

Forging Futures: our partnership with Java Republic



One of the most creative working relationships we have is with Java Republic. Design Tactics was an integral part of the formation, building and launch of the Java Republic Brand, and continues to work with the company to lead product development with a brave and creative marketing style.

We were there from the beginning, when Brendan (our creative director) and David (Java Republic's founder) first began to explore the idea of presenting handroasted coffee to an Irish audience. This is the kind of challenge Design Tactics love: "We actually visualised and created the brand before a single bean was roasted" says Brendan. The Java Republic project was one of the factors that encouraged Brendan to make the leap into creating his own company - DesignTactics.

"At the time, we were both working for other companies." says David. "I used to meet Brendan in a pub along the quays, explain the vision I had, and say 'this is what we need'. At this stage, I'd come up with the name Java Republic, and I had some visual ideas but, from the beginning, we worked together on visualising and creating the brand."

Tessa, who has since become Marketing Director of Java Republic, comments: "I think what it is that DesignTactics understood was where David wanted to go," Neither of them realised how successful those ideas would be: "In our first year of business we won everything" says David: "Design Effectiveness Awards for the creative work and Great Taste Awards for our coffee. DesignTactics put amazing time and effort into the design, and without that we would never have succeeded."

Nonetheless, the journey wasn't always easy: "Putting it together was tough. We spent 19 months working on the brand, before roasting a single bean. I was out of work for one full year while trying to start the company." It was an unusual partnership. "In the beginning it was seriously intense". Says David "There was no fun in the early days. Brendan was the only one who realised what I was going through. For a new business starting out, he's one of the most inspirational guys. He believed in it more than I did at times."

"What I came up with for the company was a good idea, but it wasn't anything absolutely radical. I don't have a background in marketing, but I do have strong ideas, and what I did want was to communicate it differently, and DesignTactics picked up on that and made it happen."





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David was more interested in being creatively involved in the marketing process than your average company owner, and Design Tactics found ways to harness his creative ideas and make them work: David explains: “Usually you wouldn’t get an owner who is that interested in marketing, but to me it’s the most exciting part of the business. I came up with the idea of using icons from the countries where we sourced our coffee. I spent so much time on research that I knew exactly what I

wanted and I commissioned an artist to create them. I’m stubborn - if I wasn’t creatively involved myself, I didn’t want to launch the coffee. But I’ll tell you why it worked - because Brendan is incredibly flexible, incredibly open to compromise. His response was fantastic, he used the icons, he finished the whole package, and he made it look absolutely exceptionally good.”

The response from DesignTactics was also very creative when it came to launching Java Republic Speciality Teas: Tessa explains: “Initially David was pushing for black as a colour, as he thought tea in a black box would be cool - but DesignTactics steered him along the route of using green, because nobody else was doing that. So that was another instance where DesignTactics listened to what we had to say and came back with an outside of the box idea, having thought about it. The reality is lots of teas are packaged in black. Nobody else is using fresh, light green, and it stands out- like other Java products. It has personality, and it’s actually evolved really well for us: Our use of colours has helped to create personalities for the product families within our brand.”





When it comes to the brand visualisation process that initially shaped the Java Republic brand, DesignTactics believe that it's really key to blend free, creative thinking with an awareness of the competition. As Creative Director Brendan says: "We aim for an intuitive creative response when we visualise a new brand. While it's vital to understand the market context and know the competition that a new brand will face, it's just as important that you don't become restricted by that knowledge. There's no point creating a forgettable brand - even if it feels right on shelf. A great consumer brand needs to be distinctive enough to catch your attention, yet familiar enough to build trust and credibility. Big brands can create that trust with advertising, but smaller brands like Java Republic have to use pack design to get their message across."

Tessa came into the company in 2004, replacing David as the day-to-day partner in Java Republic's collaborative relationship with the DesignTactics team. "Brendan has a great mentoring relationship with his staff. Having worked both with Brendan and various designers in DesignTactics, I would say he chooses people that are good listeners, people who understand how to respond in a different way and who don't automatically think they know the solution to a problem. They solve the design with you, which I think is a key difference compared to other agencies."

David: "DesignTactics was singly as responsible as I was for the success of Java Republic. I know I came up with the idea, but without Brendan, this brand would never have had any of the success: It would never have made the impact in terms of brand recognition that it did. Java Republic punches 50 times above its weight in the marketplace."

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