

EAST CASUAL
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TOP 100

2009 MOVERS & SHAKERS



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Genghis Grill

Dallas / No. of units: 40

Twitter: @genghisgrill

Facebook: Genghis Grill



Genghis Grill president and CEO Al Bhakta saw the potential for the ethnic/Asian segment when he and his partners in The Chalak Group purchased the Dallas-based brand in 2004.

Members of The Chalak Group have been able to take Genghis Grill to the next stage of growth. The company added 14 units in 2009 — a 70 percent rate of growth for the

Mongolian stir-fry concept. That brings its total to 40 stores in 11 states. In 2010, the company hopes to open 20 more, Bhakta said.

“(The market) needed someone who has a good concept to grab that business,” Bhakta said. “We’ve grown every year so we feel we made a good choice.”

The concept’s rise also helped propel the brand to No. 2 this year, up from Fast Casual’s Fab 50 listing in 2008, the “ones to watch” segment of the annual

Top 100.

Customers like the “Build your own bowl” experience in which they can choose their protein, seasonings, vegetables, sauce and starch — then have their fresh-cooked meal brought to the table. The brand’s loyal fans also enjoy posting their favorite bowl choices on the Genghis Grill’s Facebook fan page. Genghis also courts to-go orders with its online ordering.

— Christa Hoyland

Beautiful Brands

Tulsa, Okla. / No. of concepts: 14

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Beautiful Brands International (BBI) earns a spot in Fast Casual’s Top 10 because the company continues to make smart moves in building its franchise portfolio. In 2009, the company added 10 concepts to its fold that range from fast casual salad to casual comfort food, including Greenz, The Crusty Croissant, Sonny Bryan’s Smokehouse, Kyro Pizza and In the Raw.

The company also is developing three other concepts into franchise chains, including company-owned Rex’s Chicken, a legendary eatery in Tulsa; St. Michael’s Alley, a Palo Alto, Calif., casual bistro; and Le Beau Rouleau, a crepe concept.

The concepts represent rock star or emerging categories in the industry and will propel the company into one of the largest franchisors in the segment, with BBI’s signature concepts, Camille’s Sidewalk Café and FreshBerry, as the role models.

BBI founders David and Camille Rutkauskas opened their first Camille’s in Tulsa in 1996, in a tiny mall-based sandwich kiosk. Now, the brand has more than 900 territories in development in 38 states and on four continents.

“The next one to three years will consist of opening new stores and continuing to bring new restaurants under the Beautiful Brands umbrella,” Rutkauskas said. “We want to be one of the leading restaurant development companies in the world. We’re definitely not going to limit ourselves. We want to grow our company, and we have the staff in place to do that.”

— V.K.



Camille's Sidewalk Café

8 Einstein Bros. Bagels

Lakewood, Colo.

No. of locations: 180+

Twitter: Einstein_Bros

Facebook: Einstein Bros. Bagels

There is a great benefit to being a bagel-and-coffee deli: You cater directly to the rushed business executive's diet.

"When dining management groups decide which brands they want in their facilities, we are increasingly becoming a top choice," said Jeff O'Neill, chief executive officer of Einstein Noah Restaurant Group Inc., the brand's parent company. "We are a strong concept for reputable organizations such as ARAMARK, Sodexo, Compass Group and AAFES because we offer quality, freshness and convenience where portability and affordability are essential."

But professionals aren't the only ones that go for this model of higher-scale food in a fast casual business model. Students love it, too, and the company has capitalized on that fact.

In the fourth quarter of 2009, Einstein Bros. Bagels opened 31 licensed locations in a variety of venues, including universities, health-care facilities, military bases and corporate headquarters. In 2010, the company plans to exceed its 2009 openings for another record year.

— J.L.



Zoup!

Southfield, Mich.

No. of locations: 24

Twitter: Zoup_Soup

Facebook: Zoup!

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Zoup! has been around since 1998, but it didn't start gaining speed for a couple of years. In the last few, however, it has made up for lost time, at least in terms of brand recognition.

A master of differentiation, the concept has made headway with its 12 always-rotating soup varieties, each made completely from scratch, and always including at least one low-fat, vegetarian, dairy-free and spicy option. Their homemade stock is made from triple-distilled water.

The company's emphasis on consumer choice and health has made it especially popular, and the store opened three new locations in three states in 2009 — putting it at roughly 24 units at our time of publication. It has recently turned toward nontraditional locations, having opened at Airport Center in Hanover Township in August 2009.

— J.L.

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Fast Casual Alliance

LinkedIn: Fast Casual Alliance

As the founders of the Fast Casual Alliance, we were hesitant to include the organization on our list of movers and shakers, not to mention to rank it in the top 10. But our panel was convinced the Alliance had one of the best and brightest years in 2009, and was instrumental in pushing the segment forward.

After close to three years as a small group consisting of passionate fast casual operators, the Fast Casual Alliance will reside under the NRA umbrella as the Fast Casual Alliance – An NRA Industry Council, it was announced Sept. 15. The creation of the

council fits into the NRA's new strategic initiative to better unite the restaurant industry as a whole. And it's the first industry council of its kind for the NRA.

"In a year that was highlighted by unprecedented economic conditions the Fast Casual Alliance grew and continued to spread the word about serving great food that is affordable," said FCA president Louis Basile. "I believe the overall value that our segment provides for the consumer is something very special. I am very excited about the opportunities and challenges we face together in 2010."

— V.K.

11. Smashburger

Denver / No. of units: 44

Smashburger, a self-described “better burger” concept, was founded in 2007 by private equity and concept-development firm Consumer Capital Partners. The company has already sold franchise agreements for more than 275 locations around the country. In 2009, Smashburger signed development deals for Las Vegas, southwest Utah, Chicago and Oklahoma City, among several others. It also caught the eye of Dallas Cowboys lineman Leonard Davis, who signed a 30-unit deal to franchise the company through BIGG Capital Holdings LLC.

12. Lime Fresh Mexican Grill

Miami / No. of units: 5

Restaurateur John Kunkel opened the first Lime Fresh Mexican Grill location in 2004 after selling another concept he founded in South Beach, Fla. Lime Fresh restaurants feature fresh food prepared in-house daily, a homemade

salsa bar and more than 50 varieties of hot sauce. In August, the company also hired former Starbucks director of new store development Angela Kenyon as its new VP of development. Kenyon also has worked with brands such as Dunkin’ Brands and Burger King.

13. Vapiano

McLean, Va. / No. of units: 42 worldwide

The hip, urban and sleek Vapiano has brought European fast casual dining to the U.S. market as it expands around the world. The Germany-based concept offers a Northern Italian dining experience with a menu of pizza, pasta and salad. The gourmet chain’s focus on

maximizing the guest experience in addition to its quality food has landed the chain at No. 13 on our list, up from No. 79 last year.

14. Jason's Deli

Beaumont, Texas / No. of units: 215

Rusty Coco, who co-founded Jason’s Deli in 1978 with three partners, has been on a mission in recent years to make the neighborhood deli chain’s menu healthier. Since 2005, Jason’s has eliminated trans fat and MSG from its entire menu, and high fructose corn syrup from everything except its fountain beverages.

15. California Tortilla

Rockville, Md. / No. of units: 38

From its secret password day to its “Get In On It” social media promotion, California Tortilla continues to raise the bar on creative marketing efforts that work. In 2009, the company introduced a children’s activity book and saw a 32 percent daily sales increase during its May 20 Pop-Tart Day promotion. In all, more than 20,000 Pop-Tarts were given away across the company’s 38 locations.

16. Panera Bread

Richmond Heights, Mo. / No. of units: 1,362

Panera Bread Co. operates restaurants under the Panera Bread Co., St. Louis Bread Co. and Paradise Bakery & Café names. The company, founded in 1981, is widely recognized for driving the nationwide trend for specialty breads. Last year, the company was the industry darling because of same-store sales increases that seemed to defy an economic recession. Even though CEO Ron Shaich is stepping down this year, his formula for success is what keeps Panera Bread rising.



20. La Madeleine

Dallas / No. of units: 60

While the ambiance at La Madeleine is what guests find inviting, it's the food that keeps them coming back again and again. With menu items such as Tilapia Rustique (tilapia simmered in Chardonnay and sun-dried tomato pesto) and Strawberries Romanoff (strawberries topped with a brandy sour cream sauce), La Madeleine elevates the fast casual dining experience and turns the ordinary into extraordinary.

21. Charley's Grilled Subs

Columbus, Ohio / No. of units: 400

Charley's Grilled Subs founder Charley Shin got his start in the restaurant business working at his mother's Japanese/Korean restaurant in Columbus, Ohio. It was on a family trip to New York, where Shin made a wrong turn and ended up in Philadelphia, where he discovered the Philly cheese steak sandwich. That experience served as the inspiration for Charley's Grilled Subs, which opened its 400th location in January.

**22. Potbelly Sandwich Works**

Chicago / No. of units: 200+

What started out as a small antique store on Chicago's north side has turned into one of the fastest-growing sandwich chains in the United States. In 2009, Potbelly built upon its record estimated sales growth of \$255 million in 2008. It also launched the Potbelly Skinny line of sandwiches and Potbelly BIGS, smaller and larger versions of its Originals.

23. Bruegger's

Burlington, Vt. / No. of units: 296

Despite the nation's economic downturn, Bruegger's opened 158 locations in 2009, through both organic growth and the acquisition of the restaurant holdings of Timothy's World Coffee. Bruegger's also opened its first unit in Rhode Island, marking the company's presence in 25 states and the District of Columbia. The chain also launched its first-ever kids' menu and opened its fourth airport location.

**24. Wingstop**

Dallas / No. of units: 435

At the end of 2009, the chicken-wing themed Wingstop reported its 26th consecutive month of same-store sales increases. Comparable store sales for 2009 increased 3.8 percent over the previous year, while annual system-wide sales reached \$306.7 million. In 2009, the company opened 45 new stores, including its first international restaurant in Mexico City. It has announced plans to open another 69 locations in 2010.

25. Wow Bao

Chicago / No. of locations: 3

Known for its hot Asian buns, Wow Bao has developed a reputation for serving steamed potstickers, otherwise known as a Chinese dumpling. Wow Bao is part of the Lettuce Entertain You family and features a menu that includes Pad Thai salad, soups and rice bowls. The dumplings are so full of flavor, Gourmet Magazine's David Tamarkin named Wow Bao one of the eight great places for dumplings in Chicago in the May 2009 issue.

26. Garbanzo Mediterranean Grill

Denver / No. of units: 6

Founded on the core concepts of healthy, fresh and authentic, Garbanzo Mediterranean Grill is generating buzz in Colorado and beyond with the introduction of quality, fast casual Mediterranean cuisine. Founder Alon Mor has led the growth of the concept to six units at the end of 2009, and plans are under way for six more to open in 2010. The concept also has launched a franchise effort to grow in other regions of the country, including the Midwest and Northeast.

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