

What's Your Brand?

Make yourself stand out in a crowd.

by *Kindra Gordon*, field editor

Cattlemen know that a brand on livestock signifies who the owner is — because of this, everyone wants their own unique brand. You don't want your livestock to be confused with those of the neighbors.

Similarly, in the marketing world Roger Brooks says branding — and standing out in the crowd — is essential for an entity to survive. Brooks specializes in helping small towns and communities brand themselves to be successful in the tourism industry, but his branding advice can carry over and be applied to cattle operations and agribusinesses as well.

Foremost, Brooks says that today we are “drowning” in advertising and marketing overload. He notes that, on average, most of us are exposed to 5,000 marketing messages a day — which has created a situation where 97% of all marketing and advertising is ineffective.

As a result, he says, “Competition [for customers' dollars] has never been more fierce.”

Identify your brand

An important method to cut through the marketing clutter is to “get into the branding game,” says Brooks.

He emphasizes that having a logo or slogan is not a brand.

“Those are simply an exclamation point on your marketing message,” says Brooks.

Rather, a brand is what people think of you, he explains. “It's a perception; a feeling. It's what they think as they drive by, or what they read about you, or hear from others through word of mouth.”

He adds, “With a brand you must set yourself apart from everyone else. That's the essence of branding.”

Brooks says a common mistake in “branding” is trying to be all things to all people. He says, “If your brand stands for everything, then you stand for nothing. Avoid trying to offer something for everyone. Trying to please everyone all the time is a recipe for failure. You must narrow your focus.”

He suggests asking yourself a series of questions to help identify your niche and ultimately your brand. What is the one thing that puts you/your business on the map?

What do you offer that people can't get elsewhere? How does your product set you apart from others? Why should they buy yours?

Find and promote whatever it is that makes you different or clearly better, Brooks says. He adds, “If you can fit anyone else's business name into your ad and it still rings true, then start over; you need to keep working to identify your niche.”

What's your why?

Additionally, Brooks emphasizes that “why” someone should buy something closes the sale vs. telling them “what” to buy.

He says, “Tell the world why, then who, where, what. ‘What’ doesn't close the sale. Instead, sell the advantage first. Tell me why I should choose you over anyone else.”

To illustrate this point, he cites some iconic marketing taglines: The Army's “Be All You Can Be,” McDonald's “You Deserve A Break Today” and L'Oreal's “Because You're Worth It.”

He concludes, “Evoke an emotion to pull people in, and they'll remember you. Sell the experience, not the business.”

Author's Note: *As an additional marketing tip, Brooks shares a quote by famous advertising guru David Ogilvy: “Your ad headline is read five times more than the body copy. When you've written your headline, you've spent 80% of your marketing dollar.” So, Brooks says, “When you write a headline, evoke an emotion and make a statement.”*



Branding spells other opportunities, too

Roger Brooks notes that rural communities — and small businesses — are struggling in this day and age. He points out that the global economy means times have changed, and many rural communities must find ways to remain relevant.

Currently, 50% of America's population lives in urban areas, and by the year 2030 it's predicted 70% of the U.S. population will be urbanites.

Interestingly, there are about 19,500 cities and towns in the United States, and 18,500 of them have less than 4,000 residents. Only 1,000 are larger.

Brooks believes this can spell opportunity for small, rural towns and the businesses that support them. He notes that food and culture — including the farming and ranching culture — are interesting to Baby Boomers and Millennials. He adds that farmers' markets are now a tourism draw, and gardening is the fastest-growing hobby in North America.

“People will drive two to three hours for this; they love farm-to-table experiences.”

Brooks says, “This is the age of reconnection. Ag in rural communities is a perfect way to do that,” either for your business or your entire community.

He concludes, “People want local, and they want activities. Remember, it's about the experience, not just the product.”