

BRANDING

Part 1: Who needs a brand, and why?

In this section, we will discuss the different types of brands as they relate to culinary and hospitality, ranging from personal brands to larger departmental initiatives within your organization. I am going to touch on four types of brands I think are relevant to all of you.

What comes to mind when you think of a brand? For a lot of people, iconic American brands like Ford, Coca-Cola or Wal-Mart come to mind. However, those are examples of only one brand or type of brand. Though these companies have very little to do with what a professional chef or entrepreneur does on a daily basis, they built their brand on the same kind of principles and practices a chef or entrepreneur would employ.

Let's discuss the first type of brand:

Product Brand

When I was executive chef at the Greenbrier, I created the "Greenbrier Farm." This was a 44-acre produce farm that grew about 70 percent of all the produce for the entire hotel. The real value of what that farm brought, beyond all the delicious produce, was the ability for me to have the logo of the Greenbrier Farm on all the menus. People were willing to pay more for the locally grown produce we were growing. We call this "value added." We purchased two trucks with the logo and images of the produce on the side to build awareness of the product. Always remember that a product is worth what people are willing to pay, not necessarily what you think it is worth. Marketing that product in a powerful and effective way will help you launch a new product.

Let me be clear, however: Creating a "Product Brand" is more than just slapping a logo on something and coming up with a fancy name. People will not buy something and pay more just because it's "local"; it does indeed need to be a great product. Along with your product, you need to find its voice, its story and what makes it different from every other option out there. You may have an idea for an extraordinary new line of barbecue spices, but does the world really need another barbecue spice? You may think it is the best spice mix you've ever used, but does it have a compelling enough story to make the average consumer want to buy it?

The second type of brand is a:

Personal Brand

When I first introduced my "Rich Rosendale" brand, I had left the Greenbrier and was doing a speaking engagement for a conference. I had my newly revealed Rich Rosendale logo on my jacket, and moments before the presentation, another chef walked up to me, pointed to the logo on my jacket and said, "What are you, running for office? Ha-ha." I just looked at him and said, "I'm building a brand." I knew he didn't see how people could brand themselves—their person, their lifestyle, what they stand for. But I saw clearly in my mind's eye where I was going. Sometimes you need to just go with your gut feeling if you believe in something strongly enough. The market will tell you what you need to know by either embracing your product or not, and if you need to adjust your path. However, don't confuse market feedback with doubters; they are two different things.

Personal brands are not just for chefs who follow my path. Anyone who is in the public eye (that's a lot of us these days) should really consider everything they do. All choices are contributing to their reputation and brand, and are influencing through their actions the trajectory of their life and career. If you want to be the executive chef of the most prestigious resort in the United States, then everything leading up to that moment of opportunity should reflect that. How you dress, how you speak, what you post on social media begins to paint a picture about who you are. If you want to be executive chef of the Westchester Country Club, then you need to look the part before you ever actually get the position. People may think that a brand is just for a "personal chef" brand, but that's not really the case. If you want to be on the USA Culinary Olympic team, be known as the premier brownie company in Kansas, or be the Michelin-starred catering chef—whatever it is, you need to be aware of the messaging you are projecting to the world, especially on social media. You may say you don't do social media, but everyone around you does; everywhere you go, everything you say, has the reach of the World Wide Web through our devices. So carefully consider to how you can use this awareness of your personal brand to navigate through your career and your life. I talk to chefs all the time who, after a job interview, may say, "Man, I am so bummed I did not get that job. I thought I aced the tasting but they picked someone else." This is a reality of our careers, but it's more than just cooking; there are other elements you can control to steer yourself to opportunities that are right for you.

The next type of brand is:

Initiative Brand

“The Greenbrier Culinary Apprenticeship program started in 1957 and was the first Culinary Apprenticeship in the United States. The Greenbrier has produced some of the most established and successful chefs in the country.” Imagine that statement at a job fair at a culinary school. This training initiative has manifested into a “brand” that for years has attracted aspiring chefs from across the country. They essentially come to the middle of nowhere to work at this prestigious resort.

You may have a “Chef’s Table,” an elite training program, and a fundraising initiative, but without branding it, you may not gain the kind of momentum that blossoms into a wildly successful initiative. These days, I think it is more important than ever to do this. We are all competing for the same market share of people’s attention. Some of us aspire to run a business, to support a cause, or to better our current conditions. Whatever it is, the power of branding is essential in getting your messaging across effectively.

Another example that actually impacted the health and eating trends of the workforce at the Greenbrier was when I started the Greenbrier Employee’s Farmers Market. The concept was that for \$5 a bag, employees could come twice a week to the bunker where the market was located, and fill a bag with as much produce as they could. The proceeds went to the employee Christmas party so it was a win-win, and more importantly it was something people were talking about. By branding it, we were able to use it to help market the broader category of the Greenbrier Farm.

The final brand I will discuss is:

Culture Brand

When Christopher and I first stepped foot at Facebook HQ in Menlo Park, one of the things we were most impressed with was the unique culture they embraced as it related to the workforce, or the team. It felt more like walking through an amusement park than it did visiting one of the leading tech companies of our time. There were restaurants ranging from healthy fare to barbecue and burgers. There were dentist offices, banks, woodworking stations and barbershops—all created for the benefit of the “community” of associates at Facebook. Throughout the facility were what most would consider break rooms, but at Facebook they were filled with healthy snacks, exotic beverages and an abundance of crave-worthy snacks any time of day or night. The café had fresh-squeezed juices and chefs cooking meals from scratch with easy-to-access nutritional details for every menu item. They had beer for the staff on Fridays, and my favorite was Taco Tuesday (which was actually served on Wednesday). All of this was either free to the staff, or it was greatly subsidized for a very low cost.

So, why am I talking about this? Well, because the power of marketing your workplace and creating a culture that is different, dynamic and one that creates a culture that people want to be in, can create a powerful recruiting tool for your organization.