# Use the Ick to Create Better Marketing

Our expert this week has a few hot takes.

Here's one: "Any marketer that says they've never felt the ick from marketing isn't a true marketer. You do feel the ick."

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While that doesn't sound like the *best* lesson to open a marketing newsletter, stay with me. I swear this isn't a I'm-quitting-my-job-to-work-on-a-goat-farm hail mary.

It actually has more to do with foundational marketing than you think.

## Meet the Master



## Cristina Jerome

*Creative Strategist and Founder,* Off Worque

- **Claim to fame:** Leading social for Topical’s infamous Faded Eye mask campaign.
- **Fun fact:** She was the voiceover for the Topical’s brand campaign video.

## Lesson one: Feel the ick. And use it to

## create better marketing.

Cristina Jerome has had a whole host of jobs most marketers would kill for.

She's worked on content and social strategy for Jada Pinkett Smith's show *Red Table Talk*, plus Issa Rae's *Rap Sh!t* on HBOMax. She directed social content at Topicals, Sephora's fastest growing Black-owned skincare brand.

She's also dabbled in marketing for Adidas and Lobos 1707, a luxury tequila brand.

And, most recently, she launched her own non-profit social club, Off Worque, which emphasizes mental health and work-life balance.

Phew. I'm exhausted just typing that up.

So my first question to Jerome was an easy one: **How did building her own brand shift her approach to marketing?**

"It didn't change logically," she told me. "It changed spiritually. When you're working for someone, you're so pressed on reaching KPIs… with Off Worque, it's more organic, nurturing, emotional."

She still has KPIs, but they're rooted in storytelling and community, not just conversions.

**"The strategy is not 'do this to get these people.' It's me sharing my own personal story, and giving the mic to other people to share [theirs]."**

**Jerome's** proudest takeaway? The work doesn't feel as "icky" because it's centered on well-being, not just selling.

Even if you're in SaaS or skincare, the lesson holds: If your marketing feels meaningless (or icky), it might be time to reconnect with the story behind the numbers.

If you feel inspired by what you're saying, other people will, too.

## Lesson two: Treat real customers like influencers.

"**I don't need to see another influencer on a boat,**" Jerome told me.

Which, you know. Amen, sister.

Who does she want to see instead? Someone like Kathy, who hasn't had a break in three years and wants to FaceTime her kids to show them the lip gloss she's bringing home to them.

Jerome predicts the next level of community and brand-building will revolve around brands that take *real* customers on trips.

**"Influencing… is becoming unrelatable,"** Jerome told me, adding that she'd much prefer to see brands rewarding real customers because "it shows you that the brand actually hears you, and you're not just order #564 to them."

Sure, we might not all have the marketing budget to take our devoted customers on yacht excursions. But it's worth assessing your current budget allotment and questioning whether you can spend a little more of it on loyal customers, versus sinking thousands into another sponsored LinkedIn post.

Maybe that means sending surprise freebies or thoughtful swag. It's not a luxury cruise — but recognition goes a long way.

## Lesson three: If you're going to do culture-first marketing, root it in a genuine backstory.

Jerome defines culture-first marketing as marketing rooted in

authenticity and genuine cultural connection… not surface-level inclusivity.

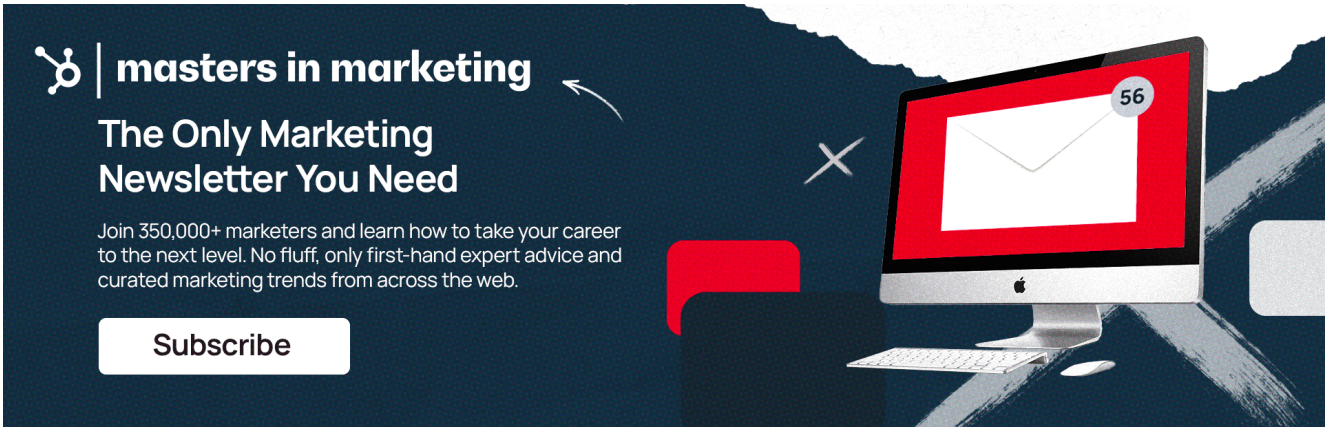
In fact, she thinks inclusive marketing is a bit of a myth.

“I don’t think inclusive marketing is a thing,” Jerome told me, pointing to brands like Skims that appear inclusive but really cater to a particular aesthetic and lifestyle. **Many brands mistake broad targeting for inclusivity when they’re actually appealing to a specific consumer without acknowledging it.**

In contrast, truly culture-first brands like Nike or Topicals are built around stories and experiences that resonate deeply with a defined cultural group — whether athletes or people with real skin conditions.

“You can’t have culture-first marketing without a founder or brand story that aligns with the culture you’re trying to speak to,” Jerome explains. “Without that alignment, the marketing feels performative.”

If you don’t have a founder who aligns with the culture, Jerome recommends building relationships with ambassadors from that community — and letting those partnerships inform your strategy and storytelling.




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