

Brand yourself with dependability.

By Jill Elliss

Branding is a big marketing buzzword these days. But actually branding's been around for decades. Most people think it has to do with a logo. The Coca Cola logo elicits instant recognition. Not many southern Utah logos have that instant recognition, yet brand recognition should be a goal of every business.

How could a small southern Utah business brand itself? First it's important to understand the real definition of branding. An attractive logo is always an asset, but the essence of branding is a "promise of value". If you purchase a product or service, you get the same consistent value *every time*.

Consider, for example, the new restaurant. If the restaurant is a national franchise, it already has a brand, which accounts for its almost instant popularity. But what does a new little independent restaurant do to benefit from branding?

First, a restaurant has a natural edge over some other start-up businesses. It is the southern Utah favorite Friday night recreation to try out the newest restaurant in town. This works to both the advantage and disadvantage of the new eatery business. If the staff has been reasonably well trained and the food is reasonably good, the consumer rates the restaurant as a success and worthy of a second visit.

If the food and/or service is poor, the fickle consumer votes for no return visit. This new eatery, like so many independents before it, begins the failure march.

So if the restaurant succeeds on the first visit, is it branded? Not so. Branding is a promise of value, a trust that the product or service creates with the customer. One positive visit does not create the trust. Trust is built on each promise kept.

Unfortunately, new independent restaurants have a difficult time providing reliable, dependable food and service. Franchises already have a system, but the new eateries most likely do not yet have their systems in place. Customers don't forgive shoddy service or a flippant server. There is no promise in place, and forgiveness is not offered. Too many inconsistencies and the business must perhaps further reduce service to conserve cash flow. And the unique new restaurant full of local color and appeal at its opening might be fighting for its life.

This restaurant example might be extreme, but it illustrates the necessity of branding in a competitive market which southern Utah has become. Many factors go into being a dependable business. All the factors have to click. Money, marketing and people must be managed so well that it looks almost effortless to create the promise of value.

The logo then becomes a visual symbol of the promise. But without the consistency and the dependability, the logo is not a brand, but just a label.

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