## EPISODE 011

## LA28

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Amy Gleeson, LA28

AND

Nicole Jeter West, LA28

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

## BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO

Hi, this is Bryony Gomez-Palacio and welcome to episode 11 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on the emblem for the 2028 Summer Olympic Games that will take place in Los Angeles, California.

Affectionately, and compactly, referred to as LA28, this will officially be the Games of the XXXIV Olympiad.

The project, designed in collaboration by Nike and a number of agencies and independent creatives, was posted on Brand New on September 2. You can pull it up on your browser at bit. ly/bnpodcast011 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast011, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Amy Gleeson, Chief Marketing Officer at LA28 and Nicole Jeter West, Head of Marketing and Brand Engagement at LA28.

In this conversation we get a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse at how an Olympic organizing committee is assembled, how they work with the International Olympic Committee, and how insanely big it will get as 2028 approaches. Amy and Nicole share the process of how they arrived at the changing "A"s, what it took to get them done, and the wonderful potential they have to serve as a conduit to share many stories. We also ask the tough question: was it too soon to reveal the emblem 8 years ahead of the games? Apparently, not soon enough for the LA28 team.

Now, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Amy and Nicole.

ARMIN VIT Welcome to The Follow-Up everyone. I am very excited about today's conversation since it's not a typical Thursday, when one gets a chance to talk about olympics design. Amy and Nicole, it's a pleasure to be here with you today.

AMY GLEESON Thank you so much for having us.

NICOLE JETER WEST Hi Armin. Thank you for having us.

ARMIN So that our readers can identify who's who, can you tell us your name and title?

AMY I'm Amy Gleason and I am the Chief Marketing Officer for LA28.

And I'm Nicole Jeter West, and I'm the Head of Marketing and Brand Engagement for LA28.

of course, we don't need to get into other details. Based on both of your LinkedIn pages, I can see the connecting threads that brought you to this job, but since hearing about it from you is far more interesting than LinkedIn. Uh, how did you become involved with the LA28 organizing committee? Let's start with you, Nicole.

Well, it actually started about two years ago while I was working for Legends, which is a sports agency owned by the Cowboys and the Yankees. And I was the CMO there and I started working with LA28 as our client. And as I started to work on the program for Platform Development and Sales, I started to work more closely with the brand

and ultimately, uh, shifted over about officially seven months ago, but was working on a grant for the last two years. And I will give you a fun fact, Amy and I actually worked together at Madison Square Garden at the start of our careers.

**ARMIN** Good trivia too. [laughter].

AMY Literally our first jobs. Yeah, it was pretty small world.

**ARMIN** Amy, how about you?

AMY So similar to Nicole, it was about two years ago that I first connected with the leadership team from LA28. My background was, I spent a lot of time in the Olympic and Paralympic movement, but from the perspective of a top sponsor. Running Visa sponsorship for five Olympic and Paralympic games. So it was quite familiar with the movement, knew the games were coming to the US and thought it was very exciting. So for me, it started as a consulting conversation as they were transitioning from a bid to an OCOG and pretty quickly I was all in and went to full time. And that's been about a year and a half now.

ARMIN So it seems like two years ago is a key date in both of your stories. Do you know what happened two years ago is that when, as you mentioned, they shifted from a bid to an official, uh, organizing committee and then started the process.

AMY Pretty much. Yes. There's a transition that happens and you kind of go from one model to the next, um, and then as the business entity was formed and so on, the, the organization has started to be built up. We're still very, very young. And, you know, as you probably are aware, the games were awarded to LA years before they have been awarded to a city in the past. So we're actually still in a nonexistent timeframe as it relates to other games in the past, which are awarded about seven years out. So it's an interesting time we kind of get to write some new rules.

ARMIN And just to put it in a little bit of perspective, how many people are employed in the organizing committee at the moment?

NICOLE We're about 70 people.

ARMIN OK.

But we'll grow to probably 6,000-about by the time we get to '28. So we know we know where we're going, but we're very much in our infancy.

That's interesting. That's a big growth too. And like, I would have guessed if I had to take a guess who would be like maybe a thousand people, but 6,000 people that's quite a number. And it was that part of what attracted you to the, I mean, aside from the fact they were working on the Olympics and Paralympics, just kinda like the size and complexity of it, was that something that attracted you both to this gig?

Yeah, I mean, for me, I think it was definitely the ability to help form what the vision will be for 2028. Um, and having the opportunity to work on something this big and impactful on a global level, but also I'm really excited about being in on the ground floor. So it's kind of a unique opportunity to say there's 70 of us all working on a lot of the very foundational work that will impact what ultimately ends up coming to life in 2028.

Completely agree very much the same motivation in terms of having a chance to get into the ground level and kind of get our fingerprints on it a bit and engage in the dialogue and the debate as we set out to build out our vision.

ARMIN And it's interesting that you're sort of committing to an eight-year process that, you know, things happen and you might not see the term through, but I think it's interesting to get in that mindset that this is a really a commitment for the long run. And I think what's at the end of those eight years is so magnificent and big that it will sustain you for that long period of time. Speaking of long periods of time... you know, we're eight years out, so also going from the 70 people to the

6,000 people, a lot of it's going to change at the organization, but a lot is going to change in your roles like right now, what does each of your roles entail?

You know, it, it is that foundation building. It's, it's a lot of time spent on strategic planning, um, articulating that vision. And then quite frankly, the last year and a half has been squarely focused on working to stand up this brand to being very clear on our strategic foundation, being very clear on who our audience is, and then being very clear on how the brand would come to life. So the, the emblem itself is a component of a larger system and one that has limitless possibilities, but because of that requires a lot of planning and a lot of consideration for what a system will look like to manage it and, and sort of governance it, if you will. So spending time with that, and then also giving thought to how we can help support, um, our commercial team and their efforts as we start to build out those programs. Um, and then another area that I've been focused on has been building out our insights, uh, capability as well.

And for me, um, I would say, you know, all of the above that Amy said as, as developing the strategy and planning alongside her and the rest of the team, but also really focused on our infrastructure, what do we need to put in place the right tools and the right resources from a human perspective, as well as technology to help us be in a position to deliver. We like to say, we've turned the lights on with sharing the brand, but now we have to actually keep the lights on, and maintain. And so building and developing a dynamic team that is agile and flexible in that we have the ability to really evolve as this brand will evolve over the next eight years. And so putting in that foundation today is a lot of the work that we've been doing at least the first two years and will continue as we've now shared the brand.

ARMIN Both challenges sound very exciting. Well, not both challenges, both sets of challenges sound very exciting. So we usually see Olympic and Paralympic emblems revealed four or five, maybe six years earlier

than the games. What was the reason or reasons behind releasing it so early?

I mean, as we kind of have said, we're in unchartered territory and that we have this 10 year journey. Um, and so we're, we're looking to kind of write our own playbook as we go. And we're really excited about the LA28 brand and the story and what we stand for. And we felt it was the right time to, to share it with the world. You know, the brand focuses on celebrating many of the core truths of our city of creativity, of possibility, of diversity. And we were really excited to bring that to life through a collection of voices and really have an opportunity to help amplify athlete voices in particular at this moment.

ARMIN Yeah, so was there any concern that it was too soon, or too early?

Not from our perspective, we, I mean, I think if you would ask some of our internal colleagues they would of wanted us to do it even earlier! [laughter] We felt like it was the right time for us on this journey. We also look, this is a weird year. Um, I think we all know that and the Tokyo games had, would have happened in 2020, I think in a normal year. And that was timing that we were very aware of too. So we were ready to, to start, as Nicole said, turn the lights on. Um, and this was a very important and meaningful milestone for us on that journey.

Yeah. I think anything that galvanizes any organization or group of people this year to be excited about something is worth it. So, you know, might as well go big and go with a release of the emblem. So, I think it's an interesting time... To me, it really came as a surprise because we've been running Brand New for 14 years. So we've covered a number of Olympic designs and this one, which is like, oh, here we go, eight years ahead of time. So it's quite interesting.

I want to say one thing on that. I'm glad to hear that you thought it was a surprise. I think in some ways that's what we wanted. Um, you know, we, we want to, we want this to feel fresh. We want this to feel new

and we know that is something that we will have to continue to really challenge ourselves to do over the next eight years.

Yeah, I'd say, unconventional is what we're going for. So yeah, surprise is good.

Yeah, and I think the fortitude that it will take to build on it for eight years, you know, like most companies, some companies in eight years, they will change logos. You know, like when you think about that timeframe, a lot can happen. A lot of things can change. So not to add, not to keep repeating myself, but it's an interesting challenge in going live so early. So in the press releases, the names of multiple agencies were mentioned as being involved in the project. And I'm sure this was a team effort, but who led the emblem design process, more or less?

Veah, the, the brand development, um, the emblem identity was developed alongside with Nike, their design team was part of that process along with a couple of other creative partners. Um, you know, we really do see that there's so much amazing creative talent in LA. And as we have said before, there is no sort of one single identity that can define LA. And so we really felt that it was necessary to bring partners to the table. And it's a part of our co-creation. Uh, so we worked very closely with the other partners, but Nike was definitely part of that process in the beginning. Um, we had Works Collective that worked alongside us as well, to help develop some of the "A" artwork that you see. And also some of the "A" designers, um, participated directly, specifically in some of the design, as well as sharing their stories.

ARMIN And how long was that process? More or less?

AMY I would say about for the last year and a half from the time that we actually were able to, you know, work alongside and figure out who were the right folks for us to go out to and reach out to. Um, and we wanted that to be a collection, not just, have it be focused on any one particular area, but make sure that we brought Olympians,

Paralympians, community leaders and entertainers to the table, and artists so that we had a broad range. And so you saw, you know, people like Allyson Felix, and Alex Morgan, and Chloe Kim, and Michael Johnson from an Olympic standpoint and Paralympians like Lex Gillette, and Scout Bassett, and Jamal Hill. And then also making sure that we had some really great artists from the LA community, like Stephen Harrington and tattoo artist Dr. Woo. And then also, you know, the entertainment side of LA and knowing that that's important too. So the Lilly Singh and Billie Eilish, and then also wanting to make sure that the community was very much a part of this and that we got to tell the stories of our community leaders and activists like Aden Hasakah, and Rachel Sumac as just an example of some of them, I didn't name all 26, but they each represented a unique part of LA and got to share their stories.

ARMIN

I think what's great about the diversity of voices that you're bringing in—and we might talk about this a little bit more later—is that given they have eight years to build on this brand, that gives you an excuse, quote-unquote, to keep telling different stories, and you can go into any sort of topic, any sort of lifestyle, any sort of industry that anyone is in. And you can tell there's different stories as an excuse to have an aide to show off an "A". So it's a really great dynamic that they have between brand and the people that you're representing in LA. So I think it's an interesting opportunity to have a sort of an endless array of interesting content because it's one thing to have endless content, but endless interesting content is a different thing. I think that's there much of the case here with LA as the backdrop.

And there's many stories that make up LA. There's many people, many cultures. And so we, we see that as the inspiration for the A's and for the ability to have continuous A's show up throughout the eight years.

For sure. So let's get into the actual, a little bit of the nitty gritty of the process. What are some of the guidelines and restrictions that you get

from the IOC, the international Olympic Committee, that you had to keep in mind as the design process was started.

AMY
So, you know, we work closely with the IOC and then also the IPC, the International Paralympic Committee throughout the process. And they make lots of tools and sort of knowledge transfer available to us as an OCOG, as a partner, but in terms of the actual guidelines, it's really tied to the application of the rings themselves or the Agitos in the case of the IPC. What the clear space is, what the relationship should be certain things along those lines. And then there's an ask for what they call a distinctive element, which I think we very much have delivered in terms of a distinctive element. So beyond that, it's really up to the OCOG to put forward a design approach and recommendation for their emblem that best represents the city and their vision for the games. And so ours, again, being grounded in co-creation, collaboration, all of that creativity, those are all themes that the IOC and IPC were very supportive of, and responsive to.

ARMIN So when you first see those guidelines, it doesn't feel like Holy cow, we can't do anything.

I mean, you go through moments where you start to have those conversations, but once you get into it and you kind of have that, uh, you have those creative partners with you at the table who are also looking at all different opportunities and ways to kind of attack what they're trying to do and achieve, you know, you kind of take that in and you acknowledge it, but then the landscape is pretty, pretty open.

ARMIN At what point in the process did you and the team decide you were NOT going to go with a traditional emblem. Or, from the beginning, did you say: we want to be different, no matter what.

AMY Pretty much our whole sort of mindset is to try and think about things a little bit differently. So it really, it was right out of the gates that when we briefed and started engaging in the process, and thinking through how we wanted it to come to life, I can't say that we had

where we landed, sort of in our minds, at the beginning at the outside, but we knew that we wanted to have an emblem and a brand that represented creativity, that represented diversity, that also would be something that would thrive in this long time horizon that we had. Being mindful of brand for the digital age was something that was also important for us to consider. So I think when we kind of had all of those elements combined with sort of a desire to reflect the history that has come before, an acknowledgement. So we did study everything that had preceded, but also gave thought to who our audience is and who we'll be talking to eight years, or really, it was almost 10 years when we started this process and what was important to them and understanding that creativity self-expression, all of those ideals were important to bear in mind. Those were the ingredients that went into the brief and kind of led us to where we landed.

ARMIN And Nicole, were you also day-to-day in it, or more of like checking in from time to time on how it was developing?

No, we were, we were in it, all in together. There was a core group of NICOLE folks who, you know, literally we were sleeping, eating, breathing the brand, and we're involved in every step of the way in determining what, who the partners would be that we would bring to the table. Evaluating and looking for partners that were not maybe necessarily the go-to big agencies, but actually looking for partners to work with that we felt would bring the LA culture to life in a unique way. So part of that entire process, part of sort of helping to determine how we would collaborate with all of our agencies, we were, we brought a number of those to the table. And as you can presume that sometimes it's challenging to bring that many folks to the table who are creative minds. And so how do we get the best out of them and make sure that we were using all of their resources to the best of their abilities and also like finding ways to project manage through all that. And so I really spent a lot of time sort of helping to manage and figure out how our agencies could bring their best to the table and how we could get that cocreation happening within our organization, but also with the

agencies and then ultimately shepherding the process of how do we get from this very sort of wonderful idea that we all think we should start with, but then how do we actually execute that? And so trying to do that in a very aggressive timeframe that we had put for ourselves and making sure that we could deliver in a way that would ultimately achieve what our truths and our visions and our missions are and how we wanted that to come to life. And so it was, it was a full team effort, I would say.

ARMIN

All seventy of you, sounds good. So when you first saw this idea in a meeting where you instantly like, yes, that's it, or did it take a little bit of warming up to the idea, and the scope of it?

NICOLE It was an evolution. We saw a nugget of an idea. And so, I think that just started us on the journey to what this could be, but then I think we had to really create a system. We have to put more around it. It, wasn't just sort of the, okay, great. We're going to have this dynamic emblem that the "A" is going to change all the time. Now, everybody go out and create these A's. It was let's create the foundation for what you see. So the way that we tackled looking at this was to go to the foundation of the city, and think about the city, and think about how the city could influence the emblem. And so we talked about like the city has a grid, and how do we take that grid and have that influence the work that we're doing. Each, if you go and you click into each one of those little sort of sections of the grid, there are neighborhoods, there are cultures, people who bring that neighborhood to life. And it was that inspiration that then helped to form the "L" the "2" and the "8" as sort of our foundations. And we used influences from the street and the curvatures of the LA character came to life through that. And then ultimately each of the A's was a long journey over that year and a half. We were having A's developed and created all happening simultaneously at different points, people coming in and having those be developed in ways that at first you couldn't see the full picture because it was happening in different ways. And so when the A's did start to come in and we got to see them and how those stories start

to match up, it was pretty electric. And then we could start to see how that was going to come to life in a bigger way. And so I think it was a journey from, from a year and a half plus ago, and it's amazing to see the place that we're at now, um, and to see all of those stories come together and how they really do have such great intersections between all of the creators and all the artwork.

ARMIN At what point in the process in this year and a half, when do you have to show something, or when did you show something to the IOC and IPC for approval to move forward?

Um, again, I mean, we were in conversation with them as you might imagine, quite regularly, but in terms of the first time we had shown them work was over a year ago for the initial conversations and, uh, initial rounds of feedback, which were very positive. They were excited to see how it was progressing towards a future. They liked that it was a digital emblem and was really developed in consideration with kind of the next generation of fans. From that first conversation, we then went to executive presentations as there is definitely a process in place for the approval of all of these emblems in the Olympic space. But again, very warm receptions from the executive team at the IOC that was in December of last year. And then we worked with them to kind of refine and build out. And you can imagine every day had a lot of cycles of the design and then the reviews and the clearances and all of those pieces. Um, and they were a partner throughout all of that.

**ARMIN** So even the individual A's had to be approved by the IOC.

Yeah, we reviewed everything with them. As we, as we put them forward, our legal team are phenomenal partners throughout this entire process with us to help us do that. But as we went through the design of each "A", you know, there's just nuances to every individual case as you might imagine, between the ones that are developed by the artists themselves versus ones that were inspired through the stories of the athletes, for example, or the entertainers, and then interpreted by a designer on our team.

Fascinating. So speaking of the A's, I personally really like that the "A" is the only letter that changes, um, in part, because I think I, I like that it represents "Angeles" in the Los Angeles name and angels. There's a lot of nice stuff about it, but a recurring question in the comments on our website was how come it was in both the "L" and the "A" that changed since it's "LA" a not just "A".

I think, as we were developing it, we really saw the "L", the "2", and the "8" as being the foundation of the emblem and that the diversity in sort of the letter forms that we talked about and those showing the Los Angeles character and the landscape was how that was going to sort of come to life. But that the dynamic "A" was what would allow us to show this sort of infinite number of stories and the ability to share the people and the culture of LA and that, that changing and evolving really allowed us to have the ability for us to never have one static element. As we have been very progressive in, in developing this emblem. And you've talked about it, it could have probably been even more challenging to try and have it be more dynamic than it is. But I think we always thought that the "A" was the ability for us to really talk about how the personal stories come to life and doing that in that dynamic way, but still making sure that there's an anchor and foundation to the emblem. So we're excited that that shows the identity and shows the stories that LA has to represent. And there's so much more that can be developed over the years as we bring those other new stories to life.

Yeah. And I would add to that, you know, we're asked a lot about, okay, great, but what is the one? And the answer is there is no one there really isn't it. We envision that when we show this emblem, it will always be different. And we absolutely understand there will be many applications where it is static and it can't have that animated "A" and the story moment there—and that's okay too. But part of this system that we've talked about is contemplating how we ensure diversity and range of the emblems as they show up so that we can tell that story as completely as possible.

**ARMIN** 

Well, that's satisfied—I was already satisfied to begin—but that is a satisfying answer for anyone else that was questioning. Why just the "a". So, you know, we've talked about all the fascinating stories that you can tell through the "A" and you were able to bring in a really great group of collaborators to introduce this idea. What I'm curious about is what was the brief that you provided them and what were some of the reactions when you ask them to design and "A"? Like, even as a designer, I'd be like, you want me to design a what for a what? And you're doing what? So I can't imagine, like, you know, someone that owns a taco stand or Reese Witherspoon say like, Oh yeah, an "A", I got it.

NICOLE

Yeah. We, we wanted the LA creators to really tell their story first and foremost. So we asked them some really key questions first to sort of set the stag. You know, what does LA mean to them? What inspires them? Just in their day-to-day life and in living in LA? And what is their LA story? We started from those as like our core messages and that ultimately then ended up transforming into telling their story. And I think once they got to start sharing with us and telling their story, it really started to flow and there was no pre-set notion on how it should go. Each creator's experience was different, each conversation on how they share it and what they started to share with us and tell their story. We got really great, wonderful, intimate stories. We got stories about their past, about where they currently are, about family, and about just how they came to be who they are in LA. And that is what ultimately then led to inspiring the design. And I think you can see that when you listen to the stories on our site or on any of our channels, social channels, you get to see how that comes to life. And it really was a really nice conversation that ultimately then landed into sharing and developing a design that represented that story.

ARMIN

Yeah, I think that what's great about it too, is that, you know, it gives you an opportunity to reach out. Now that you have this foundation of collaborators and anyone that you have a particular interest in working with, now you have a great in, like perfect opening line. Is

there a plan? I mean, do you have a number in mind of how many A's you want to make, or is it just like completely open ended?

NICOLE

I'd say there is no number, the ability to share stories and tell the stories of Los Angeles and the games is ever changing. And so there is no hidden number that, that Amy and I have talked about to say, at the end of the day, we should have this many A's. We really do want this to be something that grows. We know we have a really long journey ahead of us. And so the possibilities and opportunities for us to share and create, um, with the community and with fans, and with partners, is endless. And we want to really see this today and the launch as just the start of it. Um, we know we're at the very beginning of the journey, and so there will be many more A's to come. And more importantly, there'll be a lot more stories. So we're excited about using our platform to share those stories.

ARMIN

Yeah. I keep thinking that you need to find sponsors that have A's in their name, so that then you can just plop the "A" from their logo—I think that it is like the ultimate synergy between corporate logos and an Olympic logo. And, you know, if that happened, it would be fascinating. So you probably have four to six years to figure this out, but at the rate that you're going, you might already have solved it. Do you have any concerns about managing this flexible look when it comes to the look of the games, applying it to merchandise, to signage, you know, what do you decide to put on a t-shirt that you're going to sell? What do you decide to put on a, you know, social media out there? Like, is there anything in any way preparing for that, uh, scope of application?

АМҮ

We're definitely preparing—I think if anything, we love the excitement, we love that people are so enthusiastic and we are just trying to really ensure that we are following sort of the plan and the strategy. And as we've talked about sort of the system that we've articulated for the rollout of the brand. So from the start like we did launch with, with merchandise, right, but in a very limited fashion, um, and figuring out

how this comes to life through consumer products has been sort of a parallel conversation that we've been having throughout all of this. So there's already thinking and preliminary, or preliminary eight year plan in place for how that will come to life. As far as it relates to, you know, the unveiling we've given definite thought to kind of, what is the cadence for what the unveiling of the brand should be. We are still very much establishing who we are and trying to build that awareness. And that's where our focus will be in the next couple of years, as we start to expand that, we will start to experiment a little bit more. And probably when we get on the other side of Paris in '24 is when we will be a bit more bold and bigger and direct one where the next summer games that will be on the radar, or we're actively going to continue to push out content and stories across all of our channels. We are excited about the stories and the possibilities that we'll be able to tell with our commercial partners as they join us and about all of the different pieces that will come to life. And then I would say, as far as the look of the games... for my past lives, I've had a chance to work with a lot of different looks out on site and see those come to life. And I am so excited for what we can do with this system. We have a basic, very much interim and baseline in terms of what the full system will look like. You know, the diversity of A's, the digital applications, what we believe we can come up with to bring this to life in '28, it's really exciting. So, yeah, I'm really thrilled about that.

One of my closing questions is: what excites you the most about this emblem and Amy, you have answered that quite well. Uh, Nicole, what excites you about moving forward with what you have?

mashup of LA's culture and people, and that we have the opportunity to be a platform for them, and that we have the opportunity to share the beautiful communities and neighborhoods that make up LA with the world. And it's a privilege to be able to do that. And I'm excited to be able to go, and co-create with all of those amazing people who, who have made LA what it is. And I think that's

the most exciting part is that we have this very beautiful wide canvas and we get to help work together with these community people and partners and, and our fans to create what that looks like for the next eight years.

ARMIN

Wonderful. Well, I think as you've been able to tell from my tone of voice, I am really excited about this identity. I think it, it really changes the definition of what an Olympics logo can be or what it has been in the past. And I think the opportunity to be able to tell so many stories through a logo is almost unprecedented, in a way, not just for the Olympics, but for any other corporation or product or service. I think it's a really wonderful approach that opens up so many opportunities. I think I'm repeating myself, but I think the point is that we talk a lot about diversity and being inclusive of other voices—there's a lot of talk about it, but this actually walks that talk. And I think it will be able to finally give a manifestation for those conversations that we've been having special this whole, this year. You know, I was going to say this past few years, but because it feels like years for this past few, threefour months where we're all about including more people. I think this emblem does that. It looks great. It feels great. I wish you the best of luck for the next eight, long years as you bring this to life. And I can't wait to see it evolve. So Amy and Nicole, thank you so much for joining me on The Follow-Up today and that's it!

NICOLE Thank you so much. It was a real pleasure to talk to you.

AMY Thank you, Armin. Appreciate it.