Lean User Testing for Stressed Out Designers

Darren White

DW&CO

Give your design some respect.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

DW&CO

I’m D. White

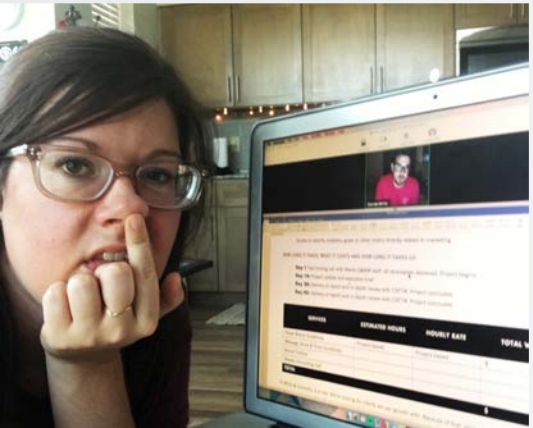
15 years creative experience...

- MBA – TXWES
- B.S., Journalism – TCU
- Texas Wesleyan – 2009 – 2018
- D. White & Company – 2018

I AM NOT A DESIGNER.

This is “& Company”

- Derek Reeves – Client Services Coordinator
- Shelly Jackman – Creative Director



DW&CO
HIGHER ED MARKETING CONSULTING

TOTAL BRAND AUDIT:

TCU

DARREN WHITE
DEREK REEVES
SHELLY JACKMAN

FEBRUARY 2019

While TCU's campus is stunning; it lacks the natural resources that schools in mountainous or coastal regions might have. Californians are not relocating to Texas for the scenery, pretty as it might be. What Texas does have is boundless career opportunity compared to many other regions.

TCU is redefining the VALUE OF A DEGREE for the next generation of leaders. It just needs to show us how it does it.

Another thing that is missing from TCU's message is anything resembling an empathetic, serious discussion about cost and affordability. TCU's average student debt is estimated at more than $36,000, making it one of the highest in the Metroplex and giving rise to the reality that many TCU students are not as wealthy as the stereotype might suggest.

By comparison, the average debt load at SMU was just over $29,000. Even more prestigious schools that recruit wealthier students are putting this discussion front-and-center. It's not a university-specific discussion, it's a nationwide one.

How can the No. 1 issue on virtually every student and parent's mind — even the wealthy ones — be so absent from TCU's message? We want to continue expanding the message into these areas. If the brand is too rigid to fit these, it must be better defined.

Our interviews tell us financial aid and admissions leadership are already working on this problem. We look forward to seeing this as a central part of TCU's message.

Tone

We didn't see anything of note about TCU's tone, which seemed appropriate and well-timed. We'd love to see some more listening and more empathy in the brand's tone overall, but feel that we've covered these above.

Visual Design & Branding

TCU's design has some elements we love and some that left us scratching our heads, including placement errors and busy designs that try to say everything while saying absolutely nothing.

Here are five things we've noticed right away:

1. "Holy Busy, Batman!" — Less is more. What do four random photos do that one compelling photo could not? Photos need to breathe, especially pictures with people in them.
2. Sloppy design — A quarter-inch of space divides the two photos in the middle. Why? Faces are cut off, and the teacher is not making clear eye contact with the students. Photos are too closely cropped to provide any value to the message.
3. Message misalignment — We love the message, but what does it have to do with the photos? This seems like an outcomes message tacked onto a student engagement (?) design.
4. Dated — The gradients, drop shadows and outlined text have been out-of-vogue since design trends switched to a flat design in the early 2010s. TCU's design looks significantly behind the times at a time when visual design is exploding nationwide with vibrant colors and message-forward text.
5. Inconsistencies — While TCU has a strong brand presence with the logo and purples, the pieces still have some inconsistencies where the call-to-action styles vary from piece to piece. These should be visually prominent and the light teal color felt out of place for the brand. Consider some contrast. CTA's should be consistent through print and digital communications to provide a consistent experience for the audience.

Out-of-home advertising presents its own set of challenges, and perhaps none is more persistent than readability. Light-colored fonts are difficult – especially when shadows are used – to read. Many font sizes are small and may be difficult to

have no more than eight rd. We like the clear calls but we would like to see

istent conversions on the website aterials. In other words, if you say or "enroll now," keep it consistent. students should expect to find the nology throughout their admissions . Also, there's no need for the phone e main website is sufficient. Not many e students based on a billboard.

We're guessing those are instructors on the 2017 billboards. Instead of having a staged shot, why not create some interaction? This will reinforce brand messaging about a small classroom. We also think that photography is a little overused in billboards. Billboards are a message-driven medium. We'd love to see a stronger value proposition here. Tell me why I should care in eight words.

If you're planning to use people, use people that look like your demographic – bright, fresh-faced, young, attractive people that prospective students will project their own lives onto.

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HIGHER ED MARKETING CONSULTING

TOTAL BRAND AUDIT:

THE CULINARY SCHOOL OF FORT WORTH

Darren White
Shelly Jackman

July 5, 2018

BLUEFIELD COLLEGE - Acceptance Pack with shirt

Cardboard tube mailer
8" h x 3.5 dia" (approx.)

Top of lid

Mailing label/sticker to seal container

Acceptance letter, shirt and wood sticker rolled inside

Shirt hangtag

Wood sticker

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- Ryan Turner, Founder & President, RefineRE

BRAND VOICE

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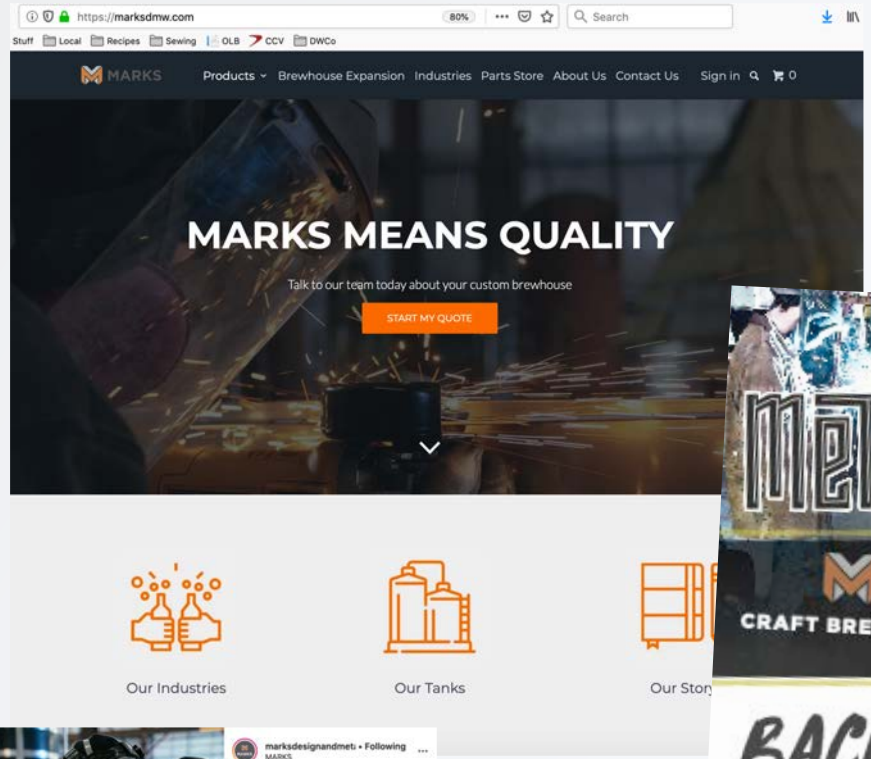
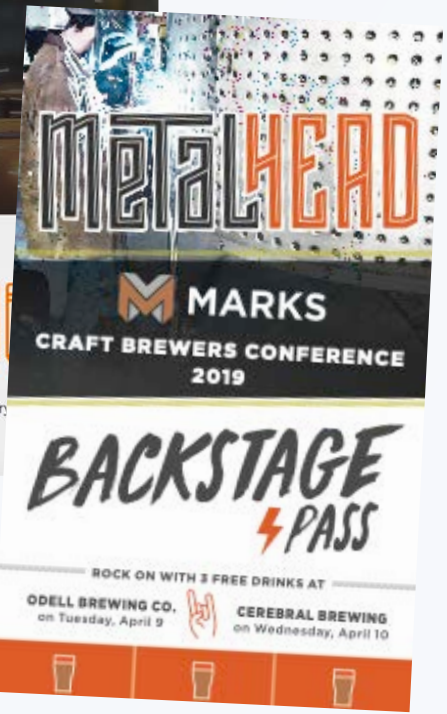
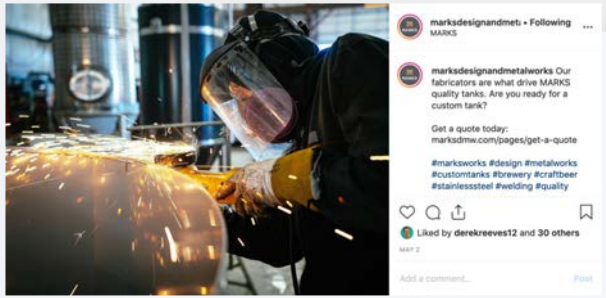
MARKS

BEVERAGE TANKS
Vancouver, Washington







The sad days at Texas Wesleyan.

Brace yourselves.

Texas Wesleyan
UNIVERSITY

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There's still time.
11
12
10

TEXAS
Wesleyan
UNIVERSITY

I'm accepted!

What's next?

The happy days at TXWES.

Brace yourselves.

Texas Wesleyan
UNIVERSITY

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MORE THAN MEETS
THE SIZE.
SMALLER. SMARTER.
Texas
Wesleyan
UNIVERSITY
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There's still time.
11
12
10

MORE THAN MEETS
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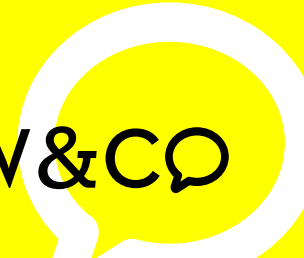
It takes a lot of testing.

It’s worth it.



- **Real Outcomes**
- **Repeatability**
- **Action**
- **Regular Review**

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Testing is a wise use of student tuition dollars.

How do you spend tuition money?

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“THE RIGHT THING IS ALWAYS THE HARDEST THING TO DO.”

- Jason Isbell

(Ask the PR person if the brand has value).

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Your work will not stand on its own at a university.

Sorry.

Anyone worked on any “cute ideas?”

You know what I’m talking about. “Making it pretty.”

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Making it pretty doesn't make numbers.

Let's be real.

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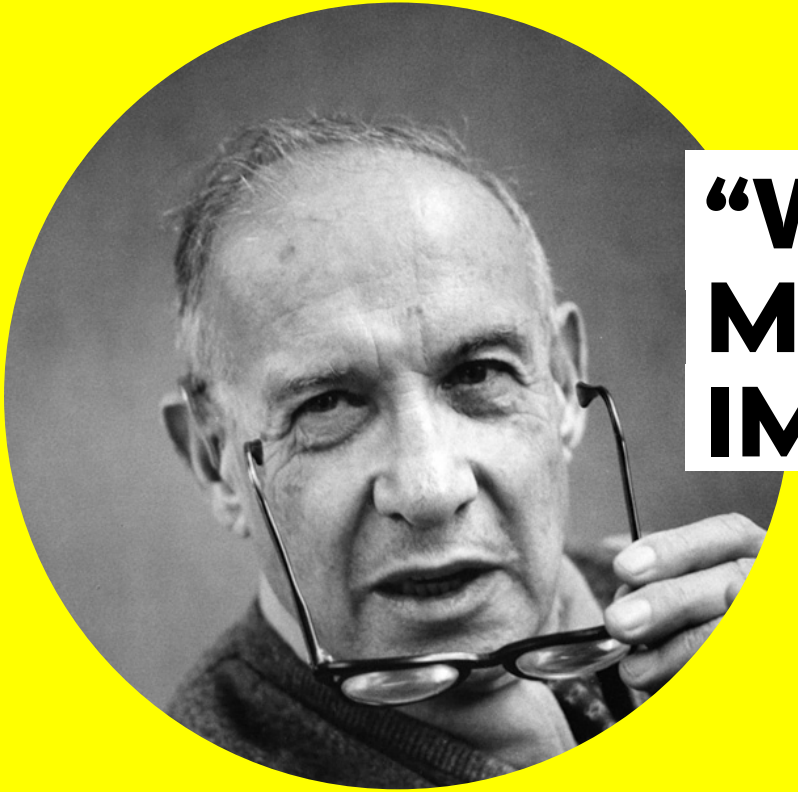

“WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS IMPROVED.”

- Peter Drucker

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- **Be strategic**
- **Do your research**
- **Start simple**
- **Report**
- **Repeat**

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Myth: Testing is time-consuming.

Let’s examine the higher ed design workflow.

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This is a tough job.

Higher ed: Medieval Times for book nerds.

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Treats them like line cooks.

Assumes design expertise is common knowledge.

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Treats them like artistes.

Assumes design expertise is not quantifiable.

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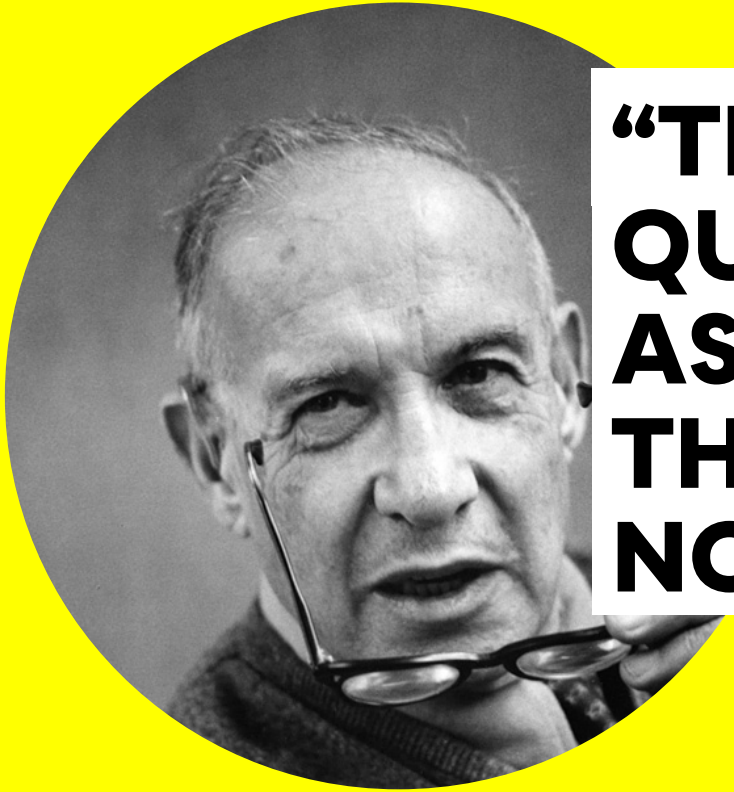

“THERE IS NOTHING QUITE SO USELESS AS DOING EFFICIENTLY THAT WHICH SHOULD NOT BE DONE AT ALL.”

- Peter Drucker

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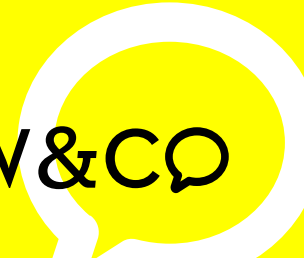
You need test, smart.

Like, a system.



Designer is a strategic position.

This is the big idea you should remember.

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Failing to plan is planning to fail.

Ben Franklin. Founded a little start-up called America.

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- ~~Be strategic~~
- Do your research
- Start simple
- Repeat
- Report

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Myth: Testing is expensive.

No. I have a whole ‘nother session on budgets.

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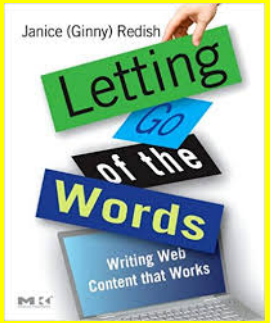
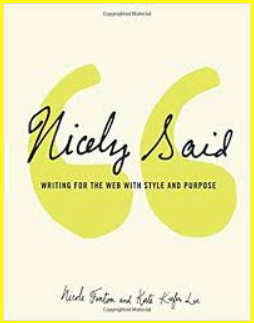
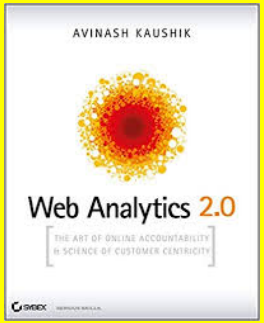
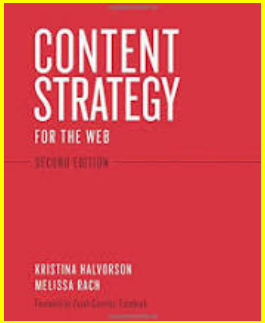
Digital design embraced data.

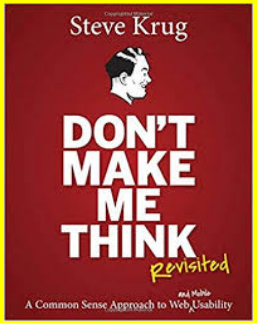
Testing is as affordable as your local library.











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Why don’t we all do this?

My theory: Sub-prime mortgages.

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Def: Lean user testing.

A system you cannot sustain is not a good system.

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Lean user testing is testing what moves the needle and moving the needle on your testing.

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Act now: Create feedback.

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Your audience is outside.

Go get ‘em.

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Ask your students.

They know students who dropped out.

A system you can't sustain sucks.

The Steve Krug stuff:

- Focus groups
- Listening Sessions
- Surveys

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- ~~Be strategic~~
- ~~Do your research~~
- Start simple
- Repeat
- Report

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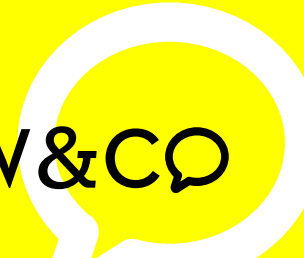
Myth: Testing can only be performed by PH.D's

LOL, No.



The simplest tests can produce the most profound results.

“KISS: Keep it simple, stupid.”

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Your audience is outside.

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- ~~Be strategic~~
- ~~Do your research~~
- ~~Start simple~~
- Repeat
- Report

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Bad tests can run off the rails.

Have you all ever seen Jurassic Park?

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Accurate vs. precise.

Summary of Analytics 2.0 and how it applies here. 🎯

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Set some parameters for your testing.

Don’t overdo it. It’s called a blood sample for a reason.

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Create testing models.

Research, think, hypothesize, test, observe and refine

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Want a few to get started with?

- Polling
- Surveys
- Task testing
- Focus groups
- A/B testing
- Multivariate testing

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- ~~Be strategic~~
- ~~Do your research~~
- ~~Start simple~~
- Repeat
- Report

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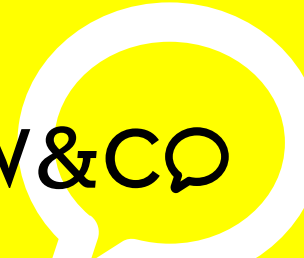
Myth: It didn’t work.

That’s not how testing works.



Specific: Pick a specific project.

Map our interactions. How do our stakeholders experience things?

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Relevant: Align to bottom line.

Designers are great at alignment. Here's your anchor. Write it down. Share it.

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Formalize it.

Write it down.

DW&CO

- ~~Do your research~~
- ~~Be strategic~~
- ~~Start simple~~
- ~~Repeat~~
- Report

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Myth: It’s not worth it.

It’s. Worth. It.

This gives you insight that's valuable to the institution.

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Report on what matters.

Skip the rest.

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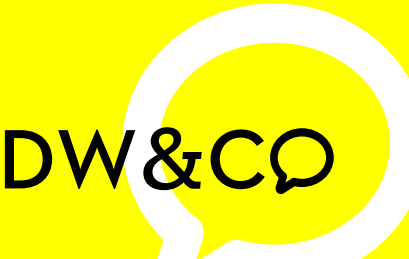
Keep it brief.

Focus on what matters to your organization.



- **Do your research**
- **Be strategic**
- **Start simple**
- **Repeat**
- **Report**

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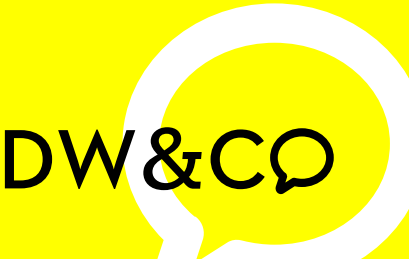
DISCUSSION

Holler:
Darren White
darren@dwhiteandco.com // @dwhite



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