1) What is the key to creating effective marketing communications in Finland?

All in all I believe that our industry and advertisers have turned marketing communications into too complicated of a process, where so-called reason has won intuition and emotion. In Finland we use all the strategy tools and methods that every global brand uses, but we forget to use our own brains and heart. It's a paradox, because when you try to minimize the risks, you will also minimize your opportunities. Also if we keep on trying to please everyone, no-one will be touched.

Effective marketing communications in Finland is about simplification. Basically good campaigning is about two things: what and how. I'm sure it's the same thing all over the world. An effective campaign in Finland is based on a unique product or service, which offers some extra value to customers. That is the “What” part. If you fail in that, the campaign won’t work no matter how good your advertising is. When your product is truly ready comes the “How” part. Every campaign that has won Effies in Finland includes really fresh and innovative approaches in delivering the message to our consumers. It still amazes me after 15 years that not every advertiser realizes how meaningful excellent creative work is.

If you are marketing in Finland, there are a few learnings and national characteristics, you have to adopt. First of all, there hasn’t been that much competition. We are a small nation, but the country is huge, almost as big as Germany. Because of that, some of the global brands won’t come here. And also because of that Finland has been, in the past, quite a closed market.

To succeed in Finland, you have to have good distribution. There are two big retail chains that dominate the market. You need to get your product on those shelves. It’s the same thing in many of the product categories; only two or three brands have the market and the marketing leader is usually a Finnish brand. So a challenger brand has to have a really innovative and aggressive marketing plan.

In communications every effective campaign in the past has used television as the main media. It makes sense because you can reach a third of the population in one commercial break, if you put your ad in the right show. Television has been and is still the media that creates topics of conversation in Finland. And as I wrote earlier below-the-line marketing is really important. Social media is also often used, although we are just learning to be good in that. Everybody is talking about doing 360-campaigns, but to me that is a joke. I’ve never seen one in Finland. No
brand has money to use several medias and I don’t see any point in that, because you can be really cost-effective by using the most relevant medias.

Because most of the Finnish campaigns are national and not used abroad, tone-of-voice is... how I would say...Finnish. We have a really good sense of humor, but it is a bit dark and ironic. We don’t like people bragging and too fancy of a style is not appealing. We like authenticity, humor and an honest approach. Burger King’s “Whopper Freak-out” would have worked really well here.

2) What strategies are working? Which are failing?
As I wrote above; strategies that are simple and give consumers truly added value. Finnish people have really good intuition to sense if an advertiser is only trying to rip them off. Last year’s Grand Effie was won by Snellman, which is a local meat brand that launched a new minced meat product. First time ever somebody branded minced meat in Finland. The product promise was freshness and best possible meat you can have. This was communicated in really humble and appealing way. It was and still is a great success.

Strategies that are failing are artificial or copycats. They try too hard and treat people like they would be dummies. Most hilarious attempts are those where brands try to communicate to youth using their language. If a brand uses the word “street credibility”, they have lost it.

3) What trends do you see? What do you feel will be next year’s trends?
It’s the same thing as everywhere: responsibility, honesty, sharing, engagement, giving back, happiness, slow culture, originality etc.

Hopefully Finnish advertisers will have the courage to invest in marketing after the depression. And hopefully advertising agencies have the spine to present ideas that are unique and relevant.

4) What technology has impacted the way brands in Finland effectively engage with their targets?
Finland is the home of Nokia and we are really into new technologies. Our problem is not in adopting new ways of communicating and engaging people, but in forgetting that content is the king. If brand doesn’t have good stories to tell, it should shut up.

• BORN: 1973
• SEK & GREY, Executive creative director (2008-)
• TBWA\PHS, Strategy director, partner (2003-2008)
• Ojalasaari, Creative director (2001-2003)
• Advertising agency Sorvi, copywriter, managing director (1997-2001)
• Anttila marketing department (retail chain), copywriter (1995-1997)
• Some of the international awards: Fazer Reilu bread "True Love" Cresta award 2009 and Eurobest Bronze, Veikkaus "Togo” Eurobest Bronze 2007, Radio Nova
• In Finland: numerous national awards including Grand Effie, 4 Gold Effies, 4 Silver Effies,
• 3 Bronze Effies, 27 different awards in Finland’s Top of the Year competition.