

## articles and tips

### **Branding: Authenticity Is Key to Long-Term Success**

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We hear story after story about organizations trying to reinvent themselves or wondering why they have lost market share or stakeholder support. Often times they are so close to the root challenge that they overlook it and try to advertise or promote their way out of slumping sales. A better approach: look deep to examine and refine your true brand essence and never lose sight of the essential emotional connection your brand must make to each guest, customer or stakeholder.

Over the years we have accepted the challenge of assessing and developing strategies to both launch and expand market share for operators and their suppliers in a multitude of industries. There's always been a common thread: be true to what made your brand great and never lose sight of what makes you, your product, and your service authentic and unique.

Often times, when business goes south, the immediate reaction is either to slash proactive marketing expenditures or to try to advertise to regain market share. Neither works. What does work is having all principals and operations folks look back to what drove business when expansion was taking place. What products built the company? What did the brand stand for? How was it conceived? What made guests and customers come back?

With increased competition comes a desire or tendency to "act like the Jones's," rather than keeping the focus on a unique and authentic brand story. Long-term success, we have found and suggest, is found in remaining steadfast in delivery of a product that is beyond anyone's duplication. Good managers, in any type of business or organization, will realize the need, every couple of years, to take an objective and impartial view of what message their brand is sending – both by operational execution as well as through visual merchandizing in all form of external outreach.

Our advice to operators in today's ultra-competitive environment: examine and refine your core brand. You may be too close to daily operations to see how your original focus has morphed into something that is truly "not you." Don't be afraid to call in expert help to look at all that you are doing, internally and externally, to see if you are truly showcasing your authentic core message. Whatever you do, don't wait until it's too late or spend thousands on unfocused advertising dollars.

When you stand back and get assistance in taking a hard look at what truly put you on the map to begin with, you'll realize that same core brand message and product can take you to new heights as well. Just realize that as you examine your brand and your operations, you need to always seek to build emotional connections with your guests, customers and stakeholders.

Great brands aren't reinvented, just are continually improved and reinforced. When's the last time you really took a hard look at how true your operations are to your brand promise? Now would be a good time!

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