



Awaiting a 'Rhythmic Resurrection' in Advertising.

By Max Sutherland

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Advertising jingles are the 'rhythm method' of advertising. Done well, they add impact. So why are they out of fashion? Is this condition terminal or are we overdue for a 'rhythmic resurrection'?

Like '*The Da Vinci Code*', the ad jingle communicates 'in camouflage' imparting information indirectly. They both communicate in a style that romanticizes rather than proselytizes.

Engage people in an entertainment experience, whether it be listening to a song or reading a novel, and there is not the same motivation to *evaluate* 'information' as when they are told directly. 'Persuasion by proxy' takes place when the focus is on the entertainment and not on the information. (See my September column '[Erectile Dysfunction and The Da Vinci Code](#)')



Music lets fantasy and feelings in rather than shutting them out. As in MTV video-clips or Broadway musicals, the content of the advertising jingle is unrepresentative of reality. But who cares? We know we are not meant to process it in a rational way. When words are set to music it somehow takes the edge off what might otherwise be a strident message.

As teenagers particularly, we seem to learn to process lyrics and music differently to spoken messages. We learn to process them as an experience rather than as a proposition and to judge them in terms of whether we enjoy them or not, rather than whether they are true or false.

Jingles have been around for about 80 years - the very first jingle was for Wheaties in 1926 at a time when sales were sagging and the brand was close to being discontinued. It [turned the fortunes of the brand around](#) and jingles took off. For about three quarters of a century, they flourished with many unforgettables such as [Brylcreem](#), [Marlboro](#) and [Dr. Pepper](#).

A whole sub-industry exists to write musical scores to pace peoples' emotions when watching movies, and similarly when ad-words are set to a musical score it makes them wash over us rather than invite us to intellectualize about them. The emotional response triggered by music [activates a part of the brain called the insula](#) - the same area that is activated when people view emotional expressions in other people. Music triggers different processing and lessens the chance of conception that anyone is trying to tell us or sell us something. It reduces our tendency to counter-argue with what is being said.

Damping down the evaluative process and triggering emotion are not the only important effects of setting words to music. Rhyme, rhythm and repetition (the three R's) give words a mnemonic quality, making the message more catchy and enduring in memory.

Chances are you still remember (and can perhaps even recite) the words "*Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun.*" Setting words to rhyme or rhythm

ensures that this and many other ads that we haven't heard for decades still perpetuate in memory. Music is a cutting edge that helps etch words into long-term memory.

Out of Fashion

It has been 'a hard day's night' for the advertising industry which has encountered tough times and faced mounting criticism (see "[The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR](#)"). Nevertheless, it is a bit perplexing as to why jingles more especially [have fallen out of fashion](#). The current trend instead is to [recruit existing music](#) into the service of advertising. Or, in the musical equivalent of [product placement](#), having brand names mentioned in pop songs. (Brands are mentioned in about 40% of all the songs currently appearing in the [Billboard top 20](#).)

One explanation given for why jingles are said to be "past their heyday" is the difficulty in a fragmented media world of getting enough reach and frequency to make the jingle stick in memory. But this doesn't make sense. Music that is done well, [aids](#) repetition. "Music not only supports repetition but can make it pleasurable when other forms would be grating and nonsensical."¹ And in making us feel upbeat, music can ward off the early boredom we might otherwise experience with a repeated ad.²

When words are set to music it can even create a *desire* for repetition. With great songs, we don't just want to hear them once. We want to listen to them over and over. Most jingles hardly rate as great songs and that's part of the problem but when Pepsi aired its [first radio jingle in 1939](#), it was so popular that it was [played in jukeboxes and became a hit record](#). Many years later in 1971 Coke did the same with "[I'd like to teach the world to sing](#)" which was originally called 'I want to buy the world a Coke'.

Part of the problem is with the term 'jingle' which carries unfortunate baggage. Jingles are said to be too quaint, too corny and too 'out of step' with today's modern consumer. Get the younger generation to listen to the pop music of their parents' generation and they think it is quaint, corny and out of step with today. But that doesn't mean pop music is past its heyday and it doesn't mean that the jingle is dead.

Pop music has changed, survived and thrived... and so too will jingles - or should I say 'the rhythm method of advertising'. The route we are taking is 'a long and winding road' but look out for a 'rhythmic resurrection' around the corner.

"We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out."

Decca Records (1962) rejecting a new group called the Beatles

¹ Scott L. M. (1990) Understanding jingles and needledrop. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 17, p230.

² Wallace W. T., Edell J. A., and Moore M. C. (1997) The magic of music: Affective responses to television advertisements. In: *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 24. Association for Consumer Research.

Ad Age Top 10	
1.	<i>You deserve a break today (McDonalds)</i>
2.	<i>Be all that you can be (U.S. Army).</i>
3.	<i>Pepsi Cola Hits the Spot (Pepsi Cola).</i>
4.	<i>M'm, M'm good (Campbell's).</i>
5.	<i>See the USA in your Chevrolet (GM).</i>
6.	<i>I wish I was an Oscar Meyer Wiener (Oscar Meyer).</i>
7.	<i>Double your pleasure, double your fun (Wrigley's Doublemint gum).</i>
8.	<i>Winston tastes good like a cigarette should (Winston).</i>
9.	<i>It's the Real Thing (Coca Cola).</i>
10.	<i>Brylcreem-- A little dab'll do ya</i>