

# EPIISODE 065

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## NOT WIEDEN+KENNEDY

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Anika Ramani, NOT Wieden+Kennedy

AND

Adam Rix, NOT Wieden+Kennedy.

### **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 65 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on NOT Wieden+Kennedy, the new, standalone branding and design studio from creative agency Wieden+Kennedy. The 18-strong NOT Wieden + Kennedy team is made up of designers, creative technologists, motion designers, 3D artists, brand strategists, and writers. The team also has the ability to draw on collaborators from both inside and outside the global agency network to tailor a bespoke response to each brief, regardless if there are advertising needs or not.

The project, designed by the NOT Wieden + Kennedy team in London was posted on Brand New on January 12, 2023. You can pull it up on your browser at [bit.ly/bnpodcast065](https://bit.ly/bnpodcast065) that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast065, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Anika Ramani, Brand Director at NOT Wieden+Kennedy; and Adam Rix, Creative Director at NOT Wieden+Kennedy.

In this conversation we hear about the organic evolution of the existing design team within the confines of Wieden+Kennedy into an offering that could be singled out and presented as a standalone option for both new and existing clients. We delve into the all the positive meanings of the negative word NOT and how efficiently it helped signal that NOT Wieden+Kennedy was both what you would expect but also not... if that makes sense. We get to learn about the speed at which this project came to be and how the team was able to fast-track it amidst client work and launch with a good deal of momentum and blindsided an unsuspecting design industry.

Now, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Anika and Adam.

**ARMIN VIT** Hello everyone. Today we're here to talk not about Wieden+Kennedy, but about NOT Wieden+Kennedy, and if that does not not make not sense, that is perfectly okay because NOT Wieden+Kennedy is not the Wieden+Kennedy you know. And no, I cannot stop myself from saying not. So to put an end to this, Adam, Anika, welcome to The Follow-Up.

**ADAM RIX** Hello.

**ANIKA RAMANI** Hello. I think you should be our ambassador. Yeah, <laugh>, you can write copy.

**ARMIN** I would like to say that I memorized that or that I came up with it on the fly, but no, I had to write it down and read it from a page because that would have been impossible to do otherwise.

**ADAM** It's a perfect introduction.

**ARMIN** So to get us started, if you can introduce yourselves with your name and title so that our audience can know who's who.

**ADAM** I'm Adam Rix. I'm Creative Director of NOT Wieden+Kennedy.

**ANIKA** And I'm Anika Ramani. I am Brand Director at NOT Wieden+Kennedy.

- ARMIN** Perfect. <laugh> I guess our audience can drink a shot every time we say NOT. <laugh>
- ANIKA** Should be the team drinking game, actually.
- ARMIN** <laugh>. That's right.
- ADAM** We didn't bring the Sambuca <laugh>.
- ARMIN** So let's start with some context. Now, me and most of our listeners associate Wieden+Kennedy with advertising, which is not a revelation to anyone here, but the company has done a good share of branding projects, a handful of which have even been posted on Brand New, most notably the Formula One project from 2017, which is so long ago. So the question here is, in the last three or five years or earlier if you know the answer, how were identity and branding projects handled within the advertising dominant model of Wieden+Kennedy?
- ANIKA** The design team's always been strong within Wieden+Kennedy, we've got a team of 18. This is really about elevating that team that already existed. It existed in different guises. We were called Brand Studio at one point, we were The Design Team, so we've always been known and that team's always been there to run these projects and work on these projects. Sometimes it's been collaborating with other projects that are sort of above the line campaigns and then things have evolved from there. So then you've got a design element and a strong designer that's always part of that team. We've had different more design led projects and a brand refresh along the way. I think like you said, F1 is probably the biggest one. So that team's always been there and then we've drawn on external collaborators, as and where we need, bringing in the right people with different expertise to add to whatever's already in-house to build on that.
- ARMIN** And is that identity team, has it always been based in London only? or is there a few designers here and there in the different offices?

**ANIKA** There's a few designers here and there in every office. I think that's the thing that sort of sets Wieden's apart because when you think of advertising agencies, they don't always have designers or they have one or two. I think this has always been part of that sort of secret source of Wieden's that design has been so central to any creative output that's come out of the company. There are design teams, there's a strong one in New York, there's a strong one in Portland, there's one in Amsterdam. So there are pockets of design all over the place and I think this is our sort of way of elevating that, and finding, sort of signposting it so we can get clients who are more focused on branding and design and give them that other way in. We're talking about it as like a new door in to kind of shine a light on the fact that this design team exists, which has always been there and just shining a spotlight on that, I think.

**ADAM** One of the things that's defines Wieden+Kennedy is that we kind of bring people together from different places. So I think Dan Waiden used to say something, don't quote me exactly on this, but you know, "a place where misfits come to feel comfortable". And I think historically what we haven't done is we haven't hired for our design team from other advertising agencies. You know, I think design's such a big part of the development of any project here, which is, you know, the size of our team is a testament to that. We're 18, which is pretty big for an advertising agency. The people that we've recruited, only one of those people in our team come to advertising. So we have people from the best in-house departments, we have people from the best branding and design agencies across the world. Really these people are kind of ready to design identities and they're ready to design for branding. They come to Wieden+Kennedy because of the creative opportunities of working on some of the huge client names we have, and some of the huge canvases we have at our disposal. There's a real kind of diversity with the team already, which lends itself to setting up NOT.

**ARMIN** And without getting it into any specifics of client wins or losses, was it hard to sell design as part of your services when clients... not assume,

but know you for being an advertising-driven or an advertising-first company? Was it difficult to also say like, Hey by the way we also do this, really well?

**ADAM** Yeah, I think it's a fair question. I think clients kind of look for specialists, right? And I think if you're looking for an advertising specialist, a 40-year-old history in Wieden+Kennedy, you know Wieden+Kennedy are definitely up there as the agency you would go to for advertising. And I think that's half of the reason behind the name NOT that we're kind of pushing against that reputation a little bit to kind of make our mark as designers within the organization.

Clients are looking for specialists. I think a lot of clients that are looking to commission branding and design, they might not even have heard of Wieden+Kennedy to the point that you've just made. And I think that's part of the reason for launching NOT to kind of show that we've got a real serious intent behind what we're doing. I think the reason a lot of those projects that you mentioned came about like Formula One was because I think once you're through the doors of Wieden+Kennedy as a client you understand that there's such a high quality of design within the building and all of those opportunities.

Almost like there was a secret door into the agency, and if you knew it you could get things like Formula One rebrand. So Sean Bratches who commissioned that used to be a client of the New York office for ESPN. He just loved the way that Wieden+Kennedy went about things. So just asked if we could rebrand Formula One. And that's true of a lot of the other work that's kind of come through. So I think in the past a lot of these branding and design opportunities have come through almost by accident, as Anika said, through kind of existing client relationships and NOT, it's like we're doing it on purpose now. We're trying to open a door directly into the design department for those opportunities to come through and create a bit of noise so that people know that we exist, that might not have previously considered Wieden+Kennedy.

**ANIKA** Coming from more of a branding and design background, it's different clients that are buying the services. So I think that's why that's where it sort of gets a bit tricky and you've got branding agencies saying, you know, they can do brand and then all of the delivery and coms, and advertising agencies starting to work in the same space. But I think that's why when you actually see it in motion, like with F1 where you've created the brand, you created the logo, then you created the whole visual identity and system across everything from end frames, cars, to actually what delivery looks like on the new launch car in 2022. So, our designers have that experience of conceptualizing a brand but then actually putting it out across, you know, thousands of different touchpoints. So when you see that in action, I think it's sort of the proof is in the pudding and I think that's the compelling story that people just didn't know about. Once you kind of learn that you can see why it, it's just totally makes sense.

**ARMIN** Yeah and you've all definitely done a fantastic job with Formula One over the years in putting, literally putting that into action in so many different ways. I think that is a great case study for drawing clients in into what kind of work that is different from branding agencies they can expect from NOT Wieden+Kennedy. How did this studio come about? And you sort of already talked about it, but what I would like to know is, was it a decision by leadership to be like, oh we need this, or was it your team saying like, hey we need to be presented more on our own as a distinct offering, or was it a combination of the two?

**ANIKA** Sort of a combination for the two. The decision was made, I think we were both hired to sort of set this up and run the teams. So it was definitely from the top in the sense of laddering up to the goal of being more of a creative agency, really responding to the times. I think as you know, marketing's changing, branding's changing, the way people consume media's changing, so in response to all of that, brands have gotta change and part of that overall strategy and shift in responding to the times, this is one part of that in sort of Wieden's kit of parts if you like. Both Adam and I were drafted in from more of a branding and

design background to come in and be able to talk to those things, and lead those processes, and lead the team in a slightly different way.

**ADAM** Yeah, we were deliberately hired misfits, going back to that previous quote from Dan Wieden. We were hired from outside of advertising from that kind of smaller agency world to work out how this should be set up. I think as a top down initiative, it was probably really obvious that we had such a brilliant team that it was kind of a no-brainer. I think exactly how we set it up, we inputted an awful lot into, so for example Wieden+Kennedy is the thing that pulled us all into here. You know, the creative reputation, brilliant strategy, the way get under the skin of brands, and we get under the skin of audiences, and their problems and I think there were a million different ways that this could have been set up in terms, you know, super, super standalone. Do the designers only ever work on branding projects? or do they work on branding projects and the wider agency work?

And I think it was us having been here for a few months deciding that actually let's create this standalone offer, let's open this door into the agency, but actually let's keep the designers working with the rest of the agency. It's brilliant from kind of a talent retention point of view in terms of people get the opportunity to work on branding and design projects, they also get to work on projects that have massive exposure like global campaigns. And also to the point that Anika made earlier, I think what makes it a really compelling offer to clients is that our designers, they're out there in the weeds, they're applying brands through design to countless different channels and different executions daily. We are not just creating design and brand that lives in PDFs and we hand over to other agencies and kind of keep our fingers crossed. We come across all the challenges that those brands have daily in our work. It means that everybody gets a bit of a breather. You know, there this kind of, not this constant production line of projects that follow similar formats. You know, you could be working on, I dunno, like creating a piece of 3D-design one week in support of an advertising project, or you could be contributing to a

massive campaign the next week, you could be branding a charity and I think it's that mixture that keeps everyone fresh. Yeah, makes it a great place to attract talent but also a compelling offer to client.

**ARMIN** So then people working for NOT Wieden+Kennedy, they're officially employees of Wieden+Kennedy. There's no borders between the two things as you mentioned. So you get hired to work at Wieden+Kennedy, but you get thrown into this design arm that just works on everything.

**ADAM** Exactly. It's borderless and I think what's brilliant about it is we've got a hardcore team of, you know, 18 designers, but we've got strategy departments not just here in London but around the globe. If there's a project that comes to us, it needs someone on the ground in China to have an opinion on it or create a strategy for it, or a designer that understands how to set Chinese script, then we can reach out to that office. We like to think of ourselves as a small design studio that's got the hunger and ambition of a startup, but with the backing of a 40-year-old creative giant. And I think again, that's what makes it a really exciting place to work, but also really exciting for clients to work with us. You know, you get the people that are working on the work in the room, and you get that kind of vibe of a small agency, but also we can tap into that wider network of collaborators as and when we need to.

**ARMIN** Speaking of clients, is there sort of an ideal client that is a perfect fit for this new group?

**ANIKA** I don't think there is. No, I think definitely we're not sector specific, we're sector agnostic. I think for us it's definitely about ambition, creative ambition. I think we wanna make work that moves people. It's one of our Widenisms and one of our guiding principles for NOT as well, where Dan Wieden said, well when they shared work with him and sort of used to call him back and say, "come back when you can move me dude". And I think that's our guiding principle and probably gonna be our guiding principle when we're selecting work go with. So it's



all about ambition, culture, creativity, they're the kind of briefs we're looking for and that's really what we're going after.

**ADAM** In terms of advertising, it's the same, right? People don't come to Wieden+Kennedy when they want to follow their competitors, they come to Wieden+Kennedy when they want to do something that's unusual, when something breaks the conventions of a category. And I think we are wired with the same mindset. It is very much about ambition and mindset. It could be anyone, it could be someone creating a new dishwasher tablet. It doesn't have to be a super cool lifestyle brand. We'll attack anything with the same level of creativity and ambition.

**ANIKA** We've almost got that luxury of being sort of naive in that sense of, we can work on anything. We'd love to work in a sector that we don't have experience in because we think we can bring in that new point of view and actually really challenge conventions within that sector. And I think we've got that because of what Adam was saying about being that sort of startup, but within Wieden's which is a powerhouse and having that backing. We've sort of got that luxury right now and I think that's another thing for the team, and a way to attract talent.

**ARMIN** I can't wait to see what you do with a dishwasher tablet client. I think that sounds—

**ANIKA** I like that that's the first thing that popped into your head. <laugh>

**ADAM** If there's, if there's anyone listening that's the Marketing Director of a dishwasher tablet company, we'd love you to get in touch. My number is, I'll stop, I'll stop now. <laugh>.

**ARMIN** So you heard it here first if you're out there <laugh>...

Let's get into the actual branding for NOT Wieden+Kennedy. You already mentioned about how, NOT the word "not" is a little bit of a way to establish some distance from the reputation from Wieden+Kennedy's advertising roots. But by nature "not" is a negative

word. Did you have any concerns that by adopting that word it would somehow send the wrong signal?

**ADAM** There were lots of discussions about the word “not” as you can imagine. There’s a couple of things. I think first of all, your introduction to this podcast was probably one of the reasons why we chose that name. Your introduction to the article where you reviewed the identity, it was a little bit like you’d peered into our minds. It was a pretty perfect articulation of what we were trying to do. I think what we were trying to do with NOT Wieden+Kennedy is we wanted to create something that was a little bit divisive, something that did have a bit of a hook and would be talked about. There’s a lot of negativity towards advertising agencies that start design and branding studios. And I think we wanted to use “not” as the signaling of intent.

When I was first hired, they were talking about calling it Wieden+Kennedy Brand Studio. I was like, okay, I’m Adam Rix, Creative Director from Wieden+Kennedy Brand Studio. Now I’m asthmatic, and that’s a bit of a mouthful. Found it really hard to get through that sentence. And also we just signed up to work at the most creative agency in the world. We thought there had to be a better way; and it was one of those ideas when we had it, we kind of sat on it for about one month because the line between stupidity and you know, I was gonna say genius, but that would be probably a little bit arrogant. The line between stupidity and good is pretty fine. I just finally shared it with Susan Hoffman, our ECD. I was just like, can’t tell anymore Susan, is it good? is it bad? And she was like, “I fucking love it” <laugh>. And that was where it went.

But it wasn’t as simple as that. There were lots of people, everyone kind of shares in a lot of the decisions we make here at Wieden+Kennedy. Everyone’s empowered to have a voice, everyone’s got a point of view. Some of the more logical thinkers probably landed on some of the things you’re alluding to. But I think we talked a lot about this works because Wieden+Kennedy is incredibly secure in its creative reputation. You know, it shows great deal of confidence, it

shows a sense of humor. As we were talking, this story came out that Wieden+Kennedy was an agency founded by two hippies in Portland on April Fool's Day. Now allegedly, and this may just be a myth, there was a big London agency who avoided April Fool's Day and launched their agency on April the 2nd because they were terrified they wouldn't be taken seriously if they launched April Fool's Day.

And I think that was the final confirmation for us, like we need to continue to do things in this vein that others wouldn't. Yeah, there might be a listed handful of reasons why you shouldn't do it, but actually if what we're trying to do is we're trying to push against a 40-year-reputation of being an advertising agency. You know, despite Wieden+Kennedy being much more than that now, Wieden+Kennedy is a creative company in its broadest sentence. It was the simplest, most single minded way to say, look, there's something unexpected here that you wouldn't expect to come to Wieden+Kennedy for, and that is design—and that's really the thought in its simplest form. In the language, when we explored it, we got a bit giddy, we've got a bit carried away, there were lots of lines with something, not something else. And I think when you started to put NOT Wieden+Kennedy at the bottom of that, there was definitely a trap that you could fall into, which felt like it was this smaller upstart within Wieden+Kennedy that was actually knocking the wider agency.

But I think as soon as we found that learning, we just decided to avoid it. And actually we could have really overused “not” in language—your introduction was perfect <laugh>. But I think if we'd have used “not” throughout every single line of communication, I think we'd have been tired of it pretty quickly. So I think as soon as we made that decision and recognized that there wasn't really a problem as far as we were concerned, and I think the great thing is, is everybody asks us the question and we have a bit of a story to tell. And I think that's part of it.

**ANIKA** It also just fits with the DNA of Wieden's. I mean if you walk into reception, there's a mannequin with a blender on his head and it says “walking

stupid” above it. So that’s just the kind of place this is. So I think you articulated it perfectly in your article when you just kind of said, if anyone’s gonna do it, it’s gonna be Wieden+Kennedy.

**ARMIN** I was already on board with the name, but now after this explanation I’m like along for the ride for the next however many years you <laugh> keep doing this. Were there other names that you considered, and we don’t have to go into a long list, but did you consider naming it something like Apple—not Apple—<laugh> Orange or... both of those are taken, sorry, <laugh> grape!

**ADAM** <laugh> Well the thought process we went through... when we kind of decided that we thought Wieden+Kennedy Brand Studio was a little bit tame. We thought there was a better way. We started looking at right, how do we inject personality into this? And whilst we didn’t necessarily get into different names, we did get into different areas of thinking and one of those was, let’s just come up with a completely different name, let’s call it Grape Squirrel, whatever. I think we just reached the conclusion we’d be kissing goodbye to the superpower of what we’ve got here. You know, the creative reputation of Wieden+Kennedy and the mindset of Wieden+Kennedy is what brought us all in and it’s what will make this offer brilliant. We decided that Wieden+Kennedy had to be a part of it in order to leverage years and years of reputation, creativity. And in a way NOT Wieden+Kennedy, whilst at first we couldn’t decide if it was stupid or good, and then actually, you know, for some people we’ll never agree on that and that’s fine <laugh>. It was perfect in a way because it said that we were both Wieden+Kennedy and we weren’t. And I think that was your introduction to your article. It was like you appeared into our brains perfectly because it said that we were, it says that we are NOT Wieden+Kennedy, there’s a different discipline here at play, but it also says we absolutely are Wieden+Kennedy and in that way it’s perfect.

**ARMIN** Agreed. Let’s talk about the logo, or not the logo, since it isn’t a static application. What was your goal when you started this project and

how do you self-direct yourselves to stay on track on time, and a strategy? And also how did you stay on track with this mindset, which seems to come natural, but there might be some moments where like, no, we need to bring this back, we already have a weird name, we should not have a weird logo as well. A lot of questions in there. Point being how did you get to the logo?

**ADAM** We went with the theory more weird is good <laugh>. So I think the first thing we try to do is that we are launching a brand and design studio of Wieden+Kennedy and we're making the conscious decision to launch now without waiting for a project because we think launching with an identity that's interesting will draw attention, and we'll be able to start more interesting conversations with clients. We knew that we wanted it to be something interesting. We knew that we wanted it to be something that hopefully people would talk about. Again, all these things are really easy to say when you are in a briefing room, right? It's harder to execute against those and hope that these things get pressed in the discussion. In the same way that we would think about any work for our client. We wanted to really work out what is the purpose of the identity, of a branding and design studio.

And we're not a toothpaste brand. We don't need to be recognized in the street every day. We're really, really in control of the interactions that people have with our visual identity. And I don't know if all the listeners will be familiar with this, but there's an organization called the DBA, the Design Business Association over here in the UK and they published a report a couple of years ago that had a really poignant statistic in it for me. And it was "your clients are likely to have two interactions with your brand maximum. One of them might be your website, they might look at your website. Chances are they might not, that's quite sobering. Or if it's a word of mouth recommendation, they will see the presentation that you give to them". So we are not looking at masses and masses of different executions like it would be if it was an FMCG brand.

We started to decide that the best thing that our identity could do was if it showed affinity, and collaboration and love for our clients. And that's where we ended up with the idea of a generator. Now obviously, the stuff that everyone saw in the press was made out of assets that we created and that's the way we see ourselves, at least at this moment in time when we bring our brand to life on our website or we bring our brand to life in social media. But really when we've been talking to clients over the last few weeks since we've launched, every single deck we create looks different. So we talk to a soft drinks company and the "not's" are all made out of their distinctive assets, their cans. We talk to a matchmaker between agencies and clients. We take their logo and we create the "not" out of their logo.

So everything is about showing affinity and love for our clients. We decided that that was the most important thing and every single person that we present to with this system just loves the fact that it looks like an awful lot of effort has gone in to creating this custom assets that really charmed them. But actually because we put so much work into the generator, anyone in the department can make an asset in like a matter of seconds and that was also something that was really important to us. You know, we don't think that creativity is restricted really to people that have got traditionally creative titles. You know, it's fantastic that Anika or someone in our accounts department or a strategist can just create a logo for a deck in this piece of software in a matter of seconds with a few clicks. Really that was the idea, you know, create this democratic tool that you could make something in minimal amount of time and show affinity to clients and their projects.

**ANIKA** It also saves people like me asking the designers every time create a new logo for each client. But when I first saw it as well, it was just the brief was not a logo. And I think that sort of guided everything that Adam's done saying of how it can adapt to clients, how it can show our personality, how it can respond to a moment in time, something that's happening that day. You could like around pride, you can really use the flag and do different things with it. So that was always the goal.

And then I think the generator was just sort of the icing on the cake that was created in-house. So that was amazing to me that we've got that capability as well. JP, who's our creative technologist, he probably created the first version of that in a day and that was the basis for what's then become the website and the tool.

All of us can use it and it's been really just something we've got behind for the launch and for socials and when we're sending emails out to people saying hi in their name, the response to that, it's just great to see it reflected back everything we wanted it to be. I think people are really responding to that sort of every time you get an email saying this is so fun, this is so intriguing and I can't believe you don't take yourselves seriously like this is actually what you're doing. So that's really the message I think behind it

**ADAM** As well as showing affinity to clients. You know, we want to be fun to work with. We don't want to be the branding and design agency that of course strategy is super important to us, but we wanna try and present it in ways that isn't dry and isn't through death by PowerPoint and charts. And I think we wanted to communicate our playfulness. I think the other thing that we are fascinated with in terms of branding and design is one thing we learn through applying brands to different channels daily is that there's this kind of constant tension between relevance and recognition for brands right now. How do you create corporate identity, visual identities that are consistent enough to have recognition but also flexible enough to move with culture. You know, culture moves faster than it ever has through social media, through the way the internet works, all of those different things. And I think that's something that's really on our mind in terms of how we'll approach branding and design. Again, that's something that's mirrored in this generator that really it is something that never stands still, it's never finished, there's no reason we should ever get bored with it. There's no reason why it should ever be outdated because we can just change the inputs.

**ARMIN** Before I get into my follow up question about the logo, one thing that I think would be interesting to know and get some perspective for people who often try to design their own identity, for their own business, and it's always one of the hardest things because you just push it to the side like no client work comes first. What was the timeframe for all of this? from the moment you decided to launch NOT Wieden+Kennedy, to coming up with a name, to coming up with a logo, to launching? What was that timeframe like?

**ANIKA** I think it was probably about three months. We had two key designers who were then assigned to this. For all of the things you're saying, I think we were very focused in that we want to get this out, we want to keep it tight, and actually we've gotta treat it like a client. So we made sure there was a team, it wasn't done in and around other projects, they were dedicated and on it full-time, and that's I think the only way we managed to achieve that. And it was good for them as well because for them then actually seeing it then go live, it is a project, right? It, it's an identity that they've created and then they've seen from conception to making it go live. I think it was quite quick. I think we had the name, then we had the NOT logo philosophy, I think after briefing within a couple of weeks the guys were at the identity, and then it was all about fine tuning.

**ADAM** We'd have got in trouble if we spent too much time on it <laugh>. I think it was great. I think there was also opportunity in that kind of three month period as well. You know, it's great that it's kind of this democratic tool that anyone can use, but it was also great that we could cast the net really wide in kind of in creating the icons that we launched with as well. We have 3D designers, we have people that have got more of an illustrative part to their work, so we could get everyone within the team as part of that process to create the icons as well. So it felt like it was an identity that represented the sort of the strength and diversity within the team as well.

**ARMIN** Three months is pretty quick. I was expecting more like a year from start to finish, just like how long it takes for something of this nature to



come to fruition at a company that is fairly large. I would've imagined it was a longer process. And I think there's something interesting about learning about that speed in which it happened in that the design sort of reflects that. Not that it looks rushed, that it looks like let's get it out there, let's just not waste time in putting all this energy that we managed to put in this project and get it out there, as opposed to let it linger for a long time. Sometimes projects start to lose their inertia and they just become stale.

**ADAM** In terms of discussions around the word "not". And in terms of discussions around exactly how we structure the department, and exactly how we go out there, and how the studio shows up, I think those conversations were slightly longer, but certainly the creative process was pretty quick. But let's not forget that the idea is ultimately the generator, it's the technology to build that. And actually there's the assets that you can feed into that that create the identity assets afterwards.

**ARMIN** Something that people expressed in the comments on Brand New, and on Instagram, and on Twitter where it got a lot of traction in the conversation was—there was a sentiment that was a certain trendiness to it, that could be taken in a bad way or a good way. I think it's a reflection of reacting to the blandness of design today. So the question is, do you worry at all that this was too trendy at the moment? or did you just go for it with your gut feeling?

**ADAM** There was a deliberate intention to get across the feeling that we got across this sense of fun, this sense of being of the moment. And again, the idea is the generator. So anything can be created in that generator at any moment in time. The way we show up in two months is gonna be different to the way we showed up one month ago. The way we show up in one year is gonna be different to the way we show up in six months. And that's completely the idea. And I think what we were probably trying to showcase in those assets that we released was that sentiment really that things can change all the time. We were really

keen to get across this idea of not being dry, and dull, and serious, and being lighthearted. We're super serious about work and I know we've got knocked by some, well you get knocked for everything don't you?

But we've got knocked for this statement about saying that we're really serious about the work, but we don't take ourselves seriously at all. But I think that's really important. Which client wants to talk to somebody that takes themselves really seriously. They want to talk to someone that takes the work really seriously. And I think it's important that it has that feeling of irreverence because it's how we operate and it's true to us. But yeah, we don't have any concerns really about, will it date because the idea behind the whole identity is that it will just be changing completely all the time. It'll never be finished. And really, like we talked about before, often the way it manifests itself is in the assets, or the logos, or the colors of a client, very rarely manifests itself. It's not about us <laugh>, it's about the people that we work with.

**ANIKA** Mm-hmm. And I think it was almost intended to be an antidote to those trends. What's trendy this year is not gonna be trendy next year. And I think this was our way of trying to cut through that, of make it all about being able to reflect the people you're working with, or being able to reflect a moment in time, and then hopefully we can keep it evolving based on that rather than selecting a typeface, doing those traditional things that give you that consistency in that fixed system.

**ADAM** There was a moment in where we would've used Boris Johnson's head as part of our press release. We made a, "not anymore" out of Boris Johnson's head, but you know, two weeks later we'd gone through three Prime Ministers. So we decided this generator can keep up with culture but it could not keep up with how quickly we changed.

**ANIKA** It was letters at one point it yeah... it wasn't gonna <laugh>,

**ADAM** But that's the idea, you know, it can be playful, it can react to the things that go on in culture, the things that go in the world around us. I think the idea that every time someone decides to make something with it,

they can think about what's going on around them. That's what makes it exciting to use.

**ARMIN** Going back to the conversation on social media, was it a conscious decision to want to make a splash in the design and ad industry to sort of say, Hey, we're here either pay attention to us or tremble in place because now we're doing this in a more serious note?

**ANIKA** It's exactly that. As we kind of talked about at the beginning, while Widen's is known for its creativity, we're not necessarily known for branding and design. It was really important for us to draw that light in the sand and just actually make that statement to say, "we're here, this is the other door in, you can come to us for branding and design". Conscious decision, and I think a confirmation and a validation when we saw it reflected back being picked up in the design press. I think that was a nice nod to yes, everything we've been thinking is we've been living with it for a couple of months at that point. So just having that affirmation of yes, it's still doing what it needs to be doing and being received in that way from our peers, and the people whose opinion we value. It was definitely intentional, and actually reassuring, and validating to be featured.

**ADAM** We're launching a design studio without client work and we want to demonstrate the way that we think. We want to demonstrate our approach. We want to demonstrate how we could use technology in interesting ways. And I think we kind of thought we were ticking all the boxes that would make it talked about. We knew it would be a bit divisive. We knew the name would be divisive, we knew some of the aesthetic choices would be a bit divisive, but you can never be sure. And I think I just wanted to give one shout out to one of your commenters actually, I don't know if they're listening to this, but RebrandouVer, I think our actual favorite comment about any of the work was: "another would be un-agency claiming to shatter all the norms with a seemingly unlimited wankery budget". <laugh> Honestly, that quote made our day. We loved it. And I think if RebrandouVer is

listening, they might be pleased to know that that quote goes in all of our cred stacks at the moment. <laugh> All of our presentations to clients, we have this beautiful piece of copy that's built around Dan Widen's "move me dude" principle, and then after that we have a section that says "in the words of others" and we have one client testimonial, and then we share RebrandouVer's comment. Clients love it, so thank you <laugh>.

**ARMIN** It's important to acknowledge how this is perceived both good and bad from people who are out there doing similar, not similar work to what you do, but they're in the same industry. So just getting stuff like that, like the wankery budget comment, I think that's as useful and encouraging as getting praised because I think it does signal that you attempted to do something different, that you attempted to do something to get people to perk up and not just take it for granted that it's just gonna be another typeface and another logo, but just something that really is different and that gets people's attention. Speaking of people's attention, was there, and you don't have to gimme any specifics, but was there any direct lead from launching to getting a client just knocking on the door? or not yet?

**ANIKA** There have been a few. Yeah. Yeah. I don't think we can talk about any specific, but yes, the emails have been going off so people are curious about it, wanna know more. And some people have got in touch directly with briefs just to say, you know, you're on our radar, we're thinking of you for this. It's safe to say it's doing what we need it to do.

**ADAM** We were quite naive to think after three months of incredibly intense work that once it was launched we were ready to have a little bit of a break and then the emails just kept coming through. So I think it's definitely done its job. I think all of the social sharing and the fact that we made the generator available to people to use online just for fun, we've had potential clients that have got in touch that want a conversation just because they saw someone that made something with it, and it led it to us. It's got us through to clients that are already

within the business that it makes an awful lot of sense too. And I think also, you know, the fact that we're aligned to Wieden+Kennedy makes things really interesting for people. I think people thinking that, wow, so I can now get to Wieden+Kennedy specifically for design and branding. I think that's a big part of it, you know, I don't think the the name and the identity can take all the credit.

**ANIKA** No, a couple of the emails have started off "now that you've got a branding and design office", excited about all of those things, we're taking every call right now. That's the only way to filter through. And then I think hopefully we'll be on with you in a few more months talking about some of the work we're doing.

**ADAM** Fingers crossed for the dishwasher tablet brand.

**ANIKA** Yes!

**ARMIN** I'm gonna start writing an intro just so that I'm ready. It's clear that it made an impression, even if 2% of the clients that came knocking on the door after that become a reality. I'm sure that is a win business-wise. Now personally, what was the most exciting aspect of working on this project for each of you?

**ADAM** I think the most exciting part of this project for me was: we briefed the team, and the team came back with this idea and it said, "wouldn't it be great if we could create a generator that we could create different "nots" with that could show our affinity to clients?" That was slide one <laugh>. The second slide was, "wouldn't it be great if we could create a set of assets to feed into that generator and show the diversity and the skillset of the team?" And I think it's very rare in these processes and of course we are our own client so it's easier, but it's very rare that the purity of ideas stay the same from concept to execution. It was a big gray area that was like, well can we, can we? The biggest moment of excitement for me was having a meeting with JP, our Creative Technologist, and him coming back a day later and this thing that we could all play with upload SVGs to upload PNGs to and just make

“nots” and then they get animated just by the click of a button. It blew my mind frankly. I was like, this is incredible. Well that was the most exciting moment for me. Not only seeing that, but also seeing the fact that our team had had an idea and it could be brought to life in such a close way to how they expect it. Cuz client work doesn't go that way all that often.

**ANIKA** <laugh>. I think for me it is definitely the team and the creativity. Ever since I've walked into this place, you know, it's probably one of the most diverse teams I've worked with. So actually seeing how that works in real life, actually seeing those ideas, you can see it in the end result. All these people, you talk about diversity and like different people with different backgrounds, different skill sets coming together. I feel like for me this has been the real way to see it in action, and in motion and it really shows up in what we've created. It really is actually, you know, you say words like “challenging conventions”, but I feel like this is actually showing that yes, it does. And the other exciting thing is the purity of it. Like Adam said, it really is very true to that first concept that we all saw and got excited about in the room on day one. So to be able to hold onto that and see that go from day one, to last three months, to last through all of the sign offs, and be out there in the world, I think that's quite special when you've worked in this industry for a while.

**ARMIN** Well Anika, Adam, thank you so much for joining me on The Follow-Up today. It was wonderful to hear about how this project came to be, how quickly it came to be, how you stayed true to the original intent, how you embraced defiance and went with your gut to create something that is definitely unique. And I think you definitely achieved something that was divisive. From the beginning I was on camp, “yes” and I'm sure there's a lot of people that may remain in camp “no”, but I think after this conversation and hearing all the great thinking that went into it, they might switch sides. So again, Anika, Adam, thank you for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

**ADAM** Thank you for having us.

**ANIKA** Thank you so much for having us.

**BRYONY** NOT Wieden+Kennedy took a chance by walking that fine line between stupidity and “good” as Adam said but, after hearing all their thinking and rationalization, we feel he was being too modest as this whole project, from name to logo, does have a strong hint of genius. And as the onslaught of emails expressing interest after its launch demonstrated, there is an appetite from both clients and designers for weird and unexpected approaches to design and this generator certainly generated enough of that and drew plenty of attention to quickly establish NOT Wieden+Kennedy as a haven for misfits.

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