

The Art of Branding

By Rick Weinberg, *California Business Journal*



Cheryl Savala, President and Executive Creative Director of Menagerie Creative in Orange County, Calif., is the face behind the most recognizable home entertainment campaigns in movie history.

Next time you pick up a set of videos from *Star Wars*, *Titanic*, *The Sound of Music* or hundreds of other classic movies from the last 100 years, pause for a moment and think about Cheryl Savala. That's because she helped translate the iconic moments and epic imagery for those legendary films into art that movie lovers can hang on their walls and hold in their hands – and their hearts – forever.

Who can ever forget Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet in *Titanic*, the epic battles in *Star Wars*, and Julie Andrews gracefully singing through the Austrian hills in *The Sound of Music*. It was Savala, President and Executive Creative Director at Menagerie Creative in Orange County, Calif., who translated those mythical moments into VHS, DVD and Blu-Ray packaging and brought the theater experience home.

“It was rewarding to see the hard work my team created for studios like Twentieth Century Fox, MGM and LionsGate everywhere,” she says. “To see our heart, soul, blood, sweat and tears lining the shelves and plastered on billboards is an experience like no other.”

However, when the marketing of films became more commoditized and packaging design shifted from specialty box sets to \$5 bundle packs, Savala realized her studio's art was preparing for “a different stage.”

So she boldly walked away from more than 20 years serving the entertainment community and did what all business owners must: she trusted her gut and took a giant leap of faith. In 2013, Savala rebranded her firm and refocused her unique talent and educational experience to directly help the artist behind the story.

“As a creativity advocate and marketing educator, my goal when working with clients and students, is never to tell anyone exactly what to do,” she says. “I’m also not the type of consultant who simply delivers the ‘soup du jour.’ I ask challenging questions and deliver meaningful creative that helps entrepreneurs feel empowered. This is the magic behind building a memorable brand and deeper relationships with customers. I want to help them see their dreams come true.”

“Cheryl is a visionary who is extremely intuitive,” says one of Savala’s clients, Marissa DiMaggio of Star Fisheries in San Pedro, Calif. “She helps people see the big picture of their business and brand. She did wonders for us. Without Cheryl, we would definitely not be where we are today in terms of branding and in our messaging.”

Most small businesses have employees who graciously help in many areas of day-to-day operation – administration and sales, for instance – but these companies rarely have a marketing expert on staff to build an enticing website with relevant content, a designer to create vibrant signage and point of purchase material or a conceptual artist to develop packaging concepts for a new product. These small business owners want to compete head to head with the big boys, the Starbucks and Corner Bakeries of the world, but they don’t have



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the financial prowess to hire the big agencies, so they do the work themselves and often struggle through it. “These are the people I love to partner with.” Savala says. “They CAN do much of it themselves – with a little guidance, assurance and experience from an array of specialists they can compete with the heavy hitters.”

DiMaggio and other top clients of Menagerie Creative consider Savala their “on-call marketing coach

AND personal branding artist.”

These days, there’s nothing Savala loves more than the process of getting to know her clients and their business, and leading them to discover the art of branding and marketing.

“No one in this space understands the visual language of design like Cheryl,” according to Eddie Alba, the owner of Century Dancesport in Orange County. “She’s a very special individual.”



Sherry Tomasula, whose daughter Lauren is a dressage athlete vying for a spot in the 2016 Olympics, says, “With Cheryl, nothing is cookie cutter. She really goes out of her way to capture the essence of the person she is working with to develop the best brand that it represents not only business-wise but with the individual’s personal style and belief system in mind. She’s just excellent at capturing all of that.”

Moreover, when you first meet Savala, “it’s like she instantly becomes a great friend,” Tomasula says. “That’s the kind of person she is. I’ve never really met anyone like her in my whole business career. She takes the time to get to know you, your needs and your goals. She’s very genuine and has your best interests at heart. She’s an amazing lady who is very giving and talented.”

That comes, in part, from understanding the needs of small business owners first-hand. “I am an entrepreneur myself,” Savala says. “I know first hand the challenges and unique opportunities that come with branding and marketing a business. I’m in this for good and thrive on working with those who are too.”

Alba and Tomasula consider Savala their “marketing coach who helps us through every piece of visual and verbal language to help us better brand our business.”

Savala, who has also spent 25 years teaching Graphic Design and Professional Practices in the Arts at California State University, Fullerton, is in a special place today in her career.

“What gives me the greatest joy” she says “is when an artist or entrepreneur I’m working with has that inevitable ‘a-ha’ moment. It’s a very different experience for each person. It’s also the turning point in their business. *That’s empowering!*”

Cheryl Savala
President/Executive Creative Director



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