

LE JOURNAL FRANCE

INTERVIEW

Kevin Roberts

"Advertising agencies are still too focused on the traditional media"

The chairman of the agency Saatchi & Saatchi is the author of a work in which he delivers his vision for the future of publicity. He gives the JDN his perception on the creation of advertising on the Net.

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JDN: Can you explain Saatchi & Saatchi to us in a few words?

Kevin Roberts: We are an advertising agency made up of 134 offices and have a presence in 84 countries. We employ approximately 7.000 people throughout the world and work with more than half of the 100 biggest advertisers in the world. We were founded in 1928 and have received more than 3,000 prizes and honours for our creations. We belong to the Publicis group.

You have just published a book, "Sisomo, the future one screen". What does this concept of "sisomo" consist of?

Sisomo ["Sight, Sound and Motion"] is a theory, a change in state of mind which corresponds to the transformations that the consumer society has undergone. The power does not belong to the brands anymore, but to the consumers. Mass markets do not exist anymore and everyone must seek to connect with an individual. This change is accompanied by a technological change: screens are increasingly present in our lives, in the shape of a computer screen, television, mobile telephone, game console screens, etc. Technology and creativity must function together.

How that is it translated for the advertising agencies?

We absolutely have to respond to people's desires. Generally, and in France in particular, to sell a product, one speaks about its price and its attributes, whereas advertising should reflect people's desires. Look at the iPod: it is an imperfect product, the battery does not function, but it corresponds to the people's desires, therefore it functions.

What do you think of creation on Internet at the present time?

The majority of the Web sites are tedious, because they are much too factual. It is a pity because the Internet is an excellent opportunity for creativity. The Internet can dream, speak, sing... but instead of that the current sites are satisfied with being purely factual. For the moment, the Web fulfils its functions of information and communication, but leaves emotion to one side. The sites should tell a story. They should resemble a movie and at the moment they resemble encyclopaedias.

Why don't they do it?

I think that the advertising agencies are turned still lean too much towards the traditional media, but that will necessarily change in the next twelve months. People realise the power of the Internet and the interest a consumer can create in terms of the brand. Moreover, the size of the market doubles each year. The only obstacle at the present time is the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness and the wider effects of a campaign on the Internet. It is also for that reason that things are going more slowly.

You maintain that the agencies remain concentrated on the traditional media. Isn't this also the case with Saatchi & Saatchi, who disposed of its interactive subsidiary company before later reinstating it in 2004?

No. Our intention is to develop our interactivity while acting like connectors between the brand and the consumer. But I think that if the market is bad quality, it is also because "interactive agencies" were created. We do not have a TV agency, nor an interactive agency or a print agency. One should not compartmentalise the various media, but on the contrary, create a message at the beginning of the creative process, then question it on different grounds. And that, is not the work of an interactive agency: it is necessary to have a general look at the strategy.

In advertising, does this result in more significant connections between television and the Internet?

Absolutely. Because it is also the way that the media is consumed: people surf the internet and at watch television at the same time. Today, it is absurd to say "we are going to make a campaign on the Internet because we want to reach young people." The right response is total.

Does that mean that TV spot can be reproduced just as it is on Internet?

No, it must be adapted. The starting message must be coherent. Then, according to the media, according to the size of the screen, it is necessary to adapt the form all the more so, as no one will watch several minutes of film on a mobile phone.

What, according to you are the benefits of the Internet compared to other media?

The computer screen is as significant as that of the television in terms of creativity. But the key is the interactivity.

Which advertising campaigns where the Internet was used, have particularly made an impact on you recently?

I believe that the best thing made on the Internet recently, was for the Telecom New Zealand account. We created the "Rubbish Film Festival" campaign. The objective was principle: we asked people to make a 30 second film using their mobile phone. The worst film

they could imagine. Then they were asked to send it to us by email and send it to their friends. We then selected the worst film and made a TV spot of it. It was funny and at the same time effective.

Do you think that the blogs and the podcasts can play a role in the communication of brands?

Totally, and France is particularly well placed, since it is the second country to have developed blogs, after the United States. The blog is a very exciting phenomenon because people create their own media, they can very well be viewed as the newspaper of a consumer. Irritation is found in the testimonies. It is the ideal place to find sincere and real opinions about a brand. Nothing is more powerful than that.

Certain brands create their own blogs and these experiments are not always as successful as they hoped because the consumers can have the impression that it is manipulative. How do you reconcile transparency and communication?

I do not think that today, the consumer can be manipulated. And it is also what is wonderful: if a brand was tempted to manipulate its consumers, the blogs would shoot it down immediately. The blogs are part of the movement which gives the power back to consumers. They play, and will inevitably play a role in communication, What that means for brands is an obligation to fulfil their promises and to communicate in an honest way.

Do you believe in advertising on the mobile phones?

Today, the mobile phone is the dominant communications device, whether it is by voice or text. But it is not yet a channel of sale nor a channel of entertainment. Will that be the case in a year? I think so. For example, a campaign recently organised by Adidas in Japan for the release of a new model of shoes. It was a collection limited to 40 pairs. The brand broadcast information by SMS to a list of young people, saying "In 20 minutes, these 40 pairs of shoes will be available in such and such a shop". Immediately there was a rush towards the stores.

Which are your favorite websites?

Amazon is fantastic because it gives constantly you suggestions, recommendations, it is permanently evolving. I find that this is one of the most interactive and stimulating sites for the consumer.