



**The Brand Coaches:  
A Bulletproof Brand**  
By Lon L. LaFlamme and David J. Morris

The Brand Coaches outline the steps needed to create a memorable, five-dimensional signature brand.

The number of companies in any business category across the globe practicing true sensory branding can be counted on two hands.

The Brand Coaches are the first to admit that it is extremely hard to craft a five-sense synergy. It is our mission to seek out those visionary few who have picked up on the brilliance of Starbucks in multi-sensory branding and applied it to their own brand.

How do you transfer an emotion communicated by one sense to another, ensuring a positive synergy that creates the elusive coffee house experience every specialty coffee business owner claims they are providing for their customers?

A brand “experience” is more than a building or a logo, but rather the overall feeling you have when you are feeling the soul of the brand in everything you see, touch, smell and taste.

Building brands requires building perception. Creating the perfect customer perception requires the perfect sensory appeal. Our aim is to steer single to multi-location coffee businesses to a clear understanding of brand positioning. They should incorporate as many senses as possible in creating that ideal sensory appeal.

Like exceptional customer service, the idea of sensory branding sounds good and easy in theory, right? Wrong! Highly insightful and intentional steps need to be taken in order to move from sight and taste, to a creating a memorable five-dimensional brand.

## **Five Step Process**

### **1. Clear Vision**

Don't get ahead of yourself here and jump right into adjusting the sound, smell and touch of your brand. Like a gourmet chef, you must first carefully consider and choose complementing

ingredients. Each of your brand's "touch points" contributes to the synergistic success. Recognize that you may not be able to tap into every sense in a tangible enough way to embrace all of the five senses. Find and define a clear customer brand message using as many senses as will meaningfully translate to your customers.

## **2. Erase Your Brand**

You need a brand vision that allows customers to instantly know the brand experience with any logo identification. Plastering your logo on everything was a founding design philosophy for Starbucks Coffee. Yet, that logo is accompanied by so many instantly recognizable and consistent branding touch points, it feels like you're in a Starbucks even without the mermaid staring at you from all directions.

## **3. Meaning Behind the Touch Points**

In order to craft a resonating brand you need to be able to understand and articulate the drivers behind the visual strategy. What role does aroma play in the message? What role does music play in the vision of your brand? Too often music is a quickly thrown together afterthought or selected at random by the baristas. Assign an equal value and investment in each sensory element of your brand if you want to effectively compete with that existing or soon-to-exist Starbucks across the street.

## **4. Synergize Your Branding Touch Points**

Once you have a vision and have identified the many touch points that will collectively create a unique customer experience, it is time to gather them together and forge a collective vision and understanding of how they work together.

## **5. Test Your Theory**

What combination of senses work best together to create your desired multi-sensory brand? In bringing them together test their effect on customers through qualitative one-on-one customer research. Are your intended synergistic touch points ensuring a positive collective brand experience?

## **The Woods 2007 Hot Brand Award Winner**

After a careful analysis in 2007 of the best brands among Dillanos Coffee Roasters' 1,400+ customers from coast to coast, the Brand Coaches have selected The Woods Coffee House for our first annual 2007 Hottest Brand in North America Award in the specialty coffee category. The Woods won this honor in our "10 Locations or Less" award category. In upcoming Tea & Coffee Trade Journal Brand Coaches columns, we will be characterizing the winners in our "Best

Single Location” and “Over 10 Locations” categories in hopes our readers will glean great ideas that they can instantly apply from these visionary and highly successful brand builders.

Let’s jump right into the mind of Wes Herman, founder and branding genius behind the Whatcom County, Washington-based The Woods Coffee House. “Before we started building this brand we studied several concepts,” said Herman. He studied various local, regional and national design themes, layouts and images before conceptualizing a seamless long-term brand image that could stand the test of time. The Woods Coffee House was started as a family business, pooling the branding imagination of Wes Herman, his wife Diane Herman and their four teenage children.

“We narrowed the study down to two specific concepts that could be used to build our brand. In the end we decided on a brand that not only had a warm nature feel, but a brand that inherently had a subtle ‘green’ positioning,” Hermann said.

He underscored the fact that green is extremely relevant today, regardless of a customer’s personal politics. “There is an ever growing social concern that not only resonates with our family, but also is in keeping with what customers want to see, products that are environmentally friendly. Our final vision was to couple this ‘green’ feel with our ‘woods’ design concept, and we knew we had created a brand where the items could feed off of each other,” Herman said.

Over the course of six years in two towns, Lynden and Bellingham, The Woods Coffee House locations have become THE specialty coffee icons, with two high profile locations recognized as strategically located community landmarks.

“We quickly dominated Lynden with our brand five years before Starbucks came to town,” Herman said. He added that his family built a defined brand that was so well loved and accepted as a local business that it has remained the local favorite regardless of Starbucks and a number of other contenders for local loyalty.

“It didn’t happen by accident,” Herman underscored. “It happened because we built a strong brand that could withstand corporate competition.”

In characterizing his latest addition to his Woods Coffee House sites, Herman said, “We saw a tired old grey cinderblock building in Bellingham’s Boulevard Park. The building was located along a popular walking path right next to Puget Sound. I knew it had the potential to be transformed into a Woods experience,” Herman recalled.

“It took a ton of imagination to visualize it as a Woods, but our brand is so defined that I could see it transformed in my mind to an incredible coffee house. So we took an almost 100-year-old concrete building and began to transform it into our unmistakable brand,” Herman said.

Herman wrapped the outside of the old building with wood, rock and timber. He crafted an

interior that gave the feel of a ranger station in the park: Lots of wood, river rock fireplace, logs, old wooden beams mixed with natural stone and “woody” looking steel countertops. Warm colors along with leather sofas and chairs allow the customers to experience a snow lodge feeling that we would all want as our “third place.”

The first question The Brand Coaches asks one of our clients when doing an audit of an existing business or reviewing plans for the birth of a new brand is, “If you removed your logo from your company, would people know who you are without it?”

The Woods has done an incredibly holistic job of seamlessly and consistently embracing multi-sensory branding so customers can truly escape into The Woods.

## **The Woods 16 Consistent Branding Touch Points:**

1. Cups, with logo and trees around bottom
2. Staff aprons that include logo
3. Ansel Adams prints
4. Black and white dress code, along with earth tones that compliment The Woods
5. Tree decal along bottom of all windows, above baseboard and along top edge of wainscot
6. Three specific earth tone colors on walls
7. Light knotty pine wainscot, window and door trim and ceilings, where possible
8. Local artisan light fixture made of rusted metal with snow capped mountains and trees
9. Local artisan stainless steel counters with copper “wood” looking edges with wood grained tops
10. Rock fireplace with wood mantle and granite hearth
11. Logo painted on walls, and frosted sticker logo graphics on glass
12. Natural colored stained concrete flooring
13. Black silhouette of trees are spray painted on inset to the floor of the stained cement at locations that have an enclosed customer meeting room

14. Eclectic mix of various music formats, from jazz to old school classics that together blend into a signature Woods sound

15. Ceiling fans in all of the stores to circulate the aroma of fresh brewed coffee

16. Decal on windows near entrances of a bear sitting under a tree working on his laptop to depict their Wi-Fi capabilities

There are no food preparation or presentation smells to compromise the fresh coffee smell customers instantly take in the second they cross the threshold into every Woods Coffee House.

At The Woods Coffee House, the creative use of trees throughout the stores has become the signature graphic image (like the Nike swoosh) that provides instant brand recognition to existing and potential local customers. Herman added, “In a short period of time and with few locations concentrated in the same markets, most locals instantly think of ‘The Woods Coffee experience’ every time they see our unique black line of trees.”

“Now when someone starts building something that looks like our brand (trees, river rock and earth tone colors) he or she comments that it must be a new Woods Coffee! It’s working!” Herman said, with more than a bit of pride in the Woods timber of his voice.

Tea and Coffee columnists Lon and David provide brand and profit building consultation to a number of coffee, retail and b2b businesses across North America. For more information on the Brand Coaches go to: [www.thebrandcoaches.com](http://www.thebrandcoaches.com)



