

Saatchi & Saatchi wins Labour Party account

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By Andrew Pierce

Saatchi & Saatchi, which masterminded Margaret Thatcher's three election victories, was yesterday appointed to handle the Labour Party's advertising account.

The agency secured the multi-million pound contract with the slogan: "Not flash, just Gordon." The appointment, which was announced yesterday, will heighten speculation that Gordon Brown is planning to call an early election.

Saatchi & Saatchi's now legendary poster, which depicted a lengthy queue of unemployed workers snaking into an unemployment office under the heading: "Labour isn't working", is credited with helping Mrs Thatcher win the 1979 general election.

The agency was the first to be appointed by a British political party. It was the agency's biggest publicity coup and one that paid dividends for years to come.

The company, run by the brothers Maurice and Charles Saatchi and Tim Bell, became one of the most successful in the world. The Saatchi & Saatchi name has been synonymous with the Conservatives ever since.

Only last year the Tories parted company with M&C Saatchi, the breakaway agency set up by Charles and Maurice after they left Saatchi & Saatchi, in 1994. Maurice Saatchi was co-chairman of the Conservative party between 2003 and 2005.

The agency's surprise appointment marks another break with the Labour Party's Blairite past. It beat off competition from Beattie McGuinness Bungay, which is run by Trevor Beattie, who was involved in Tony Blair's three election victories.

Mr Beattie was a close friend of Peter Mandelson, the former Cabinet minister, whose influence over the Labour Party ended when Mr Brown moved into Downing Street.

In the 2005 campaign Labour mocked the Saatchi slogan with a poster headed: "Britain is working."

Robert Senior, the chief executive of Saatchi & Saatchi, said that the appointment was a "seminal" moment for the agency.

"It's a real statement for the agency. We have the opportunity to take the strength and conviction that Gordon Brown has shown as Prime Minister and apply our creativity to that to do the right thing for the country," he said.

The agency is hoping that the Labour Party account will help to rekindle some of the publicity of the 1980s.

Douglas Alexander, Labour's general election co-ordinator, said: "I can confirm that we have appointed Saatchi & Saatchi and we are delighted to have them on board."

Tim Bell, who was ennobled by Baroness Thatcher, said: "All the best talent left Saatchi & Saatchi when Maurice and Charles set up M & C Saatchi."

The announcement took the advertising world by surprise.

Campaign, the bible of the industry, said in an editorial: "The idea of the agency that packaged Thatcherism turning its hand to Brownism is incredibly provocative. Political advertising accounts don't make an agency rich. But they can change fortunes and create fame as Maurice and Charles Saatchi found out. Can Saatchi do it again? With Labour? The pitch work, which shows a picture of Gordon Brown with the line "not flash, just Gordon" is a great start."



Last month, the Conservative Party also began approaching agencies about its next advertising account.

Saatchi slogans and landmarks:

- 1979: Labour isn't working
- 1984: British Airways: the world's favourite airline
- 1986 "It is - are you?" campaign which accompanied the launch of The Independent.
- 1986: Health Education Council campaign with Pregnant Man poster begging boys to be careful
- 1990: the first advertisement on the eastern side of the Berlin Wall
- 1992 general election: Labour's tax bombshell
- 1993: Stephen Hawking, in front of a British Telecom satellite dish, talking about the greatest human achievements coming about through talking