

*2015 fast casual*  
**TOP 100**  
*MOVERS & SHAKERS*

The top restaurant chains, trends and technologies shaping the fast casual segment.



***The brands consumers love!***

10th annual  
**Fast  
Casual**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMIT 2015**

October 18-20 | Miami



"For me it's all about the people. Amazingly talented, smart people in this industry and sharing ideas and hearing thoughts and expanding your mind. It's just a great time."

**- Randy Gier, Pizza Inn**

[FastCasualSummit.com](http://FastCasualSummit.com)



## Publisher

Tom Harper  
President & CEO  
tomh@networkmediagroup.com

## Executive editor

Cherryh Butler  
cherryhb@networkmediagroup.com

## Top 100 panel

Valerie Killifer  
P-O-P Communications

Alicia Kelso  
Journalist and Contributing  
Editor, QSRweb, FastCasual and  
PizzaMarketplace

Maeve Webster  
Datassential

Darrel Suderman  
Food Technical Consulting

Brenda Rick Smith  
former FastCasual.com editor

With so many fast casual brands succeeding these days, it was nearly impossible to narrow down the nearly 900 nominations we received. From impressive franchise initiatives and innovative menu items to technology upgrades and unique marketing platforms, the competition was fierce when it came to selecting this year's best brands.

Historically, we've chosen 50 brands, 25 people and included a variety of menu and technology trends to make up the last 25 spots. We did things a little differently this year, based on the pure fact that we believed it was a must to recognize more than just 50 brands.

After sifting through readers' nominations, we chose 75 fast casual brands and also included the most popular menu, marketing and technology trends of the year.

Helping us make this year's Top 100 selections included:

- Valerie Killifer, owner of P-O-P Communications.
- Alicia Kelso, contributing Editor, QSRweb, FastCasual and PizzaMarketplace.
- Maeve Webster, Datassential.
- Darrel Suderman, Food Technical Consulting.
- And Brenda Rick Smith, former FastCasual.com editor.

Tons of research went in the selection process, in which we applied multiple criteria against the nominees, including growth, innovation and contribution to the industry. We haven't forgotten to honor the industry's leaders, however. Those results will come in a separate announcement at our annual Fast Casual Executive Summit in October. (add link)

We hope you'll enjoy this year's overview of the annual Fast Casual Top 100 Movers & Shakers.

Congrats to all our winners!

Cherryh Butler  
Senior editor  
FastCasual.com



## Table of Contents

- 4 Top 75 restaurants
- 29 Top 5 technology trends
- 31 Top 10 marketing campaigns
- 34 Top 10 menu trends

The 2015 Fast Casual Top 100 Movers & Shakers. ©2015 Network World Media Group LLC. 13100 East Point Park Blvd., Louisville, KY 40223. (502) 241-7545. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the express written approval of the publisher. Viewpoints of the columnists and editors are their own and do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the publisher.



## TOP 75 BRANDS

# 1 Panera Bread

The idea behind our “Movers and Shakers” list is to recognize brands that are going beyond simply generating positive sales and unit growth. The process has a bit more subjectivity to it — to identify brands that are taking big risks and making fundamental changes that could dramatically shake up the fast casual status quo.

Based on that criteria, Panera has received our top spot this year.

Panera’s 2.0 initiative is about as big a risk as a brand of its size — and history — can take. Essentially, the company is undergoing a complete technology makeover to simplify the guests’ experiences, from digital ordering and payment to operations.

“Panera 2.0 is an investment in the customer enabled by technology and powered by operational excellence,” CEO and founder Ron Shaich said. “It’s more than a mobile payment system or digital-ordering process. It’s an integrated, comprehensive, end-to-end solution that we believe will reduce friction such as wait times, improve order accuracy and minimize or eliminate crowding — all while creating a platform for an ever more personalized experience.”

The overhaul includes advanced ordering for to-go, ordering from the table, fast-lane kiosks, customized ordering, mobile and online

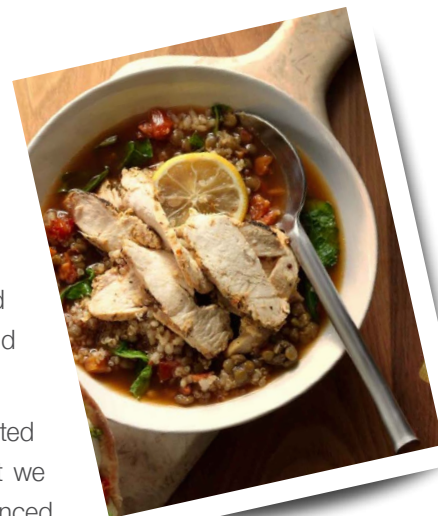
payment functions, new ordering pathways and more. Shaich said the effort meets the differentiated needs of both to-go and dine-in consumers.

“We took a totally integrated approach and believe what we are providing is a truly enhanced guest experience,” he said.

The chain also was among the first in the industry to start accepting Apple Pay when it launched in fall 2014.

Also in the past year, Panera announced a new “Food Policy Statement,” which includes a commitment to offering a “clean” menu within the next two years. In doing so, it will remove all artificial colors, sweeteners, flavors and preservatives.

All of those efforts could explain why Panera Bread topped the list of Americans’ favorite sandwich chains, according to a national study from Market Force. And it all adds up to a top ranking in our Top 100 Fast Casual Movers & Shakers 2015.



## 2 : Blaze Pizza

The big story in the fast casual segment throughout the past two years has been the emergence and rapid growth of create-your-own pizza concepts. A number of new concepts have been embracing this business model and serving up chef-driven, individual pizzas in five minutes or less.

Within this competitive hot spot, two brands have been jockeying for domination. Blaze Fast-Fire'd Pizza jumped on the scene in southern California in 2012. Blaze is the brainchild of Wetzel's Pretzels' founders Elise and Rick Wetzel, who secured financial backing from powerhouses such as Maria Shriver, movie producer John Davis and Boston Red Sox co-owner Tom Werner. Even LeBron James has put some investment muscle behind the brand in its quest to expand in the Miami market.

The company passed the 70-unit mark in the fall, and more recently planted a flag in Canada — its first international deal. Blaze is opening on average one new restaurant every five days, and its milestone 100th location is projected to open later this year.

On the menu, Blaze stands out thanks to Executive Chef Bradford

Kent, owner of Olio Pizzeria & Café, which is ranked No. 2 on Zagat's list for best pizza in Los Angeles.

The company's culinary differentiator is its dough — made from scratch and fermented for 24 hours to create a thin, crispy crust.

As Blaze continues its nationwide — and international — expansion, the company is intentionally targeting millennials and is relying heavily on social media marketing.

"We lead the category in both number of locations and rate of growth," said Jim Mizes, president and COO. "More importantly, we lead the category in defining the best overall guest experience — which includes exceptional pizza, lightning-fast speed of service and appealing restaurant design. We believe that our focused attention against these three key areas will help Blaze Pizza to not only differentiate itself, but also to deliver the highest average unit sales volumes in the category."



## 3 : Pie Five Pizza

Pie Five Pizza, which opened in 2011, has always had a solid infrastructure in place from sister brand Pizza Inn, which has been on the block for nearly 60 years. Pie Five recently surpassed the 40-unit milestone and now operates in 11 states.

But that's hardly the whole story: Pie Five has more than 400 announced company-owned and franchise units under contract in 14 states. To support the brand's staggering growth, its parent company changed its name from Pizza Inn Holdings to Rave Restaurant Group Inc.

"We are no longer a slow-growth, single-brand restaurant company," CEO Randy Gier said. "We have high expectations for our brands."

In addition to growing its unit count, Pie Five has been pulling in the sales. Systemwide retail sales increased year-over-year in Q2, including a 31 percent increase in systemwide average weekly sales.

Pie Five also has pushed the envelope in the kitchen. Although the concept is centered on customization, the menu still churns out innovative concoctions such as the

Peanut Butter Cup Brownie, a "Thai-riffic" pie, the Chicken & Veggie Pie, the Cheddar Bacon Pie-Tato, the Meatball Ricotta Pie and more.

Gier adds that Pie Five's crust variety and ordering setup differentiate the brand in the growing segment.

"No one else is offering pan pizza at this speed," he said. "The other important difference is that customers can get their pizza while they're still in line. Everyone else is calling out a number or taking it to a table. Once we get you through the line, you're in control of your dining experience again."

Gier also said Pie Five is focused mostly on digital marketing and is working to institute an integrated system that allows the company to have social media, text, rewards and email working together. Also, a new plan is in place to build up demand in local markets before a store opens.

"We will also rely heavily on word of mouth because, frankly, once people come in and experience this, it's a 'wow,'" Gier said.



## 4 **Dickey's Barbecue Pit**



The first Dickey's Barbecue Pit opened in 1941, in Texas, but growth seems to have caught on fire in the past couple of years. For starters, it opened its 400th unit in 2014, with plans to reach 2,000 in the next five years. It also created its own potato-chip line, launched a digital loyalty program and hired its first chief brand officer.

The brand has also stepped up its philanthropic focus: Proceeds from potato chips go toward the company's new Barbecue, Boots & Badges Foundation, which provides funding and resources to law enforcement, firefighters and their families.

Also to support its staggering growth, Dickey's hired its first COO last year and added catering.

In 2013, CEO Roland Dickey Jr. — who led the growth from 20 units when he took over in 2004 — told Fast Casual that he is aiming for “global domination.” He appears to be well on his way.

## 5 **Shake Shack**

The company also has spread its wings internationally in markets such as London, Moscow and the United Arab Emirates. Its plans are to continue growth but to do so methodically.

Since its beginning, Shake Shack has leveraged Meyer's focus on sustainable, all-natural, hormone- and antibiotic-free beef, efforts most of the industry is finally starting to explore. Unlike some of its better-burger competitors, the brand also branches out to hot dogs, beer and wine and frozen-custard shakes.

Few restaurant IPOs have garnered as much publicity as Shake Shack's did last year. The New York City-based burger brand has piqued the interest of fickle investors for many reasons: its millennial loyalists, its grassroots social marketing efforts and its originator, restaurateur and chef Danny Meyer.

Shake Shack has garnered more Instagram followers than Wendy's and is close to surpassing Burger King on the popular social media site. Not bad for a 10-year-old brand that started as a hot dog cart in New York City and still numbers fewer than 70 units.



## 6 **Zoës Kitchen**

Zoës Kitchen also went public in 2014. Subsequently, comparable-store sales rose about 7 percent. According to Technomic's Top 500 list, sales rose more than 36 percent, while unit count was up 40 percent in the last year.

CEO Kevin Miles said half of the money raised for the chain's IPO went to retire debt, while about \$42 million made its way to the balance sheet to grow the brand's footprint in existing and new markets. By the end of 2015, Zoës expects to be 24 percent bigger.

It is also moving away from franchising to simplify execution.

“[The company] can control the culture and the growth and stage it for the right growth target,” Miles said. “Zoës is not an overly complex concept, but it's a fresh product, not a cookie-cutter franchise model.”

The concept is well positioned, serving Mediterranean cuisine, which is growing in demand. It is also focusing more on dinner, which has helped lift AUVs.



## 7 Sweetgreen

Founded in 2007, sweetgreen sources local and organic ingredients from local farmers. The concept has grown to nearly 30 locations in Washington, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia, with two California locations on the radar.

But sweetgreen is doing more than just expanding its footprint. The brand is setting the pace for mobile and social media efforts. According to a 1-year study conducted by NetBase, sweetgreen topped the rankings for having the most passionate social media fans. Its “passion intensity index” was 92, compared to Chipotle’s score of 59.

Just 10 weeks after sweetgreen launched its mobile payments and rewards app in 2013, CEO Nathaniel Ru said the app represented 18 percent of the chain’s total transaction volume.

“We are always looking for ways to connect with our guests, offer them the most outstanding experience in our stores and to give back to

our communities — our sweetgreen rewards app has enabled us to do this in countless ways,” Ru said.

Also, sweetgreen revamped one of its D.C. stores last year to become a test kitchen and hired a culinary director to “go forward on innovation.”



sweetgreen®

## 8 Jersey Mike's Subs

Jersey Mike’s has been around since the late 1950s but recently has been making big strides in the cutthroat fast casual sandwich category. The company is aggressively expanding its footprint, jumping unit count by more than 20 percent in the past two years.

The brand also recently introduced an iPhone app that includes digital ordering and loyalty program management. It was one of the first apps in the industry to include both features. Its operators are also benefiting from technology initiatives: Jersey Mike’s back-office system and proprietary POS system earned a Restaurant Breakthrough Award from Hospitality Technology. The systems helped franchisees increase top line sales and decrease costs.

Development and technology efforts aside, Jersey Mike’s cause marketing efforts have generated a fiercely loyal following. The company has partnered with Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Wreaths Across America and a variety of other local causes. Philanthropy is written into Jersey Mike’s mission, and its contributions have increased exponentially, buoyed by its annual Month of Giving in which customers are invited to make donations to a local location’s designated charity partner.

Jersey Mike’s momentum is expected to continue with its new “A Sub Above” marketing campaign aimed at “reframing the sub sandwich experience.” CMO Rich Hope’s objective is to create the best sandwich in the category and share the brand’s story with a wider audience. For starters, Consumer Reports has listed Jersey Mike’s as a top fast casual restaurant.



## 9 **Starbucks**

Longtime behemoth Starbucks may seem like an odd choice to be a “mover” or “shaker,” but 2014 proved the coffee king has the throne for a reason. The coffee brand just passed Subway in U.S. sales to become the No. 2 American restaurant brand.

In the past year, Starbucks has focused beyond its signature coffee sales with new food options, Teavana hand-shaken iced tea, craft soda and more. It partnered with Oprah for a tea product, released limited-edition Geisha coffee and launched a new, smaller-footprint roaster store.

Starbucks is also rolling out food trucks at college campuses and is offering four years of tuition reimbursement for its employees as part of its College Achievement Plan.

While most brands are still experimenting with mobile payments, Starbucks has set the standard



in the restaurant industry and beyond. Sixteen percent of all transactions now come from mobile, and the brand is piloting mobile order and pay with a nationwide rollout this year.

Starbucks also plans to add delivery this year and is stepping up its focus on drive-thru business.

“We strongly believe the opportunity is around convenience ... Creating convenient opportunities for customers to get access to Starbucks is going to be another way in which we are going to win,” CEO Howard Schultz said.

## 10 **Native Foods Café**

Native Foods Café has been around for more than 10 years, but thanks to more adventurous consumers, it started showing up on the map only recently — and it is bringing vegan cuisine along for the ride.

What started as a vegan-only concept in California in 1994, since has spread to nearly 30 restaurants across the U.S. with a target of 200 stores by 2018. Native Foods’ menu has earned the spotlight with its plant-based, meat-substitute interpretation of bacon cheeseburgers and meatball subs.

Earlier this year, Native Foods brought on Craig Grimes as its new CEO to lead the buzz-worthy brand into its next phase of growth.



“We remain committed to influencing the way America eats, by attracting consumers who are seeking delicious, chef-crafted foods that are grown responsibly and sustainably,” Grimes said. “The company is well positioned for national expansion.”



## 11 *Chipotle Mexican Grill*

Restaurant industry experts often point to Chipotle as the impetus behind the fast casual segment. The company has been on a roll for more than 20 years, driving customization trends and “food with integrity.” A handful of new fast casual concepts admittedly aspire to be “the Chipotle of (insert cuisine here).”

But getting two decades in doesn't mean the Colorado concept is resting on its laurels. Far from it. In the past year, Chipotle continued to turn in double-digit sales growth, which co-CEO Steve Ells attributes to its focus on a unique food culture and special people culture.

For the Movers & Shakers list, one voter succinctly summed up the brand's worthiness: “The same-store sales for Chipotle is just incredible, and they've been sustaining these sales for a long time, while the majority of the industry has gone soft.”

The brand also sticks to its guns. Earlier this year, [Chipotle](#) pulled Carnitas from its menu in about one-third of its stores when it uncovered evidence during a routine audit that a supplier was not following its animal-welfare protocols.

The brand repeatedly is voted a consumer favorite in a variety of polls and has the highest millennial customer loyalty, according to new research from YouGov.

The company itself also is experimenting with a pizza concept, Pizzeria Locale, and an Asian concept, ShopHouse.



## 12 *The Habit Burger Grill*

In an active year for IPOs in the restaurant industry, The Habit Burger Grill is riding the wave with success, more than doubling its value since its debut on the market in November. Like its newly public counterpart Shake Shack, The Habit gets a significant lift from its loyal fans, who voted its burgers tops in [America in Consumer Reports](#).

Those fans are also active socially: The Habit has more than 42 Instagram followers per store, a critical metric when considering modern word-of-mouth marketing and the picky millennial demographic.

The Habit is experiencing a significant growth spurt, signing its first franchise deals and debuting on the East Coast in 2014. It's not short on R&D efforts either, launching a French Onion Charburger and Hatch Chiles in recent months.

One of Fast Casual's Top 100 voters said The Habit is the first to “capture a full restaurant style in a fast and innovative way.”

## 13 *Giraffas Brazilian Kitchen & Grill*

Giraffas Brazilian Kitchen & Grill opened in Brazil in 1981 with a focus on sandwiches and burgers. The brand has nearly 400 locations across its home country and is bringing those learnings to the U.S., where the first unit opened in 2011 in Miami. The plan is to have 100 or 200 restaurants in the U.S., according to João Barbosa, the CFO and a partner in the parent company, Giraffas International.

Giraffas is in no hurry to reach those numbers, however, and currently is laying the



groundwork, analyzing current operations to improve food costs and generate an attractive ROI for potential investors.

The brand is poised for such growth because of its unique offerings — “A Brazilian twist on what you love,” including barbecue, beans, steak and chicken, as well as warm cheese bread and Brazilian wine, beer and desserts — said Carlos Vane-gas, U.S. marketing director. The brand also has focused heavily on mobile initiatives, including payments and a loyalty rewards program.

Said one Top 100 voter, “Giraffas stands out for being the only Brazilian fast casual restaurant, offering healthy and freshly grilled food.”

## 14 *Modmarket*

Modmarket branched out of its home state of Colorado last year, opening a handful of locations in Texas. The farm-to-table concept also planted a flag at the Denver International Airport. The brand grew from six to 10 locations in 2014, and plans to double in size this year.

Last June, Modmarket announced a partnership with Creekstone Farms for its beef

supply, furthering its commitment to ingredients with no added hormones or antibiotics. It also rolled out a number of seasonal items, including wild caught Alaskan salmon, its first fish option since debuting in 2009.

Modmarket has also been progressive in its transparency and digital signage efforts, printing nutritional information on its receipts and showcasing social media conversations on its menu boards next to the food and beverage offerings. Additionally, Modmarket's website encourages customers to click on any ingredient to find its source.

## 15 **PizzaRev**

As fledgling concepts fight for room in the fast casual pizza space, PizzaRev scores big points in securing a partnership with restaurant industry powerhouse Buffalo Wild Wings. The agreement was named "Deal of the Year" by Franchise Times magazine and has helped the Los Angeles-based brand grow beyond 20 locations in its two years of business.

Also in the past year, PizzaRev inked a financing agreement with Wintrust Franchise Services to support additional growth.

PizzaRev has focused on initiatives other than growth. It recently introduced a vegan sausage topping option, launched a nutritional portal with allergen information and a nutrition calculator and added catering.

"Our catering program offers a tremendous opportunity to maximize each restaurant's throughput and make our pizzas and salads more accessible for large groups to enjoy," COO and co-founder Nicholas Eckerman said.

## 16 **Burger 21**

Burger 21 takes cause marketing — a millennial selling point — to another level. Since its inception, the better-burger chain has provided more than \$127,000 in contributions through charitable initiatives. It donates 10 percent of its restaurants' sales to schools and local charities on the

21st of each month to support the communities in which it operates.

"Since opening our doors five years ago, we've made giving back a part of our brand culture, and we're proud of what we've accomplished thus far," said Mark Johnston, Burger 21 founder and president.

Additionally, Burger 21 plans to double its footprint in the next two years. In 2014, it entered three new states, planted a flag in Chicago, began franchising in Arizona, New York and Virginia; signed a deal for two airport locations and executed six leases in four states. It also appointed its first corporate chef.

"We'll be celebrating our five-year anniversary this year and plan to continue building on the successes we have achieved thus far. Burger 21's proven business model, innovation and commitment to its franchisees and guests have ultimately positioned the brand for continued growth in 2015 and beyond," Johnston said.

## 17 **Smashburger**

Smashburger had its own big shoes to fill for this year's list to match last year's No. 1 spot. The Denver-based better-burger leader hasn't slowed, and in May 2014, the brand named a new chief development officer to oversee its continued growth.

It also entered into franchise agreements with five new groups to help the brand grow across the U.S. The combined commitments totaled 61 new restaurants and brought the brand's total active franchise pipeline to more than 460 restaurants.



Smashburger

Smashburger also broke into the Panama market, partnered with Udi's to roll out a gluten-free bun option and appointed a new chief marketing officer, Josh Kern.

"Smashburger grew about 20 percent (in 2014), and that number looks the same for next year as well," Kern said. "The better burger is back and will remain hot for many years to come. We believe that it is here to stay and we are well positioned in that space."

## 18 **Cowboy Chicken**

Cowboy Chicken stretched outside its home state of Texas in 2014, opening in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

It also signed an agreement for its fourth franchisee, for a total of 20 additional stores, and continued to spread throughout the Lone Star State.

The brand created its own tea line, a strong move considering specialty beverages are in high demand. Cowboy Chicken president Sean Kennedy conceived Razzleberry Tea along with partner Texas Select. Its "Nearly Famous" tea program includes several other flavors, including the recently added Country Peach.

Further staying on trend, Cowboy Chicken has added drive-thru locations and a Low Cal Corral menu in the past year and a half.

## 19 **Giardino Gourmet Salads**

Miami-based Giardino Gourmet Salads stepped outside its home market of south Florida in the past year, with a three-unit franchise deal in Nashville.

Over the past 10 years, Giardino has grown to 10 restaurants in various areas of Dade and Broward counties in Florida. The brand has enjoyed more than nine consecutive quarters of positive comparable sales, including an 8-percent increase throughout the first quarter of 2014.

"Giardino Gourmet Salads' nine consecutive quarters of positive same-store sales increases is a true testament to the strength of our growing brand," Founder Kenny Lugo said. "Our success is directly related to consumers' increasing desire to live a healthier lifestyle and our franchisees continually delivering a superior customer experience."

The chain recently introduced grain bowls to its menu of salads, garden wraps, soups, boccata sandwiches and a wide assortment of croutons baked fresh daily in each restaurant.

Said a nominee, "Giardino's offers a unique menu, just completed a new world-class retail design, developed a great loyalty app and signed its first out-of-state franchisee."

## 20 **Newk's Eatery**

Newk's is experiencing aggressive growth and has secured a new investor team, embraced online ordering and cause marketing and has embraced creativity in the kitchen. The nearly 80-unit concept features an open kitchen and carefully sourced, premium ingredients with all menu developments overseen by Founder Chris Newcomb.

Newk's, acquired by Sentinel Capital Partners in 2014, is positioned to grow



to more than 200 units by 2018. COO Jim Greco said the brand is leading fast casual's second generation by focusing on unique flavors, culinary driven menus, scratch-made recipes and transparency.

According to one Fast Casual voter, Newk's AUVs generate \$2.5 million for just two dayparts.

"I am a current owner of one store and am planning a second," the voter said. "My experience with this brand has far exceeded my expectations. The franchise philosophy is solid and proven, and the menu offerings are fresh and craveable."

## 21 **Fazoli's**

Fazoli's continues to post strong comps under the leadership of CEO Carl Howard. As one voter wrote: "Fazoli's continues to prove that a legacy brand can compete in — even lead — the highly competitive fast casual segment."

In 2014, Fazoli's entered new markets, launched new marketing initiatives and broke more than a dozen sales records. It won a Silver Stevie in the 2014 American Business Awards and a 2015 COEX Innovation Award.

The brand has launched a retail presence with the introduction of a new line of branded frozen products sold in select Walmart





stores. It also expanded its marketing to include a NASCAR sponsorship and sponsorship of the 69th Little Brown Jug.

Fazoli's planted a flag on its first college campus, Texas Tech University, in 2014.

Fazoli's is rolling out new pastas, such as a three-cheese tortellini Al Fredo, and new "inSALADas," including Harvest Apple and Walnut. Pizzas and sandwiches are being revamped, too. The chain also will add table service to complement its updated décor and continue its local marketing efforts, such as #GivingTuesday, bridge nights for seniors and Spaghetti Smarts program aimed toward families with young children.

## 22 *McAlister's Deli*

Last year marked McAlister's 25th anniversary, and to celebrate, it opened 19 restaurants and expanded into several new markets, including Columbus and Dayton, Ohio; Evansville, Indiana; Pooler, Georgia; and The Villages, Florida.

The company also signed 12 development agreements, representing 77 future locations, up 18 percent over 2013.

On the menu, the brand added a limited-time Big Bold Cheesesteak and made-for-you flavored beverages, including Wild Berry Tea, Peach Tea, Strawberry Lemonade and Watermelon Lemonade.

McAlister's plans to expand its footprint and menu, with 30 new restaurants planned. It has been voted as a top restaurant for

Consumer Choice and top Kid-Friendly chain. Franchise Business Review also ranked it as one of the top franchises based on franchisee satisfaction.

## 23 *Uncle Maddio's Pizza Joint*

Uncle Maddio's has set the growth pace for fast casual pizza concepts, opening its first restaurant in 2009. In just the past three years, the Atlanta-based concept has grown by 300 percent, and it plans 30 more units this year.

Uncle Maddio's stands out from the top-your-own pack with a robust menu featuring four pizza sizes, three types of crusts, 48 toppings, gourmet salads (including top-your-own) and soups, and 30 other menu items. In 2014, the brand also added a full line of paninis.

Founder Matt Andrew has credited a strong digital presence for the brand's resonance. New unit openings are promoted heavily through social media, and the brand induces trial through its "Be Our Guest VIP Cards" on Facebook.

"We maintain the same high standard of customer service online as we do in our restaurants," Andrew said. "Every

check-in, every like, every comment is a link in the chain to building our brand."

Uncle Maddio's recently launched a new IT strategy aimed at improving customer engagement, with online and mobile ordering, and enhanced loyalty and security features.

## 24 *Genghis Grill*

Genghis Grill continued to chart new waters last year, entering California for the first time and planting a flag at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, for starters.

The company also tightened its relationship with its customers, hosting its annual weight-loss challenge with "Khantestants" and launching a build-your-own-bowl contest.

Genghis Grill's marketing efforts reached deep into its local communities, too, raising money for the family of a shooting victim and supporting high school football teams, for example. The company is also venturing into new technology territory, offering order and pay-at-the-table at some locations, which has yielded a 30 percent improvement in table turns.





From an R&D standpoint, the brand leverages its healthy ingredients to complement its marketing campaigns and landed on HealthyDiningFinder.com. Genghis also launched three new drinks for the summer season and is testing a new “fresh casual” menu with make-your-own-bowls. The entrees are made with sauces inspired by Tandoori, Korean, Thai and Mongolian taste profiles as well as unique spice blends.

## 25 *Five Guys Burgers and Fries*

A top story in the restaurant industry throughout the past year has been McDonald's decelerating sales. Many point to the success of Five Guys as one reason for the Golden Arches' downward spiral, as it elevated the entire burger experience and raised consumer expectations to a level that traditional QSRs haven't been able to match up with. The better-burger powerhouse's growth spurt has slowed a bit domestically, but its sales and international aspirations are on a roll, and demand remains high.

Last year, Five Guys turned in a 5.1-percent sales increase and a 5.7-percent unit increase.

Franchisee Encore Restaurants plans on developing 45 more locations in California over the next four years, starting with the Fresno area.

“Our guests are asking for more locations in this trade area,” said William Ray Bruce, Encore's president.

The brand recently made its debut in

Glasgow, Scotland, and raked in \$63 million in Canada behind 32-percent unit growth.

[Consumer Reports](#) ranked Five Guys in its top 5 and, according to a study conducted by NetBase, Five Guys has 1.6 million mentions and 6 percent share of voice in the industry.

## 26 *Jason's Deli*

In the shadow of limited-service restaurant industry giants such as Chipotle and Panera, it might be easy to overlook Jason's Deli, a regional chain that has yet to break the 300-unit mark.

But when it comes to AUVs, the Beaumont, Texas-based chain ranks up there with the big boys, hovering around \$2.5 million.

Even as QSR and fast casual brands expand their daypart offerings — Starbucks now offers lunchtime sandwiches; you can snag a waffle taco at Taco Bell — Jason's Deli has remained focused on lunch, its biggest daypart.

Jason's Deli is looking to drive-thru and catering, a success story for the brand, to further its bottom line. Jamie Cohen, brand management director, said catering has “a very big impact on what we do.”

Approximately 10 to 15 percent of units systemwide have drive-thru windows, and the ability to offer drive-thru is a key consideration for real estate under consideration for new units.

Jason's Deli listens to customer feedback through a variety of channels, including In-Moment's Voice of the Customer tool, social media, a toll-free number for customer feedback, surveys and more.



Additionally, the brand's website includes a nutritional calculator along with its Special Diets Wizard, which allows customers to enter which ingredients they need to avoid due to allergies. The chain was one of the first to ban trans fats, MSG and high-fructose corn syrup.

## 27 *Fatburger*

In its quest to create an option for health-conscious consumers, Fatburger introduced a Skinnyburger, slicing one of its patties in half and stuffing it with lettuce, cheese, onions, pickles and tomatoes while ditching the bun.

“Sometimes your best ideas are your simplest ideas,” CEO Andy Wiederhorn said.

Fatburger also has gotten creative with its signature burgers, adding a Big Smoky BBQ version in 2014, and complementing its burgers with a new Strawnana Shake.

Off the menu, Fatburger is beefing up its presence in a number of markets, recently signing a 30-unit deal in southern California, opening its first Doha, Qatar, location, and planting flags in Abu Dhabi, Oman, India, Malaysia and more. It is also increasing

its co-branding efforts with sister concept Buffalo's Express and has opened its first gas station location in California.

Fatburger also has been engaging its fans, sponsoring a Facebook cook-off and publishing a new blog penned by Wiederhorn. It is expanding its retail presence as well and has items available on shelves at select Walmart locations.

## 28 *The Melt*

San Francisco's The Melt has been around for less than five years but has received plenty of press for its menu, technology and catering innovations. The entire menu boasts 100 percent all-natural ingredients and chef-inspired recipes.

The Melt features an order board, where customers can see the status of their orders on a monitor in the store. Also, a new feature on The Melt's app gives customers the option of sending their orders to the kitchen without being inside the store, resulting in a better pickup experience. The Melt Perks program thanks fans in two ways: Perks and Perks+.

For its catering program, The Melt uses a proprietary Smart Box thermal food container to keep sandwiches hot during delivery. The

Smart Box includes a microcontroller to adjust temperatures and moisture levels.

Last year, the company underwent a menu renovation to add burger melts, chicken melts, mac and cheese, and fries to its grilled-cheese lineup.

"It's run like a startup and is willing to grow new tech and change their concept for their customers," one voter said.

## 29 *Schlotzsky's*

In January 2014, Schlotzsky's brought on Mark Mears as CMO. The company since has undergone a "revolutionary" change in menu offerings and has launched one of the top-rated mobile apps in the industry. Under the direction of CEO Kelly Roddy, Schlotzsky's not only has made a strong comeback from the brink of extinction — including eight straight years of positive comps — it's also expanding in new and existing markets, as well as international markets such as Russia.

Schlotzsky's has put plenty of work into its menu to help drive those comps, highlighting lighter options that appear on HealthyDiningFinder.com. It has expanded from oven-baked sandwiches to oven-baked wraps, fresh tossed salads, soups, artisan flatbreads and gourmet pizzas. The brand's new "Full Bright" menu includes several new bread options such as potato chive focaccia, Italian ciabatta and soft pretzel roll, along with hand-carved meats and cheeses. Guests can even choose an Udi's gluten-free bun.

Schlotzsky's digital efforts have helped drive its success in the past year. Its new Lotz4Me Guest Rewards mobile app garnered



60,000 downloads in the first three-and-a-half weeks.

"The app is a game-changer because it drives online and in-restaurant engagement and introduces Schlotzsky's to new guests," Roddy said.

## 30 *Panda Express*

Panda Express has been on a roll lately, opening new locations throughout the U.S., debuting in Dubai, hitting on-trend menu cravings with the launch of kale and introducing an online group ordering app.

"Many fond memories are created over the opening of all those little takeout boxes, passing them back and forth across the table to try what everyone else in the group has ordered," said Dave Wallinga, vice president of guest marketing. "For Panda, online ordering is about more than just simple convenience. It's about streamlining mealtime to create an easier way for our guests to come together with their 'family' — in whatever form that might be — over a shared meal."

The brand also has stepped up its cause and social marketing efforts.

When a mudslide devastated Washington state last year, Panda Express collected donations from nearly 70 stores to assist.





Its “Joy Spotting” campaign through the holidays identified people who shared moments of joy and thanks on Twitter and surprised them with a gift card.

In a period of eight hours, the campaign yielded nearly 6.5 million impressions, a 389 percent increase in mentions of the Panda brand and a 24 percent increase in Panda Express’s following.



## 31 **Bruegger's Bagels**

To kick off the new year, Bruegger’s Bagels named a new president, Paul Carolan, and relocated its headquarters to the restaurant hotbed of Dallas.

In the past year, the brand also added bagel burgers and embraced the seasonality trend with spring and winter menu launches.

In the spirit of transparency, Bruegger’s Bagels also came up with “Behind the Taste,” a video series that gives fans an inside look at the people and traditions behind the brand, plus a special discount code for a product.

“Our ‘Behind the Taste’ campaign captures Bruegger’s Bagels’ commitment to authentic bagel baking and the high-quality ingredients,” said Judy Kadylak, vice president of marketing. “We’re featuring the unique stories of our artisans — from our

bagel makers to fishmongers, dairy farmers and sundried tomato suppliers who make our food great — to give viewers a closer look at what our brand stands for.”

## 32 **La Madeleine**

La Madeleine is on a roll, signing expansion deals for Arkansas, Colorado, Texas, Virginia and more in 2014. The brand also opened its first franchised location last year, in Lubbock, Texas. Plans are to double the brand’s footprint within the next few years.

The new locations showcase an updated layout and décor for the brand, which highlights comfort and French country atmosphere.

On the menu side of the business, the company has focused on seasonal offerings and rolled out holiday catering and gift options at the end of the year.

La Madeleine also stepped up its philanthropic efforts in the past year, joining the No Kid Hungry campaign and donating nearly \$90,000 to the Children’s Hunger Fund.

“As an organization, we should make a difference in the communities we serve and stand for something,” COO John Cahill said.

## 33 **MAD Greens**

MAD Greens is setting the pace for digital signage by curating social media content from its fans and displaying it on its menu boards. The result is stronger customer engagement with the brand, according to Lucas Clarke, director of marketing for the Colorado-based salad concept.



Additionally, the brand is looking to open as many as 10 new units and nearly double in size in the coming year. Clarke attributes the brand’s success to its local sourcing efforts.

“Less food miles equals better taste,” he said.

MAD Greens celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2014. In those 10 years, the chain has served up more than 200 tons of spring mix, 1.9 million heads of romaine lettuce and 60 tons of spinach, most of it locally sourced.

The brand has partnered with Xan Creative to develop a new interior design aimed at enhancing the customer experience and improving the food prep line function. It includes an updated ordering process and digital menu boards that can display featured menu items and ingredients.

## 34 **Capriotti's**

As most restaurant brands try to chase down the fickle millennial consumer, Capriotti’s is in a good spot: Its CEO Ashley Morris is himself a millennial. He believes his generation’s experience during the Great Recession is sparking interest in franchising and small-business ownership.

Morris and childhood friend Jason Smylie, now the brand’s CMO, took that path themselves in their early 20s, when they bought

their first Capriotti's franchise in 2004. Four years later, they bought the entire company.

They believe that successful franchisees must follow the system completely and that extraordinary customer service makes all the difference.

Capriotti's relies on meetings, testing and focus groups with franchisees to gain insights and buy-in.

Currently, the brand has just over 100 units with 200 more in the pipeline. Morris hopes to have 500 units open by the end of the decade.

## 35 **Maui Wowi Hawaiian Coffees and Smoothies**

Maui Wowi is expanding in nontraditional venues at a rapid pace. The Denver-based franchise, with more than 450 units in 48 states and seven countries, operates an average of 10,000 events per year in stadiums, theme parks, convention centers, race-tracks and various other temporary events across the world, including the Summer X Games at the Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas.

Fueling the company's growth is the rise in consumer demand for healthier beverages in high-traffic venues. Maui Wowi also has implemented new support programs and tools for its franchisees, has overhauled its website to focus on transparency and is geared up for even more growth. The company offers franchising incentives for veterans and teachers.

The brand entices its fans with creative marketing campaigns such as its \$2.14 smoothie deal on Valentine's Day and its Cy-

ber Monday promo. CEO Mike Weinberger said Maui Wowi is well positioned and plans to leverage the coffee/specialty beverage segment's continued acceleration.

"I appreciate that people are serving healthier products now," he said. "We've been doing it for a long time."

## 36 **JJ's Red Hots**

JJ's Red Hots debuted its handcrafted hot dogs and sausages in summer 2012. It since has launched a number of memorable marketing campaigns, planted flags on college campuses and pushed menu innovation beyond the basic dog.

One nominator said the brand deserved a spot on the list because of its innovative offerings and attention to detail and quality.

JJ's invited guests to build their own hot dogs for its second annual "12 Days of Hot Dogs" holiday promotion. Ahead of the Super Bowl, it launched a Brady Deflatey and

a Beast Mode Mother Lode as a nod to the Patriots and Seahawks.

The brand also teamed up with King of Pops to create a gourmet Popsicle.

As for its campus expansion, JJ's partnered with Chartwells Higher Education to debut at Florida Atlantic University with a customized menu and a special FAU Dog.

"JJ's is extremely excited for this opportunity as the value and portability of our core products will resonate very well with college students on the move," Founder Jonathan Luther said.

## 37 **Rubio's**

Since opening the first Rubio's in 1983, the brand has grown to nearly 200 restaurants and has evolved its menu to feature more grilled seafood offerings. The company is undergoing a redesign, renovating more than 60 stores in southern California.



Rubio's was named the No. 1 Mexican chain on Consumer Reports' latest survey, beating Chipotle.

What is putting Rubio's most on trend is its longtime commitment to sustainable seafood. Last year, the brand launched a TV spot called "To the Ocean" to showcase its support of ocean health.

"The ocean is an incredible resource," founder Ralph Rubio said. "It provides much of our food and also serves as an inspiration for our coastal menu and the ambience of our restaurants."



FOUNDED BY FIREMEN



## 38 Firehouse Subs

Firehouse Subs has been a Top 100 mainstay because of its sustained growth, quality products and philanthropic efforts. Its Public Safety Foundation purchases equipment for public safety organizations nationwide and gets its customers' support involved.

Last year, Firehouse was involved in raising money to provide Action Trackchairs for veterans who lost legs in combat. The brand also supports K9s for Warriors in Jacksonville, Florida.

In 2014, the brand launched a new menu geared toward healthy eaters called "Hearty & Flavorful, Under 500 Calories." It was the largest menu addition in the brand's nearly 20 years and includes 10 new choices, from Sriracha Beef to Turkey Salsa Verde.

Firehouse's momentum is expected to continue this year: CEO Don Fox said the brand will launch a significant media push, including a large investment in TV in 2015.

## 39 Chicken Salad Chick

Chicken Salad Chick has quite an unusual story, beginning with Stacy Brown's homemade chicken salad, which she sold from her kitchen. In less than five years, the concept is now a company with about 15 current franchisees, all but one owning multiple units.

For a time, so many new units were in the pipeline — a total of 85 — that Stacy and her husband and CEO Kevin put new franchising agreements on hold for nine months so they could focus on ramping up.

"We've gone a little slower than some concepts because we've wanted to make sure the tools worked," Brown said. The Browns said they have been thoughtful about making strategic hires and getting infrastructure in place to support franchisees at what they call a "world-class level."

By the time Chicken Salad Chick opened additional markets in 19 cities across five Southeastern states for expansion in September 2014, more than 300 inquiries

from potential franchisees had poured in. Since releasing the additional markets, Chicken Salad Chick has gained 39 commitments in those states.

Chicken Salad Chick has not spent a penny on advertising franchising opportunities, according to Brown. It is, however, becoming a bit more creative with its marketing efforts, having recently launched a Pick a New Chick flavor to involve its fans in the menu development. The company also recently established a new foundation aimed at funding the work of the American Cancer Society and ending hunger in the U.S.



## 40 Which Wich Superior Sandwiches

Which Wich Superior Sandwiches continues to grow rapidly, averaging two openings per week in 2014, according to one voter. That expansion includes international markets.

Which Wich stands out for its ongoing effort to offer creative sandwiches in the crowded segment. Its Bag 8 program has yielded a Reuben, gyro, Philly and Bahn Mi.

The company also launched a new philanthropic campaign, called Project PB&J. As part of the campaign, the Dallas-based sandwich chain organized 500 franchisees, corporate staff and volunteers to crank out a record-setting 26,710 peanut-butter-and-



jelly sandwiches in an hour, which then were donated to area nonprofit organizations.

For every PB&J sandwich purchased in a Which Wich location, the company donates a PB&J to a local cause and banks one for its global initiative trust.

Another signature of the brand is engaging guests' creativity: After they've enjoyed their sandwiches, guests are encouraged to draw on their bags using red Sharpies and to hang their artwork on the community wall.

## 41 Asian Box

Many voters for this year's list likened Asian Box to a combination of a fast casual concept and a favorite neighborhood eatery. The brand uses responsibly raised and organic ingredients to create dishes straight from chef Grace Nguyen's family recipes.

CEO Frank Klein, along with Chad Newton, came up with the concept when he was spending time on the road as a restaurant consultant. The two of them strive to create a "fast fine" type of brand, with high-quality Asian food at an affordable price.

Asian Box sources sustainably grown, locally produced ingredients whenever possible, butchers its own meat and makes its own sauces. Since its 2012 debut, it has grown steadily throughout California (five units) and plans a national rollout. The company recently closed on an investment from the Horowitz Group to accelerate its growth.

Employee welfare plays a role in Asian Box's brand values, and competitive pay and flexible scheduling options are two key elements. In addition to averaging 50



percent above minimum wage, employees earn bonuses, incentives and awards.

Employees are cross-trained extensively, in part so they can work a variety of positions and get the hours they need.

"We tell everybody that we want you to stick around as long as you want to stick around, even if you want to work just one shift a week," Klein said. "Happier employees mean a happier Asian Box. Anyone who is not doing that today is foolish."

## 42 BurgerFi

Florida-based burger concept BurgerFi added 31 locations in 2014, bringing its total number of locations nationwide to 63. That expansion included the brand's debut in 12 new markets, from Maryland to Alaska.

BurgerFi also focused on growth of non-traditional storefront units in 2014, adding locations at the Sun Life Stadium — home to the Miami Dolphins — and at the CNN Center in Atlanta.

The addition of locations and markets for the company resulted in a 97 percent increase in new units and systemwide gross sales of \$66.4 million, a 114 percent increase over 2013.

"Since launching in 2011, we have continued to outperform ourselves year after year, and we are thrilled about our record-breaking numbers in 2014," CEO Corey Winograd said.

The company is projected to nearly double in size with 50 to 60 unit openings. At the beginning of 2015, BurgerFi announced its first international deal for 40 locations in Mexico City and surrounding areas.

On the menu, BurgerFi created a Breakfast All Day Burger and holiday-themed frozen concretes, such as The Cereal Killer for Halloween.

The company also is ratcheting up its marketing efforts, with a Bestie Photo Contest and a matching funds promo for #GivingTuesday, with the American Red Cross as the beneficiary.



## 43 Boston Market

Although Boston Market has been around for 30 years, the brand is hitting a growth spurt backed by strong AUVs, which are around \$1.3 million, up from \$1 million in 2010. Same-store sales grew 26.7 percent from 2011 to 2014.

Last year, Boston Market entered into an agreement with the Army and Air Force Exchange Service to bring its brand to military members and their families. It also opened its first nontraditional location at Destiny USA in Syracuse, New York. In 2015, Boston Market plans to open at least 10 new locations, including expansion to the Middle East.

The company updated its operating system, menu and guest service in the past year. The new operating system is designed for better throughput and speed of service and is used in all new stores and remodeled locations. It has yielded a processing increase of approximately 15 percent more transactions per hour.

With the demand for prepared holiday foods increasing, Boston Market has had to create more capacity in restaurants and has done so with refrigerated trucks, dry storage units and outdoor tents to fill orders.

Boston Market is on-trend for health-conscious consumers, reducing sodium levels in several of its menu items and offering more than 150 meal options at 550 calories or less. In 2014, the brand rolled out a new Guest Service Excellence program based on five pillars: friendliness, taste and temperature, speed of service, table touches and problem resolution. It has seen a 6 percent increase in overall satisfaction scores since the launch.

## 44 **Fresh To Order**

Fresh To Order is experiencing quite the growth spurt. In the past year, the company has put agreements into place or is seeking franchisees for its hometown of Atlanta, as

well as North and South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, Texas and the mid-Atlantic and the lower Midwest states.

CEO Pierre Panos, an industry veteran across segments, calls the brand “fast fine” and believes Fresh To Order is leading a second wave of fast casual concepts.

In the past year, Fresh To Order added delivery in some markets, a bison burger, self-service wine and beer and a new mobile loyalty/payment app. The Fresh To Order App integrates with Apple Passbook and Google Wallet and will accept NFC payments this year.

Customers who download the app and register for the loyalty program will receive special offers, such as a \$3 credit at sign-up and an additional \$2 credit by referring a friend.

“Fresh To Order continues to innovate our menu, service model and now its digital platform by introducing a mobile app, which helps us maintain leadership in the ‘fast fine’ niche,” Panos said.



## 45 **Corner Bakery Café**

Corner Bakery Café added more than 25 new cafés and an additional nine franchise development agreements, including signings in Montana, Idaho and Virginia.

In addition to sustained growth, the chain

has continued its focus on sustainability and was awarded the Environmental Sustainability Award by EnTouch Controls for its commitment to energy efficiency.

“Guests that dine at our cafes care deeply about the impact our restaurants have on their neighborhoods, and we plan on continuing to demonstrate our commitment to the environment as we build new cafes this year and in 2015,” President Gary Price said.

In 2014, the chain also hit on some trends with a handful of new offerings, including kale and quinoa. And the brand’s effort for Share Our Strength’s Dine Out for No Kid Hungry has generated more than \$1.5 million.

Corner Bakery recently added a few key executives and underwent technological upgrades that are aimed at improving its franchisee’s economic model.



## 46 **MOOYAH Burger, Fries and Shakes**

Mooyah Burger, Fries and Shakes fit right into the hot better-burger segment in 2014, turning in a 42.7 percent sales increase and a 19.1 percent unit increase. The brand marked its debut in Kuwait and landed a spot on HealthyDiningFinder.com.

In 2014, MOOYAH was named No. 314 on Entrepreneur Magazine’s list of the top 500 franchise brands, moving up from No. 357

in 2013. MOOYAH also ranked first overall in Restaurant Business's Future 50 list.

MOOYAH opened 21 new restaurants last year and launched a new Loaded House Salad and side salad, as well as upgraded buns and an upgraded shake program with whipped cream, cherries and a jumbo straw.

The brand furthered its philanthropic mission by raising more than \$30,000 for No Kid Hungry during its systemwide campaign.

CEO Rich Hicks said the brand's success is due in part to a passionate and ambitious team of multiunit franchisees who continue to build enthusiasm and momentum for the brand.

In 2015, MOOYAH is on pace to open 30 new locations and reach the milestone of 100 before the close of the year. The booming brand is set to enter several new states in 2015, with the first MOOYAH restaurants in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, New York, Massachusetts and Florida scheduled to open this year.



## 47 Zoup! Fresh Soup Company

Zoup! stands out in the busy fast casual space simply for having a differentiated product. The brand offers hundreds of

soups, with 12 always rotating on a daily basis, including low-fat, vegetarian, dairy-free, gluten-free and spicy options. The company received plenty of press for its R&D efforts when it served up Rattlesnake Stew recently.

The company also is expanding its footprint in markets across the U.S. and Canada — including a recent debut in Wisconsin — and now includes about 70 units in North America. Zoup! landed on this year's Entrepreneur's Franchise 500 list, as well as Inc. 5000.

The company also offers catering and Zoup! to the Rescue care packages.

## 48 Togo's Eateries

Even though Togo's has been around since the early 1970s, its current growth spurt has spawned the creation of a COO position. Togo's also added a VP of franchise operations, senior director of supply chain, CMO, SVP of development and SVP of finance.

The company continues to add to its western footprint and recently debuted in Salt Lake City, Colorado Springs and Boise, Idaho, to name a few.

The brand is known for its proprietary brand of old-fashioned Pastrami, which helps with differentiation in the crowded sandwich segment. To get fans excited and to mark grand openings, Togo's plans 1,000 sandwich giveaways. For National Pastrami Day this year, Togo's gave away 10,000 of its Hot Pastrami sandwiches.

"We do things a bit differently from other sandwich shops, and that includes showing our appreciation like this. At the same time, we wanted to make it easy to invite new guests to come try one of our most popular sandwiches," CMO Renae Scott said.



## 49 Chop't Creative Salad Company

Chop't Creative Salad Company is leveraging the demand for healthier food, turning in more than a 33-percent increase in sales and 26.3-percent in unit growth last year, according to Technomic.

The chain has just over 20 locations and about 11 million customers annually, according to CEO Nick Marsh. He said the concept's purpose is to "capture, and perhaps lead, this massive trend of people's awareness (of what they're eating)." Marsh has aspirations of going national and intends to "change the perception of what a salad could be."

This growth is complemented by the brand's philanthropic focus. The company donates food to schools and nonprofit children's organizations with each new store opening. It also supports local charities through Chop't Gives Day.



The company recently released a mobile loyalty and payments app, with exclusive deals, birthday giveaways and more.

## 50 **Amsterdam Falafelshop**

Amsterdam Falafelshop, a Washington, D.C., staple since 2004, is expanding outside of its home market, announcing units planned for Boston, Dallas and Philadelphia.

The concept also is moving forward with a U.S. franchise growth plan calling for new shops in other select urban centers and is seeking franchisees interested in developing key areas throughout the Northeast, Eastern Coast, Midwest and Southeast, as well as metro areas in the Midwest such as Chicago.

The concept was created by husband-and-wife duo Arianne and Scott Bennett, who were intrigued with top-your-own falafel shops in Amsterdam. They initially thought the concept would be a small endeavor, but consumer demand led to additional locations and multiple units in development.

Amsterdam Falafelshop's staff is trained to encourage customers to sample things before ordering to make sure they like it. The top-it-yourself bar with nearly two dozen ingredients and sauces also helps customers get what they want.

Each location is independently owned and operated and reflects the vibe of its community. Amsterdam Falafelshop recently was named winner of the "Favorite Fast Bites" category at the 32nd annual RAMMY Awards, which recognize Washington, D.C.-area restaurants.



## 51 **Burger Lounge**

In a market crowded with better-burger concepts, CEO J. Dean Loring is trying to make Burger Lounge stand out with high-quality, sustainable ingredients served up in a modern, high-end context. The brand uses single-source beef and calls its signature product "the original grass-fed burger."

It also offers salads with ingredients such as organic buckwheat and features full-service dining in a fast casual setting.

"Our supply chain partnerships are truly partnerships," Loring said. "Transparency is an important part of our success with growers. We expect a lot from them and they from us."

Moving forward, Burger Lounge will continue its menu innovation, such as wild game meat LTOs. It also is continuing its expansion in southern California and plans to add four to six new locations per year.

One nominator called Burger Lounge "one of the truest representations of the better-burger segment."

## 52 **Tropical Smoothie Café**

Atlanta-based Tropical Smoothie Café wrapped up 2014, with 11.4-percent sales comps and a 28-percent increase in new franchise agreements.

The brand's AUVs also surpassed \$526,000 — the highest in the company's 17-year history.

"This past year marked Tropical Smoothie Café's transition from an emerging fast-casual brand to a true industry leader," CEO Mike Rotondo said.

This year, Tropical Smoothie Café plans to exceed 500 stores nationwide and sign franchise agreements for an additional 150 new locations. By 2018, Tropical Smoothie Café plans to have 800 stores open across the U.S. The company, with the backing of a private-equity firm, has launched a financing program to incentivize franchisees to open additional stores nationwide.

The brand is doing more than just growing its footprint; its menu innovation has boosted the balance sheet as well, with the addition of bowls, Mediterranean flatbreads, a Totally Green Smoothie, turkey club offerings, Live Better Smoothies and more.

## 53 **East Hampton Sandwich Co.**

East Hampton Sandwich Co., which launched in 2012, announced plans to expand in the Dallas metro with three new

locations in 2015, and four more locations covering other areas of Texas in 2016.

"The response has been fantastic," founder Hunter Pond said. "We hear from customers that East Hampton fills the void between a pedestrian sandwich experience and a sit-down fine-dining sandwich option."

The original East Hampton restaurant posted a 25-percent, same-store sales increase its first year, and the other two existing locations are performing well, too. The small chain has attracted the attention of a private-equity firm, which is putting up \$3 million to help strengthen its corporate operations and prepare for the next level of development.

"We do exactly what most of the other sandwich chains don't," Pond said. "We outsource the bread, and that gives us the opportunity to focus on the ingredients between the bread."

That includes sauces, such as Sriracha dijonaise, basil pesto aioli and bourbon mustard sauce, all made in-house.



## 54 **Juice It Up!**

California-based Juice It Up! had quite a year in 2014, reporting annual sales and AUV increases of 16 percent and 17 percent, respectively.

Those latest financials continue the brand's consecutive, month-over-month net sales growth, resulting in over 50 percent sales increases over the past 25 months.

The timing is right for Juice It Up! thanks to the popularity of its new raw juice platform and strong consumer interest in health and wellness, according to Laina Sullivan, who recently was named VP of business development.

Sullivan credits the brand's new Raw Fusion platform for driving the sales increases. The platform, which was introduced in April 2014, features raw blends of fresh whole fruits and vegetables.

Juice It Up! also launched its new Red Fusion platform in 2014, added Ginger Shots, added Pitaya as a permanent item and more.

The 80-unit juice brand also promoted Carol DeNembo to VP of marketing and continues to grow its footprint, nabbing a spot on the "Next 300 Franchise Chains" list by Franchise Times.

Last year, Juice It Up! also rolled out a new paperless loyalty program, My Juice It Up! Healthy Rewards, which rewards guests for visiting.

## 55 **Blazing Onion Burgers, Brews and Spirits**

The first Blazing Onion opened in 2007 by CEO David Jones and his wife, Lorri. The concept since has grown to six locations throughout the Northwest. Blazing Onion long has featured ordering kiosks for line-



busting, as well as 3-D TVs, Coca-Cola Freestyle machines and LRS pagers to expedite food delivery.

In 2004, the brand partnered with eTouch-Menu to launch an iPad app for guest-initiated order and payment.

The app features the full menu including alcohol, a social element, a paging system to summon a server and a payment system that will allow guests to split checks. Guest registration also will remember previous orders.

"This is long overdue," Jones said. "We are excited to give our guests control of their service experience. Order your drinks when you sit down, order your food when you're ready, order a second drink, order dessert and pay when ready without head turning for a server. This will not replace guest interaction. We will still have service specialists assigned to sections to help make your dining experience wonderful."

The company hopes to open a few more restaurants by the end of the year but will grow slowly.

"We think the slow, careful learning is better in the long run," Jones said.

## 56 **Noodles & Company**

In 2014, Noodles & Company marked its first year as public and experienced contin-



ued growth, including its milestone 400th restaurant opening. According to Technomic's 2014 Top 500 Chain Restaurant report, the chain's footprint jumped more than 16 percent from 2013 to 2014.

Noodles & Company's plans include the acceleration of its catering program and a heavier focus on the dinner daypart. Those two initiatives will help the brand drive sales and further differentiate itself in the rapidly growing fast casual space, according to CEO Kevin Reddy.

Catering offers the brand an opportunity to create volume, positively impact AUVs and introduce the concept to a much larger group faster, Reddy said.

Messaging — about the brand's ingredients, flavor complexity and customizability — and merchandising are two other areas of focus for Noodles as it works to expand throughout the country.

Noodles also plans to beef up its dinner daypart offerings and will offer a limited number of appetizers, desserts, coffee, tea, beer and wine. Customers will order through the line, be seated and then served when their dishes are ready. Employees will circulate the dining room to follow up with tables and ask if guests need anything else while they linger a little longer.

## 57 *Bean Sprouts*

Bean Sprouts first made the Top 100 list in 2011, and the Seattle-based concept continues to make huge strides in its quest to feed children healthier meals. Founders Shannon Payette Seip and Kelly Parthen do so by offering a "whimsical menu that focuses on playful presentation." For example, the chain serves sandwiches shaped like flowers, and salads and pizzas served on waffles called Wazzles.

The concept is very much in line with one of the National Restaurant Association's top industry trends from the past five years: Healthy kids' meals.

Last year, Bean Sprouts launched a kid-friendly cooking app designed for children 8 and under. The app features a cast of silly pea and bean characters who guide users through playful recipes such as Crocamole and Snack Man, star in food games and magically appear in videos. The app offers a play-by-play of how to create the most popular "Imaginibbles" recipes from Bean Sprouts Café and the award-winning book it inspired, "Bean Appétit: Hip and Healthy Ways to Have Fun with Food."

The NRA recognized Bean Sprouts as a winner of its annual Kids LiveWell Recipe Challenge, an initiative showcasing res-



taurants' culinary efforts to create healthy menu options for children. The panel choosing the winners included approximately 30 children.

## 58 *Zaxby's*

In a year in which beef prices experienced all-time highs, it's been a good time to be in the chicken business. Zaxby's, for example, has continued to grow throughout the Midwest and Southeast and celebrated its 600th milestone restaurant in 2014.

Also, for a second consecutive year, Zaxby's has ranked as America's "Most Craveable Fast Casual" by Technomic.

"We are continuously looking for new experiences and flavors to provide our guests, but it's also exciting for us to know that some of our very first menu items are still fan favorites to this day," CEO and co-founder Zach McLeroy said.

Zaxby's guests attribute its craveability to its signature chicken and variety of dipping sauces, including its popular Zax Sauce.

To celebrate its 25 years in business, the original restaurant in Statesboro, Georgia, which opened in 1990, is being rebuilt to reflect Zaxby's commitment to its guests' overall dining experience. Its new farmhouse design offers guests a high-end, fast casual experience with redesigned exteriors, dining areas and kitchens. Point-of-sale and other improvements will further enhance food quality and increase speed of service.





## 59 Jamba Juice

In the past year, Jamba Juice came out with a fresh juice line, cold-pressed juices, whole-food smoothies, snacks and much more. It also continued to expand, including entry into Taiwan, and continued to move toward its asset-light model to reduce costs.

Jamba Juice is on track to add 500 new franchised stores in the next five years, including the acceleration of nontraditional units and some co-branded units with Bruegger's Bagels.

The brand also launched Jamba eGifting, a new way for customers to purchase and share gift cards online, and has been an industry leader in mobile payments, surpassing the 1-millionth free beverage mark to a mobile wallet user last summer.

"Facilitating 1 million transactions through the mobile wallet over the last seven months confirms that the era of mobile commerce has arrived," CEO James D. White said. "I am proud that Jamba has been able to serve as a leader in the space."

## 60 VertsKebap

The kebab is one of Europe's most popular street foods, and the name loosely trans-

lates to "spinning roasted meat." In 2008, German-born Michael Heyne and Dominik Stein, then college students, missed their favorite street food from home, but couldn't find it anywhere.

Their craving led them to launch Verts, which started with two stores on the University of Texas's campus. The concept since has sold more than 1 million kebabs, wraps and salads in 20 restaurants in Austin, Dallas and Houston. VertsKebap plans to expand to San Antonio and beyond.

Heyne and Stein have Americanized the recipes a bit, adding a variety of vegetables and sauces. The concept also offers bowl and wrap versions of its food, and all items come in snack or regular size.

## 61 Orange Leaf Frozen Yogurt

In a crowded frozen yogurt space, Orange Leaf has elevated itself in a number of ways. Aside from being named among the fastest-growing privately held companies in the country by Inc. — its \$26.9 million in revenue last year represented a 653 percent growth — Orange Leaf recently added self-serve smoothies to its menu, launched a robust mobile marketing program and rolled out a new guest experience initiative.

Orange Leaf uses Mobivity's technology to provide opt-in SMS marketing solutions to its franchisees. Customers can elect to re-

ceive localized offers by responding to targeted calls to action.

Also, InMoment provides the technology to power Orange Leaf's guest satisfaction program, which includes several elements such as MyOrangeLeaf app feedback.

Orange Leaf also introduced an e-learning program called TREAT, which provides employees with information and tools to successfully fulfill their roles in delivering an excellent guest experience.

"As Orange Leaf continues to expand, we want to ensure that the guest experience remains at the core of our culture," CEO Reese Travis said. "Having an ongoing dialogue with our guests is one of the most important things we can do to provide consistent, top-quality service."

## 62 Slapfish

Thanks to its sustainably sourced seafood supply, Slapfish was named a Top 7 Eco-Minded Restaurant in the U.S. by Food & Wine Magazine. Founded by Food Network Chef Andrew Gruel, Slapfish recently opened new stores in southern California and Dubai and is working on its airport presence.

To help with its growth, the California-based chain brought on a new VP of operations, Greg Griffie. In the fall, it also launched a "Little Sharks Menu" for kids.

The seafood concept's plans for 2015 call for four new stores to open in the U.S.: at Baltimore-Washington International Airport, the University Center near the University of California



– Irvine, Los Angeles International Airport and another non-airport location in Los Angeles this fall.

“We want to satisfy seafood cravings around the globe by presenting flavorful plates that are also sustainable,” said Gruel, whose concept began as a social media-driven food truck in 2011. “Our two new airport locations will introduce Slapfish to an international audience of millions.”

## 63 *Great Wraps*

Driven by consumer demand for new sandwich carriers, major chains have been experimenting more with wraps. But one chain always has done just wraps, and it's grown to 80 locations.

Atlanta-based Great Wraps scored on Entrepreneur's Top 500 list for best franchised companies last year. The concept has expanded to Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, Oklahoma City, Boston and other markets, and has started planting flags in airport venues.

In support of its growth, Great Wraps has announced several key promotions. The brand also is undergoing a rebranding effort, calling itself Great Wraps Grill, adding an updated logo and rolling out new signage, packaging and marketing collateral.



“When we founded Great Wraps more than 25 years ago, we set out to provide a balance between hot, craveable comfort food, healthy menu options and off-the-chart flavor,” CEO and Chairman Mark Kaplan said. “We did that by cooking chef-inspired recipes fresh and hot-off-the-grill for each customer. As we grew, we knew we had to speed up the operation to handle the customer demand, causing us to rely less on the grill. Fast forward to now, with better operating technology, we can again offer freshly grilled menu items while maintaining acceptable wait times. Very simply, we're returning to our authentic grill roots.”

## 64 *Raising Cane's*

Raising Cane's continued its growth trajectory in the past year, expanding in states such as Kentucky, Alabama and Texas. It's been named a top brand with consumers by a Technomic survey, a top 10 excellent fast-food chain by Sandelman and Associates, and a top brand for delighting customers by Market Force.

Raising Cane's has a large, active social media following, called Caniacs. They're called to engage with the brand's local marketing effort, from raising money for a community dog park to collecting cellphones for deployed soldiers. With each new opening, the brand is raising money through its trademark preopening service projects, which have provided more than \$2.5 million in funding for charitable organizations throughout Louisiana since Todd Graves created the concept nearly two decades ago. More than \$500,000 has been donated to New Orleans' schools,

food banks, animal welfare groups, business development and other organizations.

Raising Cane's also has deployed a number of marketing campaigns to appeal to the coveted millennial demographic, including Cane's TV and Raising Cane's One Love Adventure.



## 65 *Blue Lemon*

Blue Lemon prides itself on its flavor combinations and gourmet plating. “Nobody does fast casual quite like us,” the brand's website says. “Our refined, blended service style provides table touches and quality of a full-service restaurant, yet allows for the speed that would rival some fast-food establishments.”

Utah-based Blue Lemon recently signed an agreement to open its sixth location, the first in Ogden. CEO Aaron Day and his wife, Lychelle, opened their first out-of-state location in Gilbert, Arizona, in May 2014.

In the fall, Blue Lemon partnered with WAND Corp. to integrate its POS and back-office system to support further growth.

Also in the fall, the concept launched its free Blue Lemon mobile-payment app. By signing up for the app, customers immediately are rewarded \$2 toward their first purchase and an additional \$2 each time they refer the app to a friend via social media.

"We're elated to be one of the first Utah-based restaurants to bring the convenience of smartphone purchasing to its customers," Day said.



## 66 *Luna Grill*

Nearly 400 people voted in favor of Luna Grill for this year's Movers and Shakers list, commending the California-based Mediterranean concept for everything from service to plate presentation, and from easy online ordering to support of organic and sustainable ingredients.

In late 2014, Luna Grill secured private funding to support expansion throughout southern California and Texas. The company plans to expand to approximately 30 units by the end of 2015.

"This successful financing gives us the financial flexibility to expand the Luna Grill concept in a meaningful way to new geographies, which we expect to do in a methodical fashion that allows us to stay true to our unique brand of fresh, healthy, authentic Mediterranean cuisine delivered with quality customer care," co-founder and CEO Sean Pourteymour said.

He said by 2016, the brand could be in Colorado and Arizona and eventually nationwide.

Known for its healthful Mediterranean cuisine that includes items such as falafel and hummus, kabobs and salads, Luna Grill opened its first restaurant in 2004.

## 67 *Slim Chickens*

With beef prices soaring and lean proteins in demand, more operators (and consumers) are giving chicken a closer look, putting Slim Chickens in a very good spot. Founders Greg Smart and Tom Gordon recently launched a franchising initiative to grow their 13 units to 20 brick-and-mortar locations by the end of the year, and they plan to hit 600 by 2025. The chain is concentrating on Midwest and Texas expansion.

"We have been in the midst of a 'healthier lifestyle' movement for quite some time now, and it's very apparent that consumers care about where their food comes from and how it will affect their health," Gordon said. "There's plenty of chicken places out there, but 'better chicken' is all about getting back to the basics with a fresh, quality product."

Slim Chickens has seen double-digit comp sales growth for the past three years. The brand also extended its signatures last year, launching chicken and waffles, and is installing digital menu boards in-store and at the drive-thru.

## 68 *Moe's Southwest Grill*

Moe's Southwest Grill has been around since 2000, but only recently launched its first-ever national media campaign. The 2014 effort included a revamped website and a 603-percent increase in its digital spending.

The result was a 33-percent increase in traffic to the site, double-digit conversions from display ads and Twitter engagement four-and-a-half times higher than the industry standard, according to CMO Paul Macaluso.

Macaluso's marketing team worked to contextualize Twitter ads, leveraging TV commercial buys and the television programming schedule. The team reviewed TV ad buys to discover which shows would be airing when the ads ran. They then created ads that made sense in the context. The opportunity was an excellent fit for Moe's brand, since Moe's product names are drawn from television, movie and other pop culture references. Moe's plans to accelerate to three or four media campaigns in 2015.

The company also marked the first half of 2014 with a record-breaking 120 new franchise deals. Markets include Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Houston, Pittsburgh and Salt Lake City, and include new and existing partnerships.

This past June was the largest month for franchise sales in the history of the Moe's brand, and the company has exhibited positive same-store sales for 19 of the last consecutive quarters.

## 69 *Salata*

Salata, "The Next Generation Salad Bar," was created by Berge Simonian in 2005 after he noticed the salad platform at his franchised restaurant was outpacing everything else on the menu.





Now more than 40 units are in Texas, California and Chicago. Plans call for 20 more locations in 2015, and 100-plus by 2017. David Laborde, director of product development, said the expansion is accelerating and is driven mostly by demand for customization.

The brand has a central commissary where all of the soups and dressings are made, and it is growing that space to keep up with growth. The commissary offers tight control over all of Salata's ingredients.

Salata has been adding more vegetarian proteins, such as quinoa, tofu and falafel. It recently added an LTO strategy and offers a catering menu.

The company also has reworked its salad bar to become gluten-free and trained all team members to serve customers with food allergies.

## 70 **Tijuana Flats**

Tijuana Flats is crediting a comprehensive digital campaign with a 119-percent increase in online ordering. Thanks to the digital campaign, online orders have grown from hovering around 2 percent to 3 percent of total sales to more than 5 percent in just two months. The brand also has seen a 2 percent bump in comps.

"Our overall goal is always to drive traffic in the restaurants," said Monique Yeager, VP of marketing for the 107-unit

Florida-based brand. "I do believe that we've done that with sales increases year over year each month."

The brand doesn't have a budget for television advertising but relies heavily on grassroots community-driven campaigns. Tijuana Flats kicked off its comprehensive digital marketing campaign last spring with a revamped website, local SEO, targeted Pandora ads and special blogger events.

The brand plans to double down on digital in 2015, committing a full 20 percent of its marketing budget to digital marketing.

Tijuana Flats also is keeping its menu fresh with new offerings such as The Atom Bombs and the Mega Dip.



## 71 **The Protein Bar**

Brands from Taco Bell to Kellogg's leveraged the popularity of protein last year, pushing the trend into the mainstream. This puts Chicago-based The Protein Bar in a great position.

The concept features high-protein food and beverages, from bowls to soups and salads to cold-pressed juices. It has expanded into Colorado and Washington, D.C., and offers a catering menu.

The brand was recognized by the National Restaurant Association for its inaugural Buzzed About Brands award in 2014.

Analisa Terenzio, director of sales and marketing for The Protein Bar, said her company has established itself as a leader in "simple, fast and delicious healthy fare for those on the go."

The Protein Bar recently launched its mobile app, offering customers an \$8 reward every time they spend \$88. Customers can pay with their phones, find locations and earn free swag.

## 72 **Wow Bao**

Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises' Wow Bao concept is about more than just hot Asian buns. The Chicago-based brand was just voted a top cuisine for the state of Illinois by Thrillist. That ranking includes all of food-centric Chicago.

It also has been ranked as a top food truck by Chicago magazine, which noted that of all the city's food trucks Wow Bao is the one to find for Asian taste on the healthier side.

Wow Bao has a brick-and-mortar location and offers shipping and catering services, as well as online ordering.

The company recently partnered with Mocupay to launch a branded mobile app with loyalty and reward benefits, mobile marketing and secure payment.

"Wow Bao has been thrilled with Mocupay's product and client service for years — it just seemed natural to take the product to the next level and launch a Wow Bao-branded app," said Geoff Alexander, managing partner of Wow Bao. "Wow Bao customers can now select a favorite location, buy gift cards, reload gift cards easily and much more with this new version."





## 73 **Tender Greens**

Tender Greens is a standard bearer in the farm-to-fork segment. Most of its produce is picked fresh daily from Scarborough Farms in Oxnard, California, one of the brand's investors.

Signature items include the Chipotle Barbecue Chicken Salad, Chinese Chicken Salad and Happy Vegan Salad. Each local chef also creates specialty dishes such as Harissa Rubbed Pork Loin Sandwich and Rosemary Porchetta.

The company recently added staff tasked specifically with engaging customers in the dining room.

"We're looking for people who can also engage guests at the table and elevate the experience so it feels more like full service," CEO Erik Oberholtzer said. "We believe this will elevate the guest experience and help with throughput during our busy rush hours."

Tender Greens has 23 locations open, with five more opening soon. The company offers recipes on its website, caters and designs its restaurants with environmentally friendly products whenever possible.

Tender Greens also facilitates the Sustainable Life Project, which provides a structured working and learning environment to emancipated foster youth with a goal of helping them become self-sufficient adults.

## 74 **The Halal Guys**

One Movers and Shakers voter predicts that The Halal Guys will define fast casual Middle Eastern food. Fransmart, the franchise consulting firm that powered Five Guys and Qdoba to national prominence, is betting on it, aiming to open Halal Guys outlets across North America within the next year.

"It's going to be the Chipotle of Middle Eastern food," Fransmart CEO Dan Rowe said.

The brand recently signed a 50-unit SoCal deal, a 10-unit development deal for Washington, D.C., and a Houston agreement, among others.

The Halal Guys is a street-food powerhouse in New York City, where push cart vendors serve up platters of chicken and rice prepared in accordance with Islamic law. The concept got its start in 1990, when the founding partners opened a hot dog cart on West 53rd Street and 6th Avenue in New York. They saw a demand among Muslim cab drivers needing to have a halal Muslim meal.

The Halal Guys still runs its street food cart alongside its growing storefront presence. The company also offers full catering services.

## 75 **Wahlburgers**

Wahlburgers has something no other better-burger concepts have: Star power. The concept was founded in Massachusetts in 2011, by Donnie, Paul and Mark Wahlberg. It since has surpassed the 40-unit mark from Florida and Philadelphia to Vegas and Toronto.

Wahlburgers leveraged its star power to land a reality show on A&E Network. The brand includes full-serve and quick-serve dining options, takeout and a full bar. The menu includes made-to-order burgers, pure beef hot dogs, specialty frappes and more.

Because of its growth and pop culture connection (Mark is an actor, Donnie is a musician and member of New Kids on the Block, and Paul is the founder/chef), Wahlburgers won a National Restaurant Association's Buzzed About Brands award.

Rick Vanzura, CEO, said his brand's celebrity cache is secondary to the quality of its menu and its hybrid setting, with one side offering full service and the other offering quick service.



### TOP 5 TECHNOLOGIES

# 1 Mobile ordering

Smartphones have evolved at such a swift pace and have infiltrated every facet of how we patronize and run a business. Three out of our top five technologies on this year's list are mobile technologies, and the top technology trend is mobile ordering.

Brands of all sizes and in every segment are trying to figure out how to inject mobile ordering into their operations. The feature offers convenience and saves time, which is really all consumers want these days.

The technology has other benefits, as well. For example, Cousins Subs' launched a mobile ordering app in 2014, and has experienced increased order accuracy, increased average check for online orders, reduced guest wait times and better guest service, according to Matthew Somoles, director of field services for the brand.



New research by the National Restaurant Association shows that 52 percent of U.S. Internet users likely would use a smartphone or tablet for ordering takeout and delivery if possible, with 74 percent of millennials expressing interest in doing so. In other words, mobile ordering is here to stay.

# 2 Loyalty apps

Another mobile feature providing convenience for consumers is a loyalty app. Starbucks set the pace for this trend with its My Starbucks Rewards app, which has about 10 million customers. Loyalty is important because it inspires repeat visits from guests who tend to spend more.

It also provides a brand's mobile app with utility; customers won't download a branded app if it doesn't serve a purpose for them. So offer a BOGO offer with every fourth visit and do so via the customer's mobile device. According to Bo-loco CEO Patrick Renna, mobile loyalty programs not only enhance the brand experience, they'll also soon be the standard in the restaurant industry.

Mobile loyalty programs also provide the opportunity for brands to collect comprehensive data about their best guests and to tailor deals and connect with those guests one-on-one.

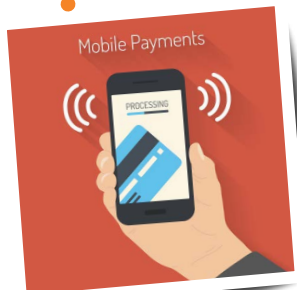
According to Punchh co-founder Sastry Penumathy, loyalty programs offer operators a single view of their customers across all touchpoints; they know when they're visiting and what they order. That information allows brands to target their customers more specifically.





## 3 **Mobile payments**

### TOP 5 TECHNOLOGIES



It didn't take Apple Pay to put mobile payments on the map, although it helped that large brands, including McDonald's and Panera have embraced them. Starbucks is the true leader in this space and, according to CEO Howard Schultz, the demand for mobile payments still is growing fast.

U.S. consumers made \$1.3 billion in mobile payments in 2013, and Starbucks accounted for more than 90 percent of those purchases, according to Schultz. Starbucks now

accepts more than 7 million mobile payments per week as 16 percent of its U.S. sales occur this way.

"No company and no retail store, domestically or internationally, even comes close," Schultz said. "And while that figure has been growing by almost 50 percent per year, the real growth is yet to come."

Global users increasingly are adopting the idea of electronic payments being the most secure — in particular, 24 percent of shoppers aged 16 to 24 and 25 percent of shoppers aged 25 to 34 as well as those aged 35 to 44.

## 4 **iPads/tablets, including kiosk and tableside**

Tablets and kiosks have changed the restaurant industry by giving customers more control over their ordering and payment processes. According to Empathica, tableside tablet developers recently reported a month-to-month growth rate of 35 percent in tablet adoption by restaurants, with retail sales and loyalty program gains mirroring those numbers.

Although the ways that restaurants use tablets vary, the overarching message is that tablets enable restaurants to enhance the convenience and level of interaction they provide to guests, ensuring that customers can create a closer connection with the brand by using technology that is al-

ready part of their everyday lives.

Genghis Grill has improved its lunch-time table turns by more than 30 percent since the rollout of tablets that enable guests to order and pay at the table. The results are based on data generated across 18 stores over an eight-week period. The Presto by E la Carte tablets currently are installed at more than 75 Genghis Grill locations across 23 states.



## 5 **Social media**

Social media's power and influence are showing no signs of slowing down. In fact, brands now have to figure out how best to leverage Instagram, Vine and Snapchat for their marketing strategies, on top of the traditional Facebook and Twitter.

And what brand wouldn't want to do that? Social media evens the playing field, giving small startups the same advantages as ubiquitous chains. Operators also can track customer analytics via social media, helping identify customer service problems and remedy issues in real time and

implement operational changes if need be.

Social media is a modern word-of-mouth marketing channel, and a brand's social presence holds nearly as much weight as the in-store experience.

What's more, social media is the best method to crowd-source ideas for menus, philanthropic efforts, events and more. This type of engagement brings the brand/customer dynamic to a whole new level.



### TOP 10 Marketing Campaigns

# 1

## Chipotle

### "Farmed and Dangerous"

When it launched in the beginning of 2014, Chipotle's "Farmed and Dangerous" received quite a bit of press for its out-of-the-box approach to marketing. The original comedy series explored the world of industrial agriculture in the U.S. and was presented initially on Hulu and Hulu Plus.

The campaign received praise for both its subtle branding and its unorthodox presentation via nontraditional channels. It also managed to convey Chipotle's brand values without typical product integration. The company said "Farmed and Dangerous" satirizes the lengths to which corporate agribusiness and its image-makers go to create a positive image of industrial agriculture.

"Much of our marketing is aimed at making consumers more curious about where their food comes from and how it is prepared," CMO Mark Crumpacker said. "By making complex issues about food production more understandable — even entertaining — we are reaching people who

have not typically been tuned into these types of issues."

"Farmed and Dangerous" came on the heels of two animated short films from Chipotle: 2013's "The Scarecrow" and 2011's "Back to the Start."

"We think of 'Farmed and Dangerous' as a values-integration rather than typical product-integration," Crumpacker said. "The show addresses issues that we think are important — albeit in a satirical way — without being explicitly about Chipotle. This approach allows us to produce content that communicates our values and entertains people at the same time."

One voter called the campaign "groundbreaking."



# 2

## Newk's Cares

Newk's Eatery led a campaign in partnership with the Ovarian Cancer Research Fund during Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month in September. The Newk's Cares campaign raised awareness and funds for the organization.

The message is personal for Newk's CEO Chris Newcomb. His wife, Lori, has battled ovarian cancer and gave a face to the campaign.

According to one voter, the campaign forged a direct connection with countless customers who sent Lori messages of support and stories of their own encounters with the disease. Newk's customers voiced appreciation for the brand's message and doubled its initial fundraising goal of \$50,000.

The campaign included an in-store awareness campaign for early detection and screening, and a five-hour Ovarian

Cycle indoor cycling event. In total, \$122,000 was raised for research, one of the Ovarian Cancer Research Fund's most successful fundraising efforts nationally.

"With early detection and treatment, the rate increases to greater than 92 percent," Lori Newcomb said. "Through education and by raising money for severely underfunded research, we hope to make a difference in the future progression of this disease."



## TOP 10 Marketing Campaigns

### 3 **Boston Market's holiday campaign**

The holiday season is Boston Market's biggest by far, with sales up double digits compared with the rest of the year. The brand even launched a holiday hub website — with recipes and hosting tips — in 2012.

Boston Market served more than 1 million customers at its 460 locations last Thanksgiving Day alone, and more than 41,000 whole turkeys, nearly 3 million pounds of mashed potatoes and more than 13 million pieces of cornbread in November and December.

The chain's social media and media relations efforts throughout the timeframe yielded 62-million-plus media impressions, an 89-percent increase over 2013. The brand's mobile website saw an increase of nearly 45-percent in the number of unique visitors year over year.

Boston Market locations designate two crew members as Holiday Ambassadors to welcome guests and facilitate their in-restaurant experience. The brand also partnered with Lisa Leslie, WNBA Hall of Famer and co-host of CBS's new all-female sports show "We Need to Talk," to develop holiday tips and recipes incorporating sides from Boston Market.



The campaign also included digital banners, DJ endorsements, e-blasts, national cable advertising, Tournament of Sides executed on Facebook and more.

### 4 **Jersey Mike's Month of Giving**

Each March, Jersey Mike's Subs partners with local charities for its annual Month of Giving fundraising campaign. In 2014, the effort raised a record \$2.1 million for more than 100 charities nationwide.

As part of the campaign, customers are invited to make an in-restaurant donation to the location's designated charity partner. Charities include hospitals, food banks, youth organizations and more.

Jersey Mike's offers incentives to donors, such as a free-chip-and-drink offer for the next visit with a \$3 donation.

The campaign culminates in a nationwide event, Jersey Mike's Day of Giving, when 100 percent of the day's sales are donated to the local partner charity.

Also in 2014, a commercial highlighting the company's new "A Sub Above" branding was part of the program.

### 5 **Genghis Grill's Fifth Annual Health Kwest**

Genghis Grill's annual Health Kwest campaign challenges its fans to adopt a healthier, more active lifestyle. One "Khantestant" then is selected by each of the chain's 110-plus restaurants to receive a free healthy meal every day for 60 days with a goal of losing weight and sharing the experience with friends.



Genghis Grill provides each of the Khantestants with exercise and nutrition tips, along with suggestions for building healthy stir-fry meals using the ingredients available at every restaurant. The brand also posts dozens of recipes online.

Competitors agree to complete a series of social media tasks throughout the contest — ranging from Facebook check-ins and Instagram photos to YouTube videos — each of which is worth a certain point value.

"What we're trying to do through Health Kwest is develop those positive habits among our Khantestants that they, in turn, can share with their friends via social media," CMO Ron Parikh said. "As each competitor loses weight and gets active, hundreds, or even thousands, of others are inspired by their success and encouraged to follow their example."

### 6 **Starbucks' Meet Me at Starbucks**

In the fall, Starbucks launched its first brand campaign, called "Meet Me at Starbucks." The campaign chronicled a day in the life of Starbucks in a documentary-type format. According to Ad Age, it was shot in 59 different stores in 28 countries. Each part was shot in the same 24-hour period and showcased a variety of subjects, from couples to bands and scrapbookers to reunited friends.



## TOP 10 Marketing Campaigns

Starbucks spokeswoman Linda Mills told the publication that the campaign stems from the idea that there are so many easy ways to be connected thanks to technology, but “we’re not really connected unless we’re face to face.”

The video states that it is “a celebration of the good things that happen when we get together.”

Said one voter, “I loved that it shared real customer stories, not some fabricated story the marketers and advertising teams made up. They feel very real.”

### 7 **Corner Bakery Café's World Smile Day**

In October, Corner Bakery Café marked World Smile Day by giving away two smiley-face mugs: one for the customer and one to share with a friend. Those mugs can be refilled for 25 cents during visits for the remainder of the year.

“While we share smiles with our guests every day, it's fun to participate in the one day a year dedicated to spreading joy and happiness,” CMO Diana Hovey said. “We hope these mugs will continue to make our guests smile all year long.”

Guests also were encouraged to post pictures with their mugs on social media using the hashtag #SmileAtTheCorner. The

hashtag produced 3.2 million timeline deliveries with a reach of more than 400,000 unique users. The top two Facebook posts for World Smile Day had a combined total of 1,433 likes, comments and shares.



### 8 **JJ's Red Hots' 12 Days of Hot Dogs**

Over the holidays, JJ's Red Hots engaged its fans during a 12 Days of Hot Dogs promotion where it sought out recipes from its fans, based on creativity (including name and ingredients). The brand picked 12 finalists who each had his or her hot dog day, with the winner based on sales.

One voter said the campaign set the bar for fan engagement and involvement, calling it “the coolest promotion without the benefit of a large marketing budget.”

Crowdsourcing is on trend, and JJ's sought out its fan engagement across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Sales were up during the entirety of the campaign.

“It is great to see everyone get excited about this,” JJ's founder Jonathan Luther said. “It was tough but at the same time a blast choosing the most-deserving 12.”

### 9 **Panda Express' "Joy Spotting" campaign**

Panda Express kicked off the holiday season with a Joy Spotting campaign on Twitter, identifying people who had shared moments of joy and thanks using the hashtag #ShareJoy. Panda Express selected 888

throughout the day to receive \$20 gift cards.

In its eight hours, the campaign yielded:

- Nearly 6.5 million impressions.
- #ShareJoy hashtag trending nationwide.
- 389 percent increase in mentions of the Panda brand.
- 994 retweets, 2,183 replies and 1,627 favorites.
- 24 percent increase in Panda Express' following.

“It's so inspiring to see all the posts of thanks and joy that are shared about family, friends, coworkers and others this time of year,” said Dave Wallinga, VP of guest marketing. “We're helping people take it one step further by encouraging them to also share joyful moments offline over a meal on us at Panda Express.”

### 10 **Fresh To Order's burger launch**

Fresh To Order launched a lineup of better burgers last year for \$10.90, which helped the brand reach both male (bison burger) and female (black bean and tuna burgers) demographics.

The burgers are served with a salad and fresh toppings. The bison burger is made with fresh ground bison and dried cherries and is served with baby field greens, horseradish aioli and caramelized onions. It features less than 600 calories.

“Our burgers go beyond what you would typically expect, both from a nutritional profile and the bold flavor combinations,” said Jesse Gideon, COO and corporate chef.

The better-burger launch was supported through social media and POP.



### 1 Healthier options

The National Restaurant Association's What's Hot chef survey of 2014 emphasizes the trend of healthier options, as seven of the top 20 trends can be linked to health and wellness. The average American places more emphasis on healthy food decisions than ever before. According to the Futures Company, 73 percent of Americans 16 and older say they are more interested in healthy eating practices than they were a few years ago.

As consumer preferences have evolved, fast casual concepts have taken the lead on offering healthier options than the typical food-away-from-home meals laden with unknown ingredients and hidden calories.

Fatburger's new Skinnyburger protein burger, for example, can be described as an inside-out version of the better-

### TOP 10 MENU TRENDS

burger chain's typical offering. The burger features one of Fatburger's standard patties sliced in half, then stuffed with typical toppings such as lettuce, cheese, onions, pickles and tomatoes. The burger weighs in at around 320 calories.

Other brands have created new menu categories to fit the healthier, lower-calorie, smaller-portion trends, such as Corner Bakery Café's 100 Combos Under 600 Calories, Planet Smoothie's under-300 line and McAlister's Lite Choose Two menu options.



### 2 Natural ingredients

Thanks to a confluence of factors — such as the Food Network, the Internet, millennials and celebrity chefs — consumers have become more sophisticated about the food they're eating. That's why brands from Panera to McDonald's have committed to cleaning up their ingredient lists in the next few years.



Smoothie King's VP of marketing, David Moore, said guests have a "new level" of knowledge and recognize the ingredients; "they want real food with real ingredients they can pronounce."

The NRA's research underscores this demand.

"Today's consumers are more interested than ever in what they eat and where their food comes from, and that is reflected in our menu trends research," said Hudson Riehle, SVP of the NRA's research and knowledge group.



## 3 Sustainable

Environmental sustainability and sustainable seafood both landed in the top 10 of the NRA's What's Hot survey. Sustainability has found its way onto the list for the past few years, proving it is more than just a passing fad. Consumers increasingly are seeking out brands that offer sustainable menu offerings, sustainable building practices and sustainable packaging.

There is even a mobile app, GoPure, that helps diners find sustainable restaurants. Also, the U.K.-based Sustainable Restaurant Association recently launched a global sustainability rating system available to any restaurant in the world.

The sustainability trend appears to have some staying power: Young adults are more likely to be influenced by a range of sustainability and sourcing menu terms, according to research from Packaged Facts. And according to the "Future of Foodservice: Food and Beverage Menu Trends & Opportunities" report, women and higher-income consumers are especially receptive to menu claims that promote sustainability.

## 4 Locally sourced foods

An extension of the sustainability trend, locally sourced foods are in high demand

from consumers, particularly fast casual consumers. They've caught on to the correlation of quality and sourcing.

Per the NRA's What's Hot chef survey, locally sourced proteins and produce remain Nos. 1 and 2 on the list, respectively, for the third year in a row. Hyper-local sourcing came in at No. 7 this year.

As one voter said, "Keeping ingredients local results in higher quality/fresher products and helps support local economies. It's also a sign that consumers are getting wise to what they put into their bodies."



## 5 Vegetable-centered

Mom always told us to eat more vegetables, and it seems we're finally asking restaurants to help us out a bit. According to research from Technomic, the total menu incidence of vegetables has increased by more than 11 percent in the past three years. Not only are veggies more prevalent in restaurants, they're moving into center-of-the-plate roles.

"Increasingly, vegetables are being offered prime real estate on diners' plates," said

Kimberly Perman, senior manager at Technomic. "No longer reserved for the perimeter, vegetables are featured more often in center-of-plate arrangements and, when done right as sides, are stealing the spotlight from protein-based entrées."

Vegetable dishes recently ranked No. 2 on the list of most popular food trends as voted by the surveyed restaurants, with 43 percent picking them to be an actual trend.

## 6 Customization

Much of fast casual's success can be attributed to its customization attribute. The segment has perfected customization and will continue to leverage customization because its consumers are demanding it.

"Fast casual chains are changing the landscape of the restaurant sector through customization," said Bob Bielinski, managing director of CIT Corporate Finance. "From the consumers' point of view, one of the major appeals of fast casual restaurants is the ability to customize. The appeal of designing your own pizza and having it cooked for you in a matter of minutes is very strong."

Fitch Ratings predicted customization to continue being a key theme in the segment throughout this year.







## 7 Spicy Foods

The demand for spicy flavors continues to rise: According to Technomic research, a majority of consumers (54 percent) say they prefer hot or spicy sauces, dips or condiments, compared to 48 percent of consumers in 2011, and 46 percent two years earlier.

A number of brands are riding this trend: Corner Bakery Café has a new Sriracha Black Bean Soup Corner Combo; Newk's Eatery added a Spicy Sicilian Pizza; Bruegger's rolled out Sriracha mustard and a Sriracha Egg Sandwich; while BD's Mongolian Grill is serving Sriracha ketchup.

To underscore the spicy trend, Food Genius reports that jalapenos have grown 100 percent in terms of item percentage across all segments. They are available at 35 percent of all locations, up from 25 percent a year ago.

## 8 Kale

Remember when salads were simply a way to start a meal? Yeah, we didn't either. Concepts built around salads are growing like weeds. From The Big Salad, which advertises more than 17 million ways to create

a salad, and Tossed, the first salad concept to hit the Big Apple, to Sweetgreen, Saladworks and Chop't, salad chains are giving customers looking for healthy options a variety of ingredients to upgrade a once healthy side item into a meal.

Adding fruits, grilled veggies, cheese, spicy nuts, pureed purple onions and potatoes are just a few ways chefs are livening up the greens.



## 9 Asian menu items

According to the Pew Research Center, Asian Americans are the highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the U.S. Asians now make up the largest share of recent immigrants. Therefore, it's no surprise that Asian cuisine has been increasing its presence on the menu in all segments — from the quick-serve drive-thru to upscale, truly authentic cuisine.

Technomic research shows that fast casual Asian concepts experienced a gain of nearly 16 percent year over year. Not only are demographics influencing that growth, but consumers are attracted to Asian cuisine because of its health halo, bold flavors and customization factors.

## 10 Mediterranean cuisine

The success of brands such as Zoës Kitchen and Garbanzo Mediterranean Grill showcases the growing popularity of Mediterranean cuisine. Like Asian cuisine, consumers are gravitating to Mediterranean fare because of its health halo and bold flavors.

Mediterranean cuisine increasingly is appearing on restaurant menus across numerous segments, according to recent research from both Technomic and Food Genius.

The cuisine's growing popularity even has inspired non-Mediterranean concepts to add to their menus: Tropical Smoothie Café added Mediterranean flatbreads; Au Bon Pain introduced a Mediterranean Power Pack; Panera came up with Mediterranean chicken flatbreads; and Planet Smoothie featured the Mediterranean Monster.

