

The Trusted Choice® Brand: Part I

Trusted Choice® is the brand of members of the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America. Over the course of a few newsletters we will explore how the Trusted Choice brand came to be, what it means and how it helps member agencies. This installment covers the concept of brand at the highest level, and how the Trusted Choice brand came to be.

Trusted Choice® is the brand of members of the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America (IIABA or Big I). What does that mean, and why should member agencies care?

The concept of brand can be confusing. The silhouette of an apple missing a bite and the ring containing a three-pointed star both represent brands. But the logos themselves are not the brand.

A brand goes far beyond the color palette, typeface and visual logo. Simply stated, brand is what your customers think it is. Not what we think it represents.

A company's brand is **what the customer believes**.

If you are looking for a cup of coffee in an unfamiliar part of town or while traveling, there might be any number of coffee shops. Odds are however, that you'll open the door to a Starbucks.

If so, it isn't because their coffee is superior to all of the other options. It is that their reputation for a good cup of coffee, a clean shop, and knowledgeable staff makes it an easy choice.

The brand tells you that you can get a good cup of coffee, and a number of food items, all made with care. The staff will be attentive and your order will be delivered quickly and with care. That is the promise of Starbucks: good service and tasty coffee.

The Trusted Choice® Origin Story

A dozen years ago, the IIBA commissioned a study to determine what the insurance buying public thought of insurance agents. The results of the study pointed out some issues for the association and their members to address.

The public didn't understand the concept of agent or agency as we use it, and confused the term with other types of agents like the secret kind. They also were suspicious of the term 'independent' and some thought that it meant that the agent was representing their own interests more than those of the insured.

The final conclusion of the report was that the average insurance consumer didn't understand the differences between a captive agent and an independent agent.

One of the big captive agency companies is playing off this understanding with a series of TV commercials involving a famous athlete, his sports agent, and his captive insurance agent. You may have seen these spots recently.

WE may think that calling ourselves independent agents provides a distinction that consumers understand. Unfortunately, too many don't, and that is why the Big I decided that a new brand would help.

Trusted Choice®: A brand that resonates

The branding consultants proposed that the association create the Trusted Choice® brand, which could be used by members to distinguish themselves from other insurance agents, whether captive or non-association members. Our National Directors agreed.

What does 'Trusted Choice' mean?

Google offers up these definitions, which provide some clarity.

- Trust: Belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of.

Trusted can refer to either the agent and agency, or the carrier that is writing the policy.

- Choice: A range of possibilities from which one or more may be selected.

Choice also can refer to both the agent, since the insurance shopper is making a decision about which agency to work with, and the carrier that the agent selects on behalf of the client.

If that is what we want the consumer to believe that our brand stands for, how do we make that happen?

In the next portion of this series, we'll explore the brand promise of Trusted Choice.

Brand Promise

In order for a brand to successfully differentiate the business it must have a number of qualities. One of the most important of these is a brand promise that is delivered without fail.

A brand promise is an extension of the brand itself, and it distinguishes what makes the brand tangible and distinguishable from other competitive offers. But to be effective, it can't be an untruth or inconsistently delivered.

If each Starbucks offered a different menu, and the customer service of each shop was highly variable and they were often dirty, chances are that they wouldn't be the first choice. The reason they are is because they consistently deliver on their brand promise of an excellent customer experience.

One of the powerful attributes of the Trusted Choice brand is that one of the key brand promises of members of the IIABA is stated clearly in the brand itself. We are the Trusted Choice. But what does that mean, and how does a member make that brand promise real to their customers?

The IIABA has provided a very useful tool to explain to a consumer why a Trusted Choice agency is the best option, the [Trusted Choice Pledge of Performance](#).

The pledge offers some concrete guidelines to agency personnel on how they can deliver on the brand promise every day to customers and prospects.

Some key points of the Pledge includes Trusted Choice agents commitment to their customers include:

- Identifying appropriate insurance products and companies
- Thoroughly explaining coverages and options
- Developing staff expertise to provide the best advice and counsel

Each of these points makes the promise of a Trusted Choice real to insurance consumers, and helps differentiate all members of the IIABA.

As insurance offerings morph, and new competitors try to muscle in to the industry, it is vital that we continue to differentiate why Trusted Choice agents are the best option. When member agents deliver on the

brand promise, we make the brand real to consumers and we gain new advocates who spread our message.