



# Rebranding UM Dining at The University of Montana

BY CHRISTINA VOYLES

## THE FOOD COURT UM DINING

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It is safe to say that most 20-year-olds are hip, “in the know,” and a driving force in today’s trends.

Well, at UM Dining, we weren’t — or at least we didn’t — look like we were. Our logos were also only 20, but they were tired, dated, and we were told by our Millennial counterparts on campus that we looked “Stuck in the ’90s!”

If we looked stuck in the ’90s, surely our customers would wrongly assume the rest of what we did was, too. While that stung, what hurt more was realizing our dated look was inhibiting our ability to communicate our messages about great food, innovative programs and all the great things we do on campus and for the local community.

UM Dining has an outstanding reputation for its food, but unfortunately it didn’t have a great “brand.” In fact, one UM student who dined with us daily cut to the core with brutal honesty: “Your brand doesn’t really exist.” The student was right. We had long been battling the confusion that our customers had over which dining venues on campus belonged to us (all except one), whether or not our nationally recognized UM Farm to College Program was actually



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cooking, and healthful, nutritional meals. We needed a look that told the story of the culinary professionals we employ and, especially, of our talented chefs — one would not typically find Molecular Gastronomy on a college campus in Montana. We needed logos that reestablished the reputation we had for our food, menus and programming, and to portray our ability to follow the culinary trends that our 20-somethings are craving. We also wanted to ensure that everyone knew who we are, and why what we do is so important to overall campus life.

The process of designing logos began in September 2012. We wanted the campus to be involved, and took initial designs to students, faculty and staff, and received feedback from focus groups, intercept surveys and valuable anonymous commentary. We shifted direction based on that feedback, and gathered more until we had a good sense of what our logos should be. It became clear that people gravitated toward vibrant colors and a clean, bold and more modern look. We finished with several new logos known as a “family series,” where all logos have a similar look, font and feel, and clearly belong together while still being able to stand alone.

Our re-branding process also included other elements: new uniforms for our staff, and making changes to our meal plans to provide the greater flexibility that students had been asking for.

While we’re finished with many initial rebranding projects, it is still an ongoing process with more to come. The next big projects will involve major renovations to our dining venues. We will continue to promote our Farm to College Program and other innovative projects that we embark upon, such as our campus garden and our four aquaponics systems that produce micro-greens daily for the main dining hall. Our culinary staff work to stay on target with culinary trends and, of course, we continually communicate with students via social media.

Rebranding is neither a small project nor an easy process, but it’s been an interesting and exciting endeavor! —OCH

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ours (it is!), and what we brought to the University of Montana at large.

We know that providing excellent food and lively “entertainment” dining experiences makes students happy and more loyal, and we also know that we contribute to their success at UM. Numerous studies on Student Retention Theory support the importance of campus dining in student life, touting benefits such as better health, higher grades, more social integration and increased enrollment and retention. We are well aware of these benefits, so it was important to ensure the campus community understands this too, which a rebranding effort would help with.

As unfair as it might be, customers do judge a book by its cover, and our “book” was a mix of logos that didn’t work alone or together, and presented like clip-art. Our main logo, with its visual wittiness of fork, knife and spoon, made to look like a grizzly bear claw swipe (Go Griz!), was completely lost on the world. So we were in dire need of a visual messaging that spoke of our ability to provide current trends in food and



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