

Of the **MOMENT**

Why the legacy of family business in pop culture matters

A few months ago, I was reading a book called *Pineapple Street*. Nothing notable about the book except midway through, there was a reference to Russ & Daughters, a fourth-generation family business located in New York City. The company is well-known to locals for its bagels, babka and caviar. It's familiar to me because Niki Russ-Federman co-owns the shop with her cousin. She's been featured in the pages of this magazine. And here, in a book, Russ & Daughters shows up while I'm swinging in a hammock.

This happens all the time. Family business brands, leaders, stories showing up in pop culture — fiction and non-fiction. It's hard to miss when you're in the business of writing about family business, but it always gives me butterflies (the discovery so exciting, I foist myself on the nearest person to say: "Hey, I know that company! It's a family business.")

Maybe it's frequency illusion (also called Baader-Meinhof phenomenon) in which a person has "a tendency to notice something more often after noticing it for the first time." This leads to perception of increased frequency of occurrence.

But I don't think so.

There is something about family businesses — a perfect story arc, conflict and set of archetypal characters — that inspires not only literary references and serialized storytelling, but fan clubs, lurkers, bloggers and memes.

Lisa Daniel, education chair for the Joseph Lodge Family Council (Lodge Cast Iron), says the Lodge brand appears in pop culture on occasion. "When we see Lodge out in the wild or referenced somewhere, we call it 'Lodge spotting'" (I get that because I read a book way before familiarizing myself with family business topics. This book, whose title I can't remember, gave a powerful description of a woman using a Lodge skillet to thwap her husband upside the head. The question at the end of the scene? A classic: "Can I use soap on this skillet?")

Pop culture is an important marker for our society. It captures collective moments of history, the moments when we become engaged in a topic, a person, a narrative or a story. Like the graffiti on the walls at Pompeii, pop culture tells a story of a cultural *moment*. Whether it's the legacy of the Medici family and their banking empire (and the cascading cultural legacy of art and architecture left in their wake) or the deeply generational story of wine families or the proverbial pop culture question of "Who shot JR?," family business and pop culture are intrinsically linked.

But why? Family businesses often preserve and promote cultural heritage through their products, services or traditions. This can lead to the popularization of cultural elements and traditional practices in mainstream pop culture.

Part of it is attributable to family business success stories. The lifestyle associated with some successful family businesses can become aspirational for the broader public, leading to the adoption of certain products, behaviors, or values portrayed by these families. Kardashians, anyone? *Please, no.*

Legacy and legacy building are a driving force behind the lore of family business. When placed together, the topics of legacy and pop culture are so unique to this industry, we dedicated this issue to both. Our cover story digs deeply into family references in pop culture and why enduring brands figure so prominently. Our legacy features look at why your legacy matters and its impact on your family, community and culture.

Turns out that your families' stories serve as a muse and a marker for our cultural history. That's pretty damn significant. **FB**



AMY C. COSPER

amy.cospers@familybusinessmagazine.com

**LIKE THE
GRAFFITI ON
THE WALLS
AT POMPEII,
POP CULTURE
TELLS A STORY
OF A CULTURAL
MOMENT.**