



What happened to “Riding for the Brand?”

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Do we still ride for the brand? What does that even mean? Does loyalty mean something different than it did years ago?

I grew up on a small quarter horse ranch in the Pacific Northwest. We raised horses for the cattle ranches. Branding means something very different there than it might in Chicago, New York or L.A. Branding was a method of marking and securing livestock to a specific owner or enterprise. Yes, it was a glowing red-hot iron that branded/burnt the mark of the owner into an animal hide. However, I'd suggest that the branding wasn't just burnt into the animal, it was marked into the fabric of those doing it.

A line in the poem by Red Steagall sums it perfectly...“Son, a man's(woman's) brand is his(her) own special mark that says this is mine, leave it alone. You hire out to a man(woman), ride for his(her) brand and protect it like it was your own.”

Riding for the brand; when a cowboy/girl signed on with an outfit (ranch, farm etc.) it meant taking ownership in that brand's success. A cowboy/girl would put everything they could into a day's work to further that brand's interests. At times in those days' one's life may be put on the line to carry out that brand loyalty. Is this kind of loyalty dead?

Of course, branding in the western sense is still going on, but branding in the market place sense means something completely different at its core. Branding is still about a visual mark to distinguish it from other products or cattle. However, it is now immensely important to marketing and recognition for business, not just merely ownership.

When a company seeks to brand itself, it must do so with their values, product and how they want people to feel about it when they interact with it. They must pursue a process that includes research into their audience, value proposition and competition. It must have a logo to communicate the face of the brand and give visual recognition. It cannot simply be a mark of ownership anymore.

Do we still ride for the brand?

According to a January 2018 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics the average person changes jobs 10-15 times during his or her career. These same workers are spending five years or less in every job. I wonder how much time is spent transitioning. As generational gaps get smaller; is the manner in which we look at loyalty changing as quickly.

It's my opinion that brand loyalty along with every other component in life is evolving and loyalty is still defined as “the quality of being loyal” or “a strong feeling of support or allegiance”, but perhaps the length of time that loyalty is preserved has changed.

How should we approach brand loyalty now-a-days? Should we be concerned/offended when someone leaves the brand in short order? Is it even fair to suggest loyalty should be applied to a brand?

Perhaps the only true loyalty is that from one human being to another?



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