

EPIISODE 064

BOLT

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Arthur Foliard, Koto

AND

Jason Rosenberg, Bolt

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 64 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Bolt, a checkout experience platform that, quote, strengthens retailers' relationships with their customers by unlocking secure, logged-in, lightning-fast checkouts; end quote. Partnering with retailers like Forever 21, Badgley Mishka, Fanatics, Akira, and Swiss Gear, Bolt's primary offer is a one-click, seamless checkout system that converts more shoppers into buyers, compared to traditional guest checkouts. Originally built by a team of 10 people when it launched in 2016, Bolt, headquartered in San Francisco, now has more than 600 employees with offices in New York City, Salt Lake City, Seattle, Toronto, Stockholm, Wrocław, and Barcelona.

The project, designed by the New York, NY office of Koto was posted on Brand New on January 23, 2023. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast064 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast064, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Arthur Foliard, Creative Director at Koto; and Jason Rosenberg, Head of Creative at Bolt.

In this conversation we hear about the need for Bolt to stand out among its competitors given that they are one of the lesser-known players in the checkout game and how they saw design as an opportunity to do so. Armed with a newfound rallying cry — Shockingly Simple — Bolt and Koto set out to make a brand that was impossible to ignore or miss. We also get Arthur’s and Jason’s opinion on what has been, relatively speaking, the biggest controversy of the past six to twelve months as Twitter exploded with comparisons to obscure logos that also happened to hide a lightning bolt in the negative space of two letters. After hearing all that went into the development of the strategy, logo, and identity — including a 90-page logo refinement presentation — it’s easy to understand why, ultimately, both Bolt and Koto stand firmly by what they created and how they arrived at it

Now, let’s listen in as Armin follows up with Arthur and Jason.

ARMIN VIT Hello everyone. Today I will try not to steal my guests thunder—not that I ever do that if I’m being honest—as I tried to find out how they were able to catch lightning in the new logo and identity for Bolt. Arthur, Jason, welcome to The Follow-Up.

ARTHUR FOLIARD Thanks for having us.

JASON ROSENBERG Yeah.

ARTHUR Thanks for having me.

JASON Yeah, great to be here. Thank you.

ARMIN So that our listeners can know who’s who, if you can tell us your name and title.

JASON I’m Jason Rosenberg, I’m the Head of Creative here at Bolt.

ARTHUR And I’m Arthur Foliard, Creative Director at Koto.

ARMIN Perfect. Jason, we're gonna start with you. As I was looking at your LinkedIn page, because that's what I do for fun on my free time, I see you joined Bolt eight months ago. Was your first assignment to kickstart this rebranding? or was the project already in motion once you joined?

JASON It was a little bit of both, I came in to definitely take over the rebrand. Bolt was basically signing Koto after doing a pitch with different agencies for the rebrand. So when I came in, the hard work was done. Here we have our partner, but I think my first day was the first meeting with Koto.

ARMIN Oh wow. So that's like here's the fire, jump into it, see how that feels.

JASON <laugh> It's what excited me to come to Bolt, is an opportunity to rebrand and really take the brand down to the studs, and find out really what the brand stood for in the North Star through this rebrand too.

ARMIN And knowing that you were going into this, did you have any sense of why Bolt wanted to rebrand at this point in its history?

JASON Absolutely. Bolt's been around for a little bit. The Fin-Tech space, the checkout space specifically, it's a sea of sameness. You look out there and you see the same color palette, see same logos, you see the same language. No one's really standing out. Bolt not being the biggest checkout platform to compete against the Shopify's, even the Klarna's, which is an exact competitor, but we stand next to them. We had to do something to stand out, and we had to do something to tell our story because there's so many checkout companies out there and it's parody in the sea of sameness. 2023 we're trying to make some big move, trying to do a new chapter at Bolt, and it was important for us to start that chapter really with a strong brand and a strong narrative for Bolt.

ARTHUR It was in your brief, if I remember correctly, I think you asked to have a vision known as provocative, and clear, inspiring. All the stuff you said about the competitive landscape was very much in the brief, which is

[yeah] everyone looks the same. We need to be different, 'cause that's how we're gonna get people interested in our brand.

JASON We're not the only Bolt out there. <Laughter> That was another thing that we were very conscious about. The name itself needed some boldness as well.

ARMIN Or some bolt-ness. I'm sorry. I'll just do that one time and will not do it again.

ARTHUR <laugh>. <laugh>. It's fine, it's fine.

ARMIN Arthur, you mentioned the brief and you mentioned the pitch. So how did Koto get involved? When was this? How long did the pitch process take? All of that good stuff that no one likes to talk about.

ARTHUR <laugh>. No, it's actually great to talk about. I think the first email we got was in Jan or Feb of 2022. It was very much a classic email you get, "hey, we're Bolt, we're doing this and this, we're looking for rebrands..." you know, "here's the timing, here's the RFP, here's maybe the, you know, the budget... do you wanna jump on a call and introduce yourself to the team?" And it's exactly what we did.

So the pitch wasn't so much a pitch, we didn't do any creative or strategy. It was very much making sure that we obviously get along. We were very honest from the beginning that I was going to do this in New York, I was leaving London, LA wasn't going to do this, New York was going to take that on. And so making sure I was getting along with everyone, Jason, Meg, Rosie, Andrew, the whole team, very much simple creds. But we actually shared some interesting thoughts because like I said, you remember Jason? is your brief was actually really good. You know, you were just telling us what's your challenge, you were talking about the competitive landscape and most of the problem and the challenge again that you had, you know, most of our clients have the same thing. They have an amazing product but don't

know why they exist and why people should care. And so we came in with some thoughts, in some ways, but that's probably it.

ARMIN A question out of personal curiosity for your Arthur. How does Koto figure out what office does what? I imagine location has a lot to do with it, but I'm not exactly sure if there's cross, not cross-contamination, I don't know why I thought of that word <laughter., but crossover between all this in working together on a single project? or if it's more divided by region?

ARTHUR A bit of everything. I'd say region is playing a role. Obviously if someone is from New York, the New York team is gonna look into it, but we try to be very open with the other studios. You know, sometimes when it doesn't work out for the US market, we go with London and Berlin and say, "hey, you know, you should just work on this." Or very recently the Berlin studio had a great email from an amazing client and they were like, actually New York it makes more sense that you do this one based on the challenge of this brand. And so I think at that time, based in Jan/Feb, we were also trying to find one or two clients I could just live with <laugh>, you know like go to New York and just do this one, and find a team, and build a team around that. And yeah, Bolt was the one.

I met them and I would say kind of fell in love with you know, Jason and the rest of his team, and I was like, I just think there something to be done here. And I think we get along really well already. That's how it happened. Very organic.

ARMIN Nice. Question for both of you, but let's start with Arthur. From those initial conversations, and that first falling in love phase <laugh>, what stood out as the things about Bolt that you felt could be taken forward in your initial phases of strategy and design?

ARTHUR We kind of talked about this already, Jason, right? But I think their vision of just doing things differently, I think when we look at the competitive landscape is true that PayPal, checkout.com, et cetera, they're very much focused on B2B. And I know B2B is a big thing for both obviously

we're talking to merchant, but none of them are actually talking to shoppers. With that in mind, it's really interesting, and great, and exciting, to create a brand that's gonna need to flex from the B2B to the B2C world. That got us really excited. And once again, the fact that we're saying we want something that feels very different, something that feels provocative, something that feels just new and fun as well because I don't think they have a lot of fun. Right Jason? We do a lot of competitive audits at Koto and we look at competitors, how they talk, how they behave, et cetera. And it's very bland. And so we're like, "hey, if you believe in us, if you believe in this vision, you gotta be different."

ARMIN Jason, we already talked about what the ambitions were, but was there anything specific about what the logo should look like? Should do? any goals that you gave Koto initially?

JASON Absolutely. Standing out. We used the term sea of sameness so much in this project.

ARTHUR I know.

JASON It was like, I feel like a broken record saying it, man, <laughter> everything looked the same. Every decision we made is how does Bolt stand out? There was some equity in the previous logo too, of being able to use it in a shorthand and being able to use it as a full mark. And so we knew we wanted a shorthand of the logo because there's so many touchpoints within our brand of Bolt that sometimes we need to show up more simple, and sometimes we need to show up with the full logo. That was really important. How do we create a more simplified version of the logo to represent us and in the future hopefully use more instead of a full logo, as awareness grows. Those were two huge things moving forward. In this project also, really create what Bolt stands for—I don't think we had a handle on that. We knew what Bolt was but we didn't really come to the terms of how to communicate Bolt in a couple of words. And once we figured that out, that drove everything. All the little details that we did with our guidelines really came out from what Bolt stood for.

ARMIN So what those Bolt stand for?

JASON Kodo brilliantly put these words in an early presentation. “Shockingly simple”.

Everything we do is about making checkout more simple for the shoppers and giving merchants the opportunity to turn shoppers through a simplified checkout platform to lifetime customers. That’s our value prop that we wanna communicate to merchants. It’s all about simplicity. It’s all about “Shockingly Simple” and shock like Bolt, and like Bolt-ify everything. That led a lot of decisions that we did with Koto. Like everything, all the little details Arthur that we talk about that are like, I’m so glad we did this, so glad we did that.

ARTHUR Because it goes from the iconography to the way we shoot people, the way we do the illustration, the way we do motion principle. It’s true that Bolt carries a meaning as a name, that the name alludes to energy and speed, and it kind of made sense with the strategy that we were also building to create something that had this intensity, this energy.

ARMIN I have plenty of questions about the logo and we’ll get that, but I did not have any questions prepared to talk about “Shockingly Simple”, which really is a great way to summarize what you do but at the same time give it a lot of personality. How did you arrive at these “Shockingly Simple” two words?

ARTHUR There’s a lot of research that we do. We spend a lot of time with the team. We did 50-plus interviews, we got access to the product itself, we got product demo, we did literally everything and at some point we just gather all around, you know the table with the Bolt team and we suggested a few options as well. Like something that was around lightning fast we see checkout that became actually “Shockingly Simple”. We had something around the power of the network, we had quite a lot of options and we tried to make them as different as possible because we want to see how people react. But it all comes down to the research. I’d say we started the project mid-April, end-of-April and presented

the first round of creative mid-June/July. So that's literally a good two months, two months and a half pure research and strategy.

ARMIN And in that first round of presentation, and we'll get to the details of what it contains, but did you show logo and identity explorations along with the possible words to describe it? Or was there a previous meeting just for figuring out Shockingly Simple?

ARTHUR A bit of everything. I think we knew exactly what the positioning statement was, 90% done I'd say. I think we had the value props as well. Everything in the strategy sort of space where I think it's when we shared this first creative presentation that we called, yeah, Shockingly Simple. It was really built around "Lightning speed checkout" that the team was like, yeah, that's it. You know <laugh>, there's literally let's just go for it. We are called Bolt, you know our product is super fast and so we're not just gonna do anything else, we just need to embrace it. And I think that's one of a great thing with Jason and his team is that they really believe in the vision. They really just put so much trust in us and we were like, if you want that to be effective, you gotta go at a hundred percent, not at 90% at 100s. And we're gonna make sure that the brand can flex from the really fun and expressive things that everyone has seen online, to the smallest part of the product. Actually, Jason can talk about this with Andrew who is Head of Product at Bolt, spent a lot and a lot of time on the most recessive part of the brand.

ARMIN We'll get into that in a little bit. Sounds the delightfully nerdy.

ARTHUR Yeah, <laugh> in a great way.

JASON Yeah.

ARTHUR Love it. <laugh>.

ARMIN Talk a little bit about the name, just Bolt, and perhaps this goes into the discussion about what was included in that first round of design, but was there any moment in the early discussions where you thought maybe we should not have a bolt graphic of any kind? or was that sort

of a no-go in the sense that we're called Bolt, we need a bolt, just shut up and do it.

ARTHUR We suggested few options. The first one we very much you'll call Bolt, why don't we just create a brand around it? The second one had no lightning bolt at all, it was very much around the power of the community-so a lot of things sort like coming together. I'm asking people to have imagination right now, <laugh>. And then the third one was no stress sort of checkout. It was using the code of not meditation in some ways because it's completely wrong but just you know, really relaxing and chill but with a really interesting twist which was we're gonna make it as bold as possible. And we actually took the boldness of that and we brought it into the Lightning Fast Checkout, which was the first.

JASON We had a lot of conversations of what we wanna accomplish with the logo. A lot of it came down was, what does a logo look like in a shorthand? What does a logo look like in an icon? If Bolt ever makes an app in the future, how could you take a piece of that logo and make it into an app icon, or how does it show up on business cards And to have that flexibility. Arthur, there was a script version, there was playing with the Bolt more <laughter>, there was playing with the Bolt last than just doing typography... We really looked at a lot of different versions and we felt—

ARTHUR Uppercase, lowercase, italicized, [Yeah], we did a lot of things.

JASON We can nerd out right now and talk about once we decided the direction of the logo [yeah, yeah] how many versions that we looked at, of just looking at the typography and the shape of the bolt in the negative space. Really getting into the curves, and the angles, and I mean we took every little detail very seriously. The versatility that the logo that we chose, it was unbelievable and wherever you put it, we're able to use it to its advantage.

ARTHUR I think that logo refinement document, I do remember the 90-page one <laughter>, which was the nerdiest thing ever and it was great but—

JASON Made me so happy.

ARTHUR <laugh>. Yeah, yeah. Nothing was left to chance. Everything had a reason. And when we present creative, we present something, there's a lot of research. So bringing back the competitors, bringing back the brief, bringing back, you know, everything that we've been talking about and saying: it makes sense. And we went in, you know <laugh> literally look this is how it works when you just changed the angle 2% and you know why we think it's interesting. And we went on a super nice before/after from very expressive, very recessive, how can we just meet in the middle? Because the first actual logo that we presented was way more expressive than this one. It was Italicized.

JASON Yeah, design on an angle.

ARTHUR The lightning bolt in there was like super, super crazy et cetera. And so we just follow it back to a bit more mature 'cuz you do have to exist, you know, against Visa and MasterCard and all of these people as well.

ARMIN So it sounds like the first iteration of that idea was very different from where you arrived at, but still everybody, after that first round presentation, saw the potential. Correct?

ARTHUR Yeah. It is similar when you do it before/after, is in some ways different. Cause we spend a lot of time on this. You think the Bolt logo is expressive right now? It's probably 10 times more expressive before.

ARMIN It actually sounds exciting.

ARTHUR Yeah. <laugh>.

ARMIN Jason, what was yours and Bolt's leadership reaction to this first round presentation? Was it an instant yes that's it? Or was it more of a drawn out process of trying to make a decision and you know, think that you made the right choice?

JASON Well there was a lot in that presentation. It was—

ARTHUR <laugh> Yeah 150 or something.

JASON I mean there were four directions, I believe. There was messaging, there was a logos, there was color palette, there was photography style. The great thing about working with Koto was is like it all turned into what conversation. It was like we really like this logo because it accomplishes this. A lot of the other logos we looked where too fun, it became less trustworthy to us. That was another thing that could have mentioned earlier. Part of the brief was we need to be trustworthy. We're a checkout company, we need to gain people's trust, we need to be sturdy, as well as bold and eye-catching, and to stand out. That led us in a different direction from some of the other ones. We took where the logo was going in one direction. We took the messaging in another direction that was labeled "Shockingly Simple" and we're like, oh my God, this is really interesting to explore. Like we want to explore this. Like what does this mean? What does it mean to have Bolt language? out of this idea? And there was different photography styles that I think none of them really felt perfect yet. And so we started just exploring through the next round. I think the next round was really close to where [yeah] we ended up going in the brand guidelines overall, the concept of the brand guidelines.

ARTHUR Yeah, we just replaced fan photograph and foundation with our own photograph and illustration, our own motion principles, all of that. But yeah, you ask about the relationship between Koto and Bolt and I think that's the great greatest thing about this rebrand is our relationship. Do you remember when we presented the first round of creative, the first route that you picked was obviously Lightning Speed Checkout and we had this idea of doing flash photography, you know, and everything happens in a flash. And I remembered you were like, yeah but like everyone is doing it. Armin you talk about it a lot, right? It's like flash photography, but it kind of made sense to us to do this. It's like, okay, it's fine, everyone's doing it but it makes sense for Bolt. And they were like, no, no, no, like let's just do it differently. You know,

let's just stand out from the crowd. And then we came back with this, I think we call it like Ultra Dynamism.

JASON Electric dynamism.

ARTHUR Electric Dynamism and this idea of doing the perspective, this sense of like you check out and then you move on, and having this great energy into this. But thanks to the team again, you know, we had a great discussion and we're like, we like it but let's just, you know, let's try something else. And it's been literally like this from day one really. You know, we did the same on the logo. We talk a lot about the colors <laugh> as well. Same with the illustration and I think that's why we're so proud and we're here as well with Jason is that it felt like just one team working on this project.

ARMIN I should have probably asked this earlier, Jason, what does the team look like on your end? How many people are involved, what roles do they play?

JASON We have our Head of Marketing, Meg, who's been an incredible leader from day one, who has been making decisions and really leading us forward. She wants to push this brand to a place that's bold, that stands out, and really has a test of time. And so all of her decisions from her perspective have been through those lenses. The Head of Product Design, Andrew, who's been really looking at all the decisions we've been making of like, okay, we need to collaborate and make sure that what you see in the product works from a cohesive standpoint of what you see in the brand too. That's a lot of what went into a lot of the conversations too is like, this is great in marketing, but how does a flex in product? My personal team is Rosie, who's actually in Stockholm, a huge time difference Creative Director who's really been my partner in trying to take all these details and make sure everything has really been thought out completely. From a messaging standpoint, a team of Creative Director Haley, and Greg who's a writer on my team who have really been looking at every page of the website as we've been rebranding. And so we're a small team, and there's so

many more people that have been involved in this. Like we're a very small team, but we've really tried to look at every little detail.

ARTHUR Yeah, you were a small team, but I do remember you saying "tomorrow we're presenting to 800 people" or 500, I don't remember. [Yeah] And you were like, oh shit, <laugh>.

JASON We were like, hey, we have some visuals. It's like...

ARTHUR Yeah, and it went well, which is good, <laugh> just doing this.

JASON That went great. Transparency is important and bringing them along in the process is really important.

ARMIN Speaking of transparency, and I usually don't like to ask uncomfortable questions, but I wouldn't be doing my job if we didn't address—

JASON Yeah, yeah. No surprise here.

ARTHUR I see where this is going. <laugh>

ARMIN We have to address either the elephant in the room or the bolt within the "L" and the "T". As you experienced, there was a lot of reactions online, especially on Twitter. I think most people have forgotten about Twitter, but Twitter can still deliver every now and then the goods. So <laugh>, the gist of the conversation was like, hey, here's a Bolt logo and then people are like, oh this is not original. People have done it before. This obscure Bolt TV dribble shot that no one had seen before...

ARTHUR <laugh>. Exactly.

JASON Yeah. <laugh>

ARMIN Things like this happen, and I have my opinions about either how it happens or what to do when it happens, and I can share that afterwards if we still have time. But what was your reaction to that initial conversation, which can literally derail many businesses in just like, oh, you know, we can't have this narrative going on around our

launch because it's the wrong thing. So how did you react? How did you deal with it internally? Did you like scream into a pillow?

ARTHUR <laugh>? You know, I think it's actually better that Jason answers this. You know, coming from the actual Bolt partner, I, I have my opinion, but yeah.

JASON At the core of it, people were talking about it and no one was talking about us before. We were like people who didn't know who Bolt was now know who Bolt is. All the decisions we made for what was right for Bolt, what was right for us. People are always gonna find what it's close to, and you know, call you out. I think what we did was we pulled from a design pillar, that we were inspired by the FedEx logo. We had a lot of conversations of one of the best logos ever made in the negative space. We knew we wanted to create a shorthand. That's what was driving us forward is inspiration. We're not looking at any of the chatter on Twitter as like, oh no, we made a horrible mistake, we stand by what we did. And there's always gonna be things that you didn't know that were out there. We can't look at every logo in the world, you know? It's all positive from our end.

ARTHUR And again, we had a lot of work on this logo, it looked different. The most important thing really is to look at the competitive landscape. You know, you have to look at Shopify, and PayPal ,and checkout.com, and Stripe, and Shop. It's so different. That's what matters. You need to look at the competitive landscape versus yeah, looking at this random maybe dribbble reference from 2004.

I'm sure you know a lot of people have done it. When you use lighting bolts, arrows, circle, or very, very simple shapes like that, it's been done. But as long as it wasn't done in your space. And also like you said Jason, it was the same with Koto. It's like all of a sudden we we're doing good job. It's like we've got never had that much engagement, likes, comments, interest, talents actually emailing us because yeah,

there's probably 1% of the population that says "you are a liar or I cheat" or whatever. But 99% we're so excited.

JASON It's what Twitter is, you know it, you can't prevent it.

ARTHUR And it's interesting, right? We also always talk about, a brand is more than a logo. And then actually I think the greatest thing about Bolt is the rest of the system and the attention to details, to the smallest thing and the biggest thing. And then most of the chat on Twitter was like "the logo!" Interesting. What do you think Armin, what do you think about all this?

ARMIN My opinion is that what happens when you go with a logo that is so minimalist, is that the more elements you take away, the less elements that you have to play with. So the moment that you narrow things to, like you said, an arrow, a bolt, a circle, [mm-hmm <affirmative>] it is almost impossible to come up with something completely original. It says if I told you like give me a sentence using three words. There's only so many ways you can make that sentence feel new.

ARTHUR Yeah! <laugh>

ARMIN To me you should like there are moments of a lot of coincidence, and I think there's also that sense of well why didn't you do a Google image search? Well you can't. I mean you sort of think, all right, well I'll just drop my logo into the Google image search box and even that doesn't—because I did it—it doesn't return anything similar. You search for bolt logo and it returns a hundred different things that have a bolt <laugh>, none of them, at least in my results, none of them had a bolt within an "L" and a "T". So you can do your homework but you still didn't happen to see this logo that doesn't exist. And I'm talking about the Bolt TV logo in particular, which is the closest one. But then someone in the comments from Brand New is like here's the Cult logo, which is also the "L" and the "T", which was only like 1990s or something. <laughter>

So, it's difficult when you go that minimalist to achieve something that is completely authentic, original. And I think that's fine. Different logos operate within different realms. We just have to learn to coexist with those. And at the end of the day, I think it comes down to whoever designed the original idea, how well they sleep at night, did they really come up with that idea? And I'm not saying whether you Arthur, or you Jason, or whoever came up with that original idea specifically, did so out of the figment of your imagination or you saw it that you're like, Ooh, there's something there. I'm sure we can do it better. Whatever it is. I think at the end it should, like in your heart of hearts, do you know that it was an original idea that lo and behold someone came up with it again, and they're geniuses as well. So I think it's just uh, something that we have to live with.

ARTHUR That's why the Bolt team never freaked out about it because they knew that it came from a different place and we worked together. Like you said, you know, it needs to be more mature, it needs to be simpler, it needs to work alongside Visa, Tesla, Nike, all the actually all cap logo in this world. And so we know where it comes from. I think the best thing is you never had that much traffic on bolt.com and it's the same on Koto.

JASON Yeah, exactly.

ARMIN And for what it's worth, I think it is the best lightning bolt in a negative space <laugh> ever so far! Until 20 years from now, someone like, look what I came up with? You know, someone from our generation will like, oh, Koto did it first. "Well I didn't see that, I apologize, I don't know every logo in the world." But anyway Arthur, you mentioned something about the attention to detail and all the little things about how the brand is not just the logo. So let's talk a little bit about some of the other elements like the lightning bolt elements in the typography, the illustration, the photography that you already hinted about. Let's just delve into those a little bit, starting with the customized type from Pangram Pangram.

ARTHUR So similarly with the type, we suggested a few options. The first one was very expressive, super, super expressive. And then Jason was like, okay, we like it because it's slightly different from the competition. Think about PayPal, think about shop. They have an engaging sans-serif type. Well okay, let's just find something. And then this one from Penguin Pen Graham was absolutely Perth. The good thing about it with our Grande area is that it looks amazing at large size, but it still reads really well at small size. So first of all, it works really well in the product. Great and obviously period with something more functional. But I think when we approached them we were like, we want to do this custom cuts, but we want it to be meaningful and useful. You know, that was better than me arm. And you see a lot of bespoke type every day that I think that sometimes bespoke type they look good, but they become a distraction.

They try too much and they take away from the information we were talking about being "Shockingly Simple". We wanna make sure that whatever we say and whatever we write, people are gonna be able to read it and they understand it. And we have obviously the rest of the graphic language. And so when we went to Pangram Pangram, we're like okay, we are thinking about doing 15 to 20 different characters, not all of them. We are gonna try to figure out what is the most useful. It came back with currencies. I think this is something that we see obviously a lot on Bolt. So the dollar sign, euro sign, pound sign, and we're gonna do more in the future. I think persons, or ads, or anything that goes with punctuation, you know? The slash, the dash, et cetera. It was very, very purposeful. We started with "why don't we just try to add the lightning bolt everywhere." <laugh>

They did it and they did it really good and they were so nice and collaborative, but sometimes it felt just insane. <laugh> When you do a lightning bolt in a dash, is it really necessary? And so <laugh>, we actually had some very amazing once again discussions and catch up with the Bolt team and the Koto team obviously, and also Pangram

Pangram thinking, okay, there's probably something else that we can bring on. You know, it's not just the idea of lighting Bolt, it's this idea of being dynamic, building that there's something, there's a shift happening, something that should be probably a bit functional, a bit recessive. And so we came up with this idea of just doing it more dynamic. You know, it starts really narrow and it goes wider. How do you actually bring that? There's also this shift as well. You go from left to right or you go offset as well. Anyway, I'm going very detailed and it's not very interesting, but it was very much an exercise of simplification as well. You know, we want to make this really cool, we want to make this great. It's gonna look amazing on marketing. It looks amazing when it moves, but when it's really small on the product, it has to be useful and functional. And so that's how we came up with the whole process. I think we're really, really happy with it. I think it looks so nice.

ARMIN It does. Jason, I don't know how long you've actually been using this for, but do you feel like you want to end every sentence in an exclamation point so you can use it ? <laugh> or is it more like, show some restraint?

JASON Funny you say that, <laugh> 'cause there was some places where I was telling my team where I was like, oh well we have an element of branding, an opportunity here, let's use the exclamation point <laugh>. And my team's like, oh, but we're not shouting <laugh>. It's like let's take it out. So I've had conversations about that. A lot of what we're doing is stats of case studies, you know, merchants using Bolt and using percentage signs. This is probably one of my favorite parts of what we did in the rebrand, because it's the smallest little detail that we've paid attention to and we've put our stamp on it. It's percentage signs, it's quotation marks, it's an @ sign. That's an opportunity to put bolt in there that we wouldn't have otherwise. Absolutely love it.

ARTHUR It should be the cherry and the cake, I think more than, oh my God, we're gonna put it everywhere. I think if you just put it everywhere, it

just become noise. And then if it's just that once in a while, I think it's gonna feel special.

JASON We're just using it like we would any other typography.

ARTHUR Yeah, yeah, exactly.

JASON That's the way to do it and it shows up. It reminds people of like the little details of what we are.

ARMIN And then there is the illustration and photography which go a little bit hand in hand. And I think, you know, my first impression when I saw the illustration, which is something that we've seen so much in the past three or five years, which is what's been labeled the Corporate Memphis style. [Mm]. And at first I would like, this is a little bit of that, which is like the extreme perspective, the big limbs, big hands, big feet. And at first I thought, well it's too much of that. But then when I saw with photography like, ooh, like that is a really cool one-two-punch of having those moments of weirdness that never gets applied to photography. So how did that come about? Did one lead the other? You already talked a little bit about how flash photography didn't work out. So how did those two elements come about?

ARTHUR We started with the photos when we figured out exactly what we wanted to do with it. Hey, maybe the illustration is just gonna do exactly the same thing cuz we wanted to make sure that we bring consistency as well throughout all the brand elements. I mean you said that Jason as well, is you wanna be different, you wanna be distinctive, but you can't forget you are also talking to a lot of merchant as well. And so you can't be completely insane for the sake of it. And once again, we had a lot of options and some of the original ones were like batshit crazy, really insane. The perspective was so, so big you couldn't see the face of the person. On a personal point of view, I find it really interesting and a bit more challenging. But look, the rest of the brand is so different as well. You know?

There's so many things. The yellow is so different and is so challenging in some ways versus what everyone else is doing, and the logo is different, and the type is bringing distinctness. And so sometimes you just need to calm it down a bit. And we do have some illustration that are pretty, pretty expressive that don't feel Corporate Memphis to me. I actually thought Corporate Memphis was probably a reach, at least on a personal point of view. I didn't think it felt very much like that, but I know why people could say it. And I trying to find like a, some sort of post-rationalization being like, this may be because the characters are always smiling, and then the color of the skin is maybe this. But I think the concept itself made so much sense with what we're trying to do with the rest that would rather prioritize consistency over style.

ARMIN They do look great. I think we're slowly moving away from comparing everything that is flat and expressive with Corporate Memphis. So good job in getting us to that point where we can just move on.

JASON <laugh>

ARTHUR <laugh> It only took 12 minutes.

ARMIN <laugh> Now talking about all the elements coming together. How has the identity been received both internally and externally from shoppers, merchants, people complaining about the logo, we can leave those out...<laugh>

JASON <laugh> We're just in the beginning of really using it and unlocking the guidelines. Internally, everything from Google Slides, Figma presentations, just a template that's a test of, does it work? Watching all these presentations internally just look incredible and designed no matter who's using 'em. That's a huge test. The website I think is a cornerstone of the brand guidelines all coming into one place. We launched a campaign recently too with the rebrand, and taking all the pieces of the guidelines and trying to really find a place for where that goes into the campaign. We're testing it, we're in the phase of testing it and finding out... we're in constant contact with Koto and Arthur and

I talk almost every day of, oh it would be great if we had something like this. Or how do we look at the icons? How do we look at the photography? Like if we're doing a fashion shoot that leans more into fashion, how does that flex? This is the fun part. We created this framework and now it's like, let's bend it and see what happens.

ARTHUR <laugh> And we're very open about it at Koto at least, you know, we create the brand but the Bolt team, they have to wear it for the next 5, 10, 20, 30 years. And so we'll always just let them have as much freedom as possible and then try new things, bring new things to the table. They're doing an amazing job.

ARMIN And Arthur, what was the most exciting aspect of working on this project for you?

ARTHUR The relationship with the Bolt team. I mean, it's just incredible. I see the trust and the belief they had in our vision. I'm repeating myself now 'cuz I already said it, but was mind blowing. And I think the more trust they put in us, the more trust we put in them as well, being they're not seeing this for the sake of it, they know exactly what they're talking about because they're making things better. You know, they made the logo better, they made the color palette better, approach to illustration and photograph was much better thanks to them. And so it started to feel like one large team. And as Jason said, definitely not the kind of studio that's gonna do the guidelines and say "see ya!" but even more for Bolt, we're still working on this. Even yesterday we finished the guidelines months ago and we just updated the guidelines with new motion principles that we added. We did new iconography, new iconographic set as well. We finished this beautiful fashion shoot as well. Interesting as well to see how the brand is flexing from being a bit more B2C slash B2B, to very, very premium and elitist in some ways.

By far our relationship with the team.

ARMIN Nicely said. Jason, without saying “sea of sameness,” <laugh> what is the most exciting aspect of this identity for you? Going through this process moving forward?

JASON The system that we created and being able to point to every touchpoint of the brand that is now cohesive and has an identity. That’s what excites me. When I walked into Bolt, the brand was kind of being patchworked, it was a little all over the place. And now that everything really feels like it has harmony together. Moving forward, people are gonna see something that we put out in the world and know it’s Bolt. That’s what excites me the most is someone who is working on this brand and trying to take it to the next place. We have the framework from a visual identity and a messaging standpoint that we can build on for a very long time.

ARMIN I can’t wait to see what else comes out of Bolt moving forward, how this harmony plays out in a loud, bold way, which seems to be the M-O of Bolt, which is just like be your face, take up space. And I don’t mean that in a bad way, but gain ground on this competition. And for the sake of it, stand out in a “sea of sameness”. Jason, Arthur—

JASON Yeah, you said it there. Yeah, now you’r saying it!

ARTHUR You said it <laugh>.

ARMIN I’m trying to figure out how to build it into the closing sentence. So Arthur, Jason, thank you so much for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

ARTHUR Pleasure my friend. It was great.

JASON Yeah, thank you for having me.

BRYONY It was great to hear how much thorough thinking went into the development of every little detail and how they were able to find moments to be very expressive but also realize that delivering jolts of extreme creativity at every point would not be the most effective. We may sound repetitive but, once again, it was clear that the positive

relationship between agency and client was key in developing a shockingly simple identity that stands out in — once more and with gusto — a sea of sameness. Our guess is that Bolt will not remain an unknown for much longer.

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