

EPIISODE 037

BOSTON CALLING

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Travis Robertson and Greg Almeida, Colossus

AND

Jon Contino, Contino

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

This week we are following up on Boston Calling, a music festival first celebrated in 2013 that attracted nearly 40,000 attendees in its last edition in 2019. Over the years, the festival has been headlined by performers like Kendrick Lamar, Sia, Beck, Eminem, Mumford and Sons, and many more. The 2020 festival was cancelled due to COVID, which was then postponed to May of 2021 and earlier this year it was decided to further postpone it to 2022. Attendees' patience will be rewarded with headliners Foo Fighters and Rage Against the Machine.

The project, designed in collaboration by Boston, MA-based Colossus and New York, NY-based Contino Studio, was posted on Brand New on July 7, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast037 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast037, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Jon Contino, Owner and Chief Creative at Contino Studio; and Travis Robertson and Greg Almeida, Executive Creative Directors and Co-Founders at Colossus.

In this conversation we go far deeper than ever expected into the design of a dog's ears as the long-standing mascot of the festival, a boston terrier, went through numerous iterations before being

decided it would have no ears. Beyond the ears, we learn about the challenge of giving the festival a brand that could be independent from the musicians to create a personality that would be able to stand on its own. This was achieved through a solid combination of energetic design aesthetics and copywriting that was as strong on posters and social media promos as it was on bathroom signs and parking instructions. All while maintaining an unapologetic Boston attitude.

Now let's listen in as Armin follows up with Jon, Travis, and Greg.

ARMIN VIT Hello everyone. Today we're heading deep into the Northeast as we heed the call of Boston Calling. Jon, Greg, Travis, thank you for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

JON CONTINO Thanks Armin. Thanks for having me.

GREG ALMEIDA Thanks for having us Armin, appreciate it.

TRAVIS ROBERTSON Yeah, thanks for having us.

ARMIN Before we get started, if you could introduce yourselves with your name and title so that our listeners can know who's who.

JON I'm Jon Contino, Creative Director, Chief Jerk at Contino Studio.
[Laughter]

TRAVIS I'm Travis Robertson, Founder and Executive Creative Director at Colossus in Boston.

GREG I am Greg Almeida and I am also a Founder and Executive Creative Director at Colossus in Boston.

ARMIN Perfect. Greg and Travis, we're going to start with you. Since Colossus sits slightly outside our design and branding jurisdiction, in the world of advertising, can you tell us briefly about your company?

TRAVIS We have grown a lot. We're a pretty small shop in Boston, Massachusetts. We are a creative company. I guess you could call us an ad agency.

We're about 20 people big, now. At the beginning of the year, we were four people. So a lot of changes here. We do everything from design and branding and packaging to traditional advertising, websites, digital design, all of the above. We just like solving brand problems using creativity.

ARMIN Greg, anything to add or your good with that description?

GREG No, I'm good with that description. You did a great job, Travis. [Laughter] I'm very impressed.

JON That's Greg's job at Colossus. He just supports Travis's opinions.

GREG I'm the hype man. I'm like, yeah, woo.

TRAVIS That's right, he's the hype man. [Laughter]

GREG Hell yeah.

ARMIN Perfect. Enjoying the dynamic already. Now, Jon, since you sit outside of any jurisdiction whatsoever, and you kind of make your own rules, for those of are listeners that may not be familiar with you, can you give us a quick intro?

JON I mean, I do appreciate that Contino is a creative studio/wiffle ball team. [Laughter] We do everything from branding and packaging to... We kind of stop at the advertising spot, but everything up to that is pretty much where we're at. Everything from A to Z in terms of creativity, we like to do.

ARMIN Now, Greg and Travis, as I was digging through your LinkedIn profiles, I noticed a certain theme, which is Boston. You both went to college in Boston and you have both worked there for years. I assume this was one of the reasons why you ended up with this project, but could you walk us through how you landed Boston Calling?

TRAVIS Sure. Boston, I think we all know and can appreciate is the greatest city on planet earth—

JON No, wrong.

TRAVIS —with the greatest baseball team on planet earth—

JON —also wrong.

TRAVIS A deep lineage and appreciation for the Red Sox that Jon also shares.

JON Wrong, wrong. [Laughter]

GREG I got to admit—before you get into it Travis, I just going to say, I got to agree with Jon on this one. I know I’m born and raised in Boston, but I’m a Yankee fan. I know I’m like traitor number one, but I’m with you on this one Jon. Boston is the greatest city, but the Yankees are the best baseball.

JON I love Greg.

GREG But you know, let’s just move on, past this.

TRAVIS Greg is a first generation American who grew up in Massachusetts. I was not born in Massachusetts, but we met working at Arnold, is a large advertising agency in Boston many, many years ago and became creative partners. That was over a decade ago. And we worked around at the big shops, the big holding companies, Mullen, Arnold, a bunch of other places getting our feet wet in the world of brand and advertising. And then I never left. I’ve been here since I was 17. Like I said, Greg, born and raised, but we just saw a big opportunity in Boston to do something a little bit differently. Something that felt, I don’t know, a little more punk rock. Something that felt like it had our stamp on it. And so we started Colossus about a year ago. One of our first projects happened to be Boston Calling.

So the client at the time was a strategist named Danny Pool, an awesome guy who we had known from a previous life who reached out and asked “Would you guys want to take this on? It’s a big deal.” And that was one of his first gigs client side. And it’s an awesome music festival. The bands are great, the headliner’s great. I think it’s

always had a slightly different vibe than the Lollapaloozas of the world, or any of the, let's go set shit on fire in the desert and run around on LSD festivals. So yeah, we jumped on it, it sounded awesome.

GREG When Danny reached out to us too... when you look at our site, you get a sense for who we are and what our vibe is. And knowing us, and having known Danny and worked with him in the past, he's like, "Your vibe is perfect for what we're looking for for this festival." And that's the exact tone and the exact... Colossus and Boston Calling were almost made for each other. He brought us in and off we went.

ARMIN Match made in heaven, AKA Boston.

GREG Exactly. Yeah.

TRAVIS There you go.

ARMIN Now what prompted you to bring in Jon, a New Yorker?

TRAVIS We owe Jon a lot of money. We've been threatened. [Laughter]

GREG It's true.

TRAVIS Jon's been threatening us. We've known Jon for many years. We met on a project for... Greg and I were the creative directors on Jack Daniels many years ago. We had done a series of these letterpress posters, they kind of made the rounds in design circles. The second year of that, we wanted to branch out and we brought Jon in and he did an awesome job on his hand drawn poster for Jack Daniels. His aesthetic was perfect. We kind of grew up in the same scenes also and I think we had a immediate kinship and Jon's just a great dude and incredibly talented. I don't think you need an introduction on that, but on this one, as we got under the hood and started exploring what the brand could be, Jon's aesthetic fit into that really well. And we've stayed in touch for years. We Slack every day, and we text, and compare notes on client behavior and typography and...

GREG I believe Jon refers to us as his best friends in the whole wide world. I believe that's Jon's actual title for us.

JON I mean that is true. That is true.

GREG Thank you, Jon.

JON They're fantastic people, I will say that. It's up to the listener to decide whether or not I'm lying. [Laughter].

ARMIN So Jon aside from getting the chance to work with fantastic people, I know that living in a different city and state than the client or where the project is happening, isn't a big deal. But this particular project feels like it couldn't get any more Boston. Did you have any hesitation into joining this project?

JON You know, it's so funny too, especially being such a classic New York type of guy. I was born to hate Boston but at the same time it's one of those cities, like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, that kind of share a lot of the same DNA. It's kind of like when siblings have that sibling rivalry. They all grew up the same way, they're all from the same parents, everything's the same but they just fight each other all the time. Those types of cities, it's not out of the wheelhouse—and it's places that I've spent a lot of time in anyway. I've definitely spent a lot of time in Boston, really love the city. I mean, all joking aside, it is a great place and there's a lot of really fun stuff, and amazing history, and a lot of characters there. So, the personalities is just overflowing out of that city. So it was a no-brainer to be a part of it. And it's not a city that I'm not familiar with. I know plenty about Boston. Some people would probably argue, why would you have a New York guy working on something like this? But when it comes down to it, the traits that identify Boston as this personality riddled place is just so easy to tap into, that I was more than excited to work on it.

TRAVIS It's a good point, like it's not St Louis.

JON Right.

TRAVIS When you get up in the Northeastern quarter, there's a lot of grit. These are cities built by immigrants, these are port cities, these are dock cities. And obviously these cities have grown up and become more metropolitan, and refined, and sophisticated over the years, but there is a certain undercurrent still. We always joke, what do you think you're better than me?

JON Yeah.

TRAVIS That's a thing and that's a friendly thing. But people don't understand that in the Midwest but Jon's right. Boston and New York, aside from slight inflections in our accents, our baseball teams, our definition of pizza, we're really not that far off. [Laughter].

JON I think a lot of times people don't realize how close they really are to one another. I've driven back and forth to Boston in the same day plenty of times for work stuff. You just feel like you're connected, one way or another. There's so much overlap that it feels very natural.

ARMIN Yeah. I like how we are bridging the divide between Boston and New York through attitude, as well as design, as we'll get into the details of this project. So Greg and Travis, you mentioned that Boston Calling was one of your first clients as you set-up your shop. Can you walk us a little bit through the timeline of this project as it spans two years that have felt like two decades. How did this all play out over the course of the pandemic? And I guess how it's still playing out because the event is happening next year.

TRAVIS Yeah. It definitely took on a very different context. Initially, nobody had any idea what was coming down the pipe in terms of that bat meeting, that pangolin [laughter] somewhere in the world coming to a standstill. But when we started this, I guess it was two years ago, these festivals were a no brainer. There were 30 of them a summer and this is the big one up in New England. So initially, it was a project to refresh the brand. They've been doing this for a while. I think the brand had gotten a little bit stale. It felt a little bit corporate. It didn't feel true to the city or to the mission behind the festival. We were

asked to give that an overhaul and then figure out design aside, what is the marketing side of things? How does design and marketing, how do those hold hands? Obviously we start from the identity system, figure out what feels old, what we need to evolve, what still has equity in it and needs to be preserved, and things like dog. And then the pandemic hit, I think right as we were finishing this thing.

JON Yeah.

GREG Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

JON Yeah, right about to launch. [Laughter].

TRAVIS Yeah. It was buttoned up with a bow and then things started getting canceled here and there. And then this one got canceled, and put on hold, and I don't think anybody knew when it was coming back. It just got put on the shelf and floated in the ether for a while.

ARMIN And I'm guessing earlier this year they were like, "Okay, time to restore it." Was there any talk about revisiting the work that you had already done? Or was it just, let's just pick up from where we left off?

TRAVIS Pick up from where we left off because nothing ended up out in the world for the festival. It's all there. Some of the headliners changed and they'll swap out some of the acts and the dates, but they're still on the shelf, I guess now until 2022. Things are going back on hold.

ARMIN [Laughter]. Yeah, it's crazy because we do events as well, our Brand New conference, and I think a month... we had postponed all of our events from last year to this year, then from this year to next year, and a month ago, we were like, "Yeah, it's happening in 2022." But as of last week, we're like, "We don't know." So it's crazy how much it continues to affect, but let's not dwell on COVID because it sucks. So let's get back onto that project. [Laughter]. Travis and Greg, what brief or direction did you get from Boston Calling..? or, you already mentioned that, yes, it was a little bit dated, but was that something that they

realized? Or were they just like, “We want to look forward? What do we do?” And what did those initial stages look like on your end?

TRAVIS Fortunately for us, I think these clients were pretty self-aware. They knew that it had gotten a little bit old and had gotten a little bit stale. The worst is when you have to have that discussion with someone that refuses to believe it. We built this brand 15 years ago and it’s still perfect. Brands are living, breathing organisms that you have to take care of and grow and evolve and eventually give a haircut to, and teach them new skills. They knew that already, which was good for us.

TRAVIS And I think they knew too that the festival, even the makeup of the festival, had changed a little bit. They had a lot of electronic artists early on and they had more pop artists early on, or they had all least grown into that and they wanted to get back to their rock roots a little bit. Boston’s got a lot of rock history from Aerosmith, to some of the punk rock bands like Gang Green and Slapshot, but they weren’t going down the hardcore path but they definitely were like, “Let’s give this an edge. Let’s give this some grit, and let’s get back to our rock and roll roots.”

ARMIN Greg, any hype to add? [Laughter].

GREG Any hype? Great job, Travis. [Laughter]. It’s funny because the headliners were Rage Against The Machine, Foo Fighters, and Red Hot Chili Peppers. Equally as disappointing as not having the work run was me not getting a chance to actually see Rage Against The Machine in concert. That was also the biggest bummer but 2022, here we come. But it’s true, they really wanted to get back to those rock and roll roots. I was talking about earlier about the tone and the edginess, and I think they wanted to feel a little edgier, and feel a little bolder, especially when we get into the marketing and the language, and in the vibe to really kind of embrace all of that. And it’s not something that they’ve really done much in the past. It was more just, “Hey, we’re having a show and let’s let the headliners lead, and we’ll go to market with the bands leading the way.” And the bands still lead the way obviously, but

they wanted to give the show a little bit more of a personality as well. Rock and roll vibes is definitely the brief that we went off of, for sure.

ARMIN Especially as Travis mentioned with so many summer festivals in competition with it, that it needs to stand out not just from the headliners, because all festivals have great headliners, but give it a personality makes a lot of sense. Jon, similar question to you. What brief or direction did you get from Colossus? And how did you go about getting started on your end?

JON The funniest thing about starting this project is that it definitely had a much different vibe at the beginning, from where we ended up. And I remember Travis and I were talking about it and we were just like, “Yeah, we want to do something super clean, and super bold, and poppy, and colorful”, and all this kind of stuff. And then I kept telling Travis, I said, “Yeah, I want to do something different. I don’t want to do something that looks like Jon Contino did it.” That kind of thing. So he was like, “Yeah, yeah, no. I totally get it.” So, then we ended up with something that looks like stuff that I do all the time [laughter]. I mean, it made sense though because it works. It made sense for the brand, and all that kind of stuff.

It was a very open brief for me. Once I came in, it was very much, what’s your opinion on this? Where do you see this going? I didn’t really get this formal, it needs to be this, it needs to be that, it needs to appeal to this blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. It was one of those things that was a little bit more just, what do you think? We know what the festival is like, we know where it’s held, we know the history about it. Where do you think this can go considering what it was, and how it can feel new, and fresh, and different, and start bringing new and different people into it? It was a lot of experimenting until we came down to the fact that it was kind of exactly what we thought it should be. We took a roundabout way to get there but once we finally landed on it, it just made so much sense that it was dumb that we didn’t start there almost.

TRAVIS So dumb. [Laughter]. Well, I think too, we have a slightly different dynamic than a... A lot of ad agencies, or marketing companies will narrow down the fine designers they want to work with, then they reach out and they get a bid, and then pull some swipe together, and loose ideas... we don't really work like that with Jon anyway. I think because we're friends, and we bounce ideas off each other all day long, whether we're working on them together or not. I'll send Jon stuff all the time, just what do you think? And he'll tell me it's dog shit and I'll start over, I'll have a good cry.

JON Mm-hmm (affirmative), usually.

TRAVIS And vice versa. But I think that that was sort of how we approached this project. Let's actually make something together. We got in the kitchen and made a nice casserole.

JON It was really good making that casserole though. But it was just the three of us just really just making fun of each other for the whole time. Just trying to figure out what was an idea that didn't embarrass the three of us.

TRAVIS It's true.

JON Especially with the three of us constantly breaking each other's chops. It was definitely to a point where sometimes you could be hesitant to share an idea, because you didn't want it to get ripped to shreds. I really find that to be a good way to go about some of this stuff because when you put work out into the world, the internet is sitting there waiting to rip you to shreds. So the way that we were going about it, I thought was actually pretty helpful, especially considering one of my favorite comments I saw online when they announced the lineup, someone was just like, "What is this? A boomer fest?" Not really understanding age, or timeline, or anything like that... or generations. It's so funny to think, if that was all that someone had to say bad about it, then I think we succeeded and we did a good job.

ARMIN And to break down the casserole metaphor, how are you hashing this out? I mean, are you drawing stuff? All three of you? Are you just drawing mood board references first? And then working through it? How does that look in terms of actual, not day-to-day work, but at the beginning of the project to end up in the direction that you wanted to go in?

JON One thing I can say, and I think I pushed Travis to his limit with this, is that when I start a project, I pull more swipecards—

TRAVIS —Oh, here come the mood boards—

JON —I do more mood boards than anyone's ever seen in the world, [laughter] because I literally will put together almost hundreds of mood boards just to figure out certain little nuances, just to make sure I can zero in on them. And I was just throwing stuff at them constantly. So even before we were able to even make anything, I was just like, "Look at these 500 images and take apart these two tiny little things out of all of them." That's what I mean. There was a lot of that to start with. And I don't know, guys, we didn't really have much visual at the beginning, right? It was more verbal and swipecards type of shit, wasn't it?

TRAVIS Yeah. I mean, we had started with mood boards I think before Jon was in. Initial conversations with a client, we we're like, "Here are five directions we could go." Because it was pretty apparent early on that if you lean too heavy into the music, into a genre... Because these festivals, you can say it's rock and roll or whatever, but it's not Boston Calling Rock and Roll Festival. They'll have Post Malone, or Travis Scott, or whoever it is playing run the jewels. Obviously it's going to be an eclectic mix. So we were looking at pieces of the city. How do you use Boston's historical color palette? What can we pull from? Is it graffiti culture? And it's really loose, right? We're not really into design systems or anything. It's kind of a vibe check. And so we'll take the client through that and be like, "Do you like something that's a little bit more street focused? Something that's scrappy or DIY Xerox kind of thing? Do you like something that's a little more refined? Do you like

something that literally takes what you did for the last 10 years and makes it a little bit better?”

And then, once we got down that path and realized where we wanted to go, we’ve got some very loose pieces. Then Jon comes in with his 4,562 mood boards—it is super helpful [laughter]. I mean, every designer works differently, right? Some people are very methodical and map out the battle plan and need those parts and pieces. I design through sheer chaos and it would drive Jon nuts because he’s more buttoned up than I am. And it’s a total personal thing. Jon will throw in his ideas, and we’ll pull these three things out, and add to it. And then we had communal mood boards going and we would add things to it until we figure out, oh okay, let’s lean into the... There’s a little bit of the color palette will come from the collegiate world, right? Because it takes place on Harvard’s campus. So we want to pull some reds from that. Or we want to pull some muted colors from that. And then we said port city before, but there is this old world thing about Boston, so the typography should take clues from that. And Jon would have some great ideas on “What if we use this cool black letter thing that’s all fucked up?” And then we just kind of start building.

ARMIN Now that you have the theme going, let’s talk about the hero of the Boston Calling identity, which is the terrier. And how did that evolve? Jon, you shared a few sketches showing the dog with different facial gestures, with ears, no ears... which was actually one of the most “controversial” elements of the design where it was like, “Oh it should have ears. No it shouldn’t have ears.” So, what did that process of refining the hero of the festival look like?

JON When we started to reinvent the terrier, the first thing we did was we sat down and we looked at it. We were like, “What is weird about this?” There’s something about this that’s funky. And we couldn’t really put our finger on it. And then we sit there and we realized, “Oh, it has no ears.” It should probably have ears, dogs normally have ears. So we started adding the ears in, and stuff like that. It was definitely our

preference to keep the ears in there. And you'll see in the sketches, the ears are kind of popping through the hat. And then it was stupid stuff like, do the ears get stuck underneath the brim of the hat? Do they poke through? It has a custom made hat for a dog with holes in the top? All these different nuances about what's the production value of the hat that the dog is wearing. We definitely went for that, and then subsequently got denied the ears. So that was not our choice. In terms of the personality, when I was sketching out the terrier head, just thinking about Boston and this little terrier guy walking down the street looking for trouble, kind of thing. That's the kind of personality I was trying to get in there. At one point we had the little tooth sticking out and all kind of—

TRAVIS We had stitches too, didn't we?

JON I think so. Yeah, I think we had stitches on his face.

GREG Yeah, we did. [Laughter].

TRAVIS We had a bite out of his ear, where this guy's rough and tumble.

JON Yeah.

ARMIN He's seen some shit.

TRAVIS But it is. [Laughter]. Yeah, he wasn't putting up with it. Those dogs, like actual Boston Terriers, that's an ugly fucking dog. [Laughter].

JON So ugly.

TRAVIS If you really break it down... I remember Jon started to draw these too. He's like, "I don't know if I'm getting the eyes right." And we're looking at pictures of the actual dog, and they look like their eyes are popping out of their head already. [Laughter]. They look like someone's squeezing them.

JON Yeah, they do.

- TRAVIS** If it was a Labrador, or a Golden Retriever, it probably wouldn't be that hard but drawing that is not easy.
- JON** It would be less fun though, if it was a lab or a golden, it would be like, "Oh look how cute it is." But the Boston Terrier has that vibe to it where it's like, whatever. It's just got that whatever look it's like, "I was just slapped together, and this is what I am, and you're going to have to accept it", which I love. [Laughter].
- TRAVIS** Yeah. It's not even a Bulldog. It's just a watered down Bulldog that farts a lot.
- GREG** For 2023, we'll propose a Labradoodle. That'd be the new Boston Calling. [Laughter]. What's really funny though is you talk about the ears and stuff, and it really shines a light on how dumb all our jobs are at a certain point too. You spend so much time and emotion and then you're like, "Oh my God, they won't... It has to have no ears. That's so dumb." And you get so emotionally invested in it, and then you take a step back and you're like, "I'm upset because this dog doesn't have ears?" Like who cares? You know what I mean? And obviously it's the passion that goes into it. And obviously you give a shit about all the details, all the time. But it was really funny when you take a step back, like even now talking about it, I think about how annoyed we were like, "Oh, we can't put ears on the dog?" Now, it's just like, okay, it doesn't really matter.
- JON** It was definitely heated too. At one point I remember it was starting to get heated. We were getting real angry where I had to step away for a day or two because we were like—
- GREG** Yeah exactly. [Laughter]. My wife's like, "What are you so upset about?" I'm like, "Forget it. You wouldn't understand." [Laughter].
- ARMIN** You wouldn't understand because no one would.
- GREG** Because no one would understand. [Laughter].

JON The only unfortunate thing about it, which is good for things like this, is where designer to designer, creative to creative, you can explain, “No, I get it. A dog should have ears.” But then when it goes out into the world and people are just like, “What freaking morons did this? They forgot to put ears on the dog.” Not even thinking about the fact that it had to go through all three of us, everyone around us, the clients, the clients’ bosses, their board of directors. So many people have to look and weigh in on ears? Or no ears? To be able to even get to that point is a struggle. And I feel like where we were able to get was such a victory because we got so many of the things in, that we wanted to get in, that losing the ears at the end of the day was just, “All right, we lost the ears but we kept the weird phrases that say ‘go pee on the grass around the corner’, or something.”

TRAVIS [Laughter] Yeah, exactly. It’s funny you say the board of directors thing, because halfway through the project, I forgot about this, Boston Calling got bought by Madison Square Garden, right? So there’s another New York tie in for you.

JON Right.

TRAVIS So now you got to go through your immediate clients, and the founders of the festival who are great people and a pleasure to work with. But they’re like, “Yeah, there’s a new layer of complexity here.” Now we got to go through Madison Square Garden. So I remember us putting together 12 versions of the terrier. We’re going to go into this meeting today, we’re going to get on the phone with the big wigs in New York, we’re really going to fall on our sword for these ears. We’re like, “Listen, guys we’re going to lay it on the table. We got to have ears.” And they didn’t want ears. [Laughter] It is what it is. But I guess that’s the difference too, between fine art and making something for yourself in a vacuum that can be anything you want it to be, and then shepherding somebody else’s brand that they have an emotional attachment to, or they feel they have equity in something. To me that’s the most frustrating part of the job, and the funnest part of the job,

because it is a riddle and you have to figure out, okay, I got to cut the ears off this dog, make it make sense fitting under a bowler cap that the dog is wearing, and make it still look pissed off and gritty.

JON And really at the end of the day, do you really want a pair of ears representing a music festival? [Laughter].

ARMIN Well, it was a heat of discussion. It's really awesome to hear that it was a heated part of the process as well, just because it validates the strong opinions that people have, especially in the comments on Brand New where like, "This should have had ears." It should have, but it didn't, and we need to move on, and at the end of the day, people are not going to decide whether to attend a festival or not because of the lack of ears on the dog.

JON It just brings up a thing that is just, by nature I think we're all very critical people because that's what we do, is to just be critical all the time. So when you are in our shoes, and you're making something, and you deal with all those things that you have to deal with, you do the best you can to get as much as you can through the door. And then when you're not in our shoes, and you're the outside looking in, and then you're looking at something, and you're critiquing it and you're saying, "Well, this could have been done better, and this could have been done better." It's so hard sometimes to just step out from all that, and remember that at the end of the day, the designer is generally not the one who's making the final final decision. And you have to be able to grade them on how much they're able to convince the client that, artistically speaking, what they're doing is the best thing for them. So it's almost like this very intangible grading process that I think we all forget, all the time. Because you just get so invested in it from the inside, or the outside. It's so easy to just say, "That's great, or that sucks," that you forget that there's that obstacle course in the middle that you have to navigate your way through. And they're not all created equal—some courses are harder than others.

ARMIN Yeah, it's also easy to forget how much is on the line when it comes to the client. For you, it's a logo and you'll make another one the next day, or the next month, but for the client—especially in this case where it's an event that attracts thousands of people during the summer, and there's so much writing on it for it happening next year—and now you add the layer of complexity of MSG being an owner, it's a minefield of problems that you have to deal with, and...

TRAVIS [Laughter]. It's a tub of Land O'Lakes butter.

GREG Armin, you said earlier too, nobody doesn't go to the show because the dog doesn't have ears. But I really like to think in my heart, there's one guy in Boston who was really going to go to the show, and he's like, "Fuck this, I'm not going."

He's like, "This dog doesn't have fucking ears. I'm not going to this show." There's one guy that did not buy tickets because of the ears.

ARMIN And he tweeted about it.

GREG [Laughter]. And he tweeted about it, yeah.

TRAVIS Tommy O'Shay from Dorchester, "I'm not going".

GREG "This is bullshit." [Laughter].

ARMIN I think we've spent plenty of time on the dog's ears.

TRAVIS You sure you don't want to talk about it some more?

ARMIN Let's talk about the rest of the stuff around it, both the graphics and the copywriting, all of which supports what we've been talking about. About the energy, the attitude, the personality that the dog represents. How did those things develop? At what point did they develop? In terms of when you show stuff to the client, did you say, "All right, here's your logo, approve that", and then move on to the next? Or did you present more complete packages to get them on board with the overall tone?

JON What did we do?

TRAVIS I don't even remember.

JON Yeah. I mean, there was so much going on. I forget what we were actually presenting because I know the logo process was deep. Getting the type right, and getting the different kind of lockups right, and the different kind of terrier heads and all that stuff. That was its own beast. Then it just became, how much stuff can we do to support the voice of this thing? I think it was literally just us just making stuff and just putting it together and being like, "What do you think? What do you think? What do you think?" Does that sound right?

TRAVIS Yeah. The utility stuff was first. There was the website, and we had to reskin that... and then the identity system. But then, in tandem, we were definitely like, "Oh, it's a festival", right? So there's a ton of way finding that we had to figure out how to do. Like, there's signs in the back, near the porta potties, how do you make that interesting? [Laughter]. There's parking. How do you make that interesting? And that's part of the allure of a festival. If you can give those mundane things that... there's no media buy behind the parking sign, but 30,000 people are going to walk past that, or drive past that. That's a first impression when they get to the event. For us it was, how do we make this look cool? But how do we give it a tone and a personality that can come to life from the corn dog stand over there, to the merch stand, to when you get your wrist bracelet? It's an experience.

We're not making a trifold brochure—although we did make a trifold brochure—or like a pharmaceutical commercial, right? It's a brand experience that lives and breathes and you go to it in person. I think there was a lot.

GREG Yeah, how do you make every touch point enjoyable? Because the concert in itself is a really enjoyable experience, but then how do you add... These are all little extra bonus features that you're like, "Oh, hey that's a really funny sign telling me where the bathrooms are. Hey, that's a really funny sign telling me where the fried dough is", or

whatever it is, right? Every single additional layer just ultimately adds to your enjoyment and your experience at the show, which is nice. And I mean obviously if the band sucked, then you're not going to leave there and be like, "God, the band sucked, but boy, that was a hilarious fried dough sign." But at least, if it does deliver on its promise, and it usually does, then it's just another additional layer of enjoyment you get while you're there.

TRAVIS I just remembered something. Early on in the process—I don't know if you know this Jon because this was before you had come in—but one of our first discussions with the client was where we broke down the top five music festivals in the country, and we made a chart about what drugs would people take—

GREG Oh yeah, that's right! [Laughter].

TRAVIS —at these festivals, right? I don't even remember, but it was Lollapalooza was Molly... and I forget what the other ones were where. This one is LSD, this one is just weed, but Boston was a beer and a shot. It wasn't drugs at all. It was a beer and a shot. We're like, "Okay, cool." The guy who's having a shot of Jameson and a Budweiser is the guy who's writing all of this copy. That was the voice. That's the tone. So what would that guy, who's having a beer and a shot 12 times over before 5:00, how would he tell you where the bathroom was? That's sort of how that came to life.

ARMIN It's funny because in branding, there's this whole thing where you define the archetypes of who your audience is. And not once have I heard the archetype being a beer and a shot guy. This is quite perfect. It's pretty unique.

TRAVIS Yeah. [Laughter]. That was a proprietary process.

ARMIN Right, and you have to trademark that.

JON [Laughter]. One of my favorite things of working with these guys is that every time I see one of the presentations of proposals I... even me,

who I like to think I'm pretty outspoken and outrageous in some of the things I say, I just look at them and I go, "You guys, you can't say this, this is not appropriate." [Laughter].

ARMIN And how are you working in all of this together in developing those final assets? Is it mostly you, Jon? Is it back and forth? Is it completely collaborative even though you're separate?

JON Once we started getting into the collection of visual icons and things like that, it was collaborative in a sense where it was just, what are these things that make up this narrative? We would talk about it, and we would list out all these different things. "Is it like this? Is it like that? Is it... whatever." And we would just list them and I would just start going, and just start drawing them out and, "Does this make sense? Does this make sense? Does this make sense?" On the other side where we were doing the bigger elements that have more utility, like the signs and all that kind of stuff, then it was flipped roles a little bit. Instead of giving them content input, I was giving them maybe more style input and they were throwing out content at me. And then we were going back and forth that way. So we did kind of jump across the line as we started to get more and more into the asset package.

ARMIN For your client, how are they reacting to all of this? I get the sense that to a degree, they were overwhelmed with the amount of stuff. They were just like, "Fine. Let's just go with this because I don't feel like fighting, but finessing this seems like a lost battle." [Laughter].

TRAVIS Yeah, no there wasn't any fighting. They were great. Nothing bad to say about anybody there. With a lot of these things too obviously, you're not going to hire a designer or an agency to do everything, right? You're going to give them key touch points and in theory, we'll give you back a brand that your in-house team, or a smaller faction of people will then take and use that as a toolkit to make the thousands of tedious things they have to make. The 728 banners, and the backstage passes, and all those stuff. We did that. We gave them the tools to do that. And then obviously, there was media that we had

to fulfill in terms of, okay we need a social teaser that needs to drop, the website needs to be live at this point, we got to announce tickets here, and so we did all that punch list beyond that. But then I think we definitely overachieved because it's fun. We could do this, and we could do this, and we could do this. And sometimes you got to reel yourself back in and just pump the brakes because it's easy to go forever.

JON We definitely went overboard. I remember having a few conversations of where do we draw the line? Because we're not really getting paid for any of this at this point. Like okay, we just keep going.

GREG But in terms of the client though, they're great to work with because they were very bought in and invested in the concept, and in the tone, and the idea. They would take in as much as we would give. They loved it. Obviously, like anything there's, "I don't know about this, or this feels a little off," or whatever it is, but as creatives too, when you are getting this positive feedback and they want more of it, they're like, "We love this. This is great." It motivates you to do more of it. We're like, "All right, well if you like that, how about this stuff?" And it just keeps going and eventually you're like, "Okay, we've done enough now. Okay, we should stop." [Laughter].

ARMIN All right. Trying to sum up the conversation, even though it's been great, and we could go back to the dogs ears for another half hour...

TRAVIS [Laughter]. Yeah, you want to talk about that some more?

ARMIN Yeah, a little bit more.

JON I'm ready.

ARMIN I don't think we delved deep enough.

JON The people who were complaining in the comments, I hope they're listening to this, and I did read for a second on there and I was like, "Should I jump in and start this whole thing?" And I was like, "No, no, I got to keep my mouth shut. I got to got to shut up."

ARMIN Because clearly you can go on forever about the dog's ears. [Laughter]. Let's go around, if you can share what was the most exciting aspect for you, working on this project. Let's start with you, Jon.

JON Honestly, the most exciting aspect of this was getting to work with these guys. We had worked together before in the past, but like the Jack Daniel stuff we worked on it wasn't really collaborative-collaborative in the sense that we were coming up with the ideas together, and we were doing all that stuff together, it was more just here's this idea for this campaign, what would you do for it?

In this sense, it was more just, let's just band together and just be a team and just tackle this as a team. And for me, I think you can make just about any project fun, and it doesn't have to necessarily be a really cool music festival for it to necessarily be your favorite project. But I think the experience of having them allow us to do certain things, and then being able to work with your friends, and do things in a really fun way, but also feel like you're growing in what you're doing by having other intelligent, talented people tell you what's good, what's bad, all that kind of stuff. To me, that was a really, really pleasant part of the whole thing and probably my favorite part of the whole thing. Hopefully I stole your answers guys.

TRAVIS [Laughter]. No, I agree with Jon, and I would tell you if I didn't. It felt like working with friends. It didn't feel like we were in a conference room filling a punch list. I won't give you the same answer even though I agree with that. The thing aside from that that I liked too is, living in the city where the event takes place, it's huge. Thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people pour into the city—even the geographic footprint of the festival is large, right? So it's something that you see everywhere when it's here, and everybody's talking about it. And in the past, it's an event that people go to, and the personality was always derived from the artists that they brought in. I feel like we took that, and gave the brand more of a personality that started to manifest itself in the city. And you could see that on their social

channel, on Boston Calling social channels. The way people talk about it at the bus stop. There's a snark to the city, that the festival took on, and I say that in a constructive way, that you start to hear people be like, "Ah, that's funny. That's so Boston Calling." I don't know that that existed before. I'm really proud of that.

GREG I mean, I agree with both of your answers, Jon and Travis. But for me, my answer piggybacks a little bit off of Jon's answer a little bit more, and it was the collaboration. I'm a writer by trade, sort of the outlier in this group right here. So Jon is obviously, he's a decent Designer. He's fine. I mean, let's not get carried away. He's all right. Travis is an excellent Art Director and Designer as well, obviously. Both of these guys are amazing at what they do.

JON How come he got excellent and I got decent. What is this?

TRAVIS He calls it like it is Jon. He's not your hype man.

JON Come on.

GREG Yeah.

JON Ridiculous!

TRAVIS He's my hype man.

GREG Jon you're okay.

JON Ridiculous.

GREG You're okay.

JON It's ridiculous.

GREG [Laughter]. No, obviously Jon is brilliant at what he does.

JON There you go. Better. [Laughter].

GREG And so is Travis. And as a writer, there are a lot of very visual elements to this project. I mean, the reality is I just drew all of them. I mean, if we're

being honest. [Laughter]. No, but what's great was the collaboration because roles... Obviously when it comes to the actual design and stuff, I'm not going to be involved in that. Where Travis is an excellent writer, and Jon is a good writer and good thinker, the roles sort of deteriorated and it felt collaborative. Throwing out ideas. "Oh, I love that line. Oh, I hate this idea. Oh, this doesn't work. That dog should have ears. Oh..." Whatever, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. But it was so collaborative and so fun. There's no ego. There's no pretense. I mean, we bust each other's chops way too much for anybody to have ego in this group. You know what I mean? That to me was the most enjoyable part of the process. I think one of you said it, it felt like friends in a room, just throwing around ideas, and getting paid for it at the end of the day, which was really awesome. And then coming up with work that I think we're all really proud of.

ARMIN Piggybacking on all three answers, I think what's clear, or what became evident in looking at the project is how much synergy there was between everything. Between the copywriting, the color palette, the design elements, everything just gelled in a way that felt very unique, very authentic. After having this conversation, it's clear where that came from. And it came from how familiar you are with each other, how comfortable you are with each other, working together, and coming up with this wild stuff that the client enjoyed. Getting that encouragement from the client, that just pushes you to keep going and going. And it's a good thing that you stopped. There could easily be a point where this jumps the shark and you're like, "All right, they went too far", but I think it just hits the right note, at the right amount of high decibels that it needs to. And I want to thank you all for joining me on The Follow-Up today, sharing your stories, talking so much in depth about the dog's ears. Thank you again for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

JON Thanks for having us Armin.

TRAVIS Thanks man. I appreciate it.

BRYONY While the resulting project looked like Colossus and Contino Studio were given free reign to do all kinds of fun and cool stuff and get away with it, it was great to hear that it was the result of a process not that different from designing a corporate identity. And, as Jon reminded us, it can often feel like an obstacle course. As Travis acknowledged, this give-and-take can be the most frustrating part of the job but, as he quickly clarified, it is also the funnest part of the job. Ears or no ears, this was clearly a fun job.

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