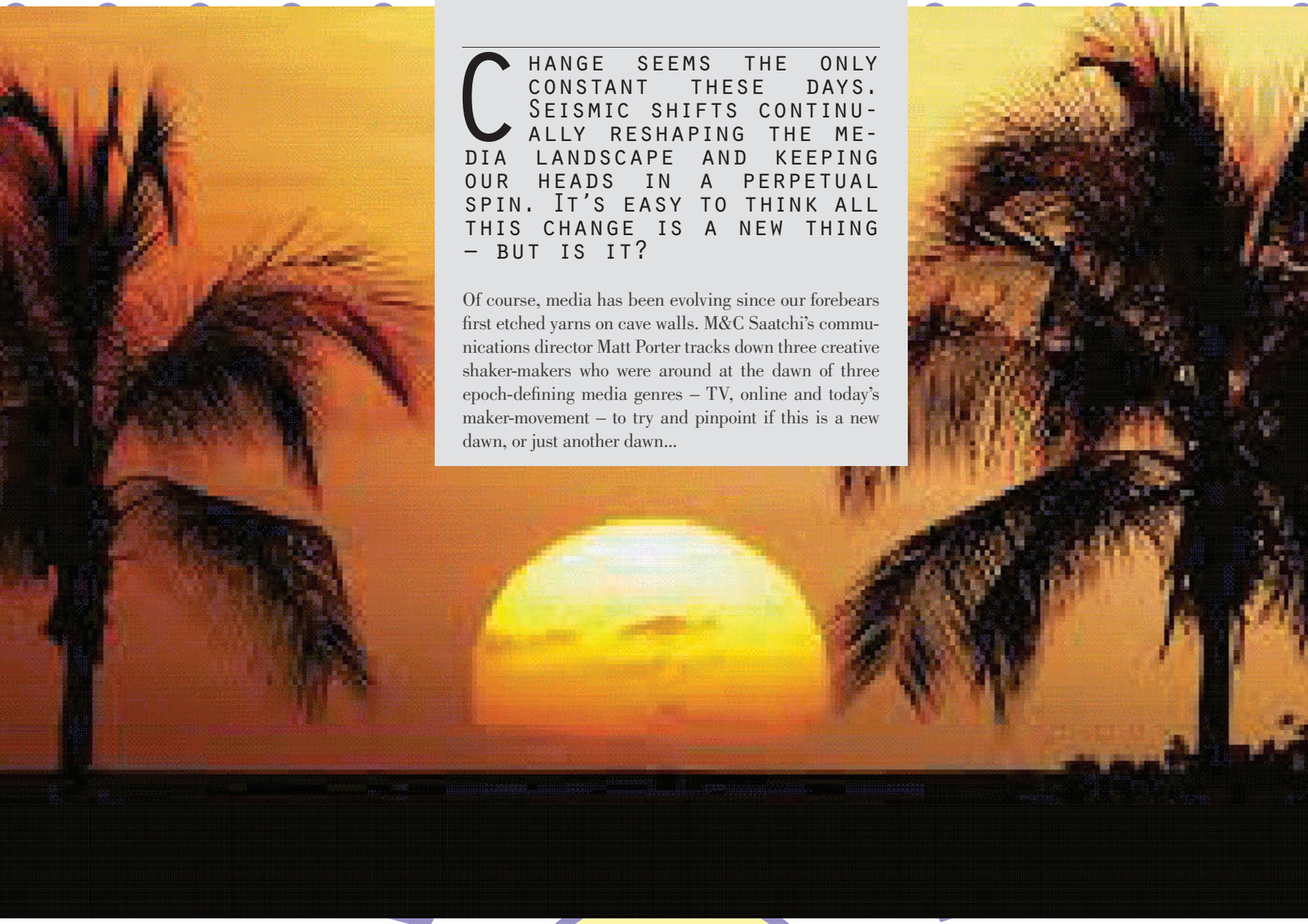
A NEW DAWN RISES



CHANGE SEEMS THE ONLY CONSTANT THESE DAYS. SEISMIC SHIFTS CONTINUALLY RESHAPING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND KEEPING OUR HEADS IN A PERPETUAL SPIN. IT'S EASY TO THINK ALL THIS CHANGE IS A NEW THING – BUT IS IT?

Of course, media has been evolving since our forebears first etched yarns on cave walls. M&C Saatchi's communications director Matt Porter tracks down three creative shaker-makers who were around at the dawn of three epoch-defining media genres – TV, online and today's maker-movement – to try and pinpoint if this is a new dawn, or just another dawn...

THE DAWN OF... TELEVISION

The real 'Mr Television': Colin Fraser

The man who literally wrote the book on Television in Australia, Colin Fraser was the chief of staff on the *Melbourne Herald* when he decided to throw his lot in with the new-fangled 'radio with pictures'.

It was mid-1956 and the first TV transmission in Australia was still months off.

Fraser's employer, *The Herald and Weekly Times (HWT)*, had been granted the licence to broadcast as HSV7 from Melbourne while The Packer Group, led by the indomitable Sir Frank, had won the same right in Sydney for TC9.

In the early days there were no interstate links, no sharing of locally made programs and virtually no recording. Fraser jumped at the chance to launch the Seven Network.

"I thought it would be an interesting challenge," says the matter-of-fact and still faculty-laden 93-year-old. "Someone had to do it. I could see TV had a successful future."

It was a view shared by few others.

"I had a neighbour over the road, a company director," adds Fraser, "who said he'd never buy a set and I had people at the *Herald* telling me I was throwing my career away."

The *HWT* also hedged its bets.

The prevailing feeling was they should run a TV station much like a "corner butcher's shop…get the profits first".

They gave Fraser just three months to learn how everything in TV worked with a secondment to US station WEWS Cleveland where he toiled day and night to grasp every aspect of the complex new medium.

Packer had also sent three people over on the study visit, one of whom was Bruce Gyngell.

"They had a great time, but they didn't do much work and didn't bring home the capacity to start up a TV station," Fraser recalls.

As Australia's youngest correspondent in WWII, Fraser knew a thing or two about disaster stories and saw plenty illustrating the pitfalls of live TV during the trip.

"I remember they were demonstrating the great capacity of an

advertiser's fridge to store lots of food," he remembers, "only to run out of space when packing it on live TV. Everyone concerned lost their jobs."

After a couple of months it was deemed Fraser could be trusted with the delicate art of programme buying on behalf of both Seven and Nine and he flew to New York to join his boss Jack Williams and Packer to buy the programmes at affordable prices to set pricing for all Australia's future buys.

"The going was tough," he says. "Australia's film distributor groups had long associations with most of America's film producers in Hollywood and New York, numbers of whom were now also producing for TV. They didn't welcome the incoming competition for theatregoers' time and didn't want us to buy without paying full dollar."

Famously, at their first meeting with a major distributor, the American executive left the Australians sitting outside his office for half an hour. Packer repaid the compliment when they resumed negotiations across town in his New York office the following day.

Within a week almost everything in the film programme schedule for the two stations had been bought, over the odds but within budget.

The package included Disneyland, the Mickey Mouse Club, Father Knows Best, San Francisco Beat and Tales of the Texas Rangers and from London: The Scarlet Pimpernel and Robin Hood.

The all-powerful Control Board that granted (and threatened to take away) licences to broadcast in Australia, deemed each station must have 40% of its weekly content live and local. An expectation that was "unrealistic and crushing", according to Fraser.

He conceived a number of panel shows, including I've Got a Secret, Stop the Music, Fun with Charades, Zig and Zag and what was to prove his greatest success, The Hit Parade.

"Nine had an orchestra," he adds, "but we couldn't afford one. I conceived a program that used popular recordings and a team of six dancers, played out little dramas to the music. It was a great success."

So much so that TV shops would tune their demo sets to it on a Thursday night and always draw a crowd of TV-less fans of the show who gathered outside to watch.

Being new, no-one, especially advertisers and media buyers, had a clue how to use TV so Fraser wrote the book, literally: How To Use TV Advertising, explaining all the nuts and bolts, time rules for program and advertising presentations, TVC lengths and how scripts should be prepared.

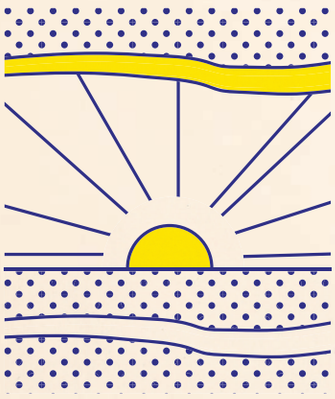
It was feverishly snapped up all over the country, went to four separate printings and became the benchmark for an industry.

Still, Fraser encountered opposition everywhere, from his old mates on the paper to his stablemates at the radio stations, all fearful of losing market share but, thankfully, auto brands were among the early adopters of the medium.

"But they didn't go out and film a commercial," he recounts. "They'd bring the cars into the studio through the back lane at great speed. Someone would do the filming, they'd back out and the next one came in. It was all very hairy but everyone loved doing it."

Something else very hairy was Sydney's Channel Nine jumping the gun and going to air first with the famous Gyngell "Welcome to Television" inaugural broadcast on September 16, 1956.

The stringent stipulation from the Control Board had been that both stations were to go to air by November 4 the same year – in time for the Melbourne Olympics – but only with complete program schedules for 40-hours a week worth of tele, 40% of which had to be live.



As Fraser recounts, Nine flouted the rules with Gyngell's transmission from their yet-to-be-completed Willoughby Studios and a mere 18 hours a week of pre-filmed content, six weeks ahead of the agreed kick off.

"All of us involved felt very cheated," he admits. "It was like De Groot riding across the (Sydney Harbour) Bridge and cutting the ribbon before the official opening. The whole thing was phony. But they got the publicity with Bruce becoming known as 'Mr Television'. Packer simply didn't fear the political backlash at all."

"Australia's film distributor groups had long associations with most of America's film producers in Hollywood and New York, numbers of whom were now also producing for TV. They didn't welcome the coming competition for theatregoers' time and didn't want us to buy without paying full dollar."

Seven duly got underway with the fully fledged program line-up, the live quotient – including the Olympics – technical and personnel resources, a testament to Fraser's sheer ability, perception and work ethic.

He says he got many advertisers on board, "if they could dodge the expense of formal commercials and instead use our on-camera announcers to present their messages from the floor.

"I'd been pressing for a more relaxed and free-wheeling variety show that would cater for them and allow our best personalities to show their talents." But Fraser's "heart sank" when he first saw the towering talent of Graham Kennedy on Nine.

"He was like gold," he admits. "He broke all the rules and rubbished advertisers' products but the audience loved him and that's all that mattered."

Fraser was desperate to lure Kennedy to Seven but couldn't get anyone interested in forking out the money.

He found Bert Newton to go up against him but even raising the funds to keep 'moon face' happy was a perpetual battle in the "run it like a corner butcher's" mentality.

Newton was to go on to become an iconic figure at Nine as Kennedy's wisecracking sidekick but not before Seven fluffed a golden opportunity of finally securing the golden Kennedy signature.

"At the end of 1959," says Fraser, "Kennedy became discontented at Nine and said he was ready to move to Seven. Graham sat in *The Weekly Times* office ready to meet the *Herald* board.

"At the board meeting, a senior director asked what salary Kennedy wanted. When the figure was mentioned, the director said, 'that's more than I get' and closed it all down.

"Kennedy was such a sensitive guy and such a money maker. After that I left."

Fraser worked for a while as a consultant helping regional TV stations get up and running before embarking on a long and illustrious career first as creative director then managing director of George Patterson.

His ads for Holden and VB, went on to win a stack of awards, including the very first gong for a TVC in Australia.

"I loved the advertising game," he confesses. "You had so much licence to be as creative as you want and really make a difference for your clients. It was brilliant fun."

After retiring from Patts in the mid-'80s Fraser agreed to work a day a month at friend Bob Talbot's agency Samuelson Talbot & Partners (now M&C Saatchi Melbourne).

As Talbot recalls: "Colin came in for one day a month but didn't end up going home for 25 years. He was just bloody brilliant. A man absolutely obsessed with the human truth."

Fraser still lives at home in Melbourne with Mary, also 93, his wife of nearly 70 years.

His mind is constantly boggled with what can be achieved on TV these days, especially with sports coverage, of which he is also an Australian pioneer.

However he's left underwhelmed by a lot of the advertising.

"I could revolutionise TV ads these days," he claims, "but nobody wants to be revolutionised.

"A commercial runs and at the end they flick a name on it and it disappears and you wouldn't know what they want to do, how to get in touch with them or whatever. It's such a waste of money."

The dawn of... Internet

The CD ROM MAN: Matt Cumming

It was the pre-mainstream internet dark age of 1993 when Matt Cumming first started connecting with people all over the world on his computer using Bulletin Boards.

The precursor to web browsers enabled Cumming to post text documents and download what others had posted and see chat threads via a telephone dial up.

"I was mucking around with them when I should have been art directing stuff for clients at work [The Ball Partnership]," Cumming says, stressing that he "had a fascination with it but I'm not 100% sure why? I was just experimenting rather than being geekily involved".

By 1995 he had discovered CD ROMS and most likely became the first Aussie creative to put his entire book on one, including TVCs, and went to try his luck in London adland.

Safely through Heathrow customs, word soon spread about the "Aussie using a CD ROM as the new CV", which got him a lot of attention, including yarns in *Wired Magazine*, BBC Radio and *The Guardian*. Despite the media glare he didn't manage to snaffle a gig and flew back to Sydney after a few months in 1996. His return coincided with the rise of Netscape Navigator, which enabled images to be inserted into web browsers for the first time.

"Now it's got pictures," he recounts, "I remember thinking this internet thing was really going places."

His old boss at Ball, Tom Moult, at the time running Euro RSCG, agreed and offered Cumming a job, "where I got to muck around on the computer for a year and try and sell some stuff to clients".

At the time Euro had a sister agency in the US, DSW who had Netscape, Intel and, "a few other really interesting Silicon Valley clients".

Cumming went to Utah for two weeks training where he learned all there was to learn about designing web pages, "which wasn't a lot because there wasn't much to it" in those days.

"All you had to do was learn HTML," he laughs, "anyone could do it. You didn't have to be a programmer. I could make things like animated gifs, that no one else was really doing here then. A web page wasn't necessarily going to get to a lot of people, because people weren't really on the internet."

His mind was blown when he first saw email. "I don't know why," he admits. "We had telexes and you could pick up the phone and call anyone in the world, but for some reason I was blown away by the concept that you could actually type something, send it and it immediately appeared on somebody else's computer."

While it was virtually impossible for agencies to make much money out of digital then, Euro made a good fist of it, winning the Australian arm of computer giants Intel and Compaq, partly through its DSW tie-up.

"We really started targeting the techs after that," he says, "and became something of a new media specialist."

The agency won a few of the fledging digital awards at big shows, then the likes of Excite and NineMSN joined their client roster as word got round that Cumming was leading the digital revolution.

Cumming had to rapidly build his team with specialist coders, flash designers, animators and the like.

"The really beautiful thing was that Cannes needed an Aussie judge for their first Cyber Lion jury in '98," he says. "There was a lot of good, talented, creative digital people

outside of agency land but there wasn't any other agencies doing it so I was kind of the only pick in the agency space and went two years running."

It was at that time that Cumming discovered the intimate link between sex and the internet. He did a cheeky, mostly outdoor campaign for Perth-based online sex toy providore Adultshop.com that got "ridiculously awarded".

It targeted average, middle class, conservative people who would be more likely to visit an online sex shop rather than walk off a street into a real one.

So they went mainstream with billboards at train stations with lines like: 'Moan, moan, moan, that's all we ever hear from our customers,' and during a sale: 'Yes, that is a pricing gun in our pocket'.

"We also had a lot of fun with vibrating banner ads," he laughs. "There's no doubt that porn drove a lot of early growth of the internet, as it still does."

Fortunately, during the messiest part of the dot.com crash in the early 2000s, Cumming was happily taking a year out surfing the world.

On his return in 2002, he joined M&C Saatchi as the founding CD of its new digital department.

The agency had just IAG, which stipulated a digital ramp up and also had the likes of Qantas and Audi doing a lot in the space. In 2007 he recruited MD David Whittle and oversaw the department's morph into Direct specialists Mark, now LIDA.

Following a couple more stints at direct agencies Cumming decided it was high time for a tree/sea change. He set up his own business and shifted to the Byron Bay hinterland to serve a few select Sydney customers remotely.

It's workable he says, save for the "pretty crappy internet connection".

"I've long thought telecommuting would be a very possible thing, but there's still a lot of remote rural areas in Australia suffering badly from poor coverage."

Looking back, Cumming says the over-riding memory was how much fun and liberty he had being at the dawn of digital in the creative space.

"The really great thing at the beginning was how limited the tech was. It was pretty easy at the start but then there was a very fast shift and things got complex quickly.

"We had an incredible amount of freedom. I had been used to working three months trying to get a TV ad through and having the third in command in the marketing department say no because they were afraid their boss might not like it. All that went away. Everything was 'yes', because they had little idea about what I was doing and they knew it wasn't going to bust the budget.

"A lot of the clients just really enjoyed being in this new space and weren't stressed or worried about it. They were just experimenting too."

Cumming said he was too busy on "the roller coaster" to give much thought to the fact he was at the forefront of something transformative.

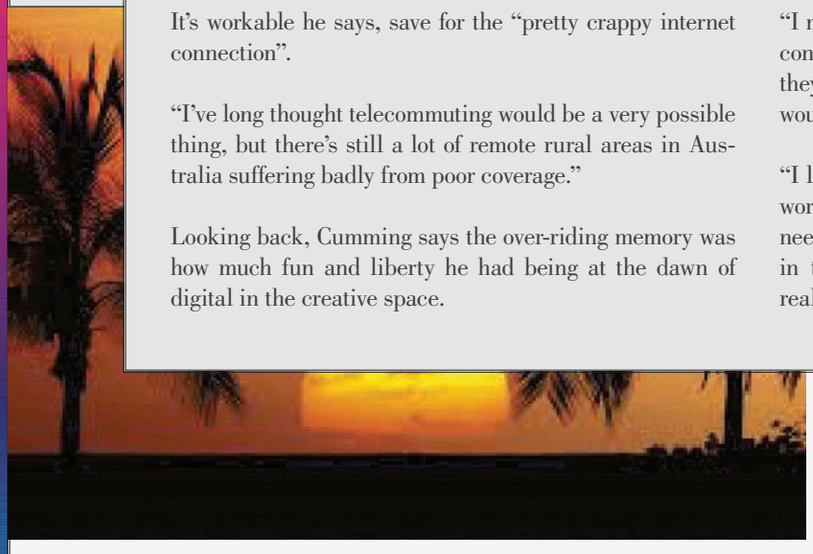
Did he forsee the internet of things playing out like it has?

"It kind of has played out how I imagined because I always thought it would never pan out the way I imagined it would!

"You never quite knew what was going to be successful and what wasn't and where the next innovation was going to come from.

"I met a guy in Cannes way back who had an idea for the connected toaster that people would get for free provided they accept the fact it burns ads into your toast. Everyone would go for it.

"I love that, seeing how people put twists on the tech and work out how to make things monetisable. A lot of brands need to realise that nobody really wants to talk about you in their social networks unless you're doing something really interesting." ▸



THE DAWN OF... THE MAKER

ROGER  CALAF

"That's a very good question," is Roger Calaf's response to the query from *B&T* about what his job title is.

Officially it's creative strategist in M&C Saatchi's innovation and new products hub. "But I don't think anybody really knows," Calaf says with a smile.

It's hard to put the new breed in a box.

Having completed an advanced degree in computer engineering, the Barcelona native worked as a chief web app developer before heading north to study Digital Media at Hyper Island Stockholm for two years.

Calaf thrived in the uniquely self-empowering environment that imbued him with "the tools to teach myself and the ability to stop saying, "I can't do this".

The 'fail fast, learn faster' mantra also had a profound effect on him.

He, along with four of his Hyper graduates, became the first intake of M&C Saatchi's 'Spark' Creative Tech internship program, which has led to the full-time gig at the agency.

Calaf's uniquely blended skillset is typical of the graduates rolling off such bespoke production lines these days.

A hardware specialist, Calaf's main role is to bring the innovation team's new product ideas to life for clients by rapidly making prototypes which he crafts to proof of concept.

He is often in the agency lab, solder iron in hand, creating new tech using platforms like Arduino and Raspberry Pi, 'circuit bread board' testing and turning software into hardware via the CNC and 3D printers.

But he's equally at home writing code or conceiving new products at the ideation stage.

"I like to be there at the start of the process as much as possible and have an input when the first ideas start flying around."

Calaf says what he does is a bit like "Tech Lego" where he uses and makes the hi-tech blocks then pieces them together to build new products.

The aim of the game is to build increasingly advanced prototypes "faster, better, cheaper and smaller".

Five years ago, Calaf had no idea he'd be doing what he's doing now, but in 2020 hopes to be "leading a small team not just coming up with new products, but new and interactive experiences, activations and installations that surprise and delight."

Calaf keeps in touch with the latest tech via his ever-expanding network of Hyper Island grads scattered around the globe and predicts the specialist skills he has will become run-of-the-mill in the not-too-distant future.

So what are the media consumption habits of a young guy at the bleeding-edge?

Surprisingly Calaf owns a TV. Unsurprisingly it's purely for the use of the wider screen "to watch whatever I've downloaded online".

His social diet is the stock-standard Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. He doesn't use Snapchat much but finds the idea of disposable sharing "really interesting".

However, he reckons there's a gap in the social market and has created a new app to fill it. "No social platform has really cracked the geo location thing to turn online connections into real, physical offline ones," he says.

"For example, if you wanted to organise a game of football in a local park, how could you connect directly with locals who might be keen to play?"

So, before coming to Australia, he and some mates got most of the way to creating a new social platform they called 'Canu'.

They built the back-end and fully functioning API, an iOS and web app http://www.canu.se/ but ran out of time and funds to take it any further.

"We're all doing our own thing now but hopefully we'll get together one day to take it to the next level."

Proof that the new breed love to paddle their own CANU. ■