

# What is WeChat?

WeChat is a “SuperApp”, and at the core of China’s social and digital landscape.

– By Alan Ma



**W**eChat (Weixin) is part of Tencent, China's most prolific Internet service provider, and one of the largest Internet companies in the world. Released in 2011, WeChat began as a messaging app and has since developed into what the New York Times describes as a "SuperApp". It has become not only a multi-level lifestyle app, but is at the absolute core of China's social and digital landscape. With 938 million-plus active user accounts, and 10 million-plus WeChat Official accounts, it is the star of the mobile Internet era in China, revolutionising the mobile commerce industry.

### WeChat's status

WeChat owes its popularity to several unique factors in China's local market. The number of people in China who access mobile data on their telephones is more than the total number of users in the US, Brazil and Indonesia together. A large proportion of China's population use multiple mobile devices, creating an increase in the need to have one app across all devices to integrate a single identity.

### WeChat users

The largest group of WeChat users is young urban residents from the Internet savvy generation, born in the 80s and 90s. This social group of young urbanites has an increasing level of disposable income and has quickly become very adept at using digital platforms for a variety of functions. With e-commerce now one of the drivers of the business model, WeChat Pay has become an integral part of the app. Users can attach their bankcards to the WeChat wallet, thereby doing away with cash or card payments, and facilitating easy transactions on the app.

### Changing the business landscape


The first targeted ads launched by WeChat in January 2015 were sent out on its Moments page as a trial, and included BMW, Coca-Cola and domestic smartphone

maker Vivo. The ads quickly caused a stir in the world of WeChat. It was assumed that those who received the BMW ad were wealthier than those who received the Vivo or the Coca-Cola ads, but it certainly got everyone's attention. A spokesperson for BMW was quoted in the Global Times as saying "so far the company is satisfied with the results of the campaign. In the first 17 hours after the WeChat ad was launched, it reached 46 million WeChat users and 7 million of them responded to the ad. Also, 200,000 followers were added to BMW's official WeChat account."

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WeChat is evolving as the go-to marketing tool for brand communication, event sharing, new launches, sales promotions, global trends, and customer feedback. It allows businesses and brands to communicate and interact directly (daily) with their followers, promoting their product, and allowing companies to gauge the impact their products or services are having. Live streaming, lecture broadcasting and direct communication with followers allows dialogue and story telling targeted towards a specific audience. WeChat groups get first-hand information about the user and their feedback, and can use this as a platform to connect and strengthen their following by inviting more users to join via QR code.

### The global market

China now has the world's largest group of mainstream consumers. Businesses across the globe cannot ignore the importance of having "a foot in China's door". WeChat has opened up to foreign companies, allowing them to open China visible official accounts for China marketing. With constantly evolving new formats, live-streaming, picture and video editing directly within the app, and the imminent possibility for publishers to post videos directly to an individual's news feed, WeChat has become an essential powerhouse for any business on a global level. 



**Alan Ma** is a China digital marketing specialist whose teams have created business-building WeChat campaigns for clients including ABB, Estée Lauder, Porsche and Tencent. Alan has worked in China for her entire career, joining Ruder Finn Innovation (RFI) Asia in July 2016.

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