

Making A Modern Chinese Luxury Spirits Brand

The Challenge

The Chinese have been drinking the potent and fragrant white spirit they call *baijiu* for about four thousand years. After acquiring a small *baijiu* distillery in western China, international spirits titan Moët Hennessy enlisted ?What If!'s help in the tricky task of updating *baijiu*'s image to appeal to today's luxury-seeking Chinese consumer while remaining true to its time-honored heritage.

The Process

We adopted a two-pronged approach, speaking to (and drinking with) many *baijiu* lovers and detractors to uncover the contemporary drivers of *baijiu* consumption while exploring the spirit's storied past with a poet, a scholar, a screenwriter, and a master blender. Based on what we learned, we generated six concepts which we tested and built with consumers before collaboratively fleshing them out alongside the client team into a compelling and relevant proposition and brand story grounded in consumer insight.

The Solution

The contemporary Chinese *baijiu* drinker is entrepreneurial and successful, grounded firmly in his cultural heritage but looking forward. So the joint ?What If! and Moët Hennessy team developed Wen Jun, a brand named for Zhou Wen Jun, a rich poetess of the Han Dynasty who famously sold *baijiu* when her father disowned her for following her heart. The spirit of Wen Jun perfectly captures the spirit of our progressive, entrepreneurial Chinese *baijiu* target consumers. We then worked with a design agency to create packaging consistent with the brand.

The Results

The sleekly packaged Wen Jun super-premium *baijiu* launched in Beijing in November 2007, where it was met with accolades from consumers, the trade, and the media. The response to the brand story was such that Wen Jun asked ?What If! to brief and help select a communications agency to ensure the brand's communication strategy remained grounded in the original consumer insight work.

"Our project with ?What If! was an important step for our marketing development and helped us to consolidate various facts and insights around the *baijiu* market, thus creating a good foundation for our marketing and packaging development team's subsequent work."

Frederic Yip, President, Wen Jun Distillery

"Most Chinese have a complex and intimate relationship with *baijiu*; it's a gift that shows respect, it's a celebratory drink shared with friends and family, it's a wedding toast and a birthday tribute—it's a liquid imbued with many complex social and cultural meanings. We really got to see the power of consumer insight as we prodded and tweaked the category, learning as much from the updates and improvements consumers rejected as from those they accepted. In a sense, the challenges facing Wen Jun resemble some of the challenges facing China as it seeks to modernize and develop without losing its heritage, and it makes me proud that the part we've played in that development is visible on so many Chinese dinner tables." Mabel Wong McCormick, ?What If!

MOËT HENNESSY



