

EPIISODE 012

TEND

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Anthony Sperduti, Mythology

AND

Steve Hoefnagels, Tend

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 12 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Tend, a new dentist practice with six locations in New York, aiming to redefine the dentistry category through service, experience, and design.

The project, designed by New York-based Mythology along with a number of collaborators across fashion, product design, and photography, was posted on Brand New on July 27. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast012 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast012, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Anthony Sperduti, Partner and Creative Director at Mythology and Steve Hoefnagels, Senior Vice President and Head of Design at Tend. We are also joined by a loud ambulance near Steve's apartment in New York at around the 20-minute mark.

In this conversation Steve shares the ambition of Tend to redesign, redefine, and reimagine the customer's journey of going to the dentist. Transforming it from something no one enjoys to something to look

forward to. Anthony highlights the importance of working with a client that has clarity on what they want to achieve and that trusts their creative partners to get there. We also delve deeper into the groovy, marbled pattern of, as Armin calls it, “swishy goodness”.

Now, let’s listen in as Armin follows up with Anthony and Steve.

ARMIN VIT Hi, everyone. Welcome to The Follow-Up today we have Anthony from Mythology and Steve from Tend. Welcome to the show guys.

ANTHONY SPERDUTI Thank you so much for having us. Couldn’t be happier to be here.

STEVE HOEFNAGELS And yeah. So excited to talk about Tend.

ARMIN All right. So just for our listeners, the first one that spoke was Anthony. The second one was Steve, and we’re gonna start with you, Steve, from what I have gathered online, the business side of Tend was set up in 2018, give or take, and it seems you joined early on in the process. Can you tell us how you became involved and what those early months look like?

STEVE Um, I joined Tend, uh, really early. I was Tend’s fifth hire. And when I joined Tend, Tend didn’t have a name yet. But I think we did have a clear goal, which is to redesign an experience that everybody knows, but nobody really likes, which is going to the dentist. And what we started doing in those early months is essentially just a lots of, uh, user research. So we spent a lot of time understanding sort of likes and dislikes as it relates to dental experiences. We talked to people in person obviously, we also just looked through tons and tons of reviews of dentists to understand sort of what people liked and didn’t like. What we also did is we open up a pilot practice. Actually we started a little dental studio in Tribeca that we actually ran for about ten months and we saw 1500 patients there, uh, to sort of firsthand understand lots of things, but also sort of to test out ideas, see what works, what didn’t work, things like that. And you know, one of the big things that we did is we created a service blueprint or sort of a user

journey, if you will, to guide our roadmap, just to really understand how this experience unfolds today and how it should unfold in the future and the way that we imagined from becoming aware of the brand to booking a visit, to showing up to the location, et cetera, et cetera. And that helped us really sort of design the journey with real intent. And of course we started working with Mythology. That was... that work actually already kicked off before I joined, which was amazing, just super early in the journey. Mythology was sort of part of the Tend story. And we we worked on sort of our brand strategy, our identity, and also a directional design for our studios. So lots of, sort of big pieces, uh, that we started to put in place pretty quickly, very early in the, in sort of the history of the company.

ARMIN Setting up a full dentist practice—that's pretty impressive. So Anthony sounds like you were there before Steve, what was those earlier days like?

ANTHONY [Laughter] Well, we were brought on by the CEO and founder as well as his partners, a group called Juxtapose that helps incubate brands. And we have worked with them in the past and are pretty like-minded when it comes to what we expect out of a brand and ultimately what companies you want to put out into the world and how consumers will interact with them. And so when we were brought on the ambitions were really big. To take this incredibly, for lack of a better word, stale... unimaginative... stuck in the past experience and not just change it a little bit, not just change, you know, a better toothbrush or a slightly nicer looking practice to walk into, but rather holistically, how do you rethink it from top to bottom? And that grand ambition was something that really excited us. So in our practice, in our studio, it is a lot about taking a couple steps back and really questioning some fundamental assumptions and in a category. So that was really fun for us to do even before the creative started really understanding what can we change? You know, you can't change everything. If you change everything, then it becomes unrecognizable. So some things might evolve, some things might have to stay the same, so there's familiarity. But really taking a step back with the founder and with the guys at Juxtapose to really go,

okay, how can we really rethink this? So that was really fun for us to do. And then that meant the playing field is really wide open. And I think there was a pretty wide range of exploration, both strategically and creatively. Until we started narrowing down and some things started to feel and coalesce around the brand that ultimately got launched.

ARMIN And were you surprised at all that a dentist brand would have such a big interest in design from the beginning? Like I imagine that that's not a common thing for most designers business, like most dentists don't come with high ambitions on branding and identity.

STEVE Well, I think that's one of the first things I would say that's a point of difference is. To me it was a group that was looking to rethink oral healthcare. So dentistry, and a dentist practice is part of that. But when you think about it, you know, a couple levels up, then it's not that strange, right? Then if you're talking about wellness and health, that should have design in it, right? That should be something that gets rethought and like many other categories in our life of the last generation where design has really improved that to me, you know, like once you reframe what we were actually set out to do, then it actually isn't that unusual. It actually was more unusual to look around and say, how come no one has done this before? And it really, that ends up just becoming part of the wow, what these guys stumbled upon was an insight that no one is willing to take this holistically and reframe it in a completely different way and have the ambition, the scale, and the resources to do it properly.

ARMIN And I think that part of it is because so many people are just so used to the experience that they just don't question it. It's just like assume there's going to be a horrible experience or a mediocre experience from start to finish. So why bother with something that people have accepted as that's how it is. So Steve, were you surprised when someone brought you on board to head design for dentistry?

STEVE I was, and it's actually one of the reasons that I decided to join. Like one way of looking at design is good design is, in a way, maybe the difference between solving problems and solving problems really well. And I think it's pretty clear that dentistry just have a ton of problems that needed to be solved really well. You know, everybody goes to the dentist, but nobody really enjoys it. And it's a really rich experience, but it's an experience that's sort of rich in all the wrong ways, right? So what comes to mind when you go to the dentist? There's bright lights, there's loud sounds, you know, drills, maybe that you might hear, there is bad smells that can be really disconcerting, discomfort, waiting... You may feel judged because you've probably didn't floss as much as you should have and, and your dentists or hygienists are probably going to tell you that you didn't do a good job flossing. You may get upsold and, and get recommended things that you might not actually believe you need. And then, you know, sometimes what happens is after your visits, you get a nice little surprise in the mail months later with sort of a bill that you weren't expecting.

ANTHONY So the industry is just... from an experience perspective has a reasonably low bar, and it's sort of reflected in a net promoter score of dentistry as a whole. It's at one, which is really low. It's only two points higher than cable companies. What that results in is that honestly, most people don't go as often to the dentist as they should, and they don't take care of their mouths as well as they should. And that's sort of just a bad thing in the end. So, when you really think about it, it's a really obvious sort of design project, where there are so many moments to tackle and to not just only make better, but to reframe and to really sort of reposition a little bit, to create an experience that is so different that you might actually enjoy going to the dentist. You do need great dentists, right? So great dentistry is sort of necessary, but not sufficient to, to then deliver an experience that is great overall. And that's, I think where we really tried to innovate sort of the things around it, you know, let's build on that great foundation of great dentistry, great clinical care, and let's make everything around it sort of as amazing.

ARMIN It's easy to underappreciate dentists, just because of how much we all hate going to the dentist, but it's not their fault. What they're doing is insanely amazing. You know, just getting over the fact that you're going into people's mouths day in and day out and fixing horrible things sometimes, but pretty things every now and then, uh, in terms of teeth and tongues, whatever and gums, but you mentioned that there's all these moments that you can improve and how the bar is set pretty low, but you decided to not just raise the bar, but raise the bar across pretty much every moment, uh, which means they hired a lot of different creatives in different industries to help build every aspect of Tend. So what was the general brief or guidance you provided as they each started their own process?

ANTHONY You know, it takes a village, obviously, right? So in, in such a multifaceted experience to create it, you need so many different experts that sort of add value in different ways to a project like this. So we partnered very closely with Mythology on sort of brand strategy and identity. And that's a really great foundation to start from for many of these projects, right? It provides sort of guidance on sort of how to execute specific moments in the journey. Um, what we also did as a, is the user research and helps us understand really sort of where the friction was in the journey. What we did is we enlisted people to help us rethink, the moments where we saw opportunity just across a range of different disciplines. And maybe one example that might be helpful to, to sort of talk about is this idea of we call it "The Brushery". So in our, in our journey, we created a new moment, right? So we realized through user research that when people go to the dentist, they often feel that they need to brush their teeth right before their visits. It turns out it's actually dentists, don't really care. Hygienists don't really care, but people feel like I got to show up with clean teeth, kind of bad form if I have a coffee and then go to the dentist. And what people end up doing is they sort of maybe brush their teeth in the bathroom of the dentist office, which is kind of awkward and weird and sort of not a

great experience. So we solved for that by creating a dedicated space and we call it The Brushery and every single studio that does not tie to a bathroom where you just have a moment where you can refresh and sort of feel good about starting your visits.

Now we can kind of could have stopped there, but we wanted to make that experience really amazing and expressive as well. Right? So we wanted sort of celebrate this idea of how amazing and fun and how rich oral wellness and taking care of your mouth, and brushing, and swishing, and swirling, and all that stuff could be. To do that we worked with a ton of different people. We worked with an artist to create this amazing pattern that is sort of inspired by this idea of swishing and swirling and all the things that sort of happen in your mouth when you're brushing your teeth. Then we worked with a wallpaper company called Flavor Paper to apply that pattern to custom wallpaper and to have that little space sort of decked out floor to ceiling in that wallpaper. We put in custom sinks so we worked with this amazing studio called Concrete Cat, a, an artist studio in Montreal that poured sort of custom sinks for us that again were inspired by this idea of switching and swirling. Then we were like, okay, one more people look in the mirror, I'd probably want to feel pretty good about themselves. We designed these beautiful mirrors, what sort of a ring light surrounding them custom for us with Lukas Flos, which is a local lighting fixture manufacturer here in New York City. You know, and then when you walk out of The Brushery there is a big photo that you actually see it in a light box on the wall. And that photo was taken by a photographer called Braden Olson. And it's a photo of maybe not the traditional smile that you might expect in a dentist office where teeth are a hundred percent perfectly white and a hundred percent perfectly straight it's intentionally, you know, still a really appealing and attractive smile, but it's, the teeth might not be perfectly straight and a hundred percent white just to make you feel a little bit less judged and sort of for us to communicate officially: hey, at Tend, everybody's welcome every mouth is welcome, no matter what your goals are for

oral health. So, you know, and that's just one example that maybe illustrates how it requires so many different people from different disciplines to create some of these moments in a way that reframes the experience and creates a new experience.

ARMIN Now, Anthony in terms of reframing this whole experience, when you first started on the project, I am guessing there were a lot of preconceptions that you had to get over in terms of what the dentist industry looks like. What was that like for you and your team? And just kinda like saying, all right, we need to rethink this. How did you approach that?

ANTHONY Sure. I mean, I think for us it starts strategically and understanding that unlock or that insight, and for us, you know, the big shift was how do you make something an experience that's reactive where you're like, I've got a problem, or I, I know I'm six months behind my cleaning and it's a very reactive reaction. And what we want to do is like, what if we want it to make it proactive? What happens when you want to actually go and you're looking forward to going, or you're so enticed by the experience, the marketing or word of mouth. So once we, we settled upon that as like a defining part of what we wanted to design towards, to us, and thankfully we have no experience in the dentistry category. So for us, in some ways it was kind of easy. You have, I shouldn't say easy, but it wasn't that kind of challenge that impeded us because we have a pretty interesting dynamic that we want to flip on its head from reactive to proactive.

And then we come from a place where we're, you know, we've designed stores designed Warby Parker stores, or stores for Allbirds, or Sonos, and categories where design is important, where it's modern and fluent in culture and is relevant. So for us, we were comfortable swimming in those waters and it was okay, we're going to bring that category to us as opposed to us going to that category. And, you know, the team, the founder, and the guys, that surrounded the funder, we're wanting that it then becomes something where the only mistake we

could've made is being too similar to what is currently out there. So we were given permission to be able to not at all think about that category, but rather the categories we're used to, where those kinds of retail stores with kinds of brands that we were used to building. We're actually much more akin to what they wanted. So it really starts with the founder's vision of, hey, I want to flip this on its head. I'm coming to you because how you see retail and brand and consumer experience. That's the big insight right there, is that they're coming to us. And so we knew we had permission to do that.

ARMIN That's a wonderful way to look at it, especially how, you know, instead of you doing what the industry or the category demands, you do what you demand from yourself and your experience and your work with other industries. So that's a, that's a really great insight for anyone out there that you don't always have to conform to what the category does, just because that's what's expected, then you're brought in for your expertise in design strategy, et cetera. So you have this great strategy in place, this great insight, now let's switch a little bit to the actual design of the identity, which, you know, everything from the logo, to the color palette, to the photography is very, as we've been talking about, it's very un-dentist like, which is pretty much a compliment. So what was your, and your team's main goal and philosophy as you started designing, choosing typefaces, colors, photography, things like that?

ANTHONY Well, I think, you know, if our strategy is to flip all those assumptions... well, okay. So then it gives you permission then to what are all the things that are typical and going 180 degrees from that. So you start to go, okay, we want to turn everything around. And then for me, as a creative, I go and my job and helping kind of shepherd the creative as a Creative Director, how do we make something feel warm? How do we make something feel human, making sure it doesn't feel too corporate? It doesn't feel too cold? It doesn't feel too sterile? You know, when you reverse engineer where a lot of those cues from that category came from, you know, the dentist industry is a lot of mom

and pop shops, right? And dentists that start their own practices. And they been around for years and probably had to do certain things that gave the people in their community faith that it was going to be, you know, a very professional, very sterile, very, you know, safe environment. And then those become cues and vernacular of a category that then other mom and pop see, well, that's just how dentists do it. So you've got this whole set. You can see where if you reverse engineer, where that comes from, and then for us, we're going, okay, this generation, and we know who our audience is, they're going to trust us. We're not going to have to earn that trust. There's a lot of assumptions that people are going to make. If a store—if a practice is opening in Flat Iron and Wall Street... in Williamsburg, if their marketing is legitimate, like there's a much shorter, much lower bar to cross. Well, then that opens us up so then we don't have to be that sterile, almost inhuman to gain someone's trust. Rather, we can skip that part and start adding warmth and personality. And all of a sudden, psychologically when someone sees like the photos Steve was talking about where they're not perfect and the mouth isn't perfect, and there's a little bit of wit, or there's a little bit of personality to it. Your blood pressure just lowers a little bit, right? And then the friendliness of the colors and nothing that feels cliché, but it's unexpected. The warmth of the person greeting you, what they're wearing, and the materiality of it doesn't feel like a nurse's scrub or something that again, starts triggering you into a world where you're like, I don't want to be here. So you just start taking all of those little subconscious cues and vernacular and go, why does it have to be this way? And again, once you have the permission from the people that hired us and that we're working with, because obviously it's a big collaboration to flip all those things on his head, then you start to go, God, well, if we're going to do this, we can do this, this, this, and this. And it becomes fairly easy. Then it's about how do we make a warm human inviting brand that still has some seriousness to it, right? It's not a joke. It's not a, it's not a gimmick, but break enough rules where people really feel like their mental state is quite different than it would

be in a typical dental practice. That's what we're most proud of, right? Like whether it's this typeface or that typeface or this color or that color, it's the overall truly what the brand's persona is. And what that's able to do for a patient, is really the thing that we're proud of that we're able to achieve and succeed at.

ARMIN Yeah, definitely. And I think all those choices of typefaces and colors, which become secondary to the intention, I think all those were pretty good choices overall. And they do convey that everything you're talking about, which is warmth, personality... and just taking you away from being on the defensive, as you mentioned, like you're always coming in, like, you don't want to talk to anything you don't want to feel at peace. And I think with the design, those cues that you introduced, they soften the whole mood. So Steve, from your point of view, did the identity design and branding begin to shape up as you and your team ambioned? Meaning was it easy from the start for both Tend and Mythology to sort of chart your way in what is relatively uncharted territory redesigning the oral category?

STEVE Look, it's never easy, but it's always fun. Once your strategy starts sort of coming into focus, so you, you find ways to express it in so many different ways, right? So we talked about colors and typefaces a little bit, the beauty and the sort of the amazing thing about a dental experience and sort of designing that end to end. It's really a service design project. When you walk into our studio for so many details that you've experienced and each of those details are sort of designed, right? It's sort of your sort of brand is expressed actually through the way that our studio smell. We know that people don't like the way that the dental office smells—so we created our own custom scent. You see the uniforms that we designed, you see sort of, you hear the words that we sort of have chosen as your welcome into the studio.

The light is really nice. Uh, you might see your name on a screen, welcoming to your studio, et cetera, et cetera. So there's just a ton of different ways to express the brand essence at sort of then all in

sort of our members' minds sort of add up to an overall impression of the brand. So once you sort of have that strategy in place and then sort of in theory, start expressing it, right? Like did a lot of work before we opened our first studio. You still don't quite really know until you launch it, whether you've hit the Mark or not. So right before we launched, we took stock of sort of what we'd done. And we were hoping we got most of this stuff, right. But of course you never really know. We're a little bit further along now, so we got some signals now from the market. The brand is kind of landing the way that we intended it. It's kind of working the way that we envisioned it. So, really found compelling product market fit. Our studios, we have five studios now that are booked out, you know, weeks in advance, sometimes months in advance, there's both good and bad. It's good there's demand. Then it's bad because people don't like waiting for the dentist so much. So, we keep opening up new studios to sort of provide them availability. If you remember the MPS in the dental industry as a whole is one which is not good. Our net promoter score, which is a measure of satisfaction, essentially, in the experience is 85. So it's 84 points higher than the industry average. That's a really, really high MPS. MPS doesn't go higher than a hundred. That's a great place to be. You know, and we also ask our members if they would be disappointed, if they could no longer visit Tend. And over 90% of our members actually would be disappointed to feel it could no longer visit Tend. So I think we're starting to really get some signals back from the market that this experience is landing as we had imagined and people are enjoying it.

ARMIN Yeah, for sure. I mean, when you have that kind of a reception in any industry to just have that big of a jump in approval, that's pretty amazing. Now, early on in the conversation, you mentioned the swirl and it's one of my favorite elements of the identity. How did that come about? Who first pitched the idea of like, yeah, let's have this swirly pattern of, you know, swirly goodness that is really unexpected for anything, not just dentistry, you know, the fact that it's all over on a jumper, you know, I would love to have one. I don't know if I can pull it

off, but it's one of those things that, because I see a lot of applications in Brand New, but then every now, and then there's a one or two that just blow my mind that I think that jumper in that pattern is so great. But then they also love how you can twist it. And it just the detail on the scarf in the uniform. So I love how it can take on this really kind of like extreme versions of itself. So how did that come about?

ANTHONY I want to say that we had presented an idea, a pattern that was based on the idea of like, if we had a piece of floss and creating some type of repeating pattern. And I think the guys on the Tend side were like, that's interesting, but not quite right. What are some other things that would do this same thing, but maybe visually quite different 'cause it didn't quite work. And we were exploring on the retail side, this idea of foam in the mouth and, and that clean, fresh feeling, and I think these guys got really, the Tend guys got really excited about that as a conceptual area. And then one of my art directors did just basically a big search and came across an artist that Steven had mentioned. This whole project has been a really good example of collaboration between the studio and client, where everyone is kind of coming at it with: we all want to get to the same place. Everyone is kind of doing their part in their position. And, um, it was a good back and forth to get us to that and to their credit saw it and was like, Oh my God, this is great. And it could be, this could be on jumpsuits. This could be moving pattern on a screen saver, like these guys really embraced it and gave us the ability to embrace it too and find other ways to use it. Hopefully not abuse it and use it too much, but it becomes those things where it doesn't only have to be a logo that becomes something that the consumer or that patient recognizes. It can be a scent. It could be a color, it could be a pattern. It could be all of the above. What we love when we create brands is that the world that we create for that brand is rich and complex and there's unexpected moments and it's not just one dimensional. It's not just a one color that we blast everywhere and a one typeface and call it a day. That really belittles the richness and the depth that the brand and that these guys wanted to create. So our job is then to be able to provide

that depth and to provide that level of visual interest. So it feels akin to the, all the thought, all the work, hard work that these guys did to make that experience, have that depth.

ARMIN And you brought a good point about collaboration. And that is a question that I have for Steve that about how much collaboration was between the separate artists and designers and creative they have working, or were they working together at any point, or was it more of your job to align them all together behind the scenes?

STEVE That was sort of more my job. Um, and again, I think sort of having a clear strategy in place and having sort of a clear understanding of what we're trying to do and sort of what this brand is about is just a huge asset, right? It helps you to sort of express this brand in any medium, any format, any sort of moment of the journey. What I focused on, one of the things I focused on is really this idea of a user journey and sort of really thinking through the journey and understanding sort of, okay, this moment needs to be about reassurance. This moment needs to be about building trust. This moment can actually be maybe a little bit more sensory rich and can be really fun and so on and so forth. And then finding the right talents to express each of these moments with that intent in mind. So we worked with a fashion designer Tawfick and, uh, when we, uh, worked with him, we have the pattern defined already, and we're like, okay, for our uniforms, we want to create uniforms that are really beautiful, obviously, but fit in a brand world, but they should also just be really functional. They should fit great, they should be easy to clean, you know, all of those things and they should make people feel their best. And we landed on uniforms that are actually reasonably subdued, but didn't have a pop of the pattern. So in our studios, actually, people don't wear the head-to-toe jumpsuit and maybe in the future... but not today. So they wear pretty severe uniform, but they use the scarves sort of maybe in their hair, around her neck or in some other way, um, to provide maybe a little visual accents, same thing in our studio. The entire studio is not decked out in wallpaper with the pattern on it. It's just a small room, The Brushery.

So it's just little moments, uh, that provide sort of a little accent and a little sort of a point of interest. And then overall sort of it creates an impression that is trustworthy and sort of you believe you're going to be taken care of in a really good way, but also a little bit unexpected. And it has a twist, you know, here and there. Um, and that's, you know, great when you create it and can create a brand that has sort of an identity that is so rich and multilayered that it can flex to all those different moments and sort of create those different moods while sort of preserving the throughline of the brand.

ARMIN I think if you had everybody dressed in those jumpers, your approval waiting with jump to a hundred—overnight success.

STEVE And, and those jumpsuits are super fun to make. So we actually use them for, um, some activations that we did when we launched our first studio in Flat Iron, and so we had a team on the streets of New York city actually backed out in these jumpsuits, going around the city or the with giant toothbrushes, uh, you know, it was meant to be kind of silly and it kind of was kinda silly, but yeah, that fabric was created for us in Italy. And there was a sort of stone for us to our design right here in the, in the garment district in New York city was a super fun project.

ARMIN Yeah, that is wonderful. All right. So trying to sum up the conversation here. So Anthony, from when you first heard about Tend to now seeing the finished studios, the uniforms, the website, did this all turn out like anything you may have or have not expected?

ANTHONY I would be honest and say, I think it did turn out how we expected, even from the early days of conversation. I think to Doug, the CEO and founders credit, he was pretty clear in what he wanted to set out to do. And we had a couple months of some pretty wide exploration that was really pushing the boundaries of that, but where we landed, made complete sense and is not surprising in a good way, because I think he had a very clear goal and a very clear benchmark of what he wanted to achieve. And I think the thing that I'm surprised by, or pleasantly surprised by is the ability by Steven and everyone at Tend to take,

you know, some of the kernels of stuff that we had and just take that and run with it and just execute it well, add to it, execute it at scale—because in our world, a fair amount of times, what might happen is we might all get to a really good place... and obviously, you know, we're an external partner we're not in the day-to-day. And so those things break down or some of those rules fall apart or people get bored of it and move on to something else and, and all that great work and intention doesn't come to fruition really. So I'm not surprised because everyone on the Tend side has been incredibly good partners and incredibly good at what they do, but it is more uncommon than common where something that we might do with a client starting from scratch when it's a blank piece of paper and where we land and then what goes out into the world and then what gets built upon a lot of times that really goes, can go off course, maybe for good reason, maybe for other reasons, but this that's the nice, surprising part, but actually creatively where we landed. I think we landed there because it felt right for what the goal was. So in some ways not surprising.

ARMIN Yeah. And it sounds like from the beginning, you had, as you mentioned a few times that you had the permission to go in this territory that was sort of unexplored in the category and you just went there with gusto and, and it's nice to hear that, yeah, we landed where we wanted to, because everything building up to that moment set up that moment of success for the brand to carry it forward.

ANTHONY Yeah. And I would say to me, like if you were to underline what makes a good client and a good collaboration between a studio and a client it's having that clarity and then having that permission to go there and then having a fair amount of trust, because there's a lot of points in the creative process where it's a leap of faith. I can't tell someone why one serif is better than another serif except, you know what I've been doing this a long time and it feels right to me, you know, we might be able to objectively get to a creative sandbox and go, can we all agree on this basic area that we're exploring or these basic ideas, but now we're getting really specific on this exact PMs color or on this

very specific typeface, or this very specific materia that's going to be part of the physical design. And some of those things just become subjective when it gets very, very granular. And so for me, like that idea of permission, the idea of trust, the idea of, hey, our partners, we've all aligned strategically where we're going. I like their track record. They're not leading me astray. I don't quite get why they're arguing over one or the other. It looks the same to me, but I'm going to trust that. And that, and that, to me, it was the process from the very beginning with Tend. And hopefully one of the reasons why it's succeeded because it was really good collaboration and trust on both sides.

ARMIN For sure. So Steve well done for, uh, giving Anthony and his team permission to do all this stuff for you. And, uh, you know, the other leaders at Tend, but then moving forward, what is the most exciting or useful aspect of this identity as you continue to evolve the brand and the business?

STEVE Mythology has just given us such a great sort of strategy and identity and such a great toolkit. And what's exciting is to keep applying to this at this to sort of different scenarios in different places, right? So maybe a couple of examples. So we've talked about sort of the obvious sort of design-y things of this experience, right? Like the colors and the pattern and things like that. What's just really amazing and really fun and interesting, I think about the work that we're doing at Tend, this, we are truly pulling this brand through in, in places that you might not expect. So one specific example is the way we compensate our dentists. You know, our brand is earning trust and earning trust. We earn in many different ways through our color palette, throughout our, uh, sort of systems and the identity, but we also earn it through the way that we compensate our dentist. So we're like, okay, at Tend we figured out our brand really is about earning trust. So let's just compensate toward dentist differently. So we compensate our dentists based, not on the amount of procedures that they recommend, or they're gonna recommend five procedures or ten. They're not making any more or less money. Uh, we sort of compensate based on patient

satisfaction, so happy members, happy dentists. And that's just an example of, for we've sort of taken the core of the brand and sort of applying it to not just the identity and the typical areas of design, but we find it all the way to sort of compensation philosophy to help build this brand to sort of make it really strong at all levels. So there's going to be more of them. Um, you know, we're going to keep introducing new services. Um, we're going to keep opening up new studios. Um, there's just so many different places that this brand can go. I think we'll, we'll continue to have a lot of fun with this brand for many years to come.

ARMIN Definitely sounds exciting. And you know, yesterday I had actually a dentist appointment and I was sitting there in my dentist at a strip mall and just thinking like, man, this is not Tend at all. So it's a, it's amazing when you're able to see someone both from the client's side and the design side, be able to redefine a category and reset expectations of what your experiences should be in these things that we take for granted. So thank you, Steve, for sharing all the insight about how Tend came to be, and thank you, Anthony, for sharing how you approached it from your point of view. So thank you again for being on The Follow-Up today.

ANTHONY You're very welcome.

STEVE Thanks for having us.

BRYONY The key term that came out of this conversation was permission. Of having permission from the client. Not in the sense of them being an authority and granting you the permission to do your job. But in the sense of a client empowering you and broadening your scope to push boundaries and redefine expectations. Also, after listening to this episode, you might wish your dentist had a Swishery.

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