

“To be happy in your job is more important than any salary”

The worldwide CEO of the Saatchi & Saatchi advertising network, Kevin Roberts, carries advertising in his blood. His job obliges him to provoke consumers, but his comments are also poison darts aimed at multinationals, the media and his advertising colleagues.

By Amaya Guillermo, Madrid

Kevin Roberts turns up for the appointment with EXPANSION in the Hotel Palace in Madrid in a tee shirt and jeans, strictly black. The only touch of colour in his outfit is the yellow LiveStrong bracelet which inevitably catches the author's eye faced with Roberts' stark uniformity. Just by his dress, this British advertising magnate meets the advertising objective of attracting the consumer's attention. But Roberts, worldwide CEO of the British Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency network, has many other resources for *hooking* you. He sits in the armchair in an active posture, without resting his back against the chair and inspecting everything in the room. Several national dailies are spread out on the table in front of him. Roberts picks one up and holds it to his nose. “This stinks, doesn't it?” he says, tossing it back down on the table at the same time with a half-smile.

Roberts is a man of advertising, and for years has occupied top managerial positions at some of the world's best-known brands, such as Procter & Gamble, Pepsi and Gillette, but he is, above all, an agitator. “The press, in general, is sensually challenged. People see the world through their five senses, yet most brands, amongst them all the newspapers in the world, insist on stimulating only one sense” he explains vehemently.

Irresistible brands

Roberts, whose book *Lovemarks, El futuro más allá de las marcas* has just come out in Spain, proclaims that an emblem has to gain a place for itself in the consumer's heart. “Brands try terribly hard to be irreplaceable, without realising that the ideal is to be irresistible. Like Brad Pitt – he jests – easily replaced but always irresistible.”

For this top Saatchi & Saatchi executive since 1997, an irresistible brand must have three basic characteristics: mystery, sensuality and intimacy. “In today's Information Society, companies choke the consumer with data and explanations. And the fact is that the more you know about something the less interest it arouses in you. Brands are killing off their mystery and that makes them boring in people's eyes”, he explains.

As for sensuality, he returns to his theory of the five senses. “It is not only the usefulness of the product or its price that influences the purchase decision; the senses play a major role. Imagine a luxury car. The consumer that decides to buy an up-market vehicle wants to feel. The first visual contact with the car is decisive, as are the feel and the smell of leather. The consumer feels that he is breathing in luxury. And hearing?”

Seeing Roberts arguing energetically, it is easy to imagine him presenting a campaign to a client. “Car makes have not yet learned to exploit hearing. A luxury make, such as Lexus or BMW, has to get to know its customers, even though it has only seen them three times in their lives, so when the car they have always dreamed of is delivered, the superb audio system should strike up, not with any old radio station, but with some song or piece of music that has been important in their lives. The song they associate with their first kiss, their first dance or the best concert they can recall. The customer will love Lexus or BMW for life. I don’t know any make that does that. It’s pathetic”, he concludes.

He attacks the press again to talk about intimacy. “The newspapers lost touch with their readers ages ago. The press tries very hard to furnish readers with information they have already gleaned from television, radio and now Internet. The person who buys a newspaper doesn’t want to hear the description of a reality he already knows, he wants stories. The papers have to become tellers of interesting stories that the reader can dream about. That’s the only way they will recover their status”, he explains.

As a good advertising man, Roberts sets much store by dreams to please consumers. “All brands can be loved if they succeed in making people’s dreams come true, even the companies apparently farthest removed from mass consumption. A good construction company builds not buildings but dreams and an electricity company distributes not electric energy, but freedom”. Any of his statements would be a perfectly valid slogan.

Ideas company

Saatchi & Saatchi is one of the most acclaimed agencies in the world and among its principal global clients are companies like Toyota and Procter & Gamble. “Working in an ideas company –as Roberts likes to call advertising agencies- requires large doses not of management nor leadership, but of inspiration. That is the key to handling this business. It is vital to find smart people, make them see we are going to share their dreams and then we managers should get out of the way and leave them room to work. The advertising man has to know how to work as part of a team, be optimistic and highly curious. I always say that the advertising person that best fits the bill is a woman, because women are much more curious and empathic than any man. Moreover, we should remember something important: women are the major consumers and that means they are perfectly familiar with general buying patterns”, he explains.

At Saatchi & Saatchi, 65% of the staff are women. In Spain, the agency’s CEO is Antonella Broglia. “I also envisage that my successor in this post will be a Chinese woman”, Roberts goes on to predict, although he is quick to point out that “that will be in many years’ time. I’m not about to retire”.

Advertising is one of the sectors with most creative mobility. How does Saatchi & Saatchi retain its talent? “Working at this agency is like playing for Real Madrid. We play the best football in the world, with incredible play, and we win five goals to nil. We’re not Bayern Munich, that settles for a 1-0 victory. We hammer the other team or we don’t win at all, but our team plays the best football in the world”.

For this Executive Officer, money is not a decisive factor in business management. "At Saatchi & Saatchi, our creatives are not the highest-paid, nor do we make the biggest profits in the marketplace. But we are the ones that enjoy work the most. Being happy in your job is more important than any salary. Honestly, the day I cease to enjoy what I do, I'll quit", says Roberts, without hinting at his salary.

Responsibility and training

For this Briton, happiness at work comes from three factors: responsibility, "people need daily challenges of a personal and professional nature, to feel they are growing", training, "it is the most gratifying part of a job", and cheerfulness.

And what about salary? "Human drivers have always been survival, wealth, power and fame. In Europe, survival is assured and wealth, power and fame are shifting to a more spiritual plane. With your basic needs covered and a capacity for consumption, people are driven by happiness".

This idealist and excellent public speaker still believes in the power of television to advertise. "It is the star medium because it is present inside every household and everybody knows how to use it. It's better than ever", he says, in contrast to the marketing gurus who prophesy a decline in the power of the *goggle box* in favour of new technologies.

Roberts cannot take his leave without firing a few sharp words on advertising in Spain: "It's awful. It's always yelling at the consumer and that's counterproductive. The creative has to think of the consumer not as a fool, but as his wife or girlfriend".

Ideas, blows and suggestions for any company

Multinationals: "Brands are choking the consumer with information and that makes them boring"

Press: "If the papers want to recover their status, they have to become storytellers again"

Services: "A good construction company does not build buildings, but dreams, and an electricity company sells not energy, but freedom"

Agencies: "The advertising man has to know how to work as part of a team, be optimistic and very curious"

An Anglo-Saxon Madrid supporter

Born in Lancaster (England) in 1949, he left school at 16 and started work in a British cosmetics group. He showed up in the marketing department with a deal: "I'll work for half my salary for six months. If you reckon I'm worth it, you give me a raise". After a successful career, he moved into management posts in the marketing departments of Gillette, P&G and Pepsi. Married with 4 children, he now lives in New York, having spent long periods of time in virtually every continent. A tireless traveller and a steadfast Real Madrid fan since the Gento and Puskas era, he loves sport and especially the New Zealand rugby team, the All Blacks.

Trends

“TV will continue to be the star medium because it is present in every household and everyone knows how to use it”

“The creative has to think of the consumer, not as a fool, but as a woman”

Irrational love of brands

“I’ve used the same shampoo for as long as I can remember: Head & Shoulders. Ridiculous, isn’t it? I mean, it’s an anti-dandruff shampoo, but I’m as bald as a coot. [...] I love Head & Shoulders. I wouldn’t use any other shampoo. It’s one of my Lovemarks”, says Kevin Roberts in his latest book *Lovemarks, the future beyond brands*. For this executive, there are companies that make products, companies that advertise these products with well-known brands and, finally, there are brands that create an affective bond with the consumer. “They are the ones that succeed”, explains this advertising magnate who claims that brands belong to their consumers, not to their makers. “The economic power passed from the multinationals to the superstores, and now it’s the consumers’ turn”.

Photo 1 caption: “Brands try hard to be irreplaceable, and they do not realise that the ideal is to be irresistible”

Photo 2 caption: “At Saatchi & Saatchi, we are not the highest-paid, but we are the ones that most enjoy work”