Why Daniel Ting Chong's computer is the real hero of the 2019 campaign

By Leigh Andrews   9 Nov 2018

The Design Indaba 2019 campaign breaks new ground as it was born out of creative curiosity and collaboration between man and machine. Here's more on the campaign conceptualised by former Design Indaba Emerging Creative Daniel Ting-Chong, Cape Town-based third-generation South African Chinese designer and illustrator with proud Vega roots.

Daniel Ting Chong.

The campaign creative is a true example of technological symbiosis and how man vs machine has become man X machine. At face level, it features 13 shapes, randomly in bubblegum pink, crocodile green, fast-food mustard and night blue, as created by Ting Chong. And that's when the design collaboration kicks in.

Ting Chong worked with Paul White to develop a document of words from which the script selects, which is used for the aesthetically pleasing banners and social media posts you're already seeing in the local design space, and the print executions you'll see at Design Indaba 2019, encouraging delegates to save water.

But the campaign is also unexpected, in that the end result can't be predicted. Confused? That's because this is not merely human neuron-sourced creative. The real stand-out factor is that AI was used to generate some of the campaign elements, using 11 lines of code. Ting Chong explains:

> " The computer does the rest by selecting the shapes and dropping them into each unique layout. We have no idea what the final composition will look like, as the shapes bounce and fall into different positions depending on their interactions with one another. "

This means that each execution is completely different. It also goes beyond just visual, as the computer also assigns a sound for every shape it selects, resulting in an intriguing play of notes distinct to each layout. The more shapes there are, the more intricate the sound design. That's a mind-blowing design idea. See (and hear) for yourself…

 I'm so excited about this project and that I finally get to talk about it. I was asked to create the identity for the Design Indaba Conference 2019. The conference has an overarching focus on AI (Artificial Intelligence) and what AI can do for you with the ideology of support being a nuance, too. I conceptualised that it would only be fitting to create an identity that pays homage to the theme of 2019 by creating an identity utilising AI. There are 13 shapes in 4 colours. Dimensions were set and physics was added to the shapes. The computer then does the rest by selecting the shapes and dropping them into each unique layout. We have no idea what the final composition will look like as the shapes bounce and fall into different positions depending on their interactions with one another as well as the holding shape around them. Each execution is completely different, which extends the identity into something unexpected and modular. The organic nature of the falling shapes leaning on one another is intended to communicate the concept of a support structure. Each shape represents us as humans relying on each other, and highlights the fact that across all discliplines of design, we can help each other to create the unimaginable. The computer also assigns a sound for every shape it selects, resulting in an intriguing play of notes distinct to each layout. The more shapes there are, the more intricate the sound design. The copy for the identity is also selected by the computer. I worked with Paul White to develop a document of words from which the script selects, which is utilised for banners, social media posts and print executions. - - - - - #graphicdesign #branding #vectorillustration #visualdesign #inspofinds #logo #brandcuration #collectgraphics #thedesignblacklist #adobeillustrator #designspiration #designindaba #designindaba2019 #ai #brandidentity

A post shared by Daniel Ting Chong *(@danieltingchong) on Nov 7, 2018 at 4:30am PST*

Here, Ting Chong explains why the computer is the real hero if this campaign of creative collaboration as a 'ghost designer', and shares the campaign's special message behind regarding Design Indaba, especially in terms of what AI can do for you, as support is an often-overlooked but important nuance…

⊞ *What are the tools of your trade, and what inspires your work?*

I predominantly work digitally in Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop and InDesign, however, I have been exploring other software lately, to improve my skill set and capabilities when approaching creative problems. I still sketch a lot in my book, as sometimes you can resolve something quicker in a sketch than on a computer. I also believe that it's good practice to work in different mediums and approaches. If you only have one set of tools, every creative problem looks like a nail which makes you very limited to resolve the problem with your toolset.

Wanuri Kahiu in the 2019 Design Indaba campaign.

Nothing specific inspires my work, however, I feel it is the amalgamation of your entire life. The music I'm currently listening to, the food I'm eating, the people I'm around and my total upbringing informs the creative decisions I make.

⊞ *Let's focus on some of those creative decisions, then. Your creativity has won Loeries gold awards, presented TedX talks and worked on magazine covers for the New York Times. Talk us through the role of these accolades in your career.*

I'm very appreciative of every project that comes through the door and couldn't have received that project if it weren't from all the work I've done prior to that. I'm truly grateful to work on international work, but the South African-based work is very rewarding as I feel those projects and businesses add value to our beautiful landscape.

▦ *Definitely. You're also a former Design Indaba Emerging Creative. What was that experience like?*
The Emerging Creatives platform is prolific for networking and is one of the biggest platforms whereby upcoming designers can get noticed. One of the most valuable things I took from the programme was that it validated what I do and that I could create a business out of my career.

David Droga in the 2019 Design Indaba campaign.

It confirmed my belief that what I was doing felt right and made me feel excited about design.

▦ *Now you're making the rest of us feel excited about design, especially as the 2019 Design Indaba campaign you conceptualised, is all about what AI can do for you. An important message, as many hold a dystopic view and fear that AI means 'robots will take our jobs'?*
We've been surrounded by AI for a very long time and we've been reliant on it, too.

> *For example, landing a plane is reliant on computer software to analyse data. The autopilot system relies on a series of sensors around the aircraft that pick up information like speed, altitude and turbulence. That data is then ingested into the computer, which then makes the necessary changes, but the pilot still steers the plane. It's similar to how cruise control works in a vehicle but the driver still has to steer the car.*

I don't think robots will take our jobs as there will always be a need for human connection or skill set. If anything, I feel it may help uplift some disciplines that only a human can do.

Sure, it can replace and speed up production to replace some humans, but there will always be a place and job specifications that only humans could fulfil.

⊞ *Makes sense. Let's talk more about technological symbiosis and how 'man vs machine' has become 'man X machine'.*
As a designer, I'm heavily reliant on computer software to create. A computer is a great assistant to speed-up processes, make calculations and prototype ideas quickly.

Hannah Barry in the 2019 Design Indaba campaign.

There are incredible breakthroughs in the medical field, where that perfect example of man X machine exists. A surgeon can now perform an operation remotely through the use of a high-speed data connection, connecting to a machine to assist with the operation. That is amazing.

⊞ *That is. Explain the process of how your creative coding created the collaborative artwork of the DI campaign.*
When conceptualising the campaign, I focused on whether we can teach computers to be imaginative, whether randomness can make something emotive and meaningful, and what this means for design.

I intended to pay homage to the overarching theme of 'What can AI do for you' by creating a brand identity that was also created by AI. The concept was strong but also fun in its approach. Usually, when I create brand identities, it will mostly be my decision-making only. With this campaign for DI, the computer runs a script and selects the different shapes and colours for me to use.

Ane Crabtree in the 2019 Design Indaba campaign.

I then have to finish off the work by structuring the layout, however, in some of the animation sequences, we have a script that attaches physics to those shapes. This means we have no idea what the final layout will be, as it is reliant on physics and some shapes may bounce or land differently, depending on their weight and the speed that they fall in.

The most important element is of the campaign is that all the shapes rest against each other as a metaphor: to support each other no matter how different we are.

Joris Laarman in the 2019 Design Indaba campaign.

We have kept the approach consistent through all the disciplines, as the copywriting for the DI campaign also randomly selects pre-scripted words for us to use. Some sentences come out very odd, but it still makes complete sense. Essentially, it's 'AI identity' built by AI.

⊞ *Amazing. Let's end with what else this year's Design Indaba attendees can look forward to.*
It will be like no other conference you've ever been to! Design Indaba might only be three days, but it provides tools and fundamentals that can last you a lifetime. My first Design Indaba experience was in 2012, and there was an incredible selection of speakers outside of my discipline, which was so inspirational and provided me with incredible insights and life lessons I still use today.

#DesignIndaba2019: Ticket sales are open!
10 Jul 2018

Looks like we're set for a truly collaborative creative future. Let the excitement build for Design Indaba 2019! Design Indaba 2019, which runs from 27 February to 01 March Book your tickets through [Webtickets](#), Follow Ting Chong on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) for more of his work.

For more:
[www.designindaba.com](#)

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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