



## Crafting a Compelling Energy Conservation Message for Chinese Consumers

### The Opportunity

China's rapid economic development has led to the rise of an urban middle class anxious to erase the privations of its childhood through voracious consumption — of luxury goods, of cars, of newly constructed homes, and of increasing amounts of energy. The Joint US-China Cooperation on Clean Energy (JUCCE), an NGO coordinating energy efficiency and conservation efforts among various governments, industry, and consumers approached ?What If! to develop an insight-based core message to use across a variety of consumer-focused channels — advertising, online, television, and educational/instructional media.

### The Process

Because our goal was a message with the broadest possible appeal, we approached its creation from many directions at once. We tracked energy awareness in the Chinese media and examined the failures and successes of recent public service campaigns (hygiene directives during SARS, pedestrian training in major Chinese cities, and the "Polite Shanghai" initiative). We spoke with foreign and local energy industry experts, environmentalists, anthropologists, advertisers, home appliance salespeople, trend researchers, policymakers, and lots of consumers in first and second-tier cities. We went shopping for energy-efficient air conditioners in several cities, visited a double glazing showroom, and learned of the advantages of radiators at a home improvement market.

Our conversations yielded potential hot-button issues related to energy consumption. We worked them into messages of varying tone and urgency and showed them to consumers, who helped focus and refine them.

### The Solution

Modern Chinese society's lack of organized religion, moral education, and civic involvement create a peculiar set of challenges when trying to influence behavior for "the greater good." The emotional triggers that work elsewhere — guilt, appeals to responsibility as a citizen, fear of environmental cataclysm — don't work in China. In addition, we learned that though awareness of environmental problems is almost universal, awareness of how energy production and use contributes to them is virtually non-existent.

We determined that to have a noticeable effect on purchasing behavior in China, an energy conservation message needs to:

- Come at least in part from the government;
- Educate consumers about the nature of the problem;
- Refer to an individual and his family's immediate surroundings;
- Give specific directions to consumers about what to do;
- Explain energy conservation's benefits.

And much more than monetary savings or the promise of a brighter, cleaner future, it was the health benefits of a cleaner environment that galvanized Chinese consumers.

### The Results

*You need to save energy to keep your family healthy. Here are some simple things you can do...*

Creating this clear and powerful consumer message for JUCCE has not only given the organization a persuasive way of speaking to consumers, but because the message is directive, it has also created a clear role for the government thus ensuring buy-in at the highest levels.

"I'm very impressed with ?What If!'s work for JUCCE because it revealed what should be the emotional touchstones of any advertising or marketing campaign that we decide to do for JUCCE. It was very insightful. ?What If!'s findings will have a substantial impact on every statement paper that JUCCE issues, every press release, every slogan that we craft — all these consumer-facing messages will be underpinned by what we've learned with ?What If!"

Joanne Ooi, Shanghai Tang, Strategic Adviser to JUCCE

"This is the message that will be used over multiple channels: over documentaries, over PSAs on television, on LCD ads, in print media, in merchandising — and so it's something that will have a long-lasting impact. Thank you to ?What If! for donating their time to make this project a reality." Peggy Liu, JUCCE

"At the start of the project, we thought we had a pretty good idea of what the answer would look like, but we were wrong. Historical circumstances have resulted in a peculiarly Chinese wariness when it comes to the greater good, so the most challenging part of this project was simultaneously appealing to individuals as consumers and as citizens. Though we normally apply it to uncovering minute marketing insights, it gives me great faith in the ?What If! process to see it yield valuable and unexpected insights when applied in a much broader social and historical context."

Alex Kauffmann, ?What If!

