

## INDUSTRY NEWS

# The Real Work Behind TBWA\Chiat\Day's Fake News Stand

*The team discuss the inspiration behind the award-winning work*

By **Will Swarts**

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**T**he video opens on an unremarkable kiosk on the edge of New York's Bryant Park. The kiosk is stocked with newspapers and magazines, and a stoic, silent proprietor perches behind its cramped counter, ready to do business. As background music plays over a sped-up shot of crowds passing by, the camera zooms in on a rack of publications with headlines that are, um, surprising.

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“Hollywood Elites Are Using Baby Blood to Get High!”

Puzzling? Sure. Far-fetched? You bet. But that’s the point. Everything is made up, and it’s all gibberish — but it’s gibberish drawn from 100 of the most heavily shared “news” stories on social media in 2018.

Viewers are meant to be deeply skeptical of what they see in The Fake News Stand, an award-winning production from TBWA\Chiat\Day made in collaboration with pro bono client *Columbia Journalism Review*, a nonprofit publication tracking the state of U.S. journalism through the startling upheavals of the digital news era. Its mission is especially challenging under the administration of President Donald Trump, who favors the term “fake news” to describe unflattering coverage of him or his policies and who calls the media the “enemy of the American people,” a variation on similar sentiments from totalitarian leaders such as Mao Zedong, Joseph Stalin, and Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels.



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Working with the agency on its second project to counter the postfactual environment of the Trump years, *CJR* and the agency set the project date just ahead of the 2018 midterm elections. Throughout the day, they engaged passers-by who idly leafed through the roster of fake titles: *The Informationalist*, *The Manhattan Daily*, *Hussle*, *New York Paper*, and *The Weekly Journal*. Every one of the slickly plausible covers, vivid visual echoes of *TIME*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *People*, was bogus. But inside, each made-up publication contained a thoughtful, direct insert full of tips on recognizing misinformation, complete with tips on taking a skeptical, fact-based approach to news found on social media.

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that produced the 2-minute spot chronicling the late October 2018 day when the real stand was taken over by fake news, the project was a dam erected against the flood of gibberish, lies, and clickbait often mistaken for reliable information just because it's easily found on the Internet.

“The plan was to bring fake news into the real world,” says Shanti, a TBWA creative who discussed the ad at a reception for one of about two dozen advertising industry awards the spot has garnered. It's also been the subject of 300 news stories across 103 countries and seen by roughly 2 billion people, according to the agency's count.



## New York City 'Fake Newsstand' comba...



“We had to bring these crazy headlines into a tangible form,” says Lumain, the chief designer for the spot. “By creating these tangible publications and these headlines — well, they were all ludicrous — it was meant to make people wonder, ‘If it's in print, does that mean it's real?’”

The one-day exercise in “making people take responsibility for what they read” was an adept, pointed response to a postfactual environment where the term “fake news” has become a weapon in a deeply polarized political environment, says Kyle Pope, editor and publisher of *CJR*.

“The term ‘fake news’ had become largely useless, because it meant so many different things to so many different people. It ranges from [disinformation](#) from Russia to — depending on your politics — the front page of *The New York Times*,” he says.





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The public service dimension cemented the agency-client relationship, with abundant mutual admiration.

**“The way people read the news on Facebook and Twitter means there’s almost no differentiation between what’s garbage and what’s not”**

“We get to work with amazing clients every day,” says Shanti. “And it was no different with *CJR*. They believed in the concept and were very collaborative and ambitious. In whatever we’re working on, we’re always striving to find a way to involve our brands within culture, and with The Fake News Stand, we hope it would strike a chord with people and the media, and it did.”

The partnership came about when the agency reached out to *CJR*. For Pope, who has testified before congressional committees on the threat Trump poses to press freedom, it was a novel, rewarding experience.

“This was a new thing for us,” he says. “They said, ‘We’ve seen what *CJR* is doing,’ and they were super-enthusiastic about it. They were really committed to it. I can’t speak highly enough about them.”

TBWA and *CJR* are currently working on a third collaboration focused on climate change, which Shanti calls a natural outgrowth of the enthusiasm spawned by The Fake News Stand. There were many reasons why the entire team and agency were really excited about the campaign, from the timing — just ahead of the midterms — and the nuanced, inventive layers it required from design and concept to helping spread the dangers that fake news poses, he says.

“We all felt that strongly about getting this message out there,” Shanti concludes. “We’ll see how we did when the next election comes.”

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**Will Swarts is a veteran business journalist who’s written about everything from Martha Stewart’s trial to the arrival of yak burger restaurants in Lhasa, Tibet. He**



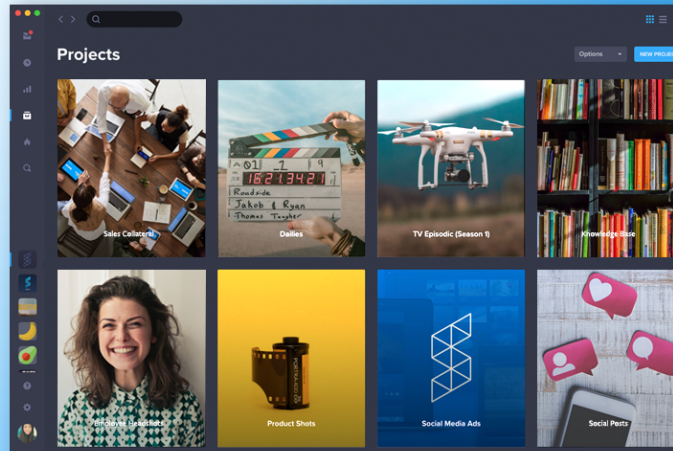
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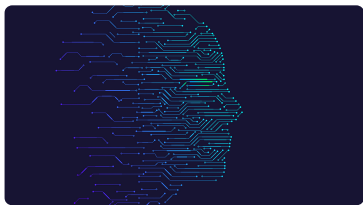
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The image shows a screenshot of the SHIFT Studios web application. The interface is dark-themed and features a sidebar on the left with a search bar and a list of project categories such as 'Data Science', 'SHIFT Video Updates', and 'Customer Success'. The main area displays a grid of media assets, including video thumbnails and image thumbnails, each with a title and file size. A modal window is open over one of the assets, showing details like filename, upload date, and duration. In the bottom right corner of the screenshot, there is a large white text overlay that reads 'Organize, secure, and present your best content.' Below this text is a blue button with the text 'START A TRIAL'. To the right of the text are social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

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