

21 March 2013

Stylus Q&A: Saatchi & Saatchi CEO on ‘Start-up Thinking’

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ADVERTISING & BRANDING

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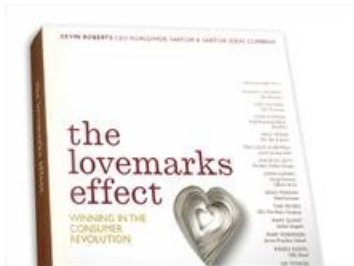
Backing A Feeling

‘Start-up thinking’ enables established brands and companies to streamline their structures, collaborate with outsiders and start innovating again. How would you define start-up thinking?

I wouldn’t, because thinking is the enemy of starting up. Thinking gets overdone; it’s too ponderous, too focused in on being ‘new’. **Winning in this age of instant everything is about backing a feeling and leaping ‘now’.** It’s about ripping an idea into the moment in order to improve that moment for your audience.

Starting up is about action, which comes from emotional velocity, not from the slow rational realm of strategising, managing and processing. All that stuff has been left in the dust. **To succeed now, have an inspired dream and roll it out in 100-day trials, because that’s as far out as anyone can see.** To get momentum, fail fast, fix fast and learn fast. The most important part of this is the fixing fast.

Ignition is not about getting things done. It’s about making things happen. ‘Winning attitude’ captures it better than ‘start-up thinking’. In the previous era of New, business spent 50% of the time assessing, 30% of the time deciding, and 20% of the time executing. **In this age of Now, we all have the same information – so start your engines. Spend 20% assessing, 10% deciding and 70% executing,** where you go with the flow, course-correct, and drive it home relentlessly.



The Lovemarks Effect by Kevin Roberts



Saatchi & Saatchi CEO Kevin Roberts



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Always On

Which of your clients or favourite brands – Lovemarks – are good examples of this way of behaving?

American consumer goods company Procter & Gamble is expert here. P&G totally gets the 'moment' world. Whether it's innovating, communicating, connecting or supporting communities, this company is **always on, always listening, always in rapid-response mode**.

Look at Tide laundry detergent, a Lovemark: always anticipating, ever-uplifting, and deep in the hearts of consumers. Tide is there for people when it counts, as its Tide Loads of Hope initiative has shown over the years, providing free laundry services to families hit by natural disasters.

And Tide taps into the P&G 'newsroom' to stay in the moment and put heat in the brand when opportunity knocks. Classic case was when a Daytona 500 [an American motor race] explosion left 200 gallons of burning fuel on the speedway. Track workers used Tide to clean the track, and off the back of the newsroom, a new ad was showcasing a new use for Tide within 48 hours, quadrupling Tide's Twitter followers. During the Super Bowl power outage this year, Tide tweeted an ad: "We can't get your blackout. But we can get your stains out." [For more on this subject, check out our **Super Bowl 2013 Ads** and **Newsjacking** reports].

Co-opetition

Collaborating with outsiders is one aspect of start-up behaviour. How is this reflected within your clients and within Saatchi itself? Agencies are particularly open to collaboration, with artists, designers and so on.

Japanese automaker Toyota is a leader in collaboration. Toyota has long believed in **co-opetition; the turbo-charge of competitors + co-operation**. This is competition to strengthen each other, to break through, to get velocity, but not to reveal trade or product secrets.

Some examples: Toyota worked with Silicon Valley tech start-up Tesla to develop the electric version of the Rav4 compact sports utility vehicle, the Rav4 EV. And Toyota is partnered with German automobile company BMW, recently deepening collaboration on a fuel cell system, a sports vehicle, lightweight technologies and lithium air batteries. Toyota of course also licenses its hybrid technology to other companies.

The communications business was never more about collaboration, because **in the age of Now, marketing is dead. Now it's about starting movements and inspiring people to join you**. That's about creating unfolding narratives – stories across the on-screen, in-store, and online worlds – through melding disciplines, expertise, ideas and technologies.

Lightness

'Lightness' is another characteristic of start-ups: small teams, often working informally in the same room, with little hierarchy. How has the economic crisis encouraged companies and brands to adopt this way of thinking?

The economic crisis and its impact has seen the military maxim **VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous)** cross over from a security to also a social context. The job for companies and brands in this fast frame is to be creative leaders, to reframe VUCA through creative ideas that are vibrant, unreal, crazy and outstanding.

Creativity has unreasonable power. It's the core of how you start stuff up, the way to win, and it thrives in noisy, nimble, involving and fast-moving environments, not the mind-numbing formalised meetings that take companies nowhere.

At Saatchi & Saatchi, our history, language and story are crystal clear, so we don't do big meetings on values, meaning and direction. I've reduced the number of worldwide executive board meets in favour of small meetings of our top inspirational players held away from the offices in uplifting environments, which can spark creative solutions and action.

Such lightness helps pump the juice needed to win in adverse economic conditions, but there's more to winning than this. A winning company – whether starting-up or revving up – needs good architecture and leadership depth; elements of weight as well as lightness.

Stylus Summary

Brands can embrace “start-up thinking” by operating with an **agile, iterative and quick-to-react mindset**.

Start-up thinking puts an emphasis on execution, smaller infrastructure, and the importance for brands to be **always on and always listening**.

Stylus will be exploring this subject in depth in the coming months, but for more on this subject, check out the news comment **NYT & BBC Adopt Start-Up Thinking**.

We live an age of Now, where execution is more important than endless planning and assessing. Consider shifting your priorities to **spend 20% assessing, 10% deciding and 70% executing**.

Collaboration with nominal competitors – or **co-opetition** – is a great way of catalysing your creativity.