

Dialogue



Design Speed Dating

You've heard about the 40 Days of Dating. Now, get Timothy Goodman's take on the experiment, its unintended results and the upcoming movie. by Steven Heller

Timothy Goodman had no indication that a big idea was brewing when he and Jessica Walsh, designer and art director at Sagmeister & Walsh, decided to chronicle their courting experiment in *40 Days of Dating* (www.fortydaysofdating.com). Although a relationship didn't blossom, the project burst into the popular consciousness. With millions of visitors to their site, a "Today" show appearance, a book contract and an in-development film, the project is now the stuff of legend.

Goodman is a designer, illustrator and art director based in New York City. He runs his own studio, working for clients such as the New York Public Library, Airbnb

and *The New York Times*. He worked in-house at Apple Inc. where he helped integrate Apple's visual language, domestically and internationally, and he was a senior designer with the experiential design firm Collins, working for CNN and Microsoft. Due to the buzz around the project, we wanted to know more about 40 Days and how the pair turned it into a successful business adventure.

What prompted you and Walsh to start 40 Days of Dating? James Joyce says, 'In the particular is contained the universal.' I've always believed that. As longtime friends, Jessie and I always bonded over our opposite relationship issues. In an attempt to

explore our habits and fears in relationships, we decided that 'dating' each other for 40 days could be a way to [do so]. Having the boundaries of a project allowed us to take on that challenge. It really was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Did you see this as an entrepreneurial feat or just a clever idea for public consumption? As creative people, we love the process of making something provocative that could potentially inspire and touch people. Naturally, as designers and art directors, it was important to us that 40 Days have an identity, but it wasn't until the project was over that we designed the site, shot the videos, photographed our items,

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asked for lettering contributions, etc. We wanted to [first] approach the project with as much sincerity as possible.

As designers, how did you prepare for the final outcome? This was an experiment, and you can't really define an experiment until it's over. That notion didn't leave a lot of room for preparation at the end.

It's impossible to anticipate if a project like this will succeed. Is that important in terms of making it? We didn't really know what to expect. We're not trend forecasters, and we had no budget or publicist. Jessica and I just put everything out there. Both of us knew that if we were going to do it, we'd have to do it with as much sincerity as possible, without worrying about the repercussions. I'm very proud that it's taken off, but we never thought it would take off the way it did. It's been sort of surreal.

It appears that you made investments of time, psyche and money. What was your aim? If there was any definitive aim, it was an attempt to connect with people and create a larger dialogue. We knew that our stories and issues were not unlike a lot of people's issues. We've since received thousands of messages from people all over the globe, of all ages, genders and cultures, about how much they relate to us and our story. Many people have written to tell us that the project has inspired them to improve their own lives, to find courage to take charge of their relationships or to finally date the best friend they've always been interested in.

Warner Bros. has picked up the option to make 40 Days into a film. Do you have any idea how this will be done? We have a great screenwriter, Lorene Scafaria, who's attached to the film. She'll adapt the story, and we'll be consulting with her.

Do you have any say in the making of the movie? Because there were so many studios and producers interested—in film, scripted TV and unscripted TV—we signed with Creative Artists Agency soon after the website went viral. Obviously, it was our property at the time, so we had 100% say on who



Top: The designers chronicled their daily dates on the 40 Days website.

Left: In the teaser videos, Walsh and Goodman sat facing each other and remained expressionless as odd scenarios took place, such as being covered in feathers.

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we wanted to sell the rights to. Ultimately, Warner Bros. offered us a great package. From there, we'll be consulting on the film. We'll also have the first stab at doing the movie titles and any art for the film.

Now that it's received so much press, are you deciding how to scale up the 'product,'

or is it simply a fun project gone viral? Besides the movie, we'll be writing a book that'll be published with Abrams and is due out in September. The book will be a much more comprehensive look at the 40 days, as well as who we were before the experiment and everything that's happened since. We also want to expand the idea into a web-based community platform, where others can sign on to their own challenges, romantic or otherwise.

What's next? Jessica and I have plans to do more projects, and now that 40 Days has been such a success, new doors are open for us. ■