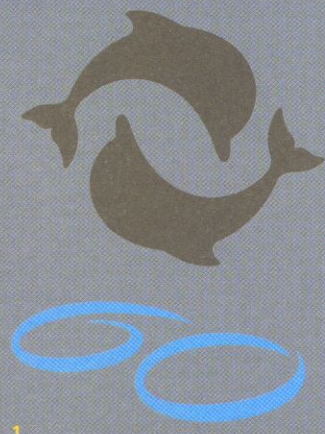
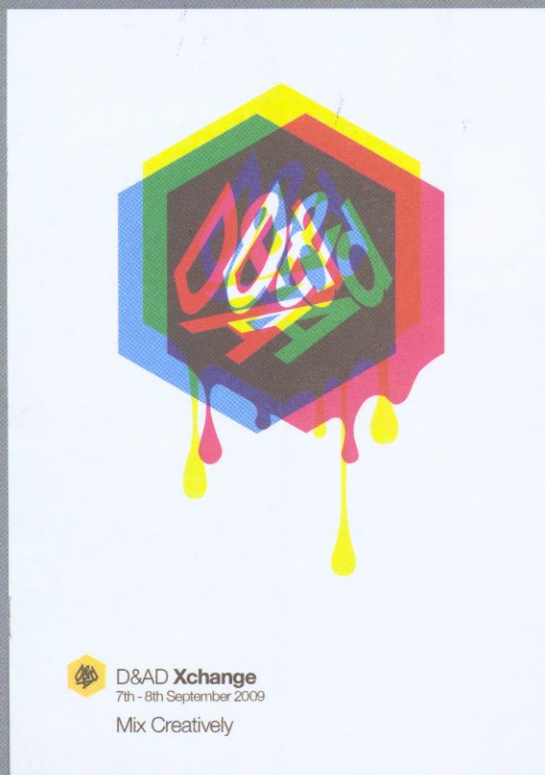
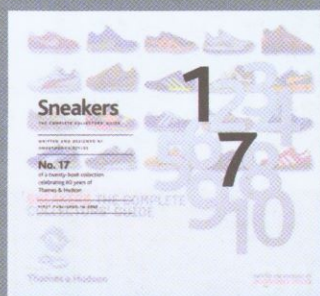
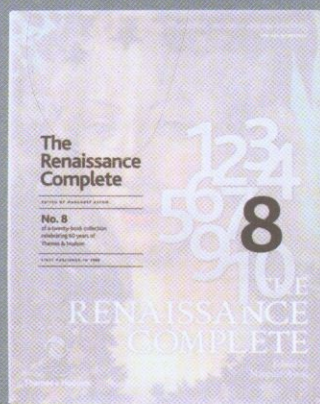


The move from Identica senior creative director to consultancy founder has been smooth for **Dana Robertson**. In a week when DW focuses on start-up success, Anna Richardson discovers his grown-up and quiet approach



the
futures
company



Many designers go through an array of different incarnations during their career, morphing from enthusiastic graduate to keen and able junior, all the way to creative director level. But often the step to founder of an independent group is the ultimate ambition.

Dana Robertson remembers his time as a happy-go-lucky designer fondly. He started his professional life at Silk Pearce, then joined The Partners, where he became design director. Then followed a step up to senior creative director of both Identica and Tango, where he worked on automotive, luxury goods and financial services branding projects, as well as leading the Nike account at Tango. In 2007 he decided to realise his ambition of creating his own consultancy, Neon.

Robertson's time at Identica was particularly challenging, as the company was in the process of scaling back and wasn't 'the most stable of ships', with Robertson brought in to steady the process. 'They were very tough days, trying to change things from the inside out, but it was a fantastic group of people,' he says. 'It was a steep learning curve. I was responsible for the creative output but also for the attitude and wellbeing of the studio, getting everyone to believe in the work and in good ideas, and put a smile on their faces.'

When it came to the end of his four-year stint, Robertson realised it was time for his next move, and that he could do this for himself 'rather than protecting someone else's investments'.

Going it alone just before a recession could have proved a mistake, but Neon quickly secured some projects. A few months after setting up, the group won a job to create an identity and name for the merger of research companies Henley Centre Headlight Vision and Yankelovich. The pitch involved a number of big groups including his old friends at The Partners, who were 'the first to congratulate us when we won', says Robertson. Coming up with The Futures Project as a name, the simple, typographic logo followed. 'That project was a very grown-up identity with very grown-up issues. We created a great name and a great marque, and what will be a great visual identity when they finalise the merger.'

Other Neon work includes the identity for Freestyle Park in Russia, which will be Europe's largest indoor snow park and retail destination, an identity refresh and brand positioning for The Goldsmiths' Company, publications for D&AD, and branding to celebrate publisher Thames & Hudson's 60th anniversary, which included a 'gentle, elegant and easily applied' logo and special-edition covers for some key titles.

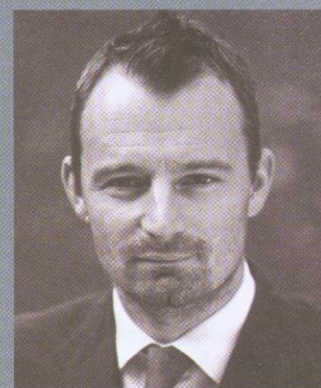
Robertson describes Neon's range of work as 'lovely little designs that keep you sane and put a smile on your face, but also bigger branding projects that are more intellectually stimulating'. He can't quite believe how smoothly the start-up has gone. 'You're always pleasantly surprised, each and every day, and so you should be, while sticking to a plan,' he says.

That plan is 'gentle growth', adds Robertson. 'We're quite small, but we can point to very big projects that we've completed recently, which are grown-up, intellectual branding challenges that we've dealt with efficiently.'

Robertson cites the likes of Mark Studio and Hat-Trick Design as inspirational friends. 'They're great examples of consultancies that are savvy, but just quietly get on with it. They use a degree of gentle PR, but it's done in a way that's very calm and collected,' he explains. 'I have huge respect for them and aim to mirror this.' The Partners gave him 'a real sense of discipline', he adds. 'It's work was always about ideas and execution. The team was very inspirational, but also very driven.'

Being comfortable in a corporate boardroom suit as well as in street-smart jeans – literally and metaphorically – is key to Robertson, whose happy-go-lucky approach endures alongside his business sense. 'I try to be in love with life as much as possible,' he says. 'I love being out and about, and that's a reflection of how I approach work. You should approach every job as an opportunity.'

Eventually, Robertson will start submitting work to design competitions and might shout a bit louder about what he's been up to, but for now he aims to 'quietly get on with it and do work that is elegant but also intellectually sound'.



8 Dana Robertson

- 1 New logo celebrating Thames & Hudson's 60th anniversary
- 2 Logo for The Futures Company, part of a new visual identity for the merger of Henley Centre Headlight Vision and Yankelovich
- 3 and 4 Special-edition covers for Thames & Hudson titles
- 5 and 7 Poster and printed materials for D&AD
- 6 Business cards for garden designer Amanda Patton
- 8 Dana Robertson