

BRAND vs RESTAURANT

UNDERSTANDING
WHY ONE AUSTIN-BASED TACO SHOP WILL HAVE
180+ LOCATIONS IN 17 STATES BY 2024
(AND WAS RECOGNIZED ON JEOPARDY)

IF I'M DOWN AUSTIN
WAY, I SAY GOODBYE
TO MY CHIPS AFTER
DUNKING THEM IN
THIS CHEESY DIP,
LIKE THE ONE
AT TORCHY'S

- RICHARD SYLVESTER -



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BRAND vs Restaurant

Making the Intentional Choice to Grow

This is the story of my two moves to Austin TX, and how I fell in love with two different taco shops. That's where the similarities end. One restaurant remained just that - one restaurant, the future of which could follow other historic Austin landmarks like Threadgills, Mars, Shady Grove, Hut's Hamburgers, Cafe Josie, and most recently Restaurant Sway. All sadly closed, most before COVID even hit. The other has plans to double in size by 2024, realizing roughly 180 locations in 17 states. Why such different paths?...

In 1998, upon arriving in the great state of Texas, and going to work for GSD&M, a nationally-recognized ad agency located on renowned Sixth Street in downtown Austin, I quickly discovered Maria's Taco Xpress on S. Lamar Blvd. Founded by Maria Corbalan a little earlier, this eclectic spot quickly became a destination for taco enthusiasts all over Austin, and SXSW visitors from around the world. With a line out the door and no parking to be found every weekend and many weekdays, its popularity soared. Soon, Taco Xpress was featured on Rachael Ray's *\$40 A Day*, as well as Guy Fieri's *Diners, Drive-ins and Dives*.

Confession #1: it was my destination for Saturday morning recovery after fun-filled Friday nights and right before hitting Lake Austin to wakeboard. The Tacos Al Pastor, Picadillo and famous Chimichurri salsa were always "the perfect cure." Maria also did her part to keep Austin weird offering "hippie church" and "big boobie bingo." And, her patio was the perfect setting when temps dipped below 95 degrees and live music was playing.

I loved Taco Xpress!

Fast forward nine years to 2007, when I boomeranged back from an 18-month stint working with O'Charleys Restaurants in Nashville. Returning to work at another downtown Austin ad agency, I was quickly introduced to a taco truck located in a gravel parking lot on S. 1st St. Just south of Lady Bird Lake and coincidentally on my way home each evening, Torchy's Tacos became my pitstop for a dinnertime appetizer of their world-famous chips and green chili queso...and sometimes a Dirty Sanchez taco.

Confession #2: My family never knew about this. We'll keep it a secret, right?



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INNOVATION

The food that came out of this truck was gourmet! It's founder, Mike Rypka, with a culinary background in upscale hotel restaurants, tested new flavors and fused many together to innovate and deliver never-experienced-before tacos that left customers echoing time and again, "Those are some damn good tacos!" Thus the motto was born: "Damn Good Tacos"

Rypka's commitment to innovation continues to this day with the rollout of Torchy's "Taco Of The Month" every month. Per Rypka, "February's Low Rider is a turn on, packing big flavors, with savory, grilled beef and sauteed cremini mushrooms, the spicy punch of horseradish and Diablo Sauce, and aged Manchego. We think it's a taco to remember and a great way to kick off the month of love!" No one knows what will hit next month, but all Torchy's fans, and foodies in general, wait with great anticipation.

The names for these tacos are just as anticipated as the flavor profiles, with the best received of these sometimes finding a place on the full-time menu. All tacos use fresh, often locally-sourced ingredients, evident in every bite. Innovating further during COVID margarita kits were made available for purchase, to accompany carryout "family packs" of tacos + chips & queso - completing the perfect trifecta! And, to be sure you can order quickly and easily, without having to stand in their lines out the door, Torchy's has offered online ordering for a few years now.



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MARKETING

Complementing the never-ending pursuit of innovation and understanding the importance of being much more than a restaurant, Torchy's intentionally launched its marketing efforts early on. Key brand architecture elements were developed and are proudly featured today, for all to see...

Brand Mission
Brand Icon
Brand Story
Brand Personality
Core Values + Culture
Shared Values + Community

Each of these elements is well thought, prominently displayed on the company's website, and undoubtedly integrated into their new employee training and on-boarding process. A consistent and focused brand message is being conveyed internally to every team member, and by many team members to the customers they get to embrace. Torchy's community of "raving fans" and "brand evangelists" grows as they expand their footprint and share "the gospel of Torchy".



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Why is all this important? Customer Experience

With 14 locations in the greater-Austin market, Rypka and team have met their “moral obligation” to be sure that as many locals as possible get the chance to enjoy Torchy’s amazing queso and tacos, as often as they want. And, without suffering the worsening Austin traffic scene. Like many, I can now go to “my Torchy’s.” Though embarrassingly recognized as “Tochy’s Suburbia” on their website, they serve the same queso, the same Green Chili Pork taco and the same Trailer Park taco...”trashy” if I want it topped with that other-worldly queso (Yes, I have a problem.)

The key difference between these two favorite taco shops of mine is in the owners. Mike Rypka made the intentional choice to grow. Ever since making that choice, he and his team have delivered in spades on the innovation and marketing that serve as prerequisite growth catalysts to any brick-n-mortar retail business.

Product and service innovations rolled out consistently, combined with marketing centered on one brand, one voice and a personality that is fun, mischievous and exciting, has made Torchy’s Tacos the new darling in the restaurant industry and will carry it far.

The only question left – how far?



Torchy’s shoutout in Time Square

A lifelong brand enthusiast, Richard Sylvester embraces the principles of sales and marketing daily. Equipped with a Business degree in Marketing and 25+ years growing Fortune 100 and independent brands alike, his mission is to equip restaurant owners and their teams with the mindset, skillset, and toolset to build their own brand – much more than a simple restaurant - pivoting and recovering from COVID faster than their competition to grow a stronger team, connection with their brand community, increase the number of restaurants and expand their footprint into new neighborhoods, cities and states. Learn more at www.FullHouseBrand.com

