

EPISODE 007

ONEFOOTBALL

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Vinay Mistry, DesignStudio

AND

Ulf Germann, OneFootball

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO

Hi, this is Bryony Gomez-Palacio and welcome to episode 6 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on the new identity for OneFootball, a football media platform headquartered in Berlin with one of the most popular mobile football apps in the world and huge followings on YouTube and Instagram where they cover news, scores, highlights, and more.

The project, designed by the London, UK office of DesignStudio, was posted on Brand New on June 30. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast006 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast006, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Vinay Mistry, Design Director at DesignStudio and Ulf Germann, Creative Director at OneFootball.

In this conversation we get to hear about how an important bit of research insight about how fans consume football led to the energetic identity, how this identity has given OneFootball a visual language to

make its product recognizable, and how DesignStudio arrived at such a, literally, mind-blowing icon.

Now, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Vinay and Ulf.

ARMIN VIT Welcome to The Follow-Up today we have on this recording session a global convergence of people from important cities around the world, including Vinay from London, UK, Ulf from Berlin, Germany, and me from Bloomington, Indiana. So welcome Vinay and Ulf to The Follow-Up.

VINAY MISTRY Yeah, man. Thank you for inviting me on the show.

ULF GERMANN Yeah, thanks also for having me.

ARMIN To get us started so that our listeners can know who's who, would you mind telling us your name and your title?

VINAY Sure thing. I'm Vinay and the Design Director at Design Studio.

ULF And I'm Ulf, Creative Director at OneFootball.

ARMIN Ulf, let's start with you. What led OneFootball to undergo this redesign at this moment in its history?

ULF I think there were a couple of reasons for it. First of all, that we had, we grew as a company of a, of a time of 12 years. And what we used to be back then is quite different from, from who we are today. Everything that we had before, didn't really represent what we are doing today. And we always pretty much had to explain ourselves and our ambitions and everything., we, every, every time we did that, people were quite surprised to hear, um, what's behind all this because they never saw it in the way we express it in our product, in our app. Uh, also we were always the service that provided aggregated news and scores. The app is still the focus of what we are doing, but we're running YouTube channels. We are organizing events. So an example, we did a football tournament in Brazil, and we also teaming up with quite big clubs, right? Sodas and B2B partners. So it's, it's much more than we were in the very beginning or when we did our last rebranding

in 2014. And then of course we are talking about football. It's quite an emotional sport where people are super ambitious about and all of this emotion was never, never expressed in the app, but, also never in the brand itself.

ARMIN So one question that I asked a few minutes before when we started recording this podcast session, except that I didn't hit the record button and we had to start over again. So what you're hearing now, listeners is the second round of the first couple of questions of the show. But one thing that came up in the previous non-recorded version was that there was a lack of awareness of what OneFootball was. That a lot of people had the app installed, they just didn't realize what it was called. Did you know that this was a thing? Or did you just discover this recently?

ULF No. I mean, we, we pretty much experienced it, um, over all the years that, um, whenever we talk to people about, uh, OneFootball, I mean, we, the first thing I always used to say was not I'm working at OneFootball. I always used to say, I'm working at a, at a football app. Uh, and then second question, which one, I said OneFootball, uh, and most of, most of the people thought that they don't know it. And then they open up the phone and check the football apps and realize that they do have it, but simply didn't know that it's called OneFootball because everything that we did was so generic and so replaceable that what stick to people's mind was probably the service itself, but never the brand.

ARMIN Yeah. So it's interesting that you had a great product, but no brand recognition. The inverse is usually the more common where companies have some brand recognition, but not a great product, or at least not all the time. So, uh, Vinay switching over to you, how did Design Studio get involved in the project?

VINAY Um, originally it was pitched. Ah, OneFootball gave us this brief and explained that actually the brand is quite outdated—it doesn't really represent who they are as a business or a brand today, it didn't reflect

their audience. And so we had to take that in mind and then consider the whole visual and verbal toolkit. So we started to create a point of view here in London and Cam our Creative Director and some of the team went over to Berlin and actually started to question everything from the identity. So looking at the logo, looking at the color, the imagery, does that feel right? Looking at the content, is that right? And also looking at the overall experience of the brand as well. And I think from that whole sort of, um, understanding of OneFootball, our major question was, what does OneFootball actually stand for? What do they want to represent in the world? And that worked. We won the pitch. And then here we are today.

ARMIN Usually with pitches. You just replied to, what's asked of you, but it sounds like you went above and beyond what the initial request was. And that's what got you in the door to just talk further about it and then get the project.

ULF If I may add something to it. Um, probably I wouldn't say they went beyond, but what I can definitely say, they nailed it by delivering exactly what we asked for. And this might sound so obvious, but what we pretty much asked every agency for was to give us an idea of how they approach the project like ours before with other clients and why pretty much everyone came to us. So either it was on the phone or people also came here and then quite a big group of people. And then what they did was always kind of explaining us the reason for a rebranding and the value of it, where we were already beyond this point, we knew that we want to do it, we just were searching for the right partner. And then there was always this kind of anecdote, um, where, where these agencies explained it with a chart where they showed, how Airbnb did the rebranding in 2014–15 and say like, yeah, look at, look at Airbnb! Like they were here and they had all these comparisons, and then they did the rebranding and then they accelerated, and now they are over the moon. And this could happen to you when you do a rebranding and all of the, all of this discussion over hundreds of slides and Design Studio was just straight to the

point. They came to us, um, three people, then they said, look, guys, if we are working together, we are the team you're working with. Uh, and that was the truth. And here is how we approached a few other projects. And yeah, it was three people, probably 10 slides, and just straight to the point. And so convincing with such a great storytelling, that there was no question after that.

ARMIN And they happen to be the firm that designed Airbnb, which all these other studios are pointing out.

VINAY Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

ARMIN It's interesting because I think Airbnb is such a, not a milestone, but I think it's such a big case for good design affecting a business in a very positive way that coincided with Airbnb growing. But a lot of clients will reference Airbnb as something that they want to do. Just go from, from kind of like their startup vibes into a more mature identity. And Airbnb is a perfect example. So Vinay back to you. So once you got the job... on your project page, it says that you work with, uh, research specialists Crowd DNA to learn more about OneFootball's audience. Was this before the pitch or after the pitch?

VINAY It's a bit of both. I think it was mainly more after the pitch that we start to take all of that, their insights. I think what's, what's really interesting is that the way we all consume football is, is totally different. It's, it's an individual experience. And for OneFootball in particular, it was important for us to understand generations and relationship with, with football. And when, when, when Crowd DNA came on board, they, um, when they started to explore that relationship. And I think more importantly for us help us understand the emotional drivers for consuming football. Especially for that, for that sort of audience. So they spoke to other people in, in Germany, and Brazil, and UK, and I think they sort of bucketed their information in, in, in three ways.

The first understanding the wider context, actually understanding who generations that actually is this generation of contradiction, then

looking at the football experience, diving into that content journey, understanding the, the emotion and that the content is actually all connected. So it's not about being loud all the time, but then also just looking at OneFootball and really unpacking that. So understanding their existing perceptions of OneFootball, and the brand, and the app—what people liked about the brand and the experience, what people didn't like about that experience. And what was really interesting is after we sort of collated all this, this information and insight to understand it, we found this really, really important part, which sort of delivered like our whole brand in essence. And that was about understanding how emotion and content is constantly interlinked. They show there's this one page in particular, where they sort of broke down the game to a pre-game, to mid-game, and then to post-game. So pre- pre-game is where actually, where it comes most needed. That's why you are way more rational. And that's where everything's much more fact-based. Then you've got mid-games, so this is where it's most terrible. And this is where your, as a, as an audience member, most excited, you're so engrossed in this game, but actually then for OneFootball, that means that's actually putting its time. It's not for us to disturb that time. And, and, and, and infiltrate that time. Then you have post-game and this is where probably the audience is our most explosive, most chaotic. If they won they are super happy, if they are sad, they are super angry. So it's a time to be loud where you can brag, where you can be angry and show your sort of emotions.

And I think this, this sort of spectrum gave us an idea for how the brand can start to manifest. It's this idea that this vibe is constantly in flux. It's constantly changing and we need to create a brand that adapts to your rhythm, whether you're you're happy, because you won, or whether you're sad because you, because you lost, whether you want peace and quiet, or you want some pre-game hype to get you excited for the game.

ARMIN Yeah, that is some really a significant insight, and, I think it applies not just to a football games, but I think just to life events in general, how, you know, you're, uh, you know, whatever it is, there's an expectation, then there's the moment of reality, and then there's coping with whatever happens. So it's ah, I think that's some pretty actionable insight that we can all apply in different facets of our life. So speaking about the audience, uh, Ulf on your website, it mentions that 75% of your audience is between 13 and 34 years old. Has this always been the case or was there ever a shift in age based on something that you did with the content?

ULF I don't think there's too much to connect it to the content. So, I mean, so we started out in, in 2008, uh, being actually one of the first thousand apps in the Apple app store. And I think back then our first users were simply the early adopters. Like the audience from back then grew over time with us. Uh, but all the other markets that we entered in the years after, and especially with, uh, I would say a bit of a different approach since 2014, we can clearly see that the people we are reaching with, uh, with the offers that we have are in that young age simply because we are where they are. We are on these social platforms where probably some others aren't yet. And we also have a bit of a influencer marketing approach where we are reaching more these younger audience because they feel more attracted by that. So it's more in the more in how we reach people than, than in our content strategy.

ARMIN Yeah, one of the reasons I asked that is because the new design system feels very young. So you're clearly targeting that demographic. You know that that is your sweet spot, you know, that, that, that they are there, but was there any concern, in perhaps, you would push away that smaller 25% older demographic, or, you know, it's like, maybe it's this app, it's just not them as the, as the best option?

ULF Of course we thought about that, but it was never the focus of our thoughts. So in general, everything that we are doing with our core and the app itself, we are quite careful. I mean, if you compare the

brand, as you also presented it in your blog, um, to what you're seeing in the app, there, there is a bit of a gap because we didn't apply all the colors or the, we call them high patterns in there. And we have quite a straight to the point user experience and, and quite a minimalistic approach. And whenever we add something, we do want to make sure that it's the best for the users, no matter the age. Uh, where our concerns were was much more than in the change itself, because we did a bit of ah, we did a smaller rebranding in 2014 and where we then also mainly changed the user experience of the app. And that's where people got confused. And, um, actually through that, we lost also quite some, some users. So this time we just wanted to be careful that we are not doing the same mistakes as last time, but yeah, I mean, we do consider ourselves still being an app for every football fan out there, but our activities might be more to what's this younger audience and how they consume football.

ARMIN And that's a good distinction in how you get people or how you get new people to the app versus how the app behaves once you're in it. I think it speaks to the, that insight from the research firm about the different states of emotion, when you're interacting with this content. Like once you are in the app, you want to consume the content. You don't want to be constantly hyped up about the content. Like you just want to like see the highlights, read the scores, read the news, whatever it is. So Vinay, it is time to get to that question that everybody wants to hear about how in the world did you arrive at that great icon? And, before you answer, I need to point out that the poll that we have on Brand New that has great, fine, and bad votes... at one point, it was 90% great, which is a remarkable achievement on Brand New. So, your have the floor, sir.

VINAY Uh, uh, that's, that's great to hear. Um, I think when we, when we started with the development of the logo, I think we knew it had to be an evolution, uh, especially when we had conversations with the CEO and the rest of the brand team. And I think what was really important to consider is that we knew that the symbol would live in the smallest of

spaces. It was gonna be an app icon. They had to be in these avatars. And what we want to do as an evolution is start to, uh, simplify the mark. So we started to dissect the current mark and simplifying it back to it's essentials—removing the circle, firstly, and then set out to remove the body, into... we were just left with the legs and then the bowl. And then what about designers? Janet actually decided to take those components and modify them slightly. And all of a sudden we sort of turned it into a curve-like, and then we thought, actually that looks like a one. And then all of a sudden it decides to organically manifest from there. Me, and there's another design director called, uh, Julien Que, who was helping during that phase as well. We saw this tiny little sketch on his little notepad and we thought, that's it! But that literally is the one we saw took that logo, marked it up, and then with Daisy and I'll Ullf started the designers start to develop even further. Start creating the symbol that you guys have seen today.

ARMIN Yeah, I think it, it really is fantastic because I remember seeing it without reading any of the explanation. At first, I scroll through it and I thought, oh, cute one with a ball, with a period, that's a ball. And they were like, no, wait, like the, that piece of the one is about to kick the ball. What is going on? So like, I don't say this often, but it literally blew my mind in the best possible way. And it's, uh, it's rare to find icons nowadays that sort of, that have that playfulness that, you know, we take for granted in logos from the 1960s and 70s when there was nothing else out there. So it was a little bit easier to create this sort of surprising icons that were very minimal, it was very simplistic. So I think, uh, achieving that with such a broad subject such as, uh, football, I think it's quite remarkable. Uh, so Ulf what was the reaction for you and your team when you first saw the, the icon?

ULF Yeah, I guess it's for, for everyone the very same, um, as you, also experienced it. So, you look at it, you think, ah, okay there is a one of course, because we are OneFootball and then always with the second step where you see, oh no, fuck, it's also a football that is kicked by, by two legs. Then it's like, there's is always the mind blowing moment,

and I still experience it pretty much every day where people are looking at it and in the first moment it's like, oh, okay, it's a logo. And the second thing is no, it's a really, really good logo. And yeah, this, this excitement that excites me also all the time. And, because back then they did, they presented two different logos and there was no question that it would be this direction.

ARMIN Yeah. That was going to be my follow-up question. If there had been another or other multiple options, what did the other ones sort of look like? And we don't have to get into a big detail, but just to, to see what else you were faced with to compare and contrast.

ULF It was actually, it was a scarf that was, uh, formed into an F and then in the scarf on the bottom, like on this F on the bottom, there was a little 1. So it was a bit more of a illustrative approach... but yeah, I mean, if you compare these two directions, it was so clear that it needs to be the, the one that it is today.

ARMIN And Vinay internally, was the second option kind of like, well, let's, let's see, let's bring it along and see how far it gets, but like deep down, did you know, or did you wish that that first option was the one?

VINAY I think I love them both equally [laughs].

ARMIN Well, said.

VINAY I love both routes. I think the logo in particular for—we went with eventually, was definitely the better logo. The design, and roots, and the expansion in the system I think was, was equally good on both.

ARMIN Someone on the comments mentioned that when they saw the logo the—one of their first expectations was to see an animation where that swinging leg sort of kicks the ball. And I'll admit, like, I was sort of expecting that, but I can see how that could be an obvious choice that you wanted to avoid. Uh, so did you consider that at all?

VINAY Yeah, we definitely did consider it, but we thought it would lose its magic and it might become a bit too, too cheesy. So we sort of steer clear away from that.

ARMIN I agree. I think it would be cheesy, but I think it will also be somewhat satisfying... and just seeing you know, that one leg kick the shit out of that ball. Um, so speaking to the identity system, um, you know, after the icon, which like I mentioned, it has like this very old school approach to it, uh, but then the identity becomes heavily younger. And we've talked about how the audience plays a role in that. Um, but how did you arrive at this visual territory with the patterns and the bright colors and, uh, the animation, which instead of the, of the icon kicking the ball, it goes into more of a dynamic almost like auto generated, responsive animation.

VINAY I think it goes back to our strategy. And what we want to do is visualize hype. And, you know, we talk about pre-game, mid-game, and post-game, it's how do we, uh, show hype in that visual expression across those three sort of states? Um, so what was really important is that our identity needed to become at certain points, but then you need to get really excited and be really vibrant at some points as well. And because we're talking to an audience that is, uh, that is quite contradictory, that, that, that embraces so many things they had to, we had to take references from passion, from music, from football, and sort of merge them all together. So we started by taking elements from football itself, and we went to add visual hype to them. So our patterns are basically the shapes that come from our symbol from the actual logomark itself, but then also from the world of football. So it's the, the, the hexagon comes from the patch from the football itself. It can come from, um, the column, the flag that you see on the sides. And it's inspired by some of the kits that we've seen throughout the years. And then our colors, again, just come from the world of football, it's the, it's the grass, it's the sky, it's the, it's the corner flag.

But what was important is that we take these base colors and then we sort of tweaked everything so it had this vibrancy, this energy that represented a hype. So it was calm and it needed to be, and energetic when it needed to be as well. And then in addition to that, we saw or developed these bespoke numbers as well. So inspired by our symbol we wanted to have that same flavor, but went to make sure that it was still functional. So when it was used for scores or for certain hero things, it was still very clear and functional at the same point. Then we just took all those things and sort of slap them together into, into a generator. So we can start to create, uh, amazing graphics that can be reused over and over. I think what was essential for us is that, when football creates so much content, whether it's on YouTube or if it's on Instagram, or anything like that, we didn't want this to become boring. You want it to become exciting and you always see something different. I think that's where that generator really solved, came to fruition.

ARMIN When I was writing about it, and just like, I'm sitting back just like, ah, are you, here's another review that I have to do. And then you're hit with all this stuff, all this visual stimulus, and you're like, whoa, like take down a notch. But I think it captures that sense of going from hype to excitement, and back and forth many times. So, Ulf, what was the most exciting part, or what is the most exciting part about this new identity system that you have to work with?

VINAY But first, I definitely have to mention that it's a system because, you know, everything that we had before was dedicated to just being a small little app where we needed an app icon, uh, and a bit of color to be represented by that. Uh, and all the other materials were more internal and yeah, with what I said in the very beginning, like we created over the years, the need for something so much bigger, and this is now a system that you can really apply to all the various touch points that we are dealing with today. And, uh, with what Vinay said before, I think the very coolest thing is by far this hype generator and

or this hype mechanism that we can cover all these, all these different emotions. Because one important thing to mention is, the football we do have in our app is the top football in the world. And... for us, it's still a quite small company. It is quite difficult to get the licenses for, you know, to get the image material for showing matches of Chelsea, Arsenal, Real Madrid, Barcelona, uh, Bayern Munich and so on, because obviously they have bigger, bigger marketing gears. And whenever we would like to use it in any kind of a marketing purpose, then we would need to have the license for it and pay quite some money for it. So that means everything that we had before was, was lacking any kind of emotion. There's big football that we are talking about. And this, this hype mechanism that's played quite well because a) it is emotional and, b) it covers all these different steps of being quite sad or being super high.

ARMIN Yeah. That's an interesting challenge that obviously I hadn't hadn't thought about it because not my business to think about that stuff, but what that does with a generator is that yes, you, you're now able to generate your own hype. Now you have between your app, social media channels, YouTube, you reach more than 70 million people. How does having such a large readership influence the rollout of the identity?

ULF And just in, how do you call them quote marks? Um, um, we, we just did a redesign, uh, where the exercise that we were running together with, ah, Design Studio, was also including a brand strategy. And there there's so many promises that we are making in the strategy that isn't applied yet to all these touch points, because it, it, it does take time. In a first step, we just applied these design changes and, uh, and where we are quite careful about the change that we are applying. So that means everything that the user knew from before is still there. It just painted in new colors and everything that would come with a brand strategy will be applied step-by-step, uh, with dedicated features over time, like also with our, with all the activities that we are doing outside of the app. But yeah, it will take time. And with the first things we did, um, we didn't risk too much.

ARMIN Because, yeah, as you mentioned with the 2014 change, you experienced some of that negative feedback, but, you know, even when you push something on social on Instagram, say where you have, I think something like 1.8 million followers, is there a hint of nervousness about releasing anything with a new design when you first started?

ULF To be honest, not at all. I guess that's just my, my very personal feeling. We ran through this exercise with Design Studio and everything that we cre—with, that we created, I'm so proud of, and I'm so confident that this is the right approach. There, there might be some, some short term dips in some reactions because yes, it's something new and probably not everyone might like it from the very beginning, but I have such a big belief that this is the right thing to do that I kept myself free from all these, all these thoughts around like, hey, what happens if... I, of course I have to say, like, I mean, I, I'm not running this company, I'm, I'm one piece of it. You could probably can ask Lucas von Cranach, our CEO who probably has a slightly different, uh, opinion on that. But for me, or spoken for the brand team, we are super confident and happy and proud what, what we achieved together.

ARMIN And I think it's ah, it's something that we don't speak about often about how important it is for the client to have confidence in the design. That then it can withstand whatever criticism comes its way, and it's a whatever, um, you see, people react negatively to a resign and then it gets taken back. That's when you realize, so like they, the client didn't have enough confidence in the design solution to stand behind it and weather the storm. So Vinay, with that large same audience in mind, and given how vocal football fans can be, were you at all concerned about how the logo would be received once it got out into the world?

VINAY Yeah, of course! I've got a super large fan base, especially across YouTube and Instagram, and they're definitely vocal. They're not scared to voice their opinions, but I think we would just, go with that gut feeling, and we sort of knew it was the right answer internally. And when we shared it with OneFootball, uh, we've got the exact same response. So I think over time that confidence just grew. And we just went with that.

ARMIN And Ulf, what was the reaction like both from the audience, and then also, like another segment that we haven't talked about is the, you know, the companies that advertise on the app, uh, what were those reactions like?

ULF Yeah, I mean, on, on the audience side, um, so there in general, we were quite well prepared from Design Studio, uh, by Design Studio, uh, from, from former, uh, projects, shit storms that can happen, like it was with the Premier League or BnB, like where people are taking the logo and then turn it into something different. Uh, so we were actually quite prepared for quite a big shit storm, or we were ready to take it basically. Uh, but so far I have to say that the audience is super positive about the things that they're seeing. I don't want to say that there aren't negative voices. There are. So there are people saying like, hey, where's my green, hey, why things have to be changed? Everything was so good. Now I have to watch for a new football, whatever, like all these comments are there, but it's, it's simply not the majority. Like the majority does like it. And biggest reactions that we got were actually not the design itself. It was about the fact that we didn't have, um, the dark mode in the very beginning when we released our first Beta version. So I was quite surprised. I mean, I thought people are reacting to the new typeface, there were little comments about it, um, which I also considered as something positive because it does feel so natural.

You know, it, it, it is something that is new and especially for us, but it's nothing that feels so experimental. It's straight to the point. It's an evolution of our old logo. It does speak OneFootball, it does speak football. So I think lots of people don't think too much about it as long as we deliver the content and then the BTB side that you were talking about there, all the feedbacks we got, like everything was super crazy. Everyone was super impressed and excited. Like everyone was saying, hey, this is not just a new design, this is going to lift you on, on higher levels. Like, this is the, what we, how we perceived you guys, when you talk to us. And now it's also represented in the design, um, which

is obviously, um, a very nice confirmation for the work, um, together with Design Studio.

ARMIN Yeah. So I think now they have this great design system. I think it's ah, going back to what we were talking about originally that people were lacking that connection between the great app and the brand recognition, and that OneFootball was behind it. I think now with this really memorable, iconic symbol, that is a gateway into the app and then all this other hype around it that you can build on it through your different social media channels, and on YouTube, et cetera. I think that will, I mean, I don't think, I think I'm pretty sure that it will begin to create that brand recognition, and... somewhat selfishly, I'm just glad that we have a new icon to talk about and to use as a standard for comparing other icons, because I don't want to give you too much praise, Vinay and Design Studio, but I think what you did here is pretty remarkable. I think it will be something that we keep referencing for some time. So it's great that it's for an app that so many people around the world can enjoy. So thank you Ulf, and Vinay for being on The Follow-Up. And, that's our show.

VINAY Thank you, Armin for having us.

ULF Thank you very much for having us. It was a lovely chat.

BRYONY Young... old... somewhere in between... in the end, it's the love of football that drives engagement between fans and OneFootball's coverage of the sport. With this new identity, they can now modulate the hype, visually AND with confidence, to fit that wide spectrum. Lastly, one more tip of the hat to DesignStudio for introducing an icon for the ages.

Today, thanks for listening. Until next time, we'll be here, we hope you'll be there.