

Takeaway: The redemption of wayward brands



By Amanda Long, senior account director, [Hughes Agency](#)

Event: Endeavor's Collaborators & Cocktails monthly professional development series

Where: Endeavor, a coworking community for creatives in the ONE building

Who Was There: 80+ creative industry and corporate marketing professionals

When: September 27th, 2018

Presenter: Ben Nemo, Argonne Capital/Krystal

The fast food wars are brutal. It's easy for brands to lose sight of what matters when panicked for market share. As the person behind the resurrection of many troubled quick serve restaurant (QSR) brands, there is no one better to tell the redemption story of marketing strategies gone awry than Ben Nemo. Here are three that he shared at Endeavor's Collaborators & Cocktails.

Don't try to be something you aren't.

Burger King was owned by a UK spirits company that didn't understand the QSR business when Nemo began to work there in 2002. This was evident with the launch of the Egg'wich and King that were copies of McDonald's sandwiches. Sales dropped significantly after the Savory

Mustard Chicken Baguette launched with Rachel Ray as the spokesperson because Burger King forgot who its super fan was – an 18-25-year-old male who visited fast food restaurants 17 times per month. Nemo added, “What made us iconic from the beginning was the Whopper and the choice to ‘Have it your way.’ Our symbol was fire. We had permission to be dangerous.”

Beyond driving innovation with Chicken Fries and the Angus Steak burger, the secret to Burger King’s success was it drove relevance. They created great ads that got people talking. Remember [Subservient Chicken](#), Man-them, and [Whopper Freak Out](#) when customers learned it was discontinued and lost their minds? Sales increased significantly, resulting in a \$425 million IPO.

Home is where the heart is.

Nemo’s next post was Popeye’s Chicken & Biscuits. Between its positioning of “pieces and prices” and bad advertising, the brand missed the mark to reach who loved them most – families who want to replace meals at home with something that brings them together and fills them up. They got back to basics to define their core customer and what made them special. Popeye’s had the best bone-in chicken and its Louisiana roots gave permission to have fun.

Popeye’s Louisiana Kitchen was born. Its orange logo was unique for the “red” fast food landscape. It also tied back to something important – the chicken. They launched Popeye’s Bonafide Chicken and created Annie, a fun-loving spokeswoman to educate customers about its full-flavored meal.

Popeye’s beat KFC in a national taste test. A move from local to national media dramatically improved share of voice from three to 11. Nemo said, “The key again was driving relevance. Where else could you get slow-cooked flavors associated with food from Louisiana in a format that was built for speed?”

Sales were up 8.6% year-over-year, gaining 2-3% market share from KFC, resulting in Popeye’s sale to a private equity firm.

Make them feel heard.

In 2017, Nemo moved to Krystal, which had suffered several management changes, disastrous product launches and lost relevance. There were so many directions they could go. Should they focus on Krystal’s humble beginnings? Or go a completely different direction?

Nemo led Krystal through the same process. While diverse, what its customers had in common was no matter where they lived, they knew the brand, were price-sensitive, 30-40 years old, and felt stressed and disconnected. Krystal’s difference was the size and square shape of their burgers and the toppings that Nemo dubbed “a slap in the face.”

When Krystal was founded in the Depression, it was a place where everyone was treated with respect, creating humble roots and a purpose to uplift others. Today, their brand celebrates

their customers' stories. "Our rally cry, 'Live a Little' is the antidote to a life that can feel stressed and disconnected through the energy and connection you can get from our 'little' food."

Their digital strategy engaged consumers in playful conversations. The offer was clear in ads. They gave a nod to their Southern heritage with new products like Lemonhead slushies and fried pimento cheese bites. They spoke to their customers. While Nemo said the plan is far from completion, he is thrilled with sales up 400% to-date.

The common thread among their failures is in their attempts to maintain relevance, they lost track of what makes their brands unique and who loves them most. But each brand won back the hearts and dollars of those lost by first building trust with their internal and agency teams, then with the frontline - the franchisees. Each brand learned exactly who the core customer is, stayed true to themselves and built strategies to be relevant once again.

[Endeavor](#), a creative, collaborative coworking community, presents a professional development speaker series called Collaborators & Cocktails, where marketing chiefs from brands like Southwest Airlines, Ritz Carlton and Nike share their marketing strategies.