

# ¡MUCHA LUCHA! BUILDING A BRAND

**Jason D Reese, Stephen F Austin State University**  
**Marlene C Kahla, Stephen F Austin State University**  
**Robert M Crocker, Stephen F Austin State University**

## CASE DESCRIPTION

*This case takes advantage of the culinary genius and entrepreneurial spirit of Chef Victor and parleys his creations into the challenge of building a brand image that will create distinctiveness in a highly competitive homogenous market. Mucha Lucha represents the aspects of Mexican culture that includes masks and wrestling – signature moves. The literal translation is “a lot of fight,” referring to the famed Mexican wrestling, lucha libre. For the restaurant in the case, it presents a unique slice of Mexican culture that few, if any, traditional restaurants use. This includes the reference of lucha libre wrestling artefacts on the restaurant walls and within the themes of the restaurant.*

*The case has a difficulty level that will challenge senior-level marketing students or graduate students, to develop a strategic marketing plan that will unite and identify the various business units. The case may serve as an individual or team project. Independent research is highly recommended and a minimum of two weeks is recommended prep time for students to develop and refine their ideas.*

## CASE SYNOPSIS

*The case begins with Chef Victor Oliveira unveiling his ideas for his latest concept, El Carnes al Mesquite Restaurant. As he shares his ideas about the restaurant, he also reveals his ultimate goal, to unite all of their ventures under one brand.*

*His brother and sister are his business partners and their shared memories of gathering in their grandmother’s kitchen bind them and motivate them to providing great dining experiences. The traditions of his family, the recipes they recreate and their heritage are forces that they hope to include when building the brand.*

*They know that Carnes al Mesquite will be the new kid on a block that is already crowded with thousands of competitors. They know they must get the customer’s attention, dazzle them with the dining experience, get them to tell others and get them to come back.*

*As a graduate of the prestigious Institute of Culinary Excellence in Boston, Chef Victor knows how to run his kitchen and to create fantastic cuisine for his guests. Now he wants to expand and solidify his brand and to capitalize on his early success. At the same time, Chef Victor needs to manage and prepare his service staffs, who are sometimes overwhelmed with life outside of work, for interactions with patrons, who are sometimes upset about service failures.*

## INTRODUCTION

San Antonio is home to 9,429 Mexican food restaurants (<http://www.chowhound.com>). Once the restaurants are sorted to exclude franchises such as Taco Bell and Chipotle, the number becomes 907 (<http://www.chowhound.com>). This makes San Antonio, Texas the location for the highest number of Mexican food restaurants than any other city in the nation.

Current trends in restaurant dining experiences for 2017 include more affordable, more intimate and more collaborative dining experiences that may actually help entrepreneurs such as Victor Oliveira compete effectively in a very large marketplace. Toss in some sensory perceptions to the casual dining experiences such things as wood-fire burning and the scene is set for restaurants such as Carnes al Mesquite to succeed. And when dining out is not an option, a host of new distribution systems have arrived in the form of technology companies such as Google, uberEats, Amazon Prim Now, Grub Hub and Yelp, all trying to become part of the restaurant food chain (<http://www.baumwhiteman.com>).

Chef Victor's creations are rooted deeply in northern and central Mexican culture. Each of his restaurants has unique characteristics that tell the story of his family and heritage. One of his restaurants, Comida de la Calle, is a dining concept of authentic street cuisine. In addition, Tazón de Frutas is a representation of his experience with colourful fruit stands in northern and central Mexico as a youth. In addition to his restaurant concepts, Chef Victor has a unique catering business, Especialista Deleite. His newest distinct dining experience is that of El Carnes al Mesquite Restaurant. However, his challenge is to weave this newest dining concept into his family of brands. He needs to do this in a way that unties his restaurants and sets his dining experiences apart from all the others.

### **Brand Attributes & Authenticity**

"Thanks for coming!" the famous Chef Victor greeted his brother Jaime and sister Rosa. "It's time to run some ideas by you. We need to brainstorm how we can make a new concept on an old method of grilling profitable. We have been through much as a family, your opinions mean much to me."

"Thanks Victor, you have great ideas too, so let's hear them," says Jaime with a bit of humour.

Wasting no time, Victor begins to tell them about his newest dining concept by asking, "What do you guys think of mesquite grilled meat?"

Jaime retorts, "I love it! Hey, a two inch thick ribeye and a beer are all I need to be happy!"

They all chime in with their favourite mesquite grilled meats that include everything from el cabrito to Porter House to gulf red snapper. They like their brother's idea!

"Good, because I would like to incorporate the use of the mesquite grill we saw in Guadalajara as a centre point for the new restaurant. The grill can be made by a manufacturer in Guadalajara and shipped here to San Antonio via rail car. And, when I pay for it, several of you will need to work for free!" exclaimed Victor as he could not resist teasing them just a little.

"With the special grill we could prepare a variety of meats on the same surface--cook seafood on one side of the grill where the meat is closer to the fire and sirloin steaks on the other, where the cooking surface is further away from the fire," Victor instructed.

"We can grill an entire slab of pork ribs on one side and an entire goat further down. I have used this type of grill before. I love using it to grill meat. Carne delicioso!" shouts Victor.

Rosa, thinking like the Marketing Director for the businesses, asks, "What do you want the new idea to represent? So, you are grilling meat over mesquite. What is the unique selling point?"

"Think about it Rosa, it's a really big grill—it is nearly the size of an entrance foyer in any of the other restaurants. Yes, I realize that we need something more than just saying, 'come

eat here,' we have a really big grill," Victor pauses. "I want our brand to represent the uniqueness of our Mexican heritage and to show the 'fun' side of Mexico."

"¡Mucha Lucha! Free wrestling! That can be the theme to the new restaurant! I want something macho for this place. The walls can be decorated with masks; the logo for the restaurant will be a mask. No other Mexican food restaurant in San Antonio uses the masks of Lucha libre. We will!" he exclaims.

"That's perfect. It emphasizes the Mexican heritage that we have in all of our restaurants and the catering business, while also showing the 'fun' side of Mexico. We just have to make sure it is done with class and fits the atmosphere we want to create." Jaime comments.

Victor adds, "That atmosphere can be professional and 'fun' at the same time. It's not going to be your traditional 'fine dining' concept."

"You have this huge grill and masks, now what else?" Jaime queries.

Victor's eyes narrow and his voice lowers then he says calmly, "Our most difficult task will be to create an image that establishes our unique identity, transcends Carnes al Mesquite and binds all of our ventures into one recognizable brand."

### **Servicescape & Brand Identity**

The framework for understanding servicescape effects on behaviour of customers bases from basic stimulus-organism-response theory (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996). In a multidimensional environment is the *stimulus*, consumers and employees are the *organisms* that respond to the stimuli and behaviours directed at the environment are the *responses*. Customers and employees will behave in certain ways depending on their internal reactions to the servicescape. Physical evidence in a service setting, servicescape, can have a profound effect on the customer experience. For example, Ellen & Zhang (2014) found servicescape diner's perceptions significantly influence their emotions and behaviours. In addition, Chua et al. (2010) suggest that the servicescape is one of the most important elements that food service providers should focus on, as failures in this area directly impacts satisfaction and repatronage of diners.

Therefore, a huge grill that adds to the visual and olfactory senses and masks that stimulate the customers' imagination as to what real Mexico entertainment is like, combine to enhance and direct customers' experiences at Carnes al Mesquite.

"The grill!" exclaims Rosa.

"What about it?" says Jaime.

Rosa explains, "That's our unique selling proposition! That's what makes us unique. If we can work it out so that the grill is shown to the guests as they enter or eat in the building, it will really make a difference in the atmosphere."

Chef Victor jumps into the conversation. "That's a perfect location for the grill!" he says.

"I have a concern with the grill" states Jaime. "If we put the grill out in the open, what do we do about the heat? And the smoke? I don't think people really want to eat somewhere that is hot and smoky."

Victor jokingly responds "Don't worry Jaime. They make vents for that!" After a few sibling jabs at one another, Victor continues, "In all seriousness, those are good questions. I would suggest we do invest in a vent that will blow smoke out of the grill area. This will not prevent the smoky smell from entering the eating area completely though."

"That's actually a good idea I think" interjects Rosa. "The smell of burning mesquite wood will add to the atmosphere of the restaurant. It reminds people of the authentic nature of

the food, she concludes. “We do need to add a clear shield between the grill and the guests, for health purposes. Putting this in will also help control the heat, along with the vent,” Rosa adds.

Shifting the conversation away from the grill, Rosa begins a dialog about the décor. “To take it even further, how about we work with our contacts in Mexico to ship in art and décor items from these regions of Mexico? We could bring in these to complement your idea of the Lucha Libre masks.”

“What about the colour?” asks Victor.

Jaime jumps into the conversation, “It should be the culture driven concept--the colours should enhance the masks on the walls. I don’t necessarily mean we should have a different colour on each wall, but the colour scheme should be the bright colours of the northern and central Mexico.”

Rosa responds “That’s a good idea Jaime!

Victor asks, “Rosa, Jaime, what are your thoughts on the entrance to the restaurant?”

“It needs to be welcoming—as if through those doors pass the world’s greatest people, our customers,” Rosa replies and Jaime agrees.

“Then, we need a relaxed and rustic environment. We will serve the food in a family dining, simple, yet elegant, setting,” Victor concludes.

## **In the Shadows**

Once they opened their doors, the restaurant took off! He now has four distinct food businesses running well. In the shadows of all the great things Chef Victor and his siblings do to create a unique dining experience for people, lurks a major stumbling block in the road to success—each organization is its own, separate strategic business unit (SBU) and lacks the identifying brand equity that is Chef Victor’s dream. He wants people to know the restaurants as a family of restaurants that offer fun experiences in authentic, Mexican culture.

## **Cold Greetings and Warm Food**

The impact of the physical surrounding on employees is as important as its impact on the customer. Lin and Mattila (2010) found that the encounters employees have with the customer as well as the servicescape impacted their satisfaction with their job and the pleasure they get from their job. Take a look at the experience the employee Gene had during his workday at Carne al Mesquite.

As the fragrance of some of the best meats in the nation cooking on the grill wafted throughout the restaurant, only one person, Gene, from the wait staff attended to several tables of patrons that have stopped in for a late Saturday lunch.

He and his wife moved to San Antonio last year after he was accepted into the law program at Saint Mary’s University. While he attempts to complete his law degree at Saint Mary’s, his wife, Anna, an accounting major, works part-time in a local accounting firm.

Gene decided to work part-time at Carnes al Mesquite to help him pay off some of the student loans he acquired earning his bachelor’s degree. Law school is expensive, too, and Anna’s salary was just not enough to keep him in school.

Most days at Carnes al Mesquite are pleasant, predictable. Saturday afternoons meant that many of the patrons were ready to relax and enjoy Mexican comfort food and drinks before getting ready for their nights out at many of the other San Antonio clubs.

This afternoon, though, was anything but predictable. He had been working on a case for a particular presentation at school. None of his team members were helpful – they left him to complete the brief for the case.

Chef Victor had called a meeting of all the wait staff, servers and runners to begin teaching them about the culture of Carne al Mesquite. Why should Gene care about Victor's culture? The entire meeting was boring.

Gene had intended to work only the evening shift, but when another wait staff person asked him to cover his shift, too, he accepted. He needed the money.

There seemed to be absolutely no time to work on the case brief for school – it was due Monday morning. He already starting to tire at the restaurant, the other two wait staff people were taking one of their many breaks. From Gene's perspective, he was the only one that tried to serve the customers well.

One of the assistant chefs failed to show up for the afternoon shift. Chef Victor was hurrying everyone working to complete the orders, but it seemed to be taking forever to have everything plated.

As a water boy tried to help Gene, his tray tipped and several glasses crashed to the floor. Of course, one of the full water glasses spilled down a patron's back. This particular patron had already inquired how much longer their food was going to be. Add the cold water treatment to his simmering mood and it was a recipe for a horrible review.

"What do you think you are doing?!" shouted the surly diner.

"What do you think you are doing?" Gene quickly responded as he stepped in to help the water boy.

"I've been waiting here for more than forty-five minutes for my food. My drink just came out and it was too weak to be good!" continued the diner.

"Leave, then," continued Gene in a firm voice, "Just leave."

## REFERENCES

- Chua, B.L., Othman, M., Boo, H.C., Abkarim, M.S. & Ramachandran S. (2010). Servicescape failure and recovery strategy in the food service industry: The effect on customer repatronization. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 11, 179-198.
- Ellen, T. & Zhang R. (2014). Measuring the effect of company restaurant servicescape on patrons' emotional states and behavioural intentions. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 17(2), 85-102.
- Lin, I.Y. & Mattila, A.S. (2010). Restaurant servicescape, service encounter and perceived congruency on customers' emotions and satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 19, 819-841.
- Zeithaml, V.A., Berry L.L. & Parasuraman A. (1996). The behavioural consequences of service quality. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(2), 31-46.