

EPIISODE 082

EUROSTAR

IN CONVERSATION WITH

David Moloney, DesignStudio

AND

and Lucie Thevenon, Eurostar

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 82 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Eurostar, which brings together the legacies of two iconic, rail transportation companies: Eurostar, established in 1994 and Thalys, established in 1996. The alliance was initiated in 2019 and received approval from the European Commission in 2022. Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, Eurostar Group will now be responsible for the two companies' high-speed rail services between France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany that, in 2022, carried 14.8 million passengers combined. Its goal is to carry 30 million passengers annually within 10 years.

The project, designed by the London, UK, office of DesignStudio was posted on Brand New on January 25, 2023. And no, that is not a mistake. The project was indeed posted 16 months ago but it was literally ahead of its time as the new Eurostar began operations in late 2023 and roll-out of the new identity has officially begun only recently. In any case, you can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast082 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast082, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by David Moloney, Design Director at DesignStudio and Lucie Thevenon, in charge of Brand Strategy, Brand Development, and Purpose-led Transformation for Eurostar.

In this conversation we hear about the nearly impossible challenge of two well-known companies coming together as equals but with one of them keeping their name while the other one didn't. Instead of allowing this to become a divisive issue, rife with hurt feelings, it pushed client and designer to find ways to honor the Thalys brand in spirit, which in turn helped the project in infinitely positive ways and it's amazing to think that such a creative solution came out from such a potentially stifling scenario with two sets of executives needing to approve the design direction. Persevering through the interruption of COVID and the struggles of the travel industry post COVID, the three teams — DesignStudio, Eurostar, and Thalys — somehow managed to find a spark in all of this.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with David and Lucie.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO My introduction to Eurostar took place in the late '90s when I spent a few months backpacking in Europe with my brother. Soon after, I forgot all about it. That is until 2011 when we covered the then rebrand by Someone on Brand New. A dozen years later, we got to chat about it again on the blog when a merger called for a brand redo. And today, we get to go deeper into the details. Lucie and David, welcome to The Follow-Up.

LUCIE THEVENON Thank you.

DAVID MOLONEY Hi, thanks for having us.

BRYONY I would love to have both of you introduce yourselves and tell our audience who you're representing.

LUCIE Hi, Bryony. I'm Lucie. I'm a Brand Program Director at Eurostar. I've been working at Eurostar for 13 years and on the new brand as well.

DAVID Hi, Bryony. My name is David. I'm a Design Director at DesignStudio. I've been working at DS for three years now and one of the leads on the Eurostar rebrand.

BRYONY Wonderful. Lucie, Eurostar was originally launched in 1994 as a people moving collaboration between Britain, Belgium, and France, and you have gone through many milestones since then. Since you've been with the company so long, you have personal insight. If you could summarize the key happenings from its inception to the merger that prompted the latest rebrand in a few minutes, that would be wonderful.

LUCIE I like that you say the people moving business. We have a long history of more than the moving people, connecting them, and celebrating cross collaboration between cultures, countries, government, businesses across all of our countries. And there's a big, big pride in the business on that kind of multicultural identity and it really shaped the history of the business for 30 years. It started indeed as a collaboration between the British Rail, SNCF and SNCB and the way companies in the UK, France, and Belgium—inaugurated by the Queen ourselves, it was quite an event in 1994 and that's the reason why we had three waves in our very first logo at the time. There's been quite a lot of events, so summarizing in a few minutes, I'm going to skip to the very, very top ones. We always say internally that the business thrive and the operations are the most seamless when there's one big event, one big common goal that we have to achieve together, whether it's a challenging one or a celebration one, and it's really how the history of the company has been shaped as well.

One of the big one was 2012, the games. It's completely shaped the culture and the spirit of the company and it was one of the great celebrations that brought everyone together. We were official partner for London 2012 and we made that year incredible changes to our fleet to carry the Paralympics team, which was quite an operational achievement. We had about 13 wheelchairs on board where we only

can carry normally two. Just this was something actually a big, big milestone for the company because we are quite engaged on making accessibility a real mission for the company as well. I arrived in the company a year before and I can definitely tell that event was one of the most shaping culture-wise for us.

That's also kind of when we, I think, matured a little bit in our advertising because we used to be quite cut through always playing with the raising awareness of the benefits of traveling by train, but always playing very cheekily on the cultural differences between all different countries, mocking each other a little bit, French versus British versus Belgian. We had quite a lot of cheekiness in our brand and our identity. And at that point, we kind of also matured a little bit and while always continued to foster cultural differences across Europe and greater connection across Europe, we just kind of evolved a little bit in terms of identity and advertising to build something a bit more emotional. It was a time where the brand started to be quite renowned. That was time for us to build something a bit more emotional with our travelers. Fast-forward to 2019, the regional reason behind the rebrand was the merger with Thalys. Thalys is a very beloved French-Belgian train company. It had a very strong heritage. We always like to remind people that in Belgium it was more famous than Apple itself as a brand.

BRYONY Wow.

LUCIE So we had a very big challenge. We couldn't just take it away without extreme care and really, really high craft. So it was a big decision and we really kind of drove that carefully. Another reason behind the rebrand was also the ambition of the business to really become a key player around sustainable travel in Europe. Sustainable and accessible travel. We've always had that ambition, but it's something that really united both companies and this basically led to expanding our network, enhancing connections between our different countries. And one of the big ambition behind the merger and the need for a rebrand

was that we want to achieve 30,000,000 passengers by 2030. Quite a bold one. We're respectively doing 12 and 8,000,000 each, so we still have a long way to go. But yeah, none of the brands that we had were really fit for that challenge, and that growth objective.

BRYONY David, how did DesignStudio get involved with this project?

DAVID As Lucie mentioned, that initial relationship started back in 2019 with Project Greenspeed and that was really about that effort to meet the growing demand for sustainable travel. So the initial relationship between DS and Eurostar started due to a great previous project between our CD and one of the brand leads at Eurostar. That initial phase was all about an immersion and a light strategy phase. And for us at DesignStudio, that's all about a bit of a beginner's mindset really. Coming to the product completely new, I think I had a similar experience to you, Bryony, where I was backpacking around Europe as well, encountering the brand for the first time. But fast-forward to the moment that this brief came into the studio, it was hugely exciting. But during that phase we will go on train rides, we'll meet the customers, employees, experience everything and really soak it all up.

We'll also host a series of workshops. We will run stakeholder interviews, all that good stuff, all the way up to meeting the CEOs and the drivers. And that's really about understanding what are the pain points? What are the ambitions? Sometimes we describe it as a bit like a therapy session, in a good way, really for setting that foundation for the project. A CD named Campbell led the charge during those early phases and that set the groundwork for what came after. Then of course lockdown came and as was the case for many businesses, especially travel, things went on hold.

BRYONY Lucie, what was that period like, internally?

LUCIE Surreal. There's always those kind of key moments you remember. As an employee, you go through events that are impacting the world but impacting your job with a different dimension as well. And for us

it was almost from one day to the next stopping everything, stopping our services except for a few exceptions because we still had, I would say, a public role to play... to help governments meet each other, to help family reunited. But it was literally what felt like a hard stop from one day to the next. And we were just gearing up for the exciting Greenspeed challenge, starting to meet each other, uniting two companies when it's not one taking over the other one, but really two companies joining together on an equal basis. The need to interact face-to-face is huge. We have to discover each other, we have to learn from each other to understand what we have in common, etc.

And so on top of changing completely our day-to-day job, it also slowed down our collaboration with the Thalys teams quite a lot. And then little by little, we picked it up in a way. So in 2020 we did most of the planning. We were not yet fully talking about the brand, we were doing brand scenarios. We were talking together whether we would go for one brand or another because those decisions were made along the way together. And it's only in 2021 when we finally started to meet face-to-face and started to work on the strategy as well.

BRYONY And then what reignited the project fully?

LUCIE I think it's been a progressive process.

BRYONY Okay.

LUCIE I don't quite remember one big thing because we were a small team of people under NDA who were working continuously on the planning. I was basically calculating the budget to rebrand all of our trains. So really from all sorts of topics, from very operational to very strategic. And so for us, it never really stopped, albeit being on furlough for quite a few months. So furlough kind of created a bit of a rhythm. Sometimes we were allowed to work two days a week, sometimes we were allowed to work five days a week. So that created that rhythm. But for us, there wasn't one single point when we were finally starting the work. It always continued in the background. When we finally got to

meet face-to-face, especially the people we were working directly with on brand strategy topics, that was the beginning of a project for me, but it never really stopped. It was just slowing down and up and down.

BRYONY I would love to hear from you, Lucie, what the internal team was, who was involved in both the day-to-day and the decision process? And for you, David, within your internal team, what disciplines, what key players did you have in order to go from the brief all the way to launch?

LUCIE The team that was involved was initially a smaller team. I think we were eight in the core team, two on each side of the brand, so Mario and myself on the Eurostar side and Nicola and Barbara are on the Thalys side. We have an in-house studio, the in-house studio lead was also part of the crew. And then after that it was both of our CCO at the time—because the company were not yet officially merged—and the Chief of Integration. So that team was the core team from almost beginning to the end and then we added a couple of people along the way.

Our designer leads, our digital UX design leads who came and supported, especially at the end when it was time to actually look into the details of how the brand works in a design system. And then in terms of a sign-off, it went through two CEOs, but actually a third one when Gwendolyn came on board September, I think, '22. Then the actual board of shareholders, SNCF, SNCB, Hermes, who made the decision to merge those two companies as well. So it really went across the board, but we were initially a very small team.

BRYONY And that's quite the challenge to deal with so many changes and such a large team.

DAVID Our team at DesignStudio was led by our Creative Director, JQ [Julien Queyrane], in charge of always pushing the vision. Obviously I took the role as Design Director. The core design team was made up of two amazing designers, Steph Wright and Sam Cornwall. Vitor was our motion lead. The motion design system was driven and developed by

Adam Beacon and our client services team led by the incredible Emily Jones and day-to-day by Lucy Arbacher and Cheryl Lee. Bit of a dream team from the DS side.

BRYONY That's wonderful. Throughout this process, what was the information that was coming out from those conversations and thoughts in terms of parameters or guidelines that would push the creative work forward? What were those needs?

LUCIE There were quite a lot. I think we came with a very full and complex brief to DesignStudio. I think what was the most important, again, because we were creating something new together, we decided together to keep the name Eurostar, but we were completely committed to rebooting the brand entirely and starting from scratch based on a shared DNA and a shared history together, basically, was the most important point of the brief collaboration and equal decision making. The change management for both companies, especially for Thalys, who was losing its name was massive. The love for the brand was huge, and so we were really committed to honor both brand legacies, so we wanted to re-energize the brand. We knew that Eurostar brand had become a bit stale over the last few years. It lacked of investment as well. Since the last refresh was 2014, we needed to re-energize it a little bit, warm it up.

As opposed to Eurostar, the Thalys brand was considered a lot warmer and more welcoming, so we really wanted to bring that in the new identity at all costs, not to lose this. But it was also about staying relevant, I would say, and appealing to much younger audiences. Our brand was kind of starting to age, wasn't necessarily fit for the digital world either, and so a big challenge was to reboot it for younger audiences.

Warming it up, but keeping our shared DNA, our shared history and bringing the Thalys brand legacy into it—those were the very key elements for us.

BRYONY That all makes a lot of sense. David, as you got this very complex and full brief, walk me through your interpretation of all of that information, plus your own research and field work leading into the first round of creative.

DAVID We all knew this was an iconic brand to work with, so this definitely set the tone for the project. We all felt like there was a sense that we absolutely had to get this right. And I think from the Eurostar and Thalys teams, we had a great brief that was hugely appreciated, all the effort that had gone in. One of the most important aspects was to capture the heritage and essence of both of those companies whilst evolving them clearly into the future. Going into some of the specifics of the brief, Eurostar's at a bit of an inflection point.

It was 25 years old. I think it's fair to say the brand had become a little bit stale. And really this rebrand was all about bringing together and galvanizing those growth efforts. We wanted to be able to motivate people, deliver impactful internal and external standout. We wanted to put the customer at the heart of everything that they do and make the brand exciting and relevant again. We noticed and we could see that consistency was a big issue and we saw that in our audit phase. And of course, as Lucie mentioned, the brand struggled in digital. The old metallic ribbon especially struggled in digital formats. Most of all, it was that rare, incredible moment for us to take a brief like this and really embody that DesignStudio spirit of "radical collaboration" and deliver the much needed bold leap that the business needed.

BRYONY What did you bring to the table as part of your first round of creative? Did you come in with multiple territories or concepts? Had you been collaborating the whole way and narrowed it down into one general direction? What was that process?

DAVID Just before we get to the creative, I wanted to talk about this really interesting phase we had before we jumped in.

BRYONY Yeah, please.

DAVID It kind of ties into that “radical collaboration” idea that I was talking about, and the kickoff of this project was a bit different. The strategy had been shortlisted to two routes and we were engaged at this point to create a series of mood films and mood boards, eventually presenting those recommendations all the way up to the Eurostar team and CEO. And we did this to help us identify which strategic territory presented the greatest leap into the visual identity phase of the project.

For Eurostar, this led us to “spark opportunity through train travel” and condensed to our brand idea, “spark new”. During those early creative phases, we also worked with the Eurostar team really closely to stress test the brand at key stages of the project. This was kind of a unique aspect, obviously we’ve just coming back out of lockdown, so in-studio collaboration felt really good again, we had the campaign lead and product design lead, Melissa and Sam, join us in the studio on multiple days to test Figma prototypes and hardworking kind of functional elements. Really that strategic phase acted as this springboard and allowed us to really have clear jump off into creative concepts really seamlessly.

LUCIE It’s true. It’s a good point, David, because it’s not necessarily always the usual kind of ways of working, but it’s again that collaboration ideal with Thalys. We brought DesignStudio back into the merger conversation after the COVID pause when we had started the work on the strategy and the culture of the company. We kind of brought them when we were still indeed refining two territories and we worked with one of Thalys partners as well on that side of things to help us design “spark new opportunity”.

And part of the brief was also giving DesignStudio the lowdown on our culture and what was behind bold, caring, and honest, which are the kind of three value of the newly joined companies. And DesignStudio helped us at the end of that journey to formalize it a little bit more towards a creative brief as well. It was almost like a baton handed over

from one strategic partner to a creative partner. It was quite unusual, but again, that's what happened when the two companies decided to merge together and each have got their expertise, their partner, and we really chose that. We really kind of did that together without one company leading another one.

BRYONY What would you say is a key benefit of that unique approach?

LUCIE It massively helped the change management internally. The big, big risk for us, especially... because Eurostar was a bigger brand internationally, we were a bigger company in terms of employees. And on top of that, the Eurostar name was staying and the Thalys name was disappearing. You could really see how in this context it would be easy to have say Eurostar is taking over, it's not really a merger, it's a takeover. And that was our compass for vast majority of the project, making sure that what we were doing was creating something new together. Splitting a project in different phases and having different partners, and it worked in the end, that collaboration really helped us to foster the idea, proved that we meant business.

It wasn't just talk. We were really creating something new together and it was a massive driver internally in terms of change management. Because if you think about post-COVID world, we managed to keep everyone, all of our employees, a lot of people were coming back from very long period of furlough, not being able to work for months on end, coming back to that context with their brand disappearing. It was quite emotional and it was something that we had to manage extremely carefully with a lot of care and a lot of honesty as well because we really decided to be super transparent with each other in the decision making we had.

BRYONY David, how did you and your team go incorporating these thoughts, and these emotions, and these challenges as you moved away from the ribbon "E" and into the spark idea as you developed the identity, and the logo in particular?

DAVID What I'd love to do is tell you a little bit about that first round of creative and how we made that leap of interpreting that strategy because there was a lot of emotion, like Lucie mentioned, in terms of Thalys losing their brand, but also creating that feeling of togetherness through the work. The first round of creative is always really fun, and this was a really super memorable one. We're not long out of lockdown at this point and we decided to invite Eurostar and Thalys teams over to London for an in-person presentation at the studio. This was to bring some theatre to the meeting. Sometimes in Zoom it's harder to create those free-flowing conversations and have the debates we need to set the direction.

With that brand strategy in place, it's now our job to translate "spark new opportunities through train travel" into a design system that's going to be really powerful capturing all of that emotion of the brand and setting this trajectory for hopefully the next 10 years. So our concepts presentation had pretty amazing four and a half routes in the mixer [laughter]. It's quite mad when we look back, but the creative energy was sky-high and there were some really great ideas and I can remember the energy in the room to the selected "spark new" route was immediate in the debate afterwards. We finished the presentation with an AR model of the spark and Lucie and the rest of the client team could see the virtual spark spinning in the middle of the room through their phones.

BRYONY Wow.

DAVID And there was just this really cool energy and sense of progressive and exciting modern brand with a super cool idea at the heart of it.

LUCIE The spark even started, it was three pens stuck together. I still have that picture from Sam just holding the actual first spark iteration of the real world. I have to concur with what David say. For me, the decision was made on the spot. We knew to the point that we even had to refrain ourselves a little bit and we asked DS to progress another route as well just in case. But for me, and I have to say for the rest of the team,

it was instant love for this route. We fell in love with the spark. We wanted to make sure the entire system was developed and we were not just working on the spark itself, but it was a very big point of that day. We loved the flexibility, the longevity of the universe they were proposing, the energy of it with all the colors and we loved the color palette as well. So it was a total knockout, very first creative meeting.

BRYONY David, I want to know how many sparks or what was that exploration like just to find the final spark?

DAVID That is a really good question. I mean, the spark logo of course went through hundreds of iterations. I think at first, you can see from those early sketches, it had eight points. This matched the spark compass theme really well in the sense of having the north, east, south, west directions on it. We did a lot of R&D and perhaps a couple of intense debates through this phase as well. We got to six points. And the six points of the star creates a seamless link to the graphic language and allowed us to transition to the motion language effortlessly. The graphic language, we have three modes: discover, connect, and express.

And they allow us to tell different stories for the brand, be that for large out of scale out of home moments, all the way to social media where the express spark shines, zooming into the details of the curves at the center point. Endless, endless craft and refinement, especially on the center points in terms of how those connections come together. I think in the end when you're creating something that you want to last this long, it has to be absolutely right. So there's a really exhaustive level of detailing and craft that goes into it, but you absolutely need to create something like this.

LUCIE It felt like we nailed down everything but the logo in the very first round. I think the logo of the original route was something completely different and we ended up working and developing the logo of another route. I can't remember if it was in the first session or if it was in the second one, but for us that was another hurrah! moment

when we finally realized we were giving the star back to Eurostar in its logo. Because on the very first route of “spark new”, the logo was quite different and it was another route that we were like, “Hang on, that route’s not quite there, but the logo, there’s something interesting in there.” And so for me, after the first kind of hurrah! moment of the spark and the colors together, that was also another big sign that we knew we went onto something.

BRYONY That makes a lot of sense. David, do you want to elaborate on the wordmark?

DAVID We really wanted to create a link back to the original version from 1994, and I think we’re also really keen to create something truly distinctive, something with a slightly European feel to it. It’s based La Pontaise Champion by Or Type, and we worked with a couple of typographers, Luke Prowse and Leo Field to craft each letter down to a “T”. The ink traps and the letter forms almost become like little sparks, and that slight italic feeling gives you that sense of dynamism and movement to the mark as well. It just sort of completes the entire system. A lot of it was about harmonizing the letter forms with the monogram symbol itself.

LUCIE And the icon itself is literally an “e” with a star, which is how everyone internally writes Eurostar when they just write emails, how we talk about it between us when we text each other, and I think how our customer actually writes Eurostar as well. And when we saw that “e” with a star, we also knew that this was something that a lot of people would love and indeed I think it was a success in terms of the icon itself. And the spark in the icon, you can see it the spark device into this icon and I think the first feedback, the first thing we wanted to address was the relationship between that icon and the spark itself and making sure both talk to each other and work together seamlessly and felt like they were part of the same identity.

BRYONY Definitely created a flexibility there.

DAVID Yeah. I also just wanted to say, in the creation phases prior to concepts,

we also had a studio post-it jam session where we invited lots of designers from the studio to create and draw all sorts of “e-star” variations and that was definitely fruitful, almost like crowdsourcing ideas within the studio. And similarly to what Lucie was saying, we’d started abbreviating the brand name as designers do to e* within things like Slack channels and interestingly e* almost became a bit of a sort of inception of the idea of basically pulling a star closer and closer towards an “e”. So I think that’s also part of its simplicity and hopefully the recognition of it as well. It has that little aha moment when you kind of get the combination of what these two very recognizable forms mean together as a symbol for the brand.

BRYONY And it gives you the option of spelling it out or being short and succinct in a tiny little logo that you can use as a period kind of thing at the end of a sentence. Now, one of your priorities early on was moving the brand into digital. With the spark and the motion graphics and the beautiful movement that you created with it, that has been very successful and it is very rare that something so digitally heavy can transfer to printed materials into the physical world as nicely as this brand has. So I would like to get a little bit more insight on how that transition worked internally and how it’s going in terms of applying it to new surfaces or products, things like that.

DAVID I think our job through the design development phases and design refinement was to take the spark expression, build it into a really functional, usable design system that we could hand over. In order to do this, we systemized it into those three states. They’ve had slightly different parameters, like one of them sits on a rigid 90-degree grid, one of them is set on an offset grid where they spark move in perspective, and then one of them zooms right in so we can see the corners and the details. And then what we’ve begun to do is attribute where they could be used across systems. Some are designed to partner really beautifully with typography and messaging. Some of them will interact with photography. So we have these things

called spark scapes where you can drop a spark into a layout with photography and it will match the perspective of photography.

Then the expressive moments can be a bit freer, therefore lighter moments maybe for social where things are moving faster and you've got that rhythm. The really interesting transition was taking all of that very rigorous geometry and maths to create the actual sparks to add some beautiful consistent angles and then translate that into a motion system and we basically ran parallel streams to develop the motion language across those three states. And then we also looked at a full broadcast package, which included transitions, wipes, moving from motion, sparks down to the finished logo.

And remember the actual core guidelines has quite a deep section on the spark, and then there's a separate pro section which we actually ended up taking out of the master guidelines because it was a bit too much to absorb, but it gives you that option to create a spark from various angles and how to create that consistency going forward for a bespoke launch campaign. The key is trying to create usable templates, so part of that came in the delivery phases and trying to keep things as simple as possible and to ensure the handover and partnership with ad agencies and other partners can be seamless. And I think we've seen some of that in the amazing launch campaign, which ran in October, starting to see how those assets are being handled and really beautifully applied across the whole brand world. It's been great to see.

LUCIE And for us, that was the most important point, finding that true balance between digital and physical because at the end of the day, we are an operational business. We move people from A to B. And so we had a lot of touch points in the real world, in the physical world, and it was an absolute no-brainer that everything we were creating must absolutely work in the physical world as well. With very clear principles terms of what does it mean in physical world. And although it kind of all started in digital, DesignStudio has done a great job to

apply it to the fleet itself all the way down to napkins that we use in our lounges, and we've got a beautiful spark hanging on the ceiling of our business lounges and I think that's the beauty of the brand.

One of the filters we had from the beginning was the flexibility. We needed something flexible. We had loads of different products, loads of different audiences, loads of different challenges, everything needed to feel consistent yet being very flexible. So the challenge of having a multiple color palette, the challenge of having a spark that crops, extends, rotates, doesn't exist in a single state. Both of those things were a bit of a challenge at times when you want to create that level of consistency. But in the end, because we have a system that is flexible and that works in every environment, got that challenge resolved.

BRYONY And another aspect of the rebrand is this inconsistent yet consistent use of illustration [affirmative]. I would like to hear more about the thinking behind having such completely different styles of illustration brought in under the same umbrella.

DAVID The illustration commission was a bit of a dream part to the project. We worked with a total of 10 illustrators across five countries in order to build this bespoke illustration library of the destinations. The galvanizing component to it all is the color palette, basically. So we have 10 colors in our color palette primarily led by an off-white and two blues. So what we did is worked with various partners and agents, some directly through Instagram, some found through all sorts of platforms. The common thread is really artists and illustrators that are able to capture the spontaneity of discovery really, and that sense of joy of arriving at a destination for the first time. That feeling of going to Amsterdam or Paris for the very first time and that magical feeling that never leaves you. We talked about the DNA of the company changing a little bit, like Germany was coming into the fold.

Having image makers from each of the countries felt like it basically embodies the artistry, the creation is all soaked up into the content

of the system and I think the work they created was so beautiful. And then it was complicated briefing seven illustrators initially, each did three to four scenes. We tried to keep the briefs as open as we could to get interesting reactions. Later, we sent some of our illustrators to different destinations such as Paris and so on. It just becomes a really interesting eclectic European component to the brand somehow holds together despite not having that maybe more typical single illustration style that fits across the brand. It's open to adapt and grow in the future and works really beautifully.

LUCIE For us, the whole point was what photography can't do, illustration will, whether it's to bring a mood to life or whether it's actually extremely technically. If you want to talk about our fleet, but you don't want to show one single train because today we have a fleet of two different sets of trains, four if I go in the details and there are different colors, et cetera. So for us, illustration was an absolute perfect angle in terms of creative direction for the brand, but also practically something we embraced as well for other topics and not just destination but for product. And the very great point for us at the launch was showcasing once more the diversity, the multiculturalism of the brand. It was really important that we had, I think for the brand launch in the end, you mentioned seven at the beginning, but we did another round and I think we had over 10 artists all coming from different cities working on their city and then being sent away to another one to bring back their own kind of vision of it.

And for us, it was really, really important to showcase that diversity of the brands, the choice we were making with illustration and it resonated beyond because it was reused for the launch campaign as well as a vector of imagination, what can happen when you travel, like travel opening the world of possibilities with the spark making that connection between photography, the real world, and illustration, the imagination, what could happen when you travel. We didn't really see it at the time, but illustration became even more important beyond

the fact that we absolutely loved the ideas. It became something even more core to the identity than we expected at the beginning.

BRYONY That is really interesting to see how that goes evolving. Lucie, what is the feedback that you're receiving both from the internal team, the employees, the operators, leadership, investors and the public in general, those who are using it now that you're a few months post-launch?

LUCIE I'm obviously biased.

BRYONY Understandably, and that's okay.

LUCIE I'm absolutely in love with the brand, but I think there was one moment for us and again back on the challenging and exciting at the same time side of that history of merging two companies together, we were obviously mindful when we launched the brand. We launched the brand internally first through a series of events, talking to leadership first, with the group of senior manager, 150 people. Then presenting it to the wider company just after what we called Cultural Connectors, a group of people from all areas of the business who were really in charge of creating those mutual connection, moving change through the company and then making sure we were talking to each other. And so we kind of staged the reveal like that and we were quite worried that we wanted it to be well-received. We wanted people to see how much effort we put into collaboration.

After the big reveal, we went through roadshows all around the business, and I remember being in a roadshow in an operational office where all the Belgian train drivers and train managers were based. All the Thalys staff, all losing their brand and people were naturally a bit more vocal and a bit more passionate because they are with the customer every day. I was a bit worried about the reaction, et cetera, and the love we got straight away—I'm not saying 100%, there's always people who don't like change and add their things to say—but the overwhelming appreciation of keeping Thalys' legacy into the brand,

the warmth of the colors, the idea of that diversity coming through colors, et cetera, was extremely well received and for me it was one of the best moments.

BRYONY Absolutely.

LUCIE We had a great debate, we had great conversation. When it's first welcomed that well internally, you know you want to do something good. After that, yes, we've had the board of shareholders absolutely loved it. Our CEO who changed and arrived after we designed this identity, that was another challenge, absolutely loves the fact that we are beyond color. We are not a blue brand, we are not a red brand, we are beyond color and she keeps saying it every day and she's really on board as well. So overall, yes, good support, but I think for me the most important was how it landed internally with colleagues, especially those who were are losing their brand.

BRYONY That makes a lot of sense. David, when a project like this, you know it's big, it's daunting, it's a big challenge, and then it's interrupted by COVID and a lot of things are involved, I'm wondering as a studio, if there's something from this process or this project that you learned or you experienced that you want to take forward to future projects within the studio?

DAVID What I learned most about this project, it's all to do with creating amazing relationships with clients, really. And I think something I've learned definitely throughout my career more and more, but having really flexible relationships, having designers from their team come into the studio, sometimes WhatsApping your clients, having that really fast cycle of collaboration I think is really important and you have to develop that. I think it's a sign of building trust together basically because when you earn trust, you can create something better together, basically. You get a vibe going, you get a relationship going, and you can sense the passion from both sides to make things great. And I think there was definitely times where we felt challenged and maybe we received feedback that we didn't like, but

we could never have got to the amazing outcome that we did without interpreting those challenges and working on things together. That's really the lasting thing for me is finding even better ways to closely collaborate and create great relationships with our clients.

BRYONY That is definitely an industry change that I'm hearing more and more about that level of day to day-to-day interaction and collaboration back and forth. Final question for both of you. What part of the whole outcome, and especially what you see coming ahead, and I'm sure you're privy to inside information, is the most exciting for each of you?

DAVID From the outcome, the reaction from the industry was pretty mind-blowing. I've never seen a project travel so fast, so far, and so much positive sentiment. It was insane. But actually, the thing that really hit home for me was shortly after the launch, one of our clients, Mario, WhatsApped me this image of a driver who had tattooed the logo onto their arm. This was a really proud moment for the team. We said at the beginning of the process, we want to bring back that sense of pride in the brand and create that love for Eurostar, giving them their star back and giving them an iconic feeling brand with a really beautiful little idea in it. I think I can say that we genuinely did that. So alongside industry celebration and plaudits, seeing the tattoos, the reaction on the platform when we went to see it get launched internally, going to the launch of the TV advert in St. Pancras end of last year, all of these things and seeing how it's affected the employees and the culture and that strategic idea really threading through the business is just amazing to see.

LUCIE It's difficult to pick one topic. I would say, for me, what's beyond how the change was welcomed and how everyone was pleasantly surprised by the outcome and how much love we got for the work, what's actually quite exciting is finding our next iconic move. We've got some stuff coming up this year which I can't yet talk about, which are pretty exciting. We've got of course another partnership with the games because we are official partner for Team GB, Team NL, Team DE as

well. So four countries out of five that we serve. And we never stand still. That's in our DNA. We're always looking for the next project. And that brand is done. A lot of people think the work is done, but actually for us it's just starting. Now we need to grow it to embed it every part of the business and to really think of what's next for it. That's pretty exciting for everyone.

BRYONY So I think you were presented with a tough situation in terms of a large merger. You developed a full and complex brief that wanted to honor two legacies that had a lot of people involved, both internally and externally with a lot of emotions, a lot of feelings associated with them. Interrupted by COVID and all of the challenges that came with it, you were able to turn all of that around and spark those new opportunities into travel through discovery, and connection, and expression of a brand that will lead that, as David was saying, the pride and love for those legacy brands, but create pride and love for the reimagined future legacy of what Eurostar is going to be. Maybe my kids, your kids will eventually be backpacking through Europe. I hope they get that opportunity and they will re-encounter Eurostar and have their own connection to a brand that should be around for another 30 and 60 years moving forward, and hopefully with the same brand identity, with its evolved illustrations and other details. Thank you so much for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

DAVID Awesome. Beautifully put. Thanks so much, Bryony. It's been a pleasure.

LUCIE Wanted to thank you, Bryony, for the opportunity. It was super interesting.

ARMIN As is now typical, collaboration — fast-paced collaboration in this case — between client and designer was key to a successful project and being able to honor the legacies of both Eurostar and Thalys. As Lucie said early on, sometimes things work at their best when there is a big goal ahead and everyone has to work together to achieve it. A sentiment we can all apply to our own projects — and life — and it makes for a nice, uplifting note to end this episode on.

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