

el Restaurante

YOUR SOURCE FOR MEXICAN AND LATIN FOODSERVICE TRENDS | www.elrestaurante.com |

How Important is a Brand?



LINDA DUKE

To find out what role branding plays in the success of multi-unit restaurants, *el Restaurante* turned to Linda Duke, CEO of Duke Marketing LLC, a

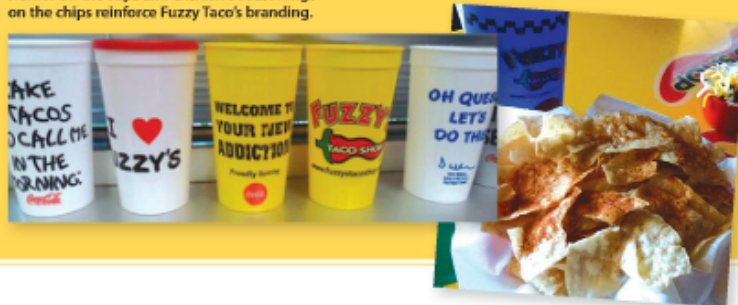
full service marketing firm based in San Rafael, Calif. that specializes in multi-unit restaurant marketing. Duke—who has worked on branding and public relations campaigns for Fuzzy's Tacos, Freebirds World Burritos and Rubio's, among others—shares her thoughts with *el Restaurante* readers.

el Restaurante: How important is a solid brand to the success of a multi-unit operator?

Duke: People remember restaurants when they have a unique experience. That experience is what your brand stands for! By creating your restaurant's brand personality, it will make it stand out from competitors. A great guest experience in a restaurant generates word of mouth, increases sales, guest loyalty and frequency.

el Restaurante: When people think of "brand," they consider logo, colors, advertisements. Is there more to it?

Humor on the cups and exclusive seasonings on the chips reinforce Fuzzy Taco's branding.



Duke: Your brand is not just your logo or your name—although they are critical aspects of your brand—but the overall set of expectations you create in the minds of your customers. Branding is a process of carefully matching the promises you make with the promises you keep. It's about finding and fixing the gaps between how you actually operate and what your ideal consumers want, taking into account your existing culture, operation processes, product offering, sales promotions, and marketing communications.

To be sure, building your brand is not easy. It takes time to research your existing attributes and scout your target markets. It takes a willingness to change "the way things work around here." It takes discipline and commitment over time.

el Restaurante: What are the first steps a small restaurant owner should take to create a brand?

Duke: Though there are many ways to go about building your brand, here is one step-by-step approach:

- **STEP 1:** Assess the situation. When you get right down to it, who are you? How do others perceive you? What kinds of promises are

you making? Come up with a few answers to what you think makes your brand unique by brainstorming with your employees. Test these ideas on your customers and have the managers ask them what they like best and what they liked about it.

- **STEP 2:** Develop a plan. In the end, it's all about focus. Once you boil down the essence of your offering, leverage it by creating a strategic approach to your situation.
- **STEP 3:** Communicate your intentions. Get internal buy-in before trying to affect the outside world. Every interaction inside the organization, between your employees and the outside world, effectively creates the brand.
- **STEP 4:** Measure the results. Once you have defined what your brand means, it will be possible to create benchmarks and indicate if your brand is achieving its potential. Have customers fill out cards to see what they find unique about your restaurant or what they liked best if you are trying some new options. Guest opinions are very important and should always be considered first.

el Restaurante: What are the main characteristics of a successful restaurant brand?

Duke: The most successful brands are those that resonate with consumers, and which keep the brand promise with every customer, every day, every dish.