

# EPIISODE 040

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## SQUIRRELS

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Jamie Ellul, Supple Studio

AND

Chris James, Scouts

### **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.

### **ARMIN VIT**

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode 40 of The Follow-up.

Before we get into the details of this episode I just have one quick housekeeping announcement that this is the last episode of 2021. We will be back with episode 41 on either January 4 or January 11.

This week we are following up on Squirrels, the newest branch of the Scouts in the UK, created for 4- to 5-year-olds. As the first branch added to the Scouts in 35 years, Squirrels joins the Beavers, the Cubs, the Scouts, the Explorers, and the Network in the Scouts' mission to "actively engage and support young people in their personal development, empowering them to make a positive contribution to society." This new branch has launched in 200 areas, or what they call Squirrels "Dreys" — which is the word for the nest of a squirrel — and establishes the Scouts as an organization that now serves kids from 4 to 25 years old.

The project, designed by Bath, England-based Supple Studio, was posted on Brand New on September 9, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at [bit.ly/bnpodcast040](https://bit.ly/bnpodcast040) that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast040, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Jamie Ellul, Creative Director at Supple Studio and Chris James, Head of Brand and Ambassadors at Scouts.

In this conversation the joy and optimism of working on this brand was palpable from both sides, which was all the more impressive given how significant and even daunting launching Squirrels would be and how much pressure there was to deliver. It was interesting to hear how big a role testing played in this project as we often think about consumer testing when it comes to packaging and consumer products. And from this, it was reassuring to find out that a combination of two separate ideas tested the best and were then combined — successfully — to create the resulting identity that drew so much praise on Brand New and beyond.

Now let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Jamie and Chris.

**BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO** As a little kid, I was the proud mascot of a Scout troop that was led by my mom, and attended by my three older brothers and other kids in Mexico city. I wore my tiny uniform with pride, but man, oh man, after looking at the case study on Brand New and all the wonderful applications you made, I would have loved to wear that red hoodie with a tail on the back. While, obviously, collecting all the merch you have developed. Is it terrible that I'm jealous of four and five-year-olds? Jamie and Chris, welcome to The Follow-Up.

**JAMIE ELLUL** Hi, nice to be here.

**CHRIS JAMES** Hi. Nice to be with you.

**BRYONY** Chris. We're going to start with you. The UK Scouts has run programs for 6-to-25 year olds for quite a while, with a recent introduction of the Squirrels, the category for the four and five-year-olds that I'm jealous of. Given that it has been over 35 years since an age category has been introduced, can you share with our audience, the thinking behind its creation?

**CHRIS** Absolutely. In a nutshell, I don't want to start with a pun, but in a nutshell, we wanted to reach entirely new people. People we'd never reached before, not just four and five-year-olds, but also their parents, new volunteers that would be attracted by working with a younger age range, and also underrepresented communities. Scouts can be a real family business and it goes from one generation to the next. But what happens if your family's got no experience of Scouts? We wanted to reach those families. And also from black and minority ethnic communities too, to make sure that we offered skills for life to absolutely every family that could benefit from it. Kind of Squirrels is a new age range, is the new program for us, but it's also a way for us to reach the people that kind of need these opportunities most. And the timing we think is really significant as well, because during the pandemic, we know that young people have fallen behind, families and communities are struggling, and we know that if we can offer friendship and skills to young children from these backgrounds, then we can really change the story. There's a lovely quote, which is "change the start of the story, and you change the whole story."

**BRYONY** That is a wonderful quote. I don't think I've ever heard of it before.

**CHRIS** I can't say the credit for it [laughter].

**BRYONY** Was this something that was in the works before the pandemic, and solidified through it? Or entirely caused by the pandemic?

**CHRIS** Squirrels have not just jumped out the tree. This is something we've been working on for some time. For the last two years, we've been running pilots right across the country, in areas of deprivation. So, where we can provide the most benefit. And they've been a fantastic success. We set up small groups, we reached out to the community, we managed to reach new families, attract new volunteers—and actually 58% of the volunteers who supported us had never supported us before. We found that it is a way of attracting new volunteers, which is really fantastic. I should also say that this builds on work that's been going on in Northern Ireland for nearly 25 years. We're kind of standing

on the shoulders of giants. There's a lot of work that happened before this year's launch.

**BRYONY** Can you tell us a little bit about that program? I don't think our audience would be aware of it.

**CHRIS** In Northern Ireland, there was a fledgling Squirrels association, not connected with Scouts, but worked with Scouts in Northern Ireland. So completely separate. We'd been watching with admiration from afar, thinking this is great work. Thinking that there could be a moment where this becomes bigger, this launches throughout the United Kingdom. We wanted to test to see how that would work with the pilots. It turns out that it did work incredibly well. And what we've done this year has been very pleased to welcome in those Squirrels into the UK Scouts for the very first time, part of the Scout movement.

**BRYONY** So, is that where the Squirrels name comes from?

**CHRIS** The Squirrel's name is really interesting. So, we weren't wedded to the name Squirrels. It would certainly make things easier for the transition for those Squirrels in Northern Ireland coming over to the Scout movement. But we tested a huge amount of names. So we tested things like Dragonflies, Bees, Acorn, Bears, you name it. We tested it. Really interesting because in the States, the earliest program is called Lions, and it's very successful, in South Africa it's called Meerkats. So, we were fascinated to see what would work. We had lots of other suggestions from people. We had things like Caterpillars, Otters, Puffins, Tadpoles, Dandelions. So, an enormous amount of things were being considered. But actually, one that polled amongst the very highest was Squirrels. And it just felt right. Jamie will talk about this more, but the place where Scouts began, Brownsea Island, has a colony of red Squirrels—so it's almost like coming full circle for us. Back to Brownsea Island, where it all began in 1907.

**BRYONY** We will definitely have to hear more about that from Jamie. I just have one more question. What did you hope to find in the design team that

would develop the brand and take all of this to fruition? And why did you choose Supple Studio?

**CHRIS** We had quite a long shopping list, I must be honest. We were riding high after re-imagining our own main brand in 2018, which was absolutely brilliant work conducted by an agency called Not On Sunday, working with our in-house team. And we knew that a Squirrel's brand would need to really, really dovetail with that really beautifully. It'd have to link to it in a really natural way. We knew that the brand has to be incredibly inclusive, thinking about the new audiences that we wanted to reach. We knew that it would have to work brilliantly digitally, especially as we were in the middle of the pandemic and the whole world was digital. We knew that they would have to have a certain instinct, and a natural sense of connection and joy for Squirrels. You know, they'd have to really want to do it. This was such an amazingly significant moment for us that had to be the right partner. And I think we're really looking for that special spark. And I'm pleased to say, in Jamie and Supple and the whole team, we found that in spades and they never stopped delivering.

**BRYONY** So Jamie, how did you go about obtaining the project?

**JAMIE** I just actually dug out the original brief. It was the very bottom of the pile of paperwork on my desk that shows how long ago we started the process. I think it was back in November last year that the brief was sent over by Chris's colleague Jade. And I remember exactly where I was when I got the brief. I was at the post office, queuing up to send some books that we were selling through our website, and this brief came and I literally, you know I remember just reading the front page, and it said: a new chapter invitation to tender for the development of a brand and visual identity for Scouts aged four-to-five year olds. And I just thought, that's it! I'm in! I didn't need to read any more than that, but I remember kind of sticking it on the group Slack for the team and just saying, oh my God, this is like a dream brief.

**JAMIE** The first part of the process was a tender. You know, the brief was really tight, really well thought through—lots of research, lots of backup, it wasn't just kind of bluster—a very tight, kind of tender guideline of what was needed. Six pages, which was actually the hardest part about it. I think I spent probably two and a half days writing those six pages because, it's that classic kind of thing of, if I have more time, I would have written a shorter letter. TSo, getting it down to these six pages... I remember deleting the cover page and thinking, I can't have the luxury of a couple of pages here... going to have to just jump straight into why they should work with us. There was a key line in the brief, which Chris has already mentioned, but it's that line "if we change the beginning of the story, we changed the whole story." It was just synergy, perfectly timing, whatever you want to call it. But I'd been on holiday that summer. Obviously we were kind of UK-based. We weren't allowed to go abroad, just come out of lockdown... and I went down to Bournemouth to stay with some family, and I'd never been to Brownsea Island. And both my kids have been in the Scout movement, in Cubs, and Beavers, and things. And I thought, oh, we should go to Brownsea Island and check it out. So I went, got a picture of the kids with the Scouts thing, saw the red Squirrels, all that stuff. And then this brief came and I was like, well, I know the beginning of the Scout story. I've literally just experienced this summer. I think page one even, had a photo of my kids at the Scouts island.

I guess we were just like, we get this, we've done this, we understand it. I think at that point we'd written a bit of an approach, but we hadn't really said that we thought we'd start by kind of looking at Brownsea Island as the influence for the brand. That was in the back of my head, and that was, I guess, my card for if we got through to the next stage. They sent over that six-page tender document with fingers crossed and then a week or so later I had an email from Jade saying that we were down to last three agencies, and then that point of the project was a paid creative pitch. That was where I was like, okay guys... said to the team—there's only five of us here, we're not a huge team. In fact at that point we were four because one of our Design Directors

was on maternity leave. I was like, we've this incredible opportunity. We've got this small budget to do some creative and got this idea that we could hang everything on the flora and fauna, and the story behind Brownsea Island can be our influence for the squirrel itself, the mark, the color, the whole thing. It just kind of flowed from that. It was just one of those jobs where, you know, as I was kind of writing the strategy, it was writing itself. And then, I kind of worked with a copywriter that we worked with a lot called Jim Davies. So one of the things that the guys at Scouts really wanted to see was the brand essence. So kind of getting that tone of voice and things down. We're lucky as a team, we've kind of worked a lot with the NSPCC, and in lockdown one in the UK here. So back last year, we did an interesting project and branded a children's theater and that was all done in lockdown done through Zoom and things. So we had these kind of learnings from that. We wanted the tone of voice to have a joy and wonder, and a sense that you only get by being a kid that kind of questioning kind of thing. And we worked with Jim. And Jim wrote this amazing piece of copy, which again just sat in that kind of pitch deck. You didn't even need to see any visuals. You could just read that sense. And it's pretty much gone through to now, barely unchanged. It's kind of tweaked the whole thing, but the essence of it was there. So, yeah, so that was kind of the launch point. So we all had to think about the brief. And then we had a day where, even though we were kind of technically in lockdown, I said like let's come into the studio for one day, we'll socially distance, and we will just smash out a killer presentation. Which is what we did literally nine till six.

And I think we ended up with about a hundred pages and so much of it stuck. I've just looked back today at that pitch document. I think we have sort of four or five, very rough kind of logo ideas. And we very much framed it as like this isn't solutions, this is approaches, we haven't done our homework properly yet. This is lots of different avenues that we might take. And three of them in there were ones that we took, and even the Squirrel "S" was in there in a very kind of embryonic way, that kind of ran through the idea of working with Tom

Hull and photography that was kind of very much take child's eye view. You know, that idea was in there. The idea of storytelling through illustration was in there. And the idea of creating a children's book was in there... just even at that very early stage, we just kind of chucked loads of ideas into the pot. We just wanted to show our enthusiasm I think. We did the pitch to Chris and the team. You know, you could just tell they were really invested. The amount of people that were on that pitch call. Everybody that needed to be there to make the decision was there. It wasn't like we were just presenting to Chris and he was going off and presenting that to stakeholders and things—everyone that needed to make those decisions were there. I think it was on the 21st of December, if I remember rightly, so very close to Christmas. Almost... in a mean way [laughter]. We kind of did the pitch, and hopefully my enthusiasm came across. I remember, I think it was only an hour or two later that Jade called and said, we've got the job. That was the best Christmas present you could get. It was amazing.

**BRYONY** Chris, I have a two-part question for you. One, did the enthusiasm come across? And two, what of that pitch was what clinched the deal for you and your team?

**CHRIS** Ah... Well, a hundred percent that joy and enthusiasm totally shown through. There were leaves growing out of my computer. You could really, really feel it come to life even through the screen. The fact that it was so abundant, we didn't know the team that well, we didn't know whether this was just a result of a fantastic day when everybody was on their best form. It was just a super abundance of great ideas. It wasn't the first pitch of the day, we'd seen some other really strong work that morning, in fact. And we actually felt that the job was going somewhere else, if I'm absolutely honest. But then we saw this work, and I think the real clincher for us was the fact that they'd answered every single part of the brief. They spoke to the inclusivity, they spoke to the fact that we wanted the brand to be rooted in the outdoors,



we wanted that brilliant youth voice to shine through. And I think, if I remember as well, the idea of the child's eye view of photography was also in that initial deck.

**JAMIE** Yeah, it was. Yeah.

**CHRIS** It was a really kind of 360° package. It really helped us visualize what the brand could be. Even at that stage, when, you know, as Jamie said, things were embryonic, we knew we could make it work. And we were just really excited by what we saw. Actually in the end, it wasn't as difficult as we thought. Though we'd seen strong work that day, Jamie's team was the only team that ticked every box.

**BRYONY** So... you ticked every box, you got a call an hour later Jamie. What next? Besides a Christmas break? I hope.

**JAMIE** Yeah. Yeah. So that was the thing. It was definitely a Christmas break. It was kind of like an air punch, and then a kind of fall back onto the chair and eat a Christmas dinner [laughter]. We came back in the beginning of January... the 4th of January, and then it was kind of just hitting the ground running really. I think on the first day back we had a call with Chris and Jade to kind of chat through the pitch document and what was liked from that, which luckily for us, you know, there's lots of things that resonated as Chris already said. You know, the copy and some of the ideas, and logo starting points that we sort of sketched and roughly visualized. The next phase for us was kind of taking the best of that, and crafting it, and pushing it. I think if I remember rightly we kind of did a lot of iterations. So we did lots of catch-ups with Chris and Jade. Sprints really. Four or five days at a time where we'd push the ideas that they liked from that first stage into kind of more refined logo things. I think we got to four or five kind of ways in, and then with each call, we'd kind of chip away and just decide what was more appropriate and what was going to have the legs. And I think we got it down to three concepts that we blew out over lots of touch points and things. And then we knew that we'd have to go into testing. So we presented those three concepts to various kind of stakeholder

groups, and could just kind of get a sense in the room of which of those were the strongest. So we kind of had a fairly unanimous kind of two routes that we thought should go through to testing.

And then again, we kind of took those and refined those, and pushed those harder. It's interesting. So we kind of, again, I've just look back at those two routes and what went into testing. We had one route that was kind of around the Scouts master brand. So the fleur de lis, a coat of arms kind of, very modern, monoline logo. And we created a squirrel in exactly the same style, with lots of the same kind of shapes and things like that. It was very much, so harmonizing... and it was actually that route that had the tree rubbings and kind of leaf emblems and things with it. And then we had this other route, which was this "S" with the squirrel tail. Looking back, even at that first stage, we had the squirrel type with the ink traps, and the kind of chubbiness. Another bit of luck I think on typography is that the master brand for Scouts uses Nunito Sans—it's a Google font. We kind of looked online and found that there was a Nunito Straight, so weirdly, the Nunito rather than the Nunito Sans is a rounded font. And it just felt like a kind of childlike version of the master font. That was in our initial pitch as well. And we took the bold weight of that, and kind of pumped it up and made the Squirrel's mark. And then the visual language for that....

**CHRIS** You didn't call it Nunito there, did you?

**JAMIE** No [laughter], we called it Nuttito... There was a lot of puns that happened during the process—there's a lot of fun and puns. There was one point where I think we pitched the idea of creating a whole typeface that had that kind of squirrely-ness and sort of bushy-ness, which again, we sort of tested with some stakeholders. And I think the feedback was that, because there's so many volunteers and things that work with Scouts, it's much easier to have a Google font where everyone can sort of centrally just download that and they don't have to go on to the Scout server, and brand center, and all that kind of stuff.

So that kind of fell by the wayside. The visual language for the squirrel “S” route was much more about energy. So we basically looked at videos of Squirrels, and the way they leap around and bounce. And we kind of created the visual language, which kind of tracks the movement of Squirrels that just got this kind of bouncy energy.

So the two routes had different visual languages. And then when it went into testing, it went through at least count of the amount of stakeholder groups and young people in other groups that Chris and I kind of presented the brand to the way before getting to the testing stage with [illegible]. You know, lots and lots of very sort of thorough engagement. And then, yeah, when it went into testing, we kind of tested the mark separately to the visual languages. And the kind of leafy tree rubbing visual language of route one tested best. And then the “S” squirrel logo of route two, that’s the best. And it was just one of those lovely things where it still works beautifully together. And so, once that testing had come back, we knew what the clear winners were. We brought those two visual languages together, and luckily for us all worked seamlessly.

**BRYONY** So for once Frankensteining the ideas actually worked.

**JAMIE** Yeah, exactly. The thing that you normally hate actually worked really well. And I think that’s partly because the work, and the brief, was tight and there was so much kind of crossover between the routes that we had anyway.

**BRYONY** Chris. We just heard a lot of information from Jamie from his perspective, but I would love to hear what this whole process, from giving them the job, all the way through testing was like for you—from your perspective and the rest of your team.

**CHRIS** I don’t want sound to sycophantic here, but it really was a joy from start to finish. And I think that was partly because of the age range we we’re working in. You know, it is just naturally bursting with joy and optimism. I think the fact that we had such a great start, from

that initial splurge of creativity, we had a lot of things, it was more an editing process rather than a creating process from there on, in. On the other hand, we were under quite a lot of pressure because we knew that Squirrels had to launch this year. We needed that brand. There was an organizational pressure to make sure that it was delivered to a really fantastic standard, and also a brand that we'll have to enjoy for, you know, maybe 10 years? 15 years? 20 years? You know, who knows. So there was a certain amount of pressure, but I think Jamie's approach, which is very, very collaborative, very, very kind of relaxing, and good humored way of working as well, which I think really, really helped us and actually calmed down our nerves as well. Thank you, Jamie for that [laughter]. We were quite relieved actually, when we got down to two or three options, because before that we had a bit of an embarrassment of riches. So we were very pleased when we got to three, and then even more pleased when we got to two, because I think at that stage we knew we could make either of them work. Then it started to become a bit, you know, 10 votes for this, nine votes for that. We did the most insane number of testing meeting, mostly on Zoom. We dropped into cub meetings, Scout meetings, Beaver Scout meetings. So very, very small children on Zoom who'd just been making pancakes or cards, you know, with their leader. Suddenly they had these brand people on the call thinking, who on earth are these strange men with beards? [Laughter] And in fact, they gave us some of the best feedback.

I mean, we were on a call once with some four-and-five-year-olds in Northern Ireland. And one of them just put his thumbs down to one of the routes and just went "no good at all". You know? Pulls no punches. But we got some great feedback from their leaders as well. And also we have this really talented in-house team. So, Jamie's mentioned Jade who's our Head of Creative Content, and she has just fantastic instincts for what works and she just made some really fantastic calls. We're also incredibly lucky to have some really insightful leadership in Chloe, our Director of Communications, who has got a lot of experience creating brands from scratch and again, made some

fantastic calls. And also CJ, our Lead Volunteer, and a huge number of other volunteers, who just gave us that fantastic reality check we needed to say look, this is a nice idea, but actually what would happen on the ground if we launched it this way? And I think that was a real clincher because this is a brand that has to be used locally, has to be so easy to use locally. That was a huge driver as well.

**BRYONY** So just to get a sense of timing, you started working in this early January, when did you hold all of the testing?

**JAMIE** So yeah, so obviously the project just bought Christmas landed, after Christmas and kind of very quickly went through the concept stage. I think by the end of January early February, we were then starting to present that beyond Chris and Jade, and the kind of smaller steering group. I think we started testing in March? Is that right Chris?

**CHRIS** Yeah. We had a number of committees that... Scout's works with a lot of committees, for all the right reasons. We've got to have due process and make sure that we've done all the right thing. And that meant that we had to have testing really early on, so we could get those papers in. So then we could have permission to move to the next stage. So, a lot of March evenings were spent on those Zoom calls with our meetings.

**JAMIE** We had quite a lot of late ones didn't we? With the volunteer groups and things. But like Chris said, even that was a joy, [laughter] even when they want to call at like seven-thirty, eight-o'clock at night, on a Monday. It was kind of like, we're going to see little kids faces when they see the logo and things, it was just—

**CHRIS** Definitely.

**JAMIE** —such fun. So, yeah. So I think after testing, we then moved straight into artwork and some of the assets because we needed to get things like uniforms created, and things like that.

**CHRIS** That's right.

**JAMIE** So I think through April...

**CHRIS** We also did some quantitative testing as well. So we use YOUGov as a partner, and we went out to a thousand parents of this age range, just to kind of get the view from the ground and especially, uh, from those underrepresented communities, because this really has to be a brand principally for those new audiences. We knew to a certain extent that our current volunteers would be supportive of the idea. A lot of work had gone into preparing the ground for that, and explaining what we wanted to achieve with Squirrels over some time. But we really wanted to hear views from new, and different communities. And so that, that all fed in as well.

**JAMIE** So yeah. So once we've gone through that YOUGov side of things, and that's really what drove this ol' mashup of the visual language and logo route. Then we got into crafting that logo, which you probably saw in the case study that's on your site on Brand New. There was a lot of work that went into that. We did lots of iterations in-house here, and then we got it to a point where it looks good, even looked borderline great. But I just felt like, as Chris mentioned earlier, I felt that this brand could be around for 20 years. And I just wanted it to be the absolute best it could be. But I knew that the best guy when it comes to logotypes is Rob Clark—I'd kind of been in touch with him in advance thinking that this route might be the route that would go through, and just kind of getting some costs and things from him. And, you know, we just decided that we would go for it, invest in that. And he really came up with the goods. It was incredible. I think he gave us 20 options that were all just brilliant. You know? Like any of them would've worked. We kind of whittled that down to five that we shared with Chris and Jade, we didn't want to kind of freak them out with all these weird little typographic changes that normal human beings don't notice. [Laughter] But really what drove it as well was, it had to be legible, it had to work at small sizes. The audience is obviously very young, plus we might be talking to families where English is a second language so, the legibility was really key, and that kind of drove it. I mean, Rob was just a master and so worth that investment to get the final logo back from him.

And then you kind of start rolling that out and it's just a dream. You start to see it come back as a badge, and an embroidered logo. And it's like, oh, just so good. That was really the moment. I think when it all just felt really real when we got those final logotypes signed off, and Chris and Jade were totally on board. And just that kind of crafted bit. And then from kind of April onwards, we were just then taking chunks of work, things like templates needed to be designed quite early. We designed those InDesign, and then they were rebuilt by the Scouts team in their brand centers—as Chris said, there's lots of volunteers, and lots of localization that needs to happen, and that will happen through the Scott's brand center. So we needed to make sure that the designs could be adaptable and easily kind of work in that scenario. But also that they weren't just picture blocks on a red background. We wanted them to be much richer than that. It was just, it didn't feel like work really, to be honest, there was a point where the whole team went out with [unintelligible] on the river here, we got bark most of the way. We went out with crayons and kids, and went and just did tree rubbings. And it was just like, oh my God, we're getting paid to do this [laughter]. You know? It doesn't feel real.

**BRYONY** Back in kindergarten.

**JAMIE** Yeah, exactly, exactly. Just doing all that stuff. Just those last, I guess that last 10% was just a real joy of getting all the copy lines just right, and getting all the, you know, we wanted to make sure there was enough leaves that they would just have, you know, we wanted to give them assets that would just last for 10 years. The guidelines and the assets we've given them in the patterns and all those kinds of things are all just so abundant, and it was just, yeah, so much fun to do that last part of the project. And then there was kind of little mini projects within that, the story book, which was something that we pitched right at the beginning. Chris and Jade managed to find the money down the back of the sofa to make that happen, which is great. Also, massive hat tip to Chris and Jade, who I think probably our favorite, most switched-on buy-in in terms of brand. You know, they just get

it and particularly brand voice, they just absolutely nail. And they actually wrote the copy for the book, which is all in rhyming couplets and really beautifully written. They kind of came back with that story and said, here's the story. We've got the budget to make it happen. We illustrated that all in-house, Sheri and Yee who work here are both really handy illustrators, so much fun developing Squirrel characters that we then checked in with the team and kind of roll that through. And another thing the icing on the cake was getting the call from Chris to say that, oh, we forgot about designing the badges. And we thought someone else was doing this, but they're not. So can you do it? And we were like, God, yeah! Designing badges, illustrating badges that are going to get embroidered, it's like, oh again, it didn't feel like work at all. An absolute joy to do that stuff. Similarly with the merch side of things, Chris was like, we've got a meeting with the merch team, can you guys come up with some initial thoughts? I think we had the Squirrel tail on the back of the hoodie idea was already in there, in concept, very early concept stage. But it was just kind of bringing in all those kinds of things, having lots of fun with the patterns. And then again, it's just so nice to see that actually out in the world as real things. I know the hoodies sold out on the first day, which is pretty cool. Yeah. It's lovely to see stuff, not on a kind of Graphic Burger visual [laughter].

**BRYONY** So that means I'm not getting my hoodie?

**JAMIE** You have to speak to Chris.

**CHRIS** I'm sure we can arrange one.

**BRYONY** No worries. Just joking [laughter]. Chris, you're getting this structured abundance of materials through guidelines, and files, and typefaces. What is it like for your team to start to use all of these?

**CHRIS** Yeah, so basically Supple created this kind of magical world for us to play in—almost a magical wood, which is so much fun, it's a lovely world to be immersed in. Our designers love it. Anything new, and fresh, toys



to play with... and the brand elements, especially things like the leaf rubbings, the leaf shapes, it's like sort of having a toy box or a paint box to work with. And as there is so much variety, it's never the same twice, which is part of the joy of it. And the influence of the outdoors really is the trump card for this brand. We know that young people learn best when they're outdoors. And this was right at the heart of the brand. You couldn't miss it. We basically asked for a squirrel, but actually we got a whole wood. It was amazing. Our designers have really picked up and run with this.

So, we've created some batch posters, and certificates, and they found it so easy to use and just a joy to use. But I think the fact that all the elements are in place. We haven't had a moment where we've gone, ah, wish we had this, or wish we had that. When we're writing copy lines, all we've got to do is just glance back at the genius Jim came up with, things like "branch out to Squirrels" and "1-2-tree-go" and all this stuff, you know, and it's just such a perfect springboard for more creativity. And when our Chief Executive actually on the day of the launch, you know, he wrote this fantastic blog for the sector and... it was basically from small acorns mighty oaks grow, you know, just totally embraced the language and iconography Jamie had come up with for us. So it was a really natural handover, from the handover of assets. Jamie was brilliant in terms of helping us populate our brand center. So we had these fabulous templates that on day one, our leaders and our volunteers could just jump on there. Add in local details, create high res PDFs, or route through the system, create banners, signage, everything was ready to go. This was a case of not just an agency's handing things over and then you get an invoice 10 minutes later, this was full service, and the sense of commitment and passion from Supple was immense.

**JAMIE** I think the bit that we missed out and our chat about the process was the photography, which was—

**BRYONY** So wonderful.

**JAMIE** —slightly hampered by going into a lockdown here, all those kind of restrictions. But luckily—I think it was June or July—we managed to do a real photoshoot with Tom Hull, who was in our initial pitch proposal. He’s a fantastic photographer and a dad of three or four girls I think, so very used to dealing with kids and does of work with us for NSPCC. And it was so nice to a) meet Chris and Jade because we have met, everything had been done on Zoom, you know, nice to see that Chris had legs. And then we just had a really fun afternoon art directing, and it’s kind of more like herding cats, but... herding squirrels. Just had a really great group of kids who just kind of really got stuck in. And it was so much fun. And a really key part of bringing the brand to life. The first time we saw the uniforms and things, it was just a really magical moment I think, where all felt quite real.

**CHRIS** That really was joyful. And they were the first young people ever to wear the uniform, which is quite a gobsmacking moment actually. And see the logo on the uniform, and the uniform color was also dictated by the work on the brand, we call it Squirrel’s red. To see that in real life and actually touch something real was amazing. And then to see Tom taking these fantastic child’s eye view shots, you know, lying on his tummy in the leaves while the children played in the woods, treasure hunts and things. I mean, it was just a joyful moment.

**BRYONY** Jamie, is there any merch that you designed, that hasn’t been produced, that you wish to see come to life?

**JAMIE** Yes! There is actually! We designed some wellies with the pattern on them that looked awesome. So that would be very cool to see those happen. It’s interesting, actually. When we got to the merch stage, my kind of brief to the team was to basically think about this as almost like a lifestyle brand. So over here in the UK, we’ve got Muddy Puddles, which is a kind of brand for kids age, it’s all about the outdoors and they’re great at pattern, and it’s kind of fashion for little kids essentially, but it’s a very kind of outdoorsy brand. And that was very much where we kind of took our influence from, we wanted it to feel

like something, I guess, an aspirational outdoorsy brand that parents would want to buy for their kids, regardless of the fact that they need to buy a uniform, or a hoodie, or whatever. We wanted it to have a bit of that aspiration and fun that you get from those lifestyle brands. So yeah, the wellies would be cool to see in real merch.

**BRYONY** How about you, Chris? Is there anything that you would like to produce that you haven't found the money for?

**CHRIS** Well, yeah. Funny, you should say that we have this idea of an acorn hat. So like a little beanie, it's just actually an acorn and that just sits on your head. That personally, I think it would fly off the shelves. It's just seeing Squirrels in acorn hats would be my dream. But to be honest, our Scout Store team totally excelled themselves. I mean, some of the things they've got are just brilliant. There's a scratch-off badge poster, as you earn each badge you can actually scratch-off the little silver covering on it, and then the badge is revealed—which is just super cute. The squirrel "S" hoodie, obviously there's no one on earth he doesn't want one of them. So you're not alone there. And the book, it is kind of a fairy tale, but the whole way it came to life, as Jamie described was also a fairy tale. We couldn't be happier with that. And actually that was one of the first things to sell out as well. So we were so happy with that. Lots of curious people wanting to read the storybook, and actually that's the beautiful part of the squirrel story as well, because literacy is also one of the skills for life, which we'd like young people to develop along with, uh, you know, social communication skills, just building confidence. If we have a small part to play in developing a lifelong love of reading, then that will be a job well done.

**BRYONY** So I'm starting to kind of send some of the feedback you have received just by sales and things like that, but be it from the parents, or the kids themselves, or the leaders, the volunteers, what are some of the things that you have heard that are helping you further develop the brand and make decisions as you move forward?

**CHRIS** I mean, the launch itself was quite mindblowing. I think it was our biggest ever media day as UK Scouts. And that included our Centenary in 2007. So we had over 700 pieces of media around the launch. Reached over a hundred million people. We were simultaneously on both our key breakfast stations here in the UK, so BBC, and ITV, social media was going crazy. Our chief Scout Bear Grylls made a video that we've seen 350,000 times in the course of a couple of days. 99% positive social engagement on social media. I mean, you can't make this stuff up. It just exploded. And actually what was visible for every single piece was the brand. You'd see the little red jumpers, you'd see little squirrel, you'd see these beautiful badges that Jamie and the team had put so much love into. And they were telling the story without words, it was such a key part of that launch. There was one moment I had to jump in the car and drive down the motorway with our only set of uniforms at that point, and a box of books, and then next morning I was seeing those on BBC-TV. It was amazing to see. You know, and I think also it's kind of the Squirrels story, and the Squirrels brand is kind of what people need right now, you know? Nearly two years of pandemic and a lot of doom and gloom. Pure unadulterated dose of joy, which Supple gave us, in which the whole Squirrels project and all of the brilliant volunteers, staff that worked on that deliver it is sort of the tonic that everybody needs. It's kind of a little reminder that the future is unwritten, and we can look to the future with optimism. And we've got a whole new generation who are taking Scouts and running with it. Beautiful moment, really for the Scout movement.

**BRYONY** Jamie, what has been the most rewarding aspect of working on this project for you?

**JAMIE** Uh, it's difficult to say one thing really. It really sounds like we're over the top, Chris and I both, because mutually I think it's just been such a joyful process from start to finish. When I first got the tender and I asked Chris and Jade if we could have a call 'cause I always like to meet potential clients, and see if there's some rapport, and find out a little bit more about the pitch process, and who we're up against, and

things like that. And even just that first call, I just felt like, oh, I could really work with these people. They're just really switched on. Really nice. So yeah. Even though there were some tricky moments along the way, what with testing, lots of audience feedback, and things like that. It never felt stressful. It always felt like it was a team effort and that we all have each other's back.

So I think that was really lovely, and truly collaborative. I think Chris and Jade had just as much creative input as us and lots of moments, and believed in us, and trusted us with those things, which is just wonderful. I think in terms of outcomes, it's a no brainer. The badges were just a joy to do. I guess the other joy of this project is that all four of us that were in the studio, or worked on this, all had a hand at different elements of it. And it's one of those projects where I couldn't tell you who sketched that initial "S" Squirrel logo anymore. Like, I don't even remember. It doesn't matter. It's such a team effort. But when we got that badge brief and just sort of thinking, God, this is going to be on a little kid's arm in six months time or whatever, it's just really, really amazing. And the magic of, I think we only saw them in August, I think when we got the badges back as real embroidered things, ready to photograph, and it was like, oh, this is just too much. [Laughter] It was just, yeah, just again, just doesn't feel like work. You know, I would have done that for free quite happily. Which is, I guess, the greatest feeling you can have about a project—if you were willing to do it anyway, just because you've done it for the joy then I think that's a big tick for the project.

**BRYONY** Chris of this entire process, what was the most satisfying part for you?

**CHRIS** I've got to say the launch because you know, that's when the whole thing became real, that's your true test and people will vote with their feet. And actually I don't know if we're going to touch on it later actually, but we saw an immediate spike in inquiries. We really felt that people responded in the way that we dared hope. To be honest, every part of it was a joy. I mean the logo options came in, they were fabulous.

The badges were dreamy. They were just, the illustration style was just so on the mark. So, you know, the badges were highlight... seeing actually the guidelines come together, seeing everything brought together in one place was a really special moment as well because before that, everything had been disparate and we'd looked at things in isolation, but bringing it all together in the guidelines they are, sort of a mini work of art in their own right. That was a joy as well.

**BRYONY** You know, you started this process by looking to the program in Ireland, and starting to develop that, test it out, see what it could become. And then it started to shape itself and take form. You started to have a whole lot of fun with Jamie and the team developing all of the different assets. It all came together with the guidelines. And in the end, it erupted in this launch that when you're thinking four and five-year-olds, you're not thinking about having a million people look at this launch. This is a program for little kids, but at the same time, there's the business side of Scouts. And the fact that it is embedded in the culture of everybody, whether you have the little kids or you were a Scout when you were a kid. Even if you never participated, there's an awareness of Scouts pretty much for everybody. So as you look ahead, what's the most exciting part?

**CHRIS** I think the most exciting part is seeing people use it. The thrill is just driving past some random place, and then they're on the wall of a little meeting place is one of those red Squirrels signs. There is a little, what we call a squirrel Dre' operating inside that building. Seeing a group in action. We went down to Portsmouth and there was a whole group down there, not a brilliantly well-off area, surrounded by tower blocks, and then in a school playground, in the evening where all these Squirrels in their little red jumpers, they had copies of the book, and it was real. It had gone from that dream on the 2nd of January, that kind of idea sketches, to something that was real and genuinely supporting those communities that needed us. We knew it was a fantastic product helping young people get skills for life, engaging parents and other volunteers as well with all the benefits of being involved in

a community program like this. To see it all real, that was the really special moment.

**JAMIE** As Chris said, I think the fact that the in-house team at Scouts are taking what we've created, and then creating new things with that. I'm really excited to see how the brand is going to look in a year or even two, and just see what they do because I think what's out there at the moment is the kind of kit-of-parts. And I think there's so much more that could be done with all those elements, and already seeing copy lines flying around and new copy lines that aren't from us, but just that the tone of voice that we've set up, I'm really excited to see where that goes and the fun that Chris and the team are going to help with that. I'm excited to see some kids walking down the street in the evening, and their Dre' with all the gear on. That's going to be a very special moment, I think. That will be good.

**BRYONY** I think this is one that is going to require a follow-up article on Brand New in about two or three years time.

**JAMIE** Yeah, cool.

**BRYONY** See how the brand has evolved, and how all the merch has grown, and what the in-house team has done with all of the kit-of-parts and the guidelines that have been provided. And See where it can continue to develop. It will be very interesting to see.

**CHRIS** Definitely, I think the bar has been set very high now. Or the branch has been set very high [laughter]. So, all of our creative has to be at this level. Otherwise it really, really stands out. It's raised our game, which is really good to see. We know everything has to be as good as this. Jade and I, we treat our jobs as Custodians of this precious new brand very seriously while continuing to have a lot of fun with it.

**BRYONY** Well, I think when you raised the branch you also raised the excitement in the team who's managing the brand. You're in good hands in that regards because it will continue to be a fun project to work on, and a fun brand to expand and develop. I want to thank you both for your

time today. It has been an extraordinary adventure, even though we are not outside, it's too noisy on the outside for podcast recording, but I really, really appreciate your enthusiasm, your joy, and all of the hard work that you have put forth for all of these kids.

**JAMIE** Thanks for asking us.

**CHRIS** Oh, thanks for the opportunity. It's been really fun. Thank you.

**JAMIE** It's been nice actually, from a personal point of view, to hear Chris talk about why they chose us, and the process, and things from his side. Because we just kind of won the project and hit the ground running, and kept going, because it's all been kind of over Zoom, we have not had a celebrating pint in a pub yet [laughter]. Which we need to.

**CHRIS** No we haven't. That needs to happen.

**JAMIE** Just to hear his side of the story has been great. That's kind of made my day. So thank you.

**BRYONY** Instead of a beer in a pub, you need to go get some grass juice at a juicery stand outside.

**JAMIE** [Laughter] Yeah. We could definitely get a bag of nuts with the pint, at least.

**BRYONY** Go for a walk in the park.

**CHRIS** Yeah. I must just tell you one other thing that you might not have heard this Jamie. We have this one kind of regular Scout groups, we have Sea Scout groups and Air Scout groups. We've heard that Squirrels are opening up in Sea Scout groups, we're going to have Squirrels at sea... but we've also had the first Dre's opening up in an Air Scout group. So we're going to have some flying Squirrels.

**JAMIE** Amazing.

**CHRIS** I mean, it's just so special.



**JAMIE** Love that.

**CHRIS** That again, that's just another thing... who would have thought that would happen?

**ARMIN** After listening to this conversation and hearing how much everyone enjoyed the process it's almost as if this partnership between Supple Studio and Squirrels was meant to be. Starting with that fateful trip Jamie took — only a few months earlier before receiving the brief — to Brownsea Island where the Scouts were founded 112 years ago and that about 200 rare, red squirrels call home. But mainly through the evident, shared enthusiasm everyone had for this project. If there is anything else we all have to look forward to is the potential of acorn beanies becoming a real product. I may be 40 years older than the intended audience for it but I'll be first in line for it.

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