EPISODE 042

NEXT

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Brian Collins, Kristine Lim, and Jump Jirakaweekul, COLLINS
AND
Spencer Hansen, NEXT

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

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO   Hi, this is Bryony Gomez-Palacio and welcome to episode 42 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Next Insurance, which specializes in insurance for small businesses with simple, digital, and affordable coverage tailored to the self-employed. Of which, 300,000 are their customers. Headquartered in Palo Alto, CA, Next uses AI and machine learning to simplify the purchasing process and allows its customers to do everything online, from purchasing a new policy, to getting proof of insurance, to filing a claim.

The project, designed by the New York, NY, office of COLLINS, was posted on Brand New on September 16, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast042 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast042, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Brian Collins, Chief Creative Officer and Co-Founder of COLLINS; Kristine Lim, Designer at COLLINS; Jump Jirakaweekul, Design Director at COLLINS; and Spencer Hansen, Executive Creative Director, at NEXT.

In this conversation we hear about Next's desire to create an identity that would be able to represent the diversity of the hundreds of small businesses that use their insurance services — whether that be window washers, dog walkers, or sex therapists among many other awesome professions. We learn about the angle COLLINS took to separate Next from mainstream insurance companies represented by talking ducks or by mayhem itself by shifting the conversation into insurance being a mark of optimism and encouragement instead of a mark of risk and precaution. And, among many other subjects, we hear about the chain of events that lead to the massive (and highly entertaining) illustration library by Bristol, England-based Caspar Wain, which started where many projects should start: By watching "Who Framed Roger Rabbit".

Now let's listen in as Armin follows up with Brian, Kristine, Jump, and Spencer.

ARMIN VIT Hello everyone, today we're here to talk about the wacky world of insurance, which is something I never thought I would say, but between COLLINS and NEXT, they have truly built a wacky world thanks to a wonderful set of illustrations that I'm sure we will talk about. Spencer, Brian, Jump, Kristine, welcome to The Follow-Up.

SPENCER HANSEN Thanks for having us.

ARMIN So that our listeners can know who's who, since we have four people on the podcast today, if you could introduce yourselves with your name and title.

SPENCER My name is Spencer Hansen, pronouns he/him. I'm in Palo Alto, California, and I'm the Executive Creative Director at NEXT insurance.

KRISTIN LIM Hi, I'm Kristine Lim and I'm a Designer here at COLLINS.

JUMP JIRAKAWEEKUL Hello, I'm Jump Jirakaweekul, I am a Design Director here at COLLINS.

BRIAN COLLINS And I'm Brian Collins. I'm Chief Creative Officer and co-founder of COLLINS.

ARMIN Perfect. Welcome everyone to the show. Spencer, we're gonna start with you. Being only five-years old, perhaps four when the company started thinking of about a redesign, what were the reasons for NEXT Insurance to embark on a redesign at this point in its history?

SPENCER Yeah, it's interesting. I kind of have to step back a little bit to when I was working at Spotify and NEXT started recruiting me to come work for them. I was a little bit like, ah, an insurance company. Interesting. And I looked at their website, and I looked at the brand elements, and there was very little cohesion. It was all stock photography everywhere. I even heard from the customer representatives that people used to call in just to validate that the company was real, that it wasn't a scam. And it was like, this must be a scam because it was too good to be true. And so they'd actually call in to find out if this was like a real company. And so when I came along, it was like, oh, we just need to apply a brand to this. You have such an amazing thing. And it's helping small businesses. And those ingredients for me, felt a lot like Spotify actually—just like the variety of artists and genres, where in this space, it's a variety of business owners and makers, and with that pallette, it just seemed like a really awesome opportunity to both join up with NEXT, but also build a brand with them and find a great partner to build that brand with.

ARMIN Speaking of great partners, Brian, how did COLLINS get involved in this project?

BRIAN <laugh> oh, that… it's a doom setup. <laugh> Spencer had known us from our work that we had done several years before work on Spotify and had liked working with us and our team. And then when he arrived at NEXT, I got a phone call from him and he said, Hey, I'm taking my next step, I'm going to be creative leader over this new insurance company. I'm like insurance? Yeah, it's small business insurance. And he was so excited about it. His enthusiasm was so contagious that

I thought it would be a great opportunity for us. So I said, Spencer absolutely. We'll help.

ARMIN And Spencer, you obviously had experience working with COLLINS before, but what attracted you to working with them for this specific project? Given how out of the ordinary it was in the sense that insurance is not an area where you're like, oh, this needs to be exciting, and fun, and with a brand forward perspective. So in all of that, what attracted you to work with COLLINS?

SPENCER When it was time to start finding a partner to do the brand refresh, it was honestly a bit of a no-brainer. But for me, what was a no-brainer was actually like a bit of a brave choice for my stakeholders. You know? For some, it was like, Ooh, I don't know, is COLLINS too cool for an insurance company? And I said, no, they're not too cool. Actually. Yes, they are too cool. And that's exactly why—.

ARMIN Exactly.

SPENCER —we need them. And then there was other stakeholders that were like, wait, they worked on Twitch? They worked on Spotify? they worked on all these like cool things? This is where WE need to be—that's the disruption we're looking for. And so again, I'm grateful that I've got some pretty dope leaders here who want to take those steps and work with the best partners possible.

BRIAN You know Armin, one of the things that's important, I think in any creative organization, whether it's you have great strategy, you have great business leaders, you have great designers, great technologists, people who code like crazy, who can design like crazy, who understand typography, form, color, illustration, all those things are table stakes. The thing that builds and makes a relationship more than anything else is trust. If you don't have trust, all those other things don't matter. Trust is about honesty, transparency, sincerity, consciousness, those are all things that are the foundation for anything we do. If you don't have trust in a creative relationship, nothing moves.

ARMIN Yeah, and I think it starts from the top down as Spencer has mentioned. Just your leadership, having trust in your decision to bring in COLLINS, and then COLLINS having that trust in that, okay, we can make something cool for insurance. Why not? So to get things started about how this project started to develop, Spencer what guidance or direction did you give COLLINS to get things going?

SPENCER We needed a diverse and colorful brand to represent our diverse and colorful audience. It's like, when we're talking about dog walkers, flower shops, restaurants, food trucks, window washers, sex therapists, construction workers, all these people are the opportunity. They're all making and doing the most interesting things. This is a bit of my Kool-Aid, I love drinking here, is that as far as like a Silicon Valley tech company, we're not making a screen or an addictive social media app. It's like, helping the people that make the most important stuff. But back to the challenge that I posed to COLLINS is that everything was blue, there was this logo that was tilted on its side, and so you had to tilt your head to see it, and it was inflexible. Like you couldn't design with that logo, and you couldn't design with the color palette because I felt like, ah, the small business landscape is so diverse, we need a brand system that's as diverse… can speak to that group of people, and not just be monochromatic.

It needed to be flexible. I think that's the main challenge I posed to them was, Hey, we've got these really creative people, similar to all the different artists, this is what you did at Spotify, so we need something similar here. Now of course people aren't waiting, you know, again, NEXT Insurance is not a culture company, but I wanna change that. And so doing a brand system that had a really strong cultural foundation, 'cuz again, this is the stuff that real people and real small businesses are making. That was the challenge I posed to the COLLINS team. Let's make something that's cultural and can speak to this diverse group of people.

ARMIN   That is definitely a hard challenge. So Brian, how do you make window washers, sex therapists, dog walkers, <laugh> interesting? Or how do you start to unpack that challenge and get the projects started at COLLINS?

BRIAN   Small businesses drive economies. And small businesses need to protect themselves against risk. And so that's what the insurance does. When you look at insurance, and you look at any business endeavor, you know, a show doesn't open on Broadway, a film doesn't start to get underway, a ship doesn't leave the port, unless someone has underwritten it with insurance. So in some ways, insurance is the catalyst for things to happen. What we got tired of is seeing… there seemed to be two conversations that were happening in insurance. One it's silly, it's filled with characters like talking lizards, talking ducks, and there's a kind of a humor to one part of the industry that's almost absurd. Then there's the other part, they are predictors of doom, and it's all about mitigating your risk. Something terrible is going to happen, so you have to insulate yourself from it. And so there are these two parts of the conversation. You are either funny, or you're predictors of doom. There had to be a third way. And since we'd seen this insurance as an important and crucial thing, we wanted to place insurance, not as risk mitigation, not have that conversation, but about an opportunity creating.

And so, when you shift the story from insulating you against risk to encouraging people to buy a new truck, bring on new employees, open a second, a third, or fourth store, then the role that NEXT was gonna to play was a brand that would encourage you to make the next leap. To make the next step. So we wanna sit on the side of the equation that few insurance companies were doing which was encourage people to "Get Going". Insurance was actually a mark of optimism, and a mark of encouragement. That was how we shifted it. And then in looking at that, we wanted to work with our team to create a world that was positive. That not only were you being encouraged by NEXT to help make the next step, and then we would provide the tools

or to tell you do that. But everything around you in that would be telling you. So the entire world would speak. The entire world will tell you. If you were a hairdresser, your scissors would start talking to you. If you were a landscaper, your lawnmower would start talking to you. Everything around you was a world that would encourage you to "Get Going". That shift was the thing that we worked with Spencer and the members of our team.

ARMIN Wow, not easy.

SPENCER The "Get Going" brand signal, it was a strategic partnership. When COLLINS first presented that, our Chief Product Officer hit me up and he was just like, this is like, not just gonna inspire… it's not something that's inspiring in the small business space… this is inspiring me, right now. And he started thinking of all the different ways that this idea, and this positive momentum of "Get Going" can apply, not even just in the small business space, but even culturally as a company. We fell in love with that idea of "Get Going" and we're putting it everywhere now.

ARMIN Jump and Kristine, what was your initial design exploration like?

JUMP I think, like Brian and Spencer just said, the brand signal of "Get Going" was really a starting point for a lot of the creative work. But also when we knew that we were going to work with a brand called NEXT, we also wanted to take a look at the word NEXT formally, both visually as well, since it it's such a good and word, it says anticipation, where are you gonna go next? It's a future-making word. We were really into that idea. And one of the first things in terms of the design process that we also wanted to look at, was add the letter forms of the word, 'cause it was N-E-X-T. There's a lot of verticals and, and horizontal forms. The first thing we did was to take a look at a typographic range of cases, all caps, all lowercase, all title case… just to see like a combination of how those letters started to read.

So that was kind of how we started the exploration. We also took a look at some versions of the logo with NEXT by itself, and also some

options with NEXT Insurance. But as we did that, we kind of aligned on just focusing on NEXT and not the full name of NEXT Insurance, because we didn't think we needed it since it would always be contextualized in the idea of insurance, whether it's in the advertising, or on the website, or even on social. That's kind of how we landed on just like going by NEXT.

BRIAN You know, it was interesting 'cuz the word NEXT is good. You know? NEXT helps you build your next store, and buy your next truck, and hire your next employees. So the word NEXT was actually a word that we wanted to use in the text. And then we would've had two kind of expressions of that word. We would've had a logo and we would've had typography. So what we wanted to do is create a logo type as Jump said, that worked independently as a logo—it would have mnemonic qualities as a logo, which is where the round lowercase "e" comes in. And yet when we would take that letter form, we would take it and then drop it into a really bold headline, it didn't stand out. So it had to serve two functions: It had to have certain mnemonic qualities that looked like a logotype, and yet it had to disappear into a stacked headline. That's the hat trick that we tried to do. I think the team pull it off. It's a weird combination of letters, it's a little awkward. We spent weeks trying to get us to the point where it would work in both those capacities, both standing alone and then sort of disappear into a headline.

SPENCER Also the heavy typeface with the Sharp Sans, or the Sharp Sans-inspired logomark, I just loved how Kristine, Jump, and Brian described it initially. That because of all of the very harsh verticals, crosses, horizontal forms in the logomark, that placing the friendly "e"and again, it's not like a thinly weighted "e", it's like a thick, round, almost circle in the center that made all that severity much more friendly. It punches hard, but then it gives you a big bear hug afterwards. There was just something really just powerful about the mark. It felt like a word, to Brian's point, a word that you could place into copy, but also a mark in-of-itself. Those were the things that were exciting to us, as

far as seeing that mark come together as a holistic—not just a word—but a symbol.

ARMIN I hope punches hard, but then gives you a bear hug is somehow integrated into the guidelines as an official descriptor of the logo because that's great. <laugh> Kristine back to you on that question. What was sort of your initial approach to the design exploration?

KRISTINE After we focused in on the logos that we liked, we had maybe around three to four, and we really wanted to explore the larger system with color, type, and illustration. We knew we wanted to show Spencer and his team a wide range so we showed them three very distinct directions. The first one was based on a slab serif logo that was super tracked in, um, super bold. And this was super tactile, hardworking, and it worked as also one big ligature. And this logo was paired with a watercolor illustration style that was really soft, to contrast the really blunt and bold logo. And then we showed a second direction that focused in on a stencil version of the logo. And this one was super modular knowing, you know, the super diverse audience. We knew that this had to be really expressive and utilitarian. That was something that we showed. And then the last one was the geometric sans logo, which is the one that we ended up going with. And we looked at a few different illustration styles that would be paired with this. That was kind of a sketchy, still life of small businesses and their owners. And then also one that was kind of more character-based. All three of the directions were very logo centric. We knew that we wanted the word NEXT to be heroed within the brand system, but then these supporting elements would really depend on the tonal, and also the formal qualities of the logos within that direction.

ARMIN And Jump, I wanna talk a little bit about the typographic approach. And we've already touched a little bit on that, about the relationship between the logo and the copywriting, but what did it take to get to that final place of major boldness, major bigness? Was there ever a point where this was like thin and light and airy?

JUMP   With the typography of the NEXT brand… when we worked on the logo, we always knew that we wanted to see if we could get the idea of using the logo in, into art we worked. That was a thread that we got from both the tone of voice, but also just graphically, how to make that work. We spent a lot of time on finding the right typeface, and the right weight for that. But one of the first things that we did look at was Sharp Sans. We also looked a lot at some of Lubalin's work, as well as type-heavy advertising from the sixties and seventies, that was really brought to light by the messaging and by the copy. So that was kind of source of inspiration there. There was a need for what happens when we don't want to be so bold all the time? And so heavy, so loud all the time. In the final brand system, we actually have a lighter weight of Sharp Sans that is being used with the bold weight—that is something that is used here and there. We really wanted to build in that kind of flexibility within the brand. You can use the type and the logo and its loudest volume in the out-of-homes and in the billboards, but also at the same time on the website, or in the product, if there's a moment that be wanna highlight typography, we can do it in a way that's a little bit less loud, but still have that same strong point of view in terms of the form of the typeface.

ARMIN   Yeah. Sharp Sans is such an excellent, versatile typeface. It's a great choice for having those different tones and different volumes. Now, Kristine, let's talk about illustration. Tell me everything. How, how, how did you end up with selecting Casper Waine? How did you define all the different characters? How do you figure out the right size of the nose for all the characters? <laugh> All the details we wanna know.

KRISTINE   So in the early rounds of the illustration exploration phase, we knew that we wanted to avoid that overly simplistic illustration style that's really saturated within the tech space. This led us to look into styles that felt really warm and optimistic, instead of generic. And the direction that the NEXT team had picked, in the early rounds had these really charming and whimsical characters. We then took a look at what these characters should be, and how they should act. One of the really early

examples that Brian has shared with us was a clip from "Who Framed Roger Rabbit", and it was that scene where Eddie enters Toon Town for the first time and he's transported into this whole different world that's filled with seeing trees, and a singing sun and singing buildings. This was one of many inspirations that we looked on in terms of what we wanted the world of NEXT to feel like.

KRISTINE And in terms of selecting Casper, we were looking for someone that captured the sincerity, and the positivity of all of these small businesses. But, also wanted someone that had a bit of grit to their work, knowing that a lot of these small businesses are really hands-on. And so we looked at a really huge range of different illustrators. When we came across Casper's work, we knew that he was the perfect fit, and that's because his illustrations feel both nostalgic and timeless at the same time—and that felt really fresh. And I thought that his hand-done quality and the halftone patterns would feel new and unique. Especially within the tech space. Also his characters that he draws are really funny and super playful. There was also this level of sophistication within the quality of his work. And we knew that this was gonna be a really huge library that we would hand over to NEXT, and that would have an ongoing relationship with the NEXT team. We knew we had to find someone that would be able to be consistent, but also unique throughout all of the different illustrations, and throughout the process. Honestly, Casper really killed it. In terms of the big nose questions.… we definitely wanted to keep a lot of the features that made Casper's work, his. That meant lots of big noses, lots of big ears, and big feet. And we wanted a sense of wit and delight to be really present. And I think that the way that these characters look have a lot to do with that, but it's also the way that these characters start to act and behave. We worked really closely with Casper on how to incorporate the humor.

KRISTINE And at times it felt a bit over the top. One of the examples that come to my mind right now is this Chef that's holding up broccoli on a platter, and that broccoli is also holding a piece of cake. It's that kind of

humor, and that kind of added layer. And it just works. And we knew that we wanted to have that kinda twist. And it almost also acts as a reward for the person that's paying attention. We knew that we wanted it to feel funny and playful at quick glance, but also wanted to reward the person that was paying attention.

BRIAN The other thing we do, we wanted the set to feel optimistic. And then we looked at two eras in American culture when optimism really was necessary. In the height of the Depression, the very early 1930s, Warner Brothers and Looney Tunes, and Walt Disney and the Fleischer Studios created these crazy characters. And animation was very early in those days. And so they had to exaggerate people's ears, and they exaggerated their expressions, and they made them sort of comical. One of the things that we wanted to do was embrace that kind of humor. Um, again, that happens in the 1970s, a lot of underground comics. So it was a quality of humor and I think of optimism that we wanted to capture, at this point, when optimism is something we—small business people could use, particularly how complex things are and challenging things are during COVID, and also with the economy. And then Kristine just mentioned it, the scene where Eddie goes into Toon Town and everything's talking to him, the buildings you're talking, the cars are talking, where everything is telling you everything's gonna be okay. There's a sense of delight and perseverance, and I think conscientiousness in those characters that we wanted to capture in the work we were doing with NEXT.

ARMIN And for you Spencer, how did you and your team feel about adopting a visual language that revolved around such an unexpected and unusual illustration style?

SPENCER The more unusual, the better. That's for me and my team. It took some discussion internally to figure out, is this where we want to go? But it also felt like it had the most legs. And it was the most interesting. Obviously the style stands on the shoulders of a great heritage of all types of illustration and animation. But just the fact that we

were incorporating halftones, which is a print mechanism, right? It's something that's intended for print to be seen as a shadow, as a piece of artwork here. And then to put it into motion, and to animate some of these characters, with the halftones… was just pure delight. But again, going back to just the functionality of these things, anything's possible, you can put a face on anything. And we do. There's a bizarre, playful, and interesting nature to this that's both familiar, nostalgic, to some people, but then also modern, new, and disarmingly fun for gen-Zers who may not be as familiar with this style. As we were looking at it, and interrogating as potential system for us, we also think about how schoolhouse rock was really good at explaining difficult concepts and teaching, and how a bill becomes a law. How do you explain complex systems of government, and complex systems of like, how is the constitution made? How are these things done? And back in the seventies, they're putting together these teaching through these inanimate objects, anthropomorphizing them. Insurance has that same problem. And we were wanna be radically transparent and helpful. And we want to teach. Using illustration to teach and inform, while also have fun, is that same sort of sensibility. And so this, although it seemed like a bold and brave choice, it was the right choice.

And we've been building out a library with Kristine, and Jump, and Casper of over a hundred illustrations that… man, people in the company are just like, there's like a black market right now for these illustrations in the company. Some of them are in some decks, other people don't have them, and there's people trading Casper illustrations—it's like, Hey, can I get the crazy paint bucket with the face for my presentation? And that's awesome. We're trying to make them more widely available, but also maybe keep a little bit of exclusivity with them internally. It's been fun to see the reaction internally to this unique illustration style.

ARMIN   So you have the typography, you have the logo, you have the illustration, this is a question for everyone. Was there a point in which something that you saw in the project, or something that you developed during

the project that you went like, okay, this is it. We've nailed it. This allows us to move forward. We'll start with Kristine.

KRISTINE Yeah. I thought when the illustrations all started to feel like they came from the same world and we started to pair that with the typography, our colors, the photography, basically just seeing the whole system come together. When we saw these illustrations animated… we've been seeing them static for so long, for months. And the team at Buck had animated the spot and seeing that was the click where it was like, oh, it's so much bigger than what we initially were thinking about the system. All of these move, and have personality, and have life to it. That made it feel like the system became even larger than what we initially handed over. And seeing that partnership, yeah. Kind of like that moment where I was like, okay, this is cool.

ARMIN I think it goes back to that scene that you mentioned about "Who Framed Roger Rabbit", you enter into this world where things come alive, that shouldn't be alive. I remember seeing those spots by Buck, and going, like, I can't believe they actually animated this just because everything is so weird, and so detailed, and adding motion brought them to life in a way that, you know, extremely pleasurable just to see all those little details come alive. Jump. How about you?

JUMP One specific illustration that Casper worked on, that I saw, and I was like, oh, wow, yeah, this just makes like so much sense. Because, when we worked on the illustrations, we looked at them by themselves. And there was an ask from the NEXT team to show this street view of all these small businesses. And when we saw how he drew all the characters in the scene, and how there were store fronts, and buildings, and a guy sun tanning, but interacting with the sun which had a face on it… I was like, okay, this is a, this is the whole world of NEXT.

ARMIN That street scene is pretty great. Brian, how about for you, as not the person making it, but the person shepherding the project?

BRIAN In the work that we want to do, and when we're at our best, I think we've done it. as a team is, we don't create systems you work to, we create systems that you work from. So, when we pass them to our partners, whether it's at an animation studio, or an advertising agency, or if we're not doing any of that stuff to other partners that our clients have, we can't wait to see what these companies, and these partners will do with it. And the fact that it came back, and it came back strong, and it came back really interesting was the hope that we had had. We always had an ambition for this thing to work in animation, 'cause that was our original touch-point. But when you start to see other people take the seeds that you've created, and turn it into something that you didn't even anticipate, that's what we love more than anything.

And so, when we started to see this stuff come back from Spencer and we saw early animation tests and we were having conversations with Buck, it just took on this other flavor. When we succeed that's what we hope to do. That we create something and we give it to our partners, or the in-house creative team uses it. They see things in it, and it shouldn't limit creativity, it should expand creative possibilities—not shut them down. If we were good and this project was successful, I think that's what this system enabled people to use. They saw their own ambition in it, and they could turn into something that they were also proud of. Does that make sense?

ARMIN It makes perfect sense. And it is a great ambition to have. Spencer, how about for you in your end? You know, being bombarded with all the goodness from COLLINS. At what point do you go kike, all right, we're good.

SPENCER It's realizing that you can make all of your brand aspirations happen, and that system can flex for all of that.

BRIAN Yep. Yep.

SPENCER We have big ideas and dreams over here with our internal agency. And circling back to what I said in the beginning, I've worked with a lot

of brand systems and there's some that have holes in them. And because of that, you see it in the work. That's why we wanted a strong brand system, such as this one. We realized that it can hit all of our aspirations, all of our plans that we want to achieve. I guess that's the moment, very broadly of like, oh, can this click? Yeah. You know, like we've got a whole docket of things that we plan on doing. One other thing I wanted to just mention was the photographic style. We've talked a lot about the illustration, which is so unique, but the photographic style that COLLINS helped us define, I think, is equally unique because it's so brutally honest about the small business experience.

You see a lot of what proliferates, if you search, if you Google search small business, you'll get a proud small business owner, folding their arms in front of their storefront with an "OPEN" sign, a smile, and a denim apron. It's kind of hilarious. Once you realize that and you search small business, Google search it, a lot of denim aprons. And one of the things that we found with the stock photography… that like we get feedback, construction workers would be like, that's not the tools you use or that hard hat is not scuffed. The people that know, know. And so we made it important for us to like, okay, so we're gonna only shoot real small businesses, when we use photography that talks about the small business experience. We're not just gonna shoot it in this shallow depth of field, everything's soft, and warm, and fuzzy. We're gonna shoot it with hard flash, fashion editorial documentary style, where instead of it being a model, all of a sudden you've got an auto mechanic, and all of the grease, and all of that stuff is just brought into sharp focus. And all the messes, all the clutter, we wanted to include in that.

Where we've got this illustrative style from Casper, that's got this playful and also very inclusive style to it. It's very androgynous. It doesn't necessarily specify anybody with the illustration style. You've got this illustration style that has a very strong point of view. Our photography also has a very strong point of view, and authenticity. And then also, I'm obsessed with attribution. I'm always gonna put the name of the

business that's participating in the work that we're doing, whether it's on the site or the massive portraits that we're hanging all over our walls of real small business businesses. This is this actual business. Reyes Coffee Roasters, just so that people know where that's coming from. That's a long-winded, sort of summary, but I wanted to get into the photography 'cuz it's also a big part of our identity system that we worked on with COLLINS.

ARMIN It's great to hear about the photography because often, it's either stock photos, or visual cliches that we're also used to. There is an honesty in the photography that is not often portrayed because it seems messy, but it ignores the reality that not everything is pitch perfect.

SPENCER Yeah.

ARMIN In real life. I wanna sum up with… what was the most exciting aspect for each of you working on this project, looking back at it, seeing the result and also in contrast to the expectations we all have about the insurance industry.

KRISTINE When we hand over the assets and we start to see the clients play with all the different parts of the system. And I feel like, that's really when all of the work that we do really comes to life. But for this project, it was different for me because leading the illustration part of this project was something that I've never done before, but had so much fun doing. And that's because you know, this style is something that's totally different within the insurance space. And so it was just really exciting to be doing something new.

JUMP This is my first time working on a brand about insurance, and just hearing from what they wanted to do and how they really wanted to support small businesses, I think that kind of surprised me, both in terms of what the work came out to be, and how they were so willing to work with us, and just really push for all the illustrations and the photography too. But, I think it was really cool to see how the NEXT team has used our brand system, and also how they've really created

so many things both internally, but also with small businesses like the coffee, the notebook, and so many other things that they have done. Down to that framing thing that Spencer was talking about with the attribution. It's great to see both our work in terms of the design, but also see our strategy both internally, and externally, in what they do.

BRIAN Armin. We've been at this for a while and what I think is important for young designers to know is that the design system, isn't the guidelines, a design system isn't in the PDF , the design system isn't on page three of a typographic hierarchy. A design system is a fluid conversation between the agency, the clients, the partners that they work within it. It is reliant on the caliber and the quality of the conversation. The trust that entire community has with each other. The system is not in a PDF. The system is in the caliber and the quality of the conversation and those relationships. That is where a design system lives. In the nature, and the trust, and a creative conversation that we all have together. I was so thrilled with how this all has unfolded and continues to unfold.

ARMIN Excellent. The question for you, Spencer, it changes a little bit. What excites you about this identity system, and the people that made it happen for NEXT Insurance moving forward?

SPENCER It runs deep. That's what gets me excited about this. It's culture. Maybe that sounds like—when I say culture, I'm talking about internal culture at NEXT, and I'm talking about company behavior and actions as advertising. I hate advertising <laugh>. I love actions, and things that people do. And although this is called NEXT Insurance, there's a lot of people here, and we all feel a certain way. Our CEO and Founder, and his partners, he said, "I wanna help entrepreneurs thrive". And we translated that as "how can we help entrepreneurs "Get Going"?" Whether in 20 years, or 10 minutes, like they just started, how can we create that energy? And then I've taken that as creative license to make this system, and these ideas seep into every part of the company. If I go into the snack area of the company, and there's

anything from Costco, it like, you know—I think I saw some Costco and Snapple and all these like things. And it's like, surely there's a small business out there that's making granola bars that we can buy our granola bars from. Do we have to have Snapple? There's gotta be something. How can we get the stuff of small business into our daily lives? As a reminder of just how amazing the stuff that we're doing is? And how we're able to help and enable these people. And so we've actually started doing that. We're working on switching out all the snacks to be small business. Last year, HR said, Hey, can you help us design a hoodie from swag.com? I said, yes, but not from swag.com. We're gonna work with an LGBTQ streetwear company, gender-neutral streetwear brand in Los Angeles, and support them because they're gonna make us something for us that's so much cooler, and so much more meaningful. And we're gonna help businesses stay in business, with all the stuff that Silicon Valley companies buy, it can't be from Costco, it can't be from Amazon. We have to support small businesses. This system is helping bring that vision to life as well, and inspiring our team members at NEXT to "Get Going", to help small businesses "Get Going". And that's, what's really exciting to me. Even our hold music. We did a session recently where we hired self-employed musicians to do our on-hold music. And we did a bit of a teaser video for it. And I feel like I'm back doing music again, but the typographic system, the illustration, all that stuff is supporting this deeper strategic idea of let's help entrepreneurs thrive. Let's help them "Get Going". Let's do something that's meaningful, and help small businesses by being transparent about what insurance is, and how we can help them "Get Going".

ARMIN <laugh> That is wonderful to hear, very on brand. And indeed it is a message that resonates. It's exciting, and it's something that you wanna adopt for anything in life "Get Going". And I want to thank you, Spencer, for sharing everything from the inside. As always COLLINS, Brian, Jump, Kristine, just hearing how you arrive at such wonderful, unique, surprising solutions for your clients, and the relationships that you build with them. So thank you everyone for being on The Follow-Up today.

BRIAN Awesome. Thank you.

SPENCER Thank you Armin.

KRISTINE Thank you.

JUMP Yeah, thank you. It was great.

BRYONY After this conversation, whether you need insurance or not, you should at least be feeling the urge to "Get Going", which is amazing to think that no other company has previously made into a global tagline. As has been the case on almost every episode on The Follow-up it was great to once again hear about how important the client-slash-designer relationship is in the development of unique and authentic branding. In this case, the secret ingredient as Brian pointed out was trust, and if trust can yield a world in which scissors and lawn mowers and tires and pieces of broccoli talk to you, that's a world I want to live in.

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