



TOP 100

MOVERS & SHAKERS

2023

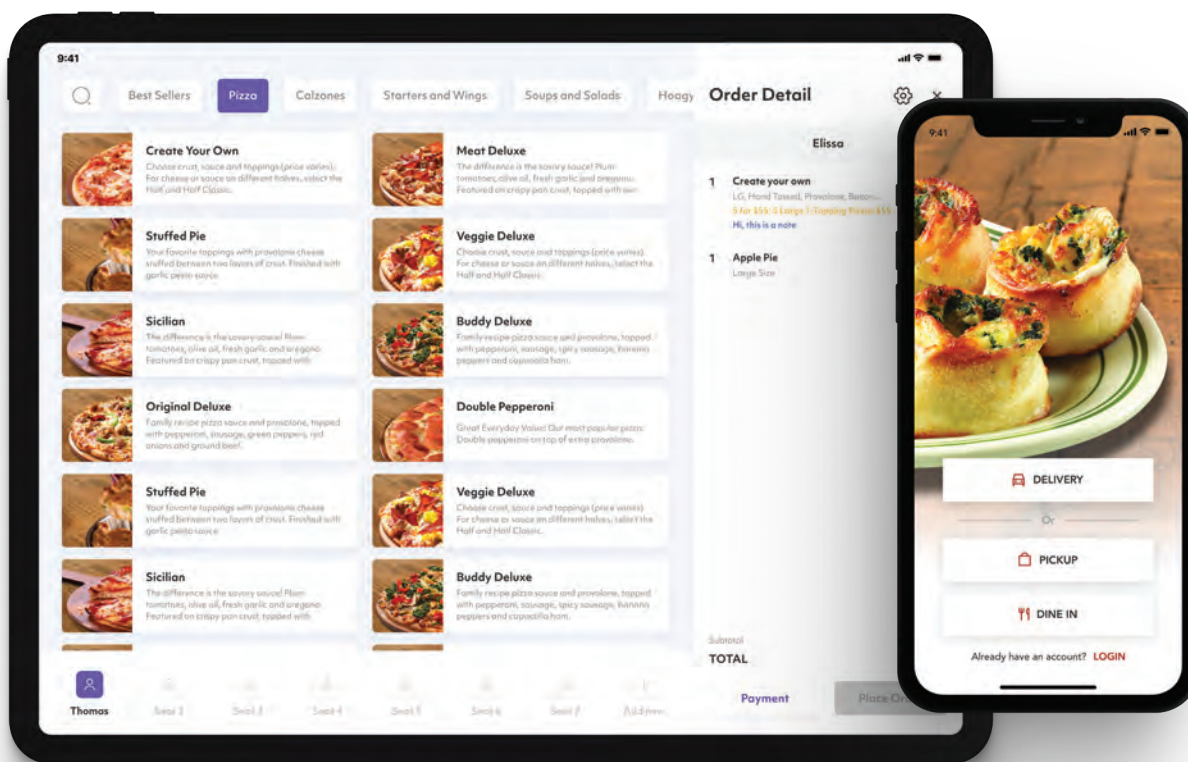
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Top 100 Movers & Shakers 2023



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Throughout the pandemic, the pizza industry has thrived with menu innovation and the use of modern technology designed to help brands prosper and grow. Some brands, it seems, are coming out on top.

Pizza Marketplace's Top 100 Movers & Shakers list identifies and rewards some of the most innovative and successful companies in the industry. Pizza brands were nominated in five categories -- marketing; menu innovations; tech; emerging brands and growth -- and a panel of judges sifted through the hundreds of nominations to create the Top 100 revealing the top 15 brands in each category. They also ranked the industry's Top 25 executives.

You'll find the list includes both big chains and small independents, truly a representation of the industry itself. The Top 100 isn't solely focused on the most profitable or fastest-growing brands. While those elements are important, it also spotlights brands that are taking risks, using technology and creatively to grow their footprints.

Congrats to all!

Mandy Detwiler

Manage Editor

Networld Media Group



ABOUT THE SPONSOR

The [Point of Sale Cloud](#) is a new, fully integrated and highly customizable technology platform built for the next generation of multi-unit pizzerias. It focuses on creating frictionless guest experiences across all channels including mobile, online, in-store point of sale, kiosk, phone and call center. On the back of the house, it ties together all aspects of the business including inventory, food cost, team member management, supply chain integration, payroll, finance and more. All backed with our exceptional customer support.

Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#1 Cicis Pizza

Cicis Pizza needed a major charge to reignite customer love and a return to on-site dining across its 80 U.S. markets. Enter “Endless Pizzabilities,” a campaign that boldly repositioned Cicis as a destination not just for affordability but also variety and “eatertainment.” Endless Pizzabilities introduced C. C. Pazzini, a fictional and whimsical spokesperson, who taps bold humor and visual effects to tout Cicis’ unique all-you-can-eat buffet, specialty pizzas and on-site game rooms, all highlighted amid tongue-in-cheek rhymes that added levity to the brand.

Cicis has seen unprecedented growth in same-store sales, with 17 consecutive weeks of double-digit SSS growth. Sales have been up as high as 25% in some weeks. The mix of paid, earned and owned media strategies has boosted foot traffic, led to repeat visits, and secured high-value press coverage. For paid advertising, the campaign is ingesting sales and store visit data directly into its media impact analysis, which shows omni-channel activations have driven 1,428,806 website visits that led to 452,140 trackable media-driven store visits and 16,913 online orders.

Guerilla-style tactics like free Mac n’ Cheese Pizza and Pumpkin Spice Cinnamon Roll drop-offs to local TV stations, along with targeted outreach to larger publications, drove press engagement and coverage. The Pumpkin Spice Cinnamon Rolls earned over 3.2 million media impressions alone, and thus far, the brand has garnered over 469 million earned media impressions in total.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#2 Blaze Pizza

Since 2014, Blaze Pizza has celebrated Pi Day (March 14) and in 2022, the event was bigger than ever. To build on the momentum of its revamped mobile app, Blaze capitalized on Pi Day's buzz, creating an incentive for Blaze Rewards loyalty members that drove new and existing fans into locations nationwide. The promotion, which ran March 14-31, gave members an exclusive one-time deal for any 11-inch pizza for \$3.14.



Blaze took a multi-channel approach including paid advertising and proactive media outreach, which highlighted its unique build-your-own pizza offering. Additionally, Blaze executes paid and organic social marketing to reach new customers on Google, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Blaze also launched a Satellite Media Tour and influencer campaign that encouraged app downloads. Brand Chief Culinary Officer and Co-Founder Chef Brad Kent conducted interviews with dozens of local stations, reaching millions.

As a result of the promotion, Blaze Pizza surpassed all expectations. The media tour delivered over 1.3 billion impressions. The app was downloaded by more new customers than ever and generated over 340,000 new sign-ups to the rewards loyalty program, 30% higher than its goal.

Much of Pi Day's success in 2022 can be attributed to Blaze rethinking its approach to attracting and retaining loyalty members. The promotion fueled greater customer engagement and boosted restaurant visits, leading to increased digital and on-site sales.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#3 Crushed Red

Throughout the year, Crushed Red participated in the GiftAMeal marketing program to boost guest loyalty while feeding families in need in its community. With this program, each time a guest took a photo of their food or drink through the GiftAMeal mobile app, Crushed Red helped fund a donation to a local food bank to provide a meal to a member of its community. The guest could then share their photo on social media, and an extra meal was donated for each platform selected (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) for up to four meals donated per visit.

Through this initiative, the brand built upon its reputation as a community-driven restaurant by sharing updates on the impact created on its social media each month. The program also incentivized guests to promote the restaurant to their friends on social media in a trusted and authentic way.

Crushed Red had thousands of guests participate in the initiative, providing over 20,000 meals to families in need. It had a 65% share rate of guests spreading uplifting photos of their experience on their personal social media channels in addition to on the GiftAMeal app, creating over 147,000 impressions. Additionally, 100% of the photo captions shared through the program were positive about the restaurant.

On average across its analysis, guests using GiftAMeal have returned 39% more frequently, spent 20% more per check, and tipped 32% more than those that did not participate, yielding a high ROI for the restaurant's bottom line in addition to supporting those in need in the communities it serves.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#4 Mountain Mike's Pizza

This year, Mountain Mike's Pizza used the brand's partnership with professional sports teams, the Los Angeles Angels and the San Francisco 49ers, to execute two fan-facing marketing campaigns – the Angels Shut Out challenge and the Kick It To Win \$49,000 Field Goal Sweepstakes. As Mountain Mike's Pizza boasts a huge presence in Northern California and is focused on strategic growth throughout Southern California, 49ers and Angels fans are a key part of the brand's target demographic.



To best reach this core audience, each contest was supported by a full arsenal of marketing tools, including website, app, newsletter, in-store promotion, television, public relations and a comprehensive social media campaign.

To complement its efforts, the team partnerships themselves operated as marketing vehicles, with both the Angels and the 49ers cross-promoting the contests across all digital platforms and in-stadium, further allowing MMP to tap into the teams' impressive fan bases.

As a result of the Angels Shut Out challenge, 1,720 free pizzas were redeemed, averaging over 100 pizzas per participating location. Aside from the brand's larger goal of raising brand awareness, it was focused on driving app downloads and encouraging engagement with loyalty members in Southern California. As a direct result of the challenge, seven of the top 10 restaurants with the highest app participation rate were in SoCal. The brand also saw an impact on overall sales at the participating locations. On redemption days following the shutouts, total sales at its SoCal locations were higher versus non-participating locations.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#5 Mellow Mushroom

Mellow Mushroom turned its marketing efforts to staff recruitment last year. The brand created a social media video in collaboration with social media influencer and content creator Drew Talbert in the company's search for new hires. The video took a fun look at a Mellow manager who's being promoted, focusing on how the brand will replace him with a current employee rather than going outside the company.

"We've learned the best talent for the Operations Coach positions comes from our existing family of franchise and company locations," Mike Foster, chief operating officer for Mellow Mushroom, said. "By recruiting from within, we expect to attract candidates who already know and love our Mellow culture and want to advance their careers in the industry."

Talbert has nearly two million followers on TikTok, 400,000 on YouTube, and more than 300,000 on Instagram. He created a full cast of Mellow Mushroom characters, playing all the roles himself. An additional recruitment campaign during the summer focused on attracting hourly employees to Mellow Mushroom.

Additionally, Mellow Mushroom launched a newly designed menu at all of its more than 160 restaurants. The cover art was created by Florida-based artist Joshua Noom and paid homage to previous design elements used by the brand on t-shirts, advertising and menu design. Mellow Mushroom sold the new menu art to benefit CORE, a non-profit that helps restaurant operations employees with children who face a health crisis or natural disaster.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#6 Hungry Howie's

"Love, Hope and Pizza" is Hungry Howie's annual campaign in partnership with the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Since its launch in 2009, the originator of Flavored Crust pizza has raised over \$4 million. To support the cause, Hungry Howie's serves its famous Flavored Crust pizzas in pink pizza boxes, and for each pizza sold in October, Hungry Howie's donated to NBCF. Additionally, to encourage pizza lovers to support the Hungry Howie's commitment and fundraising goal, customers could provide an additional contribution to NBCF by rounding up the total to the nearest dollar at checkout.

Besides being such a great cause, the campaign introduces more customers to the brand, helps build sales and increases customer databases, which allows it to contribute even more to the cause.

This year, Hungry Howie's is setting a goal to break the \$5 million milestone in total donations to NBCF. The team continuously promotes the campaign across various channels including national consumer earned media, in-store promotions, digital notifications sent directly to consumers, paid advertising in target markets and social media platforms.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#7 Rotolo's Pizzeria

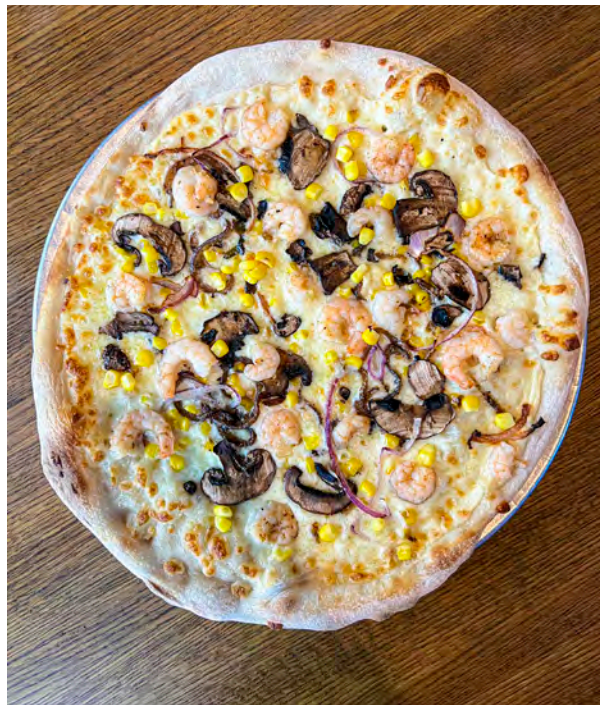
This year marked the most successful campaign ever at Rotolo's, which partnered with Tony Chachere's in Louisiana for a year-long 'Creole It' campaign to celebrate their 25- and 50-year birthdays, respectively.

Rotolo's Pizzeria created live TV spots, press releases and social media posts, managing 2.8 million impressions with its advertising. It also garnered 1.6 million impressions from video ad placement and well over 6 million social media impressions for the campaign. The YouTube TV ads it ran generated 1.1 million views.

Its in-store marketing consisted of co-branded uniforms for all staff in all locations. Rotolo's/Tony's branded cups to match the look of the world-famous Tony Chachere's seasoning can and had a branded Tony's LTO menu for the spring and fall months.

The Creole It! LTO menu (both spring and fall) generated nearly 10% of total sales for the six months that it was in circulation. Its website saw an increase in traffic of 12% year over year and system-wide sales for the year are trending at greater than 14% over last year. Rotolo's Pizzeria believes this is due in large part to the success of the Creole It! Campaign.

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Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#8 Square Pie Guys

Square Pie Guys' recent marketing campaign was called the 'Neighborhood of Good' and was a co-marketing effort with DoorDash to feature what makes beloved neighborhood establishments special and illustrate the impact that supporting local restaurants can have on local economies.

The campaign featured a visual path through its most beloved dishes to their logo and was promoted through a variety of channels, including outdoor ads, bus exteriors, billboards, podcasts and radio ads. The brand also used social media to mention where people could see the billboards and included in-app banners on DoorDash to reach a wider audience.

Overall, this marketing campaign helped grow business by raising awareness of the brand and showcasing a signature dish, the 6x8, at Square Pie Guys.

It was a multi-faceted effort that leveraged a variety of channels to reach the target audience and drive business growth.

Square Pie Guys was able to determine that the "Neighborhood of Good" campaign had a strong ROI. It saw an increase in orders of 25% compared to the same period the previous year.

In addition to increased orders, it also saw a significant increase in the use of promo codes generated by DoorDash. These promo codes were included in the marketing materials for the campaign and were used by customers to receive discounts on their orders. The high rate of code usage suggests that the campaign was effective in driving customer engagement and loyalty.

Finally, it saw a significant increase in both web traffic hits on its website and engagement on Instagram during the campaign period.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#9 Hell Pizza

New Zealand's 65-store Hell Pizza chain doesn't back down from non-traditional marketing campaigns, and this year was no exception. With a focus on fun, and maybe a little shock value, this year Hell Pizza shook things up with a different kind of campaign for Valentine's Day. It was a great opportunity to remind the nation of its playful brand and push some boundaries. The brand gave away more than 6,000 adult toys with any large pizza.

"We were confident that this campaign would be a hit amongst our customer base but were surprised at how well it was received by the public with little to no significant negative feedback," said Siang Tay, marketing manager.

This campaign was pushed out on social media, YouTube, nationwide billboards, digital advertising including google search and display and other media sites. The campaign delivered a massive amount of impressions (more than 3 million) and engagements (more than 350k), resulting in more than \$208,000 in sales.

Additionally, the brand set out on a mission to raise \$66,666 for 14 food rescue organizations around New Zealand who were supporting their communities and providing food to people in need. The brand did this by matching sales for gift cards that were purchased on one day in September.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#10 &pizza

For several years, &pizza has been a text-only company. There is no phone number published for any of its pizza shops or any email address customers can send a question to. SMS is the de facto mode of communication for most of its guests, so &pizza leans into it and uses that method to speak with them. As a result, it also communicates offers and promotions via text, but not in the traditional sense.

One to three times per week, the brand texts its loyal guests a pithy one-liner that has nothing to do with pizza. Recent examples include, “The next season of The White Lotus should be set at Mar-a-Lago” and “American football will be called handegg.” These cheeky messages remind its guests that although it is a retail brand, it’s really just a collection of individuals who take on life and current events like anyone else.

The brand’s text-based flash sales generate tens of thousands of dollars of sales each week, most of which the brand believes to be fully incremental revenue via increased frequency from its guests.

&pizza



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#11 Fat Boy's Pizza

Louisiana-based Fat Boy's Pizza uses a combination of social media and charitable contributions to drive its marketing efforts. Before opening each new store, Fat Boy's Pizza embarks on a social media campaign/PR campaign that includes pictures of the buildout beginning when the "coming soon" sign goes up. The brand uses media to its advantage in a big way with newspaper and online articles, as well as TV coverage. Billboards have also been incorporated in the past, which tease the concept that is coming over a few months.



Fat Boy's Pizza thrived during the pandemic as it adjusted to a different way of operations. The brand dives head first into every community where it opens and shows up with its pizza truck in times of need (after hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.). During the pandemic, Fat Boy's Pizza gave away hundreds of pizzas to first responders, not only showing that its pizza is good, but its community involvement is even better. The brand places a premium on customer service and community involvement.

Fat Boy's Pizza is involved in areas where it serves -- from donations, to little league to colleges to professionals. Its "Light Up the Season" fundraiser took place in all six locations, with a goal of donating more than \$14,000 to Children's Hospital New Orleans simply by having guests round their orders up to a specific dollar amount.

Fat Boy's Pizza is in the process of expanding into Texas with several locations, utilizing a growth plan there with a new investor. Outside of that, it will continue to grow the brand through eventual franchising.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#12 Mici Italian

Denver-based Mici Italian's Dining for Dollars charitable giving program kicked off in August as a way to give back to students in need. The program donated funds for school supplies to public schools through a contest called "Mici Clears the List." This contest invited teachers, educational volunteers, education directors, parents and students to post a picture with a caption about why their nominee (whether it was a school or particular teacher) deserved to win on either Facebook or Instagram with the hashtag #MiciClearstheList in the caption. Mici Italian then purchased the winners' wish lists on Amazon.com.

Mici also offered schools significant discounts on pizzas for school lunches. At the start of the 2022-2023 school year, Mici donated more than 10,000 free cheese pizza coupons to schools.

The brand raises approximately \$70,000 a year, which goes directly to local schools. The Dining for Dollars program began in 2009. Since then, Mici Italian has worked with more than 80 schools, raising more than \$500,000.

Its marketing campaigns are helping Mici Italian continue to grow. The brand turned 18 last year, and is continuing to grow. Today, Mici Italian has 11 locations in Colorado with plans to double its size by the end of 2023. It opened its first Texas-based location last year, and has plans to open a dozen more in the Lone Star State.

mici



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#13 Harbor East Delicatessen and Pizzeria

Harbor East Delicatessen and Pizzeria is gaining attention as one of the premier fast-casual restaurants in Baltimore. With a variety of soups, salads, pizzas and sandwiches, the brand focuses on providing quality food at an affordable price.

The brand's social media campaign has included constantly updating photography assets and showcasing new menu items so potential guests are able to see what's new on the menu as well as favorite staple dishes that are available. The campaign also focuses on positioning Harbor East Deli and Pizzeria as the premier fast-casual restaurant in the area, offering the best pizzas at a reasonable price.

This social media marketing campaign has generated ROI in increased orders, foot traffic and number of impressions. The brand sees a direct correlation between items that are showcased on social media and an uptick in orders. The focus the brand has on quality photography has translated into consistent success.



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#14 Pizza 4P's

Vietnam-based Pizza 4P's ensures satisfied customers by sourcing quality ingredients, and through the use of science. The brand ensures quality with the use of AI cameras, which help employees monitor the quality of pizza and improve standards across all Pizza 4P's restaurants. The camera captures the image of each pizza in the oven, and analyzes the pizzas to make sure they meet standards.

The scanners measure a number of variables against a set of data that reflects the perfect pizza, which includes pizza types, toppings, distribution of toppings, shape of the pizzas, sizes and other metrics. After years of researching and testing, Pizza 4P's has finally applied AI across all restaurants as the technology keeps delivering tangible benefits.

Pizza 4P's has successfully integrated this technology into daily operations, making AI the perfect tool, taking about 2,000 photos of pizzas per day. After being photographed, each pizza gets an itemized and overall score to ensure quality.

As a new marketing method, 4P's strategically repeats the same message of being ZERO WASTE over and over again across all communication channels. 4P's saw an uptake of 10% in concept mentioned on Google last year and had 300 attendees join its sustainability workshops and pizza-making workshops. The content on social media regarding zero waste has seen high engagement, including views in Japan and Italy.

PIZZA 4P'S



Top 15 Marketing Campaigns

#15 Via 313

Via 313's Pizza With A Purpose campaign proved to be a huge hit in 2022. Every month, the brand released a new LTO pizza and specialty drink, and a portion of the proceeds of those menu items were donated to a local charity. The brand markets these LTOs through social media, website, digital ads, in-store signage and community involvement.

Its social media posts related to Pizza With A Purpose LTOs perform twice as well as typical posts — both in engagement and impressions. Additionally, the brand's emails related to the campaign have led directly to increased sales. People love supporting the community — and this monthly campaign is a consistent, delicious way for pizza lovers to do so.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#1 Azzip Pizza

Azzip Pizza is known for providing unique flavors so customers can create something delicious. When Azzip opened, it launched an LTO with regional favorites of Grippio's BBQ Chips and a sweet soda reduction on top of a BBQ pork pizza. The Westsider became a permanent menu item when Azzip formalized an LTO program with a rotating Pizza of the Month (POTM). To date, Azzip has offered 45 POTM options.

Azzip cooks chicken, bacon, and sausage as well as many sauces such as pesto, ranch, and garlic butter. Azzip also makes its own Hot Honey and Zip Dust, an Italian seasoning blend, which together generated over \$20k in retail sales in 2022. Azzip offers personal-sized Detroit-style crust that bakes with fast-casual speed due to a par-bake process to enable the thicker crust to bake alongside traditional thin-crust pizzas. The thicker crust product is also used as a base for savory and sweet options.

The standout POTM was the March Crabness, a crab rangoon pizza, with house crab rangoon mix, mozzarella, wontons, sweet soy sauce and a sweet chili sauce. The March Crabness was chosen for 30.3% of pizzas in March 2022, generating Azzip's strongest sales month. Azzip also offers a hibachi pizza called General Yum-Yum, and a mac & cheese pizza, Mac Daddy, that sell at 13.9% and 16.6%, respectively.

Fusion-based pizzas are a key innovation pipeline for the POTMs, as is searching out unique ingredients to feature. In October 2022, Azzip built a chicken cordon bleu pizza around a specialty Swiss Pink Cheese.

Azzip enhanced the POTM brand in 2022 with the launch of a POTM Club subscription program. It enrolled over 500 members and provided members early access to new products, discounts, and a chance to vote and name a POTM.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#2 Happy Joe's Pizza & Ice Cream

Happy Joe's doesn't look at its pizza as a red sauce-based product. Instead it's looked at through the eyes of an artist/painter. The pizza pie shell is a blank canvas, and Happy Joe's fills it with whatever ingredients the brand thinks the guests will enjoy, such as Tex-Mex Taco (refried bean spread, taco meat, tortilla chips and more), BLT (bacon, lettuce, mayonnaise and tomato), Denver Omelet (scrambled eggs, vegetables and meat), Birthday Cake Pizza (an actual birthday cake baked on a pizza shell) and Holiday Pizza (turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy and cranberry sauce) as toppings.



Last year, Happy Joe's created the Mardi Gras Pizza, which included Alfredo, mozzarella cheese, onions, green pepper, banana pepper, green chilis, tomatoes and the choice of blackened shrimp, chicken or meatless. Happy Joe's created another successful LTO called the Bavarian Beer Cheese Pizza. This pizza was made with Happy Joe's classic pan crust made in a salted-pretzel style, smothered in a Fat Tire cheddar beer cheese sauce, and topped with large chunks of Chicago prime sausage, onions and crisp bacon.

Happy Joe's is looking to its food and beverage partners to produce new complementary product offerings that are unique, differentiating, and true to its DNA.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#3 Boombozz Pizza & Watch Bar

Innovation has been at the forefront of the Boombozz Pizza & Watch Bar brand since its inception in 1998. It specializes in original creative pizzas developed with top trends in mind, infused with its own twist. The Green Chili Chicken Pizza was a successful menu innovation last year. This delicious twist combines citrus marinated chicken on a garlic aioli base, Peppadew peppers, onions and is topped with a sweet/spicy proprietary recipe green chili jam and cilantro.

Additionally, menu trends at Boombozz include veganizing recipes. This approach takes classic dishes that are given a new vegan interpretation. The brand is already experimenting and with the influx of plant-based ingredients, it feels this could be a great new trend to introduce to menus this year.

Boombozz is looking at rising food costs as an opportunity to innovate. The brand knows the biggest challenge is that distributors and manufacturers have either stopped making certain products, or cannot source the products they used to get. This is leading the brand to look at other ways to adjust, which in turn is allowing it to save on certain food items that it would never have looked at in the past.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#4 Hungry Howie's

Hungry Howie's is well-known as the originator of flavored-crust pizza, but it offers more than just hot, cheesy delicious pizza. The menu also serves salads, wings and signature breadsticks available in various flavors so there's something for everyone. One of the more unique menu items is oven-baked subs that are served calzone-style. Using Hungry Howie's freshly made pizza dough instead of the traditional Italian bread, the result is a toasty, cheesy calzone-style sub that is highly craveable.

This year, Hungry Howie's started a buzz around the next new controversial pizza topping - pickles. For a limited time only, the brand released a one-of-a-kind Pickle Bacon Ranch pizza. Paired with Hungry Howie's new Dill Pickle Flavored crust (also an LTO item), the pizza is topped with smoky chunks of bacon, tangy ranch, and tart pickles, for the ultimate pizza-eating experience of contrast in flavor and texture. With any LTO that it runs, the ultimate barometer for success is increasing sales. The brand supported the LTO with heavy digital advertising, both paid and organic. It promoted the LTO and received a lot of positive social chatter, resulting in an increased brand awareness, as well as attracting new customers through capitalizing on a newsworthy limited-time product.

Hungry Howie's is exploring additional LTO opportunities to capitalize on industry trends. LTOs such as Pumpkin Spice Howie Bread, Flatbread Pizzas, and No Dough Bowls can pair with the Mix and Match promotion. The pairing of LTOs with Mix and Match allows the brand to maximize exposure to its best performing offers, as it combines low price point with a high-ticket average.



#5 Rotolo's Pizzeria

Rotolo's Pizzeria, which opened in 1996, is focusing on its Louisiana roots more and more. This year the brand partnered with Tony Chachere's to create a Creole It! menu. Rotolo's did a spring and fall LTO featuring Tony's brand products that bring a more cajun influence to the traditional pizza, pasta and calzone menu. Their goal is to do pizza with a Louisiana flair. Menu items include a boudin pizza and several seafood pizzas, and it continues to highlight its home region every chance it gets.

The brand created two different LTO menus this year, one for the spring season and one in the fall. These two menus featured all new menu items that utilized different Tony Chachere's seasonings, marinades, blends and mixes. The menu items ranged from breakfast pizza, featuring Tony's white gravy, to a bloody mary calzone that was prepared by reducing the bloody mary mix and creating a sauce to put inside calzones. The success of the campaign was measured by guest feedback, repeat buys from regular customers, same store sales increases, and how much of the total profit was being generated by the Tony's LTO items.

One of the menu items, a Jalapeno Popper Calzone or Pizza, was such a success that it has become a permanent menu item moving forward. It was a systemwide success and the white gravy is something the brand is continuing to find more uses for.

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Top 15 Menu Innovators

#6 Square Pie Guys

Unlike in many Detroit-style pizzerias, Square Pie Guys pizzas are made with the sauce underneath the toppings, which adds an extra layer of flavor and allows for topping texture.

As a modern pizza restaurant, Square Pie Guys makes careful menu considerations during the research and development phase and eats with its eyes and cameras first. The brand ensures every pizza has an instagrammable quality, allowing word to spread through user-generated content.

Another unique aspect of its menu is the collaborations with local talent, including celebrity chefs, NBA legends, and beloved food brands. These partnerships allow Square Pie Guys to bring fresh, creative ideas to the table and offer customers exciting limited time offerings.

The King's Pie, created in collaboration with Top Chef Melissa King and featuring her favorite toppings of pepperoni and mushroom with a spicy twist, was a standout success this past year. The special honey drizzle added a unique touch that customers loved. King is known for her chili crisp line that retails online so the research and development team translated her signature recipe into a hot honey.

In addition to strong financial performance at the restaurant, the Melissa King pizza received overwhelmingly positive feedback from customers and generated a lot of buzz on social media, as demonstrated by the increase in user-generated content. Story views on social media increased by approximately 27% each time King mentioned the pizza. The King's Pie mixed in the top three selling pies, outperforming sales projections.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

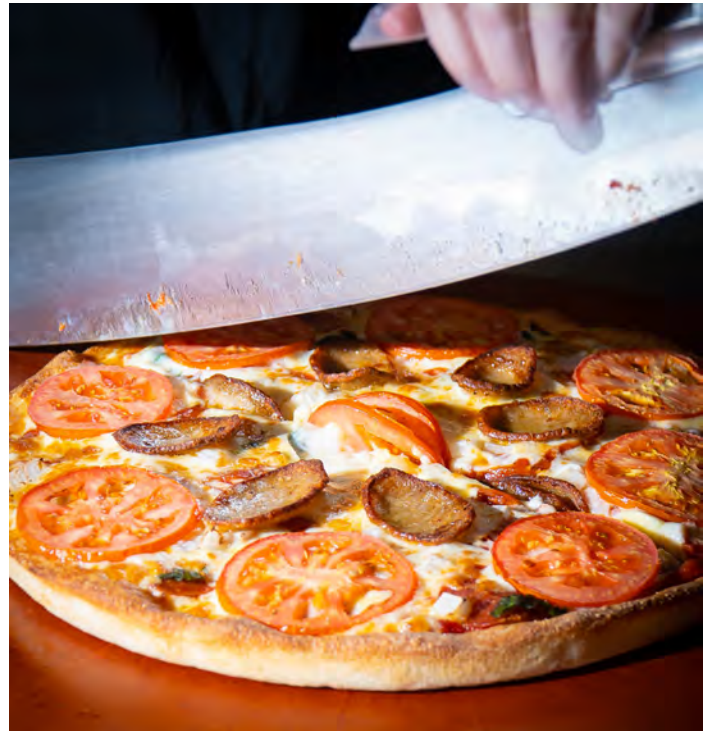
#7 Sarpino's USA

Blending Old World authenticity and American ingenuity, Sarpino's USA has carved out a defensible niche in the pizza industry. The brand has forged its own path, taking an artisanal approach to delivery pizza-making simply not found in the big chains (and rarely in independent pizza restaurants).



Sarpino's USA boasts a robust and inclusive menu featuring more than 60 specialty and gourmet pizzas, roughly 20 calzones and 20 sandwiches, 12 pastas, 11 salads, five bone-in wing flavors and a variety of appetizers. It also offers an entirely separate vegan menu. The brand offers an array of sauces to please any palate, including its house-made pizza sauce, alfredo, basil pesto, buffalo, BBQ and chipotle ranch, as well a wide variety of toppings, including everything from classics like pepperoni and Italian sausage (also offered in plant-based) to exciting additions like gyro meat, anchovies and sundried tomatoes.

In 2022, Sarpino's USA brought back two successful LTOs from previous years: its Pierogi Pizza and its Roasted Garlic Chicken Pizza - the latter being the brand's most successful LTO to date (it was in the top five pizzas sold weekly for the original promotional period). The brand also launched a brand-new LTO in Q3: the Nashville Hot Chicken Pizza.



Additionally, Sarpino's USA introduced Deep Dish Pizzas to its menu in 2022, paying homage to its Chicago roots. The rollout included sausage, pepperoni and spinach varieties, plus their vegan counterparts, as well as create-your-own options where customers could choose their own cheese, toppings and dipping sauces. Today, Deep Dish Pizzas account for more than 3% of Sarpino's USA's systemwide sales, just six months after launching.

Top 15 Menu Innovators

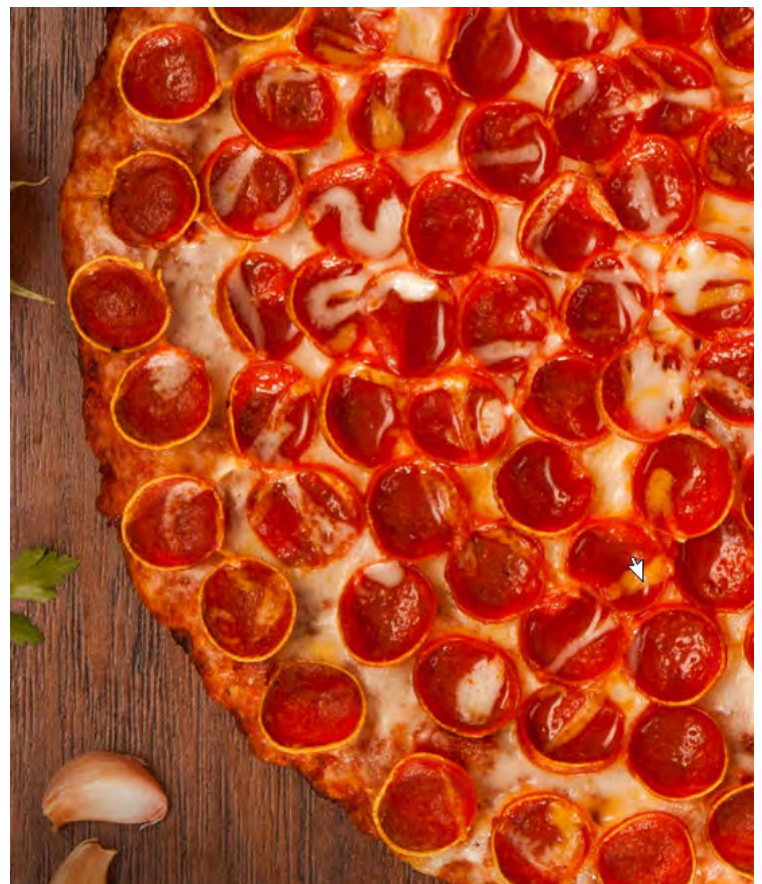
#8 Mountain Mike's Pizza

When it comes to menu innovation, MMP is in tune with the trends and committed to finding new ways for its fans to connect over pizza. Even with rising food costs, the brand refuses to cut corners on product quality. Another big competitive advantage is the brand's recognition as the home of legendary crispy, curly pepperoni. Cupping pepperoni became trendy over the past decade, but MMP has been serving these teacups of joy for over 40 years.

Finally, MMP goes big by serving its 20-inch mountain-sized pizza that is the biggest pie offered out of the top 25 U.S. pizza chains. The Mountain-Size Pepperoni Pizza is covered with over 200 crispy, curly pepperonis. And with all toppings, MMP covers its pizzas to the edge.

Mountain Mike's most successful LTO of the year is its Heart-Shaped Pizza that's offered every February in celebration of love all month long. The fan favorite, heart-shaped pizza does more than just create a buzz with consumers – it's also a great way to help strengthen unit-level economics. This past February, MMP sold over 28,000 heart-shaped pizzas, which is more than 1,000 pizzas each day.

Another successful LTO was the launch of its Mini Churrs, which brought unprecedented demand, driving traffic and ticket averages. During the Mini Churrs promotion, MMP sold more than 18,000 orders. The Mini Churrs were later added as a permanent option on the dessert menu due to the highly successful LTO run.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#9 Via 313

Via 313 is not your typical pizza joint. It focuses on delivering premium, Detroit-style pizza that is built right to the last bite. In terms of menu innovations, Via 313 offers gluten-free and dairy-free menu options, but those are not just a checkmark for the brand. The dietary dishes are hot menu items people travel and clamor for.

Every month, Via 313 introduces a new LTO. They call it #PizzaWithAPurpose, and a portion of the monthly sales are donated to a local charity. Pizzas like The Big Dill (dill pickles galore), The Cuban (carnitas, ham, onions, honey dijon), and the Queen Lobster (lobster on pizza) have led to an exciting and innovative menu, higher sales, satisfied customers and supported communities.

To combat food costs, the brand gets creative with different toppings, even hosting contests with its teams to come up with specials that use cost-effective ingredients. That said, the brand says it will never sacrifice quality to save money.



#10 Hell Pizza

New Zealand-based Hell Pizza says the brand is well aware of the pressures that farming has on the environment, and to help combat that, it has always been an innovator in the space of bringing alternative proteins to the masses. Back in 2010, the brand introduced Quorn to its menu, which placed the brand as the leader in the alternative protein space. Its Burger Pizza launched in 2019, which caused a stir on social media, attracting attention from around the world. Hell Pizza's entire menu is made exclusively from free-range ingredients. The brand prides itself on having more than 88% of its ingredients locally sourced.

Additionally, it has an extensive dairy-free menu. All pizzas can be made with DF cheese at no extra cost. There are eight vegan pizzas and 14 vegetarian pizzas to choose from, not to mention the endless combinations should customers want to create their own.

The brand created several LTOs this year. Most recently, it was the Steak & Cheese Pie pizza which, like the name suggests, is the classic Steak and Cheese pie, but with a twist. The steak is made from a revolutionary product called Fable, a plant-based protein made from shiitake mushrooms, which have a very similar texture to slow-cooked beef and a rich meaty flavor. To mitigate the outrage and quench the thirst for blood from its meat-loving customers, it released the pizza with a tomato sauce made with real blood, which came in a blood bag with the pizza.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#11 Neo Pizza + Taphouse

At Neo, the staff don't just say they use the freshest and highest quality ingredients, they actually mean it. And with its Woodstone oven, the brand is able to char hand-tossed pizza crust to perfection, proudly using scratch recipes to make its signature dough, sauces and toppings and homemade shareables. This combination has helped the brand build a unique product with a loyal customer base.

Running monthly specials on pizzas and shareables, Neo was able to identify one pizza that stood out and is now a part of its regular specialty pizza selection - the Goodfellas pizza. This pizza is made with house red sauce, mozzarella cheese, meatballs, Italian sausage, applewood bacon, pepperoni, ricotta cheese, fresh garlic and fresh basil. Out of the 12 pizzas offered in 2022, this one outsold all others by a significant amount. The brand added it to its standing menu in October and it consistently ranks amongst the top three in sales each month.

The brand is seeing an increase in customers asking for new and unique pizza recipes and toppings. Out-of-the-box ideas like wagyu beef and truffle oil are among the top requests as well as an increase in requests for vegan and health-conscious options.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#12 Domino's Pizza

From launching exciting LTOs and delicious new flavors of thickshakes, to introducing new plant-based options to cater to different dietary preferences, Domino's Pizza's menu is unique because it's not one-size-fits-all and is designed with its customers in mind.



In 2022, Domino's launched Burger Joint, an LTO and Domino's take on the beloved cheeseburger and hamburger, on none other than a pizza. The concept was simple: customers love to enjoy burgers, but they're not made for delivery. At Domino's, everything is designed for delivery – developing a burger pizza allows Domino's to deliver the best flavors and textures of a burger, ensuring it's hot and fresh on arrival.



The LTO featured two pizzas: The Burger Joint Cheeseburger – a cheeseburger with flame-grilled 100% Aussie beef patty, topped with melted American-style cheese, mozzarella, bacon (optional), special burger sauce and butter pickles, as well as the The Burger Joint Hamburger – hamburger with flame-grilled 100% Aussie beef patty, topped with melted American-style cheese, fresh tomato, red onion, mozzarella, bacon (optional), butter pickles, mayo and ketchup.

Domino's sold tens of thousands of the popular Burger Joint Pizzas across the 11-week LTO.

The brand understands that value looks different to everyone, and is committed to introducing new and exciting products and flavors to offer customers more toppings, more choice and more value, so that everyone can join in the joy of pizza. Domino's is focused on increasing operational efficiencies to reduce costs for stores, and creating new product ranges that continue to do what the company has always done – deliver high-quality food at an affordable price – but with a more sustainable profit margin.

Top 15 Menu Innovators

#13 Mister O1 Extraordinary Pizza

Built on quality and consistency, Mister O1 Extraordinary Pizza is a chef-driven concept with a simple recipe for success. With 12 full-service pizzerias between Florida and Texas, two in Madrid and one in Saudi Arabia, Mister O1 focuses on pizza, as well as fresh appetizers like burrata, fresh mozzarella and prosciutto and salads.

The brand's focus on pizza helps it keep its attention on serving all fresh ingredients. There's no freezer and everything is made without frying to be healthier for the guests. Topping its menu is the star-shaped Star Luca. The pizza is filled with ricotta cheese and topped with Italian tomato sauce, mozzarella, spicy salami Calabrese and fresh basil.

Founder Renato Viola said he believes pizza is an experience.

"Yes, it starts with good food, but it also includes the right service, location, music and even parking," he said. "All this together gives me the opportunity to provide an experience to our guests that is unique. Why not do something traditional, but also different."

Dough is made fresh every day and the brand coordinates with a family farm in Miami to make the burrata. The maturation for the dough is a minimum of 96 hours. The pizza is baked in an electric deck oven at more than 600 degrees for a thin and crispy dough.



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#14 Tony Boloney's

In 2009, Mike Hauke opened his first Tony Boloney's as a small deli/convenience store in Atlantic City. His innovative approach to pizza and subs has led to brick-and-mortar locations as well as food trucks, and even ghost kitchen concepts. This year, his innovative mindset led to a Thanksgiving partnership with the American Pecan Promotion Board to create a Pecan Pizza Pie.

"We know that the pecan pie is a staple for so many at the Thanksgiving table, but with the tremendous versatility of pecans we wanted to reimagine the traditional pie with a pizza-fied twist for a turn-key meal before the turkey," Alexander Ott, APPB executive director, said.

The Pecan Pizza Pie featured a sweet meets savory buttermilk pizza crust, a thick bourbon-infused tomato sauce, creamy mozzarella, fennel-dusted pepperoni-flavored pecan halves, topped with a spicy balsamic Pecan Pie glaze. Each pizza came with a standard pecan pie.

"This plant-based pie is a delicious marriage of our savory classic pizza and the iconic pecan pie, heaping with holiday flavor," said Mike Hauke, founder and owner of Tony Boloney's Brands.

Additionally, Hauke expanded with the launch of three ghost kitchen concepts: Deathwish Burritos, Piehole Calzone and Licky Licky Chicky Chicky. These concepts allowed him to experiment with menu items while utilizing current resources and overhead.

Tony Boloney's



Top 15 Menu Innovators

#15 Your Pie

Your Pie introduced a new menu design across all current and future restaurants last year. The modernized menu board design features high-quality product imagery, updated product names for ordering ease, and a convenient pizza sizing chart illustration. In addition to advertising the brand's signature pies, the menu shows the different sizing and crust options available for pizzas.

Overall, the menu refresh better serves the needs of current guests and continues to attract new ones. Compared to the previous year, Your Pie stores utilizing the new menu design increased overall meals sold by more than 11,000 units.

Your Pie, known for its personalized pizza sizing, launched its larger, 14-inch pizza option for guests to share with friends and family. The fast-casual pizza brand also debuted multiple limited craft series that performed well with guests. At the beginning of the year, Your Pie reintroduced the Hot Honey Pepperoni pizza that is now featured as a signature menu option. Back by popular demand, the Peach Prosciutto Pie delighted consumers over the summer. In the fall, Your Pie crafted the Cubano pizza in partnership with Texas Pete Hot Sauce and invited guests to try the limited-edition Pumpkin Spice Gelato.

Your Pie has altered its menu to keep costs in line by offering different pizza sizing options. Guests can choose from three sizes: the seven-inch Lil Pie, the classic 10-inch personal pizza and the sharable 14-inch large pizza. Your Pie's updated menu board also displays signature pizza flavors to give guests clearer ordering options.



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#1 Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza & Wings

Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza & Wings customized and integrated an AI-generated voice ordering system named "Becky," who answers the phone and takes orders for carry out. The system is now handling almost all carry-out orders and "Becky" is more than 97% accurate in understanding guests. When "Becky" cannot understand the call, it is quickly sent to a "live" manager or take-out team member. "Becky" is the model of accurate, courteous guest service and hospitality.

Converse.ai is Anthony's partner with this technology, which has eliminated missed calls and reduced the number of missed orders from guests on hold. The brand is able to reallocate cashier labor to assist with the increase in delivery, carryout and catering orders due to the pandemic shift.

Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza & Wings is testing Mavi.io, an in-car ordering system, allowing drivers to voice order from restaurants on their trip route. This will save guests time and offer additional convenience.

The brand is also evaluating self kiosk ordering using GRBBR software on Samsung kiosks and using Yoobic Training and Operations in its BURGERFI brand while evaluating using it for Anthony's. This gamified learning and operations platform makes training easy, fun and accessible. It tracks hours of training by team members, by restaurant, and by the entire system, helping with performance and employee retention.



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#2 Dodo Pizza

Dodo Pizza's proprietary tech platform, Dodo IS, covers all parts of the business — from shift scheduling and order tracking to real-time sales analytics. This year, the brand digitized every micro-process. The platform is fully integrated with its customer-facing digital products and is adapted to the 16 countries with a Dodo presence, all while utilizing no special hardware, and receiving 24/7 updates.

Dodo's quality control team receives and checks thousands of reports with pictures that help to identify violations of product quality and services at Dodo worldwide. This year, the brand automated this routine with the help of computer vision in Dodo IS. It trained a neural network so it could detect pizza defects automatically, auto recognizing pizza bottom and edge accuracy. The model can tell if pizza was deformed when delivered in 80% of cases.

Dodo is truly into automation of every little process in its pizza shops, and it wants to proceed with investing in IoT and data engineering. IoT will give the brand the opportunity to track every operation in a store, automate some parts of it, or find and evolve small operations that are currently ineffective – for example, using speech recognition of requests in the kitchen instead of manual data input about order status.

Data already allows the brand to make better decisions in marketing and give its customers the most relevant offers based on their previous choices and favorites. Such technologies as IoT and data engineering could be implemented almost anywhere in its half-offline and half-digital business to help the brand give the best customer experience and create the most scalable digital-first franchise chain.



**DODO
PIZZA**



Top 15 Tech Innovators

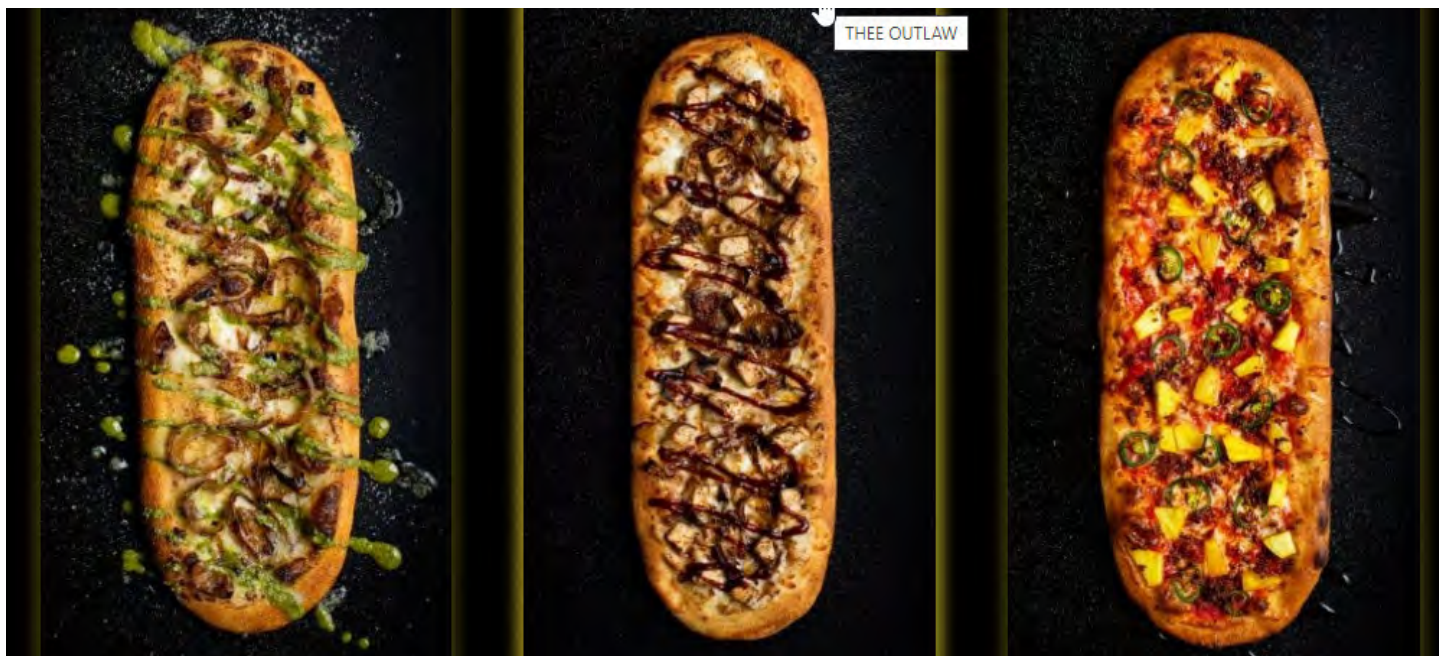
#3 &pizza

&pizza has developed a proprietary digital ordering system called &OS, which sits behind all digital customer orders including native pick-up, native delivery and third-party delivery. The brand has married order and customer data with digital touchpoints from inside the four walls of its pizza shops, including the exact moment an order is started and completed. This confluence of data points isn't just for data's sake; it helps set expectations for guests and improve operations in the future.

For example, an SMS is sent to guests when their digital pick-up order is complete, not based on some preexisting formula but when the pie is actually ready.

&pizza is consistently evaluating all technologies that could elevate its product, guest or “f&m” experience. It is testing AI-based chat technologies that would lessen the labor load for employees who staff its textline. The brand is also exploring oven equipment technologies that would adjust the bake time and temperatures for every pie cooked based on guest preferences and the toppings chosen.

&pizza®



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#4 Pizzeria Camión

Pizzeria Camión began as a food truck in 2015 but realized the potential of building an entire brand completely online and serving customers without a physical storefront location. In 2016, the brand launched its first virtual “Pizza Truck” with ClusterTruck in downtown Indianapolis. Since then, it’s launched with ClusterTruck in Ohio and Missouri and two additional locations in Indiana.

Pizzeria Camión leverages the demand generation of the online marketplaces DoorDash, UberEats and Grubhub in each of these cities. Although it is a brand without a storefront, the third-party marketplaces only generate about 20% of its demand. The brand is definitely a tech company first — labeled as the world’s first digital-only pizza company. The brand leverages Empower Delivery to manage its entire operation rather than cobbling together a myriad of tools for delivery.

The concept continues to evolve just as Empower Delivery evolves. The brand uses email and push notifications very effectively and is looking to implement SMS as a core part of its marketing stack.



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#5 Slice Factory

AI tech company, to create Pizzaiola, a custom-designed autonomous chef. The AI robot chef prepares Slice Factory's jumbo 28-inch slice and its various Chicago-style stuffed pizzas, as well as the chain's pasta dishes and chicken wings.



"Our partnership with Slice Factory, the first of many in the pipeline, represents another important milestone for Nala Robotics and the adoption of our restaurant-as-a-service platform," Ajay Sunkara, Nala Robotics co-founder and CEO, said. "Our custom solution will help Slice Factory expand production to meet rising demand for the jumbo slice craze it created in the Chicagoland area, plus offer a wide variety of food options to keep customers happy while also saving on labor costs."



The robotic operating system monitors more than 1,200 parameters every microsecond, ranging from robot field of vision and food quality to point-of-sales. Once a pizza order is placed, Pizzaiola handles all aspects of the pie, including pressing and stretching the dough, adding toppings, and then cooking, slicing and boxing the pizza.

Pizzaiola can also fulfill online orders and individual jumbo slices that can be scheduled for pickup at the chain's drive-thru within a few minutes of ordering.

Slice Factory operates 12 locations in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs. The brand got its start when Dom DiDiana's parents opened a pizzeria in Berwyn, Illinois, in 1998.

Top 15 Tech Innovators

#6 Brixx Wood Fired Pizza + Craft Bar

Brixx Wood Fired Pizza + Craft Bar made incredible strides in the technology space this year by becoming one of the first brands to participate in Thanx's Loyalty 3.0 platform. With this platform, Brixx's rewards program now features a branded app and online ordering front-end that gives customers the ability to earn 10 points for every dollar spent and cash in points for a variety of rewards and perks in their rewards marketplace.

The Brixx team will be able to leverage Thanx's self-service dashboard to change point conversions and add or change rewards perks at any time in real time. This capability offers the Brixx marketing and operations teams superior agility while ensuring its loyalty program delivers on ROI. For example, the brand can remove rewards items if COGS fluctuate or update the dollar-to-point conversion ratio as operating costs increase. Brixx's team will also be able to leverage Thanx's marketing automation tools as well as data capture technology.

With its Thanx partnership, Brixx is continuing its commitment to driving customer engagement without exclusive dependence on discounts. Brixx is known for its exceptional brand of hospitality. To extend its digital hospitality, it is excited to leverage Thanx's suite of non-discount rewards for perks like exclusive access to items and events to drive engagement without discounting the brand.

BRIXX
WOOD FIRED PIZZA
+ CRAFT BAR



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#7 Jet's Pizza

Jet's Pizza piloted a program last summer to improve the phone ordering experience for both customers and restaurant operators that allowed phone-in customers to place orders via an automated attendant in just minutes. This pilot program of HungerRush's OrderAI Talk at Jet's Pizza led to more engaging phone order experiences as well as a large percentage of converting phone customers into digital customers.

The Jet's Pizza pilot program ran in 70 stores and helped employees focus on high-quality work instead of dealing with a backlog of phone orders.

The brand reported that 92% of customers starting orders with OrderAI Talk successfully completed automated orders and increased order accuracy. The technology also provides the ability to upsell on orders as the AI system learns consumer behaviors to engage with smart upselling and smart targeted marketing.

Following its successful launch, Jet's offered the solution to all franchisees, with more than 100 signed up to date.

"After seeing a high success with using HungerRush's OrderAI Text in our locations, we were eager to test out OrderAI Talk," Aaron Nilsson, CIO of Jet's Pizza, said. "The Phone Bot is an important step in our evolution to convert all orders into digital orders. The power of digital and AI is continuing to grow and is improving lives and commerce every day. This solution has been a big win for Jet's, store employees are less stressed because they are off the phones and focusing on the best part of the job — making pizzas."

JET'S PIZZA®



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#8 Papa Gino's Pizzeria

Papa Gino's Pizzeria continues to be an iconic brand in the New England area. The Massachusetts-based brand launched an upgraded website and mobile app. The new Papa Gino's mobile app offers guests a convenient and seamless digital ordering experience where they can place a carryout or delivery order, schedule a future order, and easily access and apply their Papa Gino's Rewards offers. Based on their ordering behavior, users will receive fun, targeted push notifications to motivate repeat orders and keep Papa Gino's top-of-mind.



The Papa Gino's website has been upgraded with a modern, clean and vibrant look and boasts new features, including a quick reference menu by category so guests don't need to log in to view menu items; the ability to easily sign up for the Papa Gino's Text Program; a submission page to upload Papa Gino's pictures for a chance to be featured on their social media pages; information on the pizzeria's dedication to community involvement including programs, fundraisers and more; easy access to the online Swag Store; career opportunities and current bundle deals.

Deena McKinley, chief experience officer of Papa Gino's Pizzeria, continues to leverage social media to promote the brand and recruit employees.

"As we look towards the future of the restaurant industry, it's our top priority to provide our guests with a smooth, modern and convenient way to order their favorite meals and stay connected with us on the go," she said. "With these new platforms, we're able to innovate and evolve while staying true to what we're known and loved for – great pizza and deep-rooted connections."



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#9 Red's Savoy Pizza

Minnesota-based Red's Savoy Pizza built an efficient and savvy tech stack in 2022, designing a digital storefront made for success. Red's Savoy Pizza was founded in 1975 in St. Paul, Minnesota. CEO Reed Daniels said it started franchising in the mid-2000s and now has 18 locations, with six in development.

When Daniels started working for the company as an outside vendor, it used three different POS systems and cash registers at some locations. There was no digital footprint. His first move was to get all the stores on the same POS system, then build loyalty and gift card programs. He then joined the company as chief marketing officer before being promoted to president. His goal now is to innovate the pizza company with an intuitive tech stack.

"Between 1965 to now, the digital landscape has completely shifted," Daniels told Ryan DiLello, a restaurant specialist with Paytronix, who helped Red's Savoy build the tech component of their business. "There were no computers back in 1965."

DiLello said 33% of all of Paytronix's orders were received digitally in March, and 55% of all digital orders were for carryout as opposed to delivery or curbside in March.



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#10 Brooklyn Pizza

Brooklyn Pizza is looking to robots to further its technology. The Birmingham, Michigan-based pizza brand is testing out self-driving delivery robots to deliver pizzas within a four-mile radius of the restaurant. The robots, built by Magna International, help cut delivery costs and carbon emissions. They use cameras and radar technology to navigate traffic and can reach up to 20 MPH.

EST. 1996
BROOKLYN
PIZZA



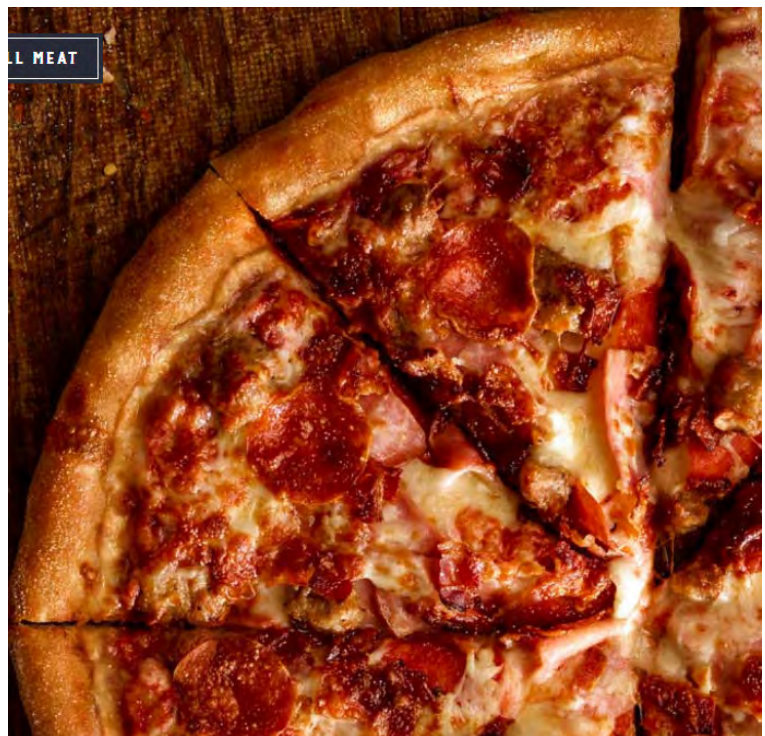
Top 15 Tech Innovators

#11 Marco's Pizza

Marco's Pizza is on its way to achieving pizza royalty with a sophisticated growth strategy while strengthening the brand with a team-first mentality. The Marco's retail footprint grew roughly 10%, with more than 150 signed agreements and more than 70 new store openings, in 2021, all while achieving continuous double-digit, same-store-sales increases.

Marco's is investing millions of dollars in technology innovations throughout the next few years as it plans to double in size. Technology will play an integral role in overall growth — from creating a seamless customer experience to enhancing store infrastructure. The brand has implemented several innovation initiatives and pilot programs, including rapid adoption of third-party delivery plus utilizing AI for voice-to-text ordering and generating automated promise times. Marco's pushes to test robotic kitchen innovations, ghost kitchens, new operational equipment and even simulating a drone delivery.

In 2022, the brand reached a historic milestone: \$1B in annual systemwide sales. To commemorate the achievement, the company launched the Marco's Pizza Foundation as an extension of its mission to empower franchisees and team members to make a positive difference in their communities. The new effort marks a deeper commitment to unification across Marco's as it brings the brand, its franchisees, and the communities it serves closer together under one common cause.



#12 Mountain Mike's Pizza

Mountain Mike's Pizza (MMP) has implemented a best-in-class learning management system (LMS) by Discoverlink that allows the brand to distribute proprietary customized content throughout the entire system to ensure training is streamlined and effective. The LMS provides franchisees and team members with education in the form of engaging videos, animations and audio narration, and deploys interactive learning to keep learners engaged, including adaptable quizzes and courses that franchises can tailor, allowing for customized training.

The content is accessible via an app, along with a traditional website, and to maintain content confidentiality outside of restaurants, the LMS utilizes geo zones. The brand has also invested in app consolidation to directly integrate all major third-party delivery platforms into MMP's POS system, allowing third-party orders to be uploaded directly into the POS and printed for production, eliminating the need for tablets and manually entering orders.

Looking ahead, Mountain Mike's Pizza is exploring both an AI phone management system and business intelligence tools. The brand is currently in the development and testing phase of an enterprise-level telephone call management system, which will prevent long hold times, mitigate call drops, migrate guests to digital ordering, promote loyalty programs and increase check averages. Once implemented, the system will provide franchisees with in-depth analytics into call volume, on-hold times, and call drops, helping the stores to optimize their process.

Additionally, franchisees are able to lower labor cashier costs by utilizing this system. To complement the new phone system, Mountain Mike's Pizza is also pursuing the integration of additional business intelligence tools into the brand's POS, and partnering with outside vendors to provide franchisees with BI tools on supply chain, third-party delivery, POS, digital marketing and web and app orders.



#13 Pizza 4P's

Pizza 4P's wants to ensure satisfied customers by sourcing quality ingredients, one of the most important factors that has driven Pizza 4P's to success. AI cameras are helping the brand monitor the quality of its pizza and improve standards across all Pizza 4P's restaurants. The camera captures the image of each pizza in the oven, and analyzes the pizzas to make sure they meet standards. The scanners measure a number of variables against a set of data that reflects the perfect pizza, which includes pizza types, toppings, distribution of toppings, shape of the pizzas, sizes and other metrics.

After years of researching and testing, Pizza 4P's has finally applied AI across all restaurants as the technology keeps delivering tangible benefits. Pizza 4P's has successfully integrated this technology into daily operations, making AI the perfect tool. The brand now takes about 2,000 photos of pizzas per day, and each pizza gets an itemized and overall score to ensure quality.

Kaizen (continuous improvement) is one of the brand's core values, and it is always exploring new ways to satisfy customers in terms of both food quality and service. The brand would even like to apply facial recognition technology to read customers' emotions through analyzing expression and tone of voice. This way, it can clearly know if customers are happy or not with their food and service. This "emotion detection" is strictly for "happiness analysis" purposes, and this is one way the brand plans to get closer to achieving the mission of making the world smile for peace.

PIZZA 4P'S



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#14 Square Pie Guys

Square Pie Guys is using a technology platform called NUMA to significantly improve the customer experience. This platform allows the brand to field every call in an automated way, which has resulted in a response rate of 0% missed calls. Additionally, the brand is experiencing a decrease in phone talk time of 85%, which has allowed it to streamline operations and be more efficient.

One of the key benefits of using NUMA is that it has helped drive traffic to its website.

The platform funnels guests to Square Pie Guys' FAQ page. This has led to a decreased bounce rate and a higher likelihood of capturing online orders through its own platforms. Additionally, it is using Trainual, a cloud-based learning management system, to significantly enhance operations and cut costs.

The brand is exploring the use of Raydiant technology for digital menu boards. One of the ways it is planning to use this technology is by embracing digital menu boards at all locations, using digital screens to market in-store, showcasing LTOs, and updating menus through the cloud. All of these innovations will be utilized to create a more dynamic and engaging dining experience for customers.

One of the benefits of using Raydiant is that it allows for the use of dynamic digital menu displays that are completely integrated with the existing POS system. This means that any time the brand updates a menu item or makes a price change in POS, digital menus will update instantly. This helps keep menus current and accurate.



Top 15 Tech Innovators

#15 Uno Pizzeria & Grill

UNO Pizzeria & Grill introduced a virtual brand called Detroit Pizza Works, featuring Detroit-style pizza. Detroit Pizza Works was launched in November on major delivery apps.

"The feedback we've received from our guests is that we've absolutely 'nailed it,'" CEO Erik Frederick said. "Even though UNO's is the birthplace of, and is known for, deep dish pizza, we also make a spectacular Chicago-style thin crust pizza. Our customers have grown to trust us to provide quality pizza varieties. And if a new great style comes along we will always explore the possibilities to expand our product offerings. With Detroit Pizza Works, we wanted to stay true to the classic Detroit-style pizza and think we have a top-of-the-line pizza to offer. The Virtual Kitchen marketplace gives us the opportunity to open up to entirely new guests and markets."

Additionally, Pizzeria Uno opened five locations in 2022, with more in the pipeline for 2023.

"2022 has been a record year for growth for Pizzeria Uno, and we attribute much of our success to our franchise model and new focus on hotel restaurant conversions," Frederick added.

The brand launched a hotel-restaurant conversion strategy that gave hotel owners the chance to open a full-service Pizzeria Uno restaurant inside the footprint of their hotel. Pizzeria Uno is targeting 10 to 15 new units in 2023. The brand includes 80 company-owned and franchised units in 18 states.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#1 Slice House

Serving authentic, New York-style thin crust pizza in Leonardtown, Slice House serves pizza by the slice. Their focus on slices as opposed to whole pizzas allows the brand to keep the slice counter supplied with enough oven space to accommodate orders.



In addition to his many domestic and international accolades, Tony Gemignani began franchising his Slice House by Tony Gemignani concept this year and has 20 units in use or in development in only the first year of operation. He has a goal of becoming the largest franchisor in the U.S. of award-winning pizza while maintaining the highest levels of quality that he is known for. Gemignani is excited to provide an opportunity to business owners interested in the pizza industry while bringing high-quality pizza, service and jobs to their communities.

Gemignani was born in the Bronx and raised in Massapequa, Long Island. He is a second-generation Italian/German, and has amazing cooks on both sides of his family. His love for cooking and going out to eat has translated into Slice House. His goal was to create an environment that was comfortable, fun and most importantly, had great food.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

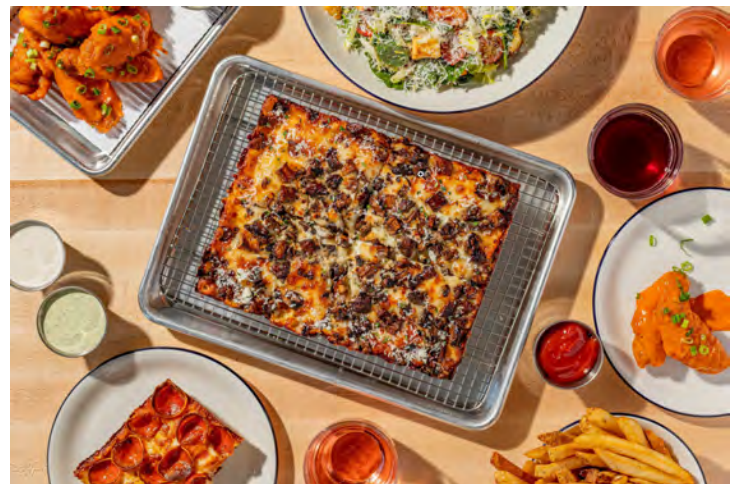
#2 Square Pie Guys

Square Pie Guys is a food-forward and chef-driven brand that is always thinking about trends and innovating its menu offerings. In addition to its focus on food, it is savvy in its use of technology. The brand embraces technology and uses it to streamline operations, improve the customer experience and drive growth. For example, it leveraged QR code technology to allow guests to order and pay directly from their phones, which makes the ordering process more convenient and helps alleviate labor costs.

Square Pie Guys also believes in building community through thoughtful partnerships and charitable donations. The brand is committed to giving back to the community and supporting causes that are important to the brand and to its customers. With an ambitious expansion plan, Square Pie Guys is committed to growing its brand through additional brick-and-mortar locations, as well as embracing ghost kitchens and licensing deals.

The brand believes that making delicious food and doing good for the community are not mutually exclusive goals. In fact, it sees them as integral parts of its mission. The ultimate goal is to make delicious food and do good for the community at scale, so that the brand can have a positive impact on as many people as possible.

To achieve this goal, it focuses on using high-quality ingredients, collaborating with talented chefs and food industry professionals, and constantly innovating menu offerings, all while giving back to its community and supporting causes that are important to customers.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#3 Smokin' Oak Wood-Fired Pizza & Taproom

Smokin' Oak Wood-Fired Pizza & Taproom is redefining the fast-casual pizza segment with authentic, wood-fired pizza paired with a self-pour taproom wall serving beer, wine and mixed cocktails. It makes sauces from scratch, roasts meats in the wood-fired oven, chops veggies fresh throughout the day and, of course, makes its own dough. The brand is so fresh, it doesn't even have a freezer.

Smokin' Oak is the only franchise pairing its fast-casual pizza with the self-pour taproom wall. It's truly a unique guest experience that elevates the brand, diversifies the revenue streams, and increases the check averages.

The brand's goal is to redefine what 'fast-casual' means in this segment. It is making a massive investment in the self-pour taproom wall, as it is proven to produce incremental revenue with a very low labor cost. The goal is to become the lunch spot for those working around its locations, since pizzas can be ready in just five to eight minutes.

The brand also wants to be seen as a destination because of the self-pour taproom wall. Friends and families congregate at locations in the evening to sample new drinks off the taproom wall and enjoy the freshness of wood-fired pizzas.

Each of its franchise partners aligns themselves with an organization they are passionate about. Smokin' Oak believes in giving back to the communities the restaurants are in. For example, in Grand Junction, Colorado, beneficiaries include Special Olympics Colorado, where they donated \$2,500 cash to support local athletes traveling to Orlando, Florida, for the 2022 Special Olympics USA Games.

SMOKIN' OAK
wood-fired pizza®
& TAPROOM



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#4 Pasqually's Pizza & Wings

Launched in April 2020 by CEC Entertainment (parent company of Chuck E. Cheese), Pasqually's was one of the first virtual kitchens to emerge nationally during the pandemic. The delivery-only restaurant concept lived within Chuck E. Cheese's brick-and-mortar kitchens, but reached a more mature consumer with a fresh menu and bold flavors, expanding the company's customer base tremendously. Pasqually's grew quickly, with mid to high double-digit growth in two years with the same footprint.

As off-premise dining and delivery remain a large part of the industry post-pandemic, CEC Entertainment continues to focus on growing Pasqually's by evolving its menu to offer more on-trend flavors, shareable sides and crowd-pleasing bundle deals.

Pasqually's was created to satisfy the consumer need for more premium at-home dining options, and its goal is to continue catering to that promise. CEC Entertainment aims to grow the Pasqually's brand through menu expansion and value offerings, such as new bold pizza and wing flavors and bundle deals, that target Gen Z and Millennial consumers, many of whom grew up loving Pasqually's sister brand, Chuck E. Cheese, but now have a more refined palate.

Pasqually's was one of the first virtual kitchens that came onto the scene during the COVID-19 pandemic. The delivery-only brand initially received backlash from consumers and media as the idea of virtual kitchens was still relatively new. Yet, as the brand grew, it was quickly recognized as a bold and innovative business move that helped keep CEC Entertainment afloat during the pandemic.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#5 Hangar 54/Wingman

During the pandemic, many of Hangar 54/Wingman's current franchisees and partners were facing supply-chain shortages in other concept segments; however, the parent company's commitment to its success and continued growth drove the brands to develop new concepts for them to add to their existing brands to expand both consumer choice and economic sustainability. Since that initial launch in early 2021, the brand has grown rapidly to over 100 Hangar 54 Pizza locations at the close of 2022.

Ultimately, it wanted to create an evergreen company that provides consumers with a pizza they love to fuel their adventures, a choice of high-quality products in convenient locations, and profitable investments for its franchisees.

The brand is improving the industry by providing the C-store and grocery store owner a QSR high-quality product that is supported with ongoing training, technology and labor-efficient opportunities the segment has not previously had. The systems and offerings introduce mobile app technology, relationships with third-party delivery, and order management systems that help to ensure strong profits, while achieving these metrics in a low-labor, high-efficiency branded model. This has allowed its franchisees to continue to operate and expand their revenue streams while labor shortages continue.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#6 Fat Boy's Pizza

Fat Boy's Pizza has done a lot in a short time – the Louisiana-based brand thrived during the pandemic as it adjusted to a different way of doing things. It dove head-first into every community within which it opened and showed up with its pizza truck when people needed it most. During the pandemic, it gave away hundreds of pizzas to first responders. Fat Boy's Pizza is in the process of expanding into Texas with several locations and has a smart growth plan there with a new investor. Outside of that, the brand will continue to grow through eventual franchising. Restaurants in Louisiana and Mississippi are currently strong and enjoying a lot of success.

Fat Boy's Pizza places a premium on customer service and community involvement. Fat Boy's Pizza is involved in every level of the areas it serves – from donations to little leagues, to colleges, to professionals – the brand serves everyone it can and gives back through various endeavors.

"This past year has given Fat Boy's Pizza the chance to continue our growth and enter new markets. Our innovative concept and commitment to quality have only accelerated this process, and we're thrilled to continue our journey into 2023 with new partners and new communities," Gabe Corchiani, founder of Fat Boy's Pizza, said. "We're excited that more families are able to experience our high-energy environment while enjoying our delicious food and entertainment."



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#7 Sauce'd

Grapevine, Texas-based Sauce'd Pizza and BYOB is home to the original Texas-style pizza crust. In the last three years, the brand opened two locations with no outside funding. The family-run business is looking to continue to grow and become a leader in Texas for pizza and community service.

The restaurant serves both New York and Texas-style crusts, and customers can order by the slice or by the full pizza. It also has a BYOB policy, allowing guests to bring their favorite beverages to accompany their pizza.

Sauce'd donates and hosts events with its local chamber of commerce and food banks. It employs mainly high school kids and has a "world readiness" training program it puts its young employees through. The brand believes this is very important because when employees leave Sauce'd, they do so as responsible people, ready to make their mark on this world.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#8 Thunderbird Pies

Originally conceived and operated as a ghost kitchen out of the two Zoli's Pizza locations in Addison and Fort Worth, Texas, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Thunderbird Pies made the leap to a brick-and-mortar shop in East Dallas in the summer of 2021. The Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex was lacking in Detroit-style pizza options prior to Thunderbird Pies opening, and the pandemic gave PILF Restaurant Group (Cane Rosso, Zoli's Pizza) the time to research, refine and perfect its Detroit-style pizza making process and recipes.

Having operated the Cane Rosso pizza restaurant brand since 2011 and Zoli's since 2013, PILF Restaurant Group had the know-how, ideas and recipes to bring its signature flavors to a new style of pizza for the group. Since opening, Thunderbird Pies has been named one of the Best New Restaurants in Texas by Texas Monthly Magazine, one of the Top 100 Restaurants in Dallas by the Dallas Observer, and Best Detroit-style Pizza in D Magazine.

By adding a third brand and third style of pizza to the PILF Restaurant Group's lineup of restaurants, Thunderbird Pies further cemented the group's position as a thought and business leader when it comes to pizza in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. The brand offers a casual, family-friendly environment with easy pickup and takeout options, arcade games for kids, and a fun and light-hearted atmosphere for its East Dallas clientele to bring their families to after baseball games, weekend activities or birthday parties.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#9 Italian Disco

Italian Disco is the first of its kind pizza concept in Baltimore, infusing old-school flavor with modern energy and elevated pizza and dishes. This is not an average pizza joint – the menu is curated by one of America’s best chefs, Julian Marucci, and features a full bar as well as an outdoor patio/seating space for guests to enjoy.

Guests can take a trip back to the days of groove and glam at Italian Disco. The brand serves international beer, delicious Italian cooking, and music straight out of the '70s and '80s.

Italian Disco’s goal is to elevate the concept of a pizza joint and remain as a staple in the Baltimore community. When guests want a relaxed environment for lunch, dinner, takeout, or late-night snacking, Italian Disco is the place to go.

Chef Julian is constantly mentoring young chefs and fostering a love for the culinary space through his work at Italian Disco. The staff is continually giving back through volunteering in the community.

Italian **DISCO**



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#10 The Wizard of Za

At The Wizard of Za, dough is made fresh daily and each pizza is handmade by team members who “simply love to feed people.” The Columbus, Ohio-based brand says the magic’s in the dough, and that makes for a great pizza.

Founded by Spencer Saylor, who was furloughed from his job during the pandemic and started making and selling pizzas from his home, The Wizard of Za became popular by word of mouth. The counter-service concept offers pizza by the slice, as well as what the company calls a “square” — a 6-inch by 6-inch pizza — and full pizzas and salads. They’re rolling out New York-style, as well. The Wizard of Za has thrived on being a hometown pizza brand since its inception.

The dough is a focaccia crust, and it’s made in house. Sesame seeds are placed on the bottom of the pan to add a little bite.

“It goes through a multi-proofing process every morning where it’s able to rise and stretch again with garlic salt,” said Carly Hensley, vice president of team service for The Wizard of Za. “And then we build our pizza on top of that focaccia crust on the bottom. The bottom is light and fluffy, but also crunchy and flavorful. It’s really something special.”

The Wizard of Za’s two stores sit at the gateways to the University of Dayton and The Ohio State University. The brand knew it was ready to open a second location because it already operated 13 other restaurants and had the systems and operations team in place to grow.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#11 Parlour Pizza

Parlour Pizza has a unique concept with a culture that is people driven. With a focus on being “Kentuckiana’s Best Destination for Craft Pizza, Live Music, Craft Cocktails and Beer,” Parlour is all about bringing people together in a laid-back atmosphere.

Don Robinson, who co-owns the parent company Craft Culture Concepts with his wife, Teresa Robinson, said Parlour has an incredible team that loves what they do.

“Our brand is high volume focusing on craft beer, craft cocktails and craft pizza in a very elevated dining experience,” he said.

The Kentucky-based brand has a goal to build two stores per year starting in 2023. This growth will be internally funded for the next eight to 10 locations, after which the owners will determine if they want to explore a franchising model. With five current locations in Kentucky and Indiana, the brand strives to serve delicious artisan-style pizzas, smoked wings, extensive beer, wine and cocktail lists in a fun and family-friendly atmosphere.

Parlour has a commitment to give back to its communities. Robinson serves on Indiana and Kentucky Restaurant Association boards. He said the brand spends a large amount of time with many charities around its restaurants and is focusing on helping as many organizations as possible by getting its team involved.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#12 Artisan Heat Bistro

Artisan Heat Bistro was born out of a love of fire and food. The owners spent decades tending fires, moving coals and rotating dutch ovens. The South Carolina-based brand is dedicated to its customers and to providing them with the best product possible. It has worked for several years perfecting its dough and recipes prior to launch and is very responsive to customer feedback.

Parent company Red Fern Dynamics CEO Charles Daugherty said the brand is always looking to improve and grow.

"We will never be satisfied with where we are as there is always room to grow and improve," he said. "We love this industry and the amazing companies that work within it."

Daugherty said his goal is to continue to create amazing recipes and to provide opportunities for franchisees in both a brick-and-mortar location as well as a mobile option. He said the brand strives to be first to the industry by staying true to using only the best ingredients and helping others with their difficulties getting into the industry.

"We enjoy sharing knowledge with others and helping them discover the joy and endless possibilities that pizza can provide," Daugherty said. "This is a community, just like the BBQ world, filled with amazing talent and exceptional people and we are proud to be a part of it."



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#13 Truli Italian Food & Drink

Truli Italian Food & Drink was developed by global restaurant and bar concept creator and operator Doug Zeif in order to fill a gap in The Promenade at Coconut Creek's amazing roster of consumer offerings. According to its website, Truli is a modern Italian trattoria and bar that is designed to be a place where people get together to eat really well and enjoy the company of families, friends and couples.

The brand is definitely heating up, filling a niche that has been virtually abandoned – with a small footprint, in an elevated fast-casual service environment. The brand prides itself on serving high-quality, delicious food and drinks in a setting with a cool vibe. Tastes of the most genuine Italian culinary and mixology traditions combined with thoughtful, playful relevant twists make Truli a next-gen restaurant and bar.

The brand's ultimate goal is to give 100% of its guests a burning desire to return often, which will ultimately help grow this brand nationally.

With a focus on using local vendors when possible, the brand strives to be the employer of choice in the areas where it has restaurants. Benefits for employees include a better-than-industry compensation package with free meals, insurance, and everyone participating in the tip pool. Additionally, the brand is hosting a contest in which the Team Member of the Year will win a free trip to Italy.



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#14 Konz Pizza

Konz Pizza is the creation of executive chef and restaurant veteran Kris Lawrie. It started as an idea in early 2014, and he opened his first food trailer in the summer of 2015 in Kelowna, British Columbia. Needless to say, the trailer, the concept and the brand were a huge success. After running the trailer for two seasons, Lawrie decided it was time to launch the franchise business of Konz Pizza, and opened his first store in Edmonton, Alberta in early 2017.

One of the foundations of the business model of Konz, from day one, was the idea that its franchisees would be more than just owners – they would be partners in the system. In fact, they would be family. Lawrie wanted partners who could think and had an opinion and a strong desire to be part of something special.

It is with this mandate that Konz Pizza has now grown from that small trailer to over 20 locations, from British Columbia to Ontario.

Family is the core foundation of Konz Pizza and that is why the brand does what it does as a company. Lawrie said family means having someone to support you unconditionally in spite of your shortcomings.

“Families nurture and support one another even when it’s not easy,” he said. “A family is a group of people going through the world together. Family is one of the most important and valuable gifts of our lives. The word ‘family’ itself is so important that it means to feel secure with people around you whom you can always count on, you can share your problems with, people you can trust and people who can always boost your mood.”



Top 15 Emerging Brands

#15 Pizza Stone'd

Pizza Stone'd has been working hard over the last four years to perfect the ultimate customer experience. With a consistent five-star rating, owner Madisen Saglibene said that shows the pride its employees take in their work and the love they have to make every event fun and special to each guest.

Though it is a relatively new brand, Pizza Stone'd has become a pizza staple in the Las Vegas community for families and the prominent wedding industry in the city. It started with a typical food truck model but quickly emerged into the mobile catering space as a trusted brand to serve across the valley for private events – including high-profile clients in the City of Sin.

Pizza Stone'd worked incredibly hard through the pandemic to survive, and did so with passion. Pizza Stone'd has strong brand ethics that have led to a happy customer base. Not only is it recognized as a great source for pizza, but as a company that has a culture for caring about others and the community it provides service in.

Saglibene said its goal is to continue perfecting the pizza, using the best ingredients on the market and learning better practices to give every customer the perfect bite.

Saglibene has participated in several podcasts, news articles and one-on-ones with other women in the food truck and pizzeria industry to offer her knowledge as a means to help others get started. She donates pizzas monthly to various organizations in Las Vegas as a way to give back and honor the locals.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#1 Marco's Pizza

In 2022, Marco's Pizza hit a historic milestone: \$1B in annual systemwide sales. Additionally, the brand has an overall growth goal of 1,500 units by the end of 2023. To celebrate the \$1B achievement, the company launched the Marco's Pizza Foundation as an extension of its mission to empower franchisees and team members to make a positive difference in their communities. Headquartered in Toledo, Ohio, Marco's Pizza also focuses on giving back to its communities.

The Marco's Pizza Foundation joined the No Kid Hungry national campaign by committing to donate at least \$250,000. The donation helped to provide 2.5 million meals to kids.

"The work we are doing through The Marco's Pizza Foundation plays a vital role in our success as a business and as an effective corporate citizen," Tony Libardi, co-CEO and president of Marco's Pizza, said. "The campaign with No Kid Hungry is a national extension of the local store efforts already happening to support kids and will magnify the overall impact that the Marco's Pizza brand can have in the communities where we serve and operate."

Marco's Pizza operates more than 1,100 stores in 34 states with locations in Puerto Rico and the Bahamas.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#2 Jet's Pizza

Jet's Pizza continued to grow its brand in 2022. The company opened more than 20 locations, introducing Jet's in new states, including Utah, Kansas, New Mexico, Washington and Las Vegas, Nevada.



Expansion continues in markets with existing Jet's locations as well, including Denver, Colorado; Phoenix, Arizona; Austin, Texas; New York City; Chicago, Illinois; and Naples and Pensacola, Florida, according to a press release.

"It's truly incredible to see the love for our brand grow. People appreciate quality and that's what sets us apart," John Jetts, president of Jet's America Inc., said. "We continue to have new franchisees who want to be part of this era of growth. Last year we had 294 new applicants wanting to open up their own Jet's Pizza."

The brand has also stepped up its technological game with online sales, and text to order or by third-party aggregator sites. The franchise also recently launched a phone bot ordering system using AI technology. A pilot program of HungerRush's OrderAI Talk at Jet's Pizza delivered a more engaging phone order experience for customers. The technology improves the phone ordering experience for both customers and restaurant operators as it lets phone-in customers place orders via an automated attendant in just minutes.

Jet's operates nearly 400 stores in 19 states.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#3 Chuck E. Cheese

Chuck E. Cheese is on pace to remodel all existing U.S. locations in the next three years. The company is currently undergoing one of the largest FEC Capex investments with remodel efforts of nearly half of the fleet complete in 2022 (200 by Jan. 2023). Guests can experience a completely reimagined Chuck E. Cheese with new and more games, space and modern technology.

The company also plans to open 10-20 international locations next year and is building a pipeline for future growth in territories across the Middle East, Asia and South America. This builds upon its 88 international locations across 19 countries and territories, including eight recently opened locations in Suriname, Mexico, Chile, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The brand has also signed new development agreements in the Dominican Republic.

Chuck E. Cheese was one of the first FEC brands to launch a virtual kitchen at the start of the pandemic – Pasqually's Pizza & Wings. The delivery-only concept was a success that allowed CEC Entertainment to reach a new demographic and revenue stream.

Most recently, the company announced a new virtual brand, Lankybox Kitchen, in partnership with Virtual Dining Concepts, homing in on the rise of YouTube entertainment. LankyBox Kitchen pairs America's largest family entertainment center with one of the world's most popular YouTube brands.

Chuck E. Cheese is also reaching families in non-traditional settings through expanded licensing deals and at-home offerings. Inspired by the company's fan-favorite pizza, a frozen-pizza option is currently in frozen food aisles at over 3,000 grocery stores across the U.S., including Kroger.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#4 Hungry Howie's

Hungry Howie's has seen incredible growth through both the 2008 recession and the recent challenges of the pandemic. By upholding the brand's core values, Hungry Howie's has stayed true to its foundation for nearly 50 years and has become a pillar of its local communities. The concept continues to emerge as a major player within the pizza marketplace, consistently ranking in the top 10 of the nation's largest pizza franchises.



Hungry Howie's is well-known as the originator of flavored crust pizza, but it offers more than just hot, cheesy, delicious pizza. The menu also serves salads, wings and signature breadsticks available in various flavors so there's something for everyone. One of the more unique menu items is Hungry Howie's oven-baked subs, which are served calzone-style. Using Hungry Howie's freshly made pizza dough instead of the traditional Italian bread, the result is a toasty, cheesy calzone-style sub that is highly craveable.

The brand has had to raise prices to combat the rising food costs and supply chain challenges but only less than average compared to its competitors due to existing, long-standing relationships with its suppliers. Hungry Howie's has seen success in adding in-house driver training programs to reduce the difficulty of warehouse and delivery jobs.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#5 Mountain Mike's Pizza

Over the past four years, Mountain Mike's Pizza's (MMP) systemwide AUV has grown considerably – nearly 40%, an impressive feat for the brand, which has more than four decades of history and longevity. Today, AUV has reached \$1.1 million, with the top quartile of locations topping \$1.6 million, on average.

Over the next five years, the brand's growth plan will be focused. Maintaining the brand promise established in 1978 remains a top priority, and MMP's expansion model calls for the brand to be selective with its franchise partners and the communities in which it conducts business, emphasizing strategic corporate growth. With nearly 270 restaurants in six Western states, MMP will be operating in eight states in the next 90 days. From there, the brand expects to grow by 10% annually, reaching approximately 450 locations in the next half-decade. Non-traditional locations are not part of MMP's current outlook, as community and family gatherings are woven in the fabric.

Committed to providing a comfortable and interactive dining environment for sports fans, families and the communities it served, Mountain Mike's Pizza is equally invested in its dine-in component and digital ordering options. With most restaurants featuring big-screen TVs throughout, a beer and wine program, party rooms and a kids' arcade area, and because of the space required, the brand does not support any non-traditional units at this time.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#6 MOD Pizza

MOD Pizza has more than 530 stores across 29 states and Canada, and has no plans of slowing down. In order to continue its aggressive growth, MOD hired talent to lead its expansion. In September, MOD Pizza announced the promotion of Becky Mulligan to the newly created position of chief restaurant officer, and Stephen Blum as its first chief development officer.

MOD also hired Cynthia Richardson as vice president of franchising; Scott Uehlein as vice president of culinary excellence and innovation; Ben Coarde as regional vice president of operations, overseeing the Eastern region; and James Holguin, a seven-year MOD veteran, was promoted to regional vice president of operations, responsible for the Western half of the U.S.

"As MOD continues to scale, we remain focused on our people-first mission, while delivering an incredible and consistent customer experience, centered around our craveable food. We are incredibly grateful for Becky's leadership and commitment to our purpose over the past year and we all celebrate her well-deserved promotion," said Scott Svenson, co-founder and CEO, MOD Pizza. "I am equally excited to welcome Stephen, Cindy, Scott and Ben and to congratulate James on a well-deserved promotion. They are all industry veterans who bring decades of experience to the leadership team and who will help us continue to support our people and product as we further our growth trajectory, on and off premise."



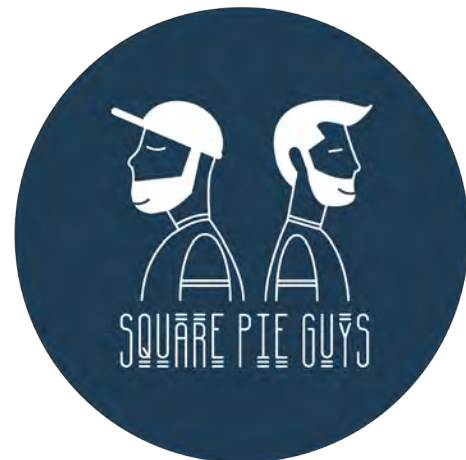
Top 15 Growth Brands

#7 Square Pie Guys

Square Pie Guys' five-year growth plan includes the expansion of its business into 12 locations within the nine Bay Area counties and then into Southern California, with a first location in Los Angeles. The brand is also planning to open additional ghost kitchens to further increase its reach. These ghost kitchens will allow Square Pie Guys to offer products to customers in new locations and help the team understand demand. The brand plans to use the data it receives from its first ghost kitchens to test customer interest in a particular location without the need for traditional brick-and-mortar restaurants.

Square Pie Guys also plans on utilizing licensing deals as a way to expand its reach and generate additional revenue without the need to invest in physical infrastructure or other resources.

Square Pie Guys will differentiate between its full-service outlets and takeout- and delivery-only outposts in order to better meet the needs of its customers. Its full-service outlets will offer a complete dining experience, including dine-in options, while takeout- and delivery-only outposts will be focused on providing convenient and efficient options for customers on the go.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#8 Farrelli's Pizza

Farrelli's Pizza was founded in 1995 by John and Margaret Farrell with the help of their daughter, Jacque. More than 25 years later, the Washington-based pizza brand is still family owned and operated.

This year marked the first in Farrelli's Pizza's history that the brand opened two units in the same calendar year. Next year, it plans to open another two. Within the next five years, it plans to double in size. Farrelli's Pizza is expanding regionally, looking for opportunities in concentric circles slightly beyond each additional existing unit, so that it can continue to support these new areas of expansion.

Farrelli's is located near two colleges and a host of high schools. Moving forward, its strategy is to identify neighborhoods with a strong high school presence. The brand dabbled in virtual kitchens, but the model wasn't feasible. Ultimately, it is focusing on a strong mix of dine-in and takeout/delivery, with a 70% dine-in to 30% takeout/delivery ratio.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#9 Blaze Pizza

Blaze Pizza opened 13 restaurants and signed seven multi-unit development agreements in 2022. The development agreements over the past 12 months will add 27 restaurants across target markets like Maryland, Georgia and Tennessee, according to a press release.



"The ongoing development success we've experienced throughout the past 12 months is a testament to Blaze Pizza's position as an industry leader and the bright future we have ahead. Despite the unexpected hurdles the restaurant industry has faced in recent years, our brand has remained resilient and our team is excited about taking Blaze Pizza to the next level in 2023," Ed Yancey, chief development officer at Blaze Pizza, said. "Having a best-in-class leadership team and the determination of franchisees who show such passion for our brand and our mission of bringing fresh, customizable menu items to consumers has been instrumental to our growth and will further propel us forward."

Last year, Blaze debuted on the campus of Tarleton State University and plans to focus on airports and other non-traditional venues in the future.

Earlier this year, Blaze Pizza announced the appointment of a new president and chief executive officer, Beto Guajardo, who will lead Blaze through its next phase of growth, with plans to expand the brand in target markets. Franchise opportunities remain across the U.S. including in Texas, Colorado, Virginia, and key regions throughout the Northeast.



Top 15 Growth Brands

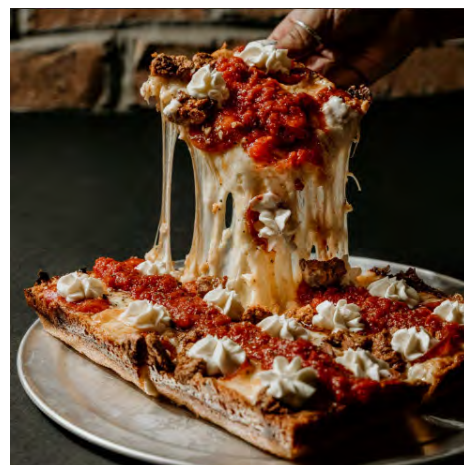
#10 Via 313

Via 313 Pizzeria is definitely coming in hot. What started in 2011 in a nondescript trailer in Austin, Texas has now grown to 12 brick-and-mortar locations in two states — with 13 more to come in 2023 alone. Via 313's energized growth is thanks to world-class ingredients and hometown heart. The pizzas are called square, but they're actually rectangles and baked in metal trays — just like the ones used on the automotive assembly lines at the Big Three.

But instead of being filled with metal parts, Via 313's trays are filled with the finest pizza ingredients it can source. What's more, Via 313 offers gluten-free and dairy-free options — making it a dining destination for all.

The brand plans to extensively grow across the United States and bring Detroit-style pizza across the country. In 2020, Via 313 was acquired by Savory Fund in Lehi, Utah, which has been instrumental in its expansion. Savory is an innovative private equity firm that combines over \$650 million in assets under management with a growth playbook and expertise that has been developed over 15 years of operating in the restaurant industry.

Founder involvement in the expansion of a brand is a central theme of the Savory approach, as the founders carry the tribal knowledge around the uniqueness that has energized early success and is essential to future growth. In Via 313's case, the involvement of founders Brandon and Zane Hunt was a non-negotiable factor in the acquisition. Savory not only invested in their delicious pizza, but in the talent, grit, determination and heart of the founders.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#11 Panhandler's Pizza

Before COVID, Panhandler's Pizza was averaging \$50K a month and now is strategizing in 2023 to average \$150K a month at its mothership location. In the next five years, Panhandler's expects to grow to 10 brick-and-mortar locations, two food trucks, and five to six Panhandler's Inside locations in various entertainment venues and breweries.

The brand is in the research and development process to launch two retail standalone products, as well as continuing its nationwide delivery. It plans to grow through growth marketing and improving not only the customer journey but by blueprinting FOH & BOH of all of the horizontal and vertical journeys of its employees and customers, starting at the pivotal point before a person becomes a Pan's Fan.

It is blueprinting its current-state processes in order to understand/plan/strategize for the future. The brand is looking to expand throughout Colorado and potentially neighboring states in concentric circles in order to keep growth somewhat controlled.

Panhandler's Pizza is developing a model of strategically placed larger stores that can act as commissary kitchens for a fleet of Panhandler's food trucks. Each food truck will service several counties in Colorado with a home-base commissary kitchen. The brand is also creating a Panhandler's Inside Concept in which it provides hoodless ovens, product and marketing to entertainment venues like bowling alleys, concert venues, sporting facilities and breweries/distilleries. It is also using the concept of ghost food trucks at several local breweries within walking distance of Panhandler's.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#12 Mattenga's Pizzeria

Known for its giant 28-inch Tailgate Pizza, Mattenga's Pizzeria is really taking off. The brand opened four locations in the first six months of 2022, and more than doubled its team members in the last 12 months. It almost doubled its average sales of \$225k per month in 2021, to \$420k per month in 2022.

Aside from being a Mattenga's Pizzeria Co-Founder, Hengam Stanfield is a small business advocate, host of the Making Dough Show, an electrical engineer, and a mom of four. Hengam and her husband are the owners of Mattenga's Pizzeria. Their passion for hospitality and good Italian food let them buy a failing pizzeria in 2014 with zero prior restaurant experience. They now have six locations across Schertz, New Braunfels, and San Antonio, Texas.

Mattenga's Pizzeria won Small Business of the Year for three years in their local Chamber of Commerce. Maybe their biggest claim to fame is Hengam's YouTube channel, the Making Dough Show, which recently made it to the Top 25 Food Marketing YouTube Channels of Feedspot.com.

The brand would like to franchise in the next 12 to 18 months, and have up to 100 locations within five years.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#13 Fat Boy's Pizza

Fat Boy's Pizza, truly has done a lot in a short amount of time. With five company-owned stores, the brand restructured its executive management team in 2022.

Chad Collura was promoted to VP of brand development and is responsible for seeking out locations, lease management, contractor bidding oversight, and serving as point person from start to finish on projects, according to a press release.

Casey Biehl, former director of operations for Louisiana and Mississippi, is now VP of operations and is guiding the training team as well as overseeing sales and special events.

Pete Lewis has been promoted from his role as controller to VP, finance and human resources.

"Fat Boy's Pizza has grown significantly in a short period of time," Gabe Corchiani, brand owner, said. "With this growth we have been able to maintain excellent product quality and deliver top-notch service to our guests. That is solely due to the team we have assembled, from the executive level to managers to employees. We will continue to grow and bring great individuals into our company."

Placing a premium on customer service and community involvement, Fat Boy's Pizza is involved in every level of the areas it serves. The brand plans to open several locations in Texas and begin franchising across the southeast this year. It will continue to grow the brand through eventual franchising. Fat Boy's Pizza is now open on or near two college campuses (LSU & Southern Miss).



Top 15 Growth Brands

#14 Your Pie

Your Pie continues to look for opportunities to expand and engage local franchise owners. Your Pie franchises are a unique value proposition with a strong corporate support team and elevated brand standards, but also give local owners the chance to reflect their local community through local hiring and charitable giving. Your Pie is looking to expand throughout the nation, focusing on the Southeast and mid-sized markets.

Currently, Your Pie is not using non-traditional growth methods. However, the fast-casual pizza brand is looking to explore military bases and college campuses in the year ahead.

This year, Lisa Dimson has created and spearheaded multiple marketing initiatives for the Your Pie brand. Consistent with her ability to create new and alternative go to marketing strategies, Dimson debuted a new logo for the brand earlier this year. The new logo design spotlights the three main offerings of the fast-casual pizza eatery: pizza, brews and gelato.

Your Pie also rolled out a new menu board design across all current and future stores to make the guest experience even simpler and more appealing. The modernized menu board design features high-quality product imagery, refreshed product names for ordering ease, and a convenient pizza sizing chart illustration.



Top 15 Growth Brands

#15 Mici Italian

In the last five years, Mici's footprint has expanded by 60%, and it has entered the franchise market, signing deals in Arizona, Dallas and Michigan, with stores open in each state. The Denver-based brand will continue growing the Colorado market corporately, and will add another corporate market in 2024. It currently has large franchisees developing entire markets in Arizona, Texas and Michigan. CEO Elliot Schiffer said the brand will selectively bring on new franchisees for more cities in 2023 and beyond. A large focus for Mici's will be expanding its footprint into airports.

In 2022, Mici's overhauled its tech stack, including online ordering and mobile platforms, POS, third-party integrations and the loyalty program. This effort allowed the company to not only survive the pandemic, but continue its growth trajectory.

Mici Italian also rebranded in partnership with Denver-based branding company Wunder Werkz. The rebrand included the launch of a new logo, website and branded visuals found on in-store materials, digital assets, team uniforms and more, according to a press release.

The second phase of rebranding includes a completely new store design -- from a new color scheme and furniture to updated design elements.

"With Mici poised for massive growth and expansion with our newly launched National Franchise Program, and stores opening for the first time outside of Colorado, our founder Jeff Miceli and I felt like this was the right time to update the brand aesthetic and bring some of the innovation and modern convenience we are offering guests to their visual experience as well," Schiffer said.

mici



Top 25 Executives

#1 Tony Gemignani, Partner, Slice House

Tony Gemignani is not only a partner of Slice, one of the top up-and-coming franchises on the West Coast. He also owns 27 pizzerias and is a founding member of the World Pizza Champions, which he has won 13 times for his pizza-making and acrobatic dough-spinning routine.

The San Francisco-based celebrity chef has authored or co-authored three books, including “The Pizza Bible,” and appeared on several national TV networks.

In addition to his many domestic and international accolades, he began franchising Slice House this year and has 20 units in use or in development in only the first year of operations.



#2 Tony Libardi, Co-CEO, Marco's Pizza

Tony Libardi is paving the way for Marco's to achieve pizza royalty with a sophisticated growth strategy while strengthening the brand with a team-first mentality.

In 2021, his first year in this position, Marco's grew its retail footprint by roughly 10%, with more than 150 signed agreements and more than 70 new store openings, all while achieving continuous double-digit same store sales increases.

In 2022, Libardi led the brand to reaching a historic milestone: \$1 billion in annual systemwide sales. To commemorate the achievement, the company launched the Marco's Pizza Foundation as an extension of its mission to empower franchisees and team members to make a positive difference in their communities. The new effort marks a deeper commitment to unification across Marco's as it brings the brand, its franchisees and the communities it serves closer together under one common cause.



Top 25 Executives

#3 Jim Metevier, President/COO, Mountain Mike's Pizza

As the President and COO of Mountain Mike's Pizza, Jim Metevier has been a catalyst for driving growth in system and franchisee sales and profitability, operational systems and brand development. Under his leadership, the brand continues to climb the ranks as a leader in the pizza space. With over 265 restaurants, MMP will open 30 locations by the end of 2023, and systemwide AUV has grown 40% over the past four years. Same-store sales increased by 18% and 26% over the last two years, respectively.

Metevier, known for his people-focused culture and history of catering to sports fans, has recently extended MMP's partnership as the Official Pizza of the SF 49ers, plus secured a new partnership this year with the LA Angels.



#4 Tom Krouse, CEO, Donatos Pizza

Tom Krouse has served as the CEO at Donatos since October 2010 and has been responsible for not only growing the brand's traditional restaurant reach, but also leading non-traditional growth through a strategic partnership with Red Robin and additional opportunities with REEF Kitchens, which put the family-owned brand in 27 states and 431 total locations.

Krouse, who is only the fourth CEO in the family-owned company's 60-year history, led the chain to make Pizza Marketplace's [2023 Pizza Brands to Watch](#) and a co-founder, board member and past chair of the Columbus Music Commission.



#5 Mike Bausch, Owner, Andolini's Worldwide Restaurant Group

A certified master pizzaiolo, instructor and winner of Tulsa's Restaurateur of the Year, Mike Bausch is also author of the Amazon No. 1 best-selling book "Unslice: How to Stay Whole in the Pizzeria Industry," which Entrepreneur.com named a must-read business book of 2021.

He began his pizza journey in 2005 and has grown his empire to two gelaterias, two food hall concepts, a food truck, a fine dining restaurant and five pizzerias, including Andolini's Pizzeria, which was named one of the "Top 10 Pizzerias in America" based solely on reviews by TripAdvisor, CNN, BuzzFeed and USA Today.



Top 25 Executives

#6 Michael Lastoria, Founder and CEO, &pizza

Referred to by Bloomberg as “what Jesus might look like if he walked in a Yohji Yamamoto show,” Michael Lastoria is a serial entrepreneur who grounds &pizza in a commitment to better flavor, quality ingredients, living wages and real action. At Lastoria’s direction, &pizza has donated to local causes aligned with the company’s core values, distributed 30,000 free pies during the 2019 government shutdown, and started the Hero Pie Program as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing free pizza and support to hospital workers on the front line of the coronavirus pandemic. Through higher base wages and tips, &pizza hourly employees currently earn at least \$20 per hour.



#7 Scott and Ally Svenson, Founders, MOD Pizza

The pizza industry’s power couple, Scott and Ally Svenson, who founded MOD Pizza in 2008 in Seattle, have built their fast-casual pizza business to over 520 stores. They are also leading the way in providing opportunities for individuals with barriers to employment – specifically in the area of justice-involved individuals and people with intellectual and developmental differences.

In 2022, the couple expanded its [Journey Program](#), giving its 10,000 employees at company-owned stores access to paid college tuition for bachelor’s degrees, professional certificates or learning English.

“This is an important investment for MOD, and one that can help remove the barriers to education and career mobility that exist for so many,” said Ally Svenson.



Top 25 Executives

#8 Tom Sacco, CEO, Happy Joe's Pizza & Ice Cream

Happy Joe's CEO and Chief Happiness Officer Tom Sacco has worked hard to cultivate a positive culture among guests, staff, vendors and franchisees since joining the Iowa-based pizza brand in 2020. He even works in the trenches and will happily hop into the kitchen, help with bussing in the dining room, take guests' orders at the counter, and has been known to personally deliver pizzas. Throughout the past 21 months, the brand has signed more franchise agreements and opened more locations than during the entire previous decade.



Takeout and delivery sales are greater than pre-pandemic levels, too, proving that Sacco has reinvigorated the 50-year-old brand with new branding, [relevant menu development, technology online ordering as well as a new prototype featuring an updated game room.](#)

#9 Renato Viola, Co-Founder and Chef, Mister O1 Extraordinary Pizza

Master Pizza Chef Renato Viola, a member of the Italian Acrobatic Pizza Team, which has won various awards in global pizza-making competitions, is known for combining traditional pizza-making methods with new broad flavors. But that's not all. In 2022, he became the inventor of the most expensive pizza in the world. [Dubbed Pizza Louis XIII](#), the pie costs \$12,000 and includes Viola coming to your home, along with a chef and a sommelier, to prepare the pizza. The crust is made from organic Arabian flour and has three types of caviar, lobster, and seven types of cheese.



The trained pizza instructor resides in Miami Beach and in 2014 created a modernized authentic Italian restaurant, Mister O1 Extraordinary Pizza in Miami. It now has 11 locations in Florida, Texas, Madrid and Saudi Arabia.

Top 25 Executives

#10 Jeff Hetsel, President and COO, Cicis Pizza

Jeff Hetsel is not only president and COO of Cicis, but also a franchisee of two successful locations, which has allowed him to lead by example as he drags Cicis back from the [bankruptcy](#) it filed in January 2021.

Hetsel took the lead in March 2021 and quickly [launched a rebrand](#) focused on delivery and carryout. He also enhanced game rooms, added digital menu boards, and implemented a birthday party system. The chain has been working to reduce its footprint and is cutting building and remodeling costs.

Hetsel is dedicated to creating a positive workplace, maintaining a culture that attracts and retains top talent. He is truly a hands-on executive, traveling to Florence, Kentucky, to officiate the wedding ceremony of two Cicis superfans on their special day, for example.



#11 Deena McKinley, Chief Experience Officer, Papa Gino's

Deena McKinley has established herself as a transformational, data-driven and tech-forward leader, overseeing successful campaigns and driving concrete results. In 2022, for example, she transitioned from CMO to CXO and is implementing a new app and website to deliver a sleek, easy ordering experience.

She also leads partnerships with restaurant tech companies, applies data to seek brand growth in a shifting QSR industry, and holistically analyzes campaigns to optimize sales/traffic, according to Jill Grogan, the company's VP of Marketing, who nominated McKinnley.

"She drives our community involvement, ensuring it's engaged in impactful local initiatives and charitable giving, cultivating and reinforcing deep-rooted relationships built over 61 years in business," Grogan said.



Top 25 Executives

#12 Jay Jerrier, Founder, Zoli's Pizza, Thunderbird Pies and Cane Rosso

Jay Jerrier must be one open-minded pizza guy as he's created three pizza brands offering a variety of styles to meet a plethora of pizza tastes. His first concept, Cane Rosso, was founded in 2011 in Dallas, and served only traditional Neapolitan-style pizza. Two years later, Jerrier created Zoli's Pizza for customers who preferred New York-style pies and eventually added pastas, sandwiches, burgers, salads and desserts.

Jerrier's latest creation is Thunderbird Pies, which specializes in Detroit-style pizza and was born as a ghost kitchen out of the two Zoli's Pizza locations in Addison and Fort Worth during the COVID-19 pandemic. It opened its first brick-and-mortar store in 2021.

"We have thrived during the pandemic and the recovery with double-digit sales and EBITDA growth – along with launching a new brand and opening two new restaurants during the sh\$tshow that was 2020-2022," Jerrier said.



#13 Mary Jane Riva, CEO, Pizza Factory Inc.

Pizza Factory CEO Mary Jane Riva started with the company as a franchisee, which is why she understands how important it is for them to be community leaders. She learned quickly how small businesses had the power to help kids survive bullying and implemented a "friends are awesome" bench, then began visiting schools to speak to kids about the importance of kindness and friendship, and the repercussions of bullying. Once she took over as CEO in 2012, she took the program to all stores and has been excited to see how franchisees have embraced it across over 100 cities.

Of course, Riva cannot help kids without first keeping her business thriving, which she has managed to do despite the pandemic. In 2021, she launched Pizza Factory Express, a 1,000-square-foot model optimized for delivery and carryout, allowing it to enter new markets and eliminate many operational, equipment and furnishing costs.

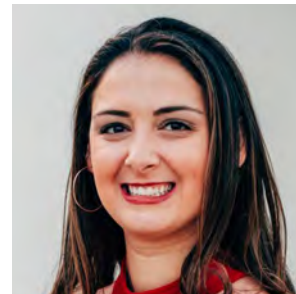


Top 25 Executives

#14 Rebecca Gollin, Director of Marketing and Off-Premises, Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza & Wings

During her 16 years with Anthony's, Rebecca Gollin has been instrumental in building the brand to 60 restaurants. She's worked every position possible during the store's 20 years in business. One of her most important roles, however, was helping to develop and integrate an AI-generated voice ordering system, "Becky," who answers the phone and takes orders for carryout, with over 97% in understanding of guests, COO Steve Lieber said.

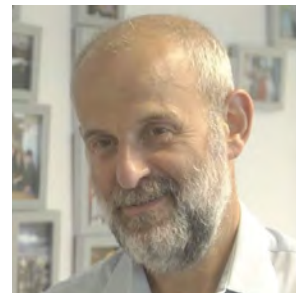
"Becky is the model of accurate, courteous guest service and hospitality – wonder where we thought of the AI's bot name," he said. "Rebecca lives our core values and personifies the 'Anthony's' passion for excellence. Thanks, Rebecca!"



#15 David Chatkin, President, Sarpino's USA

David Chatkin brought Sarpino's Pizzeria to America in 2002 as the brand's original Illinois franchisee and has spent the past 20 years developing it into a 40-unit brand with efficient systems and strong unit-level economics. Under his leadership, Sarpino's USA AUVs are now averaging more than \$1.05 million, and systemwide labor costs average 27%, with the best performing stores averaging 24%.

Throughout Chatkin's tenure, Sarpino's USA became a diverse, inclusive franchise system as several franchisees are immigrants, like Chatkin himself. A common thread they all share is an appreciation for the American dream and creating equal opportunities for everyone - no matter the level. In fact, many of Sarpino's USA's recent franchisees are former employees.



Top 25 Executives

#16 Jamie Beall, CEO, Ledo Pizza

With over 25 years in the restaurant industry, Jamie Beall leads Maryland-based Ledo, and although it was founded in 1955, there is very little that is outdated about his leadership style. Leveraging community partnerships, such as with the Baltimore Ravens, the Maryland Terrapins, Aberdeen Ironbirds and the Naval Academy Athletics Association, Beall ensures that residents know all about Ledo Pizza. He is a champion of Ledo's Pink Pizza Box, a campaign to honor Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and gave back \$10,000 to local charities.

Last summer, he began [testing a robot](#) in the West Springfield, Virginia location, to help run carryout orders directly to the counter, allowing team members to focus more on creating excellent guest experiences.



#17 Gabe Corchiani, Owner, Fat Boy's Pizza

Gabe Corchiani dreamed up a concept in 2018, brought it to life in 2019, and now has six Fat Boy's Pizza locations in Louisiana and Mississippi, each known for serving massive 30-inch pies and offering the "World's Biggest Slice." Several Houston locations are on the way, and Corchiani is getting into the [franchising game](#), saying he is proud of the family and community-oriented culture that surrounds his brand.

"We aim to separate ourselves within the pizza industry by having our restaurants serve as true community hubs, providing food and entertainment for the whole family, while supporting local community initiatives along the way," he said.



Top 25 Executives

#18 David McKillips, CEO, CEC Entertainment

After pulling CEC from bankruptcy in 2021, David McKillips is paving the way for a new era of two legacy brands, Chuck E. Cheese and Peter Piper Pizza, while innovating with new categories. He charged the international division by expanding the Chuck E. Cheese global footprint into new markets, putting it on track to have over 100 locations by 2023.

His experience managing global brands and iconic characters drove the creation of a global media, licensing and entertainment team that is creating revenue opportunities via apparel and toys while leveraging existing in-store and digital properties. Also, after helping the company establish its first delivery-only brand, Pasqually's Pizza & Wings, McKillips is targeting young consumers with its second virtual restaurant, Lankybox Kitchen – the first family-focused, kid-friendly brand that leverages Chuck E. Cheese kitchens nationwide.



#19 Ray Risley, CEO, Via 313

Although Ray Risley is in his first year as CEO of Via 313, the former president and COO of Front Burner Restaurant Group's Whiskey Cake Kitchen & Bar and Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse is on a mission to expand the pizza brand just as he did in his previous roles. At Front Burner, he was responsible for building its executive leadership team and overseeing 12 locations that generated system-wide sales of \$85 million. At Del Frisco's — where he spent nearly two decades of his career — he led 13 Double Eagle Steakhouse locations with over \$176 million in annual revenue.

Those skills will come in handy as Via plans to have at least 40 stores in the next few years, all of which will be company owned and operated.



Top 25 Executives

#20 Lee Kindell, Founder, MOTO

Lee Kindell founded his Seattle-based pizzeria, MOTO, on the notion that food should be nutritious and sourced nearby to deliver the highest quality meal. That doesn't mean, however, that he's opposed to using technology to get his pizza to the masses. In fact, he's very much for it, having recently [tapped Picnic Works](#) to automate his pizza-making process in order to produce a higher volume of pizza. The technology can assemble up to 100 pizzas per hour, and after taking six years to perfect his Detroit-style pizza, while also [running a traveler's hostel](#) in Seattle with his wife, Nancy, he's ready to move some pies.

"We're looking forward to Picnic helping us produce a higher volume of the peculiar pizza Seattle desires, without any sacrifice to taste," he said.

A couple of those flavors include the Mr. Pig, which has a pork belly with a lime calamansi sauce, and the Clam Chowdah, which is topped with chopped clams, smoked bacon, onions, clam chowder sauce, and black garlic chili oil crunch.



#21 Marc Schechter, Owner & Founder, Square Pie Guys

Square Pie Guys owner Marc Schechter's passion for all types of pizza and an understanding of trends, combined with his talents in social media marketing, has led to his creation of a highly engaged following for Square Pie Guys.

Although the three-unit brand began as a pop-up inside a California wine bar in 2018, Schechter knew he was onto something with his Detroit-style pizza concept that he's looking to [grow to Seattle, Portland and Los Angeles](#).

"His ability to make quick, effective decisions and adapt to changes in the social media landscape has helped him to effectively reach and engage with his audience," said Priya Kane, who works on the brand's marketing team.

"Marc has been on the forefront of Detroit-style pizza in California and has been critical in aligning with partners, such as Amin Nosrat and Jeremy Lin, for collaborations."



Top 25 Executives

#22 Michael Miceli, Co-Founder and VP of Operations, Mici Handcrafted Italian

Before creating Mici Handcrafted Italian in 2004, Michael Miceli had spent his whole life in the restaurant industry, which started while he was still in college earning his business degree in hospitality management at the University of Central Florida. He and his brother, Jeff, opened an independent carryout and pizza delivery business. While competing against similar pizza concepts in town, they learned about running lean while maintaining high food quality and service standards.

He applies those practices at Mici, where he often takes the role as opening GM for new locations to ensure successful launches. He also serves as the company's expert on food quality and technique, responsible for testing, piloting and perfecting operational systems. In fact, he recently led the installation and operation of Mici's first conveyor belt brick oven.



#23 Steve Jackson, CEO and President, Hungry Howie's Pizza

The pizza business has been a slice of CEO Steve Jackson's life since high school, when he started working as a delivery boy for Hungry Howie's founder Jim Hearn, who converted a 1,000-square-foot hamburger shop in Taylor, Michigan, into a successful carryout and delivery pizzeria. In 1976, Jackson partnered with Hearn to help build his pizza empire and opened a second location of what was then the first Hungry Howie's Pizza.

Nearly 50 years later, and under Jackson's leadership, the chain has grown to over 535 locations in 21 states.



Top 25 Executives

#24 Carlo Agostinelli, SVP of Development, Sbarro

Since joining Sbarro in 2016, Carlo Agostinelli has overseen real estate, franchising, construction and design for the brand's nearly 700 locations in 24 countries. Reporting directly to the CEO, he develops an average of over 10 corporate and franchised stores per year, leads a team of six direct reports, and negotiates and renews an average of 30 locations per year, which preserves nearly \$40 million in annualized sales.

The Youngstown State University graduate also updates the Board of Directors on a quarterly basis and works with legal to finalize all lease and franchise agreements for non-traditional locations.



#25 Brent Cordial, VP of Operations, Giovanni's Pizza

As VP of operations, Brent Cordial manages the day-to-day operations of Giovanni's Pizza Inc., developing food products, practices and procedures, while leading growth for the 50-year-old family pizza business, which has 102 locations in six states.

He is the visionary behind bringing technology to Giovanni's at both the corporate and franchisee support level, which included mobile and online ordering as well as a loyalty platform and curbside pickup.

