

I = interviewer; P9 = participant. Refer to DDM2020 dataset documentation for more information.

1 I so let's get started erm in our email discussion
2 you told me about a recent sustainable design
3 project that you'd worked on could you remind me
4 what the product was

5 P9 it was a er a custom packaging system for um a
6 premium shoe brand

7 I uhu so there was a client and you were what was
8 the context of the project

9 P9 um so I as I'm a designer so I either work
10 independently with clients or I'll work through a
11 studio um I've worked through ((company name))
12 here in New York and one of the clients we have
13 through ((company name)) was um an Italian shoe
14 brand that wanted to kind of redo their packaging
15 systems from like your typical shoe box in a
16 cardboard

17 I mhm

18 P9 box or thing something that was more disruptive
19 and sustainable but can also be produced in Italy

20 I okay

21 P9 so they were our main client for that

22 I and so there was a design brief which had a
23 sustainability element in it then

24 P9 mhm yeah they had I want to say it was either
25 three or four kind of metrics that they wanted to
26 hit and that

27 I okay

28 P9 was you know that was disruptive design that it
29 was sustainably sourced materials that it was
30 cost effective and that it was um feasible to be
31 produced in Italy because they wanted to produce
32 the packaging near where the shoes were being
33 produced

34 I okay and were you working with anyone else on the
35 design

36 P9 um so it was two of us on the design team at the
37 studio and then we partnered with um another
38 design studio that was actually in Italy to help
39 us do the sourcing since they had a lot of
40 manufacturer contacts over there um so they did

41 mainly the manufacturer sourcing and we did the
42 design portion

43 I okay and how did it work erm during the design
44 with someone else did you both work together or
45 on different bits of it

46 P9 so as far as the design portion goes I was in the
47 role of the like the junior designer then I had a
48 senior designer that was kind of doing more of
49 the er I guess like creative direction

50 I okay

51 P9 um but I have a background in sustainable
52 materials so although they were doing more of the
53 creative direction um I was pitching a little bit
54 more on the materials

55 I okay

56 P9 and construction side so it was kind of like we
57 each had part of the project to kind of own too

58 I yeah okay so could you tell me about some of the
59 things that you had to make design decisions
60 about

61 P9 mm so I think some of the biggest things um
62 because this company that we worked with they had
63 never done any like sustainably initiative
64 projects before it was getting them familiar with
65 the sustainable materials um and to them they
66 thought that you know all plastics are bad
67 plastic is bad which you know you could argue
68 that but the right kind of plastic in the right
69 usage isn't or things like cardboard or moulded
70 pulp could be more sustainable than they thought
71 or even things like you know cornstarch based
72 foams or or um you know materials that we looked
73 at and we had to kind of get them comfortable
74 with the idea of using something like that in
75 their packaging where they were more used to
76 using plastic and velvet making it really premium
77 so kind of changing their mindset on what can be
78 sustainable but also premium um that was
79 definitely really interesting to kind of play the
80 part is like an educator as well as a designer

81 I yeah so would you say from what you've said erm
82 the choice of materials was that the most
83 important decision in terms of sustainability

84 P9 yeah I would say that definitely was they were
85 working in pretty small quantities so they were
86 looking for more local sourcing to get those
87 products base they weren't really too concerned

88 with you know shipping worldwide as far as the
89 production goes

90 I mhm so what design did you go for in the end

91 P9 we ended up looking at which sadly the we got to
92 the point where we had concepts chosen and we
93 were going to get samples made but that was right
94 before um covid hit Italy

95 I oh okay

96 P9 actually kind of put the project on pause
97 indefinitely um which is one of the reason I
98 could share haha

99 I okay right haha

100 P9 but they ended up kind of going with this concept
101 that was you know like a like a rigid cardboard
102 mailer tube it was kind of like a almost like
103 what you would ship like rolled up documents in
104 um but it was kind of an elongated tube so it was
105 more like an oval shape it was about that long
106 ((indicating with hands)) and the shoes would
107 kind of nest and fit inside so the tube was
108 cardboard and there was kind of an end cap that
109 was made of aluminium sort of like a like a
110 whiskey um

111 I right yes

112 P9 sort of thing and then um there was like an
113 insert that came out that was kind of a moulded
114 pulp tray with like the recycled film erm
115 covering over it so you kind of pulled this tray
116 out and the whole kind of experience butterflied
117 open so it was like a really nice multi step
118 presentation to kind of getting your shoes but
119 everything was either biodegradable or a hundred
120 per cent recyclable

121 I okay and you said they ended up going with it was
122 it the client that made this decision

123 P9 and it was really interesting because they were
124 hesitant to go for such a different you know
125 approach to something like that but what really
126 actually caught their eye especially on the
127 business end was the fact that instead of it
128 being a box it was a tube and I had all these
129 other features they it was kind of like they used
130 the disruptive form and kind of like the really
131 ownable nature of the design to make springing
132 for a sustainable option I guess feel more valid
133 in a business sense even though from a design
134 sense it was you know really sustainable that

135 kind of helped convince them that that was the
136 best option because it it hit more of their
137 metrics than the other designs but also that it
138 it felt the most unique

139 I uhu so were you was this the option that you were
140 trying to convince them to go with or were you
141 did you give them a selection

142 P9 so we we definitely gave them a selection and we
143 worked we worked with them kind of we had one or
144 two or like work in progress meetings where we
145 would show them you know a wide range designs and
146 kind of get their ideas on where they wanted to
147 go so it wasn't like we worked for a couple weeks
148 and just gave them one um but I think we ended up
149 giving them three or four at the end

150 I yeah

151 P9 and two were based around the mailer tube one was
152 based around a box or excuse me two were based
153 around a box and then the fourth or fifth one was
154 um a completely different design which is
155 personally the one I wanted to go with

156 I okay

157 P9 but we thought that they would probably spring
158 for the the tube design because it was kind of in
159 the middle of its it's not too foreign to be
160 something that they didn't want to work with but
161 it's just ownable enough that they felt like it
162 was like really special so we kind of positioned
163 that as the best middle ground as far as designs
164 go and they they really enjoyed um

165 I mhm and the option that you personally wanted to
166 go with was that more sustainable in some way or
167 why did you

168 P9 in some way only that it used so it was kind of
169 like um if you had a moulded pulp tray but it had
170 multiple kind of like when you have a box that's
171 been flattened out multiple sides to it that all
172 kind of pop together and then go inside a sleeve
173 so it used less material and a less number of
174 materials so you're only using moulded pulp and
175 then a cardboard sleeve it was only two materials
176 the reason they didn't want to go with that is
177 they didn't think that the the form was ownable
178 enough it didn't seem as kind of special looking
179 to them even though it was probably the most
180 sustainable option erm and that was why they
181 didn't end up going in that direction but I
182 thought that was a really good option

183 I and did you and the senior designer agree on what
184 was the best option

185 P9 we agreed that either that moulded pulled option
186 or the tube we're probably going to be what they
187 went for

188 I mhm

189 P9 and that was just based on we knew that those
190 were both both pretty special design wise but
191 also sustainability um probably spring for either
192 the most unique or the the kind of middle ground
193 they ended up going to the middle ground

194 I okay so for the option that they went with how
195 did you choose the specifics of the materials

196 P9 it really came down to working with that other
197 firm that was in Italy because some of the design
198 decisions we made were not necessarily based on
199 what we thought was the best material but it was
200 what's the best material that they have access to

201 I right

202 P9 that we wanted to use

203 extremely familiar with green cellfoam it's like
204 a cornstarch based foam

205 I okay

206 P9 that's really sustainably produced and it was
207 designed in Copenhagen but they produce it mainly
208 in erm er South Korea so they really liked that
209 material but since they were going to have to
210 ship it all the way from South Korea to use it it
211 really didn't end up being cost effective or
212 feasible for them to implement it so we ended up
213 making a lot of design decisions based on what's
214 the point where sustainability meets feasibility
215 for their you know for for their manufacturing
216 capabilities

217 I okay erm and so that was the cardboard that you
218 went with was something that they had locally
219 available

220 P9 yeah they had erm the tubes they were going to
221 get sourced from a different manufacturer but the
222 cardboard and multiple pulp inserts they were
223 able to talk to their existing manufacturer and
224 they had the capabilities to do that so in in the
225 long term it it turned out that that was also
226 going to be pretty easy for them to kind of
227 switch over to that sort of packaging because

228 they didn't have to go out and sign a bunch of
229 new manufacturing contracts and whatnot

230 I yeah and then the metal lid on the end how did
231 you choose the material for that

232 P9 um we just looked at what you know what's
233 typically used in honestly just like whiskey tube
234 end cap and things like that which is just like a
235 standard aluminium and they had access to that
236 easily in Italy so um and they really like that
237 as kind of a nice premium material touch um to
238 the packaging

239 I and that would just be recycled you said

240 P9 yeah yeah in the the only I think the biggest um
241 the biggest thing that they ended up not really
242 understanding but which kind of you know gave
243 them the best with because they went off was that
244 because it was all different materials you know
245 you couldn't just throw the whole packaging in
246 the recycling together unless it was like a
247 single stream system um but that it might be
248 worth educating the buyer that if they don't have
249 single stream these materials actually have to be
250 separated for it to be sustainable which I think
251 was quite in my mind at least it wasn't the most
252 sustainable option because you can't throw them
253 all into the same stream um and they they
254 understood that I don't know if they ever went
255 forward with any initiative to kind of provide
256 the buyer with any educative sources

257 I yeah okay and in terms of the materials did you
258 make those decisions and then you pitched because
259 you said that you were the one bringing the the
260 materials angle to it or did you decide together
261 with the other designer

262 P9 so it was it was definitely we both came up with
263 a bunch of those ideas for that specific concept
264 those are some ideas that I had originally um but
265 it was a combination of you know I have less
266 design experience

267 I mhm

268 P9 but I would you know have some school experience
269 from sustainable materials but the senior
270 designer has been in the field longer and knows
271 what materials work and don't work for certain
272 applications so we both have I think an equal
273 number of ideas come up um and some just ended up
274 landing the clients better than others

275 I yeah and do you document this kind of decision
276 making do you do you keep records at these kind
277 of detail of options you considered

278 P9 we we do in terms of concepting so you know if we
279 are going to do five stages of ideation and
280 concepting through to wherever the final result
281 is that we give to the client you know we'll
282 probably talk to them initially and then we'll
283 have a work in progress in the middle and then
284 the final presentation but for all of the stages
285 in the studio when we are concepting when we're
286 coming up with this stuff when we're designing
287 these different you know configurations we're
288 also making sure to note the intended materials
289 or the intended construction so although we might
290 not have a documented list of what all we went
291 through when we go back and look at the concepts
292 and the presentations we have noted on there what
293 our preferred materials and whatnot would be so
294 we kind of have a more well rounded picture of
295 what this is and how we could go about making it
296 we try to do that at most steps especially when
297 sustainability is a key component so that when
298 we're thinking about materials from the start

299 I yeah did you look back at this documentation to
300 kind of finalise the design or is it just to have
301 a record

302 P9 yeah yeah we definitely refer back um especially
303 if we've we've kind of developed a concept to the
304 point where it might not resemble its original
305 self as much we'll look back and kind of you know
306 get get some re inspiration from our initial
307 concept on what we were trying to go for or you
308 know just remind ourselves of if we had a you
309 know a nice little moment of genius of oh this
310 material and this material could work really well
311 together and remind ourselves that maybe that is
312 possibility and we definitely refer back to the
313 process

314 I yeah do you use any other kind of tools or
315 databases to look up materials properties or
316 anything like that

317 P9 um since we were just in packaging a lot of that
318 we already had experience with on this project
319 I'm sure if it was different you know a different
320 sort of product we would have er dive in I know
321 we have um some friends at a packaging company
322 that have like a dedicated sustainability expert
323 we can reach out to

324 I okay

325 P9 and then a lot of the manufacturers that we work
326 with have um they have a lot of knowledge in that
327 too so at least for this specific product we
328 didn't have to kind of go out of house to get
329 that information we had enough between the two of
330 us that we were able to accomplish that um but
331 the resources were there if needed be

332 I yeah okay and so in terms of bringing
333 sustainability to this project would you say that
334 that your own values influence this in your
335 design work

336 P9 oh yeah or at least at least the values that I've
337 learned to design with erm I was originally in
338 school as a sustainable materials engineer and
339 then I switched to design

340 I right

341 P9 so I've kind of always had that in the back of my
342 mind which I'm sure is more influential I mean a
343 lot of designers will kind of bring
344 sustainability on as a second thought

345 I yeah

346 P9 but my process has always been to think about
347 that first just because that's how my education
348 led me to um and I think that might have been why
349 I was valuable in that project is it's kind of
350 ingrained in my design process

351 I yep so what led you to be specialising in
352 sustainable materials in the first place

353 P9 um that was just I had like a really good haha
354 because I had a really good like earth science
355 teacher in high school but I was always really
356 conscious about you know about the ecology around
357 us and the environment and being sustainable and
358 when I went to college um originally as an
359 engineer that was a really interesting track to
360 me um and I just want to explore it and explore
361 sustainable materials and eventually got into the
362 design field because that was more what I enjoyed
363 doing day to day instead of like being in a lab
364 but I still kept that on as all my projects
365 having some basis in sustainability or trying to
366 be as sustainable as one could make um so that's
367 always just been a big big component to my
368 process

369 I yeah and in this particular project who would you
370 say took responsibility in the end for how
371 sustainable the final option was

372 P9 um other than like the client's final decision I
373 think the creative director was ahead of that I
374 mean as you know he makes kind of those final
375 decisions but I don't think any of the decisions
376 he made um were neglecting sustainability and
377 whether that was because he felt that
378 sustainability was that important or because it
379 was you know laid out as one of the client's
380 constraints that they wanted to hit

381 I yeah

382 P9 I couldn't say whether it was one or the other
383 but all I know is that he made sure to keep that
384 in mind in all of his decision making

385 I yeah and since sustainability was in the brief do
386 you think if it wasn't in the brief and you were
387 working on a similar project would you still try
388 and push for sustainability

389 P9 um I definitely would I'm not so sure that our
390 creative director would um they definitely in the
391 in our studios kind of like creed they say that
392 you know they try and use sustainable materials
393 where appropriate but it doesn't mean they always
394 push them so I've been on a few projects where
395 they've they've worked with sustainable materials
396 or they've come in and considered them um but
397 unless it's directly in the brief I don't think
398 that's ever a goal specifically so I'll try and
399 push some options in projects

400 I yeah and have you managed through pushing some
401 sustainable options to to convince the creative
402 director or the client in any previous examples

403 P9 um some it kind of seems to me that um if
404 sustainability is the main selling point then
405 that's not enough but if its sustainability
406 paired with a good design or with a cheaper
407 manufacturing cost then they're much more likely
408 to consider it so it kind of needs to be sugar
409 coated in a way for them to accept it as more of
410 a valid concept which I understand from a
411 business point of view is important that that
412 can't be the only option um but I definitely
413 think that's something that needs to change

414 I yeah and who do you think is responsible in
415 general for the sustainability of products

416 P9 I think a lot of the time it comes down to I mean
417 whoever's making the main business decisions but
418 those business decisions are usually based on
419 cost so I think the cost is the true the true
420 point there a lot of our infrastructure at least
421 for making products and packaging is based around
422 making the cheapest thing to get the job done and
423 not necessarily the best thing so there's a lot
424 of sustainable options that could be just as
425 inexpensive or even more cost effective to use
426 but the infrastructure just isn't there to
427 promote it so if you're you know on paper making
428 decisions just for what your bottom line cost is
429 going to be they're usually going to go with the
430 lowest cost and not the most sustainable you know
431 they don't take in the environment as like a cost
432 I guess

433 I mm and would you say you feel any responsibility
434 as a designer towards sustainability

435 P9 oh yeah our we got accepted to that programme um
436 the head of the programme wasn't necessarily
437 sustainability minded but he's very well aware
438 that designers make a lot of stuff and a lot of
439 stuff goes into the trash so he said if you're
440 going to be a designer just don't make crap like

441 I yep

442 P9 that's just your biggest your biggest thing is
443 don't make stuff that's just going to go into the
444 trash and that's always kind of stuck with me is
445 if it's going to go into the trash it better be
446 something that goes away quickly um but yeah it's
447 definitely I feel a lot of responsibility for
448 that and I was still a small sense of guilt when
449 I'm designing something that isn't sustainable or
450 not as sustainable as it could be

451 I yeah

452 P9 which has its pros and cons but I guess I'd
453 rather that feeling be there because it kind of
454 pushes me to make better decisions

455 I right and how do you manage that feeling of guilt
456 in your profession

457 P9 um I mean I try the best that I can to push
458 sustainable options um I also when I have the
459 ability to choose projects that might allow for
460 that then I try to go down those roads

461 I yeah

462 P9 so if I'm doing you know with independent clients
463 from doing you know er packaging or soft goods or
464 even some housewares projects if I can find a way
465 to push sustainable practices then I typically
466 spring for those projects um but in the case that
467 you know I just need to pay the bills and I need
468 I yeah
469 P9 to get some projects done and the client is
470 specifically asking for injection moulded plastic
471 or you know bonded materials that really can't be
472 recycled if that's what they're specifically
473 asking for sometimes as the designer I just have
474 to execute for them and
475 I yeah
476 P9 I might be able to educate them on some
477 alternatives but at the end of the day if it's
478 not their you know it's not my choice
479 I yeah sure
480 P9 but I can provide them with options
481 I yeah and are you finding more opportunities to to
482 choose work that does allow you to embed
483 sustainability
484 P9 more or less um when I'm working independently I
485 can it might be a little bit of ignorance is
486 bliss to not choose projects that can't be
487 sustainable because it doesn't really push the
488 boundaries as much
489 I yeah
490 P9 that means that I'm also also still pretty young
491 in my career so I don't feel comfortable taking
492 on projects that don't have as much room for
493 sustainability and pushing them
494 I uhu
495 P9 because I don't have that much knowledge yet
496 I yeah okay yeah it's really interesting to hear
497 how you're managing to find ways to do this even
498 though you know the the industry hasn't
499 necessarily caught up yet there's a long way to
500 go yeah
501 P9 yep and after at the studio too I'm working with
502 ((company name)) they're I guess the upside is
503 that they have a lot of projects that come on
504 that provide opportunities for me to push
505 sustainable materials but um very they're very

506 transparent and allow you to be really vocal
507 especially within the studio setting of hey I
508 really want to work on this project I have some
509 really good sustainable ideas or during our
510 concepting I can pull as many sustainable ideas
511 up as I want they they really like to see that
512 even if they don't end up going with that
513 concepts at least they're very open minded which
514 is nice

515 I okay are there many other designers there or is
516 it a small team

517 P9 it's a pretty small I think there's about six or
518 eight full time so I'm on roster with them as a
519 freelancer so I get brought in on an as need
520 basis but their core team is only about six

521 I yeah and do you see much sustainability interest
522 among those six or so

523 P9 um not as much I think there's one other designer
524 that definitely has a more sustainable mindset
525 than most but I think that comes a lot from er
526 his he the materials that he enjoys working with
527 are usually sustainable um you know a lot of he
528 enjoys a lot of earthenware and wood um like
529 natural fibres and whatnot I think that might
530 come more from his you know aesthetic material
531 choices maybe than the sustainability aspect

532 I yeah okay well those are all the questions I had
533 actually so was there anything else that you'd
534 like to add related to this topic or anything you
535 thought I might have asked

536 P9 oh yeah there was actually on this project we
537 kind of encountered a weird a weird question and
538 kind of like a higher level thinking it wasn't
539 necessarily pertained just to this project but we
540 were thinking about um the premiumness of
541 sustainability

542 I right

543 P9 a lot because this was like a really premium shoe
544 brand

545 I yeah

546 P9 and it kind of went as like an unanswered
547 question but we thought a lot about you know a
548 lot of the times we see eco friendly brands and
549 stores as the more expensive option

550 I mhm

551 P9 when in reality if the infrastructure is set up
552 right they should be least expensive

553 I yeah

554 P9 but is pushing sustainability on a premium
555 product a premium attribute and is it seen as
556 such like should that raise the price or should
557 that bring the price down and

558 I mmm

559 P9 shouldn't the ecological aspect be more of like a
560 base level factor that it should just be that way
561 to begin with you know it's kind of like how does
562 the company see sustainability and for them it
563 was definitely like a marketing or a selling
564 point to kind of raise

565 I so you think that that was their motivation was
566 to add something else kind of premium

567 P9 yeah but their motivation was not necessarily we
568 we care about the environment and we want to make
569 this choice but it's really trendy to be in you
570 know eco friendly and we want to make these
571 decisions which you know regardless of their
572 motivating factor I'm glad that that was
573 something

574 I yeah

575 P9 they wanted to do but it was just interesting to
576 see that their their motivator was er marketing
577 in the fact that it's kind of a trend um and not
578 that they actually cared about it which was
579 interesting which is why we had to educate them
580 so much on what was actually sustainable

581 I yeah cos I guess there's a risk of them
582 greenwashing and choosing an option that looks
583 sustainable but isn't

584 P9 yeah so I'm glad they gave us that opportunity
585 and the platform to kind of show them what was
586 sustainable what wasn't

587 I yeah

588 P9 um I'm sure they definitely learned a lot but it
589 was just it was interesting to see that they were
590 very open with the fact that their motivator was
591 branding and marketing and I was like huh yeah

592 I yeah interesting yeah okay well unless there's is
593 anything else you want to say and that was um
594 pretty quick but that's because you're being to
595 the point and concise and answering my questions

596 P9 but that was something that I'll add to that
597 project we only got to like the right before we
598 would have gotten some factory samples but

599 I right

600 P9 obviously ((inadible)) locked down before that so
601 it was about halfway through the process

602 I okay yeah well I'm sorry that that hasn't carried
603 on yet but who knows what's going to happen

604 P9 for sure

605 I yeah well I are you all just locked down there

606 P9 um I feel we should be more we're not really as
607 much as we were the US is not handling this very
608 well New York is better than most we're not
609 really getting a whole lot of cases right now but
610 we are also kind of opened back up to we can do
611 outdoor seating for like food and whatnot
612 ((inaudible)) store at either twenty five to
613 thirty per cent capacity you definitely have to
614 wear a mask everywhere which is good but I still
615 think we maybe shouldn't be going into stores

616 I no I think we we've just been allowed to start
617 going to you know cafes and stuff but a lot of us
618 don't want to I mean we don't need to anymore

619 P9 yeah yeah and it's you know it's this summer is
620 hot everyone wants to be outside drinking in the
621 park and having a good time and it's just we've
622 seen at least in New York we haven't seen a lot
623 of spikes but definitely it's been kind of we
624 were at a rate where it was definitely going down
625 in that when we started opening up outdoor
626 seating it kind of levelled off on places in
627 country that are definitely started spiking back
628 up because they just everything is just open

629 I yeah no it's a very strange time yeah

630 P9 yeah definitely to be doing this kind of work
631 from home too has been

632 I yeah are you having like that's design meetings
633 online and stuff or

634 P9 yeah yeah lots of lots of the zoom calls and
635 shipping prototypes around I actually got to go
636 drop some prototypes off to go send to someone
637 for review instead of just being in the same room
638 you know

639 I yeah yeah

640 P9 it's definitely it's interesting I'm curious to
641 see how much when this is over how much goes back
642 to normal how much people will be working from
643 home

644 I yeah yeah I mean what I'm doing right now I can
645 completely do from home cos we've got these video
646 calls so that's fine and then the rest of it is
647 just a lot of reading and writing and thinking so
648 er meetings yeah okay well I won't keep you any
649 longer thank you so much

650 /end/