



The death of the jingle: whatever happened to my Shake â??nâ?? Vac?

Description



Ah, the jingle. That late and unlamented relic of 20th century advertising, which harnessed the uncanny memory-jogging power of music and lyrics like nothing else, but has vanished now into the dusty

cabinet of advertising history. Right? Well, to a point.

There's room for debate about what a jingle truly is. What if it appears in just one ad? Can you call it a jingle if it's an original track co-opted for the purpose? (Remember Aardman Studios and BMP DDB Needham's use of "Hoots Mon" by Lord Rockingham VI for [Maynard's wine gums](#), or WCRS's appropriation of Buddy Holly's [Not Fade Away](#) for Scotch videotape?) Well, strictly speaking: no. Technically, a jingle must be composed for the purpose of product or brand promotion. We are, however, navigating quite nebulous waters here, so prepare for pretty generous wiggle room.

The birth of the jingle

Though in some ways it's hard to imagine the advertising landscape before them, jingles as we think of them were only made possible by the advent of the radio after 1923. It's possible to point to their origins much further back in history, in the rhyming cries of street vendors throughout the 15th and 16th centuries – some of which, such as the nursery rhyme "Hot cross buns" or the "Cockles and mussels" portion of "Molly Malone", survive in popular song.

As the idea of advertising evolved in the 1800s, so too did the use of ad music to bolster marketing efforts. A very successfully advertised American rat poison, Rough on Rats (which, to go by the number of accidental and non-accidental human deaths also attributed to it, was rough on pretty much anything) was marketed with the pre-recording equivalent of a single release: 35 cent sheet music for a [rather grisly](#) albeit chirpy ditty, copyrighted in 1882.

General Mills tends to lay the most vocal claim to the world's first recorded jingle. Their barbershop-style "singing commercial" for Wheaties, broadcast in Minneapolis on Christmas Eve 1926 in lieu of a typical spoken testimonial, proved a sales-boosting smash and, the legend goes, saved the cereal from discontinuation, laying out the red carpet for a worldwide wave of ad music.

The (fruit) salad days

The jingle took off and developed, and often growing into full songs, such as the cinema-based 1940s spot for Chiquita Bananas, which provided a cheery, minute-and-a-half guide to optimal banana eating from a comely lady banana drawn by comic strip artist Dik Browne and voiced by wholesome singer/actress Monica Lewis. Throughout the middle of the 20th century, jingles would almost be taken for granted as a key part of the marketing mix for brands of all kinds and in differing awareness-raising formats – for example, one of America's most famous now-defunct jingles, for [Oscar Mayer Wieners](#), was composed in 1962 as part of a competition for the Kraft brand.

Often too jingles meant collaborations between brands and artists (more on this later) – take the television show of big band singer and actress Dinah Shore, sponsored by Chevrolet and opened with the extremely of-its-time song ["See the U.S.A. In your Chevrolet"](#).

Even more so than the programmes they bookended, generational nostalgia for advertising jingles tends to split along very regional lines. Though there are a few stalwart globe-trotters such as Calgon, most tended to be region-specific: there's a marked divide between those who get misty-eyed over Toys R Us's ["I don't wanna grow up"](#) and those who memorialise the [Milky Bar Kid](#). But thanks to the internet, this level of regionalism is becoming more a thing of the past – how about the jingle itself?

Changing fortunes

So why aren't we still swimming in jingles? Well, to be brief, it's a sad truth that advertising often dates as hard as hairstyles. A more aware, not to say jaded, audience came to associate the all-out mid-century jingle with an earnest advertising era long past, no longer in tune with the increasing self-awareness they demanded of their advertisers and expected would be reflected in ad music. Let's have a look at some example jingles and how they've changed or disappeared altogether.

First, two of the best-recognised 1970s jingles from opposite sides of the Atlantic with somewhat similar fortunes – Purina's [Meow Mix](#) and Glade's [Shake a Nac Vac](#). Meow Mix, embraced by American popular culture, adapted (in a singularly [migraine-inducing fashion](#)) to the whims of the shareable internet in its online reappearance. Shake a Nac vac, whose original was beloved for its energetic star, also received a somewhat unlikely zeitgeist update, this time both with [guests](#) and [without](#).

Coca Cola have produced shelf-fuls of musically-led commercials over the years, from [chipper](#) 1950s [animations](#), through the [jazzier](#) 1960s and into the rather starry-eyed 1970s and [bombastic 1980s](#). In fact their sweet-humoured 1971 effort – "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" (liberally incorporating their ad refrain ["It's the real thing"](#)) became one of the most indelible pieces of 1970s ad music, even charting separately as a full-length song in the year of its release. However, the 90s offered a less jingle-heavy mixture – get a flavour [here](#). The brand also favoured sync during the [1990s](#) and [2000s](#) particularly for Diet Coke. Their current five-note signature is also incorporated into [new songs and artist partnerships](#).

MacDonald's – "I'm lovin' it" slogan and the following five-note signature, a combination which for many brands has in effect become the 21st century jingle, both spring from [Justin Timberlake's 2003 composition](#) and have served the brand faithfully for over 11 years now.

Mars offered a solid example of the short but fanfare-filled 80s end jingle visually revived but audially replaced by sync [in the 2000s](#).

Certain brands, such as Ragu/Knorr daughter Chicken Tonight in the 1990s, made only one great jingle effort (and in this case, [an oft-parodied but indelible one](#)).

A UK favourite from McVities, Penguin's catchphrase started life as a full, [rather Upper Class Twit](#)

[song](#) (later refitted with lashings of [eighties attitude](#)) but by the late nineties had tamed to a [short spoken catchphrase](#), then became [even more low-key](#). Sadly Penguin advertising has wound down altogether since then. It's worth noting that McVities' latest odd yet adorable campaign has plumped for [TV theme song sync](#) instead.

Seeming stalwart and younger brand Charmin also shed its brief but once-beloved [end jingle](#) altogether, forgoing one for both its American spots and its [European rebrand](#), though it does remain in Latin America.

More recent efforts, and jingles still going strong

Calgon keeps on trucking around the world, with a brief end jingle unchanged in content but given a little more urgency since [1985](#), and equally recognisable in [English](#) and its rather horror-tinged [Russian counterpart](#). Subway's [Five Dollar Footlong](#) might in some ways most closely resemble the jingle of old, though it too sticks to a short and sweet refrain and in advertising terms is now a little long in the tooth.

One-off repurposing of existing songs is a perennial if occasional tactic – try the UK national favourite from Cornetto, a cheeky 1980s take on [O Sole Mio](#) or the more recent and divisive (but undeniably memorable) [Go Compare](#) use of an [American WWI propaganda tune](#).

Old Spice's theme, in the 1950s a furling [sea shanty adaptation](#) of Scotland the Brave, has evolved and fallen in and out of favour via some [dramatic 1970s sync](#), reappeared in the late 2000s, but stripped down to a rather unassuming [little marine whistle](#), which has [shortened even further](#) since. There's no debate that it works as a fresh, neat little foil for the deft wackiness of their spots, though.

Others have managed to retain the earworm but cut through potential cheese with a view on mad-eyed, meme-honouring cult status – take Quizno's [disconcerting 2003 effort](#) or McDonald's [filet-o-fish](#).

So there we have it: shortened and slotted in at the end, pared down to a sleek slogan and five-note signature – the jingle today is usually either as unobtrusive as possible or an unhinged effort aimed at cult status. Will it die out altogether? Or evolve?

The jingle's future, and ad music alternatives

As artists continue to seek new ways to get along in a brave new [Steve Albini-endorsed](#) world, custom-made music and advertising still marry, but the ceremony has gotten a little sleeker.

In many ways, the landscape has become more subtle. Ads are no longer the preserve of highly commercial acts such as [N Sync](#). Though spoken testimonials from certain artists may still provoke some degree of side-eye, musical collaborations, if they hit the right note, can entail pretty astounding

success for both parties. Precedents have been set throughout the decades — one such was in 1986, when —My Adidas—, Run D.M.C.’s defiant lovesong to the eponymous brand and their shell-toe Superstar shoes, led to the first major endorsement deal of its kind, between a high-profile, highly credible music act and a sports company.

Artists rerecording existing songs for the purpose has not been uncommon, offering as it does a clear stamp of product approval from the artist, and another shot at the charts for the single in question — for the clearest semi-recent example take Chris Brown’s poorly-timed [Doublemint](#) ad. Sometimes the rerecord even eclipses the original — if you had a creeping, never quite confirmed suspicion that one of the Black Eyed Peas’ dozens of inescapable singles once had another, less socially acceptable incarnation, you’d be right. —Let’s Get It Started— first appeared on album Elephunk as —Let’s Get Retarded—, but was transformed into its less repugnant, more airwaves-friendly iteration on the back of a 2004 NBA campaign.

As the sync industry continues to grow, instead of only a handful of willing pop artists taking on huge commercial contracts, we find slices of the advertising pie being doled out much more fairly. Long-established stars who in the older advertising landscape wouldn’t have countenanced the idea are now [quite happy](#) to see their music accompany spots, whereas newer artists welcome the exposure [a solid sync deal can bring](#).

Another wave-making trend in the last two years is brand/artist partnership within music videos, recognising the the format’s [power](#). Activia and Shakira’s World Cup collaboration, for example, staggered sharing charts and became the most formidable example of the rather awkwardly dubbed —trackvertising—, in which company becomes part, to a greater or lesser extent, of a single’s promo video. It has become the internet’s [most-shared advertisement](#), doing rather better than the Coca-Cola sponsored custom song (note that [signature](#)) or the Pitbull and Jennifer Lopez-led [official song](#). How accepted the format will be by the general public is still to be seen — the inoffensive tummy-smile placement in Shakira’s video obviously didn’t impact on the video’s popularity, but more dramatic retroactive ad-insertion software has drawn satirical fire from [various quarters](#).

Speaking of tech, innovations often allow for greater comfort in creative collaboration. In the last few weeks alone, Dev Hynes and FKA Twigs have lent their music and their own persons to campaigns for [Gap](#) and Google Glass without a hint of discomfort — in fact with a distinct sense of artsy relish in FKA Twigs’ case — probably because the format allowed space for the artist to get playful with the concept and the product. And of course OK Go’s [subtle Honda partnership](#) has lacked for neither views (12 million and counting) nor praise.

The music video format, alongside the novel star-making potential of various sites and more flexible ad formats also offer greater advertising options — take the liberal use of Youtube celebrities in Old Navy’s [Unlimited](#).

In time for 2014’s tennis season, [Evian](#) also got in on the act, while Cornetto chose to have Lily Allen narrate and cameo rather than sing in their [long-form](#). Meanwhile, Purina’s most recent mass

advertising eschewed music altogether to partner with two other juggernauts: [Buzzfeed and the cat video](#).

So whatâ??s to become of the poor old jingle? In truth, we reckon itâ??s still more than a museum piece. Thereâ??s no denying that ear-worm, memory-hook power. Though the jingle is no longer the big fish it once was, keep an eye open and youâ??ll spot it frolicking as part of a much more varied advertising landscape â?? the kingâ??s not quite dead, but heâ??s freed up a lot of crowns.