

EPIISODE 055

THE MEAN TOMATO

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Alec Tear, independent Designer and Lettering Artist
Kuba, Kuba & Friends

AND

Jessica Lauria, Gopuff

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 number 55 of The Follow-up. Before I get into the introduction for this episode, a quick note that we will be taking a 4 to 6 week break from the podcast so that we can finish all the materials for the Brand New Conference that is happening less than a month away. Actually, speaking of the Brand New Conference, we have a special discount for you, as a listener of the podcast: use discount code thefollowup, all one word, and you will get 20% off your registration cost, whether it's an in-person ticket or a webcast. If you've already registered, we are happy to send you a refund for that same 20%. Email us at thefollowup@underconsideration.com with your order and ticket number and we'll take care of it. Now, on to episode 55.

This week we are following up on The Mean Tomato, a new brand of New York-style pizzas available exclusively through U.S. and UK delivery service Gopuff. It marks the first expansion of the company's freshly-prepared food offering since opening Gopuff Kitchen in 2021. Operating from mobile facilities attached to the company's micro-fulfillment centers, Gopuff Kitchen expands the company's offering from its already expansive inventory of more than 3,000 products that

includes snacks, groceries, health and beauty items, and pet supplies to offer fresh meals like a restaurant, delivered at quicker speed. The menu and brand for The Mean Tomato was spearheaded by Amelia Riba, former Pizza Hut Chief Brand Officer, and Alan Morgan, former Culinary Director at Whole Foods, who leveraged data and insights — made possible through the millions of deliveries Gopuff does — to specifically design the menu with pizzas featuring hints of customer favorites like TRUFF and Mike’s Hot Honey.

The project, designed in collaboration by Amsterdam, Netherlands-based Alec Tear and London, UK-based Kuba & Friends was posted on Brand New on June 27, 2022. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast055 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast055, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Alec Tear, an independent Designer and Lettering Artist; Kuba, Founder and Creative Director of Kuba & Friends; and Jessica Lauria, Head of Brand Marketing at Gopuff.

In this conversation we hear about the genesis of The Mean Tomato and how it started from the simple fact that GoPuff had figured out a unique way to make pizzas really, REALLY fast. The project then snowballed from needing a name to needing a logo to needing its own mascot to developing its own typeface to, well, ultimately kicking ass. A big part of the success of this project — and both Jessica and Kuba made it evidently clear — was Alec, not just for his design contribution but for realizing early on the potential that this quick-pizza-making scheme could be much more robust and meaningful and had the foresight to put together a bigger team, bringing in Kuba & Friends who helped shape the strategy that paved the way for this adorable jerk of a tomato to come to life. Warning: Some of you say tomayto, a lot of people in this episode say tomahto.

Now let’s listen in as Bryony follows up with Alec, Kuba, and Jessica.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO Earlier this week, we were surprised to learn we could order yummy and lovably-mean pizza, alongside toilet paper and other household items or snacks. And to our kids surprise and delight, that is exactly what we did. How did this come to be? Well, that's something we're about to find out. Kuba, Alec, and Jessica, welcome to The Follow-Up.

KUBA Thank you.

ALEC TEAR Yeah. Thanks having us.

BRYONY Just for our audience sake, if you can each introduce yourselves with your name and where you're coming from.

KUBA My name is Kuba. I am the Founder and Owner of Kuba & Friends. We're a UK-based creative design and advertising agency.

ALEC And my name's Alec and I'm a lettering artist and designer, often have the pleasure of working with people like Kuba.

JESSICA LAURIA And I'm Jessica Lauria, client here, Head of Brand Marketing at Gopuff.

BRYONY Jessica, with that intro, let's take a step back and establish for those who don't know what Gopuff is, where it's located, and what the overall vision of the company is.

JESSICA Gopuff is a go-to instant commerce platform. So you can get everything that you need. You experienced it the other day. Everyday needs. You can get groceries, alcohol, home essentials, and pizza in minutes, and it's actually quite life changing once you try it and then you start and then it kind of becomes part of your life. We're based in Philly, but all over the country—our team is all over the country—but we have local fulfillment centers, called micro fulfillment centers, all over the country and in Europe. And go Puff's vision is to be the world's go-to solution for immediate everyday needs.

BRYONY No small task.

JESSICA <laugh>. Yeah.

BRYONY It is my understanding that Gopuff launched The Mean Tomato as an offering through the kitchen that was established, if I'm not mistaken in 2021.

JESSICA Correct.

BRYONY Multipart question here. Why pizza? And what was the prep work internally to get to that point, before focusing on the branding, and who was involved?

JESSICA Gopuff has an amazing assortment. It's one of the things that makes Gopuff so amazing. And we're very focused on what consumers want, and one of the things we knew consumers were looking for was the fresh food offering. So we opened up kitchens and as part of this offering, we have a proprietary way to make pizza super fast, which is kind of our whole theme of doing everything fast, getting things to you in under 30 minutes. Knowing that we had this proprietary to make pizza, we said, okay, what do we need to do besides just having pizza? We needed to create a brand. And the person who led our kitchens business was this amazing visionary Max Crowley. He was the one who said, we need a brand. And now this business is actually run by Amelia Reba, who is the Ex-Chief Branding officer at Pizza Hut.

So we've got some, like really qualified people behind this little pizza brand here. Amelia came on a little bit later. So Max said, you know, we need a brand. Max came to me and gave me the keys to build this brand. He said, we need something, we need something really cool. And then he said to me: I know a guy, this guy, Alec look him up. And I was like, oh geez, what does this guy know about design, or branding, or anything? I said, all right, I'll reach out to this guy that you know, and then I literally emailed Alec from his website. I think was actually even under construction at the time. And I'm like, ah, who's this designer guy? I was like, Hey, you wanna help me with this pizza brand? And that's kind of how this all came to be.

BRYONY So Alec, you got that cold email in a way. <laugh> What was your first impression? And how did you get Kuba and everybody involved?

ALEC I mean, my first impression was... it was to do some design for a pizza brand, which was something I'd always wanted to do. I was pretty excited. And then after the cold email came through, we had a very warm conversation over Zoom, which was nice. So Jess kind of gave me a call and just explained Gopuff's ambition. We talked about the vision for the whole thing, shared some mood boards, and some early ideas. But it was very kind of early days. And then they were just like, would you like to kind of help on it? Which obviously I did, as I said, I've always wanted to work on a pizza brand. They're just so cool. Pizza is just so effortlessly cool. The kind of problem was is that for the ambition that they had, I didn't think I'd be able to provide what they needed by myself as a one man team; for it to be as good as it could be, as it should be. So essentially I said yes, but I'd love to get a wider team involved on this. And I've done a few jobs with Kuba and his friends that went really, really well. It's always just such a pleasure to work with those guys. Everyone's like really good at what they do. I suggested that we widen the team and really do this properly.

BRYONY Jessica, I'm assuming at this point, you're a little bit more comfortable with this guy. <laugh> that came to you. You are a little more reassured with the process, is that correct?

JESSICA Listen, my background is agency, you know, for over 15 years. And so when he said that, it was actually comforting for me to go, oh great, if you are pushing that we need to do this properly, and how to properly build a brand, it actually gave me a lot of comfort too. Because I don't think a lot of people understand what goes into amazing design, right? Like you need to do the work, you have to do the strategy... when he said that, I was like, oh, okay. Yeah, I get you. We can do this properly. And then once he brought in Kuba, Kuba and I have a million connections too.

KUBA I was gonna say that, yeah...

JESSICA There was a short hand of like, oh, okay. And that's kind of, you know, when Kuba got involved, there was just like a level of comfort. And I knew I was gonna be in good hands. I knew from Alec already, but it was just, we knew we were gonna build the foundation and not just some awesome logo.

BRYONY Jessica called Alec, Alec called Kuba. Kuba, what was your take—
<laugh>

KUBA I then called Jessica just to complete this wonderful triangle of warm Zoom conversations. As Jessica said, I think within about 30 seconds, we realized we had a ton of friends in common. I'm also ex advertising. Come from the same world. I then did a long time in the design world, so I did advertising and then design. And we realized that we had brilliant friends in common. We all pretty quickly realized that we have this sort of mutual respect and friendship, which is just the best way to start any project. It didn't take me long to embrace this project and bring on the best possible team that I could. I think that's the thread which went through the whole thing. I mean, Jessica and her team had this ability. One of my old bosses in advertising used to say, the clients always get the work they deserve, which I think is a brilliant saying, right?

Normally used to say that Jessica, I think it might have been one of our old bosses who said that, and it's so true. Jessica and her team have this ability to make us as agency people want to do the best possible work. That was apparent from day one for me. I wanted to bring on the most brilliant people. Already had Alec who is a brilliant, incredibly talented person. But then my job was to bring board the, A-team, if you like. And, and I think I did that Jessica, right? I think we just brought in some brilliant people and it was a fantastic project to work on. Loved it.

BRYONY Okay. You've got the great team. You've got a good startup. I'm curious to know if there was any parameters or directives that launched the branding side of this project. And I'm very curious to know if Jessica

brought the name to you? If the name came out of the brainstorm, where does the name fall into this process?

JESSICA This was done properly, right? The strategy, then the naming, then the design. Of course the team was involved. So I'll let them speak to that. You know, as I mentioned before this person Max, he said, I want a cool brand. There's probably some curse words in there. I'll keep it clean. You know, I want a blank and very cool brand. I want a brand that you'd wear on a t-shirt. Not even that you would put on a t-shirt, but that you would wear, that you would WANT to wear on a t-shirt. That was really the brief.

KUBA It was that simple.

JESSICA Yeah. And then from there, I'll hand it over to these guys and how they took that.

KUBA I love that, Jess. It really was. I mean, I said to Alec that looking back on this stuff is amazing actually, 'cuz it, it was not that long ago, but it was almost a year ago we did the first bit of strategy. And it's been such a joy reading through all the documents. But the wonderful thing about the brief was it was obviously longer than that. I mean, Jessica didn't just send us six words saying I want to wear it on a t-shirt. But at its heart, that was the brief, right? For us. Which was, I want something cool. That really was a start point of our strategy. It will take me too long to go through all the strategy. I think there's a really relevant bit of the strategy actually, where very, very early on the process we unpicked, I suppose, what we understood as being cool.

I mean, I think we called it the cool criteria, Jessica. And we kind of had 10 very simple points, really. That was a bedrock for everything we then did. Whether it was naming, whether it was then working with Alec on the visuals, or even then working on the tone of voice. The first one was be original. The second was be authentic, which is quite different than be original, but was very relevant for tone of voice. Third was be rebellious. The fourth, we wanted to create our own

culture, or our subculture, so be a creator of subculture. We wanted to create a brand with status. We wanted to be sensorially appealing and obviously aesthetically appealing. I knew it would be aesthetically appealing 'cause we got Alec, but we wanted it to be sensorially appealing as well. We wanted to be energetic, be extraordinary, be iconic. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, 'cuz this is a commercial endeavor be popular. We knew that if we got those 10 criteria right, they were basically the ingredients we had to make our cool pizza pie, if you like. When we briefed—again a bit like the client brief, the strategy was slightly more fleshed out than that—but that I think was a sort of bedrock of what we were trying to build. And the foundation we were trying to build on. When we briefed our UK-based copywriter, who's also ex-advertising, funny enough, for a list of brand names, 'cause that's always the first point after you do the strategy, you get the strategy approved and then it's like, crap, we need a name, really fast. So we generated a whole bunch of names and we used that sort of strategic criteria to brief our naming specialist, our copywriter. She then came out the ton of names. And interestingly, what normally happens is one name is chosen. A lot fall out because either the clients don't like them or the trademark lawyers don't like them <laugh>. We ended up with four names. That was quite an interesting bit of the process. The Mean Tomato was one of four. Am I allowed to say what the names were Jessica, or would you rather not?

JESSICA I think we can say what the four—

KUBA You sure?

JESSICA —names were. The strategy we leaned with was this whole idea of defy the unexpected. Alex was the strategist and Alec was heavily involved too. It's not like Alec was sitting in the corner, like give me the name. And so when we went through the names, one of my first questions was what does Alec think? I need to know what got him excited, and what were the things where he was like, okay, I can visualize it. So throughout the process, it was so collaborative. It was very fluid and

everyone weighing in. So you can share the four names. ‘Cause I think they all had reason and purpose behind them.

KUBA And actually I think it’s a really interesting for any listeners out there listening to this. It’s a really interesting exercise whenever we present names, we always say “a name is nothing without clothes”. Without branding, without pictures, without a vibe, without a personality. And I think often when you see a name on a blank piece of paper, they are hard to judge. We had Sauced, we had Dough Runners, we had 12th Street Pizza. Is that right? Yeah. 12th Street Pizza. I need to make sure the street’s right. And then we had The Mean—

JESSICA Yeah, that was where the Gopuff original office was. So it kind of had like a origin story.

KUBA That’s right. That was the original... and then we had The Mean Tomato. They were the four names, and Alec you should talk a little bit about, which were your favorite names off the bat.

ALEC When I originally heard them I immediately loved Dough Runners. Sounded like a cool like tease like arcade game. And Sauced as well, which is so sensorial, really ticking that box. We did some cool stuff with that in early days as well. My immediate reaction for The Mean Tomato was that I didn’t like. It sounds weird. I don’t get it. Why is it mean? All the obvious questions that you have when you first hear a name, when there’s no context or no clothes on it?

BRYONY Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

ALEC Which is quite funny because I absolutely love the name now. I just needed to live with it for a bit. You know, hearing stuff cold sometimes is weird. But then when you think about it a bit and create this vision in your head for what that could look like, you know, everything kind of falls into place. In the end, we had four great names to start with.

BRYONY Curious to know if you presented creative for all four names or did you reserve the creative to The Mean Tomato, and that was it?

ALEC Well, it's funny actually 'cuz from the start I was like, we absolutely need to get down to one name. One of my least favorite things to do as a designer, you know, we've got like multiple names on the table because you want the name to be kind of entwined with everything in the brand. Everything, it shouldn't come from the name necessarily, but it's always better when it does. When it all flows together and works together. So when I found out we'd like narrowed it down to four, I was a bit like, okay, well we're gonna have to do four designs then? One for each name, and we're gonna have to create these interim creative territories, I think we called them, to work out which the best name would be. It was a great process because I think that's when I changed my mind about The Mean Tomato. When I saw what it could be through mood boards, and quick early sketches, and things like that. We created one of these territories for each of those four names.

KUBA We wouldn't have ended up with Mean Tomato if it hadn't been for that process. We would not have ended up with it. There's no doubt in my mind. And that was an interesting conversation that I had with Jessica, then I had with you Alec. And it was one of those, like we'd never done this before, you really wanted to do a sketchbook for four names? In hindsight, it was the best thing 'cuz it led to this incredible thing.

JESSICA 'Cause it wasn't in the scope. It was another step, and it was more time 'cuz we were on this time crunch. Yeah <laugh>, and we were in a tight scope. And so it was like, okay, if we do this, it's more time more money. Are you sure you wanna do this? It was a discussion, but without ah, we kind of need to do it. And in my mind, on my side, I'm like, how am I gonna sell any of this, if I don't have tangible things? It's not like everybody gets design and brand or whatever. So it's almost like, how do I make this tangible for everybody else.

BRYONY Jessica, did you have to then sell this upwards to a whole bunch of people? Or was it a core team? How much of a struggle did you have internally?

JESSICA I think what kept it so successful was that it was a super tight team. We did some naming research, which I'll talk about in a second. But the naming research we did was great validation and it was just really helpful 'cause we kind of knew... you know, that guy Max, basically who I had talked about before we were like, do we feel good? I just had so much confidence in this team. And I knew that it was right, that I was willing to take the risk with Alec and Kuba. Like it felt so right, that in a way, I didn't even wanna ask for approvals because I already knew it was right. And we were able to really build the brand and share it out almost at completion. Like I would say like 85% or even 90%, we got the brand to where it needed to be.

And then we shared it out, got the thumbs up. And then the last like 15% was like all the awesome stuff. The little touches and dialing up the tone. That is what I think made it so successful, was having such a tight team. But again, I had to do my homework. We had great strategy, which I felt really confident about. And we did research with our existing consumers on the name. The four names that we talked about, we put into testing with the sketches, included the territories, I'm pretty sure we did the sketches. We definitely did the naming and we had some criteria. It's interesting, 'cuz we talked about Sauced, and Sauced was almost like the obvious answer 'cuz it was very visceral and cool. And it was like, yeah, it's Sauced. It's pizza. And it was fun. Mean tomato was definitely the outlier. But in this research, people said it was a fun and funny brand, and the attributes that it scored so high on was attention grabbing, cool, unique, intriguing. And this was the killer, was high quality ingredients. 'Cuz at the end of the day, we can make a really awesome brand, but if it's for a crap product who cares, right? For us, the fact that this was also screaming "high quality product, high quality ingredients" was like the no brainer. And the other names hit some of those, but not all of those. So once I knew I had that, I knew no one could argue the name. And then once we had this initial sketch, I was like, okay, I know this is gonna be great.

BRYONY I would love to hear about the four territories that were presented. And then what was the next step to take The Mean Tomato to phase two? After you received the testing feedback, and feedback from Jessica.

ALEC The four territories, as we said already, Sauced, Dough Runners, 12th Street Pizza, and The Mean Tomato. Sauced was really getting into that kind of sensorial, slightly seductive side of pizza, you know, it's messy and saucy and it does all of the taste appeal, but also it feels a little bit provocative. And if this is a brand about defying expectations, that felt like a really rich area. Dough Runners, sounds like a kind of arcade game name. So we had all this stuff about pixel art, and how pixel art and it looks like mosaic tiles. There is a kind of nice cross over there with like the language of pizza, and the language of gaming, and the fact that this is like an app-based thing—that one felt really tight as well. 12th Street Pizza was all about Gopuff heritage, if you wanna kind of call it that, you know? The street where their first office was, and there's also kind of a popular market on that street as well. So we made that one all about the kind of market language, and stickers, kind of handmade signs and things like that. And in The Mean Tomato, it kind of really all came together from the name. We can't not have a mean tomato character. Once we had a character and you know, we had some kind of early sketches of this little grumpy-looking tomato sat in the middle of some like logotype kind of in a circle. We just kind of let him jump out of a logotype and just do what he did, and be mean. And kind of, you know, there's kind of lots of cartoon references, Bart, Simpson and Rick from Rick and Morty, and even like Dennis the Menace, they're all like lovable mean characters. And that one just seemed to really hit the nail in the head with the ability to become a cool brand, or just to kind of subculture, I suppose.

BRYONY That makes sense.

KUBA I think Alec absolutely nailed it from the design perspective. The only thing I wanted to add really was the thing we realized when Alec kind of uncovered The Mean Tomato has this character, 'cuz that's really the idea behind the route. Without the character we were all struggling

with the name. But as soon as Alec's brain gave birth to this cheeky little guy, I think it suddenly was one of those no-brainers, wasn't it Jessica? It was like, there wasn't even a discussion. Really. It was like, wow, of course this is the right route. The thing about it, which became so clever for me was okay, our structural purpose was, you know, we existed to defy expectations. That's great. But what Mr. Mean Tomato enabled us to do was to talk about our pizza actually, 'cuz the brand could talk about the pizza. So we have this phrase, I think the idea "pizza first, mascot second". I love that idea is baked in the idea, excuse the pun. It does enable Jessica and her team to talk about how brilliant the pizza and the ingredients are, without it feeling forced. 'Cause you've got this duality to the brand, this dichotomy of having the brand talking, and having The Mean Tomato character talking that's very different from the brand.

ALEC Mm.

KUBA We realized really early on Alec didn't we? We've got something quite unique and quite special on our hands because of that really.

ALEC Yeah, it kind of opened up a door. If a brand tells you it's pizza's good. It's like, course you're gonna say that. But it isn't the brand saying that really. I mean it is, but it's actually a little tomato saying that, and not saying it overtly, he just like really wants to get the pizza and eat the pizza. It's kind of something clever there happening that lets you get away with just talking about how great your pizza is in a more trustworthy way weirdly, through the kind of guise of a tomato.

BRYONY And if you can expand a little bit on the actual development and creation of this character, I believe you brought in Dan Woodger into the project, he created the illustrations. What was the directive there? What were you seeking? And then what was that process like?

ALEC Picking up from where we got to on the development of the character? You know, we done the naming, we'd done these little sketches of this funny little grumpy little tomato thing that everyone fell in love

with, and everyone was basically like, we've done it, right? We've got it. There's your logo. It's a little tomato, sat in a circle, but we were like super keen to really push it and make sure this thing's executed in the best way possible. But before we even got to putting pen tool to paper, we had to really nail down the personality of the tomato. I've worked with illustrators a lot and having a really clear, but also open brief is the kind of fine line that you need to create to get great work, in my opinion. To create a really clear brief, we needed to know exactly what this tomato's personality would be.

And actually we realized the first sketch was quite grumpy-looking and we realized quite quickly no one wants a grumpy little thing. People need to love the tomato. He needs to be mean obviously, but not crude. We didn't want people to not like him for that reason. And he needed to be cheeky as well. Not kind of cruel, or too sexualized or something, you know? There's a real kind of fine line to doing this. And we wanted him to be arrogant as well. That was a big one, but not in a unlikable way, in a lovable way—in the same way that people love Rick Sanchez, and he's arrogant. So it was creating that fine line and we pulled together this amazingly detailed document of exactly what his personality should be. We even trialed some lines. One of the lines was written on the inside of a pizza box was the idea. And it was "greasy as your hair at prom", for example, written by the tomato. And it's a great line, copywriter came up with it, but everyone was like, that's just a bit too mean <laugh>! We don't want him to be taking the mick out of people. We wanna have him poking fun, but we don't want him to like actually be mean. There was a really kind of specific brief. Once we had that, we let Dan do his thing really to kind of sell into the Gopuff guys, so that they could sell it into their guys, this character. To do that I think you really need to, you know, seeing is believing with these things, so we had to show the potential of this mascot being executed properly to Jessica and team so that they could believe it, and then they could sell it in.

So, you know, we did all sorts of him in different situations, and these are rough vector illustrations that I did. All the potential of him kind of jumping out the logo, doing all these different things, having all these different poses, getting up to all sorts of trouble. And then we shared some of Dan's work saying, look how amazing this illustrator is. You know, he's got this amazing style that's so simple. He manages to capture so much energy, and movement, and weirdly he'd already done quite a few illustrations of food, but with anatomy. It was just the perfect guy for the job. And I'd had my eyes on him for a couple of years waiting for the right job to work with him. And this just was so perfect for that. We brought him in once we shared these early illustrations and we'd really nailed down the personality. And then he created a toolkit of all these different poses. There was a lot of back and forth to really nail the details. But I think we got there.

KUBA He brought an authenticity to it, didn't he Alec, as well? I think it goes back to our cool criteria, which is the sort of early part of our strategy. And one of them is be authentic. And I think that authenticity runs through the visuals. He was just the right illustrator.

JESSICA Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

KUBA And I think that ran into the photography, and especially into the tone of voice—the way the character spoke and wrote, his written word and his spoken word became so incredibly important. It was one of those brands which became an obsession for all of us. I mean, Jessica, you included, right? We were obsessed with getting every single detail, right. We work with a copywriter here who came out with the name in the UK. She's incredible! Ex-Creative Director at Satchi, but we quickly realized that it needed an authentic, more of a sort of New York voice. Certainly someone who was closer to that spirit that the character had within him. This is an example of how collaborative. This is the perfect example where Jessica was like, guys, I've got this guy I used to work with, he was amazing. He's the best frickin' copywriter I've ever known. Da da, da, da. I then did a call to our mutual friend who said, yeah, he's incredible. Within a week, Anthony, his name is, was on the project,

came via Jessica. He's now a very much an honorary member of Kuba & Fiends, and he was incredible. He gave the character his distinct voice. Whether it's illustration or how he speaks, we all became slightly obsessed with getting it right.

JESSICA I mean, this is like probably the most favorite thing I've ever worked on in my 22 year career. I'm just sitting back here going, yeah! I mean the greatest people, the greatest team, I do wanna say when Alec first presented the tomato, a lot of the elements that are in the brand today were in that very first presentation. The idea of his attitude, and the crossout, and even some of the language like the crossout and bite me. The things that fell out of Alec's head that came out on the screen still live very much today. Which just shows how amazing, and how strong that initial idea was. And we've only built off it and continued to refine it. It's not like it was like, oh, a little thing here, a little thing there, that first presentation, he was brought to life, and it was clear. And then it was really more about like molding and shaping. I really have to give Alec so much credit for birthing him. I like to say I birth him. I was just like the doctor. I feel, you know, <laughter> but like this came from him and I feel like we were all just in the room to fuel the fire, and keep the vision going. And again, with the foundation with the amazing strategy. So it's like, it was just like so great. So yeah, I'm just like sitting here, like a proud mama.

KUBA <laugh> So nice to hear.

JESSICA Loving it! And then bringing in Anthony... it became like a family affair at some point.

KUBA It's so nice to hear, but I completely, completely double down and agree with you, Jessica. Going back to that first presentation, all we did was build on what Alec did by bringing in people like Anthony, and even Dan Woodger, and the photographer—I can't remember his name now—great photographer. We just built on what Alec did in the first presentation. I think you were absolutely right. By the way, Jessica. I

love that analogy of we were all in the room whilst we watched him being born like proud parents! <Laugh> It's just brilliant, man. <laugh>

JESSICA It's true, you know?

ALEC It was a really cool one. 'Cause yeah, we did like four mood boards with some sketches basically. But then the second presentation, which was supposed to be the first presentation before we added an extra step, we just built one route. There wasn't options or anything. It was just the vision. And it was so kind of strong from like everyone's early discussions, and the naming, and that first meeting, that everyone was just super on board with. Really great process.

KUBA If clients are listening to this, I'm not being a creep here, but it's true, Jessica, like if clients are listening, there is a lesson in how to get the most out of your talent and your agency. And the amazing thing was you gave us a freedom. Obviously we did have a few guardrails, mainly cost, but not many. I mean, actually you were like, if that's what you guys think is right, then go for it. And we all have the same instinct anyway, we didn't even have to sell anything to you were like, yeah, of course he's the right writer. Or of course that's the right illustrator. You gave the project, the right amount of oxygen, and you let it breathe, and you let it grow. You and your team. It wouldn't have happened without a brave client, actually. There's no way. Can you imagine Bryony a client presentation, it's like, we're gonna create a mascot who's a bit of a dick, and he's gonna lick your product and drop it on the floor, and insult some of your customers, and scribble and deface your menus <laugh>. It takes a certain bunch of clients to buy that. And that's why I think Jessica and the Gopuff team at large are just amazing. They were like, yeah, we love it. Go for it. Amazing. <laugh> like, WOW!

BRYONY Not only to buy it, but to wear it with such confidence, I have to admit.

KUBA Yeah.

BRYONY Kudos to you Jessica for that because you know, you can buy it because you're being told and you believe the rationale about it. But then to carry it forth proudly is a whole other step.

ALEC I can second that as well. And just also the fact you can buy it as well, and then you can dilute it down to something that it wasn't. And then it wasn't, it was always so strong from the start and yeah, absolutely could never have done that without the right client. Congrats to you guys. <laugh>

KUBA The trick is not screwing it up now Jessica, say that in this public forum.

BRYONY <laugh> I think that if you've made it this far, you're good.

KUBA I think so too.

JESSICA I mean, you know, Kuba's still texting me like this post is out of guidelines, you know....

KUBA Off brand <laugh>.

JESSICA Yeah. I mean, that's the problem, right? You know, birth the baby, you bring up the baby, and then you put it out in the world, and then you just are like, oh geez. You just hope you built a good enough foundation that it will do the right thing. But there's still things like this. Like, and of course I'm the person on our side going the crossout is used in this way. This is off guideline, you know, or...

KUBA The thing is though Jessica, all babies turn to teenagers. That's the sad fact of the world, you know? And teenagers start hating their parents. Listen, I've got four kids in the real world, not in The Mean Tomato world. So I'm still enjoying his infancy stage 'cuz it still looks amazing. But I think teenagedom is only around the corner. So that's when he needs proper parenting <laugh>.

JESSICA Right.

BRYONY But before we get to teenagehood, I wanna take a step back real quick because while the concept was solidified really quickly, it seems that

there was a lot of refinement afterwards where it wasn't that you changed things a lot, but you wanted them to be just perfect. So you spent a lot of time on the illustration. I wanna talk a little bit more about the typography, and where you started in that concept phase, and where you ended up with your custom typeface.

ALEC Type is something that's very close to my heart. And I had a clear vision for having a custom typeface for this brand, which isn't always the right thing to do. People, you know, often do them just because, but here I think we really needed to. The kit of parts for this brand—considering it can do like a lot of stuff and paint all sorts of different pictures—the kit of parts is relatively simple. It's basically just a mascot, and two typefaces, and a color palette. And the way though these kind of things scale up and down and, and tell different stories is wild how much you can do those things. But to have such a strict back toolkit was super essential to make sure all the bits were perfect. You know, we talked about the kind of craft that went into the illustration already and the kind of same level of thinking went into the typefaces.

I think in that same first presentation we've sold in the idea of doing a custom font, in the same way we did with the illustration. I have successfully sold in custom fonts. And I've also tried selling them and failed. And over time I've realized it really is kind of seeing its believing. It's really hard to show examples even, and be like, oh, look at these brands have got custom fonts. You should get one. Yeah, that sounds great. But what does it look like and is it gonna be worth the investment? So for me it helps, like I'm a lettering artist as well as a designer and can kind of quite quickly do an alphabet. It won't be perfect, but I can rattle up an alphabet based on a logotype or based on a concept. You know, I managed to pull together a kind of beater version of a Deep Pan Sans, which is the name of our typeface, that we could use in that presentation. It was an extra step of work to do early on. It felt like all on nothing for me—we need to sell in the illustration, we sell the photographer, we need to sell in the typeface, and for it to be bought as a full package, we need to show how amazing it can be

as a full package. We just showed how powerful it could be. And what I mean by that is when you've got a custom font, which is also your logotype, anything you write can be branded, and look like it's come from the brand if it's distinctive enough. You know, I'd always had in my head that I wanted to work with Dan Woodger on something, I'd also always had this typeface in my head in a way. Kind of starting point for it was the typeface Poplar, which is kind of wood cut poster, fun and it's just got so much character, and it's just like oozing with personality basically.

I always wondered what would a contemporary take on this look like? That would be the starting thoughts, which kind of led to Deep Pan Sans. And with that as a foundation, moved further away from that and turned into its own thing. I work quite closely with Polytype, which is a one man foundry. We worked together on a few jobs and have been doing for the last few years. We worked together and really explored how can we make this font super tasty looking, and chunky? And we wanted it to give it like squishy edges, like a tomato has. And we wanted to have bits that felt like oozing cheese, and stuff. It wasn't just about making it a tasty looking font, which I know has been done by lots of people, but it was about creating a typeface, which imbued a personality. And that personality was a cheekiness, and a boldness, and a brashness of the brand. All those things went into what eventually turned out to be the custom typeface.

BRYONY Lots of considerations without a doubt. And then you paired that with Sandwich Marker Pro, right?

ALEC Yeah. And weirdly that was the harder of the two to nail down. The first was in my head, I just needed to make it happen. But there's so many not-great script handwritten script fonts out there, because you know, anyone can just write something and turn it into a font. I went through hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of different options for that. One of the hardest font that I've had to choose. And I even surprised myself with a lot of them thinking, like I found it,

I found the ultimate one and then you just put it on there with the custom font, which already had a lot of personality and it just wasn't right. Either it was too like graffiti and trying too hard to be, oh, I'm an edgy urban font. Or it was the other way, and it made the tomato look dumb. Like it wasn't confident enough, you know? It didn't have that personality, and that kind of swagger that the one we chose did. And also we were looking for one that was like a marker pen style. We already decided that we wanted him to have thick a red marker pen. Lots of consideration went into that one. And that one also had loads of ligatures, different alternates. There was multiple reasons why we chose it and it got the right vibe we were after, in the end.

BRYONY And the right balance. Fantastic. So in the end you provided Jessica and her team with a whole kit of parts. Let's talk a little bit more, just to wrap up, of the other elements that you developed and how that transition is going with giving everything to Jessica.

JESSICA The scope was, I need a brand. I need a logo, a toolkit, and probably the pizza box. A name, a logo, and a box was kind of what we had asked for. You know, like a brand identity that you could give me that I can like go take. And by the way, I was like the shortest timeframe you could have ever imagined. And then luckily I think timing kind of got pushed. The evolution of this, the guys will talk about it more, there was no photography in it, there was no custom font, there was no... the things that had evolved because the brand almost needed it. And I think too, like Alec being like, Hey, I know I'm not necessarily supposed to oversee a photo shoot, but I think we should do this, and I think we should... was like, yep. Yep, yep, yep. Yep. It evolved so much because of the birthing of this thing. So I'll let you guys speak to it, but I just wanted to say it started out as something very parameters, pretty tight. We just need this thing.

KUBA I think, just to build on that really, and to answer your question as quickly as possible, from my perspective, and I'll let Alec say anything that I've left out is, I'm not interested in being a retained agency in

the way that I used to work for big ad agencies. That's not how we operate. We're a quick dose of, well, sometimes quick, sometimes not so quick, but we're a dose of like a nuclear bit of creativity to do something amazing. And that's how to use us. So if we've done our job properly, it doesn't need us to steward it on any project. Not just Mean Tomato. We need to hand over a brand which then organically creates itself, and the clients can steward and brief their creative partners. 'Cause we're not gonna do everything obviously, you know, moving into the future. So I think we didn't leave the project until we had full confidence that Jessica and her team had everything that she and they needed in order to take the brand into the real world. The boring bit of that is yes, we did a toolkit or a kit of parts, which was longer than we normally do, 'cuz we did more. And he was a bit more complicated 'cuz there was a character and the brand, right? Which I've already spoken about a bit. We handed over a pretty fleshed out brand toolkit for Jess and the team to then take forwards.

ALEC We had a whole tone of voice toolkit as well attached to that. With these kind of characters, there's a lot of room to go wrong. You really have to nail it. It's not as simple as just making sure that the logo's not too close to the edge of the page or whatever. You have to make sure when your logo's running around or doing things that he's behaving himself to a certain extent and how to use him in the correct ways. We had a pretty comprehensive set of guidelines to steer that, especially knowing the ambition that Jessica and team had for how this brand might grow in the future. Who knows who's gonna be taking this tomato and doing something with it. Want it to be safe <laugh>.

KUBA That's why I think tone of voice was such an important facet of the brand toolkit for us. Because it's easy to get wrong. If you have the brand trying to be too clever or you have Mr. Mean Tomato trying to be too nice, or too bland, it doesn't work. The whole brand is built on the tension between the brand voice, which is expected. I think we had the word boring in one of our toolkits, but it's very expected, I think is the best way to talk about the brand voice. And then the characters, Mr.

Mean Tomato's voice is the opposite, if you like. He's there to troll the brand, and to call it out, and all of that stuff. And it's the combination of the two, which makes this so special. That can be a tricky balance to get right. We put a lot of effort into building the sort of tone of voice behind the character in the brand, and that's within the toolkit as well.

JESSICA But one thing I wanna say is super interesting, and I think what Alec did awesome too this tone of voice, he brought it to life visually too, right? Like there's something so visceral. Even when you look at some of the photography, how things are done, how the boxes are placed. Alec was an integral part of the photo shoot that we did that again., wasn't something initially scoped, but there's something about the brand that comes through visually, very viscerally... just all works together, right? It's nothing in isolation.

KUBA And Alec was at the heart of everything.

ALEC When you've got such a strong idea, it informs literally everything you do, and it kinda has to, yeah. That's, what's so exciting about working a project list. When you've got a strong idea, you've always got a North Star if you're not sure how to do something.

BRYONY Now, Jessica, what's the chatter that you're hearing both from employees, from customers, from some of your drivers? What are people saying about The Mean Tomato?

JESSICA I mean, it's been amazing because also too, we worked on it for how many months? In isolation, a bit. So people really didn't know. And then once they came out, internally, everybody loved it. Consumers are loving it. For me, and this is just like a little soundbite, we made hats and we gave them out to; we didn't make too many, but they gave them out to some leadership, right? And one of the people in leadership said, you guys, I need help. And we said, what's going on? He goes, my daughter stole my hat, I need another one. And that's when I was like, ah <clap>, this is going to be killer. Because if this guy's teenage daughter stole his hat, and he wants it too, we're

crossing generations here. Right? It was just a huge signal to me. I knew anyway it was gonna be a hit, but that was the little nugget of, oh yeah, we did it guys. Hat, t-shirt, same thing.

KUBA Yeah exactly.

JESSICA People wanna wear it.

KUBA We didn't get a hat.

JESSICA I know they didn't make enough. Don't get me started.

ALEC <laugh> it's not too late.

BRYONY Maybe on the second round, or you'll get an apron, or uh, sticker, or the t-shirt that was the original part of the brief. Have you done the t-shirts?

JESSICA We did do t-shirts. 'Cause we had them on the shoot. Alec. You got one, right?

ALEC Yeah. I got one actually. Yeah. I was keeping quiet about that in case Kuba was jealous. But yeah.

JESSICA I know. I know. I gotta figure it out. Trust me, people are gonna want more.

KUBA I've got literally nothing. I've got no swag. All I've got is Jessica's love and respect, which is much more valuable than a t-shirt by the way,

BRYONY Maybe one of those pizza boxes should have a t-shirt in it from time to time.

JESSICA Oh, that was a PR swag kit that Alec did. Yeah. There were so many there's so...

BRYONY There you go. I did not see that.

JESSICA Well, it didn't come to life, but yeah. There's so many ideas that we had for this brand that may still, you know, come to life in the future.

BRYONY You've extended the scope so many times that it's no surprise that there is a limit, at some point, as to how far you can push it in its infancy,

KUBA No limit, Bryony, no limit.

BRYONY No limit?

KUBA We debriefed on the feature film soon. When's the Hollywood movie coming out, Jessica? <Laugh>

JESSICA Waiting for director.

KUBA Yeah.

BRYONY So I often, by this point, have a clear idea of what you're going to say next, but I wanna know what was personally the most satisfying aspect of working on this project for each of you. Jessica you're making faces like there is no way I can answer that in just a couple minutes.

JESSICA I know! I'm definitely not going first.

ALEC I live by doing design that I care about and doing cool design work is what kind of gets me from the morning. So obviously I tick lots of boxes on this project there, absolutely loved it and very proud of it as well. The most satisfying bit of the whole thing was just working with such a talented team of people. People I'd already worked with and I knew were amazing, and bringing some people who I'd swooned over on Instagram for years into the mix as well. And then sharing those ideas and that vision with the Gopuff team, and having them totally get it as well. That is so rare that you get everyone in line in that same way. Everyone could see the potential of this thing. And it didn't seem like anything was too much of a stretch, you know? The team of people that we worked with was amazing and all enjoying that work together was my favorite bit.

KUBA That's my answer. I mean, that's why I should have gone first. That's my most satisfying thing is bringing together these incredible people. In 28 years of working in advertising and design, and 'cause I'm old—

people can't see my face, I have a very young sounding voice, but a very old face <laugh>— and this is by far, you know, say this on record, this is my favorite brand I've ever been involved in. That's saying something working nearly 30 years. But for me the most satisfying thing is just working with incredible people. I mean obviously Alec, Anthony Fava, I'm gonna give him a shout out 'cuz he was incredible. I know it's design blog and he does words. But anyway, there you go, Jessica <laugh>. You know, the amazing photographer, Dan Woodger, I mean the caliber of the team that we managed to bring on and that Jessica signed off on was just amazing. Watching it all happen in front of our eyes. It was a joy to watch these incredible professionals create this brand. Just an amazing experience.

JESSICA I've built brands, worked on so many projects... There are some projects that are just a little bit more special than other projects. And that actually happens when the people doing it, it doesn't feel like a job anymore that you go, oh my God. And they're not just ticking boxes. They literally go above and beyond at every turn. And this happened on this project with every single person, and especially Alec. I remember one of the first presentations where he had just talked about this before, where he goes, so I was playing with the tomato and literally showed us like 75 expressions. It's like, he could be thi, you could be that. And I was like, holy molly, this guy is in. And that's when I knew like this was not just a delivery of scope. Everybody doubled down and we're like, we're gonna do right by this brand.

I felt that way. I think everybody felt that way. And then that became, but what else can we do? And this like again, constant refinement and just making it amazing. And it never felt like a job. It felt like we were doing something bigger, and better, and the passion behind it, you just can't buy that stuff. I've been lucky enough that that has happened a handful of times in my career, but this is one of those where it was just something clicks and everybody's on board. And it's not just, what do we have to do again? What do we have to do? There are too many ideas, and too many things, that you actually have—it's a hard time to

pick. Alec presented like 75 different things we could do for swag. And we're like, oh my God, what do we do? Is it a t-shirt? Is it a hat? Is it the sneakers? Is it the bag? That was one of my favorite days at Gopuff. <laugh>.

ALEC Yeah.

JESSICA We had to go, which swag do we make? Because they're all amazing! That's when you know you've got gold.

BRYONY That's a good problem to have. When you have too much, and you're too excited about it. I mean, I have to say for a project that came in asking for a name, a logo, and a box, that was cool enough to have on a t-shirt... you have by far exceeded all expectations. You've created as a collective group something that's definitely original, authentic, rebellious, all of the points that you created and developed during the strategy. It is extraordinary to see how something so unexpected, in a way, can be such a perfect fit to what the product is, and who is receiving it on the other end. Pizza, you know, we're all pizza is pizza. Pizza, you don't expect too much of it other than you want it to taste good, obviously, you want it to be good ingredients. But for the most part, people are generally surprised by the one pizza box here or there. This whole brand has created a conversation that far exceeds what pizza is thought of. Absolutely wonderful work that you have done there, and the passion definitely shows through every single aspect. Well done.

KUBA Thank you.

ALEC Thanks very much.

BRYONY Thank you all for being on The Follow-Up today, and sharing the process, the expanding scope, and your hearts, because you definitely all put your hearts into this. Hopefully you will have another project in the future that, if it doesn't come entirely close, you know, just close enough. Thank you so much.

ALEC Yeah. Fingers crossed.

KUBA Thank you. Did you hear that Jessica?

JESSICA Oh, of course. This is a lifetime. <laugh> This bond is unbreakable.v

ARMIN As has been the norm with most episodes, everyone clearly had a jolly good time working together on this project. A sentiment best summed up by the analogy that all involved felt like family members in a room watching a baby be born. With one big difference being that this was no ordinary baby but, as Kuba put it, one “who’s a bit of a Dick and he’s gonna lick your product and drop it on the floor and insult some of your customers and scribble and deface your menus”. Proud parents they must be! Analogy and kidding aside, it was great to hear about how everybody saw the potential of creating something unique and memorable. Especially Jessica, whose enthusiasm for the brand was contagious, and who gave Alec, Kuba, and the rest of the team — the copywriters, the illustrator, the type designer, and the photographer — ample room and motivation to do their best work possible and deliver on part of her original brief: To create a brand that you’d wear on a t-shirt. I know I would.

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