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Q&A: Saatchi's Roberts

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By Gregory Solman

LOS ANGELES Kevin Roberts, global CEO of Publicis Groupe's Saatchi & Saatchi, sat down last week with *Adweek* West Coast Editor Gregory Solman to discuss recent network developments, initiatives in California and the "Lovemarks" approach to marketing.

Define "best practices" in the Saatchi network?

I'm very happy with progress in a bunch of places. First of all [CEO] Mary Baglivo and [CCO] Tony Granger have remixed New York. Saatchi's soul and birth was on Charlotte Street in London but our heart and our future obviously are going to be led by New York. Because in the advertising business that's kind of 40 percent of the activity, right? And you have to Tom Cruise-like "Follow [sic] the money." I'm very happy with the success in New York. You've seen J.C. Penney's and Wendy's come on board. You've seen General Mills work get better and better. Our work on P&G is the best it's ever been. They're doing terrific work on Ameriprise, Avaya, Reynolds and so on. Sandy Thompson at the heart of the planning function is redefining that. So I'm pretty stoked about New York.

What about Los Angeles?

I think the model we've developed at Saatchi Los Angeles and Team One—where we have 50 interactive people fully integrated into both agencies, where we have launched vehicles like the FJ Cruiser without any main media whatsoever, and where we've done Mobisodes [for Yaris]—I think the innovation with the consumer in everything we do at those two agencies is stunning. Obviously, if you look at the success of Toyota and Lexus it feels pretty good.

You had hopes that Saatchi L.A. would be both a Toyota and a P&G shop. While it has a tiny piece of P&G [Pur filters], it hasn't grown much beyond Toyota. Does that bother you —and how will the new management structure affect that?

I'm delighted with Saatchi L.A. in terms of the work we've done on Toyota. I think it's been breathtaking. With Kurt Ritter and the Tundra you're going to look at one of the most successful launches that you will ever have seen. The issue is, there isn't a lot of business in California that we find desirable. And it is very hard to attract a New York or a Midwest client to the West Coast when they can get Saatchi & Saatchi New York for example. And very few of the businesses here are sustainable or to last. Team One is in the [final round] for Activision. How big is that really going to be? The good news is that Activision is run by Mike Griffith who is ex-P&G, so you would hope that there would be some sustainable marketing behind what is a fantastic, phenomenal idea. But if you look at the track record, we've had business in and out.

Is the London shop the future?

At Charlotte Street we've assembled, I think, the best communications company in the go-forward era. The future is to the world's creative connector. That's the future for our agencies. How can we connect consumers with great ideas and how can we stimulate them to act, to buy? We've got, in Saatchi & Saatchi X in Fayetteville, 300 people led by Andy Murray and I believe we are at the forefront of shopper marketing. We're designing all of Wal-Mart's new stores. We are really making the store a theater of dreams. I've been at Saatchi ten years now, and I feel that we are probably, because of our focus on exploring, which is generating insights, ideas and "Lovemarks" [Roberts' concept of a brand that has both consumer respect and love], and our focus to fill the world with Lovemarks, we are in a really nice space. We have a global network that feels local, consumers at the heart, we're busy reinventing, we have momentum, and that's a very important thing. It's a confidence booster. And we're firing on all cylinders.

To what do you attribute the momentum, winning Wendy's and Penney's?

It's driven by beliefs. We have a clearly articulated belief set as you know, in Lovemarks, and that has been quite a conversation over the last few years. It has been deliberately pitched as a provocative conversation: Do you want to create loyalty *beyond reason*? Do you want your brand to become irresistible? If so, you have to move along the spectrum of respect and trust and reputation and add emotional connectivity to it. CEOs really get this concept in today's age: Is it better to be respected, or respected and loved? So we stand for something, right? We stand for Lovemarks.

If in the fullness of time the Tundra is not a success, knowing how much it meant to Toyota, how would that affect the agency relationship?

We've been a partner with Toyota for 31 years. And they believe in *kaisan*—continuous improvement, and going back to the source. And when things go wrong at Toyota, they are not a blame culture. They're not a knee-jerk culture. They're an in-it-forever partnerships. They just want their partners to grow and perform at peak with them.

What is the management structure being adopted throughout the Saatchi network?

What we believe at Saatchi is one team, one dream. We believe the CEO and the creative director have got to be really tight. We're now adding to that the the insight planner, the Mark Turner. So we're seeing triumvirates in place at most of our agencies. In New York, Sandy Thompson, Mary Baglivo, and Tony Granger. Now Sandy is being promoted to worldwide head, so she's partnering with me, and Bobby Isherwood, my worldwide creative director. So we're a triumvirate at the top of the company.

So this is the model being implemented?

I'm not obsessed with models, to tell you the truth. I'm a big believer in "local," that we've got to be reflective of the market we're in, the clients that we serve and the way consumers are, and the talent that we have available. So I will have a different game plan for each market—against core beliefs, of course. But within that framework, rather like Toyota, which has a core set of principles, but they are driven market by market, locally by locally. These guys are not Sony or Toshiba. They're not this top down, centrally driven organization. They're driven by central values, principles, beliefs, then very much by bottom up consumer execution. That's the model that I've learned from Toyota is very successful.

How does Toyota's culture correlate, however, to what you've articulated as a desire for Saatchi's advertising to move quickly?

It is total kaisan. It's about learning fast and fixing fast, which is our view of kaisan. We've taken the Japanese vernacular of continuous improvement and put it into English. We've learned a lot from Toyota on how they operate. They move at warp-light speed. These guys are fast. It's an incredibly effective, emotionally based communications system. Consensus, yes, but very fast and very rapid. There's no delaying on decisions. It's very decisive. There're very big on going back to the truth and seeing what really happened and to learn from that. It's very liberating. Velocity is the name of their game. We didn't work on Scion, but just look at the tremendous job they did on that.

Does it worry you that there are specialty brands for which Toyota hires specialty shops? Is there a misunderstanding of the digital capabilities of Saatchi and Team One?

I spend no time worrying about Toyota and a lot of time thinking about them and figuring out how we can add value to their business, how do we sell more cars. At the time Scion was launched, Saatchi vied for the business. And it was felt that Attik had a closer connection with youth. We've gone back to the source, and we now think we are leading the way with youth marketing with Yaris. Toyota has done what they've done so well, they've driven their partners to step up. Now they're in the position of having two partners to select from.