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First these Singaporeans designed jackets for chickens, then they made jackets that can massage you

The AiraWear project was founded on the back of literal pain points

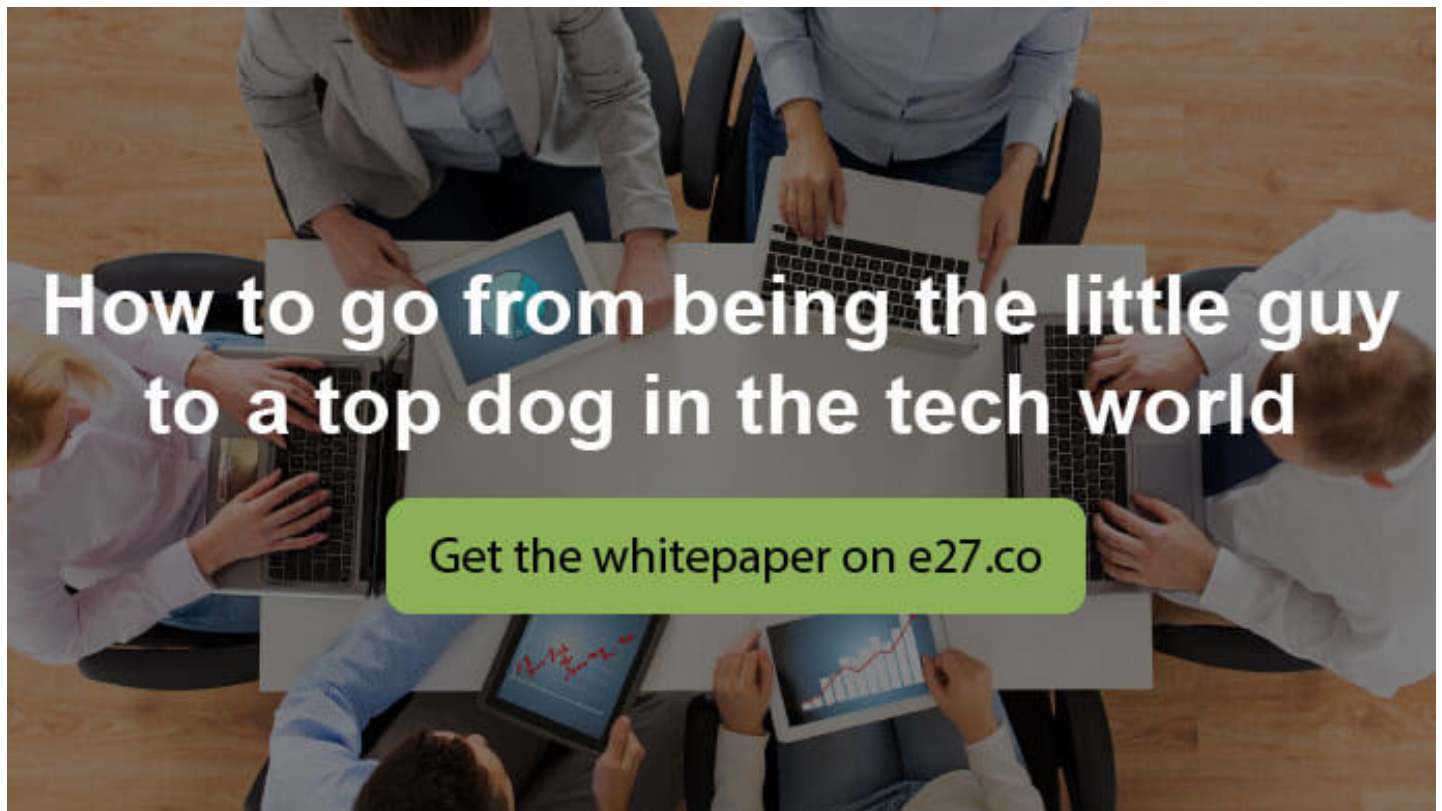
By Yon Heong Tung (<https://e27.co/yon-heong-tung>)

11 Aug, 2016



When Singapore-based wearable tech startup TWare (<http://mytware.com/>) first hatched in 2011, it had one objective — to fit chickens with jackets.

Despite the adorable visual imagery it conjures up, the project — a joint collaboration between the Connective Ubiquitous Technology for Embodiments (Keio-NUS CUTE) center and TWare — was rooted in a grim practical reality: chickens are bred for human consumption. The team wanted to develop a more merciful way to give chickens the chop.



(<https://e27.co/top-dog-in-the-tech-world>)

The idea for the chicken jacket was based off findings from animal researcher Dr. Temple Grandin, who found that putting cattle in squeeze boxes or machines help the cattle to feel calm before they are slaughtered, thus making the process more humane.

Using the same theory, the team designed the chicken jacket to accomplish the same goal.

“The chicken jacket is basically a remote hugging system, allowing a chicken to put on a jacket, while its owner remotely controls the hugging process via a model chicken,” says Ong Si Quan, a growth hacker at TWare in an interview with **e27**. The hugging system uses a mechanism known as ‘deep touch pressure’.



The team even made a model of a chicken, though this fella escaped the gallows

The next project led by TWare's then co-founder and CEO James Teh was a whole lot less morbid. The remote hugging system was to be integrated into jackets (worn by humans) so couples separated by long distances can give each other hugs remotely. But, it faced setbacks, and out of it, another idea was spawned — one with a socially conscious bent.

“The idea was limited by the state of technology at that time. It was also during this period that Teh and the rest of the co-founders, Lai Sep Riang (also CTO) and Lin Wei Liang (now CEO), met an occupational therapist who told them that hugs are beneficial to children with autism,” says Ong.

Autistic people's sensory functions behave a little different from other folks; this results in them being hyper sensitive to their surroundings.

You see, besides using the squeeze machine to calm cattle, Dr. Grandin, who happens to be diagnosed with autism too, found it to be soothing when she tried it on herself.

This led to the development of a squeeze machine for autistic people (<http://www.squeasewear.com/en/testimonials/temple-grandin/>).

There are, however, a couple of limitations of this machine. It is expensive and too heavy to lug around (Note: Grandin has since developed lightweight vests).

Also Read: Singtel's new initiative will see up to 7 social startups receive up to US\$14.8K each (<https://e27.co/singtels-new-initiative-will-see-up-to-7-social-startups-receive-up-to-us14-8k-each-20160629/>)

TWare worked to solve this problem by developing the TJacket — a similar concept but with a focus on being highly portable.

While it was an effective product, the team was restless; they wanted to do more, think beyond niche markets and leverage on their hugging technology to develop a product for the masses.

“The founders wanted the touch technology to not just benefit people with autism, but the whole world. They wanted to reinvent the idea of comfort for everyone. Yet, creating a ‘hug’ jacket for everybody to hug themselves made no sense at that current point. Tware wanted to do more,” says Ong.

The next step

The TWare team went back to the drawing board to think about who else can benefit from this technology. But it didn't take long for them to arrive at an answer. It was quite apparent, and as a matter of fact, literally right in front of their eyes.

The company's CFO Dinos Demetriades is diagnosed with scoliosis, an impairment in the alignment of the spine; Tan Jun Yuan, the Product and Product Head, often suffers from back pain from sitting too long at his desk.

TWare thus set to task on its new project, a massage jacket dubbed AiraWear (<http://airawear.com/>),



TWare's office at Block 71

“Sore muscles, back pain, stiff shoulders are common problems affecting the majority of the working world, who spend countless hours hunching over their desks. I am referring to people like journalists, programmers, designers, and so on. Not only that, long flights and commutes contribute to even more backaches and postural problems. These are challenges we often ignore, but can lead to severe long-term consequences,” says Ong.

“We built AiraWear so that everyone has the opportunity to experience an affordable massage at any time without worrying about having to schedule time off to see a massage therapist, or fork out big bucks to purchase a massage chair,” he says.

Also Read: Lifesaving lessons from Reblood CEO: How social businesses balance between impact and sustainability (<https://e27.co/lifesaving-lessons-reblood-ceo-social-businesses-balance-impact-sustainability-20160622/>)

Despite having previously developed similar incarnations of the product, the team still faced obstacles making AiraWear. Its strength and intensity were significant hurdles.

“Initially, when we brought the jacket to CES 2016 in Las Vegas to gather feedback, we faced brutally honest comments that told us the strength wasn’t strong enough...through countless repeated experiments and development, multiple prototypes, we are glad to say that the

strength of the modules are now strong enough, equivalent to the strength your masseuse can press on you. Of course, the strength is completely adjustable via the app,” says Ong.

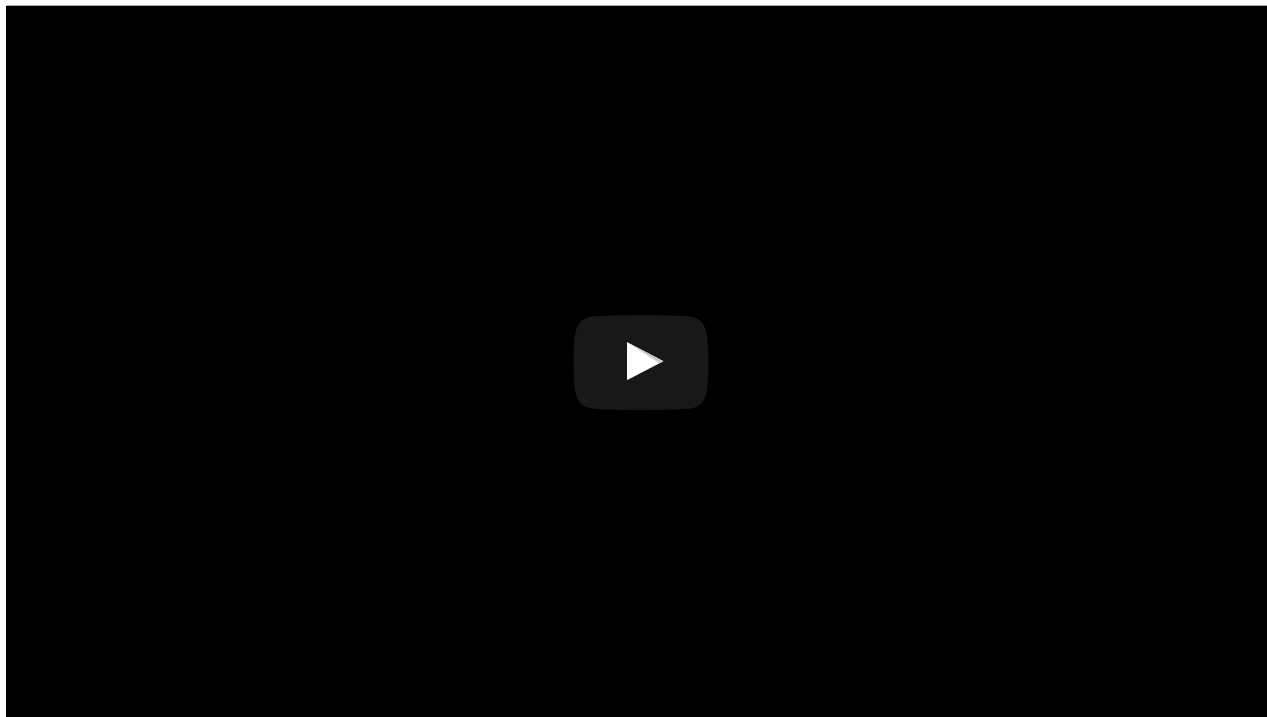


The guts of an IoT startup

Besides controlling the intensity and strength of the massages, the app also displays four different massage routines.

The jacket weighs about same as a conventional winter jacket at 1.2 kilograms. It is made of high-tech composite materials such as TPU-coated Nylon fabric — which TWare claims is hardy enough to knead your muscles yet flexible to move around comfortably at the same time. A single full charge (which takes 2 hours) will give the user 3 hours of continuous usage. AiraWear currently retails at US\$199.

Here's a video of how it works:



Funding and the future

TWare has previously received funding from the angel investors at Singapore Center for Social Enterprise (raiSE), SPRING SEEDS as well as corporate funds.

It also turned to crowdfunding for AiraWear. It raised US\$150,035 on Kickstarter (<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/781514562/airawear-worlds-first-massage-hoodie/description>) and US\$163,345 on Indiegogo (<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/airawear-world-s-first-massage-hoodie#/>) to date. Ong says TWare is looking to raise a Series A round in the near future.

Several upgrades to AiraWear are in the pipeline.

Some of these include implementation of VR, more massage preset routines on the app, massage variations and other fitness tracking (heartrate and steps tracking, etcetera).

Also Read: This startup wants to support Indonesian youths' social projects (<https://e27.co/startup-wants-support-indonesian-youths-social-projects-20160108/>)


Expounding on the VR integration, Ong says: "We intend to pair virtual reality cardboard sets with our massage jacket to create a relaxing environment. This means that users can be immersed in scenarios like a beach, a spa, in Bali, near rivers and mountains and so on for a full

massage experience, even though they are totally just relaxing in the office or at home! Of course, we aren't ruling out the possibility of using even more advanced VR headsets like Oculus Rift and etcetera in the further future."

For many who foresee a lifetime spent in the cold embrace of swirly office chairs, the AiraWear may provide some relief.

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Image Credit: AiraWear



Tware (<https://e27.co/startup/tware>) *Singapore*

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The six companies raising the bar for in-content advertising

Banner ads may not be dying any time soon, but sponsored content is becoming an ever more important marketing strategy

By Eli Schwartz (<https://e27.co/eli.schwartz>)

11 Aug, 2016



According to a recent survey by eMarketer, more than 25 per cent of Internet users (<http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Ad-Blocking-Jump-by-Double-Digits-This-Year/1014111>) use an adblocker, and ad blocking is expected to cost publishers US\$35 billion (<http://digiday.com/publishers/uh-oh-ad-blocking-forecast-cost-35-billion-2020/>) by 2020.

To anyone (or basically every Internet user) who has ever had their browser crash from a rogue banner ad or seen a mobile advertisement so big they could not close it, it is no surprise that the demand for ad blocking tools is so attractive.

While publishers are frantically trying to reinvent their revenue models that have been so heavily powered by impression or click-based advertising, advertisers are also scrambling to find a new way to reach their target audiences.

A popular solution that seems to satisfy all stakeholders (publishers, advertisers and consumers) is sponsored content. Everything, from boring text to viral content, falls under the umbrella of sponsored content.

Here are six examples of companies that are consistently raising the bar on what can be considered the ideal form of sponsored content.

Netflix

Netflix isn't just the most popular streaming service; they are also proving to be an ad innovator. Netflix partnered with *The Wall Street Journal* to launch 'Narcos' via a sponsored content article (<http://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainenomics>) fit for the outlet's readership.

The item, which focused on the Medellín Cartel's origins, was engaging, aesthetically pleasing and creative, all while smartly presenting Netflix as an innovative content creator.

Netflix took a similar approach when promoting the second season of its Emmy-award winning original show 'Orange is the New Black'. According to Chartbeat, Netflix's sponsored article promoting the show's second season, entitled 'Women Inmates' (<http://paidpost.nytimes.com/netflix/women-inmates-separate-but-not-equal.html>), was among the top-1,000 most-trafficked articles on NYTimes.com in 2014.

The item paired interactive imagery and video with text and slideshows.

Also Read: LeEco reveals Netflix partnership (<https://e27.co/leeco-reveals-netflix-partnership-20160803/>)

In Asia, where they face an uphill battle to combat local competitors and cultural challenges, they are experimenting with localized videos (<http://www.demystifyasia.com/netflix-singlish/>) that use actors from Netflix-exclusive shows.

All three of these examples represent an approach to achieving sponsored content that users actually want to engage with and bridges the chasm between advertising and entertainment.

Buzzfeed

No discussion on sponsored content is ever complete without mentioning BuzzFeed. BuzzFeed was founded as a ‘pre-viral aggregator (<http://www.fastcodesign.com/1672323/can-buzzfeed-reinvent-ads-with-the-perfect-viral-formula>)’ of stories gathered by an algorithm which aimed to predict potential popularity of a story.

After having enormous success at building what is likely the world’s largest trove of viral content, BuzzFeed now has a built-in audience to begin monetizing through paid content.

In addition, they utilize their research on virality to forecast what kind of content has viral potential and then create promotional pieces that fit this mold for their paid content customers.

The advertising content that BuzzFeed creates is so captivating that it can be hard to even dig out the paid content when sifting through the latest stories on the website. Some great examples are ‘12 Backpacking Hacks That Are Vital For Business Trips (<https://www.buzzfeed.com/hiex/backpacking-hacks-that-are-vital-for-business-trips>)’ sponsored by Holiday Inn and a promotion for GE’s PI day celebration (<https://www.buzzfeed.com/generalelectric/18-ridiculously-geeky-pi-jokes>).

Playbuzz

Playbuzz (<https://publishers.playbuzz.com/>) takes BuzzFeed’s approach a few steps further with their ‘sponsored content at scale’ approach.

Playbuzz has a suite of interactive content formats (<http://playbuzz.com/create>) that media publishers and brands use to elevate their storytelling capabilities. Advertisers can create a sponsored content items by populating a format, such as a quiz or list, with content.

Playbuzz then distributes it to thousands of publishers that it has pre-existing relationships with.

The vast network of diverse publishers solves the issue about where to publish sponsored content that readers might actually discover. The ability to create varied and engaging content increases the likelihood that readers will engage and even share the sponsored advertising.

The Washington Post

The Washington Post has given its native ads an editorial treatment (<http://www.adweek.com/news/press/washington-posts-native-ads-get-editorial-treatment-156048>). By focusing on the long-form template, color and font used in its newsroom features, *The Washington Post's* clearly labeled sponsored content items offer a non-intrusive environment to readers.

And the outlet didn't stop there – it recently partnered with Outbrain (<http://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/266869/outbrain-partners-with-washington-post-for-spons.html>) to provide personalized content recommendations to readers, including those for sponsored content.

As one of the oldest newspapers in the US, they are not taking a hands-off approach to advertising that was the modus operandi during the heydays of the banner ad. Rather, they are taking a proactive approach of working with advertisers to create content that fits the tastes of the average *The Washington Post* reader.

Outbrain

Speaking of Outbrain (<http://www.outbrain.com/>), the content-discovery platform is focusing on providing premium publishers with tailored content recommendations to different audiences for both editorial and sponsored content.

This ensures that the content suggestions you get differ from the ones your grandmother sees.

Similar to its industry competitors, Revcontent (<https://www.revcontent.com/>) and Taboola (<https://www.taboola.com/>), Outbrain also preaches a 'story sequencing' approach that enables brands to take consumers through an entire story that responds to their previous behavior, such as a product purchase or brand engagement.

Compared to an intrusive, dull ad that urges readers to click, this option is a lot more attractive.

Red Bull

While many sports drinks have long-running deals that place their brand at the center of sporting events — Mountain Dew's BMX bike tournaments as an example — energy drink Red Bull takes it to the next level.

In addition to standard product placements and celebrity endorsements, Red Bull creates events that have captivated the world with their audacity.

These include wind surfing in storms, extreme relay races and Felix Baumgartner's record setting parachute jump from the stratosphere.

Red Bull doesn't stop at just creating content to promote their products, they also produce their journalistic content under their Red Bull Media House arm which they sell to Reuters (<http://globenewswire.com/news-release/2016/03/31/824387/10161432/en/Reuters-Enriches-Offering-to-Media-Express-Users-by-Adding-Red-Bull-Media-House-Content.html>).

Given its massive investments in content, many debate (<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2016/05/red-bull-content-marketing/>) whether Red Bull is a beverage or marketing company.

Also Read: Biggest threat to OTT industry is not Netflix, but another video giant (<https://e27.co/how-ott-is-impacting-traditional-television-20160729/>)

With over US\$32 billion (<http://www.emarketer.com/Article/US-Digital-Display-Ad-Spending-Surpass-Search-Ad-Spending-2016/1013442>) predicted to be spent on display advertising this year, it is unlikely that we will see the death of the banner ad anytime soon.

Nonetheless, if more advertisers and publishers follow the lead set by these six companies, native advertising spend, which this year is estimated to reach just US\$8 billion (<http://www.businessinsider.sg/spending-on-native-ads-will-soar-as-publishers-and-advertisers-take-notice-2014-11/?r=US&IR=T#csaWBjDlqgdrhlq.97>), will actualize its potential and displace the banner ads readers no longer want to see and eventually figure out how to block.

Photo (<https://pixabay.com/en/parachuting-red-bull-chute-skydive-872483/>) courtesy of Pixabay (<https://pixabay.com/>).

Outbrain (<https://e27.co/startup/outbrain>) *Israel*

Outbrain is a content discovery platform providing publishers a service for recommended links to increase traffic and generate revenue.

Funding: **35M Series E**

Investors: Index Ventures (<https://e27.co/startup/index-ventures>) Lightspeed Venture Partners (<https://e27.co/startup/lightspeed-venture-partners>) Carmel Ventures

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