



The Acropolis, the Sphinx and Vancouver's Lions Gate Bridge will all get the lights-out treatment on Saturday.

When the lights go out, bright minds pierce the dark

Their goal is to make Earth Hour more than a 'do your own thing' event



JENNIFER WELLS
ADHOCRACY

jwells@globeandmail.com

Here's a cosmic recollection: the sun was setting outside the offices of Montreal agency Bleublancrouge a couple of weeks back, causing the brainstorming session to fall into darkness. "We were working and we had no ideas," recalls Gaetan Namouric, creative director and executive vice-president at the agency. "Time was running. The sun was going down."

I say "cosmic" because the agency brain trust had been in talks with World Wildlife Fund Canada, which wanted to launch some sort of happening in Montreal in recognition of Earth Hour, the global lights-out-for-an-hour initiative. But what?

"We imagined that the hour could be more than just switching the lights off and thinking about global warming," says Mr. Namouric. "We wanted to make it a very creative time."

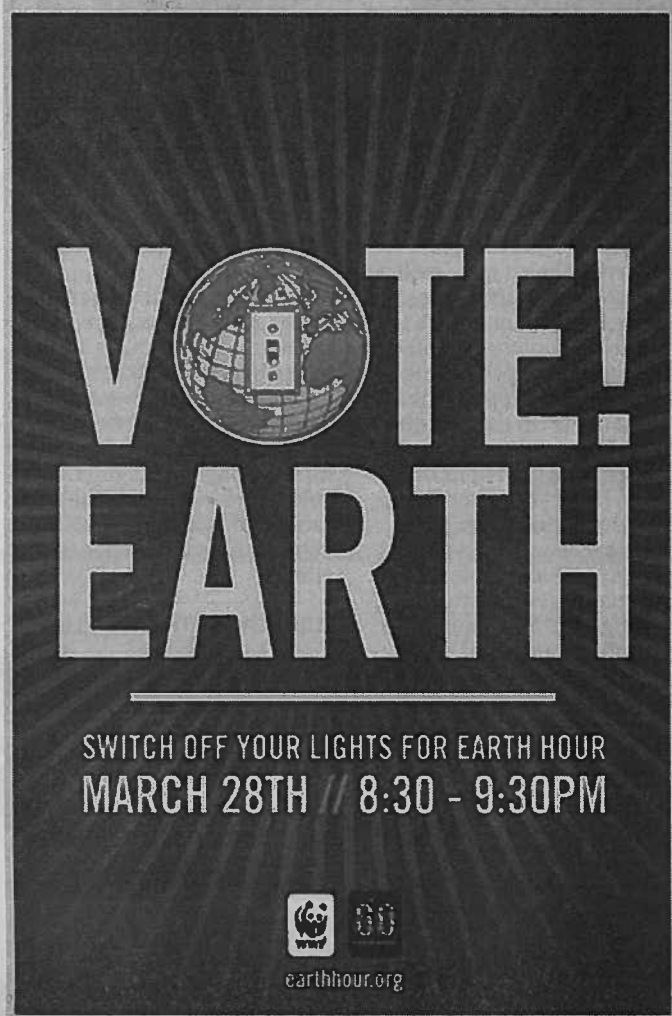
So there they were. Thinking in the dark. "It creates intimacy," says Mr. Namouric. "If we talk together in the dark, I'm going to listen to you more."

There's the light bulb moment right there: to get people thinking and creating in the dark. Light bulb moment No. 2 was launching a super cool darkened website, www.ideasinthedark.ca. When visitors scroll across the seemingly black screen, the mouse casts the glow of a subtle spotlight upon the text, a call to Quebecers to participate in Earth Hour 2009.

On Saturday, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. E.T., Montreal will play host to Ideas in the Dark, where artists will create with the lights out and then put their works on display when the lights come back on. There will be creative thinking in the dark, and musical performances in the dark, all in aid of a celebration of what Mr. Namouric calls "eco-creativity."

"For us it's a lab, we're going to test it," he says. "If it works we're going to push it out into the world next year. We need people to make that hour a creative hour."

Christina Topp, vice-president of marketing and communications at WWF Canada, which has only a slight presence in Quebec, says the wildlife fund "loved the initiative." As to whether a broader rollout is possible, that depends. "They pitched it to us as a Montreal insight," she says of BBR's proposal. Is it translatable to other parts of the country? Ms. Topp thinks it might



For its Earth Hour poster, above, agency Leo Burnett hired graphic artist Shepard Fairey, who also created the "Hope" poster for Barack Obama's presidential campaign, below. LEO BURNETT



We imagined that the hour could be more than just switching the lights off and thinking about global warming.

Gaetan Namouric, Montreal agency Bleublancrouge

be. But, she adds, "Earth Hour is so much about people doing their own thing."

In a way, that is the event's curse as much as it is its blessing.

Launched two years ago, Earth Hour at its inception was the brainchild of three parties: advertising agency Leo Bur-

nett, Sydney; the World Wildlife Fund, Australia; and Fairfax Media.

A lot of the buzz this year has been around Leo Burnett's inspired idea to tap graphic artist Shepard Fairey to come up with an image that Burnett undoubtedly wishes will become as representative of Earth Hour as Mr. Fairey's "Hope" poster was for Barack Obama's campaign.

Mr. Fairey has achieved precisely that: His "Vote Earth!" poster, with a simple light switch on the girdle of the globe, is beautifully executed and tied to a call-to-action website, www.voteearth2009.org. The results of the "election" will be presented at the global Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December. The WWF is aiming for a billion votes in the global election, pitting Earth against global warming. That's a quantum leap: 50 million people turned out the lights on Earth Hour last year.

And yet, Mr. Fairey's work seems strangely underexposed. The brand momentum, which Leo Burnett hoped to earn as a result of the inspired creative, is absent in the Canadian campaign.

"We did not choose to go with that version of the brand idea here in Canada," says Ms. Topp. The reasons she cites are twofold:

One: WWF Canada was uncertain as to when the creative

would be ready.

Two: the organization wanted to continue to build on its existing brand awareness in Canada.

It could be that in so doing, WWF Canada has missed an opportunity to bring cohesiveness – or a social movement on the scale of an Obama – to the campaign.

That's not to ignore the many undertakings that will be realized this Saturday – some noble, others on the slight side.

Sears Canada Inc., an official sponsor of Earth Hour in Canada, has placed reminder clocks at stores in Vancouver, Toronto and Halifax to remind shoppers to turn out the lights. Coca-Cola Canada, another official sponsor in this country, has offered tips on entertaining. ("A room full of candles always manages to create a sophisticated ambience.")

Okay, it's not quite on the scale of shutting off the lights on the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid of Giza, announced by Her Excellency Madame Suzanne Mubarak this week.

Last week, all 4,000 employees at IKEA Canada received a candle and an encouragement to go to the WWF website to show their support. (And to turn off the lights for an hour.)

The retailer will be turning off the signage on its 11 outlets across the country, and lowering the lighting levels inside all stores open at that hour. Madeleine Lowenberg-Frick, the company's public relations manager, says the event offers the company an opportunity to get across a bigger message: having initiated an energy reduction action plan last September, IKEA is on target to reduce its in-store energy consumption by 25 per cent by the end of April.

"We use it as a platform to talk to customers and co-workers," says Ms. Lowenberg-Frick of Earth Hour, adding that employees and consumers aren't necessarily going to see or feel the effects of energy reduction. Earth Hour, she says, is a "changeable event."

(To the suggestion that IKEA could create an intimate dining moment simply by lighting candles on all of its cafeteria tables, Ms. Lowenberg-Frick responds that the company's loss prevention and safety department has already ruled against the candle-lit dinner.)

Gaetan Namouric says there will be a "very special art activity" involving "playing with different colours" as part of the Bleublancrouge Ideas in the Dark party. "This," he says, "is a worldwide thing. We need people to make that hour a creative hour."

Perhaps all those ad agencies out there that keep trumpeting the potential for Canada's creative voice on the world stage should listen up. This is a call to action.



Ten months ago Ann Nurock made the cultural shift from being chief executive officer of Grey advertising in Johannesburg to taking on the same duties in Toronto. Translation: She survived her first winter. "People said you have to go outside and you have to shovel snow and I said, 'Why?'" Ms. Nurock reports that her daily routine from condo to underground parking to warm car and warm suits her just fine.

The bigger challenge has come from seeding creativity at Grey Canada. "If you had to ask me, are we going yet? The answer is no." She says the agency is making strides, including being short-listed for three big, though named, pitches, and the latest iteration of the agency's for Prince Edward Island. Working off of "The Gentle Is Rejuvenation" platform the agency established three years ago, Grey has launched its latest campaign, addressed to globe-trotters. Ever been to the Louvre? You'll appreciate the campaign line: "The vacation you won't need a vacation from."

» Jennifer Wells

NOTED » MEET THE 'OTHER MAN'



And now for the sing-along portion of Persuasion: "Mr. Clean gets rid of dirt and grime and grease in just a minute. Mr. Clean will clean your whole house and everything that Mr. Clean. Mr. Clean. Mr. Clean."

One of the most successful jingles in advertising history marked its 50th year last year. Created by Chicago ad executive Thomas Scott Cadden, the ditty was lauded for carrying the entire brand strategy through a couple of stanzas of lyrics.

Now the muscular cleaning guy is celebrating his 50th in Canada, and Procter & Gamble is rolling out a new campaign. Created by the Extreme Group, the ads feature the ever-chrome-domed-and-cut cleaning boy in the role of "Other Man" (www.theotherman.ca). And here you think the other man was good for something other than cleaning grout.

» Jennifer Wells

QUOTED » SLOGAN OF ANOTHER STRIPE



Pump your money back into Canada.

Petro-Canada slogan

It's not quite up there with "Put a tiger in your tank," is it? But then again, Petro-Canada had to convey both the presence of its downstream operations (gas at the pump) and its overarching importance to the nation in one striking branding message. And while the image of that big orange cat the Esso tiger is undoubtedly "iconic" – a horribly overused word – there were plentiful examples of flagrant brand messages among its competitors. I cite: "Go with Shell" and "You can be sure of Shell." Here's an oldie from Texaco: "You can trust your car to the man who wears a star."

Today's quiz: Emery Smith, a copywriter at McCann-Erickson, coined the tiger-in-your-tank phrase for Esso in 1964. Who scripted that line for Petro-Canada in the 1980s? The company was too busy to get back to Persuasion on that something to do with a merger.

» Jennifer Wells