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# AN INSIDE LOOK INTO BRANDING & DESIGN WITH COPILOT CREATIVE

Words and Photos: Teryn O'Brien

Illustrations and Graphics: CoPilot Creative

Think about one of your favorite businesses. When you walk into their store or go to their website, what are the reasons you like it? What is the vibe, the atmosphere, the general feel that makes you personally want to associate with this particular company? These are the questions that CoPilot Creative, a branding and design studio located in Colorado Springs, asks every day. While most aren't necessarily thinking about the why behind brands and businesses, it's CoPilot's job to know what makes a company stick in the minds of the people.

CoPilot Creative was founded in Colorado Springs over 40 years ago. Its latest owners, Austin Buck and Thomas Eisenbeis, were both employed by CoPilot Creative before purchasing the company in 2010. Austin is the art director and designer, responsible for the thoughtful look of everything CoPilot creates—from graphic design on paper to web layouts. Tommy, as the web developer, takes the web design from a flat environment and programs it into an interactive format in a variety of platforms: online design, apps, desktops, and mobile devices.

## The Importance of Branding

According to CoPilot Creative, without the direction of good branding, people don't know how to process information about a company. "We are all flooded with brand impressions every single day," explained Austin. "If you can't parse that information with a good identity or a consistency, then a company can become washed into the marketing masses and not leave a lasting impression."

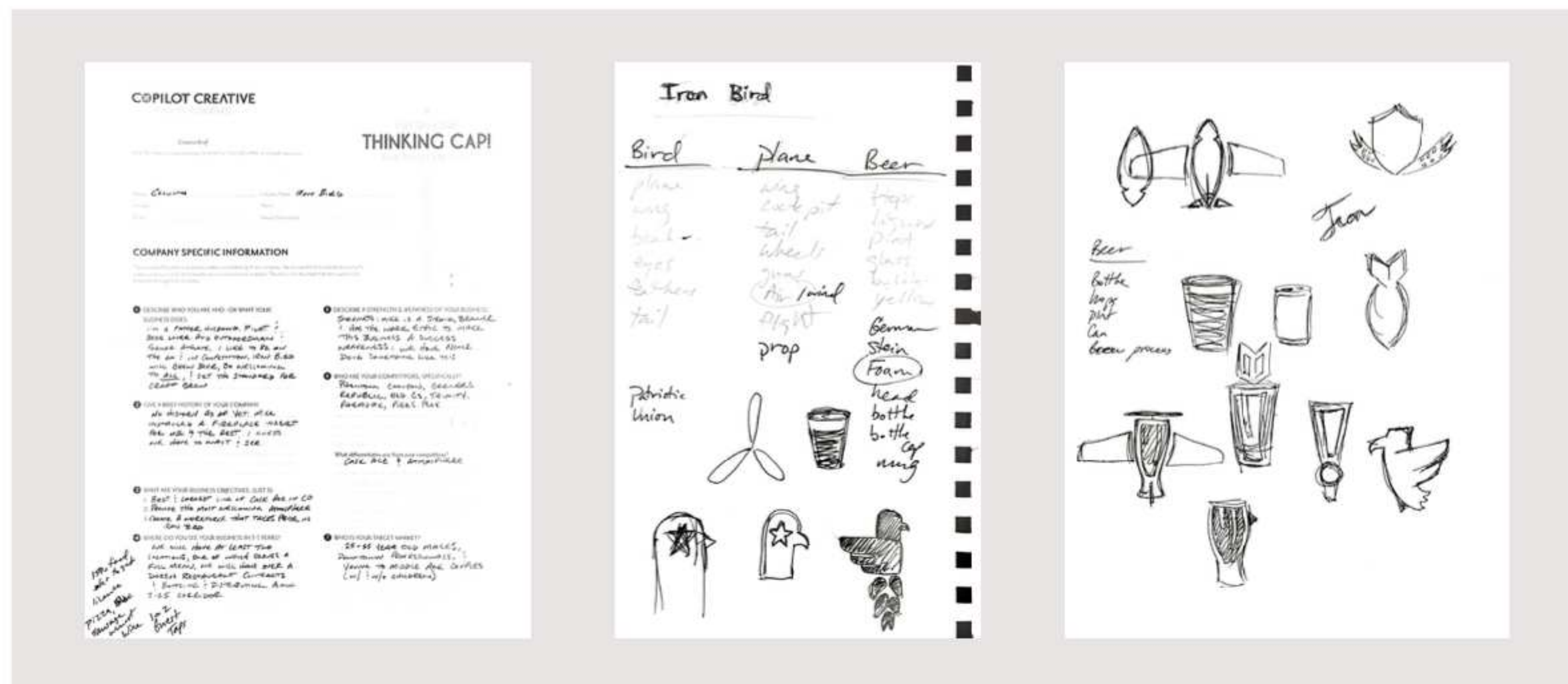
Good branding also helps people form an emotional tie to a brand and feel secure. "Once you get that emotional connection, people are naturally going to talk about it," said Austin. "A well-packaged brand helps people know exactly what to expect from a certain company."

A perfect brand is different for every single client, and CoPilot works hard to help a company speak in their unique voice. As Tommy put it, "You wouldn't want to have a brand that looks awesome, but doesn't convey anything about the company that you just developed it for." That's why the branding process is so important: It helps a company communicate exactly who they are and what they want.

CoPilot works closely with each of their clients in order to implement the company vision into everything visually created for an individual business.







**The Branding & Design Process**

So what does the branding and design process look like? CoPilot Creative walked Colorado Collective through an inside look of how they work with clients to represent a brand well. Every client is different. However, CoPilot recently collaborated with Iron Bird Brewing Company, and they decided to use this brewery as an example of what the process often looks like for a company that wants to use their marketing and branding services.

**1. Relationship Building Through Initial Meeting(s)**

A set of meetings helps CoPilot figure out exactly what a client needs. During the beginning stage, it's all about developing a relationship and strategic listening. "We talk to our client extensively prior to developing anything," emphasized Tommy. Clients will often fill out a creative brief before the initial meetings to help brainstorm what it is they're looking for, giving the client some helpful structure in how to communicate.

In Iron Bird's case, the brewery wasn't open yet, so the business owners (Aaron Celusta and Mike Centanne) were coming into CoPilot to receive help with initial identity and branding development. CoPilot was able to hear the background story of how the two met and their past individual accomplishments. "Mike has had 4 or 5 different companies. He's a do-it-yourselfer," said Austin. "And Aaron flies airplanes. So we aligned really well to

their stories and the craft of it." Learning as much as they could about the clients helped them really connect with what Iron Bird Brewery would be all about.

**2. Creative Brainstorming**

Once the initial meeting(s) takes place, the internal creative brainstorming begins. An element of this creative process is what CoPilot calls a "mood board". This is where CoPilot and the client pull imagery they really like that might fit with their brand. They will also develop key words and phrases that help Austin and Thomas understand the look and vibe they're going for with their business. CoPilot Creative does their part in pulling ideas and concepts for what they think the client wants from their vast storage of creative knowledge, as well as collected information during the initial meeting stage. "We share visuals paired with words, and when the ideas cross, we know where to go," said Austin.

For some of their visual brainstorming, Iron Bird's owners brought in old Russian propaganda posters that were black and red. Just two colors. Immediately, Austin and Tommy began to get the feel for the visual elements what Iron Bird was wanting. While they created the "mood" for the brand, they incorporated elements that were evoked from the material Iron Bird provided: raw, simple, and strong.



**3. Logo & Brand Guide**

After the mood boarding is approved, Austin will start conceptualizing designs. He will come up with several visual ideas, and then CoPilot Creative will reveal the ideas to the client. Usually, the logo is the first piece to build in the initial conceptualization, because a logo will be one of the most impactful defining elements of a brand.

For Iron Bird, Austin presented three different visual ideas to the owners. "By the time they left the meeting, they had chosen a logo," Austin said. "And then everything just kind of fell into place."

Once the logo is in place, an entire brand guide for the company is developed. Fonts and colors are selected to create parameters for future marketing material, print work, or web changes. This brand guide includes fitting imagery, slogans, shapes, etc.—anything pertaining to the brand. It's given to the client for independent use so that they know exactly what to use to keep all visuals clean and consistent.

Initially, Iron Bird didn't want any color, and so the logo was black and white to represent that raw, simple, strong feeling that the owners wanted. "When we developed sub brands, that's when we started to bring in colors," said Austin. "They're all very muted tones to go with that aged printing process they initially attached to." This color scheme was intentionally incorporated into all aspects of the brand guide for Iron Bird.

**4. Developing a Visual Package**

From the brand guide and logo, a client might need business cards, a website, t-shirts, etc. CoPilot takes the initial brand guide and designs all sorts of print and web pieces to go with the overarching brand for a company. Having an in-house developer like Tommy is something most design companies don't have, which makes CoPilot Creative that much more effective and flexible as they collaborate between the initial visual designs and translating that onto the web. CoPilot Creative can create all marketing collateral—online or offline, large or small.

CoPilot developed all of the beer tap handles for the Iron Bird Brewery. They helped design the menu and t-shirts, and they also made fun, promotional wooden nickels for the initial launch of the brewery. All of it was in an effort to make Iron Bird a brewery that people emotionally connected with. "It's a brewery, and everybody loves breweries," said Austin. "But we do all have our favorites. So we wanted to create an environment that's cool to hang out in. The look is super consistent, and customers really want to wear that bird and associate with that brand."





*“We are all flooded with brand impressions every single day. If you can't parse that information with a good identity or a consistency, then a company can become washed into the marketing masses and not leave a lasting impression.”*

### Expanding the Business

The passion these two have for extraordinary design is evident in the work CoPilot Creative has produced. CoPilot is responsible for building the online platform for IndyGive, a site that builds enthusiasm and tracks all donations for around 200 local nonprofits in Colorado Springs. Since its conception, IndyGive has raised over \$10,000,000—including 2 other cities that implemented IndyGive's platform. CoPilot Creative has since retired from managing this platform. During the Waldo Canyon Fire, CoPilot and friends started Wild Fire Tees, which sold t-shirts and raised over \$450,000 for wildfire and flooding victims before its retirement. Some more members of the CoPilot family include the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, the USA Cycling Foundation, and Gold Hill Mesa. In other words, this company knows what they're doing, and their track record proves it.

While still creating amazing work in Colorado Springs, CoPilot is expanding its business to Austin, TX, where they will provide branding and design services for companies as passionate as they are in other cities that they love.

Clearly, CoPilot Creative loves what they do, and they love the clients they work with day-to-day. They get more excited over working with an awesome client than a sizeable paycheck. “It has to be relationship-driven, because there's not a formula for what we do,” said Austin. Tommy added, “I just like meeting cool people....We try to do great work and we have fun with it!”

The company is known for its healthy work-life balance, which Karen Mitchell—an employee of CoPilot's—can attest to. “It's family first,” she said. “That bleeds into the way we treat our clients when it's people over dollars. When we come to work restored, refreshed, and not spent, it's a different experience than people who are burning 70 hours a week and trying to just get through it.”

Ultimately, for CoPilot, it's all about the art and intention behind the branding and design. Anyone who sees their high quality work will know they listen to their clients, care about a healthy creative environment, and create truly engaging brands. ●

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