

Emmy Williams
Extension Associate

Dr. John Park
Roy B. Davis Professor of
Agricultural Cooperation

Department of Agricultural Economics
Texas A&M University
2124 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-2124

Phone: (979) 845-1751
Email: jlpark@tamu.edu

Branding Makes Perfect!

Making the brand for your cooperative business may require "hard to find" time and energy but in turn could lead to really big pay offs. Decisions made now, or lack there of, can affect the future of your business - all at the customers' discretions.

Which comes to mind when you hear the work "brand" – a mark of ownership found on cattle, or better yet, a way to distinguish your business in a competitive market? Branding takes on more than one connotation but, whether its livestock or business, its purpose is clearly one of recognition. Consider some of your favorite branded products, whether they are expensive tractors or simple cookies. The very colors, symbols, and letter make these products instantly recognizable. But this isn't by chance. A successful brand is a carefully crafted message to the customer.



Unfortunately, neglecting your brand might also send a message: "go away!"

What is the value of a brand? Perhaps you are drinking a nice cold glass of Coca-Cola® while taking a refreshing break and reading your

Cooperative Management Letter. Most will immediately picture the red Coca-Cola® label in their head just from tasting the beverage. Many other things may come to mind such as the red aluminum cans, the Coca-Cola® shaped glass bottles, the Christmas polar bears, vintage Coca-Cola® signs, or even an old fashioned Coke® float. So...exactly what's in the Coca-Cola® brand name? The Coca-Cola® Company holds about \$2.6 billion cash; \$6.9 billion property, plant, equipment; and \$30 billion

total assets. Yet their president was once heard to say that if it was all lost or burned up in a fire, the company could be rebuilt on two things...the secret recipe and the brand.

Your Brand is a Message

Everything that your customer experiences in relation to your business sends a message. This is your brand, and it will either strengthen or weaken your relationship to that customer regardless of any formal efforts. This means that every conversation with an employee, every obligation met, every glimpse of the facility (even a back room) should work together to strengthen the customer's desire to continue your business relationship. Your customer's decision to participate is only partially placed on price. More importantly, value to your customer might involve price, reliability, image, and service.

People don't want to be sold, but they love to buy. Feel and experience is important. Your brand experience needs to take the customer from being sold in his head to wanting to buy in his heart. What reaction does your message provoke: "Aha, this is exactly where I want to do business!" or "Where can I find a better deal?"

What kind of brand have you put on your co-op? What can you do better: Price, Quality, Variety? Find your comparative advantage, show consumers why your

**"AHA, THIS IS EXACTLY
WHERE I WANT TO DO
BUSINESS!"**

Cooperative Management Letter
is supported through funding from the
Roy B. Davis Distinguished Professorship
in Agricultural Cooperation at Texas A&M
University. © 2009

roy b. davis
COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

<http://cooperatives.tamu.edu>

product or service is a better value, and build on that message. Shine the spotlight on your most outstanding attributes - the ones that customers genuinely want or need and will set your business apart from the competition.

Successful Branding

Most importantly Brands are promises. Henry Ford once said, *“You can’t build a reputation on what you’re going to do.”* What you say pales in comparison to what you actually do. Exceptional customer service can establish a significant competitive advantage. Excellence in customer experience always trumps the fanciest graphics, advertising, and marketing efforts. People who experience your brand should have the same great experience every time. Consistent reinforcement of your brand promise will strengthen your brand. On the other hand, when brand encounters are not what the customer expects you have broken your promise and your business’ reputation.

Sharing the Brand Message

Once you have determined your strengths and intended message, share them. Not only is it important to share your message with cooperative members, but also with employees. Educating employees on the cooperative’s brand and mission can build member loyalty through improved service and lasting relationships.

A cooperative business is established to benefit its members-customers. Therefore, to truly evaluate your cooperative brand, you can ask a few relevant questions: Does your cooperative act in a manner that serves the needs of members? Does the cooperative maintain open lines of communication with members? Is there a strong mission statement in place? If so, are the members aware of it and does the board act to support it? What actions does the cooperative take to keep old members faithful and recruit new customers?

Ideas to strengthen your cooperative brand:

Conduct competitive intelligence - study your competitors’ web sites and how they market themselves.

Don’t pass up an opportunity for public speaking – its recognition.

Support community events – its recognition.

Take advantage of what’s around you...for example, participating on a local radio talk program or hosting Extension demonstrations.

Survey your customers and find out why they do business with you.

Promote cooperative activities through advertising, letters, newsletters, and your personnel.

Build on tradition if possible, but don’t get stuck in a rut.

Wear your brand; make sure it is recognized with everything you do.

Clean up the grounds surrounding the cooperative, maybe even the neighborhood.

Remember! If you don’t actively deliver your intended message, customers will make assumptions based on their experiences.

Photo Credit: ©iStockphoto.com/sagaYago

Educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture, Edward G. Smith, Director, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.