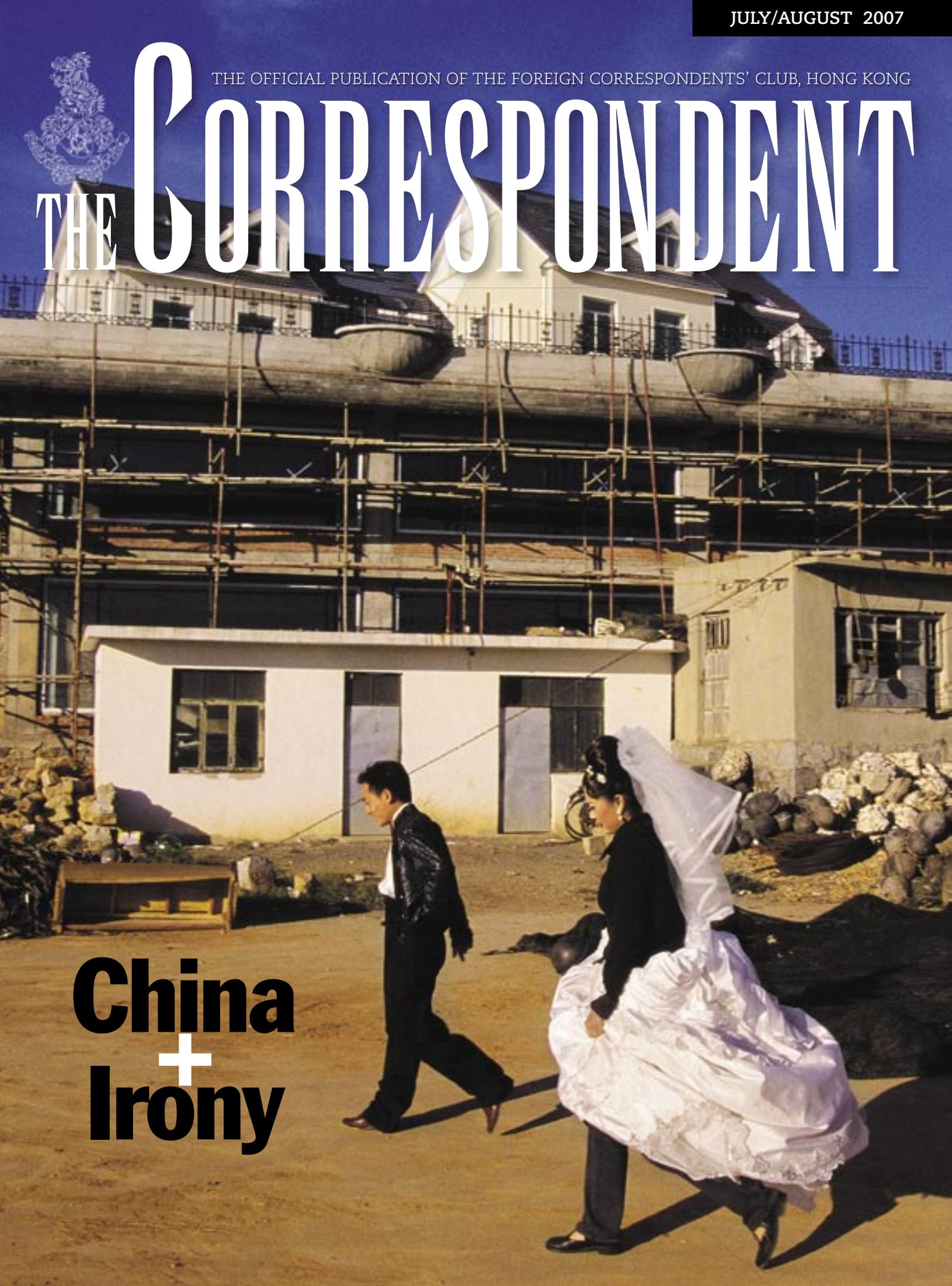


JULY/AUGUST 2007

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB, HONG KONG



# THE CORRESPONDENT



**China  
+  
Irony**

# The revolution

**WILL NOT BE TELEVISED**

... but will be available on your computer



If the words “internet video” bring to mind grainy images of pop idol William Hung or Hong Kong’s infamous bus uncle, it may be time to refresh your browser, writes **Chris Dillon**.

In just two years, internet video has grown from a novelty into a powerful communication tool, one that businesses, educators and politicians are using to reach a global audience. And like many new technologies, it's evolving in some unexpected directions.

### A little history

For many people, online video means YouTube. Founded in February 2005 by three former PayPal employees, YouTube is an internet service that lets you upload, watch, share and rate video clips. The service debuted in May 2005, rapidly became one of

Tube capitalises on new technologies that make it easy to record video on inexpensive digital camcorders and mobile phones, and then edit and manipulate the footage on a personal computer. By encoding the video files with standard software such as Adobe's Flash and delivering them through a standard Web browser such as Firefox or Internet Explorer, online video sites avoid problems with international TV standards and make their wares free to anyone with a broadband connection.

Online video services also benefit from the growing popularity of TiVo and other digital video recorders that allow you to record television programmes – a controversial documentary, a humorous commercial or a late-night comedy routine – and upload them for the world to see. These services are part of a larger trend toward participatory media, where people consume and create content. Blogs, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, and social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, are all part of the same movement.

### That's entertainment

By removing technological and geographical barriers, online video sites have become a platform for sharing a broad range of amateur and professionally produced content. Amateurs value these sites' ability to reach a large audience at no cost. And while many independent projects are forgettable, some, like What Barry Says or Fallen Art, are surprisingly good.

Media companies, on the other hand, have a love/hate relationship with the sites, which have a proven ability to promote and create "buzz" for new films, TV programmes and

music. The video for Avril Lavigne's single Girlfriend was viewed nearly 40 million times in the three months after it was released on YouTube.

Media companies are less sanguine about online video sites' effect on box office receipts and DVD sales, and some industry executives describe the sites as parasites that have built a business on stolen content. In March 2007, Viacom launched a US\$1 billion lawsuit against YouTube, which Viacom accused of illegally showing clips of its TV programmes. Despite the threat of legal action, directory services like [www.youtvpc.com](http://www.youtvpc.com) make it easy to find movies and TV series on overseas internet hosts. And portals such as [www.chime.tv](http://www.chime.tv) aggregate a variety of news and entertainment in a convenient, easy to navigate package.

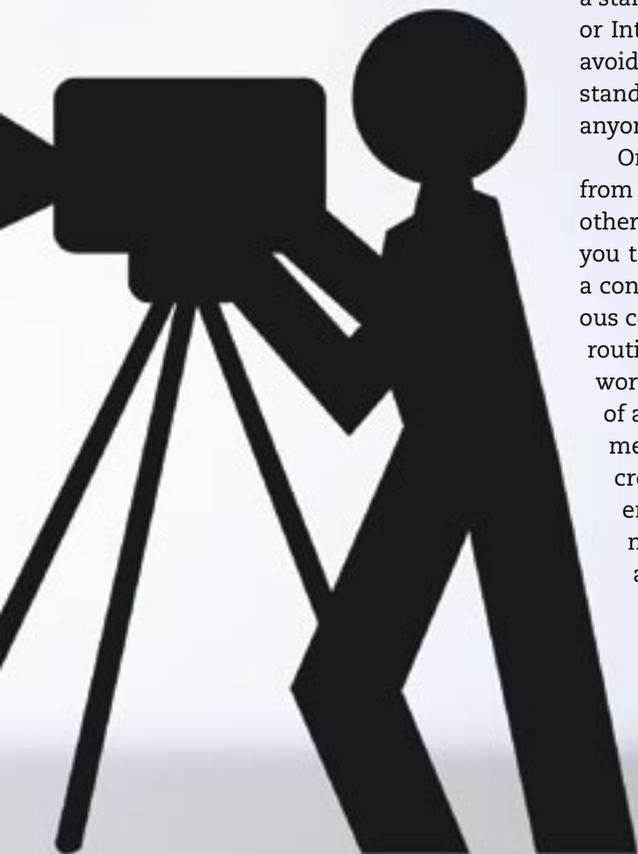
### Brain food

While the entertainment industry and online video sites search for a satisfactory revenue-sharing formula, a surprising amount of educational content is appearing online. How-to projects, music lessons and cooking tips are widely available and, if you dig a little deeper, you can learn how to cross-dress, pick locks or create inexpensive zombie effects for your next low-budget feature film.

A growing number of educational organisations are making documentaries, lectures and other materials available online. Search Google Video or visit the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's site or the Internet Archive and you can view university-level lectures on topics ranging from cancer to geothermal energy. Other sources include the US-based Public Broadcasting Service and the BBC. For autodidacts, home-schoolers or anyone simply looking for something interesting to watch, online video sites can be a gold mine.

### Macaca moments

The political power of online video became apparent in August 2006, when the re-election campaign of US Republican Senator George Allen



the most popular sites on the Web, and was acquired by Google in 2006 for US\$1.65 billion in stock. In mid-2007, Alexa.com ranked YouTube as the world's fourth most popular site (behind Yahoo, Microsoft Network and Google), with over 10 per cent of internet users visiting the site in the previous 24 hours.

Along with Revver.com, Metacafe.com and dozens of similar sites, You-



self-destructed after Allen used the word *macaca* to refer to an Indian American, S.R. Sidharth, who was videotaping Allen's speech for an opposing politician's campaign. Largely unknown before Allen's speech, the word *macaca* was soon identified as a Francophone slur used to describe people from North Africa. A minute-long segment of the speech appeared on YouTube, quickly became popular, and was eventually credited with costing Allen the election.

Politicians are using online video to reach younger audiences who are abandoning television. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair released a video message to congratulate Nicolas Sarkozy after his victory in the French presidential elections in May 2007. And in the United States, CNN has teamed up with YouTube to cover the 2008 presidential debates and serve as a forum where viewers can record and upload their questions for candidates.

One of the more controversial uses for the new technology can be found on the Middle East Media Research Institute site, which takes Arabic-, Farsi- and Turkish-language television broadcasts from the Middle East and subtitles them in English. Memri has detractors, who accuse it of cherry-picking footage that portrays Middle Eastern countries and their politicians and religious leaders in a negative light. That said, the clips make for interesting, if uncomfortable, viewing.

Unflattering videos have caused several countries to restrict access to YouTube. In April 2007, Thailand

banned YouTube after a video on the site was deemed to have insulted King Bhumibol Adulyadej. A month earlier, Turkey instituted similar restrictions after a court ruled that a clip on YouTube insulted Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. Brazil and Iran have also imposed bans on YouTube.

#### Corporate connections

Like the entertainment industry, businesses have discovered that online video poses a threat and an opportunity. A corporate screw-up that appears online can quickly take on a life of its own, and local or regional issues often escalate into national or international ones. And because they are archived, searchable and easily accessible, embarrassing TV reports – like scenes of rats scurrying around inside a New York City fast food restaurant – have a longer lifespan than ever before.

On a more positive note, companies like Gillette and Wendy's are signing sponsorship deals with YouTube in an effort to reach younger, tech-savvy viewers. Businesses also use online video as a crisis management tool. In February 2007, for example, JetBlue Airways Chief Executive Jeff Neeleman appeared in a video to apologise and explain changes to the company's policies after 10 passenger-laden aircraft were stranded in a New York City snowstorm. It's difficult to gauge how effective the video was, but it did reach an audience of more than 280,000 people.

In a crisis, online videos offer several advantages. They are inexpensive and easy to produce: all you need is a digital camcorder, a computer, senior management, a script and a location. Second, they let companies react quickly and disseminate a message within hours of a crisis. They also allow management to speak directly to consumers, without editors and other gatekeepers filtering the message. Finally, videos help companies to display a human face in the midst of a crisis.

Business applications continue to grow. Companies like Veodia offer higher picture quality and the ability to track, store and manage broadcasts, so customers can use videos for training and internal communications. Others, like Zentation, let you upload a video of your speech together with your PowerPoint slides, so viewers can watch the two side by side. And there are many other projects under development that are designed to take advantage of faster broadband connections and improved mobile internet services.

Will internet video replace television and movies? Not tomorrow. But YouTube and its imitators are an important step toward the convergence of computers, the internet and the news and entertainment industries. And as the technology improves, it won't be long until you can watch what you want, wherever and whenever you want it.

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Here are links to the clips and some of the organizations mentioned in the story.

**William Hung:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwMjpt62Ja4>

**Bus uncle:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsYRQkmVifg>

**What Barry Says:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmP8Bgof6KE>

**Fallen Art:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yQhXBeabUE>

**Avril Lavigne's *Girlfriend*:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQ25-glGRzI>

[www.youtvpc.com](http://www.youtvpc.com)

[www.chime.tv](http://www.chime.tv)

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology:** [http://mitworld.mit.edu/video\\_index.php](http://mitworld.mit.edu/video_index.php)

**The Internet Archive:** <http://www.archive.org/>

**Public Broadcasting Service:** <http://www.pbs.org/>

**British Broadcasting Corporation:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

**Senator George Allen's macaca moment:**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r90z0PMnKwI>

**Middle East Media Research Institute:** <http://www.memritv.org/>

**Rats scurrying around a New York City restaurant:**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su0U37w2twS>

**JetBlue Airways Chief Executive Jeff Neeleman's apology:**  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-r\\_Plg7EAUw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-r_Plg7EAUw)

**Veodia:** <http://www.veodia.com/>

**Zentation:** <http://zentation.com/>