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DEEZER

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Joe Ling, Koto

AND

Maria Garrido, Deezer

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

ARMIN VIT

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode number 77 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Deezer, one of the world's largest independent music experiences platforms. The company provides access to a full-range catalog of high quality music, lossless HiFi audio and industry-defining features on a scalable platform available in more than 180 countries. Founded in 2007 in Paris, Deezer is now a global company with over 600 people based in France, Germany, UK, Brazil and the US and in 2022 went public, listing on the leading European trading exchange Euronext in Paris. As of December of 2023 it had 9.4 million subscribers

The project, designed by the London, UK office of Koto was posted on Brand New on November 9, 2023. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast077 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast077, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Joe Ling, Creative Director at Koto; and Maria Garrido, Chief Marketing Officer at Deezer.

In this conversation we hear about the challenging and quick-paced process of Deezer evolving from a digital streaming platform to an experiences services platform and how it all started with a strong foundation of the team at Deezer redefining their mission, vision, and how they wanted to be perceived. We also learn that the project involved a creative pitch from Koto and four other agencies, which is not an ideal working scenario, especially as the conversation around avoiding pitches has come front and center for our industry, so you can use this particular episode to further develop your own set of pros and cons of pitching. In this case, the fast-paced schedule of it allowed Koto to not second-guess themselves and try a lot of different things quickly while sticking to their strategic approach, which is what ultimately landed them the job more so than their design solution. From Maria we get a glimpse into their factual and objective approach to the rebranding, relying on testing and data to inform their decisions, empower its internal team, and pave the way for a new era of Deezer to help its audience, quote, Live the Music.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Joe and Maria.

BRYONY While our access to music has changed dramatically over the last couple of decades, one thing is certain, no matter the language or the time zone, music is one experience that we can all relate to. Today we're chatting with Deezer, based out of Paris, France, who streams to nearly 10 million subscribers, about their recent rebrand. Maria and Joe, welcome to The Follow-up.

MARIA Thank you.

JOE Thank you for having us.

BRYONY Maria, what led you and those around you to consider a rebrand right now or redesign in this particular moment in time? And where did this conversation start within Deezer?

MARIA I came on board in November of 2022 and we were looking at our business in France, which is our biggest market. There was an opportunity to really consolidate this market even further and strengthen our market share. We are the second player in this market, but strangely enough, this market has a low penetration for digital streaming platforms. So our objective was, together with our music label partners and with the French government, to look at expanding the penetration of music. So we took a look at where we stood in the market today and said, “We’ve held onto the same brand identity for a while. It’s a chance for us to refresh and look at whether or not we should be repositioning ourselves.” And to do this, this is a lot of heavy lifting internally, in the marketing department. We looked at, “Okay, what is our vision as a company?”

And at that point, our product team had already said, “For the next five years, we want to transition out of becoming a digital streaming platform and becoming an experiences services platform,” which is, we are providing music experiences both inside of the product and outside of the product to our users around the world. So this was the anchor and the launching pad for us to look at repositioning the product and the brand, around an experience that services platform. The second thing we had to look at was who is our target audience? Now a lot of digital streaming platforms try to reach young people and although that is important, young people tend to have a tendency to not want to pay for content. So we couldn’t only focus on Gen Z, we had to look at a wider audience as well. And as I said, the penetration opportunities in our biggest market were quite big across multiple generations.

So we looked at what’s happening in the world, just sociologically of Gen Z and other generations, what are some of the traits that we see happening around the world? How are people feeling? So, culturally, in each of the markets we are were important. And then the last thing we had to bring into that puzzle to establish our new positioning,

was what is our vision as a company and what do we stand for? We are a company that's been very bold, that's been very fresh, trying to constantly renew our product features and our brand in the past. So we wanted to make sure that we respected that history and that legacy as we reposition the brand. So we took those three things, we pulled them all together and we came up with a new positioning for the brand that was really around driving what we call, Deezer helps people be and belong.

The be is about expression and giving people a space to express themselves through their musical taste. And for this, we have three targets. Our basic customer who uses our product, we have our strategic partners, so all of the telecom companies and business partners that we have around the world that sell our product, whether it's with the Deezer name or white labeled. And then we also have the artists because the artists need to express themselves to their audience through our product as well. So that was the expression in the be pillar. And then the second pillar was the belong pillar, which really is about connection. Again, connection is how we create those connections between artists and their fans, between fans and their favorite artists, between fans and their friends or other fans of the artists that they love. And for our business partners, it's about giving them an opportunity to connect with their fans, their customers in different moments of their lives.

So, that's what we created. We also focused on a personality for our brand saying, "If we were a person who would we be respecting our past and respecting our vision of being an experiences platform? We would be bold, we would be fresh, and we would be quirky." And we also established a tone of voice that we would use moving forward for the brand.

BRYONY Well, it sounds like you really thought this out through with your team for quite a while before engaging Koto.

MARIA Indeed.

BRYONY Joe, how did Koto get involved with this project? What was that process like?

JOE Koto were approached in, I think it was March of last year, 2023, by Deezer. We were invited to have a bit of a pre-pitched chemistry session to present credentials and show some projects to Deezer, which gave us examples of work which proved we had the relevant experience to be able to work with a DSP like Deezer, and in that kind of world of music generally. We were then invited to participate in a one-week creative pitch process. And I think it's worth saying that, to be completely transparent with you, Koto don't pitch very often, but sometimes opportunities arise for us that we simply can't miss out on and this was definitely one of them. Lucky enough, we won the pitch and then we got creative from there in working with the brilliant Deezer team.

BRYONY And Maria, what caught your attention?

MARIA It was super important for me that we pitch at a global level. We have a very French team, but I said, "Don't focus only on France. Geographically," said, "we have to look at agencies in London." I've been in marketing for 25 years and there's something really magical about design in London. I've seen it in every industry I've worked in. So I said, "Please don't discard the possibility of looking at agencies in London." We did look at five key agencies, Koto was one of them, that my team pre-filtered and then they were all given the brief of exactly what I just said to you, the connection and expression, we're about to be and belong, we're moving towards an experiences services platform. And they all came back with some initial ideas. I think from the very first initial idea we got from Koto, we knew they got it. We knew they got it from the beginning.

BRYONY And now just to have a deeper understanding of the workings of the project itself, if you can tell me a little bit about what your teams

looked like, who was involved and the overall timeline of the project, before we jump into all of the details.

JOE Handing, the client relationship from our side was Kim Bourne-Hallett. She's the client director and was incredibly important in making sure the whole project ran as smoothly as possible. And we had a strategy director, Cassidy Moriarty, who was in charge of making sure whatever visual executions we created, it stayed and functioned as closely and as best as possible for that core idea of Live the Music and those principles of be and belong. And then in terms of creative, we had our design director, Luke Dodridge, our motion designer, Santiago. His role incredibly important to the project because of that sentiment of Live the Music. Everything felt like he had to move and come to life as much as possible. And then we also had a whole set of designers that worked across the project 'cause it was quite the big one, so we liked to chop and change and make sure we were always bringing fresh ideas in. So we had a team of about six or seven designers working on that in London for the length of the whole project.

BRYONY And how about you, Maria, in terms of who was involved and then the decision-making as well?

MARIA This is a company-wide project for us. The core team that worked with Koto on this was marketing, but within our marketing function it was my design agency, our internal design team. So Arnaud Rouleau, and Sarah Kendous handles the project management team. All of their teams were heavily involved. Our motion designers as well, our copy team, everyone was involved on that side and then the brand marketing team because they had to go out and test everything to make sure it would fit in with our existing user, that it attracted new users, that it fit our new positioning and that we weren't alienating people too much in such a big change. They were the key teams, I think, that Koto had the most relationship with. But in our case, this became a company-wide project because the product has to change

too. We can't just change all of the external advertising and all of our marketing materials.

The UX itself had to be adapted to the new identity of the brand. Both our chief product officer as well as his teams under the UX VP and under the product VP were involved. Even our office management team was involved because we had to change the logos on the building and talk about how we're going to present, these are moving forward, the templates on all of our presentations. I don't think we can underestimate the volume of work it takes to rebrand, beyond the brand, an entire company to the level that we have in such little time with Koto's help.

BRYONY And what was the timeframe?

MARIA We started in March and we launched in November. I still can't get over how miraculously that we pulled this off, Joe, but it has been quite intense and we had to build different pipelines and different priorities because we have a big Slack group going at Deezer called Kill the Old Logo, where people are still spotting things in some random partner or some random shop down the street with the old logo. So there's still quite a lot of work ahead of us, but all of the biggest heavy lifting has been already done.

BRYONY Joe, I think that's something that you need to suggest for future clients. Have that Slack channel of Kill the Logo. I had not heard that before. I like it. Joe, walk us through that week-long pitch, how your team approached it and especially what was the outcome of that that led to the project launch and into the first round of creative that you presented formally as the agency that had been hired.

JOE We very much see pitching as an opportunity to prove our capabilities in a very short amount of time and try and deliver as much compelling for and visual thinking as we can, in an incredibly short amount of time. And I think what we wanted to prove to Deezer was our ability to collaborate with them actively. We made sure we had a mid-pitch

check-in so we could throw some ideas around straight away, kick some thoughts around and see what was landing and what was generating any level of excitement, which I think is really handy for us to start to test the success of some initial thoughts we have but also start to really build a bit of chemistry and get input from the Deezer team as well, to make sure that we feel comfortable working with each other. And I think in the initial halfway-through pitch meeting that we had, we presented five initial ideas which were just thought with some visual reference to see what was getting any kind of love from the Deezer team. And to be completely transparent with you, not much did.

It was really helpful for us though because it really enabled us to see the importance of systemized thinking, which is the key thing that particularly Arno from Deezer kept on reminding us, that as much as they want pithy thinking and big ideas that relate to that core story of Live the Music, making something that was fundamentally systemizable so that it could be rolled out by the Deezer team easily and efficiently, was incredibly important. After that initial meeting we said to ourselves, “Okay, let’s rethink and reset about how we’re going to approach this,” and we then went back to the drawing board for two or three days and came up with two set systems that really had clear visual ideas from a logo into a couple of brand examples.

We were very aware of the fact that we had a very short amount of time to be able to bring these ideas to life but push them as far as we could in that time. We had one idea, which is focusing on this idea of the love of music and this idea of passion, bringing together the idea of be and belong, making sure this core idea, feeling like you can express yourself through music and your love of music, and a second route that was much more focused on this idea of community. The first route, which is basically, I’ve got to be completely transparent, is so close to what we ended up with. Live the Music came slightly further down the line. We weren’t even aware of that story at that point and I think we do have to acknowledge luck in the equation

that we did come upon something that definitely started to perhaps become more relevant further down the line, once Live the Music had come to life.

But I think, Maria and the team were able to see the potential, we're now visual thinking at that early stage, which has really carried us through to the end of the project with the smallest amends I've ever seen with route chosen in a pitch, which I think is amazing. It really demonstrates the value of that sometimes the first idea can be the best idea. That was the kind of pitch process and I think that being forced to work quickly in a week sometimes makes you make decisions quickly and makes you move very efficiently and I think that really benefited us in the creative process. We didn't have a ton of time to go wide. We focused quickly, got into that systemization piece, which really benefited us in the long-run, of course won us the job. So yeah, we were super happy with how that pitch process went.

BRYONY Do you find that that quick pace also helps with the second doubting of things? You don't have time to doubt.

JOE Absolutely. It really does take a whole peace of mind out of your brain because you just don't have that ability to stop and consider. I personally find it really exciting. It really does force you to work and think differently, so I think it's always an interesting opportunity when you get to pitch. Also, there's a lot of guardrails gone when you pitch. You always feel like you have a little bit more creative freedom than usual because it is a bit of a test of our capabilities, so I think that's really exciting as well.

BRYONY And, Maria, what was that initial reaction from your team to those ideas being presented and what kind of feedback did you give them to really get them going in the implementation of it?

MARIA For us, the pitching process, and I'm going to echo a little bit what Joe said but I'm going to add an extra credit to his team on this one, is really more about making sure that the agency understands the brief.

In that first phase, I'm less worried about do we like or do we not like the visual representation that they brought as their first proposal. I'm more interested in their process and their strategic thinking, as to how they got to that visual representation because that shows us we're working with somebody that has the right strong fundamentals that will get us to the right design or the right visual representation afterwards. For us, it was pretty obvious in that initial process that Koto understood where we were going with connection and expression, where our new tagline was Live the Music, which you're right, Joe, wasn't totally landed yet when we started on this project.

They were able to visually express their strategic thinking in such a simple way that even if you weren't somebody working on our design team, because our job was to convince the rest of the building, I can tell you it's sometimes more difficult to convince your employees than it is to convince your customers that we need to do a refresh of the brand. That work has been long and it's been a lot of education in the building as to why we're doing it and here's the elements and it reflects our new positioning. But Koto had the right strategic thinking, even with our first proposals, that made us comfortable and made us trust that they were going to work with us collaboratively to get to the right visual representation in the end.

BRYONY That's wonderful to hear. Now Joe, let's start to get a little bit more in-depth of the various parts of the brand. What was the first element created that started to inform what was coming after?

JOE I think the logo was the key starting point for when we really started to realize how clearly it could be a visual manifestation for the idea of Live the Music. When we started to really play with what a heart symbol could be and what it could do and what it could symbolize, we really saw the value in that as a core idea to influence every other part of the system and I think the idea of a heart representing, as we said earlier, that sense of belonging, that love for music, that ability to be yourself and express yourself, but also the way it can move and

come to life and literally augment and change a beat to become that idea of reacting to music or the feeling you get when you are listening to music, when your heart rate increases, when you are excited at a gig or when your heart rate can slow down when you you're feeling relaxed, the fact it can pulse and actually move rhythmically to music as well, we had this amazing period of exploration where we were finding out the power of would it do live what we were experimenting in motion.

And I think the more we realized the power of that, we realized how much we could then influence the rest of the system through that logo. Arno, Maria and the wider Deezer team made it very clear to us at the start about how important that level of systemization was, but also the visual thread that run through everything, and as soon as we had that heart, we had that story, that strong visual shape, which we can then manipulate in different ways to build the system and that's how what we call the beats, which the oblongs that make up the logo become so apparent in every other part of the brand. The most important part of the brand is probably the typography brings our voice as Deezer to life.

When you look at that typeface that is designed with those oblong beat forms to be the very structure of the typeface, typography is an incredible tool that also get slightly forgotten in the branding process as a tool for us to carry a visual sentiment from a logo into typography because that is going to be our workhorse. That's going to appear everywhere that Deezer is and being able to get those forms into the typeface, enables us to use that typeface as a core brand asset in the same way we use that logo, because that visual thread between the logo and the typeface is there.

Beyond that, things like the brand patterns which start to move and augment to reflect music and start to hold imagery and start to affect how we show you why. We are a digital streaming platform. When

we show you why of a music player being able to use those beats to actually attach onto the UI, to show the type of music that is on the player is an amazing asset for Deezer to be able to make visual executions that display that Deezer is fundamentally a digital product but also relates back to that core branded moment as well.

BRYONY I'm going to interrupt you because there's questions that I'm coming up with of all of these different elements and I think it's worth-

MARIA Do we need to show you a visual? Maybe we need to show you that one pager that shows the whole ecosystem.

JOE Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BRYONY Those are always good, a specialty that we have now labeled the Bento Box that Koto has put forth.

JOE Yes.

MARIA Yes, yes, yes.

BRYONY Before we go into all of it, I think it's important to process a couple of the elements. With the monogram, you stepped away from the equalizer, but at the same time you integrated the equalizer in a very different way. Was that a hard sell internally?

MARIA I think it was a harder sell internally than it was with our customers, Bryony. I wasn't going to do this massive rebranding without us testing and I mean quantitatively testing. It's great to bring a bunch of people into a focus group, but it's not statistically significant enough for us to make this big of a change in the company. So we did go out and test at the beginning. We told Koto, "Give us an evolution and a revolution of the equalizer," just so that we had a more conservative approach and then something that was really completely out of the box, which is where we ended up. When we went out and tested, for me, part of the reason of that testing was also to get our employees on board so that they understood that we had to be as user-centric as possible. You have a lot of people who've been here from the beginning of the

company and are personally attached to the logo, so it was key for us to show them the relevance if they bought into our positioning of, we are going to an experience and services platform, if they bought into, we are Live the Music, that's what we stand for.

We are giving people experiences and opportunities to connect and express, then we need to have a visual representation that says that to our 10 million customers around the world. So we did go out and test and funny, what was so interesting to us is among all the people that we tested... We broke the data down into different demographics and different genres of people and everything so that we could look at all. Even our competitive users we brought in. And what was really great to see was that even the users who know our product today and like our product today, preferred the new heart logo and its ecosystem and the people who didn't know us and were not Deezer users said, "Oh, I'm really curious about that one. I wonder what they're doing?" And that's great. What you're looking for is non DSP users to consider looking into Deezer because they see something visually that sparks their curiosity.

The alienation rates were really low. About 11% of our existing users that said, "No way, I don't want you to change it." That is something you always have to measure for because you don't want something too polarizing that makes people literally jump off your platform because they don't like the new purple heart. And that is actually completely reflected once we actually launched the logo, but we'll talk about that I'm sure later, in the data and the comments and the feedback we got back. But that data that we did when we ran all of those studies, helped me bring it internally and say to our internal employees, "Don't worry, I know it's a bold move, but it's a bold move in the right direction for where we're going as a company."

We've had some people who aren't happy about it, I will be honest. Some people who were very upset about it. Some people who were

so happy about it, they actually tattooed the new logo on their skin. We have a couple of those very diehard loyal fans of Deezer, but I think honestly the debate has been more internal because any kind of change, especially a bold change like this, is difficult for people to transition into.

BRYONY I always find that the stories are more interesting internally than externally when something like this happens, especially because you did have a brand of illusion in the middle that went from one equalizer to another, then this one was a bigger change. You mentioned the purple a few times and before I jump into the typography, I want to touch base on that. There's conversation about saying, well Deezer went purple to Spotify's green kind of thing and I want to see if that is truly the sentiment or if it comes from a different point

MARIA Before Joe gives you the answer. I'm going to say, this again is another proof point of the way that Koto approached the thinking around this project. That was one of the key clinchers for us to work with them. Go ahead, Joe.

JOE It was incredibly important when we assessed the competitor landscape that there was. Spotify had green, YouTube music have red. There is a lot of brands that do have incredibly dominant colors that have massive amounts of brand equity in them. There was a thought that was, "Okay, Deezer don't currently own a color." They are a gradient. The equalizer had a gradient that ran through it, which immediately takes them out of that space of being able to own a singular color and we really do see the value in owning singular colors to ensure that we do have brand equity in a single color. Their aim was to brand a touch point immediately over time when we get that brand equity in that color. The way we went about trying to find what Deezer's color would be, would be strategically assessing the landscape, finding the gaps in the color well. There were some colors kicked around like yellow, which felt like an empty space. There was purple as well, but we had to come up with an emotional reason why it felt appropriate for Deezer.

And I think the story that we really tried to get excited by, was this story that purple is a mix of blue and red. Blue is the color of life, of the sea of nature of energy and we really like this story that red could be passion for that story of the love of music. And those two things coming together just felt really right for purple. We also, I think in the initial presentation, we had a big picture of Prince singing Purple Rain, so it had been a sense moment. There's an inherent sense of musicality to it, which we were really excited by as well. Doubling down on purple, there's those two strategic and emotional reasons of why it works and we think it has incredible potential to be really very ownable for Deezer moving forward.

I'll be completely transparent with you, it took a very long time to get that exact shade of purple. There's a lot of experimentation and consideration for print and digital purposes, but the one we've ended up with, I think, we're super excited by and I definitely think delivers in all those needs for all those places it needs to show up for Deezer.

BRYONY I am sure that there was a lot of iterations of purple in order to find the exact shade. In terms of the typography that you developed, what was the thinking behind it because it's quirky and also very modular, goes to extended or it can be condensed, but those D centers and A centers give it a lot of personality. There's things that you think are straight but then when you look at it closely, they're not straight. So what was the thinking behind those decisions and who did you work with in order to develop it?

JOE Customs typography was the subject that came up very early in the process. Particularly Arno and Cassia from Deezer made it clear very early on that they saw the power in having a really ownable typeface. So it is always in the back of our mind from the very early starts and those conversations. As much as we're considering be and belong, we're also considering these key principles, personality traits of bold, quirky and fresh. And I think quirky, as you said, is very clear the way it comes out in the typeface. I think when we have these really strong

shapes that made up our logo, the beats, the oblongs, we want to make sure that those moments are felt throughout the brand, that visual thread from the logo to the typography and being able to use those shapes and create a client face that had the structure that felt like it related back to the logo through those oblongs, was incredibly important for us to build that systemization piece so that every single output we create, whether it be typography, whether we're using a logo, it still feels incredibly branded as Deezer.

And I think being able to use those beat forms as things like the counters and those moments which are beautiful, particularly in French when you get the accents and those ability to bring personality to even the most mundane piece of punctuation, it's such an amazing asset for Deezer and I think the more we played with it, the more ability we had to really see the potential for where else we could affect the typography to bring out that personality, that quirkiness and that boldness too. And I think all credit to Luke Krause at NAUM, the type foundry who helped us develop that typeface. He was an incredible creative partner on this, really pushed way beyond what we even could have imagined it being and really took the typeface to a lot of new places that were incredibly exciting. So we really believe in it as an amazing asset for Deezer to be able to utilize and really brand every touch point possible with that super bold typography.

BRYONY So you have the logo, the monogram, you've got the color and you've got the typeface. Those three elements are extremely strong for this brand. Then you took these elements and started to implement the system, the things that were going to be a lot more flexible to create all the communications, be it online, be it in person, be it in all of these things. How did you go about developing those assets and, Maria, what has it been like for your team to receive that toolkit and then start to develop it even further and put it to the test throughout all of the different materials?

MARIA We cannot underestimate the volume of assets that are done and executed here on a weekly basis. We have about 1,700 basic assets that get refreshed every other week. It's massive the amount of work. So I'm not at all surprised, Joe, that Arnaud was quite a stickler with you guys from the beginning on the importance of the system because we haven't had a system in the past. This is, for us, the best reboot of the brand, but also of our internal design studio because they now have a brand book, a toolkit to work with so that we can start to automate certain processes which we couldn't do before. Everything was being done manually. With the system that Koto has created for us, we can start to automate a lot of this factory work that we have from the design standpoint.

Our performance assets have to be refreshed every two weeks. We have new promos, new discounts, we have multiple brand partners that we work with around the world that need assets adapted to their particular communication need. The volume is massive and at the same time there's so much breadth and depth in the system that they've created that when we do have certain seasonal or peak moments in the year where we can get more creative, there's so much to work with that it's still part of the same family, but it becomes quirky and unique to that particular campaign that we're running.

JOE I think it's worth acknowledging that the ultimate test of any brand is when you get into the real weeds of the application. I think it's very easy as a branding agency for us to make work and then hand it over. But it was incredibly important for us to really work collaboratively with the creative team at Deezer to really push, pull and test every single part of the brand and where it would appear. The brand has to work on a piece out-of-home, it has to work as an icon in the app, it has to work as a playlist cover and a thousand other renditions of that playlist cover and they still have to feel branded. And it really was a super difficult challenge to make sure it could show up and succeed and still feel successful in those places.

And I think we wouldn't have got to the point we're at now with the brand if we hadn't have had that continuous collaboration with the Deezer team to ensure that they were keeping us on track to make sure that everything we made had a purpose and it was like this for a reason. And so when they handed it off to someone else on the design team, they knew how it should function and why it should work and what its reasoning is. So that was an incredibly important part of the process that we definitely can't underestimate.

MARIA The creation of the system allows us, this year, to do a much better tracking of consistency of our storytelling, which we didn't have before. This morning I was reviewing objectives with the teams and one of the things we were looking at is how we're going to measure the fact that we're being consistent across our out-of-home assets, our online assets, our playlist covers, our video content, ensuring that the brand looks like it's the same person talking to you all of the time.

BRYONY And, Joe, from a logistic standpoint, how do you hand over all of these assets in the toolkit?

JOE For a company like Deezer, we knew we had to move quite quickly, so there was an initial drip feeding of assets, because even from when we were maybe 65%, 75% of the way of the rebrand process, the team were like, "We need to print things for this, that," things that are coming far ahead that are happening as they launch" So we had to kick into action as early as possible. We always knew that things like the typeface and the logo were going to be the most important things to hand over as early as possible so the team at Deezer could start to work with them immediately. But then after that we started to build core brand guidelines, which is an incredibly important part of everything we do at Koto, where we build the brand book that acts as a set of guides for how the Deezer team can use the brand.

But we also really believe in also leaving guidelines open enough. There is flexibility. The average rebrand should last for a minimum

of 10 years. If you are just activating the same set of guides over and over and over and over again, you are going to find yourself in a place where things get repetitive. And I think what was really interesting about working with Deezer is that once they had those guidelines, we started to run workshops with the team to really start to test how they found the guidelines, how they were using the assets and where they could push and pull things. And I think immediately in those workshops it became clear that they, the team had started using the branding ways we hadn't even imagined initially. So that was a really exciting process, when you really start to apply the brand to things like vouchers and cards and these smaller touch points. They may not have been the biggest priority when we were considering the overarching rebrand, but suddenly being able to activate the brands in new ways that we hadn't considered in those touch points.

It was a really exciting process and I think being able to drip feed those bits initially enabled our Deezer team to tell us, "Okay, we're slightly worried about how this could be used, the way we can use the logo. Can we separate the symbol from the word more? Can we use the colors in this way?" Testing it, and then also building the guidelines at the same time enabled us to really sort out all our issues as early as possible, which I think was really valuable.

MARIA There's an emotional side to the employees now having such a beautiful toolkit to work with and it sparks further creativity in our teams. I can see the excitement and the spark in people's eyes when they get to work with this kind of solid, grounded and super creative material. So our goal was to revive the soul of the brand and I think we've revived the soul of a lot of our team members as well through this process.

BRYONY That's a nice happy accident there.

MARIA Yeah, yeah.

BRYONY Let's talk about launch. What was the strategy behind the launch and how did it all land?

MARIA One of the elements is the design. The launch was really about anchoring our new communication platform around Deezer Live the Music, which comes back to this strategic thinking of be and belong and connection and expression. So we had to tie it all together. There was at one point where we had to connect Joe with our creative ad agency to make sure that our ad campaign, that we could put the new logo in in time before it went online. The product was really important for us too. Very different from a manufacturing company. The UX had to be adapted. We couldn't go all guns blazing into the application with all of the new elements. We had to soften them a bit because you have to respect people's navigation of the product excel. So there was a lot of work to be done with the product team. We initially launched the product first before we did anything else, and that includes, like Joe said, not just the logo, but especially the vibration aspects, new playlist covers in the product that start to bring that identity alive.

That came on November 7th of last year, and we did a big global event around that. And then on November 14th in Brazil and November 19th in France, our two biggest markets, we launched our new ad campaigns both off and online, including our digital acquisition assets. They were working six months before quite a lot, and then the weeks after to try and get everything out by the end of the year was super important for us. Very, very intense. I think everybody went away on Christmas break, completely exhausted, including myself, completely exhausted at Deezer, but starting 2024 with a new look and a new fresh point of view. So we're very happy about that.

BRYONY And what kind of feedback are you receiving from your existing customers now, from your employees, aside from the ones that got tattoos, especially those that were harder to convince at the beginning about what the need was?

MARIA Well, the numbers so far look really good. I can't reveal any of the numbers.

BRYONY Absolutely.

MARIA We're seeing upticks on all of the key metrics that we look at in the first eight weeks now that we've been out. So that's a very, very good sign for us. It's drawing a lot of interest and curiosity around Deezer, which is really what we were looking for. Buzz more than anything else. We had some backlash. I think we had over a thousand comments on social media said, "What is this? I don't like it." Which we expected, honestly. It's quite small. It's not even 3% of the comments and engagement that we get. So we did expect some backlash. Very funnily, somebody launched a change.org petition to go back to the old Deezer logo, and I can confirm after eight weeks there's 196 signatures.

BRYONY All right, so that one's not going to go through.

MARIA As long as there's buzz, we don't mind. We knew that making this kind of a bold move was going to rustle some people's feathers. Any kind of buzz and talk about us is good talk, as far as we're concerned. The employees have caught on now. Everybody got their sweatshirt and their mug, so everybody's now happy. There's still a few detractors in the building, but I think those are people who were personally attached to the original logo and have to move more towards understanding the why of what we did, not so much the what, whether they like the heart or not. Initially I thought it was super important. A couple of people in RC level went, "Oh, I don't like it." And I said, "Wait. Wait till you see the whole ecosystem. It isn't just a heart logo. It's about how we bring it alive across everything that we do." And once that came on board, then everybody was on board. That was great.

BRYONY There's a big leap between just seeing one thing and then experiencing it through all of its different assets and bits and pieces.

MARIA Correct.

BRYONY Joe, this whole project was a little bit different for you and your team, starting with a pitch that you normally don't and then the timeframe, is there anything that you learned or experienced in this process that

you want to implement for future clients and projects?

JOE I would say the value of moving quickly has really, really been a core contributor to the success of this work, but also moving quickly with collaboration, ensuring that when we were making those decisions on the fly, we were involving the Deezer team as much as possible to make sure that they were as comfortable as we were with those creative decisions. I think having that hard deadline running towards November throughout the whole of last year, kept everything on track. Being able to work quickly but spend a lot of time together in person building chemistry and ensuring that we are working as collaboratively as possible to ensure that we're all working towards that same goal successfully, was incredibly important. So I would definitely say I would carry that forward into another project.

BRYONY And now I have a question for both of you. What of this entire project was the most satisfying aspect?

MARIA For me personally, when I saw that Bento Box, I'm all in. I understood that there was a dynamic aspect to what we were trying to bring across, and I kept telling everybody in the building, it's not just a logo change that we're making, the logo is a cue to our customers and our potential customers that there's something new and different about Deezer and you guys should pay attention. When I saw the Bento Box, I said, "We've hit it." I'm so excited. And I think the team this year is really thrilled to be pushing forward that consistent storytelling in all of the visual cues and the graphic system that Koto helped us build. So we're very excited about that. That's the most satisfying part for me.

JOE Probably when we were at the launch night in Paris and we had to explain the story of Live the Music, which then introduced the brand, which obviously started with the logo, and seeing how that logo immediately brought to life, that core story by beating and dancing and moving and doing all of those things we spoke about through this whole process, it felt like a real beautiful moment of that core story being brought to life in such a visually rich way. It was like, "Yeah,

we've done it." That feels so appropriate. It brings to life that core story, but also delivers on those core brand principles of being quirky, fresh and really delivering on that sense of boldness at the same time. And for me, that was the real moment where it's like, "Yeah, this is right. We've cracked it. I'm incredibly proud of this piece of work."

BRYONY Final question, what part of the outcome, and especially of what you know lies ahead, is the most exciting for each of you?

MARIA For me, it's about the consistency of the storytelling for my team. They have such a rich toolkit to work with now that will allow them to tell stories through the Deezer brand that emotionally connect with our users in a deeper way. It's our challenge and also our most exciting adventure of 2024.

JOE I think I said this already, but I think for us, it genuinely is seeing how the brand starts to manifest. Now we've handed it over to the Deezer team, but I think that's also how the users influence and react to the brand as well, is incredibly exciting for us. And I think we are constantly looking at social media and seeing how people are interacting with the brand, particularly when there's physical manifestations at events and gigs where people are taking photos of someone waiting for the stage and the Deezer logo is up there being displayed on the screen. And I think all of these moments, when we start to see the brand become more and more present, more and more vivid in how it's brought to life, is always the most exciting part for us. Watching what happens next is the most exciting part.

MARIA We sponsor one of the biggest indoor stadium in Europe, actually. We do a karaoke event at the very beginning before the concerts and at the P!nk concert here in Paris, there were 40,000 people in the stadium. I was there, and our logo popped up on the biggest digital display screens in the whole continent of Europe, and it was bobbing back and forth, and then they started putting the tune up so that people could sing along and the logo was on the bottom on the side of the screen and I said, "That's it. This is Nirvana. We've hit it. We've hit it."

JOE Awesome. That is perfect. That's exactly what we wanted. I love it.

BRYONY So not just living the music but living the brand.

MARIA Yes, very much so.

BRYONY Well, I think you have done a wonderful job of starting a project with a very clear idea of what it is that you needed to achieve, not necessarily knowing how visually it was going to pan out or anything like that, but that foundation really was integral to the success of the project because you cannot move that quickly and implement that many pieces. 1700 assets per week is insane, and in such a short period of time for the Koto design team to figure it all out if you don't have that very solid, solid foundation. In this particular instance, the work that you did before was so important to the success of the project. I know it's hard. Sometimes you just need to have somebody else look into your company and figure out what that strategy and what those things that are needed are. But kudos to you for really setting up a great, great foundation.

MARIA Thank you. I used to work in agency world, not in graphic design, but in agency world. And we had a saying, "Garbage in, garbage out." If the client doesn't brief you properly, you can't expect the agency to deliver really, really high level work. So it was really important that we do that foundation work, both for the rebranding with Koto as well as for our communication platform with our creative agency.

BRYONY Absolutely. Well, it's been a pleasure hearing all of the details and I can't thank you enough for being on the follow-up today.

MARIA Thank you very much.

JOE Thanks for having us.

ARMIN There were quite a few things that stood out from this conversation, starting with the jaw-dropping number of assets — 1,700 — that Deezer has to update every two weeks, supporting Maria's comment about how easy it is to underestimate the volume of work it takes to

rebrand a company beyond the actual rebrand. She also revealed that the internal team has a Slack channel called “Kill the old logo” for keeping track of places where the old logo is still appearing and must be updated. With Deezer’s focus on data it was also interesting to hear how what sounds like a lot of negative comments — 1,000 — about the new logo was actually a mere 3% of the conversation so it’s a nice reminder for designers out there that negative comments can feel like a majority because of how hard they hit, but it’s, literally, all about keeping things in perspective. Finally, Maria shared a great sentiment about how this exercise was meant to revive the soul of the brand but how it also ended up reviving the soul of their team members and that’s an achievement that no Bento Box, no matter how good, can achieve on its own without solid and committed internal engagement.

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