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Motioning Forward: Exploring the Power of Motion Design in Brand Identity, Influences, and Future Goals

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ABSTRACT

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In this dynamic digital landscape, the marriage of motion design and branding has emerged as a powerful tool for businesses looking to captivate and connect with their audiences. Motion design, with its ability to breathe life into static visuals through animation, sound, and interactivity, has become an integral component of modern branding strategies. This paper delves into the author's approach on creating relationships between a brand and consumer through motion design, exploring techniques used by the industry leaders and implementing them on a creative project.

DEDICATION

To the Almighty who created motion; to my parents who are the reason for who I am and to Marty for teaching me to be curious.

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And finally, I would like to thank my family back in Bangladesh for their continued love and support throughout this journey. It's impossible to imagine my life without you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced digital world, combining motion design with branding has become a crucial strategy for businesses aiming to engage their audiences effectively. Motion design brings static visuals to life through animation, sound, and interactive elements, making it an essential part of modern branding approaches. Over time, motion design has evolved from traditional animation to its current prominent role in digital media. Beyond just making things look good, motion design now serves as a powerful tool for storytelling, evoking emotions, and expressing brand identity.

With an equal passion for branding, graphic design, and animation, I embarked on a career path as a motion designer. This ultimately became the reason for selecting my culminating experience research topic - 'Motioning Forward: Exploring the Power of Motion Design in Brand Identity, Influences, and Future Goals'. Throughout my academic and professional journey, I've drawn inspiration from the work of numerous design studios. I would like to mention two studios whose work has significantly influenced my creative thinking and my capstone project: 'Territory Studio' and 'Elastic Pictures'. Both studios boast a rich history of collaborating with diverse brands. It's intriguing to observe that despite workforce size and clientele differences, both studios share commonalities such as a talented pool of artists, robust creative workflow, high-quality deliverables, and satisfied clients. Analyzing their approach in brand identity and creative decision-making has helped me address the challenges for my project.

In the following pages, I invite you to join me on a journey of exploring case studies, tackling technical challenges, and identifying future goals. I will illuminate the project's technical and aesthetic aspects and how it fulfilled a product's brand identity using motion design.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 - Understanding Motion Design & Branding

Motion design is the culmination of studying motion (animation) and applying aesthetic design and systematic thinking. It involves solving problems related to content, context, perception, and other variables. The term "Motion Graphics" was first used by John Whitney, an American animator known for computer animation. In 1960, Whitney founded Motion Graphics Inc., where he created opening sequences for Dinah Shore and Bob Hope (Krasner, 2013).

Following this, Saul Bass, the American graphic design pioneer, effectively utilized motion graphics on "The Man with the Golden Arm." movie title sequence. This marked a significant milestone in the evolution of motion graphics. Since technology has advanced, motion graphics have as well, reaching the highest or most important era of their existence (Silveira, 2021).

Ellis (2020) states, that "Motion graphics focus on giving movement to graphic design elements". Before, when motion graphics did not exist, all the design materials for brands were flat and static. According to Paget (2016) "Brand elements can´t afford to just appear static, they need to move, flow and live in these new digital places".

Coomber, 2002 describes Branding as "complex, and some might say vague and imprecise, subject." A legal definition might approximate to ''a sign that distinguishes the goods of a company from those of another while guaranteeing its origins.'' In recent times, the definition of branding has shifted to encompass "creating a mutually acknowledged relationship between the supplier and buyer that transcends isolated transactions or specific individuals." This evolution signifies the relationship between the brand and its consumer. Hanna, M., & Coman, N. (2021) define this as "The Brand Resonance" – how strong/deep the bond is between the brand and its consumers.

2.2 - The Role of Motion Designers in Branding

As motion designers, our job is to create eye-catching promotional materials showcasing the brand's key features. The result should be compelling and informative to the target audience.. Previously mentioned "Brand Resonance" highly depends on the quality of our work. Successful campaigns can ensure the financial and outreach growth of a brand.

For instance, Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign strategically employed animated graphics to personalize beverage bottles with individual names, resulting in a notable 4% increase in global sales and a 2% increase in the United States (Das, 2024).

My first approach for a brand-related motion design project is to find the story behind its graphics elements such as, its logo shape, typeface, colors etc. The more understanding I have, the more it helps me to create eye-catching animation with those elements. This can be a challenging task, as the design elements have already been decided and I have to work with those elements only, even though there may be a better idea. So, it's essential to achieve a balance between the design and animation. David from Territory Studio stated that "… the industry often doesn't expect an animator to design, or a designer to animate. But Territory will go a long way to avoid sacrificing design for great emotional movement and, likewise, movement choreography for great graphic design and composition. Both have equal importance."

My capstone project allowed me this rare opportunity to create a branding from scratch. All my design decisions came from a motion designer's point of view. I conceptualized the animation of the logo beforehand and then created the design elements around it.

I regularly follow what techniques/workflow other successful studios like 'Territory Studio are using to achieve professional quality motion graphics content that improves the brand-consumer relationship. For instance, I followed their product animation commercial and implemented some of the camera movements on my capstone project.

Chapter 3. Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss the influences behind the workflow and key design decisions throughout the production process. For my capstone project, I created a 3D commercial for a modern juicer brand. This project required multiple software used in the industry. I was awarded Small Grand Funding from ETSU that helped me acquire those required software.

The objective of this project was to research the entire production workflow involved in crafting a 3D commercial for a fictitious smart juicer brand named 'PureXtract'. My research was guided by the approach of an established juicer brand named 'Zumex' and their methodology of product branding, particularly the modern juicer 'Soul Series 2'. A brand is structured around a visual design language containing key elements like color, shape, font, texture etc. These elements keep the branding consistent, authentic and clear. For example, the 'Zumex' logo is created with letters using 'Tusker Grotesk Bold' font and three orange-colored circular shapes on top of 'u' letter to resemble fruits. I I integrated this element into my design along with some of my own ideas.. I'll explain the whole creative process step by step:

3.1- Purpose and Context

Before starting the conceptualizing process of a brand, it's mandatory to define its purpose and context. What is the main utilization of the brand and its products? Who is the target audience? What should be the tone and style of the brand? How are motion design materials displayed through media?

Understanding the target audience is key; their demographics, interests, and viewing habits will influence the design decisions. The tone and style should align with the intended message – is it formal, playful, or persuasive? Answering these questions will help narrow the visual hierarchy and composition.

For example, 'Player Agency' created the 3D commercial for Zumex Soul Series 2. They were instructed with these words: 'Simple', 'Smart' and 'Stylish'.They focused on creating the branding based on those values and with the niche target audience in mind.

> "The new Soul Series 2 arrives as the latest addition to the market. For this reason, we developed an introduction strategy in which we easily determined its strategic niche: the reference in design and innovation."

> - Cristina Real, Director and Manager, Player Agency

I tried to use a similar approach for my brand too. During the conceptualization of my brand identity, I wanted to make sure the design reflects these two words: 'Elegant' and 'Fresh'. By combining the words 'Pure' and 'Extract', I finalized the name on 'PureXtract', which reflects its functionality and has a modern tone. While designing the logo, I chose a font like 'Aktiv Grotesk font family by Dalton Mag'. The Sans serif letterings keep the logo clean, easy to read and fits well on top of the 3D juicer model. The purpose of using a font family is to use different weight variables throughout the branding materials for consistency.

3.2- Visual Hierarchy and Composition

Visual hierarchy and composition are the foundations of any graphic design project, and they are especially important for motion design. Visual hierarchy is the way of organizing and prioritizing the elements of a design to guide the viewer's attention and convey the most important information. Composition is the way of arranging and balancing the elements of the design to create harmony, contrast, and movement. Numerous techniques, such as color, size, shape, position, alignment, spacing, and typography are used to create effective visual hierarchy and composition for a brand.

Essential information can be emphasized using larger fonts or brighter colors. To accomplish this, I transformed the 'X' of 'PureXtract' to look like an hourglass with three circle

shapes on top half and three fluid droplet shapes on bottom half. The circles reflect oranges, the droplets reflect juice, and the hourglass reflects a smooth flow of motion. This was a conscious decision as going forward this symbol will be the defining factor of the brand. As a motion designer, usually I am given a ready-made logo and instructed to animate it. This was a rare chance for me to build the logo based on how I would animate it. That's where the hourglass idea came through where it would be animated to visualize the juicer's ability to produce continuous smooth flow of juice.

I chose Dark green and orange as the primary colors of this brand. Whereas green is associated with nature and freshness, orange is associated with vibrancy and energy (Stone, 2006). Another reason of using orange was to illuminate those parts of the logo to indicate the juicer in action. On 3D renders, the orange glows on darker surfaces gave better composition. In addition to that, I used gold, silver and opper on the juicer's metallic parts. I used these colors to make variations for my juicer, which allows the consumer to choose what color variation they prefer. My primary software for doing the graphic design work were Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator.

3.3- 3D Modelling Techniques

When it came to the process of 3D modeling the juicer, I decided to stay close to the original reference. The main reason for this approach was my lack of knowledge in product design and the purpose of this project is more motion design and branding oriented. And, the original product had won multiple product design awards. I didn't want to reinvent the wheel, followed the reference images and created the model from scratch. However, in my rendition of the juicer, the model has more curved surfaces with softer edges that give a better impression of flow. I modeled the 3D juicer and its parts in Autodesk Maya.

For the inner parts, I used the Boolean tool to intersect and connect the multiple shapes and clean up the connecting edges. For more complex shapes like the filtration system, which contained hole-shaped patterns, I created the 2d version of it in Adobe Illustrator. Then, I exported it as vector to Maya for 3D conversion.

For the 'AI' integration sequence, I modeled the central microprocessor and its circuits in Maya. For the circuit board, I created a displacement map on a plane surface using a generator called 'JS Displacement'. This released me from creating unnecessary small parts of the circuit board.

3.4- Animation Principles and Techniques

Animation is the parent term of motion design, where any visual element can come to life through movement, timing, and transition. Animation can enhance the emotional connection between the product and the consumers. To create smooth and realistic animation, the basic animation principles need to be applied such as easing, anticipation, follow-through, squash and stretch, and overlapping action (Williams, 2001). Planned and choreographed movement and transition techniques can improve the storytelling aspect.

For my project, I took inspiration from the key sequences used in Zumex's 'Soul Series 2' commercial. I have animated five key elements: camera, shapes, lights, particles and texts. I set up each 3D scene with a well-lit background, the juicer model and the camera. It was necessary for the parts and the fluid to complement each other when they are animated. And the camera war placed and animated based on that motion. With correct camera placement and animation, different features of the juicer were emphasized, familiarizing them with consumers. Additionally, smooth transitions from one camera to another allowed me to do less editing work in between scenes.

I used 2D UI animation on the juicer's front touchscreen display. It showcased the juicer's different settings, such as the ratio of pulps, daily intake, wireless connectivity, etc. The UI elements were designed in Adobe Illustrator and animated in Adobe After Effects.

As it's a commercial for a juicer, it was mandatory to have some fluid simulations. I was unfamiliar with creating such simulations and this project became a great opportunity for my technical research. I used two different plugins to simulate the fluid particles. They are Insidyum Xparticles and Nextlimit Realflow. Both were used on Cinema 4d and had their own advantages and drawbacks. X-particles had robust functionality and freedom to create simulations. It came with various types of emitters and modifiers to manipulate the simulation. Unfortunately, I was only able to use it on my home computer with its restricted single-user license and couldn't install it in Lab computers. This resulted in longer cache and mesh conversion time and caused multiple crashes. Although the final test simulations gave great results, it required better hardware.

On the other hand, Nextlimit Realflow had a straightforward approach. It has all the basic emitters and modifiers to create simple fluid simulations. The cache time was also fast. But, there was a lack of detail and fineness I was getting from X-particles. Ultimately, I had to go with Realflow for better performance. I cached the result of each simulation and converted them to animated meshes. As an extra step, I exported the animation as alembic. Alembic cache allowed me to manipulate the speed of the simulations the way I wanted.

I worked on three different sequences that tackled some fluid simulation challenges. The 1st scene was where the flow of juice rotates around the juicer and reveals the branding. To create this simulation, I connected the emitter to a spline curve. Additionally, I added multiple 'Despline' and 'Noise Field' modifiers alongside the curve to manipulate the particles to follow and rotate around that curve path.

The 2nd scene showcased the filtration process, where the orange piece pressed through one side and juice comes out from the other. I added a 'collider' tag on the 3D filter model and when the emitter emit fluid, it went through the holes. I had to tweak the bounce, friction and collision distance to get the optimal result. In addition to that, I wanted the fluid to simulate in slow motion after a few frames. To achieve this, I animated the scaling the time of the exported alembic.

Finally, the 3rd scene was to showcase the internal juice presser. The orange was split into half and connected to two continuously rotating conical-shaped containers. Then, the orange pieces were pressed to extract the juice and the empty orange skin fell down to the waste bin. To make the simulation realistic, I had to connect two emitters on each half of the orange using parent constraint. That way, when the orange pieces move, the emitters can follow them. I had to make all the parts as 'collider' so that the fluids don't go through the geometry. Additionally, I tweaked the bounce, friction and collision distance so that the fluid didn't explode into small granules when the emitter collided from both sides.

The technical research portion was a great learning experience for me. Although, in some cases, I didn't achieve the final result up to the mark I was going for. I'll keep improving upon my intake on fluid simulation from this project and give better results.

3.5- Rendering and Compositing

I've rendered my sequences in multiple AOVs (Arbitrary Output Variable) such as diffuse, specular, emission, etc. that allowed me to control color value of each layer. Additionally, I've rendered z-depth passes separately, so that I can manipulate the focus of the composition. All the sequences were rendered using ACES(Academy Color Encoding System) instead of Adobe color. ACES contains a wider color gamut than Adobe resulting in richer and accurate colors. The final files were in .EXR format image sequences.

Compositing is the process of combining different layers of images, videos, or graphics into a single output. It involves adjusting the color, lighting, transparency, and effects of each layer to create a realistic and harmonious result. I imported all the render sequences with passes in After Effects. To view the ACES renders correctly, the project needed to set up with OCIO(OpenColorIO) color management. I used 'EXtractoR' to separate the AOVS in different layers, then using blending modes to composite them together. I assured the color balance of the sequences was similar to each other. It was easy to edit any specific element like reflections or light intensity using 'levels' or 'curves' effects. Finally, I used adjustment layer separately on top of all compositing layers to do a global color grading.

3.6- Editing with Audio

After the compositing process, the color-appropriate sequences were edited together with background sound. It's essential to keep in mind that the cuts and transitions don't disrupt the flow of the video.

Sound is the final element that can add another dimension to a commercial, making it more immersive. A great background sound can leave a footprint in the viewer's mind. For instance, The BGM (Background music) of "Interstellar" enhanced the quality of the visual effects used in the movie, resulting an Academy Award (Peterson, 2023)

For my project I used a track called 'Future Snow' – by Infraction (Alldio No Copyright, 2024). The violin portion had a nice smooth flow to it, that made me interested to edit the videos matching that rhythm. This track was not tied to any copyright, which allowed me to share my commercial online without a fear of getting copyright strike.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

Working on this capstone project has allowed me to act in multiple roles: brand owner, consumer, and motion designer. As a brand owner, I had to research the best way I could sell my juicer to the targeted consumer. As a consumer, I primarily focused on whether the product I am going to buy will fulfill all my needs and whether it will be better at doing that than other similar products in the market.

The most challenging role was motion designer. As a motion designer, I had to think about both sides' requirements. I've followed an already established brand and combined their process with my own creative decisions. I have done multiple projects previously which required me to work on a specific portion of the production pipeline. This was the first time I have worked on a production from scratch to finish. It was a great learning experience to familiarize myself with the current design trends and industry-standard workflow. I implemented my research on creating technically and aesthetically rich content that can build a connection between the brand and its consumers.

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