

MARKETING SPOTLIGHT: GREEN MONDAY

“MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN. MAKE GREEN COMMON.”

Simple. Viral. Actionable.

That’s the mission of Green Monday, one of the most successful social change platforms advancing sustainable lifestyles on a global scale. Green Monday is a movement to promote and enable “low-carbon plant-based living.” In 2014, *Fast Company* named it one of the 50 most innovative companies in China. It was founded in Hong Kong in 2012, and in just the last three years, the percentage of the seven million residents of Hong Kong who consider themselves “hard core meat lovers” has dropped by a third, from 27 percent of the population to 17 percent.

Green Monday is resonating far beyond its home base to 23 countries around the world—from Albania to South Korea, the United States to Indonesia—and it’s precisely because of those three core strategies.

Simple

The name “Green Monday” was chosen with care. These two words are among the first that a child learns, in any culture, in any language. The founders realized that if there is one color that is universally accepted as pleasing, environmentally friendly, and natural, and evocative of health (by bringing to mind plants and vegetables), it’s green.

The platform is intentionally positive and inclusive. “If we’re going to create something we want everyone to be able to join, we’re not going to use anything that has a blaming, shaming, or bashing connotation,” says Green Monday CEO and co-founder David Yeung. “You will get criticism before you get impact. To us, anyone who even takes a baby step, we celebrate it like crazy, because that baby step is when the door opens.” In other words, it’s about a gradual shift from green eating to green living—building a sense of awareness around environmentally friendly habits that people apply to other aspects of their lives, from recycling to wasting less food.

The concept is intended as the umbrella for both individuals and institutions to incorporate a whole range of activities under, from energy reduction to plant promotion. The city of Shenzhen, China, for example (whose population exceeds 10 million people), uses Green Monday to promote biking in addition to plant-based diets. “There is a lot of flexibility and scalability to the term of Green Monday, and we absolutely want to open source it. We aren’t dictating the way people apply Green Monday.

They don’t use words like “meatless,” but instead emphasize “green,” “plant-centric,” and “plant-based” food choices. The selling of climate-friendly diets, they find, works best if they don’t use terms like “Climatarian,” “Reducetarian,” or other “-arians.” Their aim is not to create tribes or narrowly defined identifiers, like “I am a _____,” but rather to generate specific actions. So they opt for phrases with verbs, like “Go Green” or “Let’s Green Monday,” which spark a specific step to take, and a social one at that. (While they use the term “vegetarian,” it’s to identify menu options that don’t contain meat. They aren’t trying to turn people into self-declared vegetarians.)

Viral

The vernacular of Green Monday is part of the secret to their second core characteristic: “viral.” People are likely to communicate their participation in the movement while in a social setting: At a table of friends out for dinner, one might say “I’m going green tonight,” which might generate celebration from a fellow table mate, who may even choose to join that individual in the moment, creating a snowball effect. It happens at the institutional level as well: For example, when Standard Charter bank got on board, their executive leadership held a major press event to demonstrate buy-in from the top. That made other banks eager to join in. “People follow what other people are doing,” says Yeung. “‘You’re wearing that brand, I want to wear that brand, too; you’re doing yoga, I want to do yoga, too.’ We are creating the peer environment among schools, corporations, and organizations.”

Actionable

Finally, their initiative is “actionable,” offering three main ways that participants of Green Monday can act. The first is to create a routine: skipping meat one day a

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week, or one meal each day. The second is to reduce the proportional presence of meat in each meal: Suppose you’re ordering five pizzas for a group of students in a dorm; you might stick with pepperoni for one, Hawaiian for one, and one with sausage and peppers, but opt for the other two pizzas to be veggie only, they say. And third is to focus on eliminating only the foods with the highest environmental impact: opting to not eat red meat at all, for instance, without going all the way vegetarian. They offer these three options because it lowers the point of entry for people, enabling everyone to “go Green Monday” in the way that is most comfortable to them.

As for Monday as opposed to another day, the other co-founder, who named Green Monday originally, hadn’t even been aware of Meatless Monday, the initiative widely known in the US and the UK. Rather, as far as changing human behavior, intuitively Monday is symbolic of a fresh start. Plus, in Asia, Yeung says that few people have heard of Meatless Monday, so the concept is still a blank canvas.

Ultimately, their goal is for Green Monday to go far beyond Monday or even just one day. Yeung says: “People tell me, ‘I don’t even realize it but I’m greening four or five times a week!’ That’s the message I love to hear. Do you have to remind yourself to brush your teeth? No. It just becomes normal behavior. And that’s when you’ve had real penetration.”

The structure of the organization is different from most social change platforms. They have three arms, which work synergistically: advocacy, investment, and food distribution. Green Monday is the advocacy wing, and the only not-for-profit segment. Green Monday Ventures invests in companies developing innovative solutions and products to enable sustainable behaviors. And Green Common is their plant-based foods emporium, with both dining and retail, as well as their distribution arm to foodservice channels and supermarkets. Green Common is currently at four locations in Hong Kong but set to expand.

Green Monday works with thousands of foodservice operations at a wide range of corporations and educational institutions around the world. One of their most successful tactics is helping each participating operation tell the story of its impact. Green Monday provides a basic report about the percentage of meals over time that each operation is serving that are plants only, celebrating the carbon and water reduction of that organization’s shift. Those figures can in turn be shared in annual reports and with stakeholders to demonstrate positive, measurable progress.

In the cafeteria setting of a participating operation, menu items will appear with the Green Monday logo beside them, and Green Monday ambassadors hand out pledge cards to diners. Pledge cards may also be

displayed near the register, and large billboards and digital signs featuring celebrities are placed around the cafeteria. The signs are posted all the time, not just on Monday. One of their most prominent campaigns was a complete canvassing of the Hong Kong airport, which benefited the airport, Yeung points out, by positioning the city as helping to drive a major global sustainability movement.

Overall, their marketing approach has been extremely successful. But when has the Green Monday way backfired? When it was misinterpreted by an organization aiming to adopt its philosophy a bit too enthusiastically. The principal of a school in Hong Kong ignored Green Monday’s guidance not to remove *all* the menu options containing meat. It turned out that the school’s chefs had very little experience or know-how around cooking plant-based options, meaning the only options available tasted terrible. Students wound up talking to the media, telling them how much they hated the program. Yeung says it’s the only organization of tens of thousands they have worked with globally that encountered resistance. From their experience, the optimal menu balance for those implementing Green Monday is 70 percent plants only, 30 percent containing meat.

“I’m not a believer of just black and white,” Yeung adds. “The [CIAs] blended burger project is very much aligned, because it’s not about all or nothing. We don’t have some hidden agenda to ultimately make everyone go vegan.” Instead, it’s about changing the *ratio* of how food is served. “Do we want to teach 100 people to go vegan, or 100 million to go 70 percent plant-based?”

GREEN MONDAY!
EVERY MONDAY
ORDER ANY VEGETARIAN MAIN AND
GET AN ADDITIONAL VEGETARIAN DISH ON US,
IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT.
Thinking and eating green is great for improving our health
and caring for the environment. That's why Beef & Liberty
has partnered with Green Monday to tempt you with
the delicious plant-based dishes on our menu which are
as good for our bodies as they are for our planet.
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