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Falling in Lovemark

From Four'n Twenty Pies to Lexus, it takes mystery, sensuality and intimacy to lift a brand into the realm of being a Lovemark, according to Kevin Roberts, worldwide CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi.

How many times can a person fall in love – with brands?

"I've never counted them deliberately because I think counting them and analysing them is completely anti-cultural to what we're doing here, which is to measure emotions," says Kevin Roberts, worldwide CEO of Publicis-owned agency network, Saatchi & Saatchi, in town to give the keynote address at last week's Folio Awards for magazine advertising.

"I think the research industry finds it very difficult to measure emotion right now because they try to take it to the lowest common denominator of numbers. I don't think the secret's in that. I don't think you evaluate your mother, your best friend, your favourite uncle in numbers."

Later, Roberts asks: "How many Lovemarks can you have at one time? I've got no idea. Can you have more than one in a category? I'm not really sure." He then concedes that a person can have more than one favourite perfume, or five favourite beers.

There are a lot of questions about Lovemarks that Roberts doesn't know the answer to even two years after its launch, but since he made it an open forum he has received much assistance via the web site (lovemarks.com), to building a vast amount of information on brands and how people relate to them. In fact, he is currently putting together a book on Lovemarks.

"I'm learning a lot about it because we made it an open forum, which is what's appealed to a lot of people. We didn't trademark it, we didn't hide it, we didn't patent it.

"My view is you use it or lose it. We're just out there learning, and we're getting case studies, histories, and all this kind of stuff.

Australians have contributed to the mass of knowledge about brands.

"We believe Lovemarks belong to people, not to manufacturers. We had a load of Australians writing in to us talking about Four'n Twenty Pies. These incredible stories about what it meant to them and how they thought about their grandad and growing up and all that. It was a big Lovemark."

Lovemarks don't have to be steeped in history.

"I'll give you an example of an immediate Lovemark: Red Bull."

The man who shot Red Bull to stardom himself was in Sydney a couple of weeks ago. Johannes Kastner was visiting the newest addition to his own family, Kastner & Partners Sydney run by Darryn Devlin. Johannes is a dynamo, revelling in stories about the product that spurned an entire category, including the black market run in some European countries prior to official distribution. Students, he says, would drive to Germany and fill their car boots with product to sell outside venues.

“Cool guy, cool idea, cool concept, cool position,” says Roberts. “Look at Red Bull, it’s full of mystery. Talk to my kids – they’re 18, 21 and 23 – the stuff they tell me about Red Bull. ‘The US Army has banned this, Dad.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because it’s got bull semen in it.’ Rubbish, right? They’ve got all these stories, and myths.

“A Lovemark has three things, versus a brand: it has mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Nobody in marketing ever uses those terms. You’ll never see them in a brand plan, you’ll never see them in a budget document.”

That, however, is starting to change, thanks to Lovemarks.

Roberts says some of the most dramatic changes he is seeing in marketing include leading global brands embracing the highest emotion at the business strategy level, after nothing happening in brand management for 30 years, “absolutely bugger all. It’s just been incremental playing around the edges.

“Toyota believe it 100%. They were the most respected car company in America and they said we want to become the most loved. The head of Toyota told me that. That was like, wow, how’s that! [Procter & Gamble], the biggest consumer products company in the world, rewrote their inspirational dream, which was ‘Improving customers’ lives every day’ to ‘Making the world a better place by creating brands people love’. So I’ve just influenced two of the biggest companies in the world.”

It’s not about whether P&G can implement it, says Roberts – that’s a whole different story. But the fact that “they’ve put the word love in their inspirational dream! That is an unbelievable thing for them, because they are not renown for that.”

Other changes in marketing style which Roberts is noticing include a gradual acceptance of the stuff that initially made CEOs squirm.

“There was a big article in Fortune magazine about Lovemarks, and Fortune is the establishment, right? It was about Jack Welch, it was about the guy Herb Kelleher who runs Southwest Airlines, and it was about me, talking about the importance and the power of love, and how it was all about that, love in the boardroom.

At the brand level the changes include “more use of music, more use of humour, more use of things that ask questions rather than provide answers, much more use of design, because somebody can’t love something that’s single-dimensional”.

“Nike found out you can’t hide behind an ad, because they can get you now, you’re wide open. To be a Lovemark you cannot have anything closed or incongruent or inconsistent. So it puts much more pressure on marketers.”

Roberts uses Nike as an example of a brand that lost its Lovemark status.

“I went to Nike to talk to Phil Knight and all of his 200 people, and my big thing was, the key word for Nike now is ‘brutal’. Nike started as a product, which was athletic shoes... University of Oregon, Bill Bowerman [Nike co-founder] and all that kind of

stuff. Then it turned into a trademark, because they developed the swoosh. Then it turned into a brand, when they had 'Just do it'. Then one person turned it into a Lovemark. Michael Jordan single-handedly took Nike from a brand to a Lovemark. Because people loved to be like Mike. Then one thing turned it back into a brand. What was that? Sweat shops. Absolutely."

So can a brand be a Lovemark for some people, and a Hatemark for others?

"I hope not. That's a really great question, because some people really do polarise. Nike – we don't work for Nike – have a view that you're either for them or against them. It's fame through controversy, and that's not what I believe. I personally believe in fame through popularity. So I'd like everybody to like Toyota, and a few people to love it. And I'd like no one to hate it. I think there's no room in the world for hatred, it's such a negative, hobbie thing. Totally destructive."

How to become a Lovemark

Lexus, arguably *the* luxury brand in the US, is aiming for Lovemark status in Australia. Roberts thinks of them as two completely different companies, and his profile on the Lovemarks web site is steeped in high emotion. Not to mention the multi-award winning advertising Saatchi & Saatchi has produced for the marque in overseas markets, especially the US. So when can Lexus expect to be a Lovemark in Australia?

"With Lexus, you can't become a Lovemark without becoming a trustmark and high respect first," explains Roberts. "I believe in Australia we should be focusing on 'The relentless pursuit of perfection' for another few years, and really building up respect. I told John Conomos [Toyota senior executive vice-president] that this morning. I don't think it's time to introduce massive emotional love yet into Lexus. I think we still have to demonstrate our technical, functional capability versus the competitors."

"There's two things. We need to focus on 'The relentless pursuit of perfection' – I believe that in there lies gold – and number two, we absolutely have to inspire the dealer network."

Does there need to be a separation of the dealer network from Toyota?

"You should ask John Conomos that."