

Beasts, Booze and Bells

News agencies aren't the only ones guilty of fake news. Some advertising companies like to go that extra mile to promote their product of choice. Take the special case of the Sibuxiang Beast, for example.

On September 19th, 1994, the television viewers in the quiet city of Taiyuan in northern China received a shocking message. Their TVs went blank for a moment, then a message scrolled across the screen warning that the Sibuxiang Beast was on the loose and rampaging towards them. It was only days away and heading for the city. What was the Sibuxiang Beast? A famed mythical creature with a deadly bite. Within days it could strike thousands of homes. Citizens were warned to lock their doors and bar their windows.

The poor citizens of Taiyuan! What could they do? Quite rightly, they panicked.

The only problem was that the TV warning wasn't a news broadcast. It was an advert! Advertising was relatively new to Chinese television and normally consisted of a simple image of a product and a voiceover describing its qualities. This advert was a stark departure from the norm. It ended with a message stating that it had been 'plotted by Jinzin Advertising', but not many people had paid attention to that part.

And Sibuxiang Beast? Well, that was a new brand of liquor, due to arrive in shops in the days following the broadcast of the advert. The Chinese authorities were less than pleased with this ingenious advertising campaign and fined the creator 5,000 yuan (about £450) for causing such a commotion. The advertiser thought this was fair dues, however. Sibuxiang became a household word overnight and sales quadrupled within three months of the advert airing.

Another great advertising ploy? In April 1996 (April 1st to be exact), Taco Bell, the American fast food company, took out an ad in the New York Times stating that the company had purchased the historic artefact, the Liberty Bell, and would be renaming it the Taco Liberty Bell. Thousands protested at this apparent selling-off of one of America's historic monuments but, by noon, the entire thing was revealed to be a hoax. It garnered the attention of the nation though. For next two days, sales at Taco Bell shot up by a million dollars. That's one lucrative hoax!

