

# EPIISODE 070

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## NORDSTROM RACK

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Lisa Smith, Jones Knowles Ritchie (JKR)

AND

Red Godfrey, Nordstrom

### **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.

### **ARMIN VIT**

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode number 70 of The Follow-up.

Before we get into this week's episode a couple of sidebars: First, apologies for the one-week delay on this episode but we were all hands on deck in getting the website ready for this year's Brand New Conference, which launched last Wednesday. If you like pizza or even if you don't you'll want to check it out as the identity is inspired by it. If you are considering attending in person one thing to note this year is that there will only be 250 early-bird tickets available so you want to get on that fast before they are gone. The second sidebar is that the next episode, number 71, will be delayed by 2 or 4 weeks as we are taking a very early Summer family vacation for two weeks starting... yesterday. So... stay tuned.

This week we are following up on Nordstrom Rack, the off-price division of Nordstrom, Inc., offering apparel, accessories, and shoes up to 70 percent off regular prices from brands that customers would find at the more expensive luxury department store chain Nordstrom. In fact, 90% of the top brands at Nordstrom are sold at Nordstrom Rack while also offering a differentiated product assortment. The first

Nordstrom Rack opened as a clearance center in the basement of the downtown Seattle store and the first stand-alone store opened in 1983 in Clackamas, OR. Today, it operates nearly 250 stores around the United States.

The project, designed by Jones Knowles Ritchie, was posted on Brand New on April 13, 2023. You can pull it up on your browser at [bit.ly/bnpodcast070](https://bit.ly/bnpodcast070) that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast070, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Lisa Smith, Global Executive Creative Director at Jones Knowles Ritchie; and Red Godfrey, VP Creative at Nordstrom.

In this conversation we hear about the significance of the Nordstrom Rack brand within the Nordstrom ecosystem and how important it was to differentiate it in the minds of its customers, especially as its brand and identity had started to blend in with other off-price retailers. We learn how what Lisa calls “the crooked path” lead JKR and Nordstrom Rack to arrive at a design that was rich, layered, and meaningful. We also get a peek at the strategy behind the design, which rallied around “swagger”... not so much the meaning of the word but the attitude of the word. As Red mentioned, think Lizzo, not Oscar Wilde. Let’s face it, any time Lizzo gets invoked as part of a brand strategy, we are here for it.

Now, let’s listen in as Bryony follows up with Lisa and Red.

**BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO**

Invariably every summer I end up online on the Nordstrom Rack website as I search for the perfect pair of outfits that will round up the Brand New conference branding—this has been going on for well over a decade. I might search for items in other seasons and for other reasons, sometimes even going into the physical store in my search. But one thing is for sure... thus far it has not been an exciting or inspiring task at all. Something that has shifted with a recent rebrand. So let’s find out how. Lisa, Red, welcome to The Follow-Up.

**RED GODFREY** Hi.

**LISA SMITH** Hi.

**RED** Thanks for having us.

**BRYONY** Absolutely, it's my pleasure. Before we get started, if you don't mind introducing yourselves and stating your name and where you're coming from for our audience.

**RED** Hi, my name's Red Godfrey, I am the VP of Creative at Nordstrom, which covers both Nordstrom and Nordstrom Rack, and I'm in Seattle.

**LISA** Hi everyone, I'm Lisa Smith. I'm a Global ECD of JKR based in New York.

**BRYONY** Red, Nordstrom Rack in itself does not need to be introduced to our audience. What I want to establish is the why seek a redesign in this particular moment in its 50-year history? Was it prompted by this big anniversary? By new purchasing trends post pandemic? Something else that I'm not aware of? Can you give us a scoop?

**RED** I inherited The Rack brand a few years ago and I really wanted us to deep dive into our proposition and have a visual identity system that would better support that. So we started the work a couple of years ago on the proposition, but Rack became a much bigger growth priority for the company. That really spurred on the effort here because our old system—over the years there'd been different add-ons. It wasn't serving us well, it wasn't differentiated enough, that was probably the biggest thing, and didn't allow us to communicate everything we needed to in a really beautiful and distinctive way. So that's really what was behind it. The timing somewhat fortuitous, but the 50 years, I don't know, when we realized we'd been looking at the 1973 logo and who we were in 2023, it felt really serendipitous to celebrate at that time.

**BRYONY** A perfect circle. Lisa, how did JKR get involved?

**LISA** We were very lucky actually. One of my colleagues, Hayley [Burnham], who's Strategy Director had actually worked with Red in a past life, a

previous agency and I think Red and her had been in contact and were meeting agencies to be able to engage on this project. I think it was in October, 2021, Red and some of her senior leadership team came to New York to meet us, and I'm sure she'll probably tell you maybe they were meeting with other people, and I think it was a really interesting brand to come and meet us because I don't think JKR have been synonymous with working potentially in retail. We do a lot of QSR, and we've done obviously a lot of CPG, and we do work in other categories, but we hadn't done so much here. So it was a really exciting meeting, but we were a little nervous, are we gonna be the right fit? We all had some really, really great conversations and I went on to meet some of Red's senior creative leadership team afterwards to check that it did feel like a good fit, and the conversations kind of rolled from there.

**RED** For me it was a love at first sight! on the work!

**LISA** <laugh>.

**RED** Yes, I knew Hayley and I was excited to meet JKR, and I was looking for the right partner for The Rack, even though it wasn't even approved as an ongoing job yet. And I think when Lisa was sharing case studies of prior work, to me it was that really, really high quality work that was so purposeful and well thought out, and working for brands that were accessible. It's doing it, and doing it in a way that will appeal to a really broad audience, and that was super important. I came back to Seattle going, I found the partner! And I was very excited for my team to meet Lisa and her team.

**BRYONY** And that need to appeal to a broad audience, was that something that you had clear ahead of time? Or is that something that became clear to you during that meeting?

**RED** No, I think it comes with the territory. The Rack is an access point into the greater Nordstrom ecosystem. It's a pipeline for new customers. You know, I think we all believe a customer deserves great design whether they're buying something at an accessible price point—I

mean people expect it with luxury—but I think a customer should expect good design everywhere, from every brand. That means good design to me is that it works, and the fact that it works is that it works for the mass audience that we're going for. Like we want everybody to feel The Rack can be a place for them.

**BRYONY** Absolutely. To get a better understanding of the dynamic of the project. Red, if you can expand on who was involved throughout these two years on your end, working on the project and also what was your main hope in hitting the ground running? What did you want to have internally figured out before starting the creative?

**RED** In terms of the way we work the project, it's really hard for an internal team. My team is essentially an internal agency that delivers everything we need to for Nordstrom and Nordstrom Rack. It's really hard to take a group of people off that work for six months and put the thought needed into it, which is why we needed a partner. But at the same time, you don't wanna just show up at the end of the six months and go, ta-da! Here it is! You wanna bring people along in the right way so that they feel their needs being met and that they're invested in the outcome. There's a small group and as the project moved forward, that group became bigger beginning probably myself and The Rack creative director, she has three leads, a design, copy, and image lead. So at different points they came in and saw work and were able to give feedback.

We also had our marketing partners, which is really key because they're the ones that are essentially asking us to communicate numerous messages to the customer. And I think being able to show them how we were gonna be able to do that, they were really bought in. And I would say that throughout the process they became one of our biggest advocate partners — it was really exciting. We shared with our executive leadership why we were doing this. And that's always difficult because it can be subjective. And I think the biggest thing I'm trying to talk about is this is not an exercise in decoration,

this is purpose-driven design, and do you believe that it will fulfill the purpose? And then if you do, then let us creatives get on with what we do best.

**BRYONY** Well, and hopefully in a year's time you will have a good conversation, an assessment of how it's going and what the impact has been.

**RED** Yes.

**BRYONY** And it can further educate and make your job a little bit easier down the line as you seek more creative outlets from your leadership.

**RED** Yeah.

**BRYONY** Lisa, what about your team?

**LISA** Our team comprised of more of a strategist to help navigate the beginning parts of this project in terms of finding what was special about Rack, and what we could amplify that was in like the core DNA of that, and building off obviously the other positioning that had done more reasons to Rack. And you can find great brands at great prices. There was a lot of rich things that were happening and even the communications they were starting to do with The Rack vernac, there was early things happening in the brand that were already moving in the right direction. We worked with the strategist and with Hayley who we mentioned earlier, really got into what was happening in terms of the culture, what's happening with the consumer, what's happening in the category, and then what is happening with the brand. And it's a really, really interesting space looking at the off-price category.

And I think that piece of work unlocked the whole project. I think what we found was that we were in a sea of sameness in terms of how the whole broader category was looking, very similar visual tropes, like diagonal angles, similar colors, similar photography, similar messaging. And it was all feeling very cheap and speaking to a customer in a certain way. And everybody had been doing that for a very long time. So there was no one really looking at what is

happening in that culture, and that shopping thrifty or savvy, I think we talk about how savvy and badass this customer is. Is something that transcends any socioeconomic backgrounds at this point, it's completely badass. And finding that as an insight just unlocked everything in terms of the creative potential, the Nordstrom Rack we could take it to, but also all the same time complimenting the Nordstrom master brand as we were going cuz we had to keep an eye, and that was a piece that we had to juggle.

But yeah, it was strategy, creative of various levels, different points of view, writers... and they collaborated and it was a very collaborative project. A lot of things were co-created together, whether that was the creative principles or the creative idea that sat at the heart as kind of idea of "Real Swagger". And then the designers that again, all throughout the process we collaborated together. And then there was obviously a big production shift as well. So, it takes a village to make these things happen and bringing in the right talent at the right moment to bring in their superpowers, was super important. And of course that extended to partnerships like with, OH no with the typography and other bits and pieces. But yeah, it was an incredible process and very, very collaborative, as Red pointed out.

**RED** In thinking about this, I went back and looked at the brief that I gave you guys. There was a lot of trust in working together actually cuz the brief was fairly high level. But initially there were two phases; and the first phase, which Lisa I hadn't even been thinking about recently is that, before we started we had to work together strategically on what was the relationship between Nordstrom and Nordstrum Rack. We did this work to kind of understand, you know, you talk about cousins, or siblings, or how do they relate, and we were talking about the sun and the solar system... <laugh>

**BRYONY** So what did you land on?

**LISA** <laugh>

**RED** It's interesting cuz it's not a parent/child relationship for sure. We moved away from, and it's not the sophisticated chic sister and the less-than...

**LISA** The non-sophisticated...

**RED** It was like no, we feel like they're kinda two species that related. And the way the Nordstrom name mark appears connected to The Rack and the way it shifts as the logo can adapt, that's really significant. And actually one of our leaders, one of our executives said: it's kind of amazing that you've managed to somehow make Rack its own unique thing, but also make it more connected to the Nordstrom brand, at the same time. Yeah, great design solutions.

**BRYONY** That stems from a lot of the strategic work.

**RED** Yeah.

**BRYONY** Seems that there was a long period — would love to hear how long that was — just devoted to figuring things out before even taking pen to paper and starting sketching and coming up with creative ideas.

**RED** We met at the end of 2021.

**LISA** Yeah.

**RED** We started in earnest in January of 2022. Yeah, when you got to the summer we were rolling out the identity, think about how do we apply, how do we implement, we needed to get UX, VM on board. The meat of the project was six months and probably we spent a third of that on the initial strategy. The design solutions, and Lisa might disagree, I think it was definitely like a tempo of the strategic work and then landing on that idea of "Real Swagger" and then building off of that, and then design went quickly... and then it went slower when we were really thinking through the detail and the different applicants. Yeah, it slowed down with a lot more thought again.

**LISA** Yeah.



**BRYONY** Not all phases are equal.

**RED** Yeah.

**LISA** <laugh>.

**RED** Yeah, a good rollercoaster.

**BRYONY** So let's focus on that beginning, the strategic into the first round of creative. From both of you I would love to hear what that process entailed, what you got out of it, and how you started to shift into that creative. Did you land on one creative route? Did you go down 10 different possible solutions? <laugh>? How did that transition take place?

**RED** The "Real Swagger" wasn't unlocked, and I will say cause I think this is interesting, we're not gonna say that on a poster to a customer. That's an internal filter for our work.

**LISA** Yeah.

**RED** The word swagger called quite a lot of controversy. You know it's a very current word, so how does it age? But if you move beyond not being worried about the actual vocabulary, but what it means. We looked for replacements and we didn't find anything that had that absolute right balance. It's not the Oscar Wilde definition of swagger, it's the Lizzo definition of swagger. Right? Relevant to today. And it wouldn't be a problem if colloquialism changed and there was a new word that represented that, we can adapt. That was super helpful. And then I do remember being in New York with Charlotte [Westley], our Creative Director, <>affirmative> and Lisa and team presenting three proposed avenues.

For me and Charlotte was an absolute clear winner. And I think it's that piece where you know the brand so well. Intuitively you know it, but you haven't yet articulated all the components in a way that you can easily pass on to others. There are a couple of things in there that really resonated, and some of it was the bold type, and that perfect

balance of bold but friendly. You can be loud but you are fun, you're not shouting at me, I'm part of it. That font development felt like something was there immediately. And then we also responded to this idea of blue. Like we didn't set out to change the logo or even maybe even change the color, but when we started to look and explore blues, and what different blues represent... and then we were like, let's not just have one, let's have a family! That was early on and that's an example of those first early stages of <affirmative> starting to have anchors that we could build upon.

**LISA** I remember very well that room. And I think landing the idea of "Real Swagger" and I think, not to go over what Red said, was tricky, but the word swagger is a fascinating one, especially when you're looking at off-price space where it is completely badass and savvy to be shopping in this type of space and how can we be the most empowering, and hence it then leads to quite an expressive feeling. It's a very big word and I do have the Lizzo quote, "if you've got the juice, you've got the sauce, you've got the swagger, you got it". We also looked at the Helen Mirren version, and we looked at a few other people in culture who've used it, which shows it transcends age in all different type of demographics, but it's just got that kind of spirit. So the three directions we created, we had up in the room, which were what I would call mood worlds.

But more and more we're designing those mood worlds. We're not just putting swipe on the wall, we're already sketching into it, playing with language, writing a bit of an introduction to each one. So it's not just visual, it's verbal. More and more I love to make those even move so you've got a feeling of what you are buying into before you even go and start actually designing a typeface, or a logo, or final colors. And there was definitely bits that did come out of other ones. I do recall that there was a photography in one direction that had unique perspective and angles and we were like, oh my goodness, how can you have a distinctive photography style for a brand that embodies

”Real Swagger”? We called it the polo t-shirt polo test. Like how can you make that even look really exciting? Is it laying over something?

Is it the way it’s presented? And whether that’s got casting in it or whether it’s just product by itself that was something we just stole out of one and put into another. But the audaciousness, yeah, I think of the typography and this idea of this fixed and flexible system that could expand and contract and fill with things was just how dynamic the brand is with its ever-changing merchandising in store, every different moment that people go there, it was just a true embodiment. And of course then you go and start designing and then we go again. You go in and then you go back out. And then we still did three further nuanced design directions again where you pick up bits. I’m more and more in the process of liking when other people like bits in another direction so it gets richer. I actually quite like the camel these days.

I know there’s a lot of creative leaders who are very like one direction, it’s done, and it’s like perfect. I sometimes worry that’s got too contrived out of mood and things like that. So I quite like when we start mixing references together, and it gets richer and richer, and you’re telling the story of every single element. That was the journey. But yeah, there was clear bits that the team just loved. I think we did too. And as Red said, colors and logos weren’t on the table. It was kind of part of the journey that we went on, and we were like how can you not have this visual expression, and then sit with this wordmark logo that they had? And we did, we even to the executives, we held it back — the logo — and then presented it as almost like, but... what if it looked like this? I’m a bit more headstrong, probably would’ve gone straight in with the logo first. Red, and that partnership between Red and I was like how are we going to take this to people who haven’t been on the journey the whole way along? and sort of invite them in step, step and gain their trust, and hopefully their permission, which we did to be able to go and rebrand.

**BRYONY** Being privy to these conversations, over and over, I have to say that there is a big shift happening within creative teams towards the camel versus it has to be A, or B, or C. We're coming to realize that by putting three ideas, we believe in all three ideas, and all aspects of the three ideas, and there's no reason why one should exclude the other two in their entirety.

**LISA** Yep.

**BRYONY** It's interesting to watch.

**LISA** When we write scopes, we say one to three, we don't actually commit to it because if you have such a clear perspective and answer, why not present that and have the conversation. But sometimes the fruitfulness is pushing at different tension points, or different pieces of the strategy, and trying to bring that to life. And then as you, I call it the crooked path, as you go on that path, you bring different bits together and it just makes it more and more unique to that brand.

Whereas I think there's been a history of people putting mood boards together and that's being like, oh well you could look like the Nike of this, or the Apple of this, and then your brand ends up looking like the Nike of this, or the Apple of this, and that won't be unique and right for that brand. So the whole journey is to go on this step by step process to get to the core essence of what the Nordstrom Rack brand stood for, and how that could come to life visually. And that's not gonna be in any one piece of swipe cuz that was somebody else's and a different story. So you have to start designing, and iterating, and ripping up, and putting it back together. And I love that., personally. I quite like a bit of ambiguity, and exploration, and get messy before you get tight <laugh>.

**RED** I honestly feel from a collaboration standpoint, this is the bench of working together with two teams that cared so much. I mean I feel so positive about the whole journey and the experience and some of that was some pretty rough meetings that might be a bit contentious

<laugh>. And I'm really happy that that happens because if it didn't happen I would worry that, you know...

**BRYONY** Are you pushing enough?

**RED** So it's like this really good push from both sides. Stand up for what you really believe in and why, and have those messy conversations, and get to a great outcome. I love the word that Lisa used on superpower because everybody has a superpower to bring to the table, right? The experience, the lens, or once you get to the people that are gonna be implementing it, for them to be able to look at it and go, well that's gonna work better or whatever, is all part of the rich crooked path. But ending a destination that we really both wanted <laugh> I think, delivered on the brief in a way that we felt so good about.

**BRYONY** So let's focus on that destination a little bit deeper. Let's start with the logo, which as you mentioned it wasn't an initial task but in the end you ended up with something that is loosely based on the logo you had in the '70s and the '80s. Why that reference? And what were the challenges of turning it into something that's modern and ready for the 21st century?

**RED** I go back to the idea that we wanted something that was really bold, but it had to also be fun and friendly, and that balance was super important. The other thing that was part of the system was this idea of our Rack vernacular. So in our display font, our hero font, we would be using our brand as a verb, like rack your look, or rack your way, or rack this way or you know, and inviting customers in. So it felt really strange to have a logo... The embodiment of your brand was gonna be in all your headlines. And so we needed to reconcile that. We felt that we should use the same display form and then it was, how does it work with Nordstrom? And then also the practicality. Working through that and saying is it friendly enough? How much should we curve off those letter forms? And then accessibility and legibility. We wanted the space that the letter forms occupied to be full but then it needs to be legible.

Do you remember Lisa you were going: this is what it looks like at 30-foot, you know? <laugh>

**LISA** Yeah, all the different scales. But I think, Bryony, the logo from the '70s and '80s was a slightly happy accident. We found that after the fact of starting to look at the typeface, and there was characteristics in it that was similar. Obviously as extra, extra bold in comparison to what the original was. But it was really interesting to see the curves of the "K" and some of the characteristics. Happy accident, but I'm pleased it does exist there cuz I always love something if there is something interesting, not for the sake of it, but it also felt like that was a point in time when the logo was pretty distinctive in comparison. And if anything, over time the brand had lost a lot of its personality. It was very simple, and straightforward, and probably ripe for the time, but then everybody else was looking and acting exactly the same. And that era just had a bit more character when they came out of the basement and they were their own freestanding store. It had a bit more character than we found when we started working on it.

**RED** Did experiment with the lowercase "A" and upper "K".

**LISA** Yeah.

**RED** And there was something that was part of our history so we liked the way that it sat <affirmative> and when we started to work on the animation and movement, it felt that that was the best solution. There was a whole meeting on that I think.

**LISA** <laugh>. Yeah, well I think you found an old brochure or guideline. It was hard to find that, even on the internet, and that kind of unearthed lots of conversations around caps... lowercase... <laugh>

**BRYONY** And Lisa, at what point did OH no Type Company get involved in developing both Rack Display and the supporting sans serif? and what was that process like?

**LISA** We had sketched out, I mean you go from logo into the rest of the system, you have to understand this is a world that has 12 tier off-price system. The modules and the containers are not decorative. They serve lots of purpose and functions. So this whole grid inspired, obviously the wordmark, and the display font that then went on to be the grid for the whole rest of the design system. But I think when we were doing it, it was just very square, and looked a bit brutal, and probably didn't have all of the character. So we looked for a partner that we just felt really, really good at working with probably much more responsive typography; and we could feel like we could see some character in some of their early explorers. So I think it was probably after we'd chosen the first round direction, and then we started to go into wordmark and typography. The display font went the whole way through the process — we were still probably delivering, and we're still fine tuning, and making sure that it paired well with what the primary typeface was, what the secondary for all kind of the workhorse digital level of typography.

So we wanted it to sit together as a family. We had to keep tweaking and customizing to get it all to work. And especially the characters, the numbers and the percentage signs, the things that are used so much in the language of Rack. We tested those and we printed them out at all scales. We probably drove OH no kind of crazy as well going into it cuz even all the hinting, cuz it is tight and crunchy and that's kind of the beauty of it. That it feels playful, it's got a bit of quirk in it, the candidness, the expressiveness, and then how it expanded, which that was also quite a bit of time to figure out. Can you expand every letter from the right and the left? And what does it look like when you put content inside it? Or colors? Or contrast? And just a lot, a lot of testing maybe more than on a lot of fonts I've worked on because we were using it as a visual graphic element of the brand.

**BRYONY** Definitely you needed to test more than just the typeface aspect of it or <laugh> the open type aspect of it. Red, what was that process for you, you know, and be receiving updates as they went along and to

see it all come to life? And now that you and your team are actually implementing it, how's that working for you?

**RED** I'm gonna start with our immediate team. The excitement was just growing. Like we did a workshop with JKR in Seattle, we brought in a couple of our team members, so we were going to principals, and senior designers, and copywriters. It was palpable how excited the team were. Like they couldn't wait to get the hands on it. It really did feel like that. And then they got to road test, you know, I mean Felice is an ECD and a branding agency., she gets the chance to touch and rebrand a lot of brands, but it's not often that you get to touch a \$5 billion brand and rebrand it when you are an in-house creative.

This was super exciting and I'll give you two examples in terms of our design community: a couple of our really talented Principles that are on the Nordstrom side wanted the Principal Design role on The Rack because they knew that they were gonna get to implement and take this forward. And then the other thing, one of our designers on The Rack side was up for a promotion but it would mean moving to the Nordstrom side and they were like, I wanna stay, I wanna see this through. Which is an incredible thing! If your team love it and care about it as much as all of us that we're trying to devise it, and they help improve and evolve it, as we are road testing it. I mean there were definitely small adjustments that we needed to make. That part has been amazing.

In an in-house agency the creative team does own the branding. All the employees that work on it own the brand. At one point it felt like you're trying to push a boulder up the hill single-handedly. And then there's this time where you just turn around and you realize there's a ton of people carrying this with you.

**BRYONY** That's beautiful.



**RED** Your work then, is done on this particular project cuz you've got a whole team that are carrying it forward. And I know that the team that we have internally will take it to new heights.

**BRYONY** You briefly touched on the shift in use of color, and how you started to look into the blues. I would love to hear the in-depth strategy as to why the blues? And then how you complimented that with other colors for special occasions.

**RED** Initially we weren't necessarily gonna change the color. What the family of blues unlocked for us was the ability to create bold contrast. Allows your messaging to be even more legible. So you can decide whether it's a poster in a store, what works best versus digitally, what works best from an accessibility standpoint. So that family of blues allowed us to do that. We also named the blues because in a way our hero blue is a really, really true highly saturated blue. Versus our prior blue was a mid-tone that we used against grays. It can look really insipid. These colors are highly saturated. And then we had the Dive Blue and it is that idea of it feeling like you do wanna <laugh> dive into this blue, and enjoy that calming effect ,and maybe it's evocative of the swimming pool blues, and what that represents. And then we had Sky Blue and we think about that, and possibilities, and open space. Why don't we use all three in combination? Why don't we find the perfect balance?

The other big thing on color that was major is the use of black and white. Because black and white is our Nordstrom brand core colors. And so by being able to bring them into the pallet, it allows us, when we need to communicate both Nordstrom and Nordstrom Rack, like in a loyalty offer that we've got an option where it actually works better for us rather than this looks like a Nordstrom piece of work in a Rack environment. And then promo pallets, you know, we have our everyday value but then we do do further mark downs. I mean it is a chance to get a great deal and the customer is absolutely trained to understand red. So then we were like, what is the most perfect swaggery red? And then let's compliment it with other colors, like the

pink that aren't necessarily, it's a little bit more un unexpected. So we've got these two palettes that give us a lot of possibility. And also when we use one versus when we used the other.

And then there's when do you use seasonal color? We used a color for Easter, we used a color for Mother's day. So then you can signify this is a particular moment in time. And the more we do this, the more the customer will understand, oh, it's Fall, there's a Fall pallet, it's newness, it's new arrivals, it's Brand New product straight off the truck, you know? We are promoting that versus, okay, we are now at an end of season clearance, we're gonna clear The Rack, we're gonna get ready for the new season, and then we're in our promo palette. A lot of thought went into the color and the combinations of how those colors get used as well.

**BRYONY** And Lisa, can you expand on other partnerships and collaborations that you had in terms of photography and other elements of the brand as it developed?

**LISA** OH no was the core partner we worked with. I know Red works with Exposure who do all the TV and has also an internal team who art direct. So a lot of the photo guidelines and we had illustration, et cetera, guidelines. They're all been brought to life, mainly led by the in-house team. They shot them at their location in LA and all the seasonal shoot. It was mainly, OH no. The motion and everything we did at JKR. It was really these two teams collaborating and making as much together, which was also really exciting and fun. I love working with obviously so many different partners, but Red already had a set that she works with. So we all kind of shared, and even with the relationship with the ad agency Exposure, we'd had many meetings along the journey with them, sharing them, sharing vice versa, as they were shooting video, they were sharing back how they were using the perspective and the different angles, and how they're gonna continue to push and grow some of the principles that we've created. They've

found a very rich fertile ground to keep growing and pushing it, which is really exciting. I love that. <laugh>

**RED** On the photography, we had an early mood board — before we rolled out this and moved to the new branding — but there was no reason to wait. Our image team already started to lean into that idea. You know, The Rack vernacular we had out there and then we started to move towards this imagery. If you look at our imagery today on our website versus a year ago, you're gonna see a significant difference. It's elevated and I think people were inspired by the idea that it is fertile, completely. You just think about camera techniques alone and what you can do with this idea of either creating the perspective that brings the viewer in more, or pushing out towards the camera with product. Because at the end of the day, the product is the thing that's really exciting. Getting that amazing brand handbag that you want a a great deal, so why shouldn't that be right front and center, and coming out towards the camera.

The team has just run with this. We've got techniques in our current ads and then we have new techniques that are coming in Fall. So we are continuing to evolve techniques that still deliver on this whole idea. So Exposure, we work with them on our top of funnel execution. It's a partnership between our internal team and Exposure, and the way we worked, the three of us... when we were working on motion graphics and supers over video footage, JKR did some work, Exposure did some work, we looked at it together, we then leaned into what should be the rules around this? And what should be fixed? And where should we flex? And I think we ended up with a really great solution because of the three groups all weighing in, and bringing their best ideas to the table.

**BRYONY** Best ideas and also the know-how of all of the different aspects I'm sure, and the deep understanding of what each is bringing to the table and how it's all gonna work. Was there a moment in the entire process, from drafting and reading that brief until you were able to put your

hands down and say we're done — with the rebrand, not with a work — that was pivotal, or super important for each of you? Where you were like, okay, this is it, we're on the right track, there's no turning back, so exciting.

**RED** I think it was the letter forms moving in this grid. So we had this four-by-four grid with the R-A-C-K, and the letters moved around. When I saw that, that for me was: this is it! It's the modularity. For me, I think what we've built into this system is the way the visual identity behaves is really critical. I'm not so worried about in the future, future, future, if you need to make adjustments. It's the way it behaves to me that was so critical. And I was like, we are gonna build out this modular system, and it is gonna absolutely work, and it's gonna make our lives easier. I could see it, it's gonna make the work better, and our lives easier, and this is it.

**LISA** I love that Red goes to the work because I go to meetings and I think how nervous I was going into the executive leadership meeting. We prepped so much. I suppose maybe my experience of doing brand transformations, this brand is going through a very big visual verbal change and yes, bits were already happening, but sometimes you can have those meetings. I have a couple in my history of what I call misses where they, you know, that was as far as it can get. And I know, I trusted Red implicitly by the way, and she definitely had done the work of meeting with different leaders and taking them through so it wasn't sticker shock all in one meeting. People love this brand, they're very passionate, and it's family founded. You never know, you never entirely know what could happen in a situation like that. We actually had very serious rich conversations.

I'd think if we were truly honest, didn't come where I'd go, whoa, let's go and celebrate. It's a, they gave us a lot of things still to think about, which we took very seriously as we continued to develop, and deliver, and roll out. And rightly so, it was a really big thing to be able to do. So that was the moment. Even though it wasn't like, woo, let's go, but you

do sit on the plane on the way home and go, oh, phew! <laugh> I feel like this is gonna happen. I'm really excited. We've put our hearts and souls. I mean, I've had someone say no and I've cried in one of those meetings and been so embarrassed. A little tears come out because you've put so much in, collaboratively. So on behalf of all the internal team at Rack, I felt a huge responsibility of everybody that had been part of it. Red and I had to make sure somehow that we could tell the story in the best way, and that people were really excited about the potential and where it could go. And we had some amazing advocates. That was the moment for me. When you get the green light! <laugh>

**RED** I remember coming outta that meeting to a slew of texts going, "how'd it go? How'd it go? How'd it go?" from team members. Because we met with pretty much our executive team, Pete Nordstrom, Erik Nordstrom, Jamie Nordstrom, and our head of dot-com, and our head of Rack stores, our head of merchandising... You are showing those people who are the business, really the business owners of the brand, super exciting. Everybody was so excited when they were like, we're gonna move forward. We've got some feedback that we need to take on board, we need to do, <affirmative> do diligence on a few things, but we're gonna move forward. And everyone's so excited.

**BRYONY** It's always better when you get a little bit of pushback because then you know they care, and they're paying attention <affirmative> to the details when they're like, yeah, sure, do it, go for it!

**LISA** Yeah, yeah!

**BRYONY** Call me when it's done. Then you're like, oh...

**LISA** Oh, there are invested. Yeah.

**RED** Everybody deeply cares. I mean...

**LISA** It was good.

**RED** That's one of the things that's amazing about Nordstrom. I mean, everybody cares so much.

**BRYONY** So now that it's all out there Red, what's the feedback that you were receiving, you know, from the internal teams, the employees, the executives, but also retailers, distributors, customers? What are you hearing as far as how the rebrand is being received?

**RED** Okay, so I told you earlier about by start really on the nucleus, like people on our team wanna be part of this. You know, the designer that was staying and some of our talent moving into this team to bring it to life. So lots of positivity internally and that's growing. We've done a series of lunch and learns in the company so that lots of people that we don't get to work with on an everyday basis, so it might be a store manager, gets to hear and understand the context. And there's a lot of love internally because people understand what the intent is. I think as we go to other teams, our UX team, they're excited. One of the early quotes was, this is a gift because they want really robust brand guidelines and there's a lot in there. There's a lot to work with the colors, you know, we've thought through the fonts. And so that's been really exciting to partner with other areas of the business and work together. So whether it's UX or VM.

And then I think as you go broader, it was so exciting. I was down in LA two weeks ago for the start of our store openings for this year. So I was in North Hollywood and you get to see the people that work in the store that have just been hired. They're new employees and they're excited. The people on the shop floor are proud of this branding. They're walking by in their t-shirt, they feel good. So that feels good. And then we're starting to hear customers are responding well to it. Of course, you're gonna get mixed feedback when you've just relaunch something. That's gonna happen. But overall it's very positive, extremely positive, so that it's really exciting.

**BRYONY** Lisa, you mentioned certain nervousness in the beginning going into an industry that JKR is not known for. What are you taking from this project internally, and applying to future projects or ambitions within the industry?

**LISA** Probably why it works so well is it's a shared philosophy around democratization of design, and making accessible good design for all. More and more as I go through my career, I've made career choices over that. Whether I worked in-house at Chobani and the idea of bringing affordable food that could cost .90 cents for a cup of yogurt, maybe it's a bit more these days. That's good design. And similarly, whether that's in fashion, retail, or any other category, I feel very much more equipped to be more category agnostic with the similar centralized core idea that those are the right businesses and brands that I love working with, and JKR loves loves working with. It's all in service of people. And as long as there's the right match in terms of around bravery, tenacity, and being yourself, which is very much our core philosophy, which I think when we met Red, I felt like her and her team imbued all of that.

And that's normally when then you have the best partnership. So it doesn't really then matter what category, long as you can navigate that and you have the same vision together in terms of the ambitions. The bigger thing I think around also that I've taken away from this as we work more and more on not only what are distinctive assets that we can make and create the iconic and memorable for a brand that can live across time and brands are living, breathing things. So you'll probably add more and push more as it goes into the future, is also how it shows up across the experience. And I think Red touched on that, whether it be the digital team or the visual merchandising team, that was definitely a piece of the project. Red leads all the marketing, so it's how you bring the URL, IRL, all of that together and navigate everybody that's got very specific objectives to the channel that they're playing in, and get us all on the same page.

And more and more, we're having to do that with a lot of the brand identities we are working on because customers enter from any point in the journey and they're not gonna get the full perfect picture that you can lay out on on a piece of paper. They're gonna get the

window where they came in, whether that be from banner advertising, then going into store, or from then clicking on that into the URL. I'm thinking much more about how does the UI toolkit work as just as much as the physical. And I think that's more and more what we are focusing on as we keep working with new brands.

**BRYONY** Fascinating. Final question for both of you. As you look ahead, what is the most exciting thing that you see?

**RED** Ultimately it can be summed up in great work, that works. I'm super excited to see this work that we've done, support the business growth and see those results. We're celebrating that we feel great about this work, but I am looking forward to celebrating when we really can match the excitement of what we are doing with the results of our new stores that we're opening, we're bringing in more brands into the stores that customers love. So I just see this onwards, onwards, onwards and upwards, which is exciting.

The other thing I would say from a creative standpoint, and this might not sound sexy, but then it's gonna enable more sexiness, is we have this incredible system that is also ripe for automation. So certain parts of our work, I am looking forward to being able to automate in such a way that it frees up our creative to then be more creative on the custom aspects. That is where this brand's gonna go, and I'm super excited about it.

**LISA** I love it. Deployment and impact <laugh>, basically, I live for the impact too. There was so many people that already love this brand, but the idea of bringing more people, inviting more people into this brand, I get so excited about just really opening up this to more and more people, is the mission. And I'm really, really excited for the future, for Rack. It's really exciting. And I love the deployment automation. I mean we are all, even at agency side, you know, with AI tools or automated tools, more and more they're all in purpose of creating more time to be more creative, and think more creatively, and make stuff, and



then these things can clear away all the things that just were taking too much time, and too much talent. Using talent in the right ways is gonna be really, really exciting. Where we're going at the moment.

**BRYONY** Well, I'm looking forward to kind of a review in a year's time to see where it's all at <laugh>, but for the time being, I definitely think you have managed to disrupt the sea of sameness by bringing in not only something that's visually rich, and bold, and fun, and friendly, as you set out. It is challenging in a way that is invigorating, not in a challenging way that makes you kind of go, eww, no, I don't wanna be a part of that. It brings energy and playfulness into an industry that... really needs it. Thank you so much for bringing the swagger into the conversation, not only to the design and for being on The Follow-Up with me tonight.

**RED** Thank you.

**LISA** Thank you.

**ARMIN** Not that we find joy in Lisa's past bad experiences of presenting at big meetings and not succeeding but it's always reassuring to hear that it's okay to be worried, scared, nervous, excited, and all of the above when we go in for a big presentation and that it's okay to feel emotionally invested in the work done up to that point. A reminder that we all eventually do get the green light. Also, score yet another point for mixing and matching elements from design explorations against the now seemingly outdated approach of asking clients to pick one solution or nothing at all. It was also good to hear the emphasis that Red and her team made on getting the new identity to be embraced internally as that usually means that it will project positively as it emanates externally to the audience. One last highlight was Red describing this process not as an exercise in decoration but as a purpose-driven design effort that, in their case, was about the democratization of design and making accessible good design for all — one discounted pair of brand-name shoes at a time.

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