

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

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Justin Prochnow ([00:26](#)):

Hello and welcome to Legal Food Talk. I'm your host, Justin Prochnow, a shareholder in the Denver office of the international law Firm, Greenberg Traurig. This is a podcast brought to you by our food beverage and agribusiness practice, to give you some insights and knowledge about the world of food, beverage, and agribusiness.

Justin Prochnow ([00:53](#)):

Well, welcome to another addition of Legal Food talk from Greenberg Traurig. I'm joined here today by my co-host Michael Goodman. Hello, Michael.

Michael Goodman ([01:02](#)):

Hi, Justin. Thanks for having me back.

Justin Prochnow ([01:05](#)):

Justin Prochnow here, and we're excited to talk with you today. On this podcast, we try to talk about all things food, beverage, dietary supplement, and from a bunch of different angles. So sometimes we have clients on. Sometimes we have other GT colleagues. Sometimes we just talked about various regulatory issues, and today we're excited to have one of my friends in the industry. I've been with him on a lot of different panels, trade shows. We've collaborated on different clients, and so happy to talk with him today. We have Fred Hart here from Interact. Fred, happy to have you here with us today.

Fred Hart ([01:47](#)):

Justin, Michael, thanks for having me on. Mom, if you're listening, I love you. It's great to be here. Just as good as a panel, without the in person element.

Justin Prochnow ([01:57](#)):

There you go. Well, that's one of the things before we get started on everything, just to catch up. We used to see other at all the trade shows. We're not living that far away from each other, still.

Fred Hart ([02:09](#)):

No

Justin Prochnow ([02:10](#)):

Twenty-five miles away, and yet, I don't think we've seen each other in like two years. Well, what have you been doing without trade shows and everything else to hang around. That's one of the places I wanted to start is, pandemic obviously affected a lot of people different ways. I know one of the things that you guys Interact do a lot was go to trade shows, conferences, speak at things. So how did Interact, you and Blake and others there, deal with the pandemic and the cutoff of some of the natural outlets where you guys would go to talk with potential clients.

Fred Hart ([02:51](#)):

Yeah, well, I think we were very fortunate all things considered to have built up a really strong community prior to the pandemic. Being dedicated to the industry of food and bev and going to 10 or more trade shows a year consecutively for nearly a decade has really earned us a lot of relationships, you included. So when the pandemic hit, we started to do some experimental things where we tried to keep in touch with our community, but in a more creative fashion. So everyone remembers Clubhouse, at least a flash in the pan. We were hosting talks on that with entrepreneurs or different folks in the industry, just about what they were experiencing, how they were dealing with maintaining company culture, things of that nature. So that was great.

Fred Hart ([03:38](#)):

We got really creative, and I think like a lot of people, we had some downtime at the beginning. So we used that bandwidth to do two things. One, we decided to practice what we preach and build our first agency owned brand. We branded and created an elevated skincare brand that started with a fresh take on hand sanitizer, essentially. We called it Cleanly. We built all the branding. We worked with a team on the product and the manufacturing.

Fred Hart ([04:12](#)):

It had essential oils, really interesting scents, and olfactory elements. It was really focused on being additive to someone's life, rather than redactive. Everything out there was so harsh. It was all about just killing germs, drying out your hands, et cetera. So this was moisturizing, uplifting from a scent perspective, really focused on treating your hands as well as you treat your face with the efficacy of hand sanitizers. So that was really interesting for our studio to do that for ourselves and become our own client, which is always tough.

Fred Hart ([04:45](#)):

We also wanted to do something for all of the entrepreneurs out there. We're so deeply connected to that community and a lot of our success is based off of the success of entrepreneurs that we work with. So we created a series called Sprint to Success in conjunction with the good folks at BevNet and NOSH, where we had an application process. We received over a hundred applications from entrepreneurs. Our goal was to work with someone who was under a million in revenue at the time, to really like propel them forward.

Fred Hart ([05:17](#)):

We ultimately worked with a brand called Superfrau, which is up-cycled whey product for hydration beverages. Amazing founder in Melissa. We took them through a sprint process from positioning and strategy, all the way to creative through to mechanicals, and recorded all of the presentations with the client, and then internal conversations with our team, almost like a reality show. Turned them into webinar episodes that people on BevNet and NOSH could watch to give them a transparent view of what it's like to work with a creative agency, and give them some principles that they can utilize on their own brands. So it turned out to be pretty busy for us and we were very gung-ho on trying to make the most of the moment.

Justin Prochnow ([06:11](#)):

So is that something that people who subscribe to BevNet or NOSH then can watch on their website.

Fred Hart ([06:17](#)):

Yeah. At the time, I don't believe it was behind the paywall. That was something that we really emphasized with that team, that we wanted all entrepreneurs to have access to this. Today, it may be behind the subscription paywall, but it was a big piece from our team's perspective that it was accessible by everyone.

Justin Prochnow ([06:38](#)):

Is that something you think was just a one off thing or do you think you'll continue to do that with others?

Fred Hart ([06:45](#)):

Well, that's a great question. We realized just how intense production is, video production, all of the elements. You guys are building the podcast and I have a lot of admiration for the time and energy that goes into it. I think for us, it was something that we tried, something that we were proud of, but ultimately I think gets in the way of us fulfilling our mission now that entrepreneurs are continuing to invest in their brands. Where we can take that same bandwidth and really help make a real world difference, rather than just a song and dance of it.

Justin Prochnow ([07:22](#)):

Well, it sounds incredible. I'm going to have to take a look.

Fred Hart ([07:24](#)):

It was fun.

Justin Prochnow ([07:24](#)):

I think those types of things are obviously invaluable and that's one of the things that BevNet and NOSH have always been good at. One of the reasons I always used to push people going to BevNet was, it's as much about learning how others have acted in the industry and some of their own personal stories, and then networking with the other people. Getting a glimpse of how it worked for everyone else, I think is a huge advantage. I think a lot of people, and I'm sure I'm preaching to the choir here, but I think a lot of people have a little bit of a misconception of the branding design agency and how easy it might be.

Justin Prochnow ([08:07](#)):

Maybe that's a good segue into you could tell us a little bit more about Interact and what you do. I know I have another friend who's a marketing person and I know there's some overlap, but some differences, but there tends to be, I think, a feeling like it's one of those jobs that everyone can fill by themselves. Oh, in a pinch, if we have to cut money somewhere, we'll cut it off the marketing budget, because I can put out a little copy or I can make a tweak to that and do it. So maybe we can use that as a stepping back to tell us a little bit more about Interact and maybe how you and Blake... I know Blake was doing it for a while, then you joined him and have this new vision of the company. Maybe you can talk a little bit about how Interact got started as well.

Fred Hart ([09:01](#)):

Absolutely. So Interact is a branding and design agency. We're really fortunate to have 20 talented folks on our team today, spread out between our offices in Boulder, Colorado, which is at the epicenter of the

natural foods movement and Austin, Texas, our second office that we opened up in the past few months. We also have some remote folks that we hired during COVID that are fully remote in Los Angeles, New York, and even Portland, Maine. Our team is comprised of strategists, designers. We have a head of production and sustainability Interact and then a fantastic account team, mixed with a bunch of other really critical individuals that help facilitate the day to day on our side.

Fred Hart ([09:45](#)):

Ultimately, what we do is we work with food and beverage entrepreneurs. We definitely work in alcohol and cannabis and pet, but most people will know as far our dedication to food and bev. We work with a lot of entrepreneurial clients, disruptors, challengers across the food and beverage scene. It's been a phenomenal ride because we've really taken this holistic approach to understanding what makes a successful food and beverage company. With that knowledge, figuring out how design can be at service of the business.

Fred Hart ([10:21](#)):

I think that's what separates us a little bit from other design agencies. You get a lot of folks that are really obsessed with just the aesthetic element of the craft, about winning design awards. For us, it's really about affecting the bottom line of the business, because if we do that, it means we've created a stronger connection with consumers. That's the best way to measure it. So I'll pause there to see if there's anything else you'd like to pry on around that, but I think that's a good nutshell for the listeners.

Justin Prochnow ([10:53](#)):

Again, we did that panel at Expo West in 2019 around building your brand. I thought it was one of my favorite panels. It was you and we had Neel Premkumar from Dyla and Stern-

Fred Hart ([11:08](#)):

Health-Ade was on the panel, the founder. That was pretty amazing. Yep.

Justin Prochnow ([11:12](#)):

Justin Trout from Health-Ade and then Gayle Strong from our office. It just was in interesting to hear, both from you and then from Justin and Neel, the different routes that some companies take, and obviously the different things that people find to be important. So I imagine when you work with a brand it's important to have that first meeting and to discuss what's really important to them, for you to shape a strategy of where to go.

Fred Hart ([11:49](#)):

Yeah. We have very holistic conversations, again, about people's businesses, not just design, because we want to understand the underlying objective. We've worked with pre-revenue entrepreneurs to recently working with the big strategics, like Nestle and helping...

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Fred Hart ([12:00](#)):

Recently working with the big strategics, like Nestle and helping them rebrand Hot Pockets, a billion dollar brand. So we've seen the entire gamut at this point and understand some of the growing pains

and the different challenges and the different phases of a brand's lifecycle. You could be redesigning because your brand has the wrong name and it's confusing consumers. You could be needing a refresh because you've been bootstrapping for 10 years and now competition is getting more stiff. Or you're moving from the natural channel and expanding into conventional for the first time and coming up against different competitors.

Fred Hart ([12:37](#)):

Or you've been successful and your portfolio has expanded to include all sorts of products, but now you have a fragmented portfolio that isn't easily shoppable. The list goes on and on and on, and what we do is in our initial sort of conversations with founders or even brand managers is really trying to understand what's the problem that they see today and where do they want to be in the next three to five years, because we want to use design and strategy to help them get to that next milestone.

Justin Prochnow ([13:12](#)):

How often does it come up? Do you ever have, I assume you do, situations where you talk with people and then decide that you are not the right agency to work with them, whether it's just you don't have that same vision or you just can't quite seem to... How often does that come up?

Fred Hart ([13:34](#)):

Yeah, it happens more often than you think. One of my favorite things to do in the new business process with our team and Erin Chaiken on the Interact staff deserves a big credit. She's our head of new partnerships. We love forcing a no in conversations, because it means we're not afraid to hear it and we're not afraid to say it ourselves and it means we're being honest above all else.

Fred Hart ([13:58](#)):

We work with plenty of entrepreneurs that reach out to us and they simply just do not have the funds to work with us, or they're so early that after we talk with them, we actually tell them, "We don't think you should hire an agency right now, and in fact, we're going to decline this opportunity, but we're going to put you in touch with a couple of freelancers," people that have great know-how that will be much more economic for the business at that given stage that will help them reach their next sort of leap stone without spending an arm and a leg to do so with a big agency.

Fred Hart ([14:34](#)):

Because there are some clients that they just need to get into market and to learn, get reception, try to find that product market fit, and then come to an agency with size and reputation that can make the most of that information and feedback. So we have those conversations all the time. We take a lot of pride in not being full service and trying to do everything. So we have some really strong sweet spots of brand strategy, design strategy, creative, mostly around what we call like visual identity systems and then a real competency and expertise around packaging because we work in CPG so much.

Fred Hart ([15:12](#)):

Then we'll do web and some of these other things, but someone comes to us just looking for a website, we'll tell them no and we'll point them in another direction. Because we want to maximize our value for our clients and so we don't take on one-off projects where we don't touch the core part of the brand.

Fred Hart ([15:28](#)):

Or if they're looking for one agency to handle everything including content creation and social and digital, we'll again be very honest and say, "We don't do those things and you're not going to want us to try. We'll bring in another partner to join us or we can give you references. But we think you're making a mistake in asking for one person to do all of that." So those are the types of conversations that we like to have and they usually garner a lot of trust because of how forthright we are.

Justin Prochnow ([15:54](#)):

So Fred, we've talked about the beginnings of a brand or brand creation, but can you talk a little bit about the lifecycle of a brand and then ending with when a company knows when to rebrand?

Fred Hart ([16:09](#)):

Yeah. Usually, a company knows when to rebrand when they've had a fair amount of success, they've got some product market fit and they're either going through an expansion process and it's a time and moment where they're looking in the mirror and going, "You know what, there's a lack of cohesion amongst these sorts of things." Or you have the opposite where a company has sort of reached some level of success and things are starting to decline. There's even been a shift in consumers or a shift in the category based on challenger brands coming in and sort of like reframing things for consumers and they need to future proof themselves essentially.

Fred Hart ([16:57](#)):

The reasons for a rebrand or a refresh are vast. Even on that scale of someone having a brand and needing to do a redesign, you can be on the evolutionary end of that spectrum where there's a lot of things that are working, but there's some really pivotal things that need shift, or you can be much more revolutionary where you want to start with a clean slate essentially, or maybe the only sacred cow is the brand name but everything else can change. So the health of the business is usually what dictates those things. That's why we like to talk about the business to understand the health of it.

Justin Prochnow ([17:31](#)):

Well, one of the ones you mentioned, I mean, strikes me as one that's like the perfect example, which is Hot Pockets. Every time I think of Hot Pockets, I can't help but think of Jim Gaffigan-

Fred Hart ([17:44](#)):

Oh, for sure.

Justin Prochnow ([17:48](#)):

Comedy routine, which I don't know... I mean, it'd be interesting to hear your perspective on whether that helped or hurt the brand. I mean, got him a lot of attention, but at the same time, it was just, hey, that's the microwave thing that you give to your kids or something that I think a lot of people would've viewed as being not very healthy and you're just trying to get something to eat quickly. So I would imagine that that was probably an example, one of the best examples you could have of something of needing a refresh [inaudible 00:18:23].

Fred Hart ([18:23](#)):

Yeah, for sure. So happy to talk a little bit about it. So Nestle-

Justin Prochnow ([18:28](#)):

Yeah, I'd love to hear that.

Fred Hart ([18:29](#)):

What I should preface is the way that we got a relationship with Nestle in the first place was they came to us to build a brand from scratch for them. You can actually go and find it in market now and find it online. It's a brand called Nestle Rallies, R-A-L-L-I-E-S. They wanted to launch a better for you indulgent snack in the refrigerated aisle, pretty revolutionary for what people perceived to be a company of Nestle, kind of old guard.

Fred Hart ([18:56](#)):

It's nut butterballs enrobed in chocolate, has some plant-based protein elements in it and just some other beneficial things, but it is indulgence first. Sits in the refrigerated next to things like a Clio bar, a Justin's, not a Justin's, excuse me, a perfect bar or a perfect day or a perfect cup.

Justin Prochnow ([19:15](#)):

Perfect cup, yeah.

Fred Hart ([19:17](#)):

And some of those other things. So we built a brand completely from scratch. They had the innovation white space, and they knew our reputation of working with entrepreneurs. So we built them an entrepreneurial brand. Then they were like, "What would happen if we gave you an RFP for a billion dollar brand?" We said, "Well, let's find out." We were fortunate to win that in sort of a rough pitch process, so to speak.

Fred Hart ([19:40](#)):

Upon diving in what we realized what the issue with the brand was is that they had always sort of marketed and positioned themselves to the buyer, never the consumer. A person buying Hot Pockets is a head of household, maybe a parent figure, someone that's maybe a caretaker for the family or they're buying for themselves, but usually their target, their core consumer of the Hot Pocket product is a 13 year old gamer and they had never spoken to them before.

Fred Hart ([20:10](#)):

So we had two audiences to cater to at the same time. We can't alienate either. Meanwhile, we need to refresh and update the brand to be much more relevant, and again, to sort of future proof it. A lot of that was going to happen through design and the design signals that we used. In the background, Nestle had been working really hard on hot products from a product formulation. They are not impervious to consumer demands and trends for cleaner and more real ingredients.

Fred Hart ([20:39](#)):

It is a snack that sort of has a satiety element to it, which is why parents like it, 10 grams of protein, real cheese, pepperoni, crust, et cetera, something easy that they can give to their kids or bring it to the house and the kids can take care of themselves, which gives kids a sense of autonomy and creates a little bit of a relationship of parents giving power to teens and whatnot.

Fred Hart ([21:03](#)):

So we looked at the brand. We said, "It's old, it's tired. It's not talking to the right audience visually. People don't read, they cognize. Right now, when you look at Hot Pockets, it's recognizably old. It's recognizably irrelevant. Things like Jim Gaffigan, I think, are positive for the brand overall because all you need to say is the word Hot Pocket and everyone in America is on a first name basis with it, whether they consume it or not.

Fred Hart ([21:28](#)):

So how could we use design to create a new sense of engagement? So we cleaned it up. We got them to double down on a really crisp, clean red with none of the, I don't know, gradients or glows or anything of that nature. We said you need to act more like Supreme, a lifestyle brand. We gave them attitude, updated the food photography, because the universal language everyone speaks is flavor. Then helped them have a tool of visual assets that they could take into the digital realm. They have all sorts of really interesting partnerships with Twitch, with eSports gaming teams, their digital touchpoints of Instagram and Twitter and social media and stuff like that.

Fred Hart ([22:13](#)):

We just got word that the brand has seen an organic 16% growth year over year. So that's really strong and really powerful especially for a brand at scale like that. Now, not all of that is attributed just to our work. There are certain things going on with consumers eating more in grocery and the freezer being a hotter place to visit. But the work certainly had a real great impact on the brand.

Justin Prochnow ([22:45](#)):

I saw the packaging on your website and it looked like a whole different product. Then I looked on the website now and it says, "Attention all gamers." It would be something that my 12 year old son who spends a fair amount of time playing Fortnite, really I can see the appeal to him, for sure. So I do a marketing class up at Thomas Jefferson High School where I have gone to high school. Michael did as well. Michael and I both went to high school just a few years apart from each other.

Fred Hart ([23:18](#)):

Amazing.

Justin Prochnow ([23:24](#)):

I do a junior achievement class up there. But I do a session on marketing and advertising.

Fred Hart ([23:29](#)):

Oh, cool.

Justin Prochnow ([23:29](#)):

I take a lot of the packaging I've accrued over the years. One of the fun things, and I'm sure fun for you to see at BevNET is some of the products you see there for one... I remember Walter Orcot who used to work at MVE and do all their cans, the 8.4 [inaudible 00:23:51] ounce slim cans. He would say he had a whole wall of the one and dones because they would have a product, you'd see them at one BevNET and then you wouldn't see them again because their core concept was just not...

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Justin Prochnow ([24:01](#)):

... [inaudible 00:24:01] because their core concept was just not one that was a sustainable thing. Whether it was an energy drink targeted specifically for hockey players. Or we had one that was, I can't even say the name here. And I know when I sent it through conflicts, my law firm is like, "Seriously, that's what you're representing?" But it was a product with strippers on the-

Fred Hart ([24:27](#)):

Yep, yep, yep.

Justin Prochnow ([24:27](#)):

... outside of the can and like, "Oh, this is awesome." And then it's like, "You understand that you can only sell that at like a strip club or maybe Spencer Gifts-

Fred Hart ([24:41](#)):

Yep, for sure.

Justin Prochnow ([24:42](#)):

... or online, but Target and 7-Eleven in Walmart are not carrying that product?" And similar, there were these guys who had a water, but it was in the shape of a grenade.

Fred Hart ([24:51](#)):

Yes. Yep. I do.

Justin Prochnow ([24:55](#)):

You remember that one? And again, so I take all those as examples of products. There's another one you might remember. It was artichoke water, and I remember when he came to me and he said, "We are the first and only artichoke water." And I remember at the time thinking, "Sometimes there's a reason for that. It's because no one wants to drink artichoke water. They want their artichokes dipped in butter or mayonnaise and not having to drink it."

Justin Prochnow ([25:24](#)):

So I wonder, you've seen lots of these things. What are one or two of the key kind of mistakes that you think people make when they're looking, whether it's before they come to you or just other examples out there? What do you think some of the key mistakes people make when they're branding products?

Fred Hart ([25:45](#)):

Well, over investing in design before your product is in the best place that it can be, is the fastest way to kill a brand. It will create trial but no repeat purchase, because if you have great design, "Oh man, this is going to be awesome.", set your expectations really high and then follow through. If it's really poor, it's going to create a really negative experience. And so, we kind of try to dig into a lot of the brands that we spend our time working on. We ask for samples early in the process. We want to try these things. And if

we really don't see it or have some serious questions, then we'll tell them we don't think it's worth the investment. So, that's-

Justin Prochnow ([26:26](#)):

So having a product that actually tastes good matters?

Fred Hart ([26:28](#)):

Yeah. Surprisingly, it does. The things that we see a lot of entrepreneurs get themselves in trouble with is, we can point it to the keto space. Hot trend comes in, everyone's trying to capitalize it, and all of a sudden you end up with all of these really generic positioned and named brands. So Keto Perfect, Keto Pint, keto snacks, CIITTO, C-I-I-T-T-O, the list goes on and on. And you see it in all of these sort of burgeoning categories that have buzz. People tend to just glom onto what the product is, but you're really putting yourself in a box that's going to expire at some point.

Fred Hart ([27:12](#)):

We're already starting to see searches for keto declining. People are still interested in low sugar, low carb, high protein, but the sort of buzzy catch term is starting to die off. And all of these companies are going to be left holding something less than desirable in their own brand name. And so, we really help clients try to see around those corners early on.

Fred Hart ([27:35](#)):

We actually just published a thought leadership piece with BevNet and NOSH around examples of companies renaming their brands after it's been in market, which sounds really painful to entrepreneurs, but actually is so much more common than anyone knows. And we want to de-stigmatize that because renaming a brand is not an admission of failure, it's an admission that you've learned something and that you can fuel your company to greater success.

Fred Hart ([28:02](#)):

So an example I like to give is, Siete, which is on the tips of everyone's tongue in terms of great brand. Used to be called Must N Nutty tortillas. Could you imagine them trying to sell anything else outside of that? And even then, the pun is a little cringy. We've rebranded a handful of successful companies. So Kettle & Fire, very successful in the bone broth space. When they came to us, they were the Bone Broth Co. When we worked with Koia, they came to us and their brand name was Raw Nature Five. So the-

Justin Prochnow ([28:37](#)):

Yes. I happened to know that because I evaluate their labeling and right. The company's-

Fred Hart ([28:45](#)):

Correct.

Justin Prochnow ([28:45](#)):

... name is still Raw Nature 5, the brand is Koia.

Fred Hart ([28:48](#)):

Yeah. So there's just all these examples. So, that's a big mistake that we see a lot of early stage entrepreneurs make, is they focus on the product rather than the brand. And unless you are really revolutionary in terms of product, you don't want to focus so much on what you are. Most founders are not creating categories, they're iterative. And so, there's a lot of preexisting understanding there.

Justin Prochnow ([29:16](#)):

And you might want to expand and so if you've named it after your kind of product, then you're, as you said... What was it? Must B Nutty.

Fred Hart ([29:27](#)):

Yeah, Must B Nutty [inaudible 00:29:27].

Justin Prochnow ([29:29](#)):

And then if you wanted do anything else that doesn't involve nuts [inaudible 00:29:31].

Fred Hart ([29:31](#)):

Or tortillas, so-

Justin Prochnow ([29:33](#)):

Makes sense.

Fred Hart ([29:33](#)):

... pick your poison.

Justin Prochnow ([29:35](#)):

Right? Right.

Fred Hart ([29:36](#)):

Yeah. So, those are some very common ones. And then, I think what we love about entrepreneurs is they're risk takers. They're already taking massive risks and starting their business. And what we encourage them to do is continue that bravery, when it comes to creative. There's a quote that we love to give people, which is, "The opposite of bravery is not cowardice, it's conformity." And you look at other successful food and beverage companies, you think, "I got to be doing what they're doing." But the last thing you need to be doing is playing someone else's playbook. And that's probably one of the more valuable things that we help companies understand is, what's the most authentic way that we can bring our unique brand DNA to life that differentiates us from our competitors, that also aligns with and resonates with consumer interests? And it's that sort of sweet trinity of the three that we try to unlock for clients.

Justin Prochnow ([30:37](#)):

Are there any brands out there that you haven't worked on, but are kind of jealous of what they did? I mean, I assume that there're some brands that they're like, "Man, they did a good job with that." Anything that jumps out to you as being one [inaudible 00:30:51]

Fred Hart ([30:51](#)):

Yeah. I mean, there are lots of examples. There are a lot of brands that we don't touch that we have great admiration for, both the agencies that may have done the work or the founders behind the vision. There are some easy ones to point to that everyone talks about, so like Liquid Death. What I really just admire there is again, on the topic of bravery.

Justin Prochnow ([31:13](#)):

Yeah. It's amazing. To think that would work. You're saying... I mean, taking it literally, this would kill you to drink it, and it's water.

Fred Hart ([31:24](#)):

It is really-

Justin Prochnow ([31:25](#)):

It's amazing.

Fred Hart ([31:26](#)):

... amazing. They're almost more of a media company than they are beverage company, at this point, very kind of Red Bull 2.0. But they really understand their consumers. They embrace being different and they're different with a purpose. Their whole tagline is, murder your thirst. They're all about killing plastic because everything's in aluminum cans. And they're just tapping into a whole segment of people that drink water that have never been attracted to the category before. And I think it's wonderful.

Justin Prochnow ([32:01](#)):

I have to think they had at least an initial... I mean, people had to have thought that was an energy drink, to start. I mean, there's no way you don't look at that and think, "Oh, another energy drink." Like, some of the others out there until you [inaudible 00:32:15].

Fred Hart ([32:15](#)):

Absolutely. I mean, when you're going to break all the rules, there's going to be some confusion along the way. What I will give them credit for is, they were smart in terms of thinking about their go-to-market strategy. They didn't start with grocery. In fact, they stayed out of grocery for as long as possible. What they did was, they started on premise.

Fred Hart ([32:31](#)):

So think about, if you want to get a water at a bar, it's kind of an embarrassing practice, particularly maybe if you don't even want to drink, but you're with other people. So the way that they package that up and the way that feels at concerts, at bars, has a certain cache that feels right in the hand and right for the moment. It also speaks to the nonconformist in some types, in some consumers and their particular mindsets.

Fred Hart ([32:59](#)):

I mean, I don't have a tattoo, I've never been on a motorcycle, and I don't like heavy metal. And yet, I associate with the Liquid Death brand because it's all about being unconventional, being disruptive,

being a non-conformist. And intellectually, I really value those things. And so, I like sort of what that brand says about me, if I'm holding it. So, they win on premise, they make huge splashes online. They have all of this pull, all of a sudden, and now retailers are begging them to come in. And they've created enough an awareness that when they do show up in retail, consumers that know the brand flock to it, and eventually the sort of legend of it continues to build and grow. But had they just tried to throw that on shelf and had no real strategy behind it otherwise, it would probably would've killed the brand.

Justin Prochnow ([33:51](#)):

What's one of your more recent kind of favorite projects you've worked on?

Fred Hart ([33:55](#)):

I am really, really proud of our recent work with GoodPop. GoodPop is a novelty frozen brand out of Austin, Texas. We're-

Justin Prochnow ([34:08](#)):

This happens a lot, sorry.

Fred Hart ([34:09](#)):

[inaudible 00:34:09]. Of course, we do.

Justin Prochnow ([34:10](#)):

... We share that. [inaudible 00:34:11] as well. And I know partly when you started, you've sent people my way and I've sent people your way. But I think also it just happens that, it's a-

Fred Hart ([34:21](#)):

Good people work with good people. That's all I got to say.

Justin Prochnow ([34:26](#)):

That's right. Right. So, we know Daniel very well.

Fred Hart ([34:26](#)):

So Daniel Goetz, amazing founder. Had been bootstrapping it by himself for 10 years. He doesn't even have a design background and he was doing all of the packaging design. So when it came time for them to do a refresh, what they were looking at is, moving into conventional. They'd sort of really put their stake in the ground in natural. They were going to go compete with literally the Popsicle brand or Outshine or JonnyPops and some of these other stalwarts of the category and target and so on.

Fred Hart ([34:53](#)):

And so, he knew that he needed to finally make the investment. He'd held out for 10 years, and done a good job. He deserves a lot of credit. So when we got our hands on that brand, we approach with a couple of philosophies. People don't read, they recognize. What's recognizable about the brand today that needed to be table stakes? And then we can refresh everything else. Turned out, white was kind of a calling card of theirs and that was going to work in conventional where everything was

hypersaturated. But if we weren't careful, white would just blend in with all of the private label brands in natural. So, doubled edged sword there.

Fred Hart ([35:27](#)):

Challenge the category, not the consumer. That's another one of our principles. We don't want to be different for different's sake, but we do want to figure out a way to disrupt everything that's going on visually in the space. And so, we did this phenomenal redesign. You can see it on our website. The before and after is awesome. We invested in all new product photography. We gave them a brand logo redesign, we gave them a new color of this sort of teal that unifies the entire portfolio, new layout, new communication hierarchy that really spoke to consumers and gave them exactly what they wanted.

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Fred Hart ([36:00](#)):

New communication hierarchy that really spoke to consumers and gave them exactly what they wanted. And we just recently won the grand prize for a design Effectiveness Award by Designalytics. We were at a conference in May where we received this and we received it because this company measures the impact of design on sales. So they take spins data. They look at the before and after time periods and then look for velocities and things of that nature. And they had determined that the redesign created a 40% increase in sales year over year, which is just phenomenal. And we're fortunate to have a handful of these sorts of statistics. We redesigned Hodo Soy, they saw 50 something percent increase. Boulder Canyon, redesigned those chips, they saw 50% increase. So this is where we really see the value of design working for businesses, not just being pretty. And as we're coming into what feels like an economic downturn, really focusing on how creative can help strengthen a brand, is going to be pivotal.

Justin Prochnow ([37:12](#)):

And so how long do you work on something with Daniel and GoodPop? How long did you work on-

Fred Hart ([37:19](#)):

Depends on the size of the portfolio and the complexity. So they had their core sort of fruit popsicles and cream popsicles, but then they were also starting a kid's novelty focus line. So twin pops that you could break apart and share. Push Pops.

Justin Prochnow ([37:37](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I have some in my freezer right now, essentially the organic, natural, healthy version of Otter Pops.

Fred Hart ([37:46](#)):

So that again is phenomenal and they just recently launched ice cream sandwiches and Klondike bars. So the more complex the system, the longer it takes us, just because we want to acknowledge the different segmentation that's required. And how easy is that to do with just photography alone or does it need stronger design cues. But I think all in all, it was probably a four to six month process of start to finish. They had never done brand positioning before. So we spent a lot of time in the upfront doing that, then design strategy, then creative development, and then taking them all the way through to mechanicals

and print production files. So, requires some patience for entrepreneurs that aren't used to working with an agency, but the benefits are monumental.

Justin Prochnow ([38:36](#)):

And it paid off with a nice award.

Fred Hart ([38:38](#)):

More so, paid off with a successful shot in the arm to the business, and that's the best case study that we can ever ask for.

Justin Prochnow ([38:48](#)):

The award doesn't come with the six figure check?

Fred Hart ([38:50](#)):

We're looking for those kickbacks anywhere we can get them.

Justin Prochnow ([38:55](#)):

Well, we're going to wrap up here, but before we finish, what do you see here moving forward? I mean, obviously we got through the pandemic for, I mean, Michael and Maya's experience was, it was a really interesting time for a lot of our clients. It was the best years they've ever had. Depending on what you're selling, if you were selling sparkling water, or certainly anything with vitamin C or zinc or echinacea, kombucha, it was the best years you've ever had. If you were a restaurant, not as good of a time. If you're a pizza delivery, nothing could be better for you than a pandemic outbreak where restaurants are closed and people are going to order pizza. So, kind of a weird time. Did you experience a little bit of slow down in people doing branding redesign, not knowing what was coming up. And I assume that's take back [inaudible 00:40:00]

Fred Hart ([40:00](#)):

In the first few months, once the pandemic started in March. So March to May, things were real slow. And then all of a sudden they picked up really, really quickly. Sorry, there's a ambulance. You can probably hear outside.

Justin Prochnow ([40:12](#)):

That's all right. If we hear a big knock at the door, we'll-

Fred Hart ([40:17](#)):

You'll come get me.

Justin Prochnow ([40:19](#)):

We won't turn it over, as your attorney, we won't turn it over unless we're required to.

Fred Hart ([40:22](#)):

Yeah. So when the pandemic first hit things slowed down and then by May, they picked back up in a big way. We actually were very fortunate to finish the year off with more revenue for the business, for the

Interact business than we did the year prior. So it just tells you how quickly everyone sort of reverse faced. Trends that were-

Justin Prochnow ([40:43](#)):

And also maybe, sorry. And also, maybe people felt like they had time to focus on that since they weren't necessarily doing some of the other things they might have been doing before.

Fred Hart ([40:53](#)):

Yes. People had more time. I think all of a sudden you realized all of the food and beverage share from restaurant, was funneling into grocery. And so now was the time to strengthen the brands. So a lot of people took advantage of that. Trends that we're seeing now, D2C is tough. A lot of people are worried about its viability. Shipping costs are moving up, supply chain issues, delays, fuel charges, all of those things. So it's actually pushing people back into retail, which is our sweet spot. So we've been attending a handful of D2C conferences this year to really understand that space, because we have now a history of helping successful D2C brands become omnichannel brands because all D2C brands, as they continue to fight for growth, eventually end up in retail.

Fred Hart ([41:48](#)):

And a lot of these D2C brands are not built to compete with others. They exist in these sort of little vacuums or their own little universe and bubble online, where they're just catering to their consumers. But suddenly, Dr. Squatch, a client of ours over a hundred million dollars in business, just selling soap bars online to men. If they want to go into retail, they're going to be competing with Johnson and Johnson and P and G and other companies that have serious consumer data and have their brands in a really tight knit place. So they come to us and we help them prepare. So that's a trend that we're seeing. People are getting pushed back into retail, which is a very competitive environment. So that's big.

Fred Hart ([42:29](#)):

You're also seeing, I think the rise and the influence of gen Z and the aesthetic soup de jour being applied in what we feel is a bit of a haphazard way. Very bubbly, very characterful. You can look at a handful of brands out in the space, and it just feels like an aesthetic backlash to what has been coined Millennial Blanding, where everything was stripped back and made super clean and a lack of emotion. So you're seeing sort of a maximalism approach right now. But what we always make sure we do is we understand our brand's audiences and then build something that caters to them rather than just simply pick up design trends and apply it to our paintbrush, as we do these refreshes.

Justin Prochnow ([43:18](#)):

You mentioned supply chain. That's my now excuse for everything. If my wife complains that I left the cupboards open at home, I just say, "Supply chain."

Fred Hart ([43:30](#)):

You're right.

Justin Prochnow ([43:30](#)):

And she really appreciates that.

Fred Hart ([43:32](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, she does.

Justin Prochnow ([43:34](#)):

Well, Fred, amazing as always. We're so happy to have you here. Hey, tell us where do people go to find Interact? Website, is it just Interact? And before we get to that, I want to ask you this quickly because you, obviously, you guys yourself kind of rebranded a little bit because it used to be Interact on Shelf. If I'm not mistaken.

Fred Hart ([43:59](#)):

You are correct. It went from Interact on Shelf to Interact Boulder to now proudly Interact Brands.

Justin Prochnow ([44:05](#)):

Interact Brands.

Fred Hart ([44:05](#)):

So we've been evolving ourselves in refreshing our own selves over the last 10 plus years. And we finally feel like we're in a place where we're not boxing ourselves in with our name or our URL, but yeah, [interactbrands.com](#). You can check out our website. Interact Brands on Instagram, you can follow along. And then I think always giving us a follow on LinkedIn. We're fairly active, both the Interact Brands, company account, as well as my personal account, Fred Hart, H-A-R-T. We're usually sharing all the things that we're doing. You start a podcast out with trade shows, kind of dying. We're back on the road. We've been to Expo West, Fancy Foods, Sweets and Snacks. We'll be at Expo East. We've got Bar Covent. We went to Nache and Bethnet. I unfortunately missed a handful of these because I got COVID for the first time. So it's very much still a reality of the world. But our team was there and we were making recaps. So we love sharing knowledge. We think that's the best way to build community.

Justin Prochnow ([45:17](#)):

We're right there with you. We'll look forward to seeing you at the next shows. Thanks again, as always. Amazing to hear the insights from you. And I know people listening will appreciate some direction.

Justin Prochnow ([45:31](#)):

Thanks to everyone for listening. If you liked it, please comment on your favorite social media platforms. If you didn't, you don't need to tell anyone about it. Thanks as always and we'll look forward to, have to do this the next time.

Fred Hart ([45:45](#)):

Thanks fellas.

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