

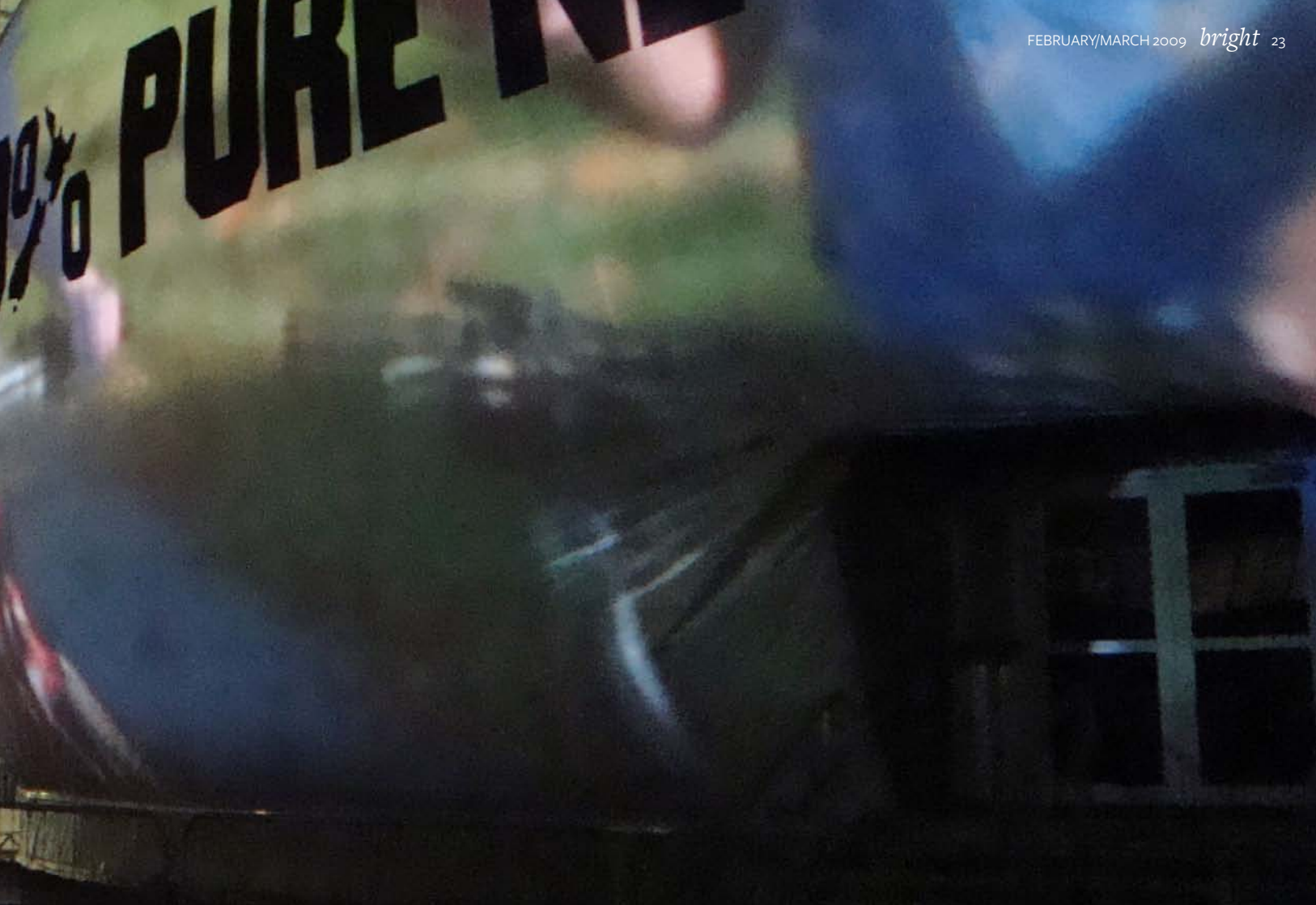
RUGBY & business

Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi worldwide, gave four key tips to business people operating in the new world economic environment at a NZTE networking event in London late last year. **Chris Wilson** provides a summary.

Kevin Roberts is known for his love of New Zealand and of rugby. So when he was asked to make a keynote address in the Giant Rugby Ball venue set up next to London's Tower Bridge late last year, it was an ideal opportunity to weave in references to the All Blacks among his key messages.

His first message was that businesses should focus on their core activities. "This is very difficult for most companies because in the last 10 years growth was core and there were many things in that environment that are no longer core in this world where value...will play an inordinate role. Value has two things – a pricing dimension and a priceless dimension. Dan Carter has a price but he has a priceless dimension too – it's the way he thinks about the game."

Roberts said Saatchi's core activities are creativity, insight



and an attitude that “nothing is impossible”.

His advice was to “invest in the core like crazy...reinvent that core and ruthlessly eliminate and reduce what’s not core”.

His second message was “this is the time to expect the unexpected” and that 95 percent of it was going to be “terrible”. Therefore companies have to put in place a system to identify problems within a day and execute a solution a day later. Saatchi had cancelled all of its strategic planning and budget meetings, he said, as they were now, with the uncertainty, “a waste of time”.

Thirdly, as the speed of decision-making must “rocket”, this places New Zealand companies in a competitive position as “this is a way of life”. “For many European companies, because of hierarchy, bureaucracy, fear and insecurity, it’s not a way

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of life...We’ve got to decide fast, fail fast, learn fast and fix fast.”

Fourthly, this was the time for “winning ugly”. “This is the time when you’ve got to give the ball to the Fitzpatricks, the Shelfords and the Grant Foxes... To survive and win we’ve got to welcome and take pride in cutting the costs.”

Roberts said to achieve these four things companies had to give their staff:

- responsibility
- learning opportunities every day
- recognition – “this is the time to be providing your people with unconditional love and support”

- joy – “give them pleasure in winning ugly”.

He said he was looking forward to the next two years. “It’s a time massively built for New Zealand because we have come through tough times, handled adversity and, as Obama said, ‘Yes we can’.”

Commenting later on Roberts’ speech at the function – attended by over 150 New Zealand Trade and Enterprise clients and key stakeholders – Sysdoc Ltd chairman Ian Williams said he thought the message of focusing on core activities was particularly relevant to New Zealand companies trading in the UK.

“Many New Zealanders have

a lot to offer but the UK market is much larger than their own and they are going to be competing against companies many times larger than they are. The only way they’re going to be successful is to have a niche.”

Williams said New Zealand companies should also be prepared to face a larger network of people involved in decision-making than they would be used to at home.

If their product or service was aimed at central government or local authorities, sales may be a little easier than in the private sector as the public sector was spending to bring the UK out of the recession.

“What impresses me about the New Zealanders I’ve worked with is they’re very focused and they’re also very keen on team play – almost bringing the concept of the All Blacks into what they’re doing.”