

Is a brand what we see on the tube, or what we experience? In the June issue of Fast Company magazine, Ogilvy's Brian Collins asserts the importance of reaching shoppers through tangible, "remarkable" experiences. His debate with Saatchi & Saatchi's CEO Kevin Roberts illuminates the necessity for powerful brand engagement beyond screens."

Resolved: The most powerful way to touch people is through screens.

Roberts: There are three ways to a consumer's heart. Mystery, sensuality, and intimacy. And today it's the screen where they come alive. As we move into an age of mobility, interactivity, attraction (not interruption), and time stress, we will rely more and more on our screens for information, entertainment, communication, transactions, and engagement. Screens feel real, personal, intimate, playful, and physical. They are the campfire storytellers of today. They connect viscerally and emotionally through sight, sound and motion. The family of screens--mobile phone, PC, TV, DVD, movie, Playstation, in-store, outdoor--is within arm's length, all the time, for all of us. And we're lovin' it--they connect us to the world, to ideas, to brands, to each other. Welcome to the Screen Age. And they let us interact immediately. Bliss.

Collins: Sure, screens are engaging. We often work with our clients to design theirs. But in our rush to embrace opportunities presented by digital technology let's remember that screens are just one part of our daily life.

You said it yourself, Kevin: screens "feel" real. But they are anything but. Ultimately they are sensation without experience. The best way to someone's heart is by creating *real* experiences, not only synthetic ones. And the best way to do that is through design. Look, it takes me only a few seconds to send a text message that says, "I love you." And it lasts only a few seconds before it is replaced by an explosion of other equally fleeting messages. Sending a dozen red roses amplifies my same message -- geometrically -- with form, weight, texture, scale and scent. Design individualizes my message because only I choose *those* particular flowers, *that* vase. Design not only ensures that my message will arrive with éclat, but it will be part of my audience's life for days. Screens may be hypnotizing, Kevin, but design is humanizing. It makes ideas tangible and real. So welcome to the Design Era, where we think beyond the screen to find real mystery, real sensuality and real intimacy.

Roberts: We've moved into the Age of Paradox--no more either/or, no more black/white. It's all and/and. Experience is key; design is core. Emotion is the common thread, and the screen is the most ubiquitous delivery method for making these connections everywhere consumers are. The screens are the new touch points which will lead consumers to feel the experience for themselves. The screens are where the attraction begins--for follow through in stores (the new theatre of dreams), in the bar, at home. So I think the game is about developing insight, moving on to foresight, figuring out how consumers feel, creating an idea, connecting on the family of screens, getting the design right from the shopper's perspective, and then delivering an authentic moving experience at the two moments of truth (when they choose and when they use). And/and. Voila!

Collins: Screens are where the attraction *begins*? For *follow through* in stores? I haven't heard such a linear communication strategy since NBC cancelled *Bonanza*. Let's finally escape the dreary old model where a commercial defined the brand story and all the

other channels endlessly repeated it. Fine when Lucille Ball ruled the airwaves, but expensive and deadly when spot-centric brand models have collapsed. In fact it's the sheer glut of screens and the flickering ersatz life they offer that makes people respond ever more powerfully to *real* experiences.

An example: Our campaign for Dove didn't begin anywhere near a screen. Instead, we started by designing a touring exhibit of women photographers' personal views on beauty -- images that undermined the unreal, damaging stereotypes of beauty advertising. Thousands of people lined up to experience the groundbreaking show at malls across North America. Not treated as "shoppers", most people stayed inside the gallery for a half hour. Many visited with their families. Some were moved to tears. This experience was powerful because it was tangible and social -- and impossible to replicate on screen. The press the brand enjoyed was far greater than any screen-driven media could generate. Billboards followed and brought the debate into the street. Print ads placed the story into people's hands. PR drove the discussion through the media.

And only then did Oprah invite the Dove women on her TV show. Only then did the debate heat up online, with over 4 million hits on campaignforrealbeauty.com.

Screens, you bet. They play a crucial role in connecting brands with people. I just don't believe that the best brand ideas start there, anymore. A brand story can "begin" in any channel for a consumer - and often does. But great brand relationships, whether Dove, Starbucks or Adidas, reach people most deeply when there's a tangible, remarkable experience to kick it off. Design first. Advertise second. C'est vrai!

Roberts: I don't see the world as clearly defined as you do. It's much more fluid and much less structured. The consumer is boss. And she's feeling, not rationally evaluating. Experiential marketing is important--and vital. But as you say, the Dove debate heated up only when the screen (via Oprah) kicked in--and was then carried out on yet another screen, the PC. The screen remains the fundamental global (and local) connector. It brings scale, speed, and accessibility to the brand's promise and experience. It's not a linear continuum--more circular--and it starts anywhere, contextually. But every success shares four things: the consumer at the centre, a meaningful insight and a big transformational idea scaled: ultimately on screen.

Collins: Ultimately, is it more effective to sell apples by looking at a moving picture of one, or picking one up and taking a bite? Is it more effective to sell Tide by watching someone wash clothes or by trying a sample? Is it better to sell running shoes by playing a film or by running around the block with a pair of trial kicks when the Nike van shows up in the neighborhood? Screens. Yes, they have their own magic. But people stare at them all day long at work. Kids now do the same at school. And everybody stares at them at home. Hell, even most movies feel disposable lately. (*The Fast and the Furious 3*, anyone?) As this becomes the norm, screens may become the last thing anyone will treasure. Ubiquity destroys intensity.

Look, brands are being knocked around by startling new marketing techniques--beyond screens--that companies don't always understand and whose effects they can't easily measure. (What's the ROI on installing super-clean bathrooms at state fairs, as P&G's Charmin so brilliantly does?) People are forming new, unshakable loyalties to brands on the basis of these experiential factors that even they can't always articulate.

What I do know about this confusing, unstructured mess is that the power of design can help people achieve the right, desired experience across myriad new encounters -- on screen and off. Emphatic design thinking -- and not screen-obsession -- is how an organization should drive their brands, making every customer encounter count.

Let's try this: I'll send your assistant Trudy a bouquet of roses. You send her a bouquet of emoticons. Let me know which one she likes the best.

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