

Trackhacking: Redesigning the sound of cancer treatment

 By Leigh Andrews

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With World Cancer Day having just been marked on 4 February, the dreaded 'C' word is top of mind. Here's how Cancer Dojo has partnered with the Berklee College of Music and employed design thinking to turn the scary noises of MRI machines into uplifting music.



Conn Bertish. © – Knut Otto
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Conn Bertish is an inspiration to many. An accomplished ad man who racked up awards and accolades throughout his career as a creative strategist, that all changed when he was diagnosed with brain cancer.

Now, he's better known as founder of the Cancer Dojo as well as resilience-building content agency, HTK or Harder To Kill.

The ultimate innovative thinker, he has spoken at the [Business of Design](#) conference about using design thinking to effect change.

One way he's doing so himself is through a novel idea that helps patients conquer both cancer and the associated fear through 'trackhacking'.

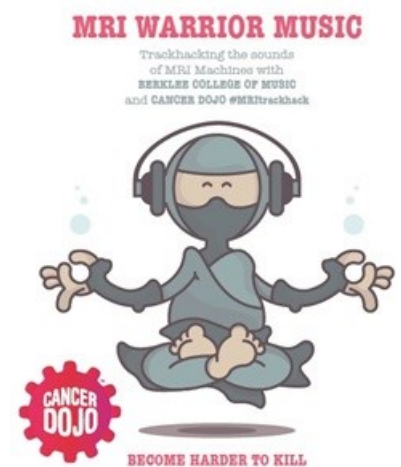
The revolutionary results of design thinking

Explaining how music ties in to the Cancer Dojo offering and an individual's overall wellbeing, Bertish says: "Cancer Dojo is all about transforming patients into active warriors in their own healing. Through music, we have been able to convert something scary into something that's empowering." For those who don't know, the Magnetic resonance imaging or MRI machines used to detect cancer, learn more about detected tumours, decide how to treat the disease and monitor the treatment's effectiveness emit brash, quite dramatic electronic bursts of sound – unfamiliar and unnerving clangs, buzzes, hums and squeaks. Bertish says this is unnerving for patients, particularly as they're already going through a very difficult time and have to undergo these scans regularly to find out if their cancer has come back.

During Bertish's own bout with cancer, he started turning the sounds of the machines into music in his head and tried to find a beat to them. This really helped him as it let him literally dance through the treatment and now he wants to share this helpful approach with others. He says it boils down to design thinking, which is about changing the design of something in a way that has a more positive emotional connection for a person. Bertish explains they have done this using music and sound. Further, Cancer Dojo uses design to reframe the way people interact with cancer and approach their healing in a way that engenders a more favourable outcome. This has been discussed in Psychoneuroimmunology studies, which show people with a more optimistic mindset actually remain more resilient through times of crisis and stress, such as cancer treatment.

From scary beeps to upbeat battle cries

Bertish wanted the best musical minds to be involved in the project, so he called Professor Loudon Stearns, an associate professor at the famous Berklee College of Music in Boston. He says it was a pretty strange call, as he "explained the idea of changing the sounds of MRI machines into uplifting, electronic dance tracks, using *The Eye of the Tiger* by Survivor as an example." He even sang the intro riff set against the sounds of an MRI machine effectively 'hacking the track', all while



[click to enlarge](#)

worried Stearns would think that he was a little insane. Instead, Stearns completely bought into the idea of changing the very fear-provoking sounds into something upbeat. Through 36 students' collaboration they came up with *Battle Call*, now available for download from the SoundCloud link embedded below:

The next step is to work with DJs on various radio stations to communicate how listeners can download elements of MRI machine sounds themselves and turn them into tracks. You can also get involved through partnerships, collaborations and donations of any kind, plus they're compiling workbooks for people facing cancer, holding creative workshops and hosting an art exhibition in the next few months.

Ample opportunity to join the fight. [Click here](#) for more on Bertish, [here](#) for more on Cancer Dojo and be sure to visit their [website](#), [Youtube channel](#), [Twitter feed](#) and [SoundCloud](#) account for their successes and more on what they need.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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