On April 7, 2004, an assortment of unsuspecting people received a link to a surprising, one might even say troubling, web site. The SubservientChicken.com home page was Googlesque in its simplicity, consisting of what appeared to be a web cam window against a black background. Visitors were met with the sight of a humanoid figure dressed in a chicken suit accessorized with a garter belt. A text box invited viewers to “Get Chicken the Way You Like it” and to enter a command. When visitors typed in whatever impromptu directive came into their heads—“Sit down,” “Skip” or “Do the moonwalk”—the seemingly impossible happened. The chicken sat down, or skipped or moonwalked. The whole thing, from set decor to the grainy look of the video to the name of the site smacked of DIY web porn, by design. The first few people who were emailed or IM’d the link were relatively sophisticated media consumers. But this was a site the likes of which even they had never seen. So, they did what the site compelled them to do—they spent, on average, nearly six minutes playing with the magic chicken, and then they passed it along to everyone they knew.

The site was created by agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky and digital company The Barbarian Group, as a companion to a series of similarly themed TV spots.

The spots, it’s worth noting, were excellent. Created by CP+B copywriter Bob Cianfrone and art director Mark Taylor, and directed by Rocky Morton, they were unprecedented in the annals of fast-food

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advertising for their shockingly dark and creepy tone. And they were promptly forgotten. The site, meanwhile, became a cultural phenomenon. Within 24 hours, SubservientChicken.com had garnered a million views; after a week, more than 20 million people had bent the chicken to their will. The site was covered endlessly in mainstream media outlets, generating an estimated 7 million broadcast impressions. By the following year, the site had drawn over 350 million views.1

Like BMW Films before it, Subservient Chicken embodied, in one feathery, complaisant package, another disruptive shift in how brand ideas were being created, consumed and distributed. And it helped change the game and the goals of copywriting.

A disclaimer seems appropriate here. As you can discern from the number at the top of the chapter, this is a separate chapter dealing specifically with the digital space. This chapter shouldn’t exist, really. A separate chapter on digital runs counter to the philosophy espoused by leading creatives and elsewhere in this book—that the web isn’t just another channel through which ads can be distributed, that writers should think first about ideas, not media-specific ads, that digital permeates everything a brand and, by extension, a writer, does.

But the changes wrought by the internet, the digital revolution, if you will, are fundamental to the role of the writer now, and, if we’re being realistic, the ad landscape hasn’t yet adjusted to a truly integrated model.

The rise of digital drove home the point that as ad creatives, your job isn’t to create something that consumers would readily identify as “An Ad.” Your job is to create engaging, entertaining or useful content or experiences on behalf of a brand. And so, we step back briefly to look at writers in the digital world and to hear from the creatives behind some of the most important “digital” work.

**INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM MAGIC**

If BMW Films was a landmark in the evolution of brand storytelling and branded content, Subservient Chicken similarly marked a watershed in the new era of interactive creativity. A weird watershed. But a watershed.