

MR NG YU:

Do I need to control the power point? This shows that we haven't really rehearsed.

It's now 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I believe you should have awakened from your afternoon nap, all right? Just now Dr Ng introduced me. He asked me to talk about popular culture. He said that I've got only 20 minutes. If I am to talk about making stars in 20 minutes, if I can really make a star in 20 minutes, I don't need to spend over decades of my career making stars.

Many people thought that EEG is like E-G-G, egg, but it's not, it should be EEG, okay? So I'm sure you are familiar with these artists. They are making money for us.

Today I'm here to talk about making stars. How do we make stars? How can we become a star?

I've been in this industry for 30-odd years. Every day, many people ask me the same question. Some parents take their children and introduce their children to me. They will say, "My son is very smart." They will ask me, "Is my son handsome? Is my girl pretty?" "Yes." "Can he sing well?" "Yes". They will then ask me can I make their children stars? And then I will ask them do they have money and then the parents will say, "Well, my son is very talented. Why do I need to have money?" And then I will say, "You should move to the northwest" and he will ask, "Is this because of feng shui?" No, because artists have to sign a contract for 15 years with us and every month they will only get a few thousand dollars. If they cannot become popular stars within 15 years, then I guess it would be very difficult for them to survive and make a living, okay? So all these, some of them have already move to the northwest. Maybe on the surface you think they are really bright stars, but then most of them actually are not that well off.

It is not very straightforward or simple to be a star. But it's even more difficult to really make stars. And that's our task.

It seems easy. Many people may think that, "Well, it's just coincidental that I took part in a contest, but then I don't know how I succeeded and I don't know how I've won." But then they don't know how much effort and time and money we have to invest in making stars.

This term, "making stars", was coined a decade ago and this term was coined in the

mainland. In the past, we did not use this term, "making stars", we just said that we would like to try to package people to become famous.

So in other words, we just want to turn people into stars. So in Cantonese, this word (Chinese spoken) means to carry a person or hold a person up. So we usually say it is not essential or it is not a must that we will be able to make a star.

When someone says, "I will surely get the job done", I think this kind of remark is rather naive because I think this is just not a rule. Making stars includes production, creation and shaping. So this is a whole process.

So first of all we have to identify the right talents and this is not an easy task. You have to really find the right talents. Of course, a lot of talents have been identified, but whether they are right or not depends very much on our judgment. And then we need to package those talents. We need to produce good songs, we need to find good movie scripts for them, so this process is really difficult. And finally we have to design their image. We have to shape them. We have to turn an ordinary person into a bright star, who is well received by the public.

So this process actually includes a lot of blood and tears. So I think this term, "making stars" really represents a really very deep concept.

I only have 15 minutes or so. Now I have to talk about how we make stars. If you take a look at this, MP3, this has really made our life very, very difficult. Nobody is buying CDs any more, they just use their MP3 to download songs illegally. Now our CDs, our records are not bought by many.

What's the relevance between MP3 and making stars? I think this is just a gimmick, this is just like a pronoun. If I use this term, MP3, to explain the process of making star, I think it would be rather interesting.

"M" stands for "made to measure". In other words, we want to tailor-make the stars. Now we are all human beings. When artists get rid of their make-up, they just look like ordinary people, but when they are on the stage, well, I don't know whether you know (Chinese name). When he was on the stage, when he was in costume, when he'd just shouted loudly on the stage, everybody was attracted to him. Everybody would listen to his song. Everybody would look at his actions. So how do we package these artists? We have to tailor-make the packaging.

When we meet with a new artist sometimes I would just stop a new singer three seconds after he's started his song, so I would just ring the bell, okay. And sometimes people would just stare at me because I rang the bell. In fact, in just a few minutes time, how can I tell whether or not a singer is good? Every year

I meet with a lot of Miss Hong Kong contestants. I will look at them in different dresses and suits and I have to evaluate their manners. Of course, all these depend on our experience. It's very difficult to explain.

The point is, whether you are destined to become stars, well, after meeting a person for three minutes, I will say "yes" or "no", so I think this is all about fate.

In our industry, the most important thing is your fate.

And the last that matters is your diligence, especially in studying. Of course I'm not discouraging you to study.

Anyway, I need to package stars so that they will not look like ordinary people. When we want to identify new talents, okay, let me now advertise. On 15th September, EEG is going to organise a new singing talent contest. Otherwise, we will also identify talents via moderators. Or sometimes parents will introduce their sons and daughters to us. Very often, the girls don't really want to become stars but their parents want their children to become stars.

At times we receive cold calls. Every day I receive a lot of letters, but then all those girls look very much like Coco so of course we also need to meet the persons individually. So all these are valid channels. The most practical channel is contests like singing contests. We then will be able to judge a person's ability. So we will organise singing contests.

So these finalists, like there will be 18 finalists or even 8 finalists who will be selected out of a few thousand finalists. Starting from the first singing contest in which Anita Mui was the champion, all those champions are really talented in singing. And then we also have Andy Hoi and Lui Fong and so on. They may not look very attractive, but later on people will start to be attracted to them. So they must be very, very skillful in singing.

There are talents chosen by moderators. Very often there are those idol-like stars that is, they only have very attractive external appearance, but they are not really very,

very competent. Let's say Twins. If the two girls develop their careers separately, then I don't think they will succeed. But when the two of them are together, they sing together and so they can complement each other and in fact their weaknesses won't be shown that easily in relation to singing.

So we do not make use of the same approach in packaging our stars. That's a reason why this term, "made to measure", is important.

There are other very important points, but I need two more hours in order to tell you, and then I really need to charge if I am to tell you all this.

After choosing a person, we have to go into the production stage. Production is simple. In fact, it looks simple but we need a lot of background workers to help us. So, no matter whether a talent is really very skillful in singing or whether he is just an idol-type singer, we need to be able to choose the right songs for him. So, for example, if he has a very smooth voice, then we should find some very romantic songs for him to sing. If a person cannot really sing well, but he or she is beautiful or handsome and he can dance well, then we will identify some disco-beat songs for them to sing.

So we have to discuss a lot. We have to do voice testing and so on.

Very often, parents will tell us their children can sing well in karaoke, but in fact that is deceptive. In karaoke, there is a vocal guide. If you go into a recording studio, if you only have the MMO, that is the band music, you don't even know when to start the song, so many people may not be able to sing in the right tune. So we need to do a lot of training.

We have to spend a lot of time, put in a lot of effort in the preproduction stage.

Then later on we need to produce MTV or music videos. We have to do a lot of image design work, because these talents are just ordinary people. However we are talking about showmanship. We are there to produce shows. We have to make them appear like idols, so we have to put in money to design their image.

I'm not talking about plastic surgery, as those very popular surgeries in Korea, but we have to design the right image. We have to spend a lot of time on this.

I think the best thing to do at this stage is to criticise these new talents, because they

have to be able to trust us. Now, if you do not criticise new talents when they are still new, you can't criticize them when they become popular.

New talents will be willing to sing whatever songs they're given. Say for instance Faye Wong. She would not be willing to sing (Chinese spoken), which actually made her well known to the public, because now she has her own style, so she won't be willing to accept this kind of song. When she has established her own style, she will be very far away from our producers or background crews. So success of a certain talent rests with the co-operation with all relevant producers and workers, so how can we gain the artists' trust?

So the talents need to have trust in management, need to have good co-operation so their artists can work well with you. So there is another lesson on artist management, an especially good lesson, because artists are special animals. You can't just teach them in the normal manner. Ultimately, artists fall out with their managers because they don't trust each other. Initially they may trust their managers a lot, but once the talents become famous, they would not listen to their managers any more. So it's important to have a trusting relationship.

During the production stage, I think we should try to give more lessons or teachings to artists. At the later stage I think is a stage where -- I've skipped a lot of stages here, so let's assume that everything has been done and when an artist is ready to meet the audience face to face, we definitely need to carry out promotion for that artist.

Promotion, you'll know, is very important. Promotion actually can make up 60 to 70 per cent of our overall production costs. Or even 30 to 40 per cent of the costs. Because to get the song composed and lyrics done, you can work out how much that will cost, yet there's no fixed estimate for promotional work because you could spend up to millions of dollars on an artist, depending on how much you trust the artist and the resources a company has. So promotion is very important.

Especially for new talents. If you want to create a star, you know -- it's better in Hong Kong, but in the mainland -- I think another speaker will talk about the mainland situation -- but I think the promotional costs in the mainland will be much higher. Hong Kong is small. There are only two television channels here. Only one, TVB. Hopefully, ATV will do better in the future, but there is only one major channel here and the newspapers and the print media in Hong Kong very much support the industry. But in the mainland, it's different. If you are going to hold a

press conference and you don't give out any red packets at the press conference, then the next day the coverage of your story will be very, very small. If you give big red packets, then you'll get better coverage the next day. In Hong Kong, it's different because we are ruled by law. That kind of thing is not allowed to happen.

But still, promotional costs for new talents or artists are very, very expensive. You may think that someone is so good, she must be successful. But still we must liaise with our advertising clients because these people, advertisers, can help reduce a lot of the promotional costs. An advertising company, if it's willing to devote millions of dollars to a new talent, can save our costs a lot and we can tell the media -- the advertisers can provide a media budget of up to tens of millions of dollars. Their products may then be advertised together with a particular hit song.

So media advertising is very, very important right from the beginning. Right before we promote a new talent, we have been liaising with advertisers, informing them about an up-and-coming star and alerting them to the possibility of investing, advertising their products through the talents.

So the advertiser media -- in fact, media budget can range from several thousand to more than \$10 million. The purpose is that hopefully, no matter if someone turns on a TV or opens up a newspaper, they will meet with the star being promoted through the media.

Also, we need to think about using old artists or experienced artists to support new talents, and that's also one of the promotional strategies and this is a strategy used by quite a lot of companies. Example, we have the veteran stars bring up a new talent in the past. So it was fine to often -- for example, when Wing Yee the new talent first appeared, Joey Yung or Tracey the successful artist would go out to public functions together with Wing Yee, this new artist. Because if it's only one new talent who comes to meet the press or the public, people might not be interested. If you have veteran artists accompanying them in public, there will be more media interest.

There are all sorts of promotional strategies we can use. The most important thing is that if there's no money, there's no way you can do good promotion. Even if you have money, you still need to be able to use the money wisely and appropriately. For new talents we need to do a lot of promotion for them.

We once tried -- let me quote example of Wing Yee, I am sure you all know who she

is, right? It's not the old Cantonese opera star but Wing Yee, a young artist that emerged last year. She has a beautiful voice. She's really got a good voice but she's not the idol type. You'll know what my definition of an idol is.

It's not that she looks ugly, but if you just show Wing Yee's video on TV, all of a sudden we still need to think of ways to make the audience pay attention to her and to make the media pay attention to her and that really hinges on promotional strategy.

What we did was we distributed hundreds of soundtracks, containing a soundtrack by her, to various stations and we told the radio stations about this song and we told the media channels that, well, she doesn't look good. We warned them beforehand that she doesn't have a good-looking face. But at least we managed to get the stations to listen to her soundtrack. And then they realised that she's got a good voice after all and they have a good impression of her. And then after that, we produced a second hit song by her. After they have listened to her songs, they began to be interested in how she looks. Even if she looks really really ugly, the stations still want to see how she looks like. So right from the start, we tried to make the stations become curious. At least these stations are interested to know more about her.

As I said earlier, packaging, tailor-made songs, image, setting, we actually produce some photoshoots of her and then the stations, the media representatives thought she doesn't look that bad, she looks quite good, after all. Because these stations, these media people had an impression of her being ugly in the beginning, so therefore when they saw her pictures, they realised she doesn't look that bad.

Over time people would think she looks sweet. This year, we have promoted a new talent. So as I said, that is fair, someone who has a good voice may not necessarily be goodlooking. But by the end of this year -- now it's 4.37. I think that very likely that at the end of this year, she'll get the medal in best new talent. I think she's destined to win a best new coming artist award by the end of this year.

This new talent was the first runner-up of the last year new talent quest. She has a really good voice and she looked cute. You might have seen her in the newspaper already and we've also got TV promotions for her. So it's really difficult to find a guy like him who looks pleasant and who also has a good voice. But we wouldn't say that he's really handsome, but at least he looked pleasant and he was good looking to some extent. People will feel that, oh he looks pure as well,

although he's not very, very handsome. So we do have a strategy and people have started to pay attention to him. So he's like my brother and I like people to regard him as their next-door neighbour as well.

So this is what we try to do, to try to promote a name among the public. So promotion is very, very important, but you need to think of the strategies. Money is also important, but strategies are even more important.

So once you've done all the things I've mentioned, okay once you've produced a star and put him or her on the market, ultimately it's not easy to maintain the star status of an artist. An artist whose first album sells well may not necessarily have other albums of hers or his that sell well, as well. So we need to think about how to maintain the popularity or the position of the artist. That is the positioning of the artist.

How to maintain the value of the artist so that he will remain popular?

Well, we've used several strategies to maintain the status of the artist. How to do that is to maintain the situation that the artist is well known. So one important strategy is to set up a big fan club for that artist. You need to have the fans, these whole crowds of fans appearing whenever this artist shows up. It's like what happens with Andy Lau or Joey Yung. You need to have this crowd impact so that the others will notice this is quite a famous star.

And also when the star is successful, we need to make sure that this artist or star ends up winning major awards at the end of the year, but this is, of course, a process. By the time an artist gets the best singer or best songstress award, cry when they collect the awards. Why? Because we've spent a lot of money on them, after all, before they managed to win these singing awards or popularity awards.

So you need to have positioning for each artist. What's next? Well, a famous popular artist is destined to hold a concert at the Hong Kong Coliseum and ultimately the successful artist will produce or act in films. Hong Kong is better because once you are popular, singers can actually get a role in films, but in the mainland it's different. Actors and singers don't mix and people remain in their own fields. Mr Liu may tell you more about the mainland situation. In Hong Kong it's more fluid. Like for example Andy Lau, he's a singer. He acts a lot in films and he has much market appeal. And Twins, the dual group Twins, actually the two members of Twins can



act on their own or perform in other productions on their own, so they're not necessarily working together now. Isabella, another artist, she sings quite well and she also won some acting awards, therefore we let her perform in films more or act in films more and now she's in Hollywood shooting the film "Mummy". So it's important to consider how to maintain the appeal of an artist and it is also a way to maintain the running of a company.

Ultimately, the most important and also the most practical is how to create advertising or maintain advertising jobs for artists. How to have our artists actually featured in commercials. Joey, Twins, (Chinese name), all of them have actually been sponsored. They have got a lot of sponsors from various advertisers.

What they wear, what they -- you know, right from the -- the whole body actually is covered by sponsored advertisers, even the jeans they wear, their nightgowns or the casual clothes that they wear are sponsored.

Ultimately advertising plays an important role and advertisers are a major source of revenue for us. So in my short speech today, in about half an hour, I just told you how to create a star. It is like an MP3. And next session now is actually going to be sponsored by an MP3 maker. No, I'm just joking. But thank you all for bearing witness to my talk. Thank you.