EPISODE 060 LEIBNIZ

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Davide Mosconi, Auge Design

Miriam Frescura, Auge Design

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 number 60 of The Follow-up. A quick heads-up that this will be the last episode of 2022. We will be back in the second week of January with the next episode.

This week we are following up on Leibniz, one of the most well-known butter biscuits around the world thanks to its distinctive silhouette of 52 "teeth" that serve as an enticing ornamental border for it. Produced by Hanover, Germany-based Bahlsen with a lot of butter at its core, Leibniz comes in its classic recipe as well as a few variations like cocoa-infused or a base made with oats or whole grain (or glutenfree!). It also comes in more indulgent variations like "Choco", where a small slab of chocolate is placed on top of the biscuit as proof that heaven exists. There is also a "Cream" variety with a creamy filling inside as well as "mini" variations and a "Zoo" range for the kids with the biscuits shaped like animals.

The project, designed by Florence, Italy-based Auge Design was posted on Brand New on August 15, 2022. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast060 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast060, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Davide Mosconi, Partner and Executive Creative Director at Auge Design, and Miriam Frescura, Associate Creative Director at Auge Design.

In this conversation we get to hear how Auge Design helped storied brand Leibniz regain its iconic status, giving it a design that makes a hero of its distinctive biscuit by placing it front and center — and huge — on the front of the packaging. We get into the crunchy details of how the biscuits were photographed and how they ended up looking so good. Spoiler: they look good to begin with. We also hear about how important the client's input and intentions were in both prioritizing design as part of the brand's growth and in challenging Auge Design to meet that new priority.

Now, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Davide and Miriam.

ARMIN VIT

Hello everyone. Today is a good day because we get to talk not just about butter, and not just about biscuits, but about butter biscuits. Davide, Miriam, welcome to The Follow-Up.

DAVIDE MOSCONI Hi.

MIRIAM FRESCURA HI.

DAVIDE Thank you.

miriam Hi, everyone.

ARMIN

First let's start with how you got involved in this project. In 2021, we posted on Brand New, the really great identity you did for Bahlsen, which is the company behind Leibniz. So was the Leibniz project already a consideration back then as part of your engagement with the client? or did it come separately, and just the client was so happy working with you, that they wanted to work with you again?

The client was very very satisfied with the work done on Bahlsen, and decide also to entrust us with the Leibniz relaunch and then also Pick-up design relaunch. In 2020, they were facing a huge company renovation, so they choose Auge as a partner and for us it was a great pleasure because there has always been a great positive relationship between our team, and all the Bahlsen team, and all the family.

ARMIN Is it something that they wanted to do from the beginning? to redesign the general Bahlsen brand and then sort of take it as a separate project to do the Leibniz brand?

Yes, it was something... they were actually, again, facing that renovation phase, the whole company. So of course Bahlsen was the first piece of this huge renovation—is the core brand for the family. It was already given to also have a restyling on Leibniz and Pick-up, but of course was not given for granted that we had to be the agency to work on this project. So it was of course then decided to keep going with us after the whole Bahlsen process was going. They were so satisfied and so they said, "Okay, let's go with Auge for Leibniz and Pick-up."

ARMIN In terms of timing, if you can just give us a little bit of insight about when did Bahlsen happen? when did Leibniz happen? it doesn't have to be exact days and months, but just sort of a general idea of how long this took.

Because everything started with a pitch on Bahlsen. We were asked to join this pitch along with four other international agencies. So it was us and an agency from Holland, one from Norway, and so on. So international, huge agency, and also small design agency. Everything started with the pitch on September, around September 2019. The Bahlsen project took a whole year from the pitch more or less, and by the end of 2020, we were asked to also work on Leibniz, and it was more or less another year of work. And Pick-up and Leibniz then went on parallel.

ARMIN Pick-up, which one is that one? Is that a separate brand?

DAVIDE Yeah.

Yeah, it's a separate brand. Part of the family, it just came out, but we need to actually < laughter > upload the case on our website yet, but it's already out.

ARMIN Okay, good to know that that's coming because both the Bahlsen and Leibniz projects have been great, so I can't wait for a third collaboration between Auge and Bahlsen, it sounds like it's going to be exciting.

DAVIDE The trilogy.

MIRIAM The trilogy. Yes.

ARMIN < laugher > That's right. Yeah. So Bahlsen was going through this revamp and this reorganization, what other challenges were part of the brief for Leibniz in particular, that they gave you to take on?

The story was quite similar between Bahlsen and Leibniz. As for Bahlsen, Bahlsen through the decades lose it's personality, it's boldness and it began to be a very FMCG common packagin. And so did Leibni. Instead of standing on the shelf, it was like it began to be something more close to a private label packaging. So with a very industrial and somehow cheap look and feel. The challenge here was to revamp the brand, the product, and make it more iconic. Exactly the same way we did with Bahlsen, because still Leibniz is a real huge brand in Germany, it's a love brand. So it has been huge task, more or less I would say the same that we received for Bahlsen.

ARMIN Did you get a sense from the client, both in Bahlsen and Leibniz, that design was sort of a new thing that they had to take more seriously? and it's not like the old packaging was terrible, but it seems like they realized that they needed design as a distinctive point. Was there a new person in charge? Was it just a realization that like, "Oh, this is what we need at this point."

During these two years of work, the daughter of Mr. Bahlsen, a young lady that was very keen to revamp the brands through consciousness

into the design. She gave a lot of importance to design, to take care of the major aspect of design on packaging. For sure, her presence has been crucial for all the projects.

That does make sense. Now in terms of how you work for Auge Design, you get the brief, then what is the first phase of a project like this before starting the design phase.

Strategy, strategy first. We think there is no good packaging, good branding, without a solid strategy. We start with a positioning study.

Once we define the strategy boundaries, we start to define the tone of the voice, the positioning, the values. We are able to kick-off the creative process, and stay focused on design and design goal. Because otherwise it will be all a matter of aesthetic and it'll be very dangerous both for the agency and for the client.

ARMIN And what kind of research do you do, especially with a client that is in a different country than yours?

The first thing is... usually, for example, if with Bahlsen we were invited to their archive, so we went to Anova, so we had the chance to see the company to get into the archives, see their heritage also in packaging, and they have a fabulous one actually because it's a very old brand and again is a love brand in Germany. So it's considered an icon, especially from the mid-century. The process to us, to get close to the brand, is understanding first its history, going across the different, also packaging and design phases and recognize what actually was really meaningful and really important in terms of values, representation.

DAVIDE Yeah.

And when we find something that makes sense, we take it and try to revamp it in a way that can be meaningful nowadays, of course.

DAVIDE We feel like Indiana Jones that discover treasure, hidden treasure onto the brand, but it's very funny and I really love this part of the job.

If you look at Bahlsen and if you look at Leibniz, it looks like our goal is to take off everything they have and rebuild something totally new from scratch. But actually the process is not that, the process is starting from the bran. And then okay, the result is of course groundbreaking, but somehow we actually always try to stick really, to the very brand essence.

ARMIN And I think part of the goal is so that 20, 30 years from now when another design firm goes into their archives, the work that you did is sort of an evolution of that and it's part of that history. So yeah, you can't just go in and change everything drastically, or you could if that was the goal, but in this case it seems like it made more sense to stick with what has been part of the legacy of the brand.

Yes, an evolution. When you have such a great heritage, it is more about having an evolution. So, you have the personality to talk the language over the decades, the right language.

We'll get into the details a little bit, starting with the logo. I mean we'll get into the packaging, but let's talk about the logo first. What was your approach to the initial design exploration? Did you explore different solutions to the existing logo that were very different from what they had? or was it clear from the beginning as we just talked about that it had to be an evolution?

MIRIAM No, no. It was clear since the beginning that it has to be an evolution more than finding totally new solution for the logo. So it was more about trying to represent the values of the brand. So, we wanted to brand to express more naturalness because this is the direction they are going to take even more in the future regarding their products. It was more a work of subtraction, I would say.

DAVIDE Yeah.

MIRIAM So it was more a work of subtraction and then of course a work on the entire system. It was a linear work actually, so simplify the logo and then understanding, so to carry in a proper way the values of the brand, and then focus on the entire system because of course there

are many ranges... and so the logo every time is joined by a specific range, and so the idea here was to find the solution, on the system, more than the logo itself.

ARMIN

So speaking of simplification, one of the most drastic "changes", because it's still a very sort of a minimal evolution. The logo used to be blue with a wide stroke around it, and some red, and then going into a single color application. Given that the changes were so subtle, was something as drastic as this a big challenge for the client to be like, "All right, we're losing a big part of what made it recognizable." Was that a difficult hurdle to overcome or did they see the value in adopting this new style?

DAVIDE

This branding upgrade, even if so minimal, will have been impossible to implement without a clear strategic direction. The decision to leave the blue and yellow combination was somehow suggested by the strategy. Yellow and blue is a very industrial combination of color, and we need more natural with a different feeling. On the other hand, just the yellow is a positive and natural color, and this is strong enough from a branding point of view. So we choose just the yellow, and when we started to design the brand, we have established that the yellow will lead in the coming years without blue, but together with a natural multicolor palette. The client at the end accepted the solution immediately because this idea was supported by the strategy.

MIRIAM Yes.

ARMIN

And in terms of getting the logo just right, how easy, how difficult was it? The small change, was it just like... I know it wasn't one sketch and it's done, but how many versions did you make before getting to just the final perfect solution?

MIRIAM

The starting idea was very clear. We wanted something linear. We want a work of subtraction, so getting rid of all these levels of different colors from white to blue. But of course then we made many many proofs to deliver, in a very special way, the idea of cookies. We made some proof

when it comes more technically speaking on the ink trap. We wanted to deliver the idea of a baking process on the logo, and that's also then the starting point for the whole typography. And so we made many many proofs on that, from a design point of view, until we found the best solution to just get to the point in huge size and smaller size, but still keep the idea of a biscuit somehow.

DAVIDE

Also, especially "L", the first letter was very tricky. As an element seems a little bit strange, it's weird in a logo because it's not the right proportion, but we trying to solve it with a very precise technique, but at the same time, keeping the logo, this sorting of naive feeling—it's a matter of balance.

MIRIAM So the feeling, the look and feel of the general look and feel.

ARMIN

Making sure that you have something that performs well on packaging, but that also makes people go like, "Hmm, biscuits." < laughter > I do think that you achieve that feeling of something that's crunchy, and soft, and buttery, so it's a balance well achieved. Now you mentioned the development of the typeface. How did this come about? Was it an idea from the beginning that you had? or did it evolve after designing the logo...

MIRIAM

I would say it was something that came out once we started with the logo, and with the system, more than everything else. The main values about Leibniz were naturalness, and there comes the linear style and so the simplicity. And then because the brand is going in this natural direction on the products, we wanted to deliver the idea of a brand that is taking care of consumers, of its product, and so on. And so, we made in this system where we always have the logo, the range that are embracing the flavor, and therefore, while we're thinking about a system like that, of course the idea of having a typography that could have the same design of the logo in order to create properly, the entire system came naturally and I would say immediately once we started thinking in parallel on both. You can see on the packaging for example,

every time we have ranges, like you have Leibniz cream, they have exactly the same design, and then in the middle you will see the flavor.

ARMIN And is this something that you designed in-house? or do you work with a type designer?

MIRIAM We design this in-house.

DAVIDE Yeah, from scratch. In-house.

ARMIN And is this something that you do regularly for other clients? Is it something that you are always, if it makes sense, is it something that you want to do because it's always fun and it adds a very high point of distinction to a brand. Is there something that you're always thinking like, "Oh, we can offer a custom typeface?"

Yeah, I think in this moment, especially the brand, the typography is very crucial in a branding. Also, the clients start to ask us having a custom font also because it's more simple to manage in terms of licensing, in terms of everything. We start to specialize in typography with design, very focused on typography, just on typography.

when you're working on a packaging, you are also working on a branding somehow and being able to create the whole toolkit is always amazing, and also exciting, because every piece on the packaging is something that you did, and so this is really satisfying.

Now turning to the packaging, sort of a similar set of questions as the logo. What did the initial exploration look like? Was that a little bit different? Like the logo seemed like it needed to evolve more subtly than the packaging design. Was there more room for exploration? Were there stranger ideas that you pitched to the client? or again, was it needs to stay yellow, it needs to stay simple, et cetera?

DAVIDE The work on packaging was certainly more complex than the branding one. Right from the start, we have presented a very good draft design, but the client challenge us to find even more brave and disruptive

solution. On Leibniz, even then more on Bahlsen, the client ask us to push hard to find something truly unique. It's rare to find this kind of approach behind the FMCG brief because which client would agree to not put the logo on the front of pack? it seems crazy, and this is a very brave approach. We were lucky enough to take this challenge. Otherwise yes, it could be very complicated.

MIRIAM

Then of course on the packaging, we approach it not in a common way when it comes to place the logo. But if you look actually the logo is there because the product is the logo, is the brand, it's the biscuit that carries the logo. So it was enough. Everything that was needed to be shown was already there with the product itself. And this is great, I mean it doesn't happen all the time to have a product that carries all the information together. And then we also wanted to be simple and essential, because we wanted to focus on the biscui. Also because we have this incredible thing that the shape of the biscuit is registered. So the 52-teeth is a design that is registered, and is really unique internationally.

And so okay, on one hand we do not need to bring up the logo in a graphical way on the front of pack because it's already together with the biscuit. And then we wanted also to underline the registered shape through the registration mark. The great thing on this packaging is you see two things on the front of the pack, but actually you have everything you need. So, no information is missing because you can read the brand, you can get the flavor, you can get the idea that a very special shape, because it's registered. So with two elements, you are telling an entire history, and the specs on the product itself.

ARMIN

And you get the third bonus that you're showing the product, which is always a hard thing in packaging. It's in a box, and we want to show people what's inside the box, and you always end up with this weird combination of logo, graphics, and then usually just a bad photo of the product. But here you have just the product itself... and speaking of the photos of the product, how do you do this? Because you also did it with Bahlsen where you have that really nice macro photography

of the cookies and it's just like you want to reach out and just lick the screen, or bite the screen, however you approach biscuit eating. How do you achieve this technically?

MIRIAM

Technically, of course we search for a photographer that was both, very good technically speaking, very into macro photography, and at the same time we also needed to join the perfection of the technique, and also the indulgence of the look and feel, the general look and feel of the product. And so we found this photographer studio, Mierswa Kluska, they are from Germany by the way, and so with them, we made a very incredible work because they were very good technically speaking. Also when it comes to post production, they pay a lot of attention on detail. They can really follow very well, hold the directions that we request, but at the same time through colors and also the lights, we found a great balance between showing perfectly the product, but at the same time having a very very good and yummy biscuit in front of you. So it's not cold, no? Because of course the challenge was, "I'm showing you something in macro, so I'm going in a technical direction, but I don't want to be distant or cold."

Because again, Leibniz is a love brand, it's the cookies of the family. So we wanted to be very welcoming and cozy somehow. That was the challenge, and we are so happy that we achieve a result where we really achieve both feelings.

ARMIN

And maybe this is revealing secrets that you don't want that you can tell me so, but when you photograph the biscuits, are these the biscuits themselves that come out of the factory? did you make—

DAVIDE One hundred percent!

MIRIAM

One hundred percent. We didn't use any mockups or fake biscuit, whatever. No, no. That was also part of the job. Our request was to use a real biscuit. We didn't want to have fake ones because in the end you can feel when something is fake. Here was about the perfection of an icon that comes also through the imperfection. If you look at the

biscuit, it's beautiful, but of course it has small flaws around, some cracks, something that it's not really perfect, but it's good. Fair enough. I mean these are biscuit that you eat where you are at home relaxing. So it has to be like that.

ARMIN And this is getting even more nerdy, but did you sit down and choose just the right biscuit for the photography? Did you have a serving of biscuits and choose the right one with the right size, right imperfection?

Around, yes. Yeah, of course. We usually ask the factory to send over many pieces, 50 different pieces for each biscuit so that we are pretty sure that we are going to use the best option. There is a lot of work behind when it comes to choose the biscuit, the styling, so it's very natural. It's true, it's exactly the biscuit that you're going to find inside the packaging, but at the same time, yes, it requests a huge casting in the beginning.

The more we talk about it, the more I want a biscuit right now. The photography just does such a good job in conveying that crunchiness, that butteriness. So, I'll stop talking about the sexy shots of the biscuits. Moving on to another aspect of the packaging, which was the kids' version. The zoo packaging, which that could be its own project just because it has different illustrations, it has almost a different treatment, but within the same style. Was that something that the client wanted? Was that something that you proposed? How did that category within Leibniz come about?

range, that it's a very innovative product from the brand. They had to follow the newer branding. So of course keeping the same overall system, carry the same principle from a design point of view, but at the same time, they needed to have their own personality on shelf. The job there was to find new tools to apply on that category, and the tools that we found were of course illustrations. In order to be coherent and consistent with the holder styling, we decided to

apply this black brush that looks like you are drawing directly on the package. This is something that conveys somehow the naturalness, again, the simplicity of the brand, and the general attitude coming from the strategy; with a very childish, naive, and spontaneous way to do, this was our solution. So from the client, the only request actually was, of course, to have a further think on the kids, a little different from the adult. So distinguish the two targets somehow.

ARMIN

I think what was really interesting about your solution was that a lot of times packaging for kids products tends to look like... they wanted to look like it was done by kids, but this was more clear that it was done by adults, for kids. It has that really hard balance of looking like, "Yes, this belongs in the kids world, but it's not childish." There's a great sophistication to it. Now starting to sum up the conversation, and your efforts in this project. Have you had any feedback from Bahlsen about how your design has performed? Has sales increased? Has social media mentions increased? Anything of the sort?

DAVIDE

Yeah, the first datas on sales are very positive, especially from brand awareness point of view. The consumer seems to have taken up the brave challenge launched by Leibniz. The Leibniz shelves is very impactful, the cardboard, fortunately, luckily the other cases seems to be able to guide the consumer across the navigation. So we open this first data on performance will be confirmed in the coming months, but until now everything is fine. Okay, we safe.

ARMIN

And actually since you brought it up, the cardboard element of the packaging. So is that what most people see on the shelves? There's a lot of attention given to the actual box that you take home, but it sounds like for the consumer, that cardboard box, which has many more limitations in terms of production becomes an integral part. Is that the case with the Leibniz packaging on the shelf?

MIRIAM

Yes, it is. Right now, the outer case as an element is becoming very common on shelves, especially in Germany, also in England. There are specific markets where they really use it a lot to keep the shelf tied

somehow. So it's very important as an element from a design point of view. And as for Bahlsen, even on Leibniz, we focused a lot on the outer case. It was an element that request a lot of effort also from a design point of view to find a solution that could be, again, very coherent with the whole strategy. And we didn't want just to turn the outer case yellow and place the logo. We wanted the outer case to be able to carry, again one more time, the values of the brand.

So the naturalness for we choose the cardboard, and also this flexible branding where the logo together with the range can feel free to change the colors according to the different flavors. And so, it is actually a crucial element and again, an element where we pay a lot of attention and that we think together with the packaging, they really are a special combo actually, because both of them can bring something of the brand in a different way, but at the same time in a very similar way.

ARMIN

Fascinating. Yeah, I think it's an element of packaging that often gets overlooked. Like we need some boxes to ship the nice boxes in. But as you mentioned, in some cases those outer boxes are kept by the grocery stores to keep things in order, and usually it detracts from the brand. But I think in this case that cardboard texture and color plays really nicely with the yellow of the nice boxes that people take home. Back to the question about results, since you do so much consumer packaging, is this something that you actively track in terms of trying to figure out the impact of your work, not just on Bahlsen, but on other clients?

DAVIDE

Yes, of course. Everything we do is measured with the sales data and it's a part of the job. Not the best part maybe, but it's a part < laughter > because at the end of the day, our work is to improve the situation of the brand, also from a sales point of view, of course. But let me say that as an agency, we strongly believe in the power of beauty, which mean, we believe in those aesthetic rules that make products more attractive and therefore, maybe, probably, sell better. But beauty comes with some risk. we know i. Especially on the supermarket shelf.

But also we know that some brands born to follow, other brands born to try to open new paths, new ways, and Bahlsen and Leibniz are one of these brands.

We also know that bolder design can struggle in the beginning because they require more commitment, more understanding from the consumer. So maybe they need more time, but if this bold design are supported by strong strategy, a solid strategy, the proper communication, they can become real game changer at the end. We believe that at the end, this kind of design also the most brave one could work on the shelves.

ARMIN

You've done a wonderful job in taking that boldness and beauty into your work and applied it to clients. I was recently in Europe over the summer and my last leg was in Venice, and in the airport coming back to the US just walked by a fridge, like a freezer, and it had your packaging for the popsicles, what are they called?

DAVIDE The ice cream?

ARMIN

Yeah, the ice cream bars. It just stood out so much in that fridge next to the other ones. Obviously I recognize it because it'd been on the blog, but it's that kind of impact that at first maybe like, "Oh, what's going on here?" It looks so good. It's not actual sales data, but as a consumer, it stood out. It was the first thing that I saw when I looked inside that fridge. What was your favorite aspect of working on this project for each of you?

MIRIAM

For sure, this has been a complete project. We started with our styling that was meant to somehow redesign a packaging, but in the end, we redesign the brand. We designed a custom type, we designed illustrations, and so the exciting part of the project, from my point of view, but for also the agency point of view, is this project is a 360-degree project. We covered everything on this, so it was an incredible team project. We really had a lot of fun actually working on it. We had fun on working on it together with the client. We also had

incredible relationship with the client during the whole process, and we were very aligned on the vision, and we shared the vision.

So, they challenged us and it was great because our first proofs of the packaging were very nice, but not that brave. And they challenged us to make something braver, and even braver, and so on until we achieved this result. To me, it's the whole process with the client, the challenge from the client, and the fact that we designed everything. When I look at the packaging, I can see that everything is from us and that's incredible and amazing.

I totally agree. The challenge at the same time, the fact that we were able to give to the client everything. From the typography, to all the illustration, it was a great result for an agency that we are in 20 people, not 100. It's a very good job. We think Leibniz is one of the favorite one of this year, and maybe all the history of Auge. It is the first of many others.

ARMIN

I agree. It is one of the finest projects you've done. I'm a fan, so I really enjoy all the work that you've done. This one does stand out as something particularly special. So, last question for each of you, which one is your favorite variation of the Leibniz range?

MIRIAM

I would say the butter biscuit because it was the first packaging we designed, and the one that rules, and leads all of the ranges. From a design point of view, definitely the butterkeks.

Lagree. DAVIDE

ARMIN And then from a taste point of view?

MIRIAM

< laughter > From a taste point of view, I love Choco Leibniz and I really love—but in Italy we don't have it—the new kid fruits that are biscuit for kids, very young kids like babies, but they're so good.

DAVIDE I'm in love with Leibniz Cream. I think they are the most yummies. They are super indulgent biscuit. Maybe too much because they're very very bold biscuit.

MIRIAM Bold biscuit, yes.

DAVIDE Not just on design.

MIRIAM Very indulgent. Yes.

ARMIN Well, I can't wait to somewhere, somehow, at some point in my life, try all of them. You've managed to make them look super enticing, super yummy, crunchy, indulgent in the best of ways. So Davide, Miriam, thank you so much for joining me on the The Follow-Up today.

MIRIAM Thank you so much.

DAVIDE Thank you, Armin.

MIRIAM It was a pleasure.

DAVIDE Thank you very much.

BRYONY

It always gives us a little jealousy when designers talk about going through the design archives of a legacy brand because there is always so many things to uncover and, as Davide mentioned, it's hard not to feel like Indiana Jones searching for that hidden treasure. As Miriam pointed out though, they didn't have to look too far or deep as the product itself was the brand and it was just waiting for its moment to shine, with all of its perfect imperfection. A good action-item-slash-takeaway from this project though is to really pay attention to that outer packaging used for the storage and transportation of the main packaging as it will often end up functioning as a point of sale. So don't get discouraged by the limitations of one-color kraft boxes and instead used them as an opportunity to make the main packaging shine.

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