

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS



A NEW TWIST
ON AN OLD FOOD:
JANICE GABLE BASHMAN
REPORTS ON HOW
EXTREME PITA
MADE PITA BREAD A
SUCCESSFUL,
FRESH NEW CONCEPT.

ALTHOUGH THE HISTORY OF PITA BREAD IS UNCLEAR, it can be traced back over 2000 years to ancient Greece, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Today, this round, flat bread is a staple throughout the world and also the driving force behind the Extreme Pita organization.

Fans of Mediterranean restaurants that served pita bread, Alex and Mark Rechichi developed an affinity for one restaurant in particular that had pita sandwiches on its menu. “We started to investigate the entire sandwich category, and 12 years ago an article in ‘Entrepreneur Magazine’ made me realize how big this category was,” says Alex Rechichi, President of Extreme Pita. “At that time, I had never heard of some sub sandwich chains such as Blimpies and then realized they had a couple thousand locations. Sandwich concepts were just starting to develop in the Canadian marketplace.”

In 1997, Alex and Mark Rechichi co-founded Extreme Pita and opened its first restaurant, in Waterloo, Ontario near a university. Amazingly, they selected the site before they developed the concept of Extreme Pita and then needed to decide what type of restaurant to build and how to design it. They approached this challenge from a menu perspective, attempting to determine how customers wanted their sandwiches, and concluded that fresh and healthy was the wise choice. “Our strategy was to provide a vast selection of fresh, healthy food, with more focus on the toppings and less on the bread,” Alex Rechichi says. “Customers could select what they want on pita, and the food was prepared right in front of them. Back then we had eight sandwiches containing an assortment of proteins and vegetables.”

The concept caught on quickly. So quickly in fact that Extreme Pita took in \$21,000 the first week it opened its doors. At first its customers were predominately female, but then athletes and others interested in fresh and healthy food soon discovered Extreme Pita and a franchise was born.

“We want to be the healthy fast food guys,” says Sean Black, V.P. of Development. “Everything we do is with the goal of becoming and maintaining the position of the leading healthful fast food chain. We want to inspire healthier living but still make it fast, affordable, convenient food.”

When people think of healthy food, they typically don’t believe the food will taste good. Extreme Pita offers “a range of healthy, great tasting food for people who are busy, active and on the go

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but don't necessarily want to sacrifice taste for healthier eating," Alex Rechichi says.

Pictured: A pita filled to the extreme with appetizing meats and cheeses – that's the focus of Extreme Pita.

A BRAND WELL RECEIVED

Today, there are more than 200 Extreme Pitas, 30 in the United States and the remainder in Canada, with the number continuing to grow. So, how did Extreme Pita become one of the most recognized and fastest growing franchises in Canada? Once the concept caught on, Extreme Pita signed area development agreements in Western Canada and Atlantic Canada. It then sought to expand the franchise into the United States. "There are development agreements across Texas, Nevada, California and New England," says Black. "And we have a strategic goal of being at 500 stores at the end of 2010, split between Canada and the United

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Pictured: Extreme Pita's restaurants invite customers in to select from a broad menu of pita sandwiches.



States.” With this type of expansion, it is no wonder Alex Rechichi and Mark Rechichi were named Canada’s Food Service and Hospitality Entrepreneurs of the Year in December 2006.

THE GROWTH OF SPECIALITY SANDWICHES

Because sandwiches are a core part of the American and Canadian consumer’s diet, it is only natural that the specialty sandwich niche continues to grow. “The customer wants a fresh and made-to-order product that is lower in fat,” says Black. “We raised that platform to another level by exchanging regular breads for the true Lebanese pocket pita, which is a growing bread type in the United States and all segments of the market.” Why? It’s rather simple. With increased knowledge about the effects of food on health and longevity, the older demographic and the baby boomers are concerned about eating healthy. “The trendy hippiness of pita attracts younger students,” Black says. “We do very well on college campuses. Once you combine pita with lower fat and fresh ingredients, you got us. That is what our brand represents.”

A REVOLUTIONARY CONCEPT

Extreme Pita believes it is important that customers do not fill-up on large quantities of bread but that they eat high quality food instead. A core line of chef-inspired recipes make up Extreme Pita’s menu: 12 varieties of pitas, five pizzas on crispy pita bread, and fresh topped salads with premium ingredients including sun dried tomatoes and pine nuts. “We find that salad is an important part of a lunch or dinner and people want to know their salad is fresh,”



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says Black. “There is no better way to prove that than to make it in front of them.”

Although Extreme Pita has a successful menu, it believes it is important to continue to develop the menu and introduce new flavor profiles in response to current trends. A recent recipe and platform overhaul will deliver updated and more ethnically relevant pita pizzas and other dinner-related items by mid-year. One of the newest concepts – Pita Bowls – provide customers with their choice of fresh vegetables with proteins and rice in a pita bowl. Extreme Pita also sells an assortment of beverages and is attempting to inject healthier versions of those currently on its menu by working very closely with the Pepsi-Cola Company to be creative in that area.

But healthy eating does not end there. Extreme Pita displays its nutritional content on a larger display parallel to its menu board so customers can see the quantity of fat, calories and carbohydrates in the food they are ordering in relation to a standard diet. In addition, Extreme Pita has partnered with Nutricate, a software solution company that created a program providing nutritional content of the purchased food on the customer’s register receipt. “They know exactly what they ate as well as some suggestions to improve their food choices,” Black says. “We also provide some coupons to help bring them back into the restaurant.” This program has been tested in only few markets, but Extreme Pita hopes the phenomenal results will allow it to take the lead in driving nutritional awareness in the fast food market. “Most chains are trying to defend their nutritionals and comply with laws,” says Black. “But we are trying



Pictured: Extreme Pita constantly introduces new items to keep its menu appealing.

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to put the nutritional in the customers' faces." That is a revolutionary concept and one that is sure to make its mark on the fast food industry.

DEVELOPING NEW LOCATIONS

Extreme Pita's corporate headquarters are located in Mississauga, Ontario. It uses contracted area developers rather than regional offices to go to market. The area developers are responsible for development, site selection, construction management and ongoing operations support. Franchisees receive comprehensive training, including hands-on in-store training, ongoing support, marketing, and advertising. The "Hot Off the Pita Press" newsletter keeps the lines of communication open between franchisees and provides franchisees the opportunity to contribute and express their views.

In the United States, Extreme Pita is actively attempting to expand and grow the brand throughout the West, and is looking to add developers in Colorado, Utah, Oregon, Nevada, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. "The challenge in the United States is to get to a critical mass so we can leverage the brand to reduce the costs of food and equipment," Black says. "We continue to be very strategic and specific about who we select as franchisee and where to capitalize and position our brand for success in the United States."



Pictured: A core line of chef-inspired recipes make up Extreme Pita's menu: 12 varieties of pitas, five pizzas on crispy pita bread and fresh topped salads.

AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

For Extreme Pita's customers, watching healthy food prepared in front of them in a quick manner coupled with great taste makes for a fantastic experience, one that keeps them coming back for more. Add in the option of customizing the food to taste and eating in an upscale, contemporary environment decorated with pleasing earth tones and new furniture, and you have a recipe for success.

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