

Graduation 2013

Oration for Honorary Graduand James Murphy

Orator: Dr Janice Pittis

Chancellor, the Senate has resolved that the degree of Doctor of the University be conferred upon James Murphy

You may not all have heard the name James Murphy before but there is a good chance you know his work. Not least because part of it has become part of Christmas tradition. The John Lewis marketing campaign of Christmas 2011, featuring a seven year old boy who couldn't wait to give a gift to his parents captured the national mood and became the most talked about ad of the year. James Murphy and the advertising agency he co-founded, Adam & Eve, have been responsible for this and many more memorable advertisements.

James grew up in Norfolk and graduated from the University of Essex in 1989 with a BA in politics from where he embarked on a career in advertising. Starting in the post room in Bates he then joined Ogilvy as a graduate trainee. He spent for years there working on well-known brands such as Ford, Brooke Bond and Guinness. Following this James Joined RKCR the year after it was founded. This company was part of WPP, the world leader in marketing and communication services. During 11 years' service he worked on accounts including Virgin, Marks and Spencer and Lego and was made managing director in 2003 and Chief Executive Officer in 2004. Under James' leadership the agency grew from number thirteen in the UK to number six and won a host of awards for its work.

Not content to be working for someone else, James and two colleagues left RKCR in 2008 and founded the agency Adam & Eve. Within 2 years the agency was named both campaign and marketing magazines agency of the year. In 2012, only four years after it was founded, the agency was sold to the American ad giant Omnicom in a deal reported to be worth £55 million. James is now the Chief Executive Officer of the newly formed Adam & Eve DDB, a merger which places it in the top 5 most awarded Agencies in the world. The agency produces well known work for John Lewis, Google, Fosters, Volkswagen and Harvey Nicholls, as well as numerous charities including Save the Children.

James' degree in politics has obviously stood him in good stead as he has been described in the press as "Peerless in managing both internal and external politics". In fact James is the model of an Essex graduate; creative, curious, enterprising, ethically aware, applying his knowledge and learning to enrich the wider world. The evidence is in the success of the teams he has lead, and the innovative campaigns they have delivered. Whilst speaking about the John Lewis campaign, he has said "While conventional advertising is interruptive, it comes at you unmasked, this is something people elect to watch and pass on. If you choose to watch it, you pay it attention." It seems that challenging conventions and getting people to pay attention is what really stands James apart.

It just remains for me to highlight that James previously lead the team that produced Marks and Spencer's "Your M&S" campaign, partly credited with reviving the retailer's fortunes. So James, this is not just an honorary degree, this is a University of Essex Honorary Degree.

Chancellor, I present to you James Murphy