

EPISODE 032

CRESCO LABS

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Kristine Arth, Lobster Phone

AND

Cory Rothschild, Cresco Labs

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 32 of The Follow-up.

This week we are following up on Cresco Labs, one of the largest cannabis operators in the United States. Involved at every point in the seed-to-sales process, it controls its own cultivation, manufacturing, extraction, and packaging. Headquartered in Chicago, IL, Cresco Labs has operations in ten states where marijuana has been legalized for medical and/or recreational use and has 18 production facilities, 44 retail licenses, and owns 32 dispensaries. The company has created a differentiated portfolio of eight brands that are aligned to distinct audiences, needs, and occasions. Aside from being sold in their own dispensaries, their brands are sold in over 700 dispensaries across the country.

The project, designed by San Francisco, CA-based Lobster Phone in collaboration with Chicago, IL-based Minimal was posted on Brand New on May 5, 2021. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast032 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast032, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Kristine Arth, Founder and Creative Director of Lobster Phone and Cory Rothschild, SVP of Brand Marketing at Cresco Labs.

Designing one brand and its packaging is a difficult enough challenge. Designing it under a tight deadline adds to the pressure. And designing it for a category that is changing day by day only adds to the difficulty. Now imagine doing that for EIGHT brands and their packaging. In FIVE months. That was the challenge posed by Cresco Labs to Minimal, who was in charge of industrial design, who, in turn, brought Kristine in to handle the branding. Spoiler: they succeeded. But as we learn in this episode it was a tough process, at breakneck speed, fueled by clear guidance from Cresco, a seemingly bottomless source of energy from Kristine, and near-weekly check-ins and presentations as all eight brands were developed in unison.

Now, let's listen in as Armin follows up with Kristine and Cory.

ARMIN Hello everyone. Today, we're going to talk about the big wide world of cannabis, and we have one of the biggest companies in the U.S. to talk about it. Cory and Kristine, welcome to The Follow-Up.

KRISTINE Thank you Armin, excited to be here.

CORY Yes. Thank you. Very excited.

ARMIN Cory, the first question is going to go to you and full disclosure, before I wrote about Kristine's work for Cresco Labs, I had never heard of Cresco Labs before, which is 100% my issue. It took me by surprise to find out how big this company is, and how consolidated everything is. So, the question in here is, was it always the goal for Cresco Labs to be this big? Or has it been a reaction to the opportunities afforded by the expanding legalization of cannabis?

CORY Cresco Labs is the largest branded cannabis portfolio in the industry. What I would say is, I guess, like revenue and bigness in size is more

of like an outcome, but certainly our aspirations—and what we think that this category is capable of—have been really big since the start. We like to say internally, we want to be the most important cannabis company in the United States and in the world, really. And that comes from a place of just believing in the power of this plant, and believing what it is capable to do, not only for those who use it today, but for people in the future. When you look at just the number of occasions that cannabis can play in, whether that's for recreation, or as an alternative to medication, and for sleep, and focus, and anxiety, and everything else in between, it is so, so powerful, what it can be, not just today, but in the future as a category. And so as a company, we want to make sure that we're not just a part of that, but we're leading the development of the brands that are going to help so many consumers access cannabis in a really healthy and happy way.

ARMIN Happy way. That is a key word. Was there a point in the last few years where the company really grew? Like there was a moment where like, oh, this is taking off more than we expected.

CORY I mean, it, it has been really consistent, really intense growth, in a way that is thrilling, and challenging, and motivating, and difficult, and everything in between. One of the times I look back on that I'm really proud of, and I'm also sort of in disbelief is just how much we grew last year at the start of the pandemic. In Q2, we grew more than 50% versus the quarter before. And we did that in the beginning of the pandemic when none of us knew what was going on, none of us knew how to act appropriately and healthy. That's just a good example, but quarter over quarter, year over year, we've expanded and it's unbelievable both on the brand and retail side to be where we are today.

ARMIN It's interesting the brands that took off through the pandemic. Zoom and cannabis is like a good combination of things to take off. Another question for you, as I was looking through your LinkedIn page, I see that you previously worked at PepsiCo as the Brand Director for Gatorade.

CORY Aha.

ARMIN This is a two-part question. What attracted you to join Cresco Labs? And what aspects of your experience seem the most transferable to this new gig?

CORY As far as to what attracted me, it's rooted in that expansiveness of the category. The idea that you could change that many people's lives in that many ways is pretty transformative. And to do that in an industry where it is being built at the same time that the companies are being built, so that, fast forward 10, 15, 20 years from now, this will be one of the largest categories in the world, with some of the largest brands in the world. It will be normal by definition because so many people are using it in so many different ways. To get there, you need brands that can deliver fundamental education—because there's so little of it today, and in some cases overcome stigmas of the past. There's no place that's more interesting to be if you're a marketer than knowing you're building huge scale, impactful brands that are changing people's lives for the better. That that was what attracted me to Gatorade in the first place.

CORY That is what is so powerful about being in every athlete's body from high schooler to a professional athlete, trying to do things they've never achieved before. Whether you're inspiring them, or whether you're functionally delivering athletic benefit, that is what is so exciting about those types of brands. And so now to be building that... there's no place I'd rather be. As far as transferable skills, I think a couple things. One is from a brand perspective, we have the challenge of building long-standing scaled, strong brands that stand for something, that have a distinct visual identity that creates memory structures and creates trust and consistency with consumers. And we need to scale our products, be ubiquitously available. These are many of the same challenges that we've faced when you run Gatorade or any other large CPG company. And where we're headed in terms of cannabis is the same place and the way we need to get there through

brand marketing, innovation, field marketing, performance media, product, all of these pieces of the puzzle are really similar to establish categories. A lot of now, and the future of cannabis is rooted in what is successful in traditional consumer packaged goods.

ARMIN Very well said. It's interesting to think about, if you imagine in the 1960s, no one ever thought that we were going to be talking about cannabis this way....

CORY Sure.

ARMIN In the same way that we talk about Gatorade. Cory, one last question for you. What prompted Cresco Labs to embark on a redesign, of not just your corporate brand, but of all the brands within it?

CORY The cannabis space is developing so quickly that we had this amazing set of brands to start out with, that were really rooted in our founders thoughtfulness many, many years before to establish differentiated brands that had distinct positions. But they needed to be updated for the time, the era that we were in cannabis. Competing against really well thoughtfully designed brands, and thoughtfully conceived positionings. We were looking to evolve where we had come from as a company, without completely rethinking everything. And doing so all at the same time, so that we could build the most significant brand portfolio, incremental to one another, but reaching as many consumer occasions, and as many consumer needs as possible at the same time.

ARMIN Got it. Kristine, we've learned all about Cresco Labs. Now it's time to learn more about you. And this question at first may sound like an insult, but it's absolutely meant as a compliment. How does a one-person design operation land a national cannabis producer as a client? We all want to know this.

KRISTINE [Laughter] Magic. [Laughter]

ARMIN All right, next question.

KRISTINE That would be the short answer. Yeah... and we're on. Well, actually I came in as a partner. And I don't mean that as a professional burner in the Cresco Labs area, I mean that as a partner to Minimal Design. Minimal is an industrial design studio based in Chicago, and my background is deeply rooted in branding for industrial design products. When I had started Lobster Phone, one of Minimal's main founder, Scott Wilson had noticed that I was doing my own thing, I had multiple interviews with him over... in multiple locations. And we discussed the benefits of partnering. And I think the major benefit is that one, my background in industrial design and working with industrial designers that deeply allowed them to have a compatible, and also insightful partner with branding, because a lot of what they were creating and doing with Cresco Labs was going to hinge heavily on what the brand was going to be creating. So I however, came in as that partner [laughter]. And, I would say that I didn't land it all on my own, I got it through a really wonderful partnership with Minimal.

ARMIN And to your knowledge, do you know if they interviewed other designers to bring in as partners? Or they just knew you, they knew that sort of really nice Venn diagram of product design and branding that attracted them to you.

KRISTINE You know, I'm going to go ahead and assume that they interviewed quite a few people for this because they're tough cookies. When I had met Scott, I met Greg, actually, I think I met both of them at a hotel in Los Angeles, I was out there on an interview. Scott flew me out and decided to throw me into the fire. And when I had met both of them, I gave them my spiel and talked to them about my background. And, you know, there's quite a few overlaps with me having worked on Miller Coors in the past in advertising—having that overlap with Greg, who was also part of Cresco as a CMO. Scott and I, having the overlap of me being very closely linked into industrial design and understanding their practices, their purposes, manufacturing, timelines, everything to do with what was actually in charge for Cresco. I think that I was a shoe-in for that. It wasn't so much that

it was fortunate, I think that it was meant to be. There was no other partnership within those three that I think could have done what we did together, in such a short amount of time, with that amount of work. We all had the tenacity to do it. And I think that I was just chomping at the bit because I had just started Lobster Phone and they were like, oh, she's ready. She'll do this. [Laughter]

ARMIN So, magic!

KRISTINE [Laughter] Magic.

ARMIN Pretty much. And sort of a follow-up question... there might be a question in here, but I've been very impressed at how prolific you have been since starting your own design business, Lobster Phone, in 2018. Aside from magic, which clearly plays an essential role, what has been your approach to starting your own business?

KRISTINE Well, I've been told I'm a robot Armin, so yeah, must be it [laughter]. You know, hard work. I know there's always some secret sauce that people will say, but hard work, and a lot of pleasure and joy about what I do. I really do feel fortunate that I like what I do quite a bit, but you know, my dad had always said, I've never met a kid who didn't know how to play. I'm going to teach you girls how to work. So I put a lot of time and effort into the business every single day. And I don't mind redoing things because I like what I do. It's funny when clients are like, you know, we're thinking about this, and this, and that. And I'm like, great, let's redo it. I'm like I have no dog in this fight. I want to design all day. I was like, you want me to do something new? Perfect. I think having a positive attitude towards really loving what you do and then working with people who also feel the same, goes hand in hand.

ARMIN Wonderfully answered. Cory, back to business. What attracted you to work with both Minimal and Kristine?

CORY Minimal had been a long time partner of ours at Cresco. We were embarking on this together to figure out who is the right fit to help us redesign, not just our own portfolio, but to build new brands and to do

this in a tremendously quick period of time, just at the pace at which our industry moves. We had spoken to and thought about different agencies. I had come from a background of working with many, many different agencies and all of the concerns that come with that, whether that is cost, and speed, and bureaucracy, and other things... I think caught up in my mind was, I can't imagine an individual who could actually bring to life seven or eight different brands with different identities in different positionings. And so don't, I have to go to an agency where I can access different minds? And different designers? One for a newbie product and one for a heavy cannabis consumer?

And then I met Kristine. And as it turns out, Kristine has so many parts of her brain—creatively, energy, to bring to life really distinct identities in an unbelievable period of time. And really the questions you were asking her, the questions we were asking Kristine, you really think you can do it that fast? And you really think they're not going to look that similar at the end of the day? Really? But you meet Kristine, you hear her passion and confidence, and it was one of those, you know, why wouldn't we do this? This seems like it makes too much sense. And we'll just see what comes of it. That was the beginning of the rest. But yeah, it was an easy decision when it came down to it. And we're so thankful we had the opportunity.

ARMIN That's a wonderful endorsement. So what was driving this craziness of designing so many brands in such a limited amount of time? And I guess this is a question for both, maybe we'll start with you Cory, and then with your Kristine, why did you say yes?

CORY You have to imagine an industry that didn't even have brands a few years ago. And the brands that did exist a few years ago were really sort of one-size-fits-all, trying to get as many customers from as many different segments of the market as possible, for good reason. Something you could focus on, it was affordable to run a company that way. And we knew that for the long run, to have a company that could succeed with medicine, could succeed with a alternative to

alcohol, and everything in between, we would need different brands with different positionings, different identities, to be able to not only win as a company, but also deliver on consumer needs in a way that they could understand and trust. It's a bit hard to just start one without the other. To really encompass and take on the entire industry is to build many brands at once. You know, as far as the speed, cannabis moves so, so, so, so fast that every day felt like, you know, a month had gone by of what you'd missed, or what opportunities you really wanted to tackle. We just knew that we would do it as fast as we could, as long as we thought we could get it right.

KRISTINE To follow on to that, with Minimal doing the industrial design, a lot of times when people are branding, they don't actually work with someone who's creating the product bespoke. Or the packaging bespoke. None of the packaging or products when we were working together were off the shelf. What that means is every single detail is being manufactured, and the lead times on manufacturing, and the lead times on something that is so, you know, it is a national brand, so it's not just creating a couple thousand, it's creating thousands of thousands. When you think about the type of manufacturing that you have to work with to create that many products, both physical and exterior packaging, the lead times on that are really far out in advance. So the brand comes into a huge play because there's logos on products, you know, the style and the finishes that come into play. And that's what my partnership with Minimal was, to really help to determine and define. They couldn't do their job without me, and I couldn't do my job without them. And to have that timeline being pretty much the catalyst of what was driving the quickness of everything, you know, it sounds insane, we're like, oh yeah, we did like seven or eight brands in five months or less, but it was a huge endeavor. I think the timeline was being pushed, not just by the quickness of the cannabis industry, but the need for manufacturing and the need to have that lead time be accessed. A lot of times you can't manufacture things without the logos on them, and you need the logo in order to do the manufacturing. You need the color, and finish,

and substrate, in order to do the logo. So they all kind of tie hand-in-hand. And that's what drives such crazy timelines for a product, especially when developing it in a cannabis industry.

ARMIN And I guess there was also a sense of hurry up, very quickly, and then wait a long time to see the result.

KRISTINE Yes. Manufacturing, and legalization I would say.

CORY Yeah. Yeah. And anyone who's worked in like a large CPG organization... I spent years of my life working on a new Gatorade flavor, you know, you'd start working on and it was two, three years later that you'd see it in market. In some ways you didn't have to wait as long as you might be used to in a more traditional industry. But there's no question that when you see a design, or a rendering on paper, and you fall in love with something, and then you realize, okay, now the hard work of actually physically getting it to market is a familiar feeling for a lot of people in the brand and consumer product world.

ARMIN Let's talk about the design of the seven brands. One of my initial thoughts, and something that was also expressed by others in the comments on Brand New, was that perhaps there could have been some form of design unification that visually tied all of the products together. I would love to hear both the business decision from you Cory, and the design decision from you Kristine, about why you decided to make each brand so completely distinct.

CORY From a business perspective, it's really rooted in creating a house of brands, versus a branded house. And what I mean by that is having distinct identities that can stand on their own because the occasions and needs are so different. In the same way that it would make no sense for Doritos and KeVita to share the same brand identity, because one is a flavorful chip that's maybe not the healthiest, but it's great on game day and KeVita is a healthy drink to support an active lifestyle. It seems so obvious that we wouldn't create the same identities for those two brands, and yet those sit far, far closer together than

something as simple as a calorie-free, hangover-free White Claw, and an alternative to Tylenol. The thought that those would somehow share an identity is almost inconceivable, and yet that's what we're working with in the cannabis space. Knowing that there's such different challenges and occasions for cannabis to really seep into people's lives, we knew that it couldn't be a one-size fits all brand, or even brands, that share significant identities or common identities as a solution. There's a bit of values of the company, and things that we stand for overall, that we wanted to make sure come through in some shape or form through all of our designs. And Kristine can probably speak to even better how to do that. But overall, we want these to be able to stand on their own, and not rely on each other, to really help a consumer understand what they need.

ARMIN What triggered to me the idea of, shouldn't this be unified, is that with recreational cannabis being so young, you just think of it as one category: it's cannabis. But when you dig down into that market, as Cresco Labs has demonstrated, there are so many divergences that have new demands for new interpretations of what purpose they serve. So a little bit, it's just the idea that you go from cannabis is just cannabis, and it's something that you sort of get on the download, but now it's something that requires a lot more differentiation and understanding that different types serve different purposes.

CORY And a portfolio that is building the brands of the future. I mean, I think you're right. We could have built brands and a portfolio that was addressing the needs of 2018. And it would have been a little easier, would have been a little faster., it would have been a little more scaled or simple, but we're intending to build the brands that will lead the category and lead the introduction and the sustained consumption of cannabis into the future. This is the future of how people relax on the weekend. This is the future of how people treat their migraines and their cancer. It can't just serve a purpose in 2018, it needs to serve a purpose for a very long time. We wanted to have a very forward looking point of view as we built these from scratch.

ARMIN Kristine, was there any inclination at the beginning to say like, oh no, this really needs to have some sort of unifying element or from the beginning where you like, all right, I get it. This needs to go in different directions altogether.

KRISTINE I was pretty confident that it should be thought of more as a house of brands, similar to a P&G, or Unilever, Anheuser-Busch, I would say even closer to Millers or beer brand in that way, because it's the same ingredients, but they're for far different consumers. We wouldn't want to unify something so much that it alienates a specific consumer, where they feel it's not actually targeted towards them, or identified for them. And just thinking about the different consumers we were trying to target, they're far different age groups and demographics—one is using it for a medical resources, versus another is using it for social, having it with their friends, they're a younger generation. So they're very different consumers and knowing that, it wouldn't make sense to unify them in that way. We did however look at a quite a few unifications like Cory was saying. One was in the dosage and the language, how that's always very direct. It's very simplified so that people can understand exactly the type of dose that they're doing. Then strategically we wanted that to be a commonality amongst all the brands where the language was specific, it was easy, it was all about demystifying the output of what you're getting when intake. And I think that's some of the confusion. So we wanted to normalize that. That was one of the main unifications across the brand as an umbrella.

ARMIN That makes sense. Cory, you had this mutual understanding that it's going to be a house of brands. What kind of input did you give Kristine and Minimal to start exploring? If any?

CORY I think Kristine would say too much, maybe a little too much. [Laughter] We know.

KRISTINE My memory is jogged!

CORY I think maybe a little too much. Look, one, we brought them into the fold. This is how we're thinking about this. It hasn't been built yet. We are at the beginning of the marathon and we need to do this together. And so we need you to not only think how we're thinking about this from a business and a strategic standpoint, but push and pull on it too, so that we build the right thing together. Some of it was the underlying challenges we were trying to take on, and then we certainly used a more traditional briefing format to express our hopes, and dreams, and objectives, and our mandates, that I'm sure there were longer conversations about our mandates than even the considerations... The hope was always to be as transparent as possible, to try to get inside of our brain as much as possible, and then acknowledge that we were going to go on a journey together and figure it out, but it wouldn't be without understanding our expectations going into it.

ARMIN So Kristine, you have all of these hopes and dreams in your hand. How do you even start working on this? Did you go one brand at a time? Did you take one stab at all of them at once? How do you even start something like this?

KRISTINE I had the craziest art board Armin. You should have seen it. [Laughter]. I did them all at once. I think looking back—we had huge brainstorm—I embedded myself at Minimal, I stayed in Chicago for a month at a time, I did that a couple times and I worked in their office. I was around the coffee chatter. I was in the business. It was like listening to the details of the problems they were having with certain things—I wanted to hear it all. And by being there, and being on site, and being so close with the Cresco team, the Minimal team, I did it all at once. In my art boards, really trying to understand the differentiation between each brand. One, first defining what style of brand it was, and then from there really doing market research and understanding, okay, if it's medical, we should play in this white space, it's clean, it's approachable. You know, it's gotta be safe. If it's social, it's got to have more bright colors.

So when I'm looking at the art board of all seven brands, really trying to clearly differentiate them, in some ways we were looking at doing them one by one, but for me, and for my own capacity, it made more sense to look at them all as a collective whole so that we could really start to define the differences between each brand. That way we're really playing in specific markets, targeted for specific groups of people, in a very tight demographic. During that actually, what allowed us come out of it as we ended up creating an extra brand. We didn't have Good News when we were starting that, but when I was creating it all my strategy partner and I am like, you know what, they're missing? We have these five brands... they're missing a brand for me! For my demographic. For the girls that want to hang out, and be bro-ey or, you know, the people who just want to hang out and have a good time or go to shop at Sephora. I want to see this cannabis in Sephora someday.

ARMIN What brand is that one?

KRISTINE Good News.

ARMIN Okay.

KRISTINE The fun, social, poppy one [laughter]. Not saying it's my favorite, but the only reason we could look at that, I would say, is because we were looking at all of them together. It's like anything else, when you see a full family, you can see the missing piece. Or you can be able to better put the pieces together and clearly define who would be the mom of the brand, the dad, the brother, the sister, the aunt, the uncle, the stepchild, whatever it is.

ARMIN The weird uncle.

KRISTINE Yeah! The crazy uncle.

ARMIN In the timeline of presentations, did you first present mood boards for all of them? Then logos for all of them? Then packaging for all of them? More or less?

KRISTINE Yeah. It was a full-on presentation of every single brand as we went through. In stages, you know, first strategically looking at the strategy and how we define what targets are for each one. This positioning that we're thinking about for each specific brand. But we did it as a whole. Every presentation was a huge herculean effort where we're like, not just looking at one brand, we're like, okay, if we come into it as Cresco Labs, you know, that was also one of the things we defined is that we really should separate and create this umbrella brand underneath and Cresco can be something different. Defining the umbrella, and then presenting: if this is the umbrella, these are the brands underneath it, and this is how they express themselves. Starting with strategy, working into their personality, then sharing mood boards. And these are all through a series of probably 30 plus presentations over five months. So every Friday we had a new presentation. Every Friday that presentation would build, it would get larger and larger to the fact where we started to really define each brand very thoroughly as a team. It wasn't just me and Nancy walking away, strategically. It was all of us meeting on Thursdays and then re presenting on Fridays so that we could, as a team, come up with something extremely strong.

ARMIN Cory, as these presentations come in to you and the rest of your team., and aside from landing on Good News as a new product brand....

CORY —you're right.

ARMIN Was there anything that surprised you, not that surprised you, but that sort of evolved from your initial either preconceptions or things that you expected? Did this take on any new directions that came out of that relationship between you, Kristine, and Minimal?

CORY The biggest was a shift in how some of these brands were positioned, including the addition of a different brand. So what Kristine mentioned that was absolutely a function of our exploration as a team versus our input at the start of it. I had never gone through a process quite like this. I'm not sure I'll ever go through a process like this. I mean, I'm reflecting, listening to this. And I think it speaks to

where Kristine was in her journey as a designer and starting her own firm, where we were starting our own portfolio... I mean, even the way we work together is such a moment in time of the level of energy that Kristine could put to this, the level of attention and focus that I could put to this, because it was maybe the most important thing that I would do. Fast forward years later, and we're 15 times the size we were then. Activating these brands, but nothing will be quite like when you're sitting in a room and actually thinking of, or saying the words, Good News or High Supply out loud for the first time. And so I think if anything, like, as I'm just sitting in listening to our own conversation now, it was just a very special moment in time when the business needs matched Kristine's capability and opportunity, matched this big audacious challenge that we somehow decided we were crazy enough to sign up to do together. Moments like that don't happen that often. And there are not that many chances to do something like this. It's pretty, pretty special.

ARMIN It's the kind of thing that in retrospect you look at it and it's like, that was crazy! There's no reason this should have succeeded in any way. When you're cut up in the moment, and you're in the flow, especially when you have a tight deadline. Most designers will complain about tight deadlines, but I think that's when the magic happens, where you have to make something, where you have to deliver, and I think that just often gets the best out of designers. So, speaking of the best, or perhaps the worst, was there a particular brand that was really hard to solve? Or that you have fights about like, no, we should do this, we should do that... And you're both laughing [laughter]. This is recorded over Zoom, so I can see the reactions here now—go ahead.

KRISTINE Oh yeah [laughter]! Cory, remember those moments?

CORY What moments?

KRISTINE What moments? All the brands were really fun to create. And, you know, it was all really difficult. It was a challenge. We were creating something new. I would say that the flagship brand, Cresco, was the

most difficult to solve, and I think because of its simplicity. It is the most simplified of the portfolio of brands, but it's also flagship, so it has to speak to a really large audience. We had some moments in there where I believe there's a very, uh, highly collectible silk bomber jacket that I had made for Greg and you...

CORY Uhu. Uhu.

KRISTINE ...just to show you how great that original logo was patterned all over it.

CORY Yes. What Kristine is referencing is, at one point she had fallen so in love with an icon that we liked a lot of parts of, but not all of it, that she decided to pattern an entire jacket with the icon that she loved and sent it to us. [Laughter]. It will someday be in a museum, I'm sure, of what Cresco once could have been and was. We haven't even spoken to one of our brands called Mindy's, it's named after Mindy Segal, who is a James Beard award-winning chef. Watching Kristine have to navigate redesigning a brand that is really one in the same with someone's personal identity and brand, and who themselves as an artist, as a talented pastry—what a challenge to not get me on board as the business guy who loves consumer products, but the person whose name and whose likeness is represented in the product. Every one of them had their own challenge.

KRISTINE Yeah, they certainly did. And it was great. I think that was actually one of my other favorite ones. I've never seen, never had someone respond in a meeting. Um, Mindy was like, this presentation was better than sex!

ARMIN Wow!

KRISTINE And we were like, yeah! [Laughter].

ARMIN It also makes me wonder what kind of sex she's having... [Laughter] A design presentation should not be this good... but...

KRISTINE It was pretty good Armin!

ARMIN All right, well...

KRISTINE We deliver! We deliver!

ARMIN It does sound like an exciting presentation. So Cory, as these brands are being developed, what is the involvement and reaction like from the leadership group at Cresco?

CORY Obviously these brands are all in market, and they're in market really closely to how they were individually conceived. I think that probably speaks the most to the reaction. Kristine nodded to it, I was in my early career at Cresco as leading marketing, it's a huge challenge to do, I am helping to redesign the portfolio that our founders created. There's a burden and obligation to do that justice. And especially when you're redesigning Cresco, the namesake, the flagship of the portfolio that they had done so well with, and did so many amazing things with. Do you want to do something that makes them love it? To get that validation, and to get that creative liberty from our CEO Charlie, is something that was really amazing at the time. And I even think looking back on it now, it's pretty amazing he could trust a group of people to make that significant of a change to his product. I mean, truly this is we're going to change the wordmark, we're going to change the symbol, we're going to change the color system... I mean, there are absolutely elements that stayed, but to have that amount of leeway and faith that we could get to something better, set us up for success and is pretty amazing.

KRISTINE Yeah. There was a lot of trust on all sides. I think we were all extremely open-hearted when we came into that process and wrapped our arms around each other in such a unique way.

ARMIN I think it's always a testament to good work when you have good leadership in place. And not just good leadership, but someone that trusts the people that are going to be in charge to do it right. And I think being open to change is something that most people want to say they are open to, but when it comes down to it, they're like, eh, we'll just keep things the way they are. The fact that you were able to change so many brands at once, I think it is a demonstration of how

well that whole synergy played out. So you have this big change... Is there one brand in particular that is your favorite? Whether in terms of the branding, or the product itself?

CORY I'm going to let Kristine answer that question first.

KRISTINE I mean, I kind of already hinted at this, but I really do love Good News and not just because it was this wild card that was entered into the family. More because I love the way that it's been expressed. The packaging is super fun. It's so unique. I'm always so proud and thankful to have worked with Minimal, obviously the whole team, but like they did such a good job at creating such a cool bespoke package that you slide it open and there's already matches inside waiting for this party to happen. You need nothing. And that was the whole idea behind that brand, is that you don't need anything but your friends. And you buy this, and it's ready. That's the excitement I think that each one of the brand has, but that one specifically for my age group, and what I'm looking to do, just makes me smile every time I see it.

CORY It's hard to pick. It's hard to pick. I obviously spend every day working in a version of every one of these brands. So it's sort of like my children. And unfortunately there's so many of them that I don't get to spend enough time with any one of them as much as I should, or would want to. I'd say the other one that I call out, which is like a true collaboration between Kristine and Minimal, was our High Supply brand. Which... as I see the brands get activated, it's just so easy. It's like, you always know exactly what it is, and what it isn't. The creative decisions are so straight forward. And even as we now have so many different creative minds working on these brands from different agencies, different internal partners, it's just so clear what that brand is, and what it stands for, in a way that is special compared to the other ones.

It's the number one brand in Illinois right now, it's spreading like wildfire to all the other states. It's a really large and fast growing brand. That again, was one of the ones that we sat in a room and had the pleasure to say, what about High Supply? So that's what's wild. Year and a half

later, you look at this business that we've built, and the people that wear the merchandise, and the people that love, love, love our brand on social every day and who consume our products in so many states. And to think that, two years ago we were sitting in a room thinking about what might happen if we go down this path.

KRISTINE Yeah.

ARMIN Very diplomatic answer, I like it. So you just mentioned about working with other agencies, other partners, and that brought up the question before we start summing up, what does it entail to manage seven brands in-house, on a day-to-day basis?

CORY It is a lot. We have teams focused on so many different pieces of the puzzle. My brand team is focused on the strategy of those brands, and the huge lift of commercializing those brands in so many product forms, in so many states. Working hand-in-hand with sales, and finance, and engineering, and packaging, and all the different pieces of the puzzle. We have a long term innovation team that's focused on building the future products, and devices, and packaging solutions, that are going to maintain our leadership and make sure that people don't just try these brands, but come back to these brands day-after-day. A field and trade team, that's making sure that we're the best branded portfolio to our customers. That we're the wholesaler of choice. That day-after-day is the one that they want to buy product from, and that we help support and make their business better.

And then, yeah, everything from social, and digital, and web, to how we think about media, and CRM, all the way down to the product interface that sells our products to consumers. All of these different pieces are all within the marketing department. And that doesn't even mention some of our production designers and people who are logistically making asset after asset guided by the principles that we designed together with Kristine. It is a huge ecosystem that really at this point mirrors a lot of what we've referenced, whether that's a Procter & Gamble, or an AB InBev. We like to think of ourselves as the fastest

growing consumer products company in the fastest growing industry, that just happens to be cannabis. Not the sort of side conversation, but really driving more growth to consumer packaged goods than almost any company in any category at this point. It's a really exciting place to be a marketer, and to get to work on these brands.

ARMIN Definitely sounds like it. And I'm already exhausted just from listening to all the different aspects at play. So, trying to sum up here, Kristine, you've already mentioned a few things that excited you about particular brands or the process, but in looking back, what is the most exciting aspect about having worked on this project?

KRISTINE I think it was just the challenge. Could I actually do it? Even though, you know, I immediately was like, yes, of course I can. But you know, when you say that you also wonder, can I really do this? [Laughter]. It was the excitement and the thrill of being able to work with such a well-rounded team, and do something so unique. I couldn't have asked for anything more interesting at that point in my career. And I just revel at it when I think about how crazy of a process that it was, and how fast that went by. It's still like almost PTSD when I think about it, I'm like what... I want to remember more! It just was so quick!

ARMIN But now here you are, all smiles... The project turned out great, so clearly you were able to take on it.

KRISTINE Yeah, we did it. [Laughter]

ARMIN You did it, yeah.

CORY We did it. Yes. [Laughter]

KRISTINE I wish that I could have had a year long event for that, so I could remember more...

ARMIN Right. So Cory, for you, as the market increases for recreational cannabis, what is the most exciting aspect, for you and Cresco Labs, in having this family of brands and all their distinct personalities? And we've

talked a little bit about this question, but just sort of summing up, moving forward with what you have in hand to play with, quote-unquote.

CORY We think we have the most powerful brand portfolio in the industry right now to bring consumers into the space and help them understand how cannabis can transform their life for the better. That is thanks to Kristine and Minimal's hard work creating the foundations that we are trying to uphold every single day, and make them proud, make sure that the foundation we created can continue to expand and evolve, but also be the source of good in so many people's lives.

ARMIN I think you have a wonderful set of brands to do this with, and I think the result... you know, just hearing about how intense the process was to get it done, to get it to manufacturing, playing that waiting game, just to make sure that all the hard work paid off in the final product. It's great to see that it paid off, and I appreciate your time and all the wonderful stories. I think my biggest hope at this point is that one day I'll get to see that bomber jacket with the lost icon that never was....

KRISTINE [Laughter] Oh, I have a photo.

ARMIN For my eyes only, not for public distribution, but I want to thank you Cory and Kristine for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

KRISTINE Thank you very much, Armin, it was a pleasure.

CORY Thank you Armin.

BRYONY It's been fascinating to see the cannabis market expand and grow. To the point where we now talk about its main players in the same realm as other corporate behemoths like Procter & Gamble or PepsiCo. Making it all the more impressive that Kristine was able to not just survive the project but deliver a comprehensive system of eight, seriously good-looking brands. All completely different, all completely unique, all completely... tempting. Perhaps the only disappointing aspect about this project is that we didn't get a peek at Kristine's artboards which

sound pretty epic and I can only imagine, daunting. Nothing some Good News couldn't fix, though. Winky face.

Today, thanks for listening. Until next time, we'll be here, we hope you'll be there.