

**A modest brand-building proposal Steven Tatar 8.18.2016**

***“Somewhere along the way, in the race to get ahead, we lost something important. Maybe we need to go back and find it. Maybe it’s time to get back to making real connections with ourselves and those who matter most.”***

**OVERVIEW** This proposal outlines a strategy to build on the success of the ANALOG launch event presented at SXSW Interactive in March, 2016. Building on the momentum and excitement of this first iteration of Analog, a follow up version of the event would capture the equity of the launch Analog, improving upon it, and cultivating an engaging and powerful new brand-building platform for AG to reach new audiences while deepening our relationships with our existing audiences. This proposal describes a next-generation, pop-up version of Analog- a public ‘makers’ workshop- in a major US city during the 2016 holiday season.

**ABSTRACT** AnalogSXSW has opened an important door for American Greetings. It extended our ethos of “meaningful connections” beyond the function and presentation of our products into a realm of bringing an enthusiastic audience into our world of sharing, caring, curiosity and creation. We invited all to enjoy not only the art and sentiments of our work, but also to participate in the joy of manipulating materials to make cool and beautiful things. At AG, we have the daily good fortune and pleasure of doing this sort of making, but for all too many, such activities are exceptional rarities, and the participants at SXSW who shared in our fun were deeply moved and thrilled to have the opportunity. And no doubt they loved AG for making the opportunity available to them.

***We have prototyped a new and exciting model for the company to connect audiences to our brand: by bringing people closer to our creative process, inviting them to make things alongside us, and share very directly in the act of expressing happiness, laughter, and love.***

And in making these physical creative activities more visible, we also are expanding perceptions of AG beyond our *products* to include our creative *process* as well. Such dynamic and expressive creativity is a highly valued attribute both culturally as well as in business, and AG’s Analog initiative presents us with an exceptional opportunity to define the company more broadly and even uniquely around these qualities. Building on the success of the SXSW Analog prototype with a next generation public “maker’s workshop” is an obvious and timely next step.

**BACKGROUND** For all the benefits and conveniences today’s technology provides, for many people, its prevalence also borders on outright intrusion, and is increasingly associated with growing society-wide feelings of disconnection: disconnection from the earth, our communities, immediate surroundings, and even primary materials. It is not a coincidence that a currently prevalent design aesthetic emphasizes the strong evidence of “a direct human touch”; from a preponderance of hand-lettering in graphic design to deliberately D.I.Y. constructions that prominently feature the material-ness of what the objects are made from. Fashion is enthusiastically embracing traditional workwear and pre-worn finish treatments, architecture and interior design seeks to leave constructions and surfaces deliberately exposed and worn to convey the origins and “innards” of the physical environment, and the provenance of our food is paramount, where local equates directly to quality. And even the insistently streamlined modern styling of tech devices has a contrarian aesthetic on the mainstream edges in “steam-punk”. This current cultural impulse is not Luddite and a rejection of technology, but more of a re-embracing of the cloth of being human and attempts to nurture soulfulness back into our everyday experiences.

Millennials, for whom the ubiquity of digitality has always been the norm, having an individual voice in their personal expression is highly valued, and authenticity is carefully vetted. Likewise, brand allegiance is closely correlated to a brand’s “realness”, i.e. being genuine.

***Today, consumers seek out brands that allows them to participate in authentic experiences- valued brands offer points of entry into their “origin stories” and cultural narratives, creation of their products, and even input into the shaping of the product. In an era when consumers have such ready sources of any product they want, experiences take on a heightened valuing.***

A product or brand may find customers in the short term based on performance features, accessibility, or price, but the dizzying pace of product development most industries now are subjected to means it can be a surprisingly short stay in the front of the product pack. A company or organization must offer something deeper or even cultural in order to sustain relationships with its audience: and whatever this “thing” is, it better be authentic, not just a cleverly packaged pitch, but a true expression of what makes that brand both unique as well as worth having a relationship with.

***The success of American Greetings’ Analog workshop at SXSW vividly demonstrated these contemporary marketing challenges: at a festival that celebrates a person only needing one finger to activate a world of possibilities, we offered a place for attendees to get both hands dirty and dive in up to their elbows.***

We didn’t present a fancy show n’ tell of product demos and performance features, but invited our visitors to express themselves by making things- and they loved it like one loves that first warm spring day after a long, cold winter. Part of the enthusiastic embrace of Analog at SXSW could be attributed to how it stood out from the digital forest around it, but its appeal also could well be a reflection of the thirst for touching materials, making things, and personal expression that so many are finding lacking in their daily lives. And nothing is more profoundly a personal expression than something that is made by hand.

It is quite ironic that in the 21st. century, where contemporary life is so dominated by technology, the fundamental acts of crafting objects from primary materials with our hands is becoming regarded as a luxury and a differentiator that signifies specialness and authenticity. And yet, this ‘makership’ of ours is at heart who AG is, both as a business and an extended professional community. It may be that many consumer goods businesses use similar hands-on product development processes, but few if any have such crafting remaining so evident as a central definer and valuation of its products. These qualities differentiate AG in the crowded world, and are a special quality where we can almost uniquely win audience hearts and minds (and wallets).

***Our artistic culture is genuinely who we are, and where we come from, and is an authentic reflection of the AG soul. And the world is now hungry to embrace into their lives such a brand. It’s basically ours to nurture and grow these relationships.***

**R O I**

Brand building

New audiences

Media Impressions

Internal embrace

Prototyping Future initiatives

***(More)Analog (vs. Analog 2.0) would be a direct outgrowth of Analog at SXSW: a fun, playful, spirited and highly creative workshop environment that would pop-up in a hip neighborhood in a dynamic “world city” for a limited engagement.***

The public is invited to be our guests at Analog to participate in a variety of hands-on art-making activities, see demos by professional creatives, hear presentations by creative industries leaders, and just simply hang out. AG’s role as the producer and presenter of Analog will be highly evident: ***a principle goal of the project is to associate expressive creativity- behaving artistically- with American Greetings in the public’s mind.***

While SXSW was produced with considerable input from outside agencies- mainly Mullen and Guild- the next version needn’t require the same level of production (and associated funding) from outside sources; with careful planning and good project management, AG could use more of its internal resources to produce a very robust and engaging workshop. The project won’t be cheap of course, but it needn’t cost upwards of seven figures as SXSW did. Ongoing relationships with our agencies of record could be more focused on overcoming some of the more formidable obstacles and the media leveraging dimensions, while AG would use more local and task specific outside contributors to support and augment planning, build-out, staffing and program development. AG artists- both staff and freelance - would rotate through the workshop for core staffing and project demos & presentations, complimented by a public program of visiting outside artists and other engaging presenters. Scaling the project to available resources and budgets is appropriate, and arguably of measurable value if done right.

This project would certainly require a lot of work, but working together is what we love to do at AG, and we do it well. And the benefits it could yield would be substantial. Our initial foray into this type of experience marketing at SXSW clearly demonstrated these potentials. The dramatic changes in retail commerce that are happening globally compels every consumer brand- in fact, I would say, *requires* every brand- to aggressively seek out new ways to have meaningful relationships with its stakeholders, starting with its customers, both those who already embrace the brand as well as those who have yet to.

A broad outline of this initiative would likely look like:

TEAM

The **project team**, as described, would be a combo of both in-house and outside contributors. Planning and pre-event, the in-house team should have representation from both the Creative and Marketing divisions, with a core of strategic thinkers for planning, and some tactical expertise for project and traffic management. Our marketing folks would interface with our outside PR and advertising agency resources, and Creative would provide the core of the actual hands-on activities with our guests / participants, including providing onsite staffing during the event. As an added benefit to the brand-building ROI, we also are giving ourselves an opportunity to engage our staffs in the “larger world” and generate inspiration and excitement for them as well.

Additionally, the debut of our new world-class Creative Studios offers a very compelling brand-building asset to leverage this initiative of projecting American Greetings as a global center of creativity, innovation, and meaningful connections.

Leading and driving this project requires someone who possesses a thorough understanding of AG and its culture, is socially extroverted and welcoming, has experience in designing and putting together effective and engaging environments quickly and cheaply, has extensive relationships in the creative communities of Cleveland and New York, has been around artist studios as both an owner and a visitor, and understands marketing communications. Steven Tatar is that guy. He has been in and out of AG professionally for +40 years (what?!?!), has a successful personal studio practice, has built numerous successful temporary and permanent environments in various locations -his Ohio Knitting Mills store in Brooklyn, NY was named one of “New York’s 100 Best Stores” by Conde Nast magazines in 2008 - and has taught and lectured on art, design and business globally at such places as Parsons School of Fashion, RISD, Pratt, and Studio Art Center International in Italy. His apparel business has mounted two exhibitions in Tokyo, Japan, and is sold in that country as well as across the USA, and he has presented over two dozen temporary marketplaces and retail pop-ups for the brand. In 2001, Steven presented a hands-on studio workshop program at the AIGA National Design Conference, which remains to the present an integrated component of this leading bi-annual professional design gathering. And, conveniently, Steven is retained as a Senior Creative Consultant for AG through the 2016 calendar year.

TIMELINE

The winter holidays would be an obvious season for launching a pop-up. Should practical realities of timing, budgets and/or staffing make this timeframe untenable, Valentines Day has a similar occasion context, though of course is less driven by the “spirit of giving”. And the Christmas season has a rich and well-loved palette of imagery, color, and stories to use as prompts for people to draw from to inspire their making experience.

**Planning:**

*August/September*: Team formation, project design, location scouting

*September/October:* Program development, media planning, facility planning and staging

*November:* Workshop physical build-out, media pre-launch

*December:* Pop-up launch and public period: approx. 10-14 days total. Peak media activation throughout. Post-workshop breakdown and disassemble.

**Event Schedule:**

I propose that (More)Analog (AnalogNYC?) run from Dec 2-11: two full weekends preceded by a Friday evening launch event, and a full week between. Weekday evenings would be dedicated to our Creators presentations. And some days could be focused on kids appropriate activities- perhaps Sundays- to encourage families to visit and play with us together.

Maker Workshops:

11am-7pm Monday-Saturday,

10-6pm Sunday.

Creator Presentors:

7:30-9pm Mon-Fri

LOCATION

The preferred (More)Analog location would offer a combination of a high urban density, a concentration of media-savvy cultural consumers, a preponderance of professionalized media content creators, and a rich cultural landscape. The obvious first choice would be New York City, which is readily accessible to Cleveland and which would serve as our project development and staging base. One downside of NYC is its high cost and availability of real estate and operating. Engaging well-connected real estate brokers to facilitate locating and securing a temporary space is well advised. Manhattan- below 23rd Street- or western Brooklyn- Willamsburg, Bushwick or Greenpoint-would be our target neighborhoods.

PROGRAMMING

(More)Analog would offer a combination of on-going craft and media maker workshop space with nightly presentations by well-regarded Creatives. Anyone is welcome to come and enjoy any of our offerings for free- Analog is completely open to the public. The maker spaces will be staffed by artists to assist visitors to create their own objects in a variety of materials, along with a schedule of demos and talks by AG artists and our other talented friends. A range of topics that touch upon the core themes of creative expression, storytelling, new media in communications, and sharing/caring/laughter & love are our point of inquiry. And of course, the winter holidays, which offers so much rich imagery, texture and color along with their joyful celebratory spirit would be prominent!

We would look first to the various workshop titles and activities from SXSW for program ideas and best practices, and then of course augment and adjust those offerings to reflect the spirit of the holiday season and location, with a particular focus on creating meaningful connections and communications. We will take advantage of some of the internal creative strengths and assets AG already has in abundance for staffing and workshop offerings. Presenting Analog in NYC would likewise put the project in the hometown of many of the country’s most accomplished professional creatives; an advantage for recruiting some of these talents to be our presenters at relatively lower costs and higher availability.

Though the pop-up would be free to all comers, consideration should also be given to having a **commerce component** as well: either seasonal AG products, special offerings tailored to the event and audience, or even make some of the work produced at the workshop available for sale. We might consider including a scaled down version of Kindred, the marvelous new AG store about to debut at our Creative Studios in Westlake. Realistically, we shouldn’t expect this Analog to be cash neutral, but some funding offset might be possible, and if merchandised right, that dimension could be an overall draw and enhancement of the whole experience. But as stated, the goal here is not for the pop-up to be primarily a retail store.

***Our focus is on creating spirited, high quality creative interactions, projecting the American Greetings brand through these interactions, engaging with audiences, and very importantly, broadcasting these experiences through social media and other marketing communication platforms.***

These types of workshops and presentations are common for us internally at AG for our own professional growth, inspiration and simple joy in being who we are. And, needless to say, producing a vast array of art for products that are for celebrating and expressing caring is the very essence of our company: it is the genuine soul of AG. Unquestionably, many people in the world would delight in having the opportunity to share in these experiences, and it can only be a good thing for them to associate AG with these happy experiences. Everyone wants to live a colorful, expressive, creative life- there are vast industries dedicated to this core human desire- we behave artistically like this everyday simply by being an AG associate. We have a golden opportunity before us to provide for those widely felt desires and sharing happiness, laughter, and love directly with our audience.

***There is tremendous potential to generate substantial brand equity by positioning American Greetings as a global center of creativity in the minds and hearts of the public.***

BUILD OUT

Let’s say we have 8-12 “workshop islands” built around a 4x8 table, each with some seating (stools?), a smaller side table/shelf, and a tool station. Construction can be simple and direct- basic materials like 2x4’s, sheet goods like plywood, pin walls of homosote, etc. Ideally the space would also have room for a smallish sit down audience- perhaps 50-100 people- for the evening presenter programs. And of course the necessary A/V stuff. We can pre-fabricate the basic fixtures, in Cleveland or at one of our plants if more cost effective and practical- to be trucked to NYC and assembled on site. We’ll pick up some odds and ends bits of fun accessories to make the space look and feel like the artist’s studio that it is. The space should include a lounge area, which might also serve as the presentation location, lots of wi-fi of course, and a reception area (which could also locate a mini-retail component should we elect to include one). Keep snacks and drinks on hand for our guests. We’re already set up for sourcing all of our necessary materials.

Workshop space: 12x12’ per station, at 10 stations: 1500 sq. ft.

Reception / Lounge, (doubles as presenter space): 1500 sq. ft.

TOTAL SPACE REQUIRED: 3000 sq. ft.

BUDGET

Analog at SXSW was by necessity a big production: big budgets, big names, big moves, big splash. Clearly, at such a high profile event, the only way to show up is to go all out. Go large, or risk looking like a minor-league organization. And it’s an expensive arena to play in over the festival. But such an involved, and expensive a production needn’t be necessary to evolve the concept and take a next step in developing the concept of inviting an audience into the world of AG through creative experiences. A next generation Analog pop-up workshop could be brought to other markets and around other occasions. The goal at this moment would be to do just ‘a next pop-up’, to ride the momentum of SXSW, and take the learning moments from that experience to iterate the concept forward.

Space: 3,000 sq. ft @ $80/ ft : $24,000. Add $6,000 for broker fees, insurance, wi-fi, electrical, etc.: **$30,000**

Opening and Special Events : **$10,000**

Visiting Artist Honoraria: 12 artists x $500/artist: **$6,000**

Presenter Fees: 5 presenters x $4,000/ ea (we’re talking players with cred here): **$20,000.**

Travel: 15 r/t CLE <>NYC x $600 (including parking, transfers, etc): **$9000.**

Staff Food/PerDiem: Average 5 staff/day x $60/perDiem: $300/day x 14 day (including pre & post set-up/tear-down): **$5200**

Housing: (AirBnB a loft for 4-6 people): $500/ night x 14 nights: **$7000**

Art / Project Materials: $400 / day x 9 days: **$3600**

Security / Documentation / Labor / Rentals / Misc: **$35,000**

**TOTAL BASIC BUDGET: $125,800**

Note: the basic budget does not include expenses associated with marketing the event. Determining those costs would best be addressed by our Marketing team. Compensation for Steven, as well as other AG associates, is also not reflected in this budget outline.

MARKETING COMMUNICATION

***Communicating (More)Analog, both within NYC to draw our audience participants, and even more importantly, globally before, during, and after is a critical component of this project. In fact, it’s the primary reason we would even undertake this endeavor: to build the American Greetings brand.***

Our Marketing team is of course in the best position to drive this leg of the project, and hopefully would engage our outside agency(s) of record to facilitate and power the campaign. A robust combination of media placements, social media, and even some guerilla efforts such as wheat paste sniping broadsheets in the City would precede the event. During the event, we would (aggressively, but nicely) facilitate and enable social media activity from our guest participants. The importance and value of these marketing communications activities can’t be overstated- they are the vehicles we use to significantly multiply the brand equity we are cultivating.

*“The brand needs to mean something. That’s part of the product as well. This is probably the most valuable thing that we own, so there’s a lot of care and feeding and nurturing that goes into the brand itself. And, then, of course, the product has to be there too. It’s the combination of those things — it’s a culture. It’s ultimately how relevant are you? The answer to that is: how connected are you to the culture?”*

*– Mark Parker, CEO, Nike*



