

EPIISODE 020

GUMPTION

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Bethany Lesko, Lippincott

AND

Elizabeth Bakhash, Lippincott

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 20 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Gumption Coffee, a coffee shop with one location in New York, NY, and a second one that doubles as their roastery in Brooklyn, NY. Originally founded in Australia by Hazel de los Reyes and Clare Lim in 2013, the popularity and acclaim of its coffee caught the attention of an investor who worked with the founders to bring it to the U.S. in 2018.

The project, designed by the New York, NY office of Lippincott was posted on Brand New on December 2, 2020. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast020 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast020, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Bethany Lesko, Partner, Design, at Lippincott and Elizabeth Bakhash, Partner, Innovation, at Lippincott.

In this conversation we hear how Lippincott aligned its design and strategy under a tight deadline to deliver both an identity and packaging system as well as a retail experience in unison. This

included not just normal things like designing a logo or coming up with patterns but also helping select the baked goods to accompany the coffee. We also get to learn about Lippincott's business model to take on a smaller client... I mean, this was the same firm that designed the identity for THE biggest coffee shop, Starbucks, so we were curious to ask about it.

Now, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Bethany and Lizzie.

ARMIN VIT Welcome to The Follow-Up everyone. I hope you're ready to talk about some coffee today. Welcome Bethany and Lizzy to the show.

BETHANY LESKO Thanks for having us.

LIZZY BAKHASH Thanks for having us.

ARMIN So that our listeners can tell who's who, if you don't mind telling us your name and your title, please.

BETHANY I'm Bethany Lesko, I'm a Design Partner at Lippincott.

LIZZY And I am Lizzie Bakhash, I am an Innovation Partner at Lippincott as well.

ARMIN Wonderful Lizzy, let's start with you. How did Lippincott get involved in this project?

LIZZY Lippincott was first introduced to Gumption and it's two founders, Clare Lim, and Hazel de Los Reyes through a mutual contact at a VC firm. Gumption is essentially born in Australia, developed a super cult-like following, which was made known in Australia through Hazel's win of Australia's Barista and Cupping Champion. And one of those fans happened to be part of a prominent venture capital firm and approached them about the potential to expand Gumption to the U.S.

ARMIN Did they have a narrow list of design firms that they wanted to work with, or was it just based off of that recommendation that they just approached Lippincott and when would it?

LIZZY We had a mutual contact, a past client who also worked at that VC firm who recommended Lippincott. And when they came to us, we were pretty eager to jump on the project immediately. I mean, we just love the founders story. They had just such incredible passion for the brand. So, we were pretty eager to jump on that opportunity as quickly as we could.

ARMIN I asked this without any ulterior motives nurse had a trick question, but, you know, compared to other Lippincott projects like Starbucks, which is the complete opposite of Gumption coffee, what made Lippincott take on a relatively small project apart from the, like you just mentioned the story of the founders and, you know, just like the appeal of smaller coffee brands.

LIZZY We actually did this project under our equity model, where we were partnering with Gumption to evolve the brand, the retail, in exchange for equity in the business. So it was that kind of equity model that enabled us to get a little bit of a smaller client and really enabled us to be so hands-on with the two founders. We formed incredible relationships with them and got to do a lot broader things within the brand, for example, food, which I'm sure we'll touch on later that we don't normally get to do in these types of projects.

ARMIN That's exciting, I didn't know that Lippincott had an equity sort of, I was going to say side hustle, but I'm sure it's not a side hustle. Is this something that happens often? Do you have a lot of those clients?

LIZZY This was actually our first one, Bethany and I were really fortunate to have worked on this and wanted to make it as much of a success for Lippincott as possible so that we can continue to work on such incredible and inspiring projects.

ARMIN Oh, very interesting. Thank you for sharing that. So Bethany turning to you. What were some of the initial conversations around the goals of the redesign, given that they came to Lippincott after they had lived with their pretty good design from Collins. You know, this is not meant to compare your design to the one from Collins, but to put in context

that Gumption wasn't new to the design process, nor where they starting from a more typical startup identity.

BETHANY Yeah, it's a great question because the Collins identity was really lovely. And I think the big reason that they came to us looking for something a little bit new and different was just that they'd gained a little bit of clarity on what they wanted the brand to stand for. And with that they wanted the visual expression to be a little bit bolder and to better express just what they really wanted their coffee to stand for, which is that their coffee gives the drinker superpowers. So it's something that's really bold. They really believe in the human spirit and then each individual's ability to do amazing things. And coffee's ability to unleash that power. Without understanding, we really went into the design first, making sure that we understood what made Gumption special, understood what really made them differentiated from the rest of the coffee space and how we could express that visually. And then the store experience.

ARMIN I already have my two cups of coffee for the day, but when you just mentioned how unleashing your superpowers, like, I don't feel those superpowers. Maybe I need more coffee or a specific Gumption coffee. Question for both probably, especially in this case where it was a little bit different. What was the first phase or the first phases of a project like this before starting to design?

LIZZY Like every Lippincott project we obviously started with a discovery and exploration phase, but as I mentioned, just being such an intimate project face-to-face with the founders, this discovery process was far more exciting and sensorial. So it was early summer '19. Our team all went down to Gumption's roastery, which is in Industry City, Brooklyn. And we did essentially a five hour immersion session of which included a cupping experience. So, if you don't know what that is, it's a blind taste test where you're tasting different coffees. You're first sniffing the coffee and then taking a spoon and slurping it up like a [slurp] kind of sound where you're spreading it evenly across the

tongue. And this was meant to emulate the experience that Claire and Hazel go through as they're visiting each of the farms, whether in South or Central America, East Africa... so it was a really fun way to get into it with them and get to know them a little bit.

ARMIN This podcast is turning out to be torture. When you made that sound of the slurp, I was like, I want that. I really want to get some cupping down right now. But anyway, so you go through that phase and then how do you start moving into the design phase?

BETHANY It was actually a pretty tight timeline for the design phase. So after all of the immersion sessions, some competitive analysis, we codified a brand platform and a brand strategy for them. And then when we got into design, after jumping off of strategy, we actually presented the logo, the visual system, and the store design all in one meeting, which is fairly rare in this type of project, probably back to your original question, how could we do a project so small, like this, a tight timeline and quick turnarounds, definitely a part of that. And we did actually present to them three different logos and design directions, and then one store design with elements that could flex based on which visual direction they went with. So things like colors and materiality. And then from there, I worked with them quite collaboratively to refine and land on where we did.

ARMIN In terms of the different aspects of the design, because it involves retail and identity... just in terms of getting a little bit of insight into how Lippincott works, is this just you working on it? Is it a big team? Or does it also have... does the nature of the business side of the project also take into account that it should be a smaller team? Things like that.

BETHANY Definitely our team sizes vary pretty wildly based on the size of the client. For this one, since we were a little bit scrappier, it was Lizzie and I, and then about four designers, two on the retail side and two on the visual side.

ARMIN So it is a tight team. Still to get to retail and identity at the same time, that must have been hard because you were trying to, in a way, put the cart before the horse with the retail coming at the same time as the logo. I think like the logo, you establish certain ground rules that can then be applied to the retail experience. So what was that like trying to do it all at the same time?

LIZZY The two teams were very much in sync. We had weekly or bi-weekly crits together to share the process. And also the neat thing I kind of wanted to mention about the team is, it was pretty much solely a female team. There was one male, but the rest of the working team was females. I'd say we had a really good cadence going, we'd meet, share, we all sit pretty much on the same floor, so we could kind of pop over and see what everyone was working on.

ARMIN Back when we could all sit on ah... in the same floor, in the same space. So let's talk a little bit about that actually. Did COVID have an impact in the rollout of this brand?

LIZZY They definitely had some delays in terms of construction. And obviously the location is in Midtown, which is obviously struggling a bit. I do have confidence in this brand in particular, because I think it's obviously been quite a year for everyone. And now more than ever, I feel that we need these bold, inspiring, and happy spaces. And Gumption really is that. You can feel that energy and that lift just by walking in. I have great confidence in success even amidst this climate.

BETHANY It's actually really interesting, their business model and their entire value proposition is built around getting in and out very quickly and getting a really great cup of coffee served to, in a snap. So actually the store design on accident a little bit is set up to be perfect in the COVID time—so you can get in and out and get your coffee really quickly. And I think they're even talking about making some slight adjustments to future stores so that they're even easier to get in and out. This one, you have to walk into the store a little bit, but maybe there's even like

a little lobby area where you can just pop in and get your coffee and be on your way to make it extra safe.

ARMIN You mentioned that there were three designs presented and the one that was chosen is sort of similar to what they had in terms of the wordmark. What did the other two options look like? And you don't have to describe them in detail, but just to get a sense of how different or close in they were...

BETHANY You're completely right. It was a little bit similar to the one that they had just in that very custom wordmark. The other two, one had a symbol and one was another wordmark solution. So, definitely teasing out whether they were more interested in adding a symbol to their wordmark, or sticking out with just the really unique type. And you can see where they net it out. They definitely have a penchant for a nice, unique typeface.

ARMIN And do you get a sense, you know, in your experience working with other clients that the two owners of Gumption had a little bit more confidence in going through the design process, having been through it before?

BETHANY Yeah, I think they were pretty comfortable giving feedback on design and understood where to push and pull things. And they're actually a fantastic client in that they really did want to push the identity. They wanted something that was really bold and really maximalist in this landscape of very minimal coffee shops. You think of a blue bottle, there's really not much design going on there. They wanted something that was really more in your face and they really pushed us in a nice way.

ARMIN Speaking of being maximalist and a little bit wild, how did you land on that cool font Salvaje Display?

BETHANY The logo that they picked and that's in use today was a customization of that Salvaje font. And we just loved it because it felt a lot like when you're pouring milk into coffee and that beautiful swirl that you

get, and also spoke to that little spark inside of each of us, if you're thinking about those superpowers. So that was where we got the fun little shape that's hidden inside the G and the O in the wordmark. And then from there, they just loved that so much that we thought, why not create a totally custom typeface based on the wordmark, so that they could use it in all of their materials.

ARMIN And what was that process like working with Typozon who are the designers of the font, and then the customization?

BETHANY It was a really fun process actually Typozon is terrific. So, as I mentioned, we had updated Salvaje for the wordmark. So we basically had, you know, six or seven letters. So we went to them, we gave them the brief described what we were trying to do. He took those letters that we'd customized, refined them, and then flushed it out to the full alphabet. And then we had some nice collaborative working sessions where we gave feedback. He gave some suggestions, came with more options, and then finally landed where we did.

ARMIN You already mentioned that the client is encouraging you through all of this. What was the reaction like as the identity evolved?

BETHANY So excited the whole way. They're a very fun client in that they are just really energized by design. So, in each phase they were really excited to see it build on each other and come to life across the different applications and in the store, and seeing the logo on each of the cups, and the packages, and on the window, and the storefront.

LIZZY Just to add to that, I think because the strategy and the identity was so true to these two founders and who they were, it was natural for them to be aligned all the way through. It just felt like an expression of themselves.

BETHANY Yeah. It's definitely a real testament of the clarity with which they were able to articulate their goals, and then we were able to bring them to life.

ARMIN And then in terms of how strategy and design work together at Lippincott, obviously you have to do the, some of the strategy work up front, but does that keep evolving as the identity evolves? Or is it more just kind of like a blueprint to keep building towards it? Sort of fulfill that strategy? Or do you keep updating it as it goes along?

LIZZY I think there were definite tweaks as we learned things about the space and how they want it to execute across things like food, and experience, and packaging. There were things in the strategy that we were able to dial up or dial down based on those learnings. But I do think that, that blueprint that we had upfront and particular, because it was such a tight timeline to execute against, it really did feel core to that the entire time.

ARMIN And you just mentioned food again, and then you mentioned it at the beginning. So let's talk a little bit about that. What role did you play in some of these food items?

LIZZY Yeah, so this was something so fun and something I had definitely never done before. As early as the strategy phase, when we were even presenting multiple strategy directions, we showed an experience implication on how each strategy would be brought to life through different food vendors. I actually had the pleasure of then identifying and running around the city for the better part of a summer, trying different baked goods which aligned very nicely to the first trimester of my pregnancy. And when we finally found King Street Kitchen, it just felt like a perfect match. It was not only absolutely delicious, but incredibly bold and show stopping in its form. So just felt super aligned to the strategy and what we're trying to achieve.

ARMIN And this food vendor, did they have a store or are they like starting their own brand as well? Just a little bit of backstory about them too.

BETHANY Yeah. So the founder's name is Christina, also a nice parallel in terms of all female founders. And she had been having a stand at Smorgasborg in Brooklyn, and then she was supplying to different vendors, but didn't actually have her own retail location. I'm actually not sure if

she's opened a retail location since, I think they've become incredibly close with Claire and Hazel. It was a nice extension of the relationship.

ARMIN And is there a goal to open more locations? I'm guessing yes, but given the climate...

BETHANY Yes. So I think part of the goals of the VC firm that invested in them is to open several more locations in the next couple of years, and then ideally open locations across the United States. Obviously, since that goal was set, COVID happened. So we'll see how that timeline plays out in the future, but they're definitely pushing and hoping to open more locations soon. I know they're still looking around New York city for other retail space and opportunities.

ARMIN Yeah, hopefully that happens because it's a really wonderful space. Switching a little bit to the packaging and the patterns that you introduced, how did those come about? And, you know, one of the things when I saw the packaging is that it almost looks effortless and I'm sure it took effort, but there's something very simple, very straightforward about them, but they still have a richness to them. If you can just talk a little bit about the packaging itself.

BETHANY Sure. First you asked about the patterns, which actually were a very rare instance of design directions being Frankensteined and working out for the better. The patterns were originally part of a different design direction, but they loved the story behind them so much that they wanted to pull them into the one that they chose. And you can see the patterns are really about that process of coffee. So it's the coffee leaves and then the coffee cherries, and then the roasted beans, and then the ground beans. So telling a really nice story about the process of coffee making and roasting that they love to tell. And then the packaging itself... definitely no accident that it's a very nice harmonious composition of all of the different toolkit elements. We knew from the beginning that obviously the coffee packaging was going to be a super important touch point. We were thinking about it from day one with the design. So thinking about how the logo would

live on there with the different colors of the color palette and those patterns, and you can see even the full logo on the front and then the shorthand “G” on the side. So thinking about how all those elements would live together, nicely on the package.

ARMIN And I think they all do. And I really liked that little video you put in the case study of the bag, flipping and revealing that nice “G” on the side, because it’s usually like an overlooked side of packaging—that gusset area—of the bags. Part of it is because it’s expensive to put things there. So I’m glad that that turned out well. In terms of starting to sum up a little bit Lizzy, and this is maybe a little bit of a hard question, but how do you think this identity, packaging, and retail design benefit Gumption’s brand and business, both in the short term, in light of the pandemic and the longterm, if they are able to weather the storm? And you sort of already touched a little bit on this, but specific about kind of where Lippincott landed in terms of the design and how would that benefit Gumption.

LIZZY It’s a really good question. It is definitely a tough one. I think that Gumption knows who they are. And I think that by picking up a Gumption cup, you also in turn, get a little bit of that superpower unleashed inside of yourself, which I think is obviously a concept that will long last the test of time. And if we continue to be positive, and can do, I think that sense of inspiration will carry us into a much more positive future.

ARMIN Well answered. Bethany, what is the most exciting aspect for you in terms of the identity being out in the world and Gumption having gone this route?

BETHANY Especially nowadays we need little things to celebrate. So I love how festive it feels and how much it celebrates, just great coffee and the human spirit, which both seem like good things to celebrate nowadays.

ARMIN For sure, are you both coffee drinkers?

BETHANY Definitely.

LIZZY Absolutely.

ARMIN All right. So, I should have asked this before, but is the coffee good?

BETHANY It is.

LIZZY It is.

BETHANY It's pretty much all I drink now.

ARMIN When I saw the design and just like reading about the backstory of the founders. Like this must be really good coffee. I think I'm just going to treat myself to some for the Holidays.

LIZZY Yeah. We should send you some, let us send you so [laughter].

ARMIN Even better. That's actually been one of the biggest benefits of running the podcast is that after we are done talking most people are like, Oh yeah, we'll send you stuff. Like we did a podcast about a distillery in Indianapolis and they send me gin and rye and whiskey. And it's all of the best that I've had. So, recent number one to keep the podcast going. But reason number two now probably recent number one is to get to hear stories like this, get a little bit of insight behind the scenes about how things happen. I think it's a great testament to Lippincott to take this route taking on smaller clients. The equity idea is great. And I think a lot of designers wonder how that works. Interesting to hear a little bit about that. And as I mentioned in my post on Brand New, it's just a joyful expression. It's this over designed in the best way possible in a way that now so many designers and so many clients are kind of like afraid to do, like everybody's doing the geometric sans and the basic color palettes—bare minimum in terms of design. And this does the bare maximum. It was very enjoyable to see and to review. Thank you both for being on the show.

LIZZY Thanks for having us.

BETHANY Yeah. Thank you so much, Armin.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO

We have always believed in the superpower-giving qualities of coffee, especially since both Armin and I rise at 5:00 am. We are happy to report that — thanks to a care package from Lippincott with samples of Gumption Coffee — the claims are true. This is outstanding coffee in outstanding packaging that is good to the last slurp.

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