

Lovemarks puts the Bite on Business

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By Simon Canning

For the past four years Kevin Roberts, CEO Worldwide of iconic ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi, has been banging on about his theory that brands are dead and the new power in marketing is Lovemarks.

“Fear” drove the former fast-moving goods merchant to develop the concept when he took on the ad agency role, and he has developed and debated it at length ever since. Lovemarks began as a theory published in the magazine *Fast Company*, evolved into the essence of Saatchi’s being, and has now become a book which was launched in Australia this week.

But turn to the final few pages of *Lovemarks, The Future Beyond Brands*, and what you find is not a marketing manual, but a philosophical challenge for companies to change the world on a social scale.

Roberts witnessed at close hand the horrors of 9/11 from his home overlooking the twin towers in New York. He then watched as brands such as Enron, Worldcom and the like collapsed, taking the livelihoods of tens of thousands with them. Even as he pondered his Lovemarks, a sense of deep disillusion crept in.

He says capitalism is the only “ism” that has served the world with any long term benefit. “But capitalism as it is practised today is falling,” he says. “I came very much to the view that the role of business is to make the world a better place for everyone. At first glance that provoked some cynicism because of the reputation of business. But when you probe into it, it really is the engine of human progress. What business has to do is become inclusive, not exclusive.”

Roberts says of the final chapter of the book, where he makes plea for big business to surrender to inspiration: “It is very much an expression of my beliefs and values,” he says. “I spend my life in business so of course [the book] has a business slant and my background from the age of 20 in brands. What is in the book now versus the last five years is the quantification. Two years, three years ago, I had no proof.”

Roberts believes he has now found proof. “This to me is not a business book, it is a book about popular culture because I think that love and inspiration are a part of our world now,” he says. “And we need to recognise it and open up to it.”

Fully distilled, Roberts’ ideal is that consumers now own the brands. When companies act in a manner that forgets that, it is the consumers who will turn on them.

“I do not believe it is the optional thing now for companies to just talk about [responsible], they better be socially responsible, they better be cleaner than clean and they better be doing something.”

Roberts closes his book with the call for companies to change the world. Not to sell, as such, but to attain a higher social purpose.

“Can business make the world a better place?” he writes. “Of course it can. Will business take up the challenge? It is in our best interests to do so, and let’s face it, our best interests have been a powerful driver for many centuries. What can inspire us with the emotional urgency required to undertake this epic task? The creation and rewards of Lovemarks.”