

Sorrell, Roberts Bullish on Industry's Prospects

April 15, 2004

By Andrew McMains

MIAMI BEACH, FLA. WPP Group chief executive Martin Sorrell and Saatchi & Saatchi worldwide CEO Kevin Roberts were bullish about the ad industry's financial and creative prospects during separate speeches on Thursday at the annual Management Conference of the American Association of Advertising Agencies.

Both identified opportunities for industry growth and stressed the need to forge tighter connections with consumers. And while they acknowledged that sea changes in the marketplace have made agencies' jobs more difficult, they asserted that the need for brand building has never been greater.



photo by Doug Goodman

Martin Sorrell

Sorrell stressed that advertising is a trillion-dollar industry that, given the need for brand differentiation, is positioned to grow significantly in the next five years, particularly in emerging markets outside the U.S.

"I fundamentally believe and am very optimistic about the long-term trends in our industry," Sorrell said. "There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that advertising and marketing services as a proportion of GNP, however you want to measure the strength of the industry, will grow and will bust through all the highs that we saw" in 2000.

Roberts fixated on the need for passionate, unconventional ideas, such as using a paroled murderer to convey that "a killer is a killer," as Saatchi did in a "don't drink and drive" TV spot for the Pedestrian Council of Australia. Roberts challenged his peers to stop trying to accommodate everyone, which he believes led Procter & Gamble CMO (and Saatchi client) Jim Stengel to recently give the industry a C-minus for performance.

"We have the ideas, the passion, the emotion, the dreams that business needs to innovate. Only we hire the people who can do that," said Roberts, who illustrated his comments with photos and nine agency spots. "Why should we be the 'go-to' people? Because we know the consumer best. Know her intimately. We know in Gerard Manley Hopkins' words that she is 'all things counter, original, spare and strange.' We know that David Ogilvy was right [when he said], 'The consumer is not a moron. She's your wife.'"

He added: "Our fight back to A-plus starts with the consumer. It's the consumer, not convergence. The consumer is boss. A boss who wants surprise and delight, not a mirror. Who wants to be impressed and enthralled, not followed around with a clipboard."

The 86th annual 4A's Management Conference is taking place here this week at the Ritz-Carlton.