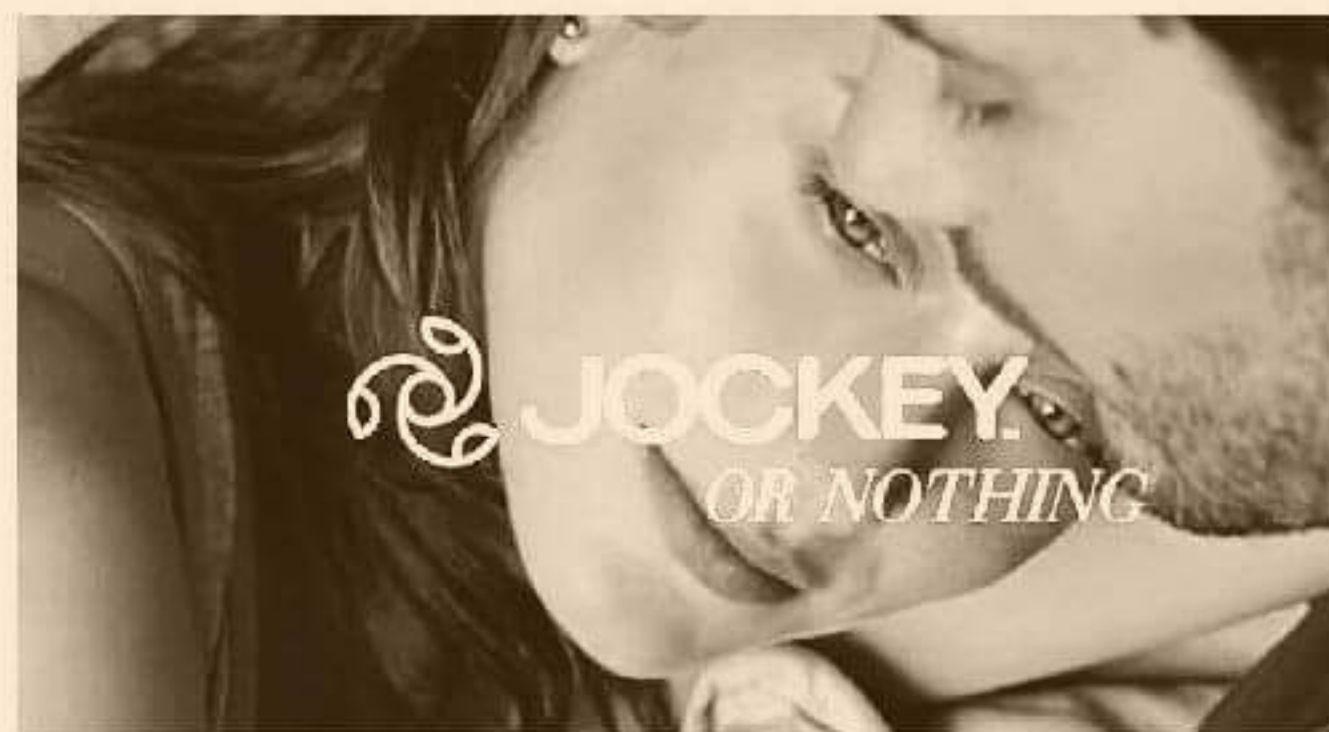


L&K Saatchi & Saatchi comes into its own

The merged entity is reaping the benefits of Law & Kenneth's local presence and digital operations, and Saatchi & Saatchi's global clientele and marketing concepts



Some of L&K Saatchi & Saatchi's recent campaigns: While Pepperfry was a recent account-win (top-left), other recent campaigns included one for Bengaluru-based Jockey (bottom-left) and the Renault Duster AWD (right) PHOTOS: L&K SAATCHI

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It has been a year since independent agency, Law & Kenneth, and Publicis Groupe's Saatchi & Saatchi merged to form L&K Saatchi & Saatchi (L&K Saatchi). The transaction was hailed as a triumph of the Indian entrepreneurial spirit at the M&A table. Typically, mergers involving local and international advertising companies result in the former being subsumed under the latter. In this case, it was L&K, led by its 44-year founder-chairman, Praveen Kenneth, which took management control. The Publicis Groupe and Kenneth have 50.01 per cent and 49.99 per cent stake, respectively.

Even though the Publicis Groupe has majority, Kenneth

and his team run the show. Since the merger on January 20, 2014, L&K Saatchi has consolidated its position. "We were 360 people before the merger. We added 40 people from Saatchi & Saatchi, making it a 400-people-strong organisation. Besides, we have pulled up Saatchi & Saatchi as a brand. It has a lot of magic and mystique and carries weight in the marketplace. The mandate for us was to bring it back into the limelight and combine it with our (L&K's) story," says Kenneth, who holds the distinction of being the youngest CEO of an ad agency, when he was appointed the head of Publicis India in 1999 at the age of 29. Law & Kenneth was launched in 2004.

Bringing back Saatchi & Saatchi to life involved resurrecting its 'Lovemarks' philos-

ophy, which was conceptualised by its executive chairman, Kevin Roberts, a decade ago. It speaks of how brands can gain loyalty by nurturing emotional connections with consumers, and is applied to all the agency's brands worldwide. Kenneth says that L&K Saatchi is now re-introducing the concept and helping its employees come up to speed. "People from the international Saatchi & Saatchi team have begun frequenting India. Kevin (Roberts) was here two months ago.

Richard Hytner, deputy chairman of Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide, was also here. Some other key people have come down to interact with the staff. So, that exchange has already begun," Kenneth says.

The mandate was to bring back Saatchi into the limelight, combine it with L&K's story

The association has given L&K Saatchi globally-aligned businesses such as Procter & Gamble, Novartis, HSBC, Carlsberg and Tuborg. This, along with L&K's local businesses, have given L&K Saatchi a more level playing field among domestic rivals that are part of international networks.

Other clients include Dabur, ITC, Renault, Jockey and the Hero Group. In the last few months, it added a string of new clients – Total Oil, Emirates, Thomas Cook, Pepperfry, Lodha, Borosil, Fastrack and Reebok.

Almost 30 per cent of L&K Saatchi's revenue comes from digital operations. Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide will invest in the digital vertical by adding its expertise in mobile tech-

nology, Roberts, on his India-visit in November, 2014, has said. The Indian digital unit could even become the hub for the rest of Asia, if Roberts' plan plays out.

Kenneth says the digital operation's health is due to the headstart L&K got from buying the Nagpur-based company, Link Labs, six years ago. Since then, it has built an integrated digital model. "We do not out-source our work like other agencies. Our digital operation sits within the company with everybody from the content creator to the technologist on our rolls," Kenneth says.

At a time when the Publicis Groupe, ranked third in the pecking order of global ad companies, is looking to strengthen its position after the collapse of its merger with the world's second-largest ad group, Omnicom, last year, Kenneth sees L&K Saatchi as a growth engine for the network in India. "Besides Carlsberg, Tuborg, Hero and Dabur in Delhi, we have Kent (RO) and McCain Foods in that city. In Mumbai, besides P&G and Renault, we have Godrej (Interio). In Bengaluru, we have Exide Insurance besides Jockey. Kolkata has ITC. Plus, there are the new business gains that should also be taken into account. So, we are growing aggressively," he says.

L&K Saatchi is also helping the global team with pitches: "We've had a consistent new-business win track-record in the last 10 years. And, I don't see why this strength can't be harnessed by the network. We are currently helping the global team on one or two new pitches," Kenneth says.

Given that the merged entity is part of the global network, Kenneth refuses to indicate whether 'L&K' will be dropped from the company name in the future. "The brand that has given Saatchi & Saatchi an impetus in the marketplace has been L&K. We will look to maximise this as much as possible," he says. For now, the go-getter is firmly in charge.