

# EPIISODE 071

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## NEW YORK CITY TOURISM + CONVENTIONS

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Georgie Stout and Becca Dunwoody, 2x4

AND

Elan Cole, New York City Tourism + Conventions

### **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.

### **BRYONYGOMEZ-PALACIO**

Hi, this is Bryony Gomez-Palacio and welcome to episode number 71 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on New York City Tourism and Conventions, the official destination marketing organization and convention and visitors bureau for the City of New York. Previously named NYC & Company, the organization is dedicated to maximizing travel and tourism opportunities throughout the five boroughs, building economic prosperity, and spreading the positive image of New York City worldwide.

The project, designed by New York, NY-based 2x4, was posted on Brand New on March 30, 2023. You can pull it up on your browser at [bit.ly/bnpodcast071](https://bit.ly/bnpodcast071) that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast071, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Georgie Stout, Founding Partner and Executive Creative Director of 2x4; Becca Dunwoody, Senior Strategist

at 2x4; and Elan Cole, Executive Vice President and Co-lead of the Creative and Content Team at New York City Tourism + Conventions.

In this conversation we learn of the organization's main goal — clarity — and how that served as a way to make some complicated decisions a little easier, starting with the name. “New York City Tourism and Conventions” may sound overly descriptive and literal but that's exactly what they needed because a part of the external audience simply didn't know what they did. We also hear about the important role strategy played in this project in helping 2x4 and the internal team navigate the complexities of the organization and all the people involved as well as figuring out what exactly this redesign needed to represent beyond just New York City. To achieve this, the strategy yielded the tension of Tough and Love as two separate spectrums that this brand could operate within. So, come for all the insights but stay for some actual tough love that Armin got as the tables got turned on him with one of his questions.

Now, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Georgie, Becca, and Elan.

**ARMIN VIT** Hello everyone, today we are turning a corner, then another corner, and then another corner as we immerse ourselves in the grid, literally and metaphorically, that is New York City with a new tourism and conventions entity as our guide, Elan, Georgie, and Becca, welcome to The Follow-Up.

**ELAN COLE** Thank you.

**GEORGIE STOUT** Thanks.

**BECCA DUNWOODY** Thanks so much.

**ARMIN** So that our listeners can know who's who. If you can introduce yourselves with your name and title, please.

**ELAN** I'm Elan Cole. I'm Executive Creative director for NYC Tourism.

**GEORGIE** And I'm Georgie Stout, I'm one of the partners at 2x4.

**BECCA** And I'm Becca, I'm a Senior Strategist at 2x4.

**ARMIN** Wonderful. Elan, let's start with you and let's start with the basics, because as clear as I tried to be in my explanation of who and what was redesigning and renaming when I wrote about it for Brand New, it seems I wasn't perfectly clear. So, who and what is and was NYC and Company?

**ELAN** I'm glad that you asked, thanks. First of all, we are formally known as NYC and Company and as we're currently known right now, NYC Tourism — we're the tourism board for the city of New York. What our role is, is to market the city to the world, tell the stories, all the wonderful people and all the wonderful things that we want people to experience. NYC and Company was our old name. And we found that for years, first of all, it wasn't clear what we did. So when people ask, where are you from? We'd say, yeah, NYC and Company. And actually more often than not, we would get confused with New York and Company, the clothing brand. From a naming standpoint, recognition standpoint, that doesn't really help us. Coming outta Covid we had an opportunity to look at who we are, where we at, and determine that we really need to be super clear about what we're doing because tourism, as it was unfortunately proven out, plays such an important role in the health of city, especially in the economic health of the city, and the spiritual health of the city. That's when we decided to do this thing and then change our name into something that was just so unbelievably clear about who we're and what we do. That's where we're in the landscape.

**ARMIN** And then also to clarify, because I think part of my confusion and other people's confusion was that you adopted the NYC identity, which was not yours, right? And I like, I don't mean that like it's not yours and you took it, but it was part of a bigger...

**ELAN** It's part of what was confusing for everyone. So Wolf Ollins did that under the Bloomberg administration, which was when our organization — I think that was 25 years ago, plus or minus on that

— our organization and a couple of organizations came together to become NYC and Company. And Bloomberg through Wolf Ollins had that amazingly ambitious plan to brand New York City. We call it chunky, where that chunky logo comes from, which is super cool in its own right. The way the angles come together, the way the letter forms are merged, all of the opportunities that came with that use, it was spread all over the city. Now our organization is not part of the city. Our organization is a partner to the city. We have very, very close ties to the city. We have contracts with the city to do this type of work for them. But we don't report into city government.

And so that was another thing that was unclear for, for many, many people. Part of this exercise was clarifying where we are in relationship to the city. And that's important because when it comes to branding the city, the city is about its residents, the city is about, you know, the 8.5 million plus people who make this town up. It's about their wellbeing. It's all the things that we are not involved in. And so it becomes problematic sometimes when we're approached to like, well what can you do about the noise in the city? What can you do about this? And that? When really, again, what we're about, we're about a very specific thing, which is selling the city, marketing the city, amplifying and promoting the city to the rest of the billions of people outside of the five boroughs.

At the time that the logo came about, we were considered close enough, our CEO at the time, a gentleman named George Fertitta worked very closely with Michael Bloomberg. And so the relationship of the organization was much closer, the organization also did a lot more of the general marketing for the city, not just the tourism. But over time we clarified and became more and more focused on tourism in our own right. So that was another reason for the clarification.

**ARMIN** My last follow up question: is there anything you can do about the noise in the city?

**ELAN** <laugh> Yeah. Get headphones! <laugh> From my point of view, I would get headphones.

**ARMIN** That's solid advice. Georgie, how did 2x4 get involved in this project?

**GEORGIE** My partner Michael and Elan knew each other from, I don't know, a long time ago. I mean, I think you guys met and you connected over some of his writing and just knowing him in the industry. So I think we were on Elan's radar and just always looking for the right opportunity to work on something. When this project came up, they included us in the group of people that they spoke to, right Elan? And I don't know if you wanna talk about why you chose us or how we ended up working together.

**ELAN** I had known 2x4... I think I actually learned about you when I was at the Museum of Modern Art. When I was working there in 2002. I had always wanted an opportunity to work with you. My focus has always been working in-house because it gave me the opportunity to work with not just one group of creative people, but whoever I wanted to. And 2x4 was always on my radar. I had coffee with Michael when I first started at NYC. I wasn't sure what there was, but when this came along it was just like, okay, yes, this is the right time. Talk to them. And in further talking to them, to Georgie too, to Michael, to you, it was kind of clear that the way that my brain works in terms of strategically thinking about what's the purpose? Why do we get up in the morning? How do we sort of get there? And the importance of that first for that to determine then everything else that happens.

And then once you get into the visuals, this notion of not just the exploration, not just sort of how 2x4 does the visual exploration, but also the fact that Georgie, you and Michael and the team and Becca were willing to have a very open workshop, <affirmative> right? It became very seamless between our team and your team. Versus here's the client, here's the agency. We're gonna do a presentation, we're gonna show you three directions. We're gonna tell you why Pantone blahdi blah is the brand specific color for super happiness, and stuff that just kind of drives me crazy. Versus let's just get all the tools out,

let's invite you over to the workbench, and then we'll all get dirty, and then we'll all figure out what we're making.

**ARMIN** Once you selected 2x4, what was the initial direction that you provided for them? Or was that defined in that workshop? This is just me not knowing exactly what happened at the beginning.

**ELAN** Georgie, actually, I'm curious what you remember first. What our approach was first.

**GEORGIE** <laugh> In any project like this, it's strategy first. And the reason I wanted Becca to join is because this project, I would say was 80% strategy, <laugh> like really a lot of thinking went into the rename and positioning. So maybe Becca you could speak to that. But you know, in terms of the creative process, once we got there, it was really collaborative.

**BECCA** Yeah, we started it with a lot of interviews. So we talked to every team at NYC Tourism. We talked to city government, we talked to some of the member organizations, which were like some of our favorite restaurants and venues and hotels. The brief was somewhat clear when we got it, you know, we wanna have this new rebrand, we definitely need new language, and how we talk about ourselves, but we didn't actually know yet if we were gonna get approval on a new name or if we were gonna get approval on "let's move away from Chunky". The interview process was kind of a way of testing the water, of talking to the chairman of the board, of talking to people at City Hall and saying, we feel like we should move away from Chunky. Does that sound right to you? Do we have your blessing? All of these other things to kind of get everyone on the same page. And from that process, it was really clear like, okay, what change can we affect?

**ELAN** And I realized we finally had the opportunity to do this. The idea of, okay, you get to brand New York City now was, first of all, it was terrifying. Second of all, it was—

**GEORGIE** Daunting.

**ELAN** Daunting. Third of all, it was, wait a minute, we've gotta reframe that because there's just no way to do something like that. We're not a cruise ship line, we're not a resort destination. It's the most diverse place on earth. We can't do this. Not that we're not able to, but it's just not appropriate. So how do we approach it and what are we actually doing? And it became really more, the question, that was the question, how do we do this? Like it wasn't even mine to figure out in the brief, like that was the project. So it became more about with respect to the nature of this city, with respect to how many people own this city. Every last person who lives here in some way owns this city. How do we do that? And the guiding principle that I try to keep that I know that 2x4 really embraced was NYC Tourism, we're not the voice of the city. We're not.

We're the curators and we're the amplifiers of the millions of voices of the city. And that was a starting point. We wanted to make sure that anything that we built was way more about a framework than it was imprimatur this is who you are now and this is how you brand yourself. Back to the notion that our audience is outside of the city for the most part, with the exception of things like Restaurant Week and Broadway Week, and things like that. We just have to make sure that we represent a particular point of view of the city rather than the entirety of all of the representation of the city. Which again, that's the government's job.

**ARMIN** Seems very complex and daunting. So it's amazing that you ended up on the other side with something, with anything. It just—

**ELAN** All my limbs intact.

**BECCA** <laugh> with anything. Yeah. Yeah.

**ARMIN** Becca, from those initial conversations and interviews, what stood out as a) challenges and b) opportunities to start creating a framework for this eventual solution that seems so unaccomplishable at the beginning.

**BECCA** The first thing we really had to tackle on this was an exercise of organization. If anyone is looking for a good brand architecture challenge, I would really recommend destination marketing organizations. <laugh> They're very thorny. And even just doing a competitive audit to try to immerse ourselves in this world was so intricate.

NYC tourism or NYC and Company as it used to be called, they do so many different things and speak to so many different audiences. So really the first problem was how do you clarify the brand so that it's gonna make sense for whoever it's speaking to at any given moment? We ended up in a space where we tried to simply create two buckets of thinking about inside the organization, and out. First how it speaks to members, and that should be quite tight as a brand, a branded house. For everyone else that it speaks to outside, for tourists, for New Yorkers, for event planners, for business planners, all of that, we really felt that it should act more as like endorser and that the programs that it affects, like Restaurant Week, all of those things, they should take the lead and have this endorsement from this really recognizable source. Just organizing all of the pieces and trying to create some clarity and even have more of a clear view of, who is our audience? Are we speaking to the public? or are we speaking to our members who, you know, pay their dues to us? And coming to understand the relationship between all of those people and what was appropriate for us to show up in each of those places. That was, I think, the biggest challenge.

The big opportunity, besides just having so many people to talk to, was kind of, to Alan's point, we aren't branding New York City in this exercise we're branding New York City Tourism, but we have so many good stories to tell about why you should come to visit New York City. You know, it's such a rich depth of content there. So I think there was no shortage of being inspired. The whole team, we all live in New York City, we've lived here for a long time, we're in all the different boroughs. It's really fun to work on a project that you deeply know the subject and love the subject.



**ARMIN** It sounds like the project was less about being original and finding some sort of super creative strategy to <affirmative> unleash New York on the world. And it was more about clarifying what this organization does, which is sort of a very different approach. <affirmative> to most design projects where it's all about <affirmative> finding that spark of originality. Not that this wasn't original, but it's a sort of a different mindset.

**ELAN** It is a quote-un-quote, a typical rebranding, a branding focused exercise. I mean a company brands because at some point you gotta get whatever is in the founder's head out. What's the purpose of it? That's one main reason. Like, how do you bring a product or a brand's personality into a commercial realm so that everybody can get it. But then when that company needs to rebrand, what is that about? For New York City, not quite like that. New York City, I think it's got about as close to a hundred percent recognition around the world as anything or any concept. But nevertheless, we had our moment at Covid, right? We behaved a certain way, we worked a certain way. And once Covid hit, we realized what is it that we are really here to do? And our opportunity... It's not to get people to Times Square, that's important, that's one of the biggest draws. But it's really to also make sure that all of those people then go out to the five boroughs. Cuz our mission really is not just to bring people here, but it's to get the benefits of the tourism economy out to places like Mott Haven, or Jackson Heights, or Stapleton, or Washington Heights, or Flatbush, and Little Caribbean. And everything that we did coming out of Covid, it was a real clarification in that moment.

So when we talk about branding, we've got a sparkly new look. It's like, it's so not about that. It's far more about how do we build a platform that we can grow to tell these stories and get people to these neighborhoods. Cause the neighborhoods themselves are what makes the city, the people from those neighborhoods and those cultures and those communities make this city. And I think once we realized that,

once we realized that, oh, that's our inflection point, that's why we rebrand, is to get that clearer focus that helped open things quite a bit.

**ARMIN** So speaking about building this new platform, let's start with the name. How easy or how hard was it to come up with a new entity name? I mean, it seems fairly descriptive once you hear the final name, but I can imagine this was not easy. This is a question for all, what do you remember about that process?

**ELAN** That's about as blunt the name as you can get! <laugh> You know? And we had something different, you know? In this industry there are very few, there's very little need to come up with something wacky, some kind of, uh, can't remember the word, but one word is pastiche of like two different things mashed together.

**BECCA** Portmanteau.

**ELAN** Portmanteau, that's it, <affirmative> thank you. All that gets you is lack of clarity. And again, one of the big parts of the mission was tell everybody who you are, because tourism is super important.

**GEORGIE** And you already had that challenge, right?

**ELAN** Yeah.

**GEORGIE** With the current name.

**ELAN** Yeah.

**GEORGIE** People not understanding what you did. So part of it was just being as blunt as possible, right? Being as clear as possible.

**ELAN** Yeah. In the past, our naming and our brands, and our platforms, it kind of came together in like a weird kind of gray gardens way. Like the stuff was all growing all over the place. We had NYC and Company, we had NYC the Official Guide, we had NYCgo.com. We hadn't really had solid brand discipline. When we went into the naming it allowed us, you know, do we want to anchor on something? So we were considering

NYC Go for a while cause that was our website. But Kyle and Wendy stopped trying to be clever and just tell people what you are and not worry about, well of course that's what you're called like yeah, of course. That's what called, that's what we need to tell people <laugh>. You know, it'd be different if it was Nike going, you know what, we're gonna change our name to Sneakers, cuz we need to tell people what we are. Totally different, very specific to this space.

**GEORGIE** I think another thing was actually using New York City as opposed to NYC. Even though we're working in tandem thinking about the name in more of the strategy phase, we're still looking <affirmative> at early references and pulling examples. And one of the challenges we did have was just the sheer number of brands that use NYC or New York City in there branding. We had a wall in our pinup room of all the logos from the local deli, to I ♥ New York, to New York City Ballet, to whatever. There's so many, and NYC is really prevalent in a lot of those graphically. And so we thought maybe it would also be an advantage to actually use the full name, even though graphically that was a big challenge, especially with Tourism + Conventions at the end.

**ELAN** Yeah.

**BECCA** <affirmative>

**ARMIN** Speaking about the logo and the name for you, Georgie and Becca, what were the first steps, if any, before the design process? And I think we already talked about the strategy, but you have the name, how do you jump from the name into the design process?

**BECCA** At 2x4 we work from something we call the "brand tension". So it's kind of the bridge between strategy and design, it's the way of getting all of those words we carefully wrote down into a clear, really generative visual idea for the designers. And we really believe that at the heart of any good brand is a tension that's always kind of pushing and pulling. And that push and pull is what begets the creativity in anything. For NYC tourism. We came up with Tough/Love, and kind of the brand

tension for New York City as well. If you think about it, you know, we live in this place that's really blunt. It's really real. It's kind of gruff sometimes, but it's also extremely welcoming, and kind, and affectionate, and exuberant. Once you cut through that, we really had a lot of fun with that brand tension. Again, we aren't trying to brand New York City, but we were trying to really capture the character in the essence of what makes New York City unique and wonderful to pull that through. First we started with Tough/Love. We kind of parsed apart, okay, what are all the adjectives in there? What does the tough part mean? What does the love part mean? How do we kind of calibrate the right balance? And then we just started sketching about the push and pull of those two terms.

**ELAN** I wanna clarify, Becca, the notion of Tough/Love. It's not "tough love" in the sense of like, you get a smack, but I really love you. It's two separate words and I think that's one of the things that I really loved about <affirmative> <laugh> when you guys presented that.

**BECCA** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**ELAN** There is this notion of New York as being tough, and there is this notion of New York as having just a tremendous amount of love. And what happens when you look at those two, two separate words. And as a matter of fact, we spent a lot of time when we were bringing <affirmative> our stakeholders through it to explain, no, it's not "tough love". And also to explain that's not a public facing thing. Like we would never go to the public saying, we're in New York, we're Tough/Love.

**BECCA** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**GEORGIE** Yeah, yeah.

**ELAN** But what you built with 2x4 was very clear to build. And what we really needed was, as we start to brief in all of our creative, because we are a creative team in and of ourselves, we're an Emmy award-winning, Webby award-winning... We do amazing stuff. And we also bring in many other creative teams. So we needed that tool that starts out

every single creative brief. This is our tone. And then the challenge becomes how do we balance that out? That's all to say how much we appreciated this notion of tension, because we are not Disneyland and we are not <affirmative> some kind of escape to New York hellscape either <laugh>, neither of those things <laugh>. But we are New York City and the beautiful tension of the random and the planned, and all the stuff that happens, the wonder that happens is really all about that tension.

**ARMIN** And Georgie, how do you go from Tough, space, Love? <affirmative> <laugh> to starting to design some explorations. What did the first round of design look like internally? And then what you presented to New York City Tourism + Conventions. I'm guessing there was more insight than what will you eventually show, whether it was one idea, multiple ideas, et cetera.

**GEORGIE** With any project like this, we usually have like a war room of sketching and a lot of different designers involved. We really filled a room with all kinds of things, and a lot of them were not things that were gonna work, but we like to test all the boundaries. How far could it be? How rough, or tough can it feel? We avoided the heart though. We did have some sketches early on and we said, no, we're not going there. Looking at all kinds of different things. In a way, we were trying to capture the frenetic energy of the city, like how do you even capture something that's so fleeting, and changing, and in motion? A lot of the sketches were just very early on. And we brought Elan and his team in, in that moment. We didn't edit, we just kept everything up.

We had chosen ones that we thought were more successful. I think maybe like four or five. We usually have five that we think are working, and then behind us everything else we did that you can look at, because sometimes there just could be a little kernel of an idea, or a certain way something is drawn, or a font, or whatever it might be that the client can respond to that you haven't chosen. We brought you guys on pretty early and that was like a smaller team, just a creative

team on your side, but really like a workshop where we just talked through all the ideas, looked at things, put post-its on things, you know, kind of a messy workshopy thing.

**ELAN** Right.

**BECCA** I wanna say while we're at this moment, I think one of the really big reasons this project was successful was the fact that we had this really tight team that could be in our fold and were really our allies and <affirmative> then the kind of much broader stakeholders we had to sell the work into. And I think the fact that Elan, you really acted as a champion of our work and really felt fully in it, but then went behind it, and did a great job of selling it to everyone in the organization. And I think that was really crucial.

**GEORGIE** Yeah.

**ELAN** Yeah. Thank you.

**GEORGIE** Because it was a really big group. You had to, get buy-in from too.

**ARMIN** I can imagine.

**ELAN** Yeah, we had a lot, we had, you know, our internal team and we also have a board of directors, we also have members, we also had buy-in from the CEO and from Nancy, our CMO. And I think that was the key, why the client/agency relationship, if you can, as much as you can melt the barriers down, that's gonna be the secret to getting stuff through.

**ARMIN** Elan, when you stepped into that workshop slash war room, what stood out to you and your team?

**ELAN** I mean, generally of course it's like, wow, this is... there's a tremendous range in what was here and that's the most important thing. The first session it was like, I don't know what I'm gonna get. I don't know if they're comfortable with how I've asked to work, but to Georgie's point walls filled with everything, which is how I like to work too. Like if I'm doing a project that bring my CEO in, I bring him into the creative

room. I don't do a presentation — again for the reasons that Georgie brought up. He might see something that I've overlooked or that my team has overlooked, and that's cool. First and foremost, it was the range. You know, we saw a lot of ways in, there were some that were pieces that were just gorgeous, that were unique. But we would start talking and we'd say, that feels really more like a part of New York or that feels like a fashion magazine. If we were to design NYC the fashion magazine.

It's hard to say, did something stand out? Did it not stand out? But it was just that we had enough of the work, enough of the pieces, enough of the Lego set to start making more. And the beauty of that process is that you can hybrid things. You can take a little piece of one quote unquote direction and move it over here and see what happens. The other reason why I really don't like doing that kind of rule of three, like we were coming to you with three directions, which one do you like? That cuts off dialogue, that cuts off the ability to say, well I like the way that you just drew that line in this one thing, move it here. Or what's that phrase you used over here? What I loved about it was that yes, it was exactly how you're supposed to start a deeply iterative process. Everything's on the table and really what's needed is guidance and facilitation. 2x4 is a tremendous partner. Both of us were able to facilitate as we brought more and more people into the room.

**GEORGIE** I think too, you guys were really honest and forthcoming. It wasn't like there were things you really didn't like and there were things that you did <affirmative>. And then like you said, there were things that we thought maybe there's potential in here, but this really isn't working yet. So it was a really iterative, honest conversation. And I think we ended up maybe with four territories that we started to explore and eventually I think down to three, and then eventually to the one that we ended up going ahead with.

**ARMIN** And the one that you ended up going ahead with, was that in the initial five that you selected that you thought had potential?

**GEORGIE** It was there, but it was a very rough drawing of it. It wasn't resolved in the way that... conceptually was there, but it wasn't really resolved at all graphically. The one we chose, of course, was super challenging to achieve. You know, we really love this idea of thinking about the way to represent the city in some way, not too literally, but in a way that you could read into it if you started to think about it. And this idea of the city grid, or the kind of relationship between a kind of rational grid and then these moments, you know, the way that Broadway cuts through New York or something like that. And it creates these triangles, or squares, or gathering spaces, was sort of in the back of our minds. And then how to bring that to life graphically became really a formal exercise at a certain point, and a lot of it was also driven by motion.

We worked a lot looking at that idea of the grid coming to life through motion, because I think that's such an important part of brand now, especially with bringing it to life on digital platforms. So that seemed really relevant to do. So we did a lot of exercises thinking about those cross pieces, the way that they cut through the letter forms. At one point they were making things feel like stencils and we really didn't want that. So we did a lot of iterations of that one mark trying to get it right. And ultimately we had one of our team members who's really strong typographer, just literally redrawing the letter forms over and over and it became a balancing act between <affirmative> things like keeping the "O" a perfect circle, but the "C" isn't, you know? All these different kind of things. And really became like a formal exercise at some point where everyone really, there were a lot of opinions, a lot of iterations <laugh>.

**ELAN** The fine tuning was, I enjoyed that the most. I enjoy that part of any process. Even like in editing films, it's like, no, it's gotta be a microsecond a little bit that way, and working with people who are equally invested in the craft side of the process was so cool.

**BECCA** Shout out to Ben <laugh>!



**GEORGIE** Yeah.

**BECCA** The typographer <laugh>. He spent so many hours with it.

**GEORGIE** He really did. <laugh>.

**ARMIN** Well I'll give a shout out to Ben too because I thought it was an amazing solution to a very complicated problem that you set yourselves up for. Like it's your own fault that you had to figure out how to solve this.

**BECCA** Totally.

**ARMIN** But it really is an amazing piece of typography and how all the letters come together in a cohesive way, yet they're all different. Like in the comments on Brand New, I don't think people were as impressed with it as I was in my head. And to me it really is one of the best word marks that we've seen this year, even if it's still early in the year.

**ELAN** Oh, thank you.

**ARMIN** I don't think it's really, really great in terms of how it solved so many literal twists and turns in a way that was unique and felt like it captured the energy of the city without being literal. Although it is literal in that it represents the grid. Shout out to Ben <affirmative>. Shout out to that kernel of an idea that started in that war room.

I usually don't have a problem saying when I don't like something online behind the comfort of my keyboard and after saying how much I love the logo <affirmative>, it's very difficult for me to say this... and I mean it with no disrespect. But then the identity, the grid, the colors, everything for me wasn't as great as the logo. So without any assumptions on my part, without trying to convince me for any reason, what was the development of those additional identity elements like once you got the logo solved?

**ELAN** I'd like to flip it back on you cuz I think we need more information in order to answer that. What is it about the rest of the system,

specifically? Like where are the problems and snags that you have with the system? and what are the specific questions that you have?

**ARMIN** Well thank you for coming on the episode. It was great. <laugh>

No, what I would say and what I said on the review was... so you had a really great interpretation over the grid in the logo that was very non-literal, but then it became very literal <affirmative> in the deploying the grid graphic. So that felt like it was too obvious of a choice, after you had gone through this great interpretation. Then the colors — I thought they were very cleverly named, it really captured a lot of the quirks of living in New York day to day — but at the same time it just felt like they were a little bit random as opposed to when you see the logo in application in the black and white. It feels very New Yorky. Whereas the colors, it may just be me thinking like New York is either black and white or black, white, and yellow because of the taxis that they're sort of unavoidable.

**ELAN** Sure.

**ARMIN** And then there was the illustrations that didn't quite seem right and maybe it just was one illustration, but yeah, certain things that felt like, uh, it's almost there.

**ELAN** Yeah.

**GEORGIE** For one thing, I think this is a brand that's launching, and it's coming together, and I think we won't fully see it at its fruition until it really starts getting out there. We wanted to create something that felt really attached to the city in some way, but I think that part of it was also to create a super flexible system that had legs that could be used in all these different ways, and that we could pass off internally to Elan's team and that they could use in all these different ways. And there's so many ways that constituents and audiences that they're communicating to, it has to be able to work at lots of different scales with different situations. One of the major challenges were

creating some of the digital online ads that were like x-pixel by x-pixel high for example. As with any brand system, it has to have all of those flexibilities.

We started with that idea exactly of looking at New York and seeing, for example, with the color palette. The baseline color palette is black and white. And that was inspired by just walking around the city when you see those big crosswalks, you know, with the big white stripes on the street. And our initial thought was, wouldn't it be cool to be black and white? And then that florescent orange that you see in construction barricades and in cones on the street, but it really isn't a company that can be that simplistic. It has to be able to have a pallet for Restaurant Week, a pallet maybe seasonally, maybe by borough. Like there's all these different ways that it needs to be expressed.

So we took the color palette basically from looking at the city. So we had the color of brick red, we had that green that you see on all the barricades and the subways. We had a kind of sand color for Coney Island, we had the Statue of Liberty mint green, we started to pull all of those kinds of colors and we had a pretty broad range. And we started to narrow down and create a more cohesive palette, which could be played up or played down. And then we added a neutral palette to go with that. Maybe as a whole might feel too eclectic, but I think when it will be used, it's going to be very selective and used in a certain way. So I think that's something that we have to see come to life.

**BECCA** We also wanted to maybe not do the obvious thing of using the subway line colors because that is such a palette for New York City. And that felt too obvious, maybe too not unique enough for this new brand that's launching. So we wanted to still be very saturated and primary in that ilk, because that feels like the identity of New York, but have it be a bit more nuanced as well, and a bit more sophisticated when it needs to be sophisticated in all these different moods.

**GEORGIE** I think too with the grid, it can be flexed. I think when it's most successful is, I don't know if you've seen any of the posters on the street, but when we use it to either break up a photograph or use multiple photographs at one time. Creates a pre-made grid, that's really easy to fill. And I think part of it is that creating a system that will be consistent across everything, regardless of who's working on it, if it's you guys internally, or someone that you hire to do something. That toolkit of parts is really important when it can be such a broad group of people working across multiple kinds of expressions of it.

**ELAN** We let the world into the very beginning as Becca and Georgie said, we didn't release to the world a full quote-un-quote brand book now because we have an internal team, we don't require a typical brand book that would naturally go to the press. The illustrations for example, there's a whole world of illustration that we're developing right now with characters, and building scapes, and backgrounds, and things like that that we need for things like trade shows or for advertising certain programs. As we start to address what does the next Restaurant Week look like? And as we move forward, we need these more human, more gestural things, this pallet to build out because that's also the city. The city isn't just buildings, the city isn't just a grid, but we need to do them in a way that can come together and not be specific to any one thing in the past.

The first campaign that I did when I got to NYC was based all on icons, and line art, things like that. We ended up developing hundreds of icons from bicycle, to this to that. It allows us to express a lot more. And then in terms of the colors, I think the 2x4 captured something that I'd always wanted to do. Again, when I first got into this company about six years ago, which was to do some kind of color study where... what happens if you stand on any street corner in any given borough, and you open and you close your eyes, and what is the color impression? Because is it a very colorful city. Yes, the understanding at first is this is black and white, it's concrete, it's grey, but it is, it's yellow, it's red, it's that blue, it's that green, it's the sand color, it's all

of that, and more, and more, and more. As with the illustrations, more so with the colors, we have to be able to build that out. You can't have a palette that's just black and white. We do need a much broader and much more diverse way of communicating. But that doesn't start to fracture up the brand. And each of those colors just come from the landscape. And we do intend for those colors to grow. The question for us now is, okay, now how do we use that? And how do we deploy that? And my team right now, now is the time when we're starting to figure that out, starting to build it out.

**GEORGIE** When I think of it, the key components are that strong grid, the black and whiteness, they're really bold typography. Those are the bones, and then everything else is how we flex. Ideally we'll have really strong photography too, like we didn't launch with a campaign or something like that that we had photographed. But that's something that will be developed over time for different aspects of the way it's launched. Those components are what would make it feel really strong and really New York. And then everything else is how we flex depending on the audience.

**ARMIN** Becca, going back to the strategy and the Tough/Love tension. How does the end result match what you all started with? Everything is an extension of that, but looking back, do you feel like the identity, and the logo all tied back to how the project started?

**BECCA** Yeah, I think it does. You know, there's that balance of where on the spectrum of Tough and Love are we landing and we certainly, I think maybe got a little bit closer to what's happening on the street, the kind of realness, the gruffness. We had some things that were a little bit more romantic. I'm actually kind of glad we've ended up a little bit more on the Tough side cuz I think it feels more accessible. I think much more broad, less stuffy in the way that sometimes people can have the prejudice about New York City to be. I see a lot of those elements in the black and whiteness, the really bold typography. But I think especially the photography style and also the illustrations, which

I do quite like, which I know will only be used in certain environments. It does have a really friendly, welcoming aspect to it. So I feel like it hits the tension pretty well.

**ARMIN** Now in trying to sum up the conversation, this is a fairly — not easy — but broad question. For each of you, what was the most exciting aspect of working on this project?

**ELAN** Oh man, there are moments, so many moments... and throughout the project what I didn't do was say, "holy cow, I'm branding the city of New York!" With the caveats of everything that we talked about, right? I can say no, I'm from NYC Tourism, blah, blah blah, but there's like the 12-year-old design nerd inside of me. He's like, "oh my god! oh my god! this is what we're working on. Holy cow." I think it's the moments when I let myself see that, seeing the proto identity for the first time and being like, "oh, okay, we got something". Or standing in front of the board of directors and taking 'em through the strategy, seeing them respond. So maybe what it was is those moments when I felt that way, or the times when we would get the positive feedback that we were going in the right direction. You know, I was gifted with that all the way through. It's those moments.

**BECCA** For me it was getting this closer look at how New York City operates and realizing how much the different businesses all work together through this organization, which is the conduit of it. That was just really endearing, and heartening, and sweet. I thought <laugh> that you get the sense of we're all in it together, but literally organizationally, that's actually played out in New York and that was cool to see.

**ARMIN** It's nice to know that there's a method behind the mayhem of New York that someone actually manages to keep it together.

**ELAN** Yeah.

**BECCA** <laugh>. Yeah. But I think it's also in the identity, like you gotta show a little mayhem, but also some method, you know? It can't be too polished cuz that's not New York.

**GEORGIE** <laugh> For us too, at 2x4, a lot of our work is outside of the city, I would say most of our work. And so to have a project that was really here in New York, that you were gonna be able to see on the street when you walked down, especially after Covid, it was so fulfilling to do something that felt so at the heart of where we're from and what we're doing. And I think we had this really funny moment maybe two weeks ago where someone spotted this video of Rihanna walking in front of one of the posters, did you see that?

**ELAN** That was dope. That was amazing.

**GEORGIE** And everybody went berserk and the team we're like, "get that up on Instagram!" And then we're like creating these posts where it was super exciting to see something that you made on the street in New York, so local, and just feeling so relevant in that moment. From a brand studio point of view that felt really great. From a process point of view, we really melded with this team and I think it was a really great collaboration. You know, we collaborate with all our clients, and it can be more or less successful depending on all kinds of things. But in this case... part of it I think is because Elan is also a creative director and a designer. We spoke the same language and it was really great to be able to communicate so clearly, and push an idea forward that maybe wasn't the easiest idea. I appreciate that collaborative effort we did, and I think in the end, we're all still friends.

**ELAN** This is true! <laugh>

**GEORGIE** And that's a great thing.

**ELAN** Yeah.

**ARMIN** It's always great to end up on the other side of a project like this with so many complexities, not so much in the design, but in the process behind the scenes, that you're able to come together in a podcast like this and reminisce with a smile on your faces <affirmative>. So I wanna thank you for sharing this story, bringing clarity to me and our audience about who actually is New York City Tourism + Convention.

**ELAN** We're still getting used to it <laugh>.

**ARMIN** Yeah, it's a mouthful when you're trying to make an exciting statement and trying to conclude the podcast. <laugh> But no, thank you for bringing clarity to me, and for bringing clarity to the entity, and I hope to see how everything develops, and how New York City promotes itself to the world and to the rest of the city. Georgie, Becca Elan, thank you so much for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

**ELAN** Thank you, Armin.

**GEORGIE** Thank you so much.

**ELAN** Thanks for being such a gracious host.

**BECCA** Thank you for having us.

**BRYONY** New York City Tourism and Conventions may have said goodbye to Wolff Olin's "chunky" logo — which isn't going away as a logo of the city — but it now welcomes an undeniably New York-y logo to call its own. With the acknowledgment that this project was not about designing an identity to brand the City of New York, 2x4 and Elan and his team certainly succeeded at creating something that reflected the spirit of the city in the best of ways. As has been the case more often than not recently, a big part of this success was due to the working relationship between 2x4 and New York City Tourism and Conventions where, as Elan said, the barriers between agency and client melted and where embracing Tough, Love paid off.

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