

# The Gathering conference in Banff looks at developing cult-like brands

## North American marketing professionals meet

BY MARIO TONEGUZZI, CALGARY HERALD FEBRUARY 20, 2014

Presented By:



Denise Lee Yohn, an author on marketing who was at a conference Thursday in Banff called The Gathering where some of the top marketing minds in North America discussed building cult-like brands.

**Photograph by:** Supplied photo, Calgary Herald

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CALGARY - From Rider Nation to Apple, achieving a cult-like following is what some brands have

successfully managed in North America.

On Thursday, many of those brands, with some of the best marketing minds on the continent, were in Banff for The Gathering business conference and awards gala, which showcased their efforts.

“One of the biggest things about a cult brand is that it focuses more on what it stands for than on what it sells,” said Chris Kneeland, chief executive of Cult Collective, a marketing engagement agency in Calgary, and co-founder of The Gathering. “Non-cult brands are so focused on sales and discounts and bribing the customers to purchase. Good businesses get customers to buy but cult brands get customers to buy in - buy into their cause, buy into their movement, their reason for being and that’s what makes them special.

“That’s where you connect on the emotional level.”

Denise Lee Yohn, author of the book *What Great Brands Do* and a featured speaker at the event, said her research has indicated that the leaders of cult-like brands view their brands very differently from other leaders.

“They don’t see their brand as external messages or images to promote like a logo or a tag line in advertising but they actually perceive their brand as a complete strategic platform that they use as management tool to fuel, align and guide everything they do,” said Yohn who is based in San Diego.

It’s an internal tool for culture, for cooperation and customer experience as much as it a marketing and advertising initiative, she said.

Gregg Sauter, vice-president of marketing and business development with the Saskatchewan Roughriders of the Canadian Football League, was also a featured speaker at the business conference.

“Our brand is synonymous with our fans and that isn’t just by chance. It’s planned over the years,” said Sauter.

“We really sell the Saskatchewan pride and putting our fans at the centre of Rider Nation. We really look at our fans as really being number one in terms of our focus and what we do. We want to be more than just a football team. We have values and we have ways of working those values that go beyond just football. If you look at this conference and the great brands that are here, they are more than just their products. We like to feel that we’re a lot more than a Canadian Football League team and I think we are in the eyes of most of our fans.”

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