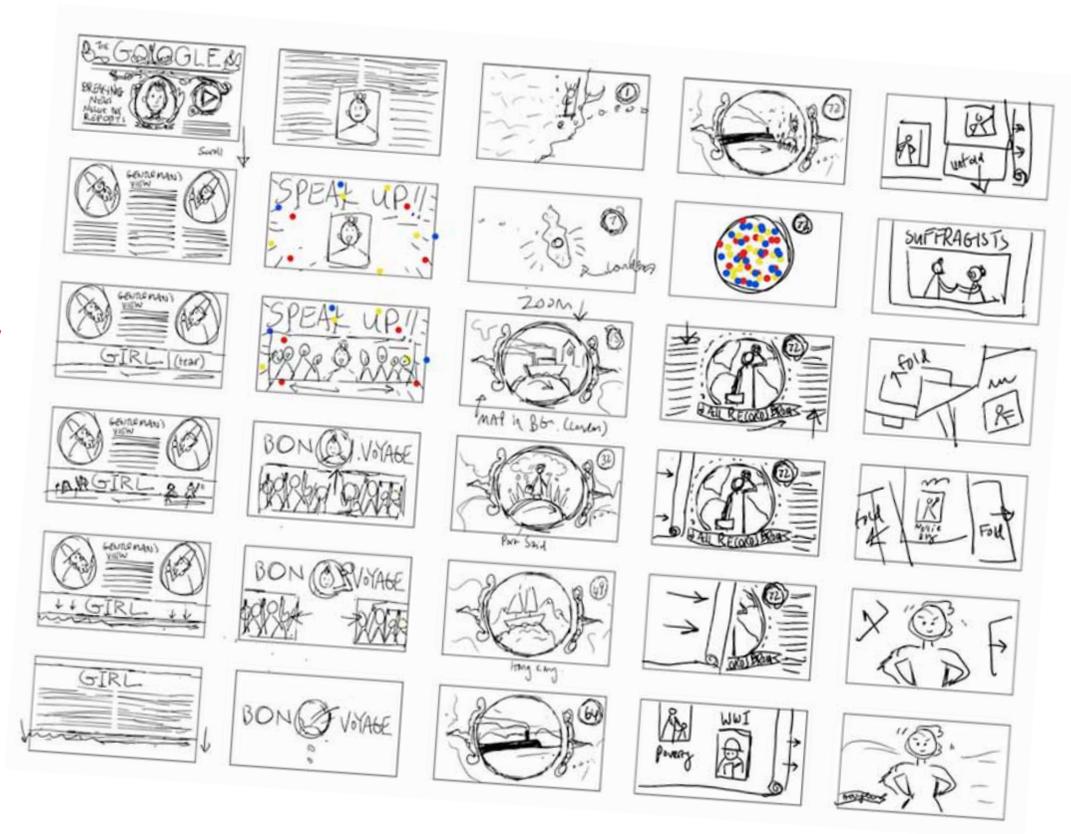


Doodle at Work

WORDS ROSSARA JAMIL PHOTOS GOOGLE

Creative and inventive, Google Doodle has become, for millions of Google users around the world, a source of distraction, visual fun, and even inspiration. We take a look at the Doodle's appeal and what goes on behind it





In July this year, Moh Journ Haydn from Beacon Primary School won the Singapore Doodle 4 Google competition. The theme was 'Singapore: The next 50 years'. And the eight-year-old was overall winner with his doodle that expressed his wish for Singapore to be powered by solar energy within the next 50 years. It went live on the Google homepage for 24 hours on Singapore's National Day this year.

Haydn counts himself among the lucky ones around the world whose drawings have been featured on the Google homepage. He also earned a sponsored trip, with his mother, to the Googleplex in Mountain View, California. They will get to meet the team of Doodlers, consisting of more than 12 artists and engineers who work full time on the doodles.

THE STICK FIGURE

The Google Doodle project came from a small spark of an idea in 1998. Founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin placed a stick figure behind Google's second 'o' as an out-of-office note. They were heading out to the Nevada desert for the now-famous art and creativity festival Burning Man.

In 2000, Page and Brin assigned then-intern Dennis Hwang to produce a doodle commemorating Bastille Day, the French National Day. Its reach was confined to France, but it won wide appeal.

Google states in its notes, "It was so well received by our users that Dennis was appointed Google's chief doodler and doodles started showing up more and more regularly on the Google homepage. In the beginning, the doodles mostly celebrated familiar holidays; nowadays, they highlight a wide array of events and anniversaries from the birthday of John James Audubon to the ice cream sundae."

BEHIND THE SCENES

Ryan Germick, who started out at Google in 2006 under Hwang's guidance, now heads the doodle team. An official team of Doodlers formed in 2009. "A very common question is how we choose which topics to doodle. So the doodle team starts with this principle, thinking about what our users will find surprising and delightful, and what also fits best with our company's identity. Once ideas are submitted, the team makes a list of the best ideas, consults with local expert 'Googlers'





Singapore Google Doodle_7-8 winner n national_haydn



Vincent Van Gogh's 152th birthday

and gets to work," says Sana Rahman, communications manager of Google Singapore.

They could be in illustration, video, animation or interactive form. In May this year, Google doodler Katy Wu worked on the animation video on Nellie Bly, a 19th-century female reporter, author and adventuress. "When creating the Doodle, we took inspiration from Karen O's lyrics and Nellie's journey around the globe. Throughout the video, Katy used newspaper as a unifying theme – with paper tearing, folding and crumpling as the story goes along. And though the video is mostly black and white, she added some colour to represent Nellie's energy and vibrancy," writes Liat Ben-Rafael, program manager of Google Doodles.

To the average Internet user, they may appear simple. Plenty, however, goes into making each work. Concept sketches are made; drafts are then revised

continually before the finalised version. Generally, it's not just the work of one person. "Throughout this process, the doodle team meets weekly for creative reviews and to give each other feedback," Rahman adds. "One of our most technically complex and popular doodles was the interactive synthesizer we created in honour of electronic music pioneer Robert Moog. It's got 23 knobs, 24 keys, four-track recording and built-in sharing."

Moog was the inventor of the electronic analogue Moog Synthesizer, a keyboard instrument in the 1960s. At one time, it became central to the work of music icons such as The Beatles and Stevie Wonder. The doodle (if you're curious, it's still available online in its Doodles Archive) allows you to use your mouse or computer keyboard to make your own music – and even record, play back and share the songs via

short links or Google+. It is absorbing and fun. It's something that would have made Moog, an untiring innovator, proud.

Like any creative project where there's collaboration, new ideas at different stages kindle the flame into a bonfire. Explaining the doodle further, Rahman says, "The doodle evolved, growing more complex, then simpler and more refined. In the end, more than 74 years' worth of music and weird sounds were created with this doodle!" Given how complicated it was, it took five engineers over four months to create.

GLOBAL REACH

But it doesn't stop there. Rahman adds, "For Doctor Who's 50th Anniversary, we created an 8-bit game doodle themed after the popular TV series. This was our most complex game to date and took months of

preparation, and tons of coordination between the animators and engineer to create."

More than 400 doodles are produced each year. An increasing number of these doodles are interactive. The team plans 18 months ahead to determine the events and milestones to commemorate. The reach for doodles could either be confined to a country or a region. More often than not, it expands further across the globe.

Over time, the Google doodle has become an effective way for bringing attention to events, anniversaries and world changers. While cleverly keeping its brand at the core of this artistic effort, Google then also becomes more than a search engine. It's an avenue for fun, wit and education all thrown together. It's a little a-ha moment that breaks the monotony of everyday life just for a while. Among its many users around the globe, how many would say no to that?

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