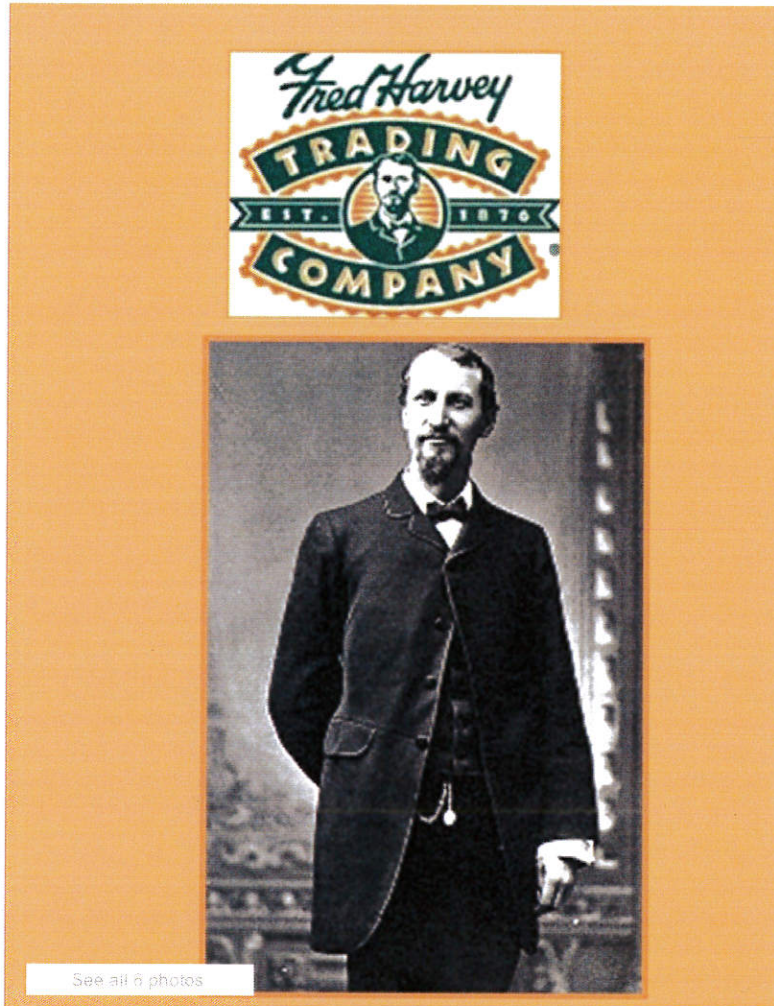


What Is Branding? A Lesson from the Fred Harvey Empire

Updated on March 14, 2014

Fred Harvey



Fred Harvey and the brand he created.

This is the history of the Fred Harvey Houses and their early excellence in branding.

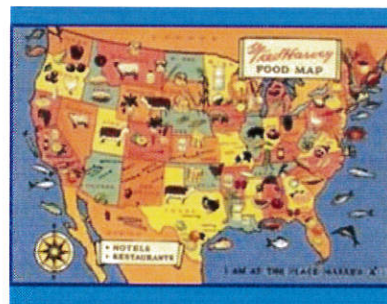
History can teach us many things. For instance, I moved to a town where there was an original Harvey Eating House from 1910. As a history buff I very soon became a docent and then served on the Historical Society Board. My background is business. It did not take long to understand the business genius of Fred Harvey.

The Harvey Houses were one of the founding chain businesses in the United States. They brought civilization to the Wild West in the form of fine dining and refined young ladies. However, Fred Harvey also understood the concept of branding and maximized on branding long before the students of marketing came up with the name branding.

Harvey Houses Restaurants, Gift Shops, Indian Emporiums, and Fine Resorts existed from Chicago's Union Station to San Francisco. They were in every small town touched by the Santa Fe Railroad. They were as ubiquitous as McDonald's and as highly regarded for quality as Starbucks is today

Branding and Fred Harvey

National Excellence in Branding



Albuquerque New Mexico Alvarado

The very name of Fred Harvey meant elegance, fine dining, fine resorts, and all things of the highest standards. If a menu advertised a one pound slice of ham, the customer was sure to receive one pound or MORE of savory ham. If the menu advertised fresh squeezed orange juice, the customer could depend on the oranges being juiced only after the customer ordered the juice. And, oh yes, the glass of juice would be served on a tray not by the hand of the waitress.

The selection of the waitresses was of paramount importance. They were advertised for in cities such as Chicago and Kansas City. The Harvey Company preferred untrained waitresses 'fresh off the farm' of good moral character who had completed their education. Well, as much education that was offered in the young ladies' home area.

These waitresses were then highly trained and dressed in the signature Harvey House uniform. The Harvey uniform screamed good moral character in that era. The uniform was to be spotlessly clean at all times and starched so stiff that it was said a Harvey Uniform could stand all by itself! The irony was that this uniform which was also designed to be undesirable to the gentlemen of the time attracted the gentleman who wanted a 'good girl to take home to meet mom' and then to marry! Many a marriage was attributed to the Fred Harvey organization!

Every attention to detail was of paramount importance to Fred Harvey. He traveled the Santa Fe lines incessantly to make sure his name was on a product and business that adhered to the highest standards.

There are legendary stories of Fred Harvey finding a table setting not to his liking and then pulling the table clothe and all the settings onto the floor in a violent jerking motion! He fired anyone who did not serve the food and drinks from a tray but from their hands.

His insistence on perfection was legendary. Yet, the people who worked for him were treated so well that he was revered. His employees often named their children either Fred or Harvey in great respect to their employer.

Finest Coffee, Liquor, and Indian Handicrafts

Keep in mind the perspective that the Fred Harvey Eating Houses were as well known in their day as McDonald's is today. Also, the quality of the product was extremely high and dependable. His coffee was legendary, and as respected as Starbucks is today.

Fred Harvey coffee was known as the best in the land. Fred Harvey branded, packaged, and sold his particularly selected coffee beans and grind. Fred also required that the water for the coffee be the finest. If a Harvey House was located in an area where the water had a less than perfect taste, Fred Harvey would insist that spring fresh water be brought in by the train in order that the water be perfect for brewing his coffee. Starbucks has nothing on Fred Harvey!

Fred Harvey served train travelers as this was before the road systems (and cars for that matter) and he had an agreement to ship all his food stuffs to the restaurants for no charge.

Very soon Fred Harvey had both hard liquor and cigars sporting his brand. Cigars were hugely popular and a great deal of money and time was spent on procuring and selling the finest of cigars to sell at the Fred Harvey Cigar Stands.

Fred Harvey traveled back to England where he immigrated from to procure the finest table linens and hard liquor as well.

Fred Harvey Company was one of the first to recognize the marketing of Indian handicrafts and jewelry. The local Indians would be encouraged to spread their blankets and sell their wares



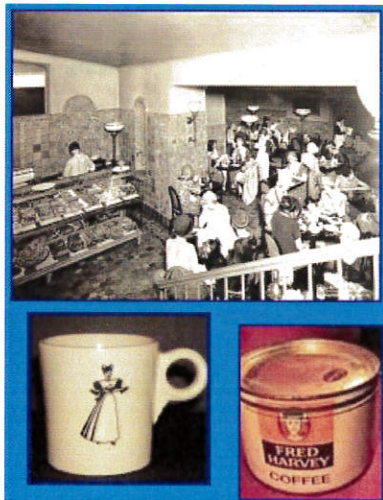
The elegant Alvarado in Albuquerque New Mexico. (torn down in a fit of modernization!)

Harvey House Uniforms



What a lady wore. Crisply starched so much that the uniform could stand by itself! Kept spotlessly clean at all times.

Fred Harvey Branded Coffee and Coffee Shops



Pre-Starbucks! Branded coffee. Unknown station.

Harvey House Marketing

to train travelers at the Harvey Houses along the train route. Often the Fred Harvey personnel and managers would encourage the Indians to make items that were desired by the "Easterners" traveling out west. This meant jewelry and pottery. The popularity of the pottery rose when the Indians were encouraged to make pottery that could be transported easily. The utility of the pottery was less important than the beauty and the smaller easy to pack travel size. This is why many pieces of pottery are much smaller than the named use of the pot would indicate.

The Gift Stores at various Harvey Houses were designed by architects such as Mary Jane Colter to look more like an artist studio rather than a store.

In many backwater towns Fred Harvey was the only place to shop for ice cream fine cigars, and newspapers from the bigger cities. To visit a Fred Harvey House was to visit all things fine and varied!



Post Card sold by Fred Harvey of a blanket weaver selling her goods at the Grand Canyon Harvey House.

The Demise of the Fred Harvey Empire

Unfortunately, the heir apparent Freddy, the grandson of Fred Harvey, was killed in an airplane accident. This left a squabbling family to manage the fate of the Harvey Houses.

The Harvey Houses did not modify and adapt well to the advent of the automobile era and the modern road system. They did have Harvey Houses in the airports for awhile and many Interstate Oasis or Rest stops were Harvey Houses for awhile.

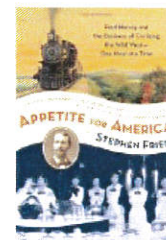
The Grand Canyon was one of the last Harvey House organizations. Did you know that the tourism value of the Grand Canyon was first marketed by the Harvey Houses? The Grand Canyon was first viewed by tourists via the Harvey House Side Trip Business. The Side Trip being from a train and back to the train. Most recently the Harvey House Grand Canyon commercial enterprises were purchased by Xanterra.

Without the meticulous care and strong leadership of one person the Harvey Houses were not viable. Still, the Harvey House and Fred Harvey provide a viable business model for marketing a business today.

In Fini

I wish to thank the Belen Harvey House and the Harvey Houses all over New Mexico for their generous sharing of their memorabilia and the permission to photograph within their museums.

For more information and a lively read I highly recommend the book "Appetite for America" by Stephen Fried. History doesn't get much more interesting than this book!



Appetite for America: Fred Harvey and the Business of Civilizing the Wild West--One Meal at a Time

[Buy Now](#)

More in this Series



CUSTOMER SERVICE & SATISFACTION

Retail Service

What level of retail service are you providing for your customers? Is the level of your retail service consistent with the customer's expectations? Is the