Dame Annette King, Pioneering Ad Executive, Dies at 57

Advertising luminary Dame Annette King has died at 57.

In a statement, King's husband, Henry Stevens, said: "On Wednesday, we said goodbye to our Annette, my AK, Dame Annette. A deeply loved and loving wife, mother, friend, and peer to so many of you."

Thanking people for their condolences, Stevens continued: "As anyone who had the privilege of being in Annette's world will know, there was nothing she loved more than people. She cared deeply about her work and the advertising industry at large, but nothing lit her up like being in the company of the people she held close."

One of the U.K. ad industry's most prominent figures, King started her career 35 years ago at Wunderman, where she spent eight years, largely in New York.

In the 2000s, she started at WPP's Ogilvy, where she remained for 17 years in various leadership roles, including head of new business, where she led the team to reclaim British Airways' creative account. She was later the managing director of OgilvyOne and, finally, U.K. group CEO.

In 2018, King joined Publicis Groupe as U.K. CEO, leading agencies including Publicis.Sapient, Saatchi & Saatchi, and Zenith.

King left Publicis in 2023 to join Accenture Song, leading its global marketing practice. In the same year, she was recognized as a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in the King's Birthday Honours for services to

advertising and the creative industries.

In January 2025, she stepped back from her executive career to focus on her health.

At the time she said: “To those who know me, it’s no exaggeration to say that this industry has been one of my great loves. I consider myself extraordinarily lucky to have been embraced by it.”

‘A leader like no other’

Stevens stated he could not let the agencies King “led and loved” over the last 35 years go unmentioned: “It was no secret how much Ogilvy meant to her. How proud she was of what she achieved at Publicis. And her delight at working alongside David Droga at Accenture Song.”

He said these chapters had given King some of her “closest friends and most cherished moments in life.”

He described King, who also chaired the Advertising Association since 2022, and sat on the board of broadcaster Channel 4, as well as being a member of the UK Investment Council and a mentor for the Marketing Academy, as “a leader like no other.”

“She had the rare gift of seeing opportunities where others felt fear and somehow, bringing everyone together despite whatever the odds were. It was this unwavering self-belief that gave so many people the chance to achieve incredible things,” he said.

“She really knew how to live – and how important friends, family, and fun are to life. Her wicked sense of humor was always in the room, often waiting for a moment when it was needed most. Her children, her friends, and I are eternally grateful for every moment we had with her.”

Tributes from industry peers

In its own statement, which included tributes from former colleagues, Ogilvy called King an “irrefutable giant.”

Liz Taylor, Ogilvy’s global chief creative officer, recalled the agency boss as an “extraordinary force… what lit her up most was people – her clients, her teams, her peers.”

Rory Sutherland, Ogilvy U.K.’s vice chairman and former creative leader in King’s Ogilvy lineup, lauded her “razor-sharp mind, dry humor, sharp elbows, and gritty determination with immense intuition and kindness.”

“You would go to see Annette whether you wanted someone assassinated (she would make it look like an accident) or if you needed to take a day off to attend your daughter’s Nativity play in the middle of a pitch,” Sutherland said. “We shall not see her again, and I shall miss her more than I can say.”

Co-founder and editor of indie publication and consultancy Creative Salon, Sonoo Singh, who worked with King on many projects over the years, described her as a “genuine titan.”

“A captain of the industry. A rare beast. She lit up rooms. Commanded attention. Bloody hell, she was just impossible to ignore,” Singh said. “Sharp, funny, curious, mischievous. AK-47 (yes, feared by many), she was never one for moping around and always up for a laugh, while ready to stir the pot a little if it needed stirring.”

In an email to U.K. staff, King’s former boss, Publicis Groupe CEO Arthur Sadoun, said: “No one embodied our motto ‘no silos, no solos, no bozos’ better than Annette,” noting her impact was still felt across the Groupe today.

He added: “I will forever be grateful to her for taking a leap of faith and jumping into the unknown with us. It was a risk,

at a time when the market and many others were skeptical. But Annette, as always, was fearless.”

King is survived by her husband and two children, Carter and Sylvie.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/agencies/dame-annette-king-pioneering-ad-executive-dies-at-57/