



## AMEC International Communication Effectiveness Awards 2014 PUBLICATION APPROVED

**Category:** Best Use of Communication Management: International – Multi-market Activity

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**Client:** Information Office of People's Government Of Chengdu Municipality

**Campaign title:** Chengdu Pambassador: The Cutest Job in the World

### Campaign Summary

Which city produces half the global supply of laptop chips, a fifth of all computers in the world and now 80% of Apple's iPads, yet seldom features in a Google tourism search?

Ironically, its highly qualified engineers make essential parts for Airbus and Boeing, yet few of these planes return with international tourists to fuel economic development in the city.

Renowned mainly for its spicy cuisine, Chengdu is the capital of Sichuan Province in western China, and China's fourth largest city. Briefed to drive international tourist arrivals to fuel the city's economic development, the agency developed an original campaign idea in 2010 that was significantly socialised and its global impact extended with experiential events that drove major public relations in 2012 to deliver its best ever results.

The "Pambassador" 2012 campaign connected the world with Chengdu's uniquely lovable icon, the Giant Panda, offering three people the opportunity to become a guest panda keeper and ambassador.

The campaign drove a **30.3% increase** in international visitors to Chengdu versus China's national tourism growth of 1.2%. Global media coverage and high social media fan engagement **attracted 255,000 worldwide applicants** to live and work in little-known Chengdu, over seven times the number attracted by Queensland Tourism's "Best Job in the World" campaign to live on a reef of stunning tropical islands!

### Objective/Brief

#### *Brief:*

The East-West divide in China's economic development is a social 'hot-button'. Western China accounts for 80% of the nation's land mass but just 17.8% of GDP (Source: Centre for Studies of China's Western Economic Development, Northwest University, Xi'an, 2010). The widening income gap drives mass worker migration from poorer western China to more prosperous eastern cities like Shanghai and Beijing.

This is replicated in the tourism industry. Chengdu's 1.2million annual visitors represented less than 1% of China's 135million total visitors in 2011 (Source: China National Tourist Administration <CNTA> statistics).

More international tourists to Chengdu would mean more tourism revenue and employment growth, thus easing a source of social tension.

**Our challenge was getting Chengdu onto the tourism radar; growing international visitors to help secure the city's economic growth prospects.**

#### *Objectives:*

Our business objective was to drive Chengdu's tourism growth rate to significantly outperform national growth forecasts (estimated in early 2012 at between 2.7-5% (Sources: CNTO, National Tourism Administration of China, Euromonitor Outlook 2011).



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Our communication objective was to make potential travelers from our key visitor markets aware of the natural resources Chengdu offers, as measured by awareness and positive media coverage connecting Chengdu with its natural resources.

Complicating our challenge, some Western media sensitivities persist towards an increasingly powerful China hence the story of Chengdu needed to be told by trusted third-party influencers in traditional and social media, not the Chinese government.

### **Strategy**

#### *Audience Analysis:*

Our early agency research indicated that if people knew Chengdu at all, it was at best perceived internationally as a drab second-tier industrial inland city, with no special distinguishing features.

International Tourists: Chengdu's priority markets were Europe, US and its key Asian neighbours – Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea.

- Chinese markets (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan) share closer proximity and cultural affinity with mainland China and our target had most likely visited Shanghai and/or Beijing in the past and were aware of Chengdu. They required less awareness building and more focus on a reason to visit a western Chinese city.
- US and UK were key drivers of traffic yet had very low awareness of Chengdu. They were more likely to be first time China visitors. China was considered a challenging tourism option, ranking 47<sup>th</sup> most attractive country out of 133 countries (source: World Economic Forum Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2009)

International Media: Traditionally considered a vehicle to reach our target audience, in this public relations-driven approach media were our critical target audience to reach to educate and persuade them to tell the Chengdu story to potential tourists. Earlier agency research (2010) had indicated stories about the Giant Panda were considered entertainment news, which would not secure the global coverage desired, and required an element of public interest to qualify as mainstream news.

#### *Campaign Insight:*

Our campaign strategy started from a success model developed by our agency in 2010. The first global “Search for a Pambassador” connected Chengdu with the surprising fact that it was the natural habitat of the lovable Giant Panda. The 2010 global search for a guest panda keeper to work at the Chengdu Panda Research Base gained global media attention which drove 61,000 people to apply (Source: “Pambassador” AME entry, 2011).

Not wanting to rest on our success and simply replicate the 2010 campaign, we convened a global summit of agency leaders from each target market nation to Chengdu in early 2012. This task force re-assessed the original Pambassador strategy and alternate ideas. While concluding that Pambassador remained our strongest campaign idea, the team recommended we needed a fresh execution approach to reflect cultural shifts toward increased use of social and digital media.

#### *Strategy:*

The opportunity to serve as a global panda ambassador would attract many participants whose individual stories and passion for conservation could then be propagated through media. By connecting Chengdu to conservation and enhancing its brand as the hometown of giant pandas, we interested global media as well as a substantial online community. Using social media platforms like Facebook would allow the campaign to interact with a very wide audience.



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Panda-themed stunts around the world drove competition submissions and localized semi-final events in four key markets allowed us to get closer to the audience and create local relevance that drove the traditional PR strategy. Authoritative endorsements from organizations like WildAid and the United Nations as well as from celebrities like Yao Ming and local celebrities in each market lent additional support to the campaign.

### Execution/Implementation

From September to November 2012 we rolled out a series of events both online and off:

- **In China**, Yao Ming, in partnership with the Chengdu Panda Base and nonprofit organization WildAid, launched the 2012 campaign
- **In Europe**, costumed pandas toured Edinburgh, Paris, Brussels, Rome and Berlin performing flash-mobs, giving panda bear hugs to pedestrians, and simultaneously providing information about Chengdu, panda conservation, and the competition
- **North America** saw the Pambassador competition semi-final and “Pambassador Day” at Georgetown University
- **In Singapore**, a retail activation with 7-11 stores featured the “Pambassador” search on posters, banners, and price tags, plus a Panda-Rock concert, Panda-themed black & white fashion show and Asian regional semi-finals
- **Hong Kong** saw a viral video of costumed pandas visiting city landmarks in search of bamboo
- **In Chengdu**, 16 global finalists experienced the giant panda natural habitat and promoted Chengdu and the campaign through their individual stories
- **Around the world**, digital content from all activities was promoted by social and traditional media

At the end of the campaign, the winning Pambassadors were chosen from among 16 global finalists during the last portion of the competition at the Panda Base in Chengdu.

### Conclusion

Our business objective was to drive Chengdu’s tourism growth rate to significantly outperform national growth by increasing awareness and positive media coverage of Chengdu.

**“Pambassador” 2012 campaign drove a 30.3% increase in international visitors to Chengdu in a year that saw a significant slowdown in China’s national tourism growth to 1.2% (Source: CNTA).**

Furthermore, Chengdu tourism receipts grew 36.5%, well ahead of visitor growth, indicating our new tourists are staying longer, spending more or a combination thereof.

### How the Campaign Worked

#### **Traditional Media Coverage**

“Pambassador” was quickly dubbed “the NEW best job in the world”, a moniker picked up in many of the 2,852 international media reports across 30 countries in 13 languages that were achieved in 2012. Media outlets from the Wall Street Journal to US networks ABC & CBS, British BBC, Global Al Jazeera, Japan’s Kyoto News and CCTV China featured video footage of the campaign and Chengdu.

#### **Social Media Coverage**

The stream of Facebook content generated by our experiential events in each market, together with agency produced short films, saw 128 million YouTube channel views on Chengdu.

Combined, we achieved a combined 1.6 billion impressions in social and traditional media.



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## Creating Deeper Fan Engagement

Our 410,000 Facebook fans were actively engaged through:

- global experiential events in 10 cities worldwide that facilitated consumer-generated content
- Adorable videos of Giant Pandas at play in Chengdu Panda Research Base
- Online voting for regional semi-finalists
- Video and updates from contestants undergoing the final week of challenges in Chengdu
- Winner announcement in Chengdu

We achieved greater word of mouth and deeper fan engagement more established Facebook tourism pages with active campaigns in 2012. Facebook PTAT scores - a metric of users who have engaged with a page's content and created a "story" in News Feeds – show far higher engagement with Chengdu's pandas than for the new "There's Nothing Like Australia" tourism campaign, Visit London post-Olympics and New Zealand during release of "The Hobbit" film.

City/Country Facebook page	Likes	People Talking About This	PTAT Score
<b>Chengdu Pambassador</b>	<b>406,344</b>	<b>117,258</b>	<b>29%</b>
Australia	3,835,886	257,834	7%
Visit London	95,484	4,881	5%
New Zealand	657,435	22,349	3%

Source: Facebook, November 28, 2012

## Driving Awareness

Quality of campaign coverage and messaging achieved our communication objective of connecting Chengdu as the home of the Giant Panda. Independent research on awareness of Chengdu as 'panda-land' increased from 19% to 43% in the UK, from 14% to 27% in the US and from 58% to 75% in Singapore (source: Facebook brand tracker study, August-December 2012).

## Translating to Action

16,495 average daily Google searches for Chengdu represented 54% growth on our 2010 peak "Pambassador" campaign level.

The level of coverage, engagement and search attracted 255,000 applicants to live and work in Chengdu, four times the level of applicants we attracted with the 2010 Pambassador search and over seven times the number attracted to Queensland Tourism's "Best Job in the World" campaign as caretaker for a reef of stunning tropical islands!

## Estimating the Commercial Value and ROI to Chengdu

More visitors accounted for US\$161million in incremental tourism receipts for Chengdu in 2012, after allowing for the national tourism growth trend.

## **Immediate campaign ROI is estimated at 19:1.**

(Incremental tourism receipts of US\$161million - global campaign spend of US\$8million/global campaign spend of \$8million.)

## Future Outlook

Chengdu was selected as host city of the Fortune Global Forum in May 2013, further driving awareness on the global stage and international visitors, supported by the agency's ongoing public relations engagement.