



THE "WOW FACTOR" IN A STRONG BRAND

Tummies restaurant is up against the new fast, fun and young chains like Wasabi. Restaurateur Tammy Mariaux, who opened Tummies in 1988, says: "Branding for a small business needs to be simple. When we opened in 1988 'Tummies' was a way of saying we are serious about food, offering a full tummy, but a friendly place, unpretentious and comfortable. Now we would probably never choose that name, but the brand is so strong we could never change it."

"At Tummies we have crayons and doodle mats. These have been with us since the beginning and they're not just for the kids – they are for everyone."

DOS AND DON'TS OF BRANDING

DO...

- Choose a name that suits your business and its character.
- Create a logo that is visual, sharp and that says what you do.
- Create a strap line to describe your business.
- Decide on the standards at every step of the experience – this includes style of service, presentation of food, look and feel of the interior.
- Deliver the brand consistently, right through

the customer journey from booking through to paying and beyond.

DON'T...

- Be disappointed – think it through. The name should match the logo, which in turn should match the décor, and the food.
- Rest on your laurels – make changes as you go to make the brand stronger and better.
- Be subjective – Carry out plenty of research, and remember what you want may not be what

the public wants. Use customer insight – remain objective.

- Ignore what customers say – listening and acting on comments will help improve the brand.
- Stop investing – creating a brand isn't a one-off, it needs to be continually nurtured and evolved.

Advice from IHG, Tummies and Captivate Hospitality

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Branding isn't just for big business. Creating the right brand identity is essential for smaller operators, too. *John Porter* looks at how it's done

What's in a name? When Shakespeare pointed out that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, it wasn't the Rose & Crown he was thinking of. The traditional inn sign hung over the door has done the job since well before the Bard's day, but today's hospitality businesses are about more than just a name – they have to be a full-blown brand.

Speaking at a recent breakfast briefing organised by food service consultancy Horizons, the company's director of services, Paul Backman, made the point that chain operators have ramped up branding in order to differentiate their offer.

"Most of the new concepts are quick-service operations merging contemporary styling and healthy food with a fast, fun and young feel. They are appealing to a new urban, health-conscious, budget-conscious consumer who would rather eat out than cook at home but doesn't want to spend too much doing so."

As examples, Backman cites health-based concepts such as Bill's, Chop'd, Pod and Tossed and quick-service Japanese outlets such as Itsu, Wasabi and Samurai.

Independent operators similarly need to embrace branding to compete, says Guy Holmes, director of Captivate Hospitality. "There are still old-school operators who think that with good food and good service, everything else will fall into place, but restaurants don't work that way any more. We live in a branded world, and the best brands are aspirational."

"It's a very competitive market, and everybody's competing for very limited disposable

income, so it's necessary to stand out in the crowd. Beyond that, a strong, well thought out brand gives a clear impression to the consumer that the people behind the business will spend just as much time and effort getting the food right."

Captivate works with hospitality operators such as Strada, Brakspear, Juno and Cosmo to develop brand identities. So, beyond a name, what does that involve? "The 'brand' is just about everything involved with the business," Holmes says. "It includes the food itself, the way it's presented, the menu, the visuals and graphics and it even comes down to staff training – how people answer the phone. Almost every aspect of the business is part of the brand."

A PROMISE TO CONSUMERS

However, branding is not a question of trying to create smoke and mirrors around a business that can't live up to the promise. The substance must live up to the brand, says Tom Rowntree, vice-president of brand management for Europe at hotel group IHG. "A brand is a promise to consumers. Brands communicate an understanding of quality, safety and assurance by attaching values that customers associate with – which should, in turn, generate loyalty."

He adds that this "is particularly important in tough economic times when people turn to brands they know and trust".

A strong identity without consistent quality is not really a brand, he insists. "Names and logos are just a part of a brand identity. We

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THE BRANDING APPROACH



When restaurant group Cosmo wanted to update its brand, Captivate Hospitality came up with the slogan “Where do your taste buds want to go today?” to reflect the wide choice of food that available at their restaurants. Adjustments to the branding included:

- Making the brand less masculine – so more colour and less use of dark textured backgrounds
- Better use of photography
- New slogans to capture the various different brand attributes
- Rewriting of text to give more of an atmospheric picture

recently completed the relaunch of Holiday Inn. Our relaunched hotels carry a new Holiday Inn logo but it is the consistently good experience our guests can expect in our hotels that has created more preference and loyalty.”

TUMMIES' EXPANSION

Restaurateur Tammy Mariaux opened Tummies in 1988. The business has subsequently expanded to include a deli, training school, and outside catering. Although she has worked with designers, the concept is very much Mariaux's. “Branding for a small business needs to be simple,” she says. “When we opened in 1988 ‘Tummies’ was a way of saying we are serious about food, offering a full tummy, but a friendly place, unpretentious and comfortable.”

“Now we would probably never choose that name, but the brand is so strong we could never change it. If you asked our customers they would use the words ‘good food’, ‘friendly service’, ‘value for money’, ‘relaxed’, and ‘informal’. These are all standards that we have developed over the years and which have become part of the brand.”

In a busy market, a USP or “wow factor” really helps, she adds. “At Tummies we have crayons and doodle mats. These have been with us since the beginning and they’re not just for the kids – they are for everyone. We have them stuck all over the ceiling and the good ones have been framed over the years and hang off all the walls.”

New branding can also draw a line under problems in a business. At a previous venture, Mariaux rebranded a pub which had become known as a hang-out for bikers as Spaggos, a family Italian restaurant, attracting a new customer base.

Holmes at Captivate Hospitality suggests another reason for changing a name as part of a revamp of a business might be bad reviews on consumer sites. “Negative online reviews can linger for years on respected sites like TripAdvisor and will always come up on a Google search. Equally, someone may have slaved away for years on a restaurant that has only broken even and needs a different approach. A new brand can give you fresh emotional energy.”

PUB BRANDS

The success of pub and bar brands such as All Bar One and Firkin in the mid-1980s launched a branding frenzy which saw many venerable pubs lose their original name to become part of a chain.

However, many in the industry now feel this trend has run its course. In a recent debate on the subject, members of the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR) voted in favour of “proper” pub names over brands.

Managed pub and bar group TCG acquired Henry's Café Bar in Norwich, one of a number trading under the Henry's brand, when the business was founded in 2005. The site had previously been a Rat & Parrot from the early 1990s.

Coinciding with a £200,000 refurbishment, TCG is now restoring the historic inn site to the name it was known as from the 1700s, the Lamb. Chief operating officer Nigel Wright says: “Customers, locals and even taxi drivers still refer to the pub as the Lamb, and so when we started drawing up plans for the refurbishment, it made perfect sense to restore the name.”

WHEN DO YOU NEED THE EXPERTS?

While a restaurateur with marketing flair may feel comfortable creating their own brand, Tom Rowntree at IHG believes: “Brand experts are essential for developing your brand – both at the outset and on an ongoing basis. Great brands constantly evolve and require careful resource or external consultants, but there are lots of options available.”

If that sounds like an expensive process, Guy Holmes at Captivate Hospitality estimates that at around £5,000 for a complete package that

includes the website and all the graphic design for logos, menus etc, the service is good value.

However, Tammy Mariaux believes that it's important for the business owner to retain control of the process. “Too often the brand experts want to take away the charm, the personal touch, and the rawness of your creativity. They like polished products and I personally think this dilutes creativity. I think customers are now fed up of seeing gastropubs that all look and feel the same, or big brands that

are ten a penny on every high street.”

The individual approach and the benefits of working with an expert aren't mutually exclusive, insists Holmes. “When the client comes to us with a concept, we try to get as much information as possible out of them as we can, to find out what really makes the business stand out. We will have our opinions, but it comes down to the client at the end of the day. If they are adamant that something will work, we do our best to make it happen.”