

'We will run more global pitches from India now'

One of the longest serving chief executives in advertising, **KEVIN ROBERTS** of Saatchi & Saatchi will make way for a new leadership team beginning next year. **ROBERT SENIOR** takes over as worldwide CEO, while Roberts, 64, will be the executive chairman. He will also be the head coach of Publicis Groupe, the holding company of Saatchi & Saatchi, working alongside chairman & CEO Maurice Levy. On a key visit, nine months after Saatchi & Saatchi was merged with New-Delhi-based independent agency Law & Kenneth, **Roberts** tells **Viveat Susan Pinto** what he has in mind for the merged entity, called L&K Saatchi & Saatchi, and his role as head coach of Publicis Groupe. Edited excerpts:



What would you be doing as head coach of the Publicis Groupe? This is the first time that a position like this has been created in an advertising group.

That is correct. This is the first time an advertising holding company is attempting to do something like this. Maurice and I were discussing what should be our future role against the backdrop of Publicis as well as Saatchi's succession planning. And he said I that he would like me to play the role of a head coach or chief mentor, where among other things, I will motivate and inspire the top leaders of the group to come together and play better as a team. I will also provide strategic direction to the group.

What are your expectations from the merged L&K Saatchi & Saatchi?

They have had time to settle in. It has been the fastest and smoothest merger in the history of the Publicis Groupe. There have been no client and people problems with the merger and now that it is com-

plete, I would like to set an agenda for next year - which is that I would like to see the Indian office produce the most loved and shared work. I would like the Indian office to make a difference to the advertising here, especially now, when India is poised for a breakout after sluggish growth in the last few years. There is confidence in the politics, leadership, business, economy and the currency. So I would like L&K Saatchi & Saatchi to do something meaningful and accelerate its pace of growth.

How will you harness the strengths of Law & Kenneth in the area of digital? It is strong in this area.

We will harness L&K's digital strengths in two ways. One, we will add to this capability in the area of mobile. We will bring to India, mobile technology that we have in the UK and the US. Second, we will look at building a hub capability here that we will take into rest of Asia. We also propose to harness some other strengths of L&K such as its

ability to make inroads into local businesses. One of the reasons why we were attracted

to L&K is because these guys were Indian, we were not. They are local. We were not. This was a tremendous advantage for us. Saatchi & Saatchi here, over the years, found it difficult with local clients because we were not connected or networked. With L&K on board, we have taken care of that. They are driven and committed and have a good track record in the Indian market. Besides, we are looking at acquiring capabilities in the Indian market. This could either be by acquiring talent or buying companies. I am willing to invest in India to increase our capabilities here. I am also looking for the office here to head a cluster of markets possibly in the APAC region; running more globally pitches from here. So these are some of the challenges ahead of us and I have asked the team in my meeting with them today to figure out how best they

can achieve this. What are the capabilities they want to acquire here. For the next 18 months, I think the team has to work together to make the operation here famous and fun. India comes in a group that we internally call the dynamic markets. It is capable of rapid growth and worthy of investment. It should be a top-20 market very quickly in the future and a top-10 market in a few years from now.

Do you see Praveen (Kenneth) taking up a bigger role within the Saatchi & Saatchi network? There is a trend of appointing senior Indian executives to global roles.

Praveen is already part of Saatchi's leadership team in the Asia-Pacific region. India will become a place from where we can export talent. We can take people from here and put them in leadership roles globally. These guys are experienced and

have the capability. All they need is some global exposure. Praveen will be leading the Indian operations this year and the next. So he will be very busy right now. But I do foresee a larger role for him in a few years.

The push you are giving Saatchi & Saatchi comes at a time when the Publicis-Omnicom merger failed. Are you working according to Maurice's brief of pushing individual agency growth?

We are all disappointed that the merger didn't go through. How do we grow again? I have said that we can grow by keeping the best of the agencies and by working much better as a group. WPP plays very well as a group. I believe that we have opportunity here. That is a big part of my head-coaching role to coach our players to play well for their own brands and also when they represent the Publicis group.

Q&A

KEVIN ROBERTS
Worldwide CEO of
Saatchi & Saatchi