



FCB CHICAGO

The inaugural ad is an interactive video in which Morris dons wearable tech glasses and leads viewers on a wisecracking journey.

From a Hinsdale animal shelter to national stardom, the 9Lives spokescat is a Chicago story. So is his relaunch, in a new digital campaign, as ...

MORRIS REBOOTS

BY ROBERT CHANNICK
Tribune reporter

Move over “Grumpy Cat.” Morris, the original finicky feline and star of countless TV commercials, is back to take his place among digital “It Cat” contenders online.

Created by Chicago-based Leo Burnett in 1969, Morris — as cats do — has had

several lives as the spokescat for 9Lives cat food. The latest incarnation is a digital-only campaign with all the contemporary accouterments: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts, a blog and an interactive video, hoping to connect with cat fanciers online.

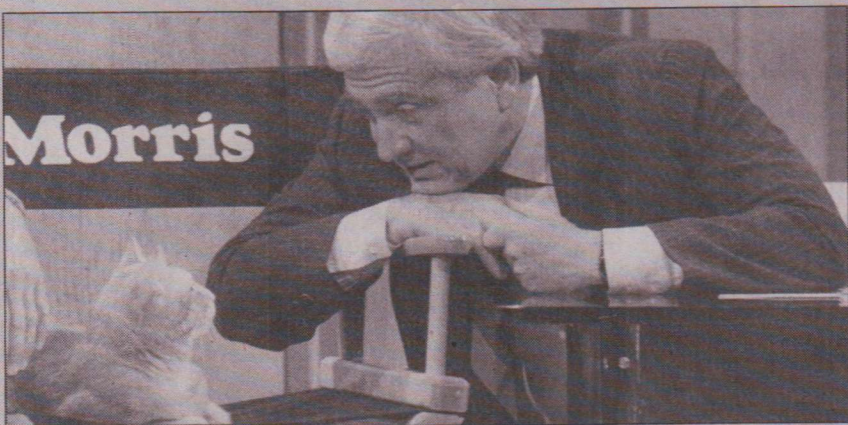
“We wanted to reboot Morris for the older consumers who are very fond of him,

but also bring him back in a way that’s culturally relevant for today’s consumer,” said Carrie Schliemann, business director for cat food and snacks at Big Heart Pet Brands. “Cats rule the Internet, and online is where consumers are right now.”

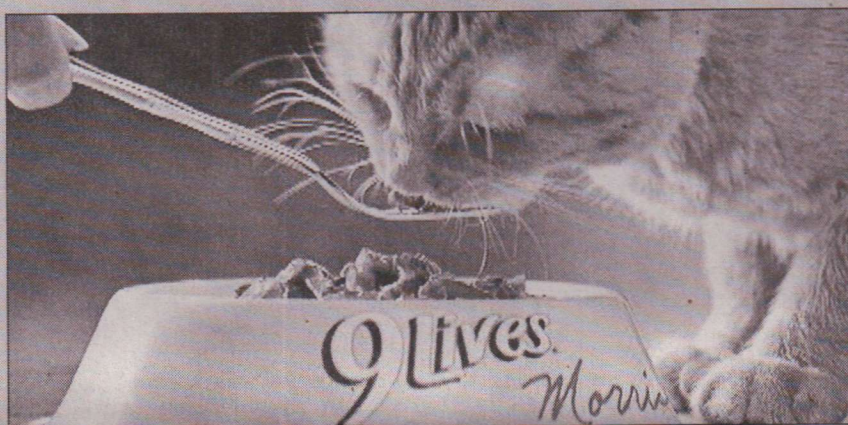
Morris, and 9Lives, are owned by San

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MORRIS THROUGH THE YEARS



JOAN ADLEN 1985



9LIVES



CBS 1973

The original Morris made dozens of TV commercials from 1969 until his death in 1978, solidifying his status as a star in an interview with Merv Griffin, top, and an appearance with Allen Ludden and Betty White on the PATSY Awards, bottom. The famous feline is getting a reboot for more digital audiences, with 9Lives cat food hoping to take advantage of the Internet's current obsession with cats.

New Web life for iconic cat

Morris, from Page 1

San Francisco-based Big Heart, formerly part of Del Monte Foods, which launched in February as the nation's largest stand-alone pet food company. Big Heart's other products include Milk-Bone, Meow Mix, Natural Balance and Kibbles 'n Bits. The privately held company generated revenue of \$2.19 billion last year, according to financial statements.

The relaunched campaign with the iconic orange tabby began this month, a \$2 million ad budget with sky high social media aspirations. The campaign is the work of San Francisco-based digital agency Evolution Bureau, with the support of FCB Chicago, among others. Chicago-based Starcom is heading up media buying.

While the new campaign has a paw in the West Coast, "Morris the Cat" is at its core a Chicago story, with a rags-to-riches pedigree.

According to the Tribune's reporting from the

Mane Society. Martwick, a Lombard resident who worked extensively in the advertising business, took the cat to an audition for a 9Lives commercial and, well ... a star was born.

"He jumped on the table ... and he walked right up to the art director, the big cheese, and bumped him in the head. And then Morris just sat back," Martwick said according to his 2001 obituary in the Los Angeles Times. "The art director said, 'This is the Clark Gable of cats.'"

The original Morris made dozens of TV commercials from 1969 until his death in 1978. The spots featured actor John Erwin voicing the thoughts of the caustic cat, who would barely tolerate the playful entreaties of his owner until she said don't be finicky and offered up 9Lives.

The cat with attitude spawned countless media appearances, including a role in the 1973 movie "Shamus," starring Burt Reynolds. He also paved the way

movie deal.

The new Morris campaign will be looking for similar social traction and is banking on earned media to help sell a variety of 9Lives products.

While Morris will still have attitude, he is cast as choosy more than finicky, Schliemann said.

"The old Morris was more finicky and could be a little bit negative at times," Schliemann said. "We're re-establishing Morris as much more positive. He's a discerning cat, but discerning in a positive way."

The inaugural offering is an interactive video called "Cat's Eye View," in which Morris dons wearable tech glasses and leads viewers on a wisecracking journey through his house, ending as the TV commercials of yore, with an eager dash to his bowl for his 9Lives.

An EVB copywriter provides the voice of the new Morris, who also shares another important link to the original storyline. The new feline star was also adopted from a shelter