In 1997, the management team at 5-year-old Cartoon Network cooked up an April Fool’s Day stunt. The idea was to pick the most annoying cartoon they could find and run it over and over again—for 12 hours.

They chose a 50-year-old Tex Avery cartoon featuring a character called Screwy Squirrel. The cartoon went on the air at 6 a.m. and, at seven minutes long, repeated about eight times an hour. What the programmers did not anticipate was the major snowstorm that hit the East Coast that day; schoolchildren were home and watching TV, and soon the network switchboard was flooded with phone calls asking what was going on. The network began running a crawl advising viewers that Screwy Squirrel had taken over the network—which he did, until 6 p.m. that night.

The event was included in Entertainment Weekly’s 1999 list of the “100 Greatest Moments in Television.” But for Rob Sorcher, then general manager of the network, the dust-up carried even more meaning. “That moment,” says Mr. Sorcher, “was when I knew that Cartoon Network mattered.”

For two decades, Cartoon Network has mattered. From cutting-edge animation and classic character repackaging to on-air events and pro-social initiatives, Cartoon Network has helped the world look at cartoons in a new, fresh, different way.

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At a Glance

- Available in 26 languages across 27 separate feeds.
- Distributed in 178 countries.
- Available in 367 million homes worldwide.
- Develops and produces much of its original content at Cartoon Network Studios, Burbank, Calif., and Williams Street Studios, Atlanta.
- Offers one of the Internet’s top-rated entertainment websites; in addition to the U.S. site, CartoonNetwork.com has 15 satellite sites around the world.
- Offers more cartoons and characters (2,000-plus) than anyone else, drawing from the world’s largest cartoon library that consists of more than 14,000 Warner Bros., MGM, Hanna-Barbera and Cartoon Network Originals series and shorts.
Branding/On-Air Promos

It was YouTube, Michael Ouweelen says, before there was YouTube.

In the very early days of Cartoon Network, the network’s marketing and promotion team had a large library of classic cartoons and a lot of airtime to fill.

They were trying to build distribution for the network and gain advertiser attention.

“We did not have a lot of media money. So the question was: What could we do with cartoons like ‘Funky Phantom’ that would make viewers want to call their cable operators and request they add Cartoon Network?” says Mr. Ouweelen, senior VP-group creative director for the network’s Creative Group.

The answer was creating a variety of attention-getting on-air promos, short content and interstitials. There were mash-ups that brought classic cartoon characters into contact with each other, mini-videos that used classic characters with modern music and longer on-air promos that took a tongue-in-cheek look at the business of running a cartoon channel.

The content was topical and hilarious. The “Scooby-Doo” gang appeared in a parody of “The Blair Witch Project.” The CN “Crisis Center” offered advice to cartoon characters in precarious situations.

“We approached this like an ad agency,” says Mr. Ouweelen, who, like Chief Content Officer Rob Sorcher, began his career as an ad agency creative. “It was our most powerful weapon. We were creating a psychographic feel for what the network was all about.”

The promo work helped Cartoon Network develop an incisive, funny, skewed way of looking at things and a brand identity that has stuck to this day.

“I don’t know many networks that have the same emphasis on the writing of promos,” says CMO Brenda Piper.

“We have producers, art directors and copywriters—and those folks are joined at the hip with our research people, so everything is grounded in consumer insights.”

For the network’s 20th anniversary, the creative team went back to the vault for a series of mash-ups that hit the air in August. For instance, one promo features the Flintstones’ foot-powered car morphing into the Mystery Machine and eventually into a golf cart driven by “Regular Show” stars Mordecai and Rigby. “It will be pretty great for audiences to see us going back to our roots,” Mr. Ouweelen says.
A third edition of the “Cartoon Network Hall of Game Awards,” an interactive, multiplatform sports awards show, is slated for early 2013. And Cartoon Network is even dipping a toe into live-action movies, working with producer Joel Silver on a live-action film based on its global hit “Ben 10.” “Ben 10” has been a network mainstay for seven years. In addition to its on-air popularity, it has generated $3 billion in consumer product sales—shirts, games, toys—around the world.

“We try to help kids connect with popular properties in different ways,” Mr. Snyder says. “We want to make sure they are interacting with our brand wherever they want to.”

A key connection point is cartoonnetwork.com, the network’s digital presence. Like Turner’s other networks, CN made “an early commitment to the Web that was smart and has proved a real advantage over the years,” Mr. O’Hara says. “We understand how our audiences want to connect with the content we are providing. We have worked hard to stay in tune with delivery systems and platforms, and how kids are interacting with all of those.”

This summer, as part of Turner’s broader TV Everywhere initiative, Cartoon Network announced it would stream its TV content live across multiple platforms, including its website and on mobile applications. In August it debuted CN 2.0, a downloadable application that allows viewers to watch television and play games at the same time on an iPad, iPhone or iPod touch.

“These initiatives allow our audience three options—watching our shows on the TV network, playing our video games or splitting the screen and doing both simultaneously,” Mr. Snyder says. “We knew through our research that kids increasingly are using two screens at a time. With CN 2.0, we just put the peanut butter and the chocolate together.”

Multiple platforms are increasingly important to the network’s advertiser partners as well. “How the network looks and feels on-air, the Cartoon Network brand, is attractive to advertisers—but a lot of that has to do with our success in partnering with marketers in a multiscreen way,” says Mr. O’Hara, pointing out that virtually all the network’s advertisers are buying multiplatform opportunities and that the network sells “every bit of inventory” for special promotions such as “Hall of Game Awards” and back-to-school events.

Mattel and Kraft are signature sponsors for the network’s official 20th birthday celebration on-air and online. They are among a group of ad partners that “have been with us from the very beginning,” says Mr. O’Hara. “We value those partnerships, and the intelligent challenges our partners bring to us. They have challenged us to come up with great work.

“Our network has evolved, but our core mission remains the same,” he says. “And kids are going to remain important to advertisers. While the marketing landscape changes, we are going to be there, to provide platforms that reach kids in a way that is intelligent and that recognizes the continuing changes in kids and their viewing habits.”*

Social Campaigns

Cartoon Network takes its relationship with its kid and teen audience seriously. Through pro-social campaigns, it regularly takes time to discuss issues important to families.

This summer, the network launched its third annual “Move It Movement Tour,” supporting first lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” initiative. Its most recent campaign, “Stop Bullying: Speak Up,” is designed to raise awareness of the nationwide bullying epidemic and inspire young people, parents and teachers to speak up safely and effectively against bullying.

“As a parent and as an executive, I believe it is our responsibility while we are entertaining our audience also to use our platforms to talk about issues that are important to families and kids,” says Stuart Snyder, president-chief operating officer of Turner Broadcasting System’s Animation, Young Adults & Kids Media division.

“We talk to kids on a regular basis, and they told us that this is an important topic they deal with—and an area where they felt they could make a difference if they had the right tools to deal with it. This was a campaign that came from our audience.”

“Stop Bullying: Speak Up” began two years ago with a host of materials, developed with the U.S. government and a special advisory board, to empower kids and adults to speak up when they encounter bullying. Public service announcements, featuring stars from the Cartoon Network series “Dude, What Would Happen,” direct viewers to stopbullyingspeakup.com. There kids can take a pledge to speak up, especially when they are bystanders and witnessing bullying in action.

The website includes a variety of content for kids and information for teachers and parents, plus a 25-minute Cartoon Network documentary, “Speak Up.”

During the past two years, CN partnered with sibling media properties CNN and Time Inc. for editorial features and two Anderson Cooper town hall CNN specials on bullying. More than 1 million Facebook users have liked the Stop Bullying page, which posts content, links and action opportunities plus an app allowing viewers to take the Stop Bullying Pledge.

“As a network that is kid-focused, we are looking for whatever we can do to make that happen,” Mr. Snyder says. “On a personal level as a parent, it gives us tremendous pride to be a part of this.”

* John O’Hara and Brenda Piper

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April 30, 1993—Cartoon Network launches internationally, starting with Latin America, followed by Europe (Sept. 17, 1993) and Asia (Oct. 6, 1994).

April 14, 1994—“Space Ghost: Coast to Coast” premiers as CN’s first original series and TV’s first animated late-night talk show.

Feb. 20, 1995—CN debuts “World Premiere Toons”—the biggest commitment to original animation on television in history—and produces 48 shorts that spawn six full-fledged original series.

April 28, 1996—“Dexter’s Laboratory” premiers as Cartoon Network’s first original half-hour series and becomes the No. 1-rated show on CN at year-end.

July 28, 1998—CN Online launches cartoonnetwork.com, the company’s first worldwide Internet website, logging 4 million visitors in its first week. Today, it regularly ranks as the No. 1 kids domain, according to Nielsen.

Nov. 18, 1998—“The Powerpuff Girls” premiers on CN, quickly becoming the network’s first global franchise phenomenon.

April 1, 2000—Commercial-free spin-off network Boomerang, devoted exclusively to classic cartoons, debuts on basic cable.

May 22, 2000—Cartoon Network Studios opens in Burbank, Calif., as an independent production facility to develop and produce original animated entertainment expressly for the network.

Sept. 2, 2001—CN targets adults 18 to 34 with late-night programming block Adult Swim on Sunday and Thursday. By year-end, the franchise generates 67 percent growth in adults 18 to 34 vs. the previous year.

Aug. 13, 2004—“Foster’s Home for Imaginary Friends” premiers as CN’s 21st original series, scoring the highest-rated original series premiere in CN history among kids 6 to 11.


April 1, 2005—Adult Swim debuts a as a separately rated network sharing channel space with CN and immediately ranks No. 1 in basic cable total day for adults 18 to 34 and men 18 to 34.

June 21, 2005—Cartoon Network Enterprises is established to be directly responsible for all CN consumer products licensing and merchandising.

Jan. 14, 2006—“Ben 10” premiers as Cartoon Network’s first Saturday morning original series, becoming the network’s second hugely successful global franchise.

Sept. 14, 2007—“Out of Jimmy’s Head” premiers as CN’s first live-action/animation hybrid series, based on its popular original movie “Re-Animated.”

Nov. 21, 2007—Cartoon Network’s first original live-action movie special, “Ben 10: Race Against Time,” sets all-new records as the most-watched telecast to date in Cartoon Network history; 3,987,000 viewers age 2 and older.

Feb. 12, 2008—Turner Broadcasting lands broadcast rights to “Star Wars: The Clone Wars,” the highly sought CG-animated series from creator George Lucas. The series premiers in October sets new performance records as the most-watched in CN history.

April 18, 2008—“Ben 10: Alien Force” begins the next chapter in the continuing “Ben 10” saga. The presentation of its 31st original animated series becomes the highest-rated original series premiere in CN history.

June 17-20, 2009—CN unveils new live-action alternative series as part of its prime-time programming. The new content strategy leads to successful live-action series “Destroy Build Destroy,” “Dude, What Would Happen” and “Hole in the Wall.”

Sept. 13, 2009—Original live-action/GC-animated movie “Scooby-Doo! The Mystery Begins” sets all-new records as the most-watched telecast in CN history. The premiere scores as the network’s No. 1 telecast ever among kids 2 to 11, 6 to 11 and 9 to 14. The movie also ranks as basic cable’s No. 1 program in third quarter 2009 among boys 2 to 11 and 6 to 11.

Jan. 1, 2011—“Adventure Time,” CN’s No. 1 original series across 2010, also closed the year at No. 1 in its time period across all television—broadcast and cable—among targeted kids and boys demos ages 2 to 11, 6 to 11 and 9 to 14.

Feb. 25, 2011—“Cartoon Network Hall of Game Awards” attracts 5.6 million viewers in three weekend plays. Featured appearances include first lady Michelle Obama, Kobe Bryant (Los Angeles Lakers), Drew Brees (New Orleans Saints), Terrell Owens (Cincinnati Bengals) and Venus Williams (WTA). Thirty-seven million online votes are logged for seven key awards.

March 10, 2011—CN President Stuart Snyder is invited to the first Bullying Prevention Summit at the White House, hosted by President Barack Obama, in recognition of “Stop Bullying: Speak Up.”

Nov. 23, 2011—“Level Up,” CN’s live-action/GC-animated original movie, premiers as the No. 1 telecast of the day on all TV among kids 6 to 11, 9 to 14, 12 to 17 and all boy demos. Series debuts on Jan. 24, 2012.


Aug. 9, 2012—CN announces first-of-its-kind app for iOS, CN 2.0, which allows kids to watch TV and play games simultaneously on one screen, available on iPhone, iPod touch and iPad. Follows June 15 launch of CN digital live streaming, part of Turner Broadcasting’s TV Everywhere strategy.