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Purpose-driven tech: Meet the UX designer on a mission to help the planet and the community

Whether she is enabling consumers to visualise their personal carbon footprint or doing user research to encourage volunteering, SP Group's Director of User Experience Priscilla Liu strives to make a positive impact



Ms Priscilla Liu, who heads the User Experience team at SP Group, is optimistic about helping consumers understand the difference they can make on a personal level in combating climate change. PHOTO: SP GROUP

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Can one less plastic bag or a night without air-conditioning actually make a difference in climate change?

This is a question that prompted Ms Priscilla Liu to find ways for everyone to chip in to counter

the effects of climate change.

“On a smaller level, we all know there are some things we should or should not do. But climate change is a concept of such a big scale that people are sceptical that one person’s action can really affect anything. And that is the problem we are trying to solve,” shares Ms Liu, Director of User Experience at SP Group (SP).

One way is to let individuals measure and see the tangible impact of his or her actions. That’s what Ms Liu and SP’s team of digital experts set out to do when designing the SP app. The app’s 1.4 million registered users can see almost in real time how their daily habits affect their electricity consumption.

“Typically, we get our utilities bill at the end of the month – by then, it’s too late to change our behaviour,” explains Ms Liu.

“But with the SP app, smart metering shows electricity consumption information that refreshes every half hour. It’s easier to link what activity consumes how much energy and motivate changes to behaviours.”

Climate-friendly features on the SP app

Ms Liu also takes pride in another climate-oriented feature in the SP app – GreenUP. Through gamification, it encourages users to learn more about sustainability and take steps to incorporate it into their daily life. Users can collect points known as “leaves”, accumulate them to grow a virtual plant, and enjoy tiered rewards and discounts with partner merchants.

“GreenUP began as a project to encourage users to take small steps towards a greener lifestyle. It is now one of the features with the highest engagement rate on the SP app,” says Ms Liu, “If we all take small steps to behave sustainably, that can have a significant cumulative effect.”

Another feature on the SP app is My Carbon Footprint, which helps consumers calculate their carbon emissions to quantify their personal carbon footprint and suggest ways to reduce it. For example, it can propose Green Goals for users to reduce their consumption of energy and water.

The Green Goals feature is calibrated according to the average consumption in the consumer’s district, benchmarked against the national consumption, and weighted according to the profile of the household. This way, the consumer benefits from a detailed and realistic analysis of their consumption patterns.

Ms Liu’s team is responsible for presenting the consumption data in a visually engaging and easily understandable manner. This helps consumers appreciate their individual contribution within the larger community and national efforts for climate action.

“Sustainability is everyone’s responsibility. We hope that through good digital design, we are able to increase engagement and encourage more consumers to take steps in reducing their carbon footprint,” says Ms Liu. These climate-conscious actions will contribute towards Singapore’s goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Ms Liu is confident that Singapore can meet the target. “If there’s one thing that Singapore is good at, it’s meeting targets,” she says.

Working and volunteering for a higher purpose



Ms Priscilla Liu (first row, seventh from left) and fellow volunteers from SP Heart Workers and Yio Chu Kang Zone 2 RC preparing to distribute bags of daily essential items to 150 families and seniors during Hari Raya last year. PHOTO: SP GROUP

When Ms Liu first joined SP Group more than six years ago, she had already accumulated skills and expertise in user experience (UX) at various multinational companies, including an Australian bank and a real estate group.

“I was attracted to how SP Group made the decision to go into sustainability before it was trendy. The energy industry is complex and there are many uncertainties to consider, so it is quite bold of them to venture into areas like electric vehicle charging and solar energy as a forerunner back

then.

“Also, after many years of building apps to sell things, I wanted to do something more meaningful in my career. SP Group gave me the opportunity to work on something that makes a positive impact,” says Ms Liu.

Besides her work responsibilities on the UX team, Ms Liu is also the Chairperson for SP Heart Workers, SP Group’s corporate volunteering programme. Activities organised under this programme include charity drives, social events and activities for the elderly, as well as packing and delivery of learning tools for children.

During one of the events, staff volunteers from SP were paired with elderly folks to shop for groceries with SP-sponsored vouchers at the supermarket.

“Usually, they buy items that they can keep for a longer time, such as canned food. And they also tend to pick cheaper items. But one time, I remember vividly that this auntie took a box of chocolates, which was out of the norm. At the checkout she told us, ‘This chocolate is for the volunteers.’ It was a really touching moment for me,” recalls Ms Liu.

Ms Liu has also put her UX skill set to good use for SP Heart Workers. “We do ‘user research’ – we get feedback from volunteers and improve the volunteering activities with each iteration. We also ensure each programme has clear objectives and desired outcomes are achieved, so that our efforts are meaningful and well received by those we volunteer with, and colleagues have an overall positive experience and are encouraged to volunteer more.”

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