

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME KEYNOTE ADDRESS: WINNING THE FUTURE – SPORT AS INSPIRATIONAL PLAYER

Kevin Roberts, CEO Worldwide, Saatchi & Saatchi

Owing to the transformation of the sports sector into an increasingly sophisticated marketplace in recent years, it is sometimes easy to forget the passion that lies at the heart of this business-savvy industry.

However, in setting the tone for the Conference Programme, Kevin Roberts, the CEO Worldwide of Saatchi & Saatchi, made sure that delegates were reminded that passion and drive lie at the heart of success.

Roberts urged delegates to make their brands “irresistible” as he opened day one of the Conference Programme with a captivating Keynote Address entitled ‘Winning the Future – Sport as Inspirational Player’.

He said that his company approaches the concept of a VUCA world – representing volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – from a different perspective.

“We live in a SUPERVUCA world – it is a vibrant, unreal, crazy and astounding world,” he said.

“The world is vibrant now in the sense that it is full of life, full of hope, full of optimism and is liberated by technology and learning.

“Earlier in my career, when I was with Procter & Gamble and Pepsi Cola, if you wanted to change the world, you had to have scale, resource, money, time, people and above all you needed size.

“However, now if you want to change the world, you don’t need any of that stuff. In fact, now the only thing you need to change the world is an idea. We live in the age of ideas and that is unreal.

“It is crazy in the sense that ‘all progress depends on the unreasonable man’,” Roberts added, quoting Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw.

“It is crazy because most institutions, most companies and most organisations are dedicated to killing ideas at birth. So we are here to kill the idea, to kill the initiative.

“Finally it is astounding because before it took you three, four or five years, a campaign and a lot of spending to change the world.



Now it just takes a short length of time. Social networks will change the course of the industry, sport and management – and that is astounding.”

Switching the address to focus on sport, Roberts added: “The challenge that needs to be faced up to in the sporting world is how in a SUPERVUCA world you guys can get ahead, get in touch and stay connected with ideas and not become a defensive, fraternalistic bureaucracy.

“Sport can produce a better world because it produces better people and because it unties everyone. The Olympics is the greatest example of sport as a unifying thing.”

Throughout the entertaining address, Roberts used a combination of humour and video examples to illustrate his ideas.

One of his key points was the notion of the ‘lovemark’ – his own creation. Roberts insisted that it was crucial to recognise the difference between a brand and a lovemark, which “is something people want to be a part of”.

He added: “A lovemark is a movement that they not only respect, but they also love. Brands are ruled by bored managers, whereas love marks are ruled by the people who love them.

“Brands build loyalty for a reason, but a lovemark creates loyalty beyond the reason.”

Roberts expanded on his point by citing the example of Apple.

“Everybody now has an iPad, iPhone or iPad, because Steve Jobs made Apple

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irresistible. That is what you should do with your brand.

“There are three secrets to making your brand irresistible – a lovemark. You need to infuse it with mystery, sensuality and intimacy.

“The heroes of the 21st century are the storytellers, and you all have the greatest stories to tell. In sport there are great stories made every day, and yet we keep drawing people into facts, stats and information. The secret is to add mystery.

“More and more emotional empathetic storytelling is what is going to drive business in sport. Rational thinking leads to conclusions, and emotional thinking leads to actions. We need to get more emotions into the whole sport business.

“Your website should be the ongoing narrative and when promoting your brand you should touch as much of the five senses as you can.

“Intimacy leads to empathetic commitment and passion. Most organisations have lost it because of command control and not being empathetic. The secret is to put yourself at the heart of the audience.”

Roberts concluded by underlining the role of the industry’s creative leaders, who will continue to develop innovative ways to engage the public.

“Creative leaders ask only three things when they see an idea,” he added. “Do I want to see it again? Do I want to share it? And do I want to improve it?”