

## Branding Lessons for Three Top Quick Serves

Marketing consultant and QSR columnist Denise Lee Yohn says that when it comes down to the nuts and bolts, brands are about what companies do and how they do it. In Yohn's new e-book, *Extraordinary Experiences: What Great Retail and Restaurant Brands Do*, she considers different companies that illustrate seven core principles. Of the seven, four are restaurants, and of those, three are quick serves: Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Jason's Deli, and Sweetgreen.

"I really think there are a lot of bright spots in our industry. There are so many great role models and case studies within our industry to learn from," Yohn says. "There is a lot of good news in our industry."

*Extraordinary Experiences* is a follow-up to her debut book, *What Great Brands Do*, which first highlighted the seven brand-building principles. Yohn says the e-book serves as a companion piece to the first book as it fleshes out the principles in seven different brands. At about 75 pages, *Extraordinary Experiences* is shorter than its 200-plus-page predecessor, but rich in content and real-world examples. If anything, she says it was hard to pare down the list to only seven case studies.

Popeyes best embodies the principle, "Great brands start inside," Yohn says. In addition to rebranding its name and overhauling its menu, Popeyes also reconfigured the way it did business to develop a strong company culture—something that Yohn largely credits to CEO Cheryl Bachelder. The turnaround was a success because it had as much to do with the way it was executed as the tangible business goals. Instead of making top-down decisions, Popeyes focused on serving franchisees and engaging the franchise community, which in turn cultivated a sense of service in the stores.

Similar in its internal focus, Jason's Deli is the second quick serve profiled in the book. Yohn says the 40-year-old sandwich concept illustrates how "Great brands commit and stay committed."

"I think there's often this temptation or there's short-term sales pressure to imitate the successful practices of others," Yohn says. "Oftentimes what happens is the company loses its focus unintentionally, but what's extraordinary about Jason's Deli is that they have maintained their core values and their focus on their core values." To preserve these founding principles, the brand offers a Core Values Workshop for employees and vendors and free classes through its Leadership Institute.

The final limited-service brand featured in *Extraordinary Experiences* is relative newcomer Sweetgreen. The D.C.-based salad brand demonstrates how "Great brands never have to 'give back.'" While most companies talk about needing to give back, Yohn says that Sweetgreen has designed its business in a way that makes positive, social impact.

"Great brands don't do corporate social responsibility (CSR); they do CSV: creating shared values," Yohn says. "From the beginning, the founders—three students—decided that they needed a concept that would serve good, healthy food, conveniently and quickly in a hip environment. Their whole platform was about passion and purpose."

Yohn adds that like Sweetgreen, the greater fast-casual movement is a response to understanding what customers want; today's consumers seek companies that are doing the right thing.

The remaining four brands are full-service restaurant Buffalo Wild Wings, wholesale retailer Costco, Texas grocery chain HEB, and premium appliance brand Pirch. The principle that Yohn says quick serves struggle with the most is "Great brands don't chase customers," which uses Costco as its case study.

“Particularly for quick serves and smaller companies, they don’t want to say no to any business,” Yohn says. “That’s why we often see discounting as the primary way that quick serves promote themselves. ... Not only does it train everyone to expect low prices, but it also means that you’re bringing in lots of people who may not stay with you, may not really value you as a brand.”

She adds that when trying to appeal to all demographics, brands end up not appealing to anyone. Instead, Yohn advises companies to design the experience, service, and food around a specific consumer.

Whether gleaned insights from fellow foodservice operators or other retailers, brands can benefit from understanding and practicing these seven principles.

“Sometimes it’s easy to emphasize all the things that we’re not doing well,” Yohn says, “But what I think that it shows is there are leaders and there are brands that are committed to doing great things ... I think there is a lot to be learned from the people who are doing it right.”

*Denise Lee Yohn's new e-book, Extraordinary Experiences: What Great Retail and Restaurant Brands Do, will be available on Amazon beginning November 2 and is now available for [pre-order](#).*

*By Nicole Duncan*