

COMMUNICATIONS

IN YOUR HEAD:

VIRAL

MARKETING

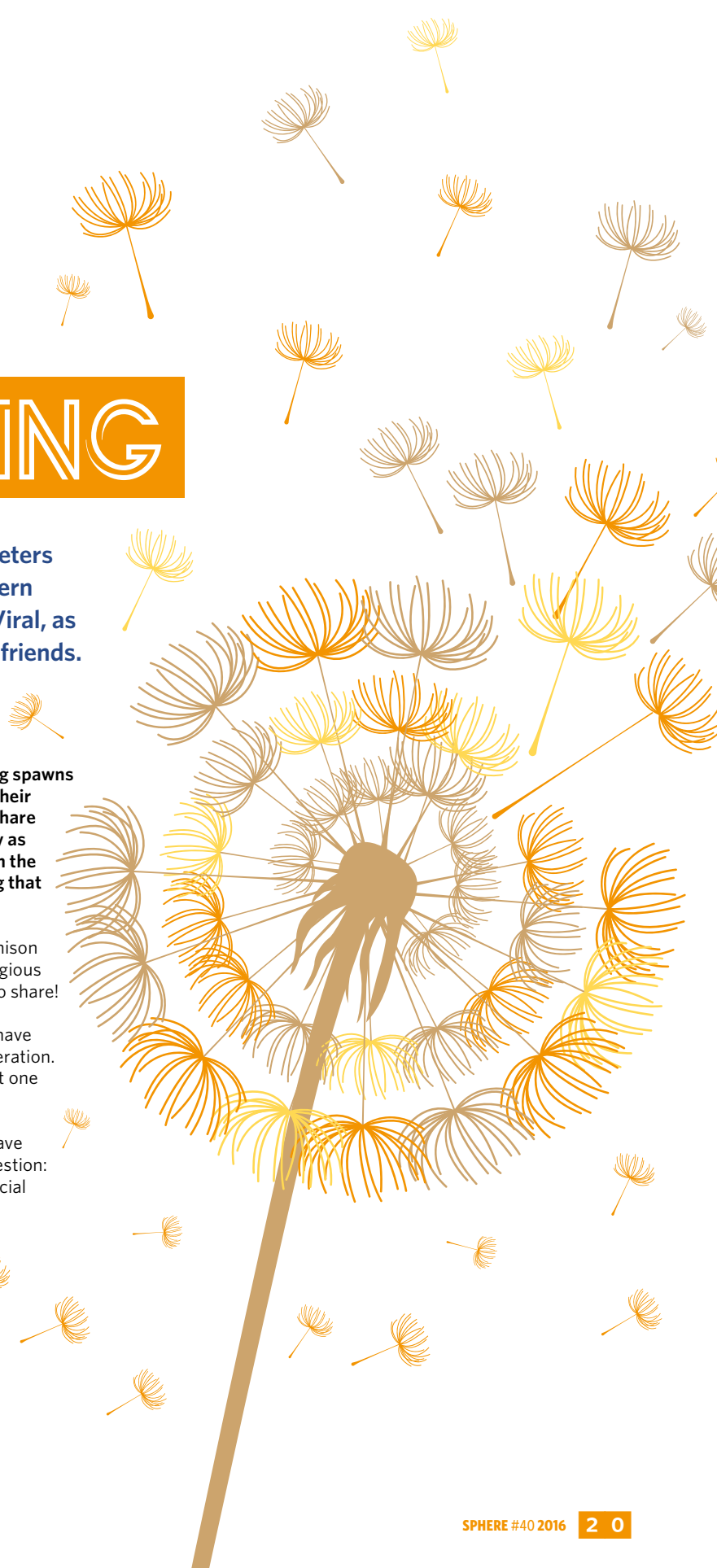
On rare occasions, the stars align for marketers and they have a campaign that, in the modern parlance, goes 'viral'. Viral in a good way. Viral, as in, people can't help but share it with their friends.

Sometimes, a piece of art or even advertising spawns a thousand modified forms as people add their creative energies to the original and then share those. In the modern era, sharing is as easy as posting to your social media account, but in the past, it may have been through a catchy phrase or a song that 'everyone' knows.

People are familiar with the term 'viral' now, but CK Hutchison companies have, for decades, found ways to create contagious messages that stick in people's heads and prompt them to share!

In the Group's birthplace, Hong Kong, its retail branches have had numerous successful campaigns that mark each generation. People need only the slightest of prompts to recall at least one CKHH advertising campaign from their youth.

Recent successes in European mobile phone marketing have their antecedents in CK Hutchison's past. It raises the question: How can advertising transcend 'the pitch' to become a social phenomenon?



Leon Lai's relationship with Hutchison Telecoms lasts for more than 10 years.



JINGLE BELLS

Ads in the early 1980s used memorable jingles that forced product awareness into people's permanent consciousness with undeniably catchy tunes.

In 1985, Watsons released an advertisement with a jingle that ended with the famous words, "Watson's - Your personal store", which became known to a generation of radio and TV consumers. Watsons' Christmas ad in 1989 used a distinctive and popular Dr Seuss-styled rhyme voiceover, with a familiar jingle playing in the background.

Times changed as the 1990s saw jingles decline in favour of using celebrities, and then the post-2000 rise of campaigns linked to social media.

Mr Clifford Ng, Executive Creative Director at DDB Group Hong Kong, Watsons Hong Kong's advertising agency, says, "Jingles grab attention and are able to convey a message effectively. 'Your personal store' was unique, very simple and direct, and the last few notes were very memorable."

But jingles, once the pinnacle of infectious advertising, became less essential over time. According to this industry veteran, it's not a matter of jingles becoming outdated, but rather a change in the message and a decline in the media of

radio and television that deliver the jingles.

"Jingles, celebrity endorsement, or storytelling, are just means of execution," explains Mr Ng. "When we receive a brief and think of ideas for a campaign, we won't say use jingles, or another particular strategy. Those are only tools. The most important thing is 'what are we trying to say?'"

Although advertising evolves over time as trends change, the variances are usually just in the tone and style of the presentation, such as the typography and the visuals. Instead of what's current and 'in', Mr Ng explains, "Our utmost concern is whether the vehicle can strengthen the message or not."

THE KING OF POP

In 1993, Leon Lai, one of Hong Kong's "Four Heavenly Kings" of Cantopop, began his partnership with Hutchison Telecoms in a TV advertisement playing himself. Unlike the other three "Kings", who each collaborated with different phone companies for, at most, two years, Leon Lai's relationship with Hutchison Telecoms lasted for more than 10 years. The ad campaigns would be an inspiration to a generation of youngsters, and the songs used in Hutchison's commercials still resonate with those who grew up in the '90s.

Ms Stella Ip, Director of Operations at Hutchison Asia Telecommunications Limited, offers a unique perspective. Ms Ip was involved with the TV advertising campaign from the beginning. She started with the partner advertising agency and then became a formal member of the CK Hutchison family.

According to Ms Ip, Hutchison Telecoms wanted to launch their new CT2 phone along with their pager service, but at the time, pagers were considered downmarket and were mostly used by blue-collar workers. The company hoped to expand that market.

To reach a broader audience, especially younger people, the team approached Mr Lai and began a close partnership. Each song was tailor-made for each campaign. The creative process involved Hutchison Telecoms, the advertising agency, the artiste, songwriter, and the lyricists. Nothing was left to chance.

The brand name and its products were deliberately excluded from the lyrics. The exposure of the songs was multiplied as they were played on the radio, on TV, and in concerts - something that was unlikely to have happened if the songs had been branded. "We knew it would kill the song, and it wouldn't be able to reach the different channels," explains Ms Ip.



#DancePonyDance: The campaign was the first time ever that a hashtag was used in TV advertising.

"The brand recall came instead from the correlation between Hutchison and the song itself, not whether the song had our name in it."

Leon Lai's star power ensured that the advertisements were discussed in the news as a story on their own, adding a dimension unique to celebrity endorsement. The advertisements were spectacularly successful and enduring, and each one had a catchphrase that went viral. Friends would talk about them, students would repeat them in school, and comedians fought to come up with the best parodies. The partnership expanded to encompass not just pagers but all the telecom services. The positive association of Hutchison Telecoms with Leon Lai endures today.

In Ms Ip's words, the effect was "Miraculous... Our advertisements created a lot of discussion, drew attention, and sales continued to rise."

#TODAY

The ascension of the Internet and social media today has produced an ecosystem that offers some very different opportunities for smart marketing people on the cutting edge.

In Europe, 3 UK has successfully produced successive campaigns that have gone viral. The #DancePonyDance advert, released in February 2013, featured a Shetland pony dancing and moonwalking to the song, *Everywhere* by Fleetwood Mac. The video has reached over 11 million views on YouTube, and received more than 43,000 shares on social media. Actually watching this 1 minute and 10 second video 11 million times would take nearly 24.5 years!

Its very popular sequel #SingItKitty — featuring a singing cat — was launched a year later.

These campaigns might seem a little silly; in fact, that was the premise of both campaigns. The tagline read, "Silly stuff. It matters". But don't be fooled. These advertisements did wonders for 3 UK, with a 50 per cent increase in relative brand appeal since the new approach to advertising was adopted.

"Sharing over the Internet facilitates our human need for belonging and helps us provide a more immersive and credible brand experience," says Tom Malleschitz, Chief Marketing Officer at 3 UK. "It's imperative today that we create emotional campaigns that encourage people to watch, share and engage with the content and our brand."

“All good communication campaigns are like cooking: Make use of the best and freshest ingredients.”

Stella Ip
Director of Operations,
Hutchison Asia Telecommunications

The initial campaign was the first time ever that a hashtag was used in TV advertising. Having #DancePonyDance added to the end of the video was a deliberate strategy to help ensure one consistent hashtag was used by people sharing the video. By accumulating shares with consistent hashtags, the advert was able to achieve trending status, which facilitated more shares.

But what was truly driving the campaign to spread like wildfire?

“Strong emotional engagement, and an added element of surprise, is what drives people’s desire to share,” suggests Mr Malleschitz. In fact, a majority of social media users reported that the adorable Shetland pony inspired ‘happiness’ and ‘surprise’.

ENGAGE

Mr Ng suggests there are two ways to encourage a viewer to share content. “It’s either because I feel it’s relevant to me,” or, “It’s just so great and interesting I want to share it.” Knowing what may be relevant to a certain target group, or what is great or interesting, may be a bit more complicated. “That takes experience and knowledge about the market.”

When asked whether companies may be drawn to online campaigns to avoid the cost of placing ads in traditional media, Mr Ng advises, “You shouldn’t do an online campaign because you don’t have a budget. You should do it because an online campaign can reach your target audience.”

Whether it be jingles, celebrity endorsements, or online advertising campaigns, both Mr Ng and Ms Ip agree that these are just different tools for different times.

“All good communication campaigns are like cooking: Make use of the best and freshest ingredients. Advertising looks at the best channel and technology available to allow a concept to evolve and develop,” says Ms Ip. Whether 1980s jingles, 1990s pop stars or the power of the hashtag, CK Hutchison’s best marketing minds are cooking up new ways to get brand awareness into hearts and minds around the world. □

Jingles that forced product awareness into people’s permanent consciousness with undeniably catchy tunes.

