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# FOREWORD

by John Tylee

**IT WAS DECEMBER 1994.** Maurice Saatchi had been ousted after a shareholder protest at Saatchi & Saatchi. His brother Charles would soon follow him out of the company they'd founded. At the offices of *Campaign* magazine you couldn't move for TV camera crews and microphone-wielding reporters. Unable to find anybody close enough to the action to give them a steer on what had happened – least of all the elusive brothers – the journalists were doing what they invariably do in such situations. They interview each other.

With good connections to both sides of the biggest bust-up in advertising history, *Campaign* was the go-to place for anybody trying to make some sense of it all and speculate on what the outcome might be. As a result Dominic Mills, the editor, and I, as associate editor, found ourselves taking it in turns to give our respective takes.

However, I had a question of my own for a camera crew that had turned up from one particularly far-flung European outpost. What possible interest could this spat be to their viewers? Ah, they replied. This wasn't just any old spat. This was a Saatchi spat. And everybody had heard of the Saatchis.

True, of course. But why? How had Maurice and Charles accumulated so much charisma – and chutzpah – that the public's fascination with them extended well beyond the UK? It wasn't that they loved the limelight. Indeed, they made every attempt to avoid it. Small wonder that you admired their audacity as much as you cursed their cussedness.

This, however, seemed only to make them even more intriguing. I met Charles just once. It was in 1998 at an M&C Saatchi Christmas drinks party for *Campaign*. He was nothing like I expected. On the contrary, he seemed so consumed by shyness that his eyes were fixed on his shoes. I don't remember much about our brief conversation. Only being surprised and flattered to hear from a man said to be so demanding of his staff that he often read what I wrote and enjoyed it.

Maurice, in contrast, was the most seductive charmer I've met. His interviews – rare and invariably off the record – were always conducted sotto voce. By leaning close to hear what he was saying, you felt he was sharing information with you that he'd never divulged to anybody else. At the end, he'd walk you to the agency's front door and shake hands. You wondered how any new business prospect could possibly resist.

Inevitably, the brothers' legacy is a mixed one. Their group was an astonishing breeding ground for talent. How many agencies can boast of providing four members of the Upper House – Maurice himself along with Tim Bell, John Sharkey and Michael Dobbs? Five if you count a one-time Saatchi trainee called Karren Brady. And what other agency could claim to have so influenced Britain's social and political course with 'Labour Isn't Working', the poster that helped propel Margaret Thatcher to power in 1979?

Yet in trying to change the ad industry so quickly and comprehensively, hubris sometimes ran ahead of common sense. There's little doubt that the mind-boggling \$450 million the Saatchi group paid for advertising firm Ted Bates in 1986 caused clients to question whether they should be coughing up 15 per cent commission when big agencies seemed awash with cash. Nevertheless, perhaps history will take a more charitable view of times when it seemed the brothers had taken leave of their senses. While the 1987 proposal to acquire the Midland Bank might have seemed insane, you could argue that, in the light of subsequent events, it could have forced the banking industry to become more customer-centric and less reckless.

What's certain is that the brothers were never scared of trying something to see what would happen. In doing so they helped ensure British advertising could do anything the Americans could do – and often do it better. No wonder that they still attract controversy and fascination in equal measure.

*John Tylee is a former associate editor of Campaign and continues to write regularly for the magazine.*

# NAME THE FIRST ADVERTISING AGENCY THAT COMES INTO YOUR HEAD.

## EXACTLY

Advertising agencies make their money by making their clients famous, and yet advertising agencies are anonymous out in the real world. With one exception.