

The calendar that became a phenomenon

DESPITE the theories of a thousand able minds over as many years, no one has been able to accurately pinpoint the time or place that advertising was invented. A far easier task, possibly, is arriving at its point of re-invention — a \$60 home video shot in someone's Melbourne kitchen one afternoon in 1988 that showed (among other travesties), a pair of hands violently chopping vegetables and raw fish with a compact disc.

These images and an accompanying "K-tel-type" voice-over ran as an advertisement for Gaslight Records on commercial television for three years and what followed only served to strengthen Gaslight's place in the history of home-made publicity.

While the trend in the music retail industry was then moving towards sleeker and more corporate methods in "moving units", Gaslight's proprietor, Jeff Harrison, stuck to his guns and chose instead to follow his classic "Aussie backyard" instincts.



Instead of concentrating on selling thousands of albums by high-profile United States and United Kingdom artists, why not stock every obscure thing you can lay your hands on and see what happens? Little-known local acts, as well as big ones found their way on to Gaslight's shelves along with music from Russia, Cuba, Algeria, Bulgaria,

Africa, Pakistan as well as Europe and America. Why not have local acts come and play in the store every Friday at lunchtime? Maybe have a barbecue, or give out party pies or hard-boiled eggs or fake moustaches or whatever! It could all be planned out on a give-away calendar with an event every day.

Subsequently, in 1989, Harrison and partner Helke Schwartz approached Australian artist and New York resident, David Art Wales, known for his cult creation Guru Adrian, and a phenomenon was born: The Gaslight Calendar.

Wales' weird visions (and lack of responsibility for the outcomes) produced a plethora of bizarre tasks to be



Wearing a pumpkin on your head and waving the American flag may not go down well in some stores, but at Gaslight it can be profitable on the right day.

performed by customers in the store, on-the-spot, in return for compact discs or gift prizes. The "events" were laid out on an attractive, large-format, functional calendar designed specifically to



conform to the dimensions of the average Aussie fridge or toilet door. Bring In Your Pet Day, Pretend to Swim On The Floor Day, Kiss the Till Day, Hug Everyone In The Store Day — each brought a horde of willing participants and astonished spectators.

No one could have envisaged at the stage, however, what would take place on Wales' most ambitiously absurd proposition — *Nude Day*. "Come in nude for the album of your choice" the calendar proclaimed and promptly at 11 am the postman strode in starkers demanding Barbara Streisand's latest release. Then they came. Encouraged by others' lack of inhibitions, scores of people stripped to their birthday suit and walked off with a copy of whatever they fancied.

That was 1989, and *Nude Day* being a yearly event, 1990's resulting pre-publicity for the notorious event was overwhelming. Dozens of publications from 'Playboy' to the 'Melbourne Times' warned Gaslight of their impending arrival and the "day of truth" turned out to be Melbourne's hottest in 50 years.

The Gaslight staff nervously took deep breaths before opening the front doors. Wham! By 1 pm a nude band belted out songs in the rear of the store while a host of nude go-go girls danced in formation on the counter. At final tally that day, 91 "total nudes" ("partial nudes" were not rewarded), almost evenly representing both sexes, had all



casually or chastely flicked through Gaslight's CD racks, while television cameras and journalists from four countries hovered around them.

The hundreds of clothed spectators fell out on to the street, and eventually became so out of hand, they had to be

Gaslight Music celebrated Rod Stewart's birthday by giving prizes to people with the largest vegetables down their pants. The competition was fierce.

curtain requested that year by the police, remains an ongoing event.

Such absurdity aside, the Gaslight Calendar also concerns itself with ecological and other issues, being printed on recycled paper and proclaiming days like Blood Donors' Day and Whale Day along with Schizophrenia Awareness Week and so on.

Coordinated now by Shayne Yaffe and offering valuable prizes provided by large sponsors, the calendar is still churned out of Wales' New York studio bi-yearly. With a print-run that has gone from 5000 to 50,000 and an ever-increasing number of individuals ready to perform the calendar's strange rites, backyard advertising was never so strong.



constantly herded to one side of the store with the nudes on the other. *Nude Day* had become the stuff of legend and with the addition of a special front-door