

EPIISODE 085

GHTK

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Duy N, M — N Associates

AND

M Lan, M — N Associates

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 85 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Giao Hàng Tiết Kiệm — which translates to “Economical Delivery” in Vietnamese — and has now been shortened to GHTK. Established in 2013, it is the leading logistics and delivery service provider in Vietnam. Catering to small and medium-sized stores as well as online shopping companies like ebay, Amway.com, Bibomart, and USbaby it offers cost-effective, reliable, and efficient delivery services that cater to the diverse needs of businesses and individuals across the country. Having fulfilled more than 1.5 billion orders in its history, GHTK employs over 30,000 people and is present in 63 provinces and cities with more than 20 operation centers; over 2,500 trucks; and more than 1,500 branches with a total warehouse area of over 220,000 square meters — that is over 721,000 square feet.

The project, designed by Ho Chi Minh City-based M – N Associates, was posted on Brand New on April 1, 2024. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast085 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast085, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Duy N, Partner and Creative Director at M — N Associates and M Lan, Partner and Project Manager at M — N Associates.

In this conversation we hear about two instances of light speed, first as we learn that the initial turnaround time for the first round of creative was one month and, second, as Duy shares that their inspiration for the photography style in the identity came from Star Wars' Lightspeed. While the Millennium Falcon traveled across galaxies, M — N Associates' light speed approach helped GHTK travel into a new era of growth as it becomes one of the most important logistics company in Vietnam and signal its impact on the economy as it helps small and medium business move their products quickly, efficiently, and, now, attractively thanks to the bold, vibrant, and energetic identity with the charming mascot leading the way.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Duy and M.

BRYONY With just over a decade since its establishment, Giao Hàng Tiết Kiệm is a leading logistics and delivery service provider in Vietnam. With a massive footprint and over 30,000 employees, a rebrand was no simple task, but the team M – N Associates was up to the task, and today, we get to hear all about the process. But before we do, I want to share that Duy and M will be joining us from Vietnam and speaking at the Brand New Conference this October to share even more stellar projects.

Duy and M, welcome to The Follow-Up.

DUY Hello.

MISS M Hello.

BRYONY If you don't mind introducing yourselves so that our audience can get to know you a little bit better?

DUY I'm Duy, ECD of M – N Associates and I'm the also Co-Founder of M – N Associates from the beginning for these project and take part in creative actions, discuss with the owners, partners and many of the brand teams which direction of the brands is going.

MISS M I'm Lang. I'm a Business Director in this project that I'm the project management who is the bridge between the client and our team.

BRYONY Wonderful. Could you give us a little bit of information regarding the origins of the company and then how it now got shortened to GHTK?

MISS M GHTK short for Giao Hàng Tiết Kiệm. This was established in 2013 in Hanoi, Vietnam. It quickly grow to become one of Vietnam leading logistic company. They are dominant, the biggest share in the market. Their products is relevant and convenient for the owner and shipper to sell and ship easily across the country.

DUY The market of e-commerce logistic becomes harder and more essential than ever in Vietnam. Giao Hàng Tiết Kiệm was founded by Mr.Phạm Hong Quan, a product developer. He started when he was 26, and he's aware of the needs of the local logistic chains and he founded this company from zero with a very unique mindset to serve the small retailers. At that point, nobody's care about what they're selling or how they're going to ship the products to the customers so he care about it. He want to start a new business taking care from that point. Before there was kind of international brand and some traditional post office, but the moment of the e-commerce market like Shopee, Tiki, Lazada, or TikTok shops will drive the market differently and they get more focus about locals and small retailers and try to giving the local brands more voices than customer have.

BRYONY And do you think the pandemic helped grow the company?

DUY Yeah, sure. The pandemic is a really big opportunity for them that everyone is now taking care of shopping online and buying their products and become a new behavior. Before they just went to the shop market knowing which brands are selling or advertising, but

now people get more convenience and they can buy a lot of products even from far away in the country size or in the very local brands that you never heard of, but they're selling really good products and GHTK was really successful on becoming the bridge between it, and now it's really successful. They become the most logistic that came across like 63 regions in Vietnam. They deliver 1.5 billion order successfully due to their new technologies that somehow they can make a really successful rate comparing to the others.

BRYONY That's seriously impressive.

DUY Yeah.

BRYONY Now, what led the company to want to redesign at this particular moment in time?

MISS M I think that their brand identities was already quite strong with green color already, the dominion and a funny iconic mascot shipper. But however, their brand was almost 10 years old already, at that time, and lack of the brand assets and just only they have is the color, the logo, and the mascot. Mechanism is really hard for them to present for their advantage in technology and their expand in logistic network to be the number one in their industry.

BRYONY And how did M — N Associates get involved?

MISS M We got invited to the branding project from the introduction of Dentsu, their strategic agency at that time. Luckily that we got it as well as the internal brand team also. We had many meeting at first to understand their business industry, get to know the proof. We also build together the new brand created proof with GHTK. This was a challenge because they would love to see how we approach the different direction just in one month.

BRYONY In one month!

MISS M Yup.

DUY Yeah.

MISS M At that moment it's just in one month. It's quite top at that moment. We knew all team and approach the direction, and we have to work so hard at that moment because that's—

DUY It's holiday, right?

MISS M Yeah.

DUY I remember.

BRYONY My jaw is on the floor. That was so quick. Tell me about that initial month. That must have been quite crazy.

DUY Yeah. It's really crazy because we have to have the meetings, at the same times, get to know what they need at that moment because of their expansion is so fast and they want to have a lot of new plan access to be one for marketing agencies, for strategy agencies, for other suppliers and partners of them. So we have to gather it fast and audit all the information from the shippers, from the customer, hearing what they're saying, understand what they really need, what concept, and then we jump right in at the same time to design the directions but we don't want to giving them a lot of options to choose. We have to discuss first and gather to the key directions showing them one or two or maybe three, and then go step by step to guide them carefully. We don't want anything to go overboard and people lost in the graphic ways because this is their first time of doing the rebrand. They also really scared and afraid of things go wrong too.

MISS M Yeah, they're afraid of it.

BRYONY I'm curious about that fear and how your team managed to appease the client and get them comfortable with the process.

MISS M It's not easy from the beginning. We also have to work closely with their agency. They have Dentsu in the between us, so it mean that we have to make sure that the three of us in the same point. But that team is

quite okay. They super talented and they supportive even when we have a short time of delivery. We happy with what we've done on that project. The management sometimes is not quite happy all the time but we're okay with that.

DUY Yeah. My part is difficult if I have to explain all the practical parts on the visual parts into strategy language for agencies to understand and for the clients to understand because this is their first rebrand and the Dentsu team that carry on is just caring about the strategy. This kind of approach for us that to deliver what we believe that this is right for GHTK and not going all over the place, and have to manage it all, have to discuss a lot, have to sit through on the table and if anything's happened in the wrong way, people misunderstanding the concepts. We have to sit it and usually have a lot of meetings and we try to make it into a new process that we can talk verbally or we can have short meetings, or we can throw it online to see how it's go and maybe read over again to create a new pinball maybe and for them to understand what we are actually really aiming to it before we actually go into the design and need concepts.

BRYONY That makes sense. And now, when you went and presented the directions, what we call the first round, what was the outcome of that series of meetings or single meeting? I'm not sure. What kind of feedback did you get that got you to the next step?

DUY First, we proposed two completely different directions. We try with some early sketches to deconstruct the mascot first and see how the client react and they don't really like it. And then we take over again and we carry on how the strategies for the next phase is going and then we try it differently. But this time we will have the heritage from the previous mascot and then we will have two directions. One is based on the original one and one is completely structured with a new system that based on how they want it to be on offline and the digital world as well.

MISS M That's the one you've seen in the final.

DUY Yeah. The final one that you guys have seen over the internet is the first concept they chose is the confidence mind that really focusing on heritage from the previous one but still have the new things going on that can shorten eliminated bodies and just need the face for the digital world. And then for the clients to feedback and gather all the information where we need to go into the next phase that we refine the concept and they have the very common comments that they love it all and they want to merge two concept into one. They want to take anything best from both and they want to create a system and then the agency add a little bit more. They love this and that, and then we have to make sure that a lot of options but we have to carry on the visual hierarchy to go through within and we want everything to be in a consistent brand system.

BRYONY I want to first touch base on the wordmark which is quite interestingly based on the wheel of the motorcycle and the streets and all of these elements that at first glance you don't really realize but then when you start to see it more in depth, it makes total sense. So if you can talk a little bit more about that and the super rounded word mark details where it all came from.

DUY From their story as well, they deeply connected with the Vietnamese traffic. The traffic system in Vietnam is growing, so it's like a backbone for their business. That's why we bring our core idea into every layers that we would draw. And that usually is a really working method in creating local type in Vietnam. People love to have meaningful letters inspired from the real objects and that's why we find very similar to the letter G from the wheels and have the exhaust pipe from the motorbike or the ladder that really inspired from him the small allies that came over across Vietnam. You will see when you go into the Vietnam and that's the corals that connect every house of Vietnam, and that's how GHTK is carrying to the very little voice, small retailer selling products from those hem. And so the TK is the ligature treatments presenting the house, all the highways, construction in Vietnam is developing, is booming right now. We are now connecting

more regionally city than ever, so that's how their business is growing as well.

BRYONY That's great cultural about wanting to have meaning behind the letters. I appreciate sharing that. Now, as you go a little bit deeper on the rebrand elements, you have the mascot that has a primary presentation within the logo but then it starts to adopt different characteristics, moods, things like that in how you're applying it and as it moves along in the sub-brands as well. So was that a fun process to come up with all of the different iterations, and since I don't know Vietnamese and I don't understand all of the words associated with these presentations of the mascot, I want to know a little bit more about what the intention is. What are you trying to communicate with these alternatives?

DUY In Vietnamese, people love sending stickers, emojis with motions. It's not like you're texting on MS, you just sending the emojis and don't have the emotions. In here, we have communications message app like Zalo or any other things. And within GHTK, they have that too. The expression, the emotion of the mascot will be the emojis within these art, so people can send the message and maybe they can send the emotion as well. In that way we want to communicate the brand is more friendly, more accessible. It's not some kind of a strict dry corporation based on logistic, the kind of tech-based company, so we want to make it more dynamic and more private, more energetic for the end users.

BRYONY Were they all developed within your team or did you bring in an illustrator or outside source?

MISS M We did everything in-house.

DUY Yeah. We're lucky to have all the talents we need to work on this work in-house.

MISS M Yeah. Even their animation and the illustration and everything that we did in-house, luckily that we have a great team at home.

BRYONY That actually brings me to another question which is how big is your team and how many people were involved in this super speedy project?

MISS M Right now that our team have 15 in total included 3 PM [project manager] and the rest is the creative team, some big project that we involved half of the team but some that two or 3% to take care of that included him together with the rest of the team.

DUY We're trying our best to have very few people on each project to smoothen the process and the communication will be easier. For this entire project, we will select only senior ones and some of it have multiple skillset that can work on different errors like for the branded motions and the digital adaptation. We have our CDs, Mr. Anh Nguyen that came up with the unique branded motion effect for this one and he can carry on working on product on digital app and build on websites app, anything else based on the digital world. It's just maybe a few other junior designer to help him but mostly they can work along.

BRYONY So you're very strategic in how you create that team. Going back to the project, another very interesting aspect of this rebrand is the photography, and I would like to go a little bit deeper in just how successfully it translates to somebody like me who hasn't been to Vietnam but it gives me a total sense of what it is like to be in those alleys and in the very busy streets.

DUY It's a reference from me from Star Wars.

BRYONY Okay, interesting.

DUY When you go into the portal and then you can come right across from one point to the other very quickly and then on the live faster in a way and anything will be blurries and transcendent on around. I try to work on it as photography or filming a videography for this one as well. And now the technologies that we have camera that can stick on multiply and then people can go together with the multiply to

shoot image and then we can select it, edit it on premier and become something really interesting.

BRYONY You're smiling, was this an interesting process for you?

DUY Yeah. Yeah.

MISS M Luckily that we are in Vietnam, because only in Vietnam you can see it.

DUY Yeah. And we got really talented supply on production partners. I just sent him the pictures and small clip of how I'm imagined this going to going to be and then he can figure out the process part of how to construct everything together and building a very successful clips that you can go in through Vietnam just by watching it for a few seconds. And even our clients are loving it, they filming it, they showing it on a big billboard from their buildings all the time.

MISS M Crazy.

BRYONY The other thing that I want to talk about is the color palette because it's an evolution from what they had, but it's a very unusual color palette in that safety orange and the neon green really you don't see that often and especially in conjunction usually it's one or the other, so I would love to hear a little bit more about that color palette and how it's being applied.

DUY It come from us very naturally because we have a few shots when we go into reach on the very first stage it come from our iPhone because when it's going too dark and my phone is quite old, it's going into low shutter mode and then we saw the new lighting effect that came because of the low shuts shooting. We figure out their colors naturally be there from the street from traffic and then we try to bring it in, adjust it a little bit to be relevant for the brands. There you go. The color palette is naturally be there, bring it into the brand and they have to own it. They have to use it, and now they becomes... Their color balance represent for Vietnam's traffic.

MISS M Yeah, dynamic and tech friendly.

BRYONY Definitely stands out. You're developing all of these things and you're in constant communication with a client but also the in-house team. And I'm curious to know, especially given the speed of this project, what did you give the in-house team? Did you give them just the tools and they started applying it to all of the things or did you come up with a system of exactly how it was going to go on every truck, and then they're just implementing? What does that line exist?

DUY In Vietnam, you have to send them exactly what did you design. If there are situations that comes with a bigger trucks, we have to be there and measure it, and giving them new guidelines. That's how things work in Vietnam. If they want the first phase of the rebrand to go smoothly and everything is go into our directions, and nothing falls apart, that's how things work. We have to be-

BRYONY Okay, so you have to be very precise?

MISS M Yeah.

DUY Yeah. We have to be very precise and we have to constantly be there for new problems and giving them solutions.

BRYONY Knowing that the client is going to be coming back with new requests, I'm interested in knowing from a business side, is this something that you charge every time they call you or is it built in into the original quote?

MISS M To be honest, we haven't charged it every time that they're back and forth from the beginning that we know that they will back and forth.

BRYONY Yeah, it's a cultural thing.

MISS M Yeah, it's a cultural, but we try to help them, at least, for the first stage of launching that can help us to make sure that our planning rebranding system is working so then that we don't trust every details but we try to make sure that from the beginning everything should be in ship. That is how we work with client. And after that all the time, after the process that we always have another contract to maintain the plan or

to develop another phase as Giao Hàng Tiết Kiệm that we now hear in Hanoi or another phase of them.

DUY Yeah. Yeah. We try to build a sustainable process because branding is really hard, especially in Vietnam when you go work for the branding or the rebranding, especially at this point of the history because people have brand before and they don't even acknowledge how upgrade brands work. Mostly trust them for package and then we don't trust them for details. We try to be as consultant for them and we try to help them go through this process less painfulness as possible and anything that's come up in this moment of things going rolling out that we can help, we will try our best to be there to help and then when go into the next phase or next campaign or next movement, new products and then we will have new contracts to work with.

BRYONY The client will be coming back to you because it's a good process and that works out in the longterm for everybody. Now, I'm interested in looking back for each of you if there was a moment or an element or an aspect of this rebrand that really excited you when it came up in a meeting or in the creative process that you said, "Okay, I'm really excited about where this is headed," and what was that?

DUY For me, there was two moments. The first one when we successfully redraw the face of GHTK, it's successful that I feeling that I don't change much the original one. It looks just the same but it's more confident, it's more smiley, it's more friendly. The face is open up, and when I look at it I feel, "That's it." And then when we send it to the clients and we got the yes right away. And the second moment when we figure out the print motions that came really broadly from the traffics, from the motion that came right across the street and then the motion is just something that we see on the scene from all of our studio. We know this is true, this is the right one and very authentic. It is cultural, it is new and also very iconic when seen on action, on time, on everything else.

MISS M Yeah. It's same for me. When we saw the first truck finish it in panting as it the warehouse, we are so proud of it seeing people to attract new identity, watching the warehouse employee look at it and humbling about it. It's very emotional moment for both of us.

BRYONY That leads me to the next question, actually, which is what kind of feedback you've been receiving on the rebrand, be it from the client, from the employees, like those in the warehouse and the customers themselves.

DUY Internal, everyone is very happy because it were done so fast and very effective for each department, but then when you release, because the brand is so big and it's got impact on a more scale across the countries and a different perspective from people and cultural regions, I read all the comments because Vietnam is very social active countries. Somewhere like 30% people that really not dead yet because they're feeling it is something too new for them. Some of them want things to be bad. They're based on a very traditional or maybe cultural or maybe they don't like things to be changed constantly. We try to read every comment online and I personally repair serious meeting if the client want to discuss about it and if there's solutions about it, but in the end, they are okay. They really came us down and they told us that it's okay, you see it for a few months and then people actually love it. The CEO very wise.

MISS M Yeah, the CEOs is great.

DUY Yeah.

MISS M He said that happy. I'm very happy about it even that the team is worried about the message and the text, and on the internet at that moment, but the CEO said that, "I'm happy with that." When we see the truck on the street and the people start screaming and show so negative and we think that, "Hey, we should sit on this pre branding already."

DUY Yeah, actually now people can see them from far away.

MISS M Yeah, it's quite big.

DUY Obviously, their brand awareness is getting higher and now they start recognizing it as a new standard.

BRYONY That's great to hear. Now that your client has gone through this process ones, do you think if 15, 20, whatever many years ahead, if they need another brand evolution or rebrand, do you think they'll be better prepared to go through this process again?

MISS M I think so.

DUY Yeah, I think so. They now very expert in understanding how the creative process could be really crazy and could be really straight at some time, and they're quite calm and they understand what is the pinpoint for creating process like this and we have earlier meetings that they're giving us more times to be ready for the next phase or the next products coming in, and now they just telling us to be very cool about it and just doing your jobs and have the repair time for this part. Just announcing it from ahead and then very commitment to the timeline and that's okay for both sides. It's not just happened for Giao Hàng Tiết Kiệm, it's happened for most of our car clients and that's something that we really proud building from this part to today.

BRYONY You're slowly introducing them to a process where they have a good experience. I'm not saying it's not bumpy, you don't have disagreements and moments of panic and things like that, but in the end, they see the outcome and the feedback from their customers and their financial growth and all of these things and they see the value of it and so it becomes easier to continue that process. Was there an aspect of this entire project that was particularly satisfying for each of you?

MISS M They got selected by the government, get the great attention and support from Prime Minister and many department to rise as a new case study for the logistic company with the international plan and vision. That's a journey.

BRYONY That's impressive.

DUY Yeah. They got selected by nations and now they national brand, they're now part of Vietnam national brands.

BRYONY So what, at this point, is the most exciting thing that you see in the future? I'm sure there's a lot of things that you cannot talk about about what you know they're doing, but what's exciting as you look to the brand into the next five, 10 years?

DUY They selected us to be branding partner for their next phase of development. We are really lucky to be constant partners with them to build new products, to build new service, to be digging deep into the digital world that they building the new technology with and giving them new directions, working on app, UI and UX. Maybe within the industry we see that they are now the new standard for the logistic forms. And people change, people really acknowledge how logistic brand can become very friendly, very caring, very casuals for end users. We see the love from young to the older generation. They're getting more attention in using their application and their service and their products more, and that's how we really want for the next things going on and we are happy to be there for now.

BRYONY M, did you say this was today?

MISS M Yeah, just today.

DUY Yeah.

MISS M We are here today in Hanoi. We just get the approval today.

DUY Actually, it's just this morning.

BRYONY Well, congratulations.

DUY Yeah, thank you.

MISS M As a business director, I'm very happy because after Giao Hàng Tiết Kiệm, many unicorn and tech company in Vietnam reached out

us, asked for what we did for them. They told us the case was very impressive and worthy as a Vietnam new unicorn. The brands is a perplex what is for a tech-based company but still have a DNA of Vietnam in it? And we happy with that. We are really happy because the new change is worthy what we've done so far.

BRYONY Well, I'm very happy for you. It's really interesting to see and I'm excited myself looking forward to see what your business will be like in five or 10 years, because through this case study and many others that we've highlighted on brand new and that I'm aware of, I see this deep investment from the two of you in making the process of a rebrand, really accessible day to day thing for your clients. You are putting yourselves out there at 110% for them and that is slowly but surely shifting in a cultural sense how corporations and companies in Vietnam will approach branding as you continue through this process. I think that it will change. In 15 years, you will not find that much resistance because more and more companies have seen what others have done and how much a rebrand has helped them and you hear from friends, "Oh, I did this. This was a great process. It was hard for a while, but in the end it really helped our company." I'm really interested to see how much of an impact you're going to have as a branding design firm in the long term.

DUY We were interested to see how things go as well. We are really surprised that the companies, the industry that close together with us and carry on us as well and they're giving us opportunities to build a rebrand, to build a new brand, access to giving a space for the designs, the creative to speak, giving them the new voice, the new face, and now they're caring about how international brand appearance that they will stand alone when they come into the bigger market and they want to compete with others as well. And it is really interesting to see people loving our work, endorsing our work, and love how something that cultural that we put in on online along the way from the brands. I'm really amazed that people acknowledge about it and people

understand about it and we're fascinated about it, and I really hope that we still have to be healthy to still carry on there. Yeah.

MISS M Yeah, still carry on our studio. We also lucky that we have a team that together with us some is more than six years and our creative director, he worked with us seven years almost and the rest of the team is two, five years. We're happy because we can create a place for the planning designer that they can help with the place to grow and we are happy with that to be honest that we also do for our Vietnamese company across the country because when they have a good branding, have international look and feel that can help them to reach to the international business. That's what we want.

BRYONY Big ambitions. I like it.

MISS M Quite big, but that's okay.

BRYONY You're actually going through with it. The impact of GHTK is quite intense.

MISS M Yeah.

BRYONY I want to thank you both for being on The Follow-up today and for sharing not only really interesting information about the project, but the impact of the cultural insight on the project, and how you manage your business. I really appreciate that.

DUY Yeah, it was a really fun podcast, and we are happy that we can share about it and we can talk about it and it's run along well with us for quite a while now we can have shares and seeing the people giving us feedback and reactions to know that we are going into the right way. I'm happy to be on every time for The Follow-ups and working together with brand new to share things with us, and that deeply appreciations from us every time we have new case, brand new owns always supporting us from the past.

BRYONY Thank you so much. I will let you celebrate now. Go celebrate.

DUY Yeah.

MISS M See you October.

DUY Yeah.

ARMIN First of all, congratulations to M — N Associates for getting a new contract with GHTK on the day of this recording and given the amount of energy that went into the initial push to transform the brand, the future looks promising for GHTK as it helps establish a new standard of branding for large Vietnamese companies and helps cement the value of engaging in this process. Also, it was great to hear all the thoughtful consideration behind the design decisions and how they were informed by different aspects of Vietnam's culture and infrastructure as it all converged into a vibrant new identity.

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