



Upstarts: Mediterranean Diet

Chicken Dijon plays up its points of differentiation while driving sales as it embarks on franchised expansion.

By Maya Norris, Managing Editor -- Chain Leader, 3/1/2008

for the last 15 years, but now it's ready to franchise throughout California and the Western United States over the next five years. Seven-unit **Chicken Dijon** has spent the last two years grooming the fast-casual rotisserie-chicken concept for expansion.

Modern Mediterranean

Chicken Dijon bills its fare as California cuisine with Mediterranean flare. It features items such as rotisserie chicken seasoned with Mediterranean spices and pita sandwiches. But to further play up its Mediterranean influence, the company added new appetizers and sides such as stuffed grape leaves.

To boost dinner sales, **Chicken Dijon** debuted a new prototype in 2006. Unlike the bright, sterile interiors of some QSRs and fast-casual concepts, **Chicken Dijon's** new atmosphere is reminiscent of casual dining, with dark woods, brown leather and dim lighting, says COO Niko Albanis.

"We've taken the No. 1 protein sold and consumed in the world and taken the second-fastest-growing ethnic food category, which is Mediterranean food, and blended that together in a real nice, eclectic atmosphere that focuses on lunch, but also it's designed to allow people to look at [**Chicken Dijon**] as a dinner opportunity," Albanis says. The company also polished customer service. While servers always delivered food to the tables, they now check on customers within three to five minutes of receiving their food. Servers also bus the tables before guests leave to gauge their satisfaction and offer to-go boxes.

Since implementing these changes in 2006, same-store sales increased 16 percent in 2007.



Chicken Dijon units average 1,600 square feet and cost \$250,000 to \$325,000 to open.

Sales Drive

The company is looking for other ways to drive sales and keep costs down.

Because catering has high profit margins and fixed costs, **Chicken Dijon** has spent the last two years building its catering sales to 10 percent from 2 percent. The company will continue to set up catering presentations to local businesses with at least 15 employees, doctors' offices, pharmaceutical representatives and party planners. It also recently hired a consultant to find catering leads.

This year **Chicken Dijon** will work with a consultancy to analyze and restructure the menu board to increase its ticket average to \$15 from \$13. By redesigning the menu, the company wants to guide guests to buy more profitable items and more signature items like rotisserie chicken and salads.

In the meantime, **Chicken Dijon** opened two company stores in Irvine and Long Beach in 2006 and will retrofit its three oldest stores with the prototype design in 2008. Then it will open two more in Los Angeles and Orange County in 2009. But most of **Chicken Dijon's** growth will be through franchising. It has partnered with , which is contracted to sell 650 units in 10 years. Two franchised units have since opened in Palos Verdes in 2006 and South Torrance in 2007. Another two will open in West Los Angeles in 2008.

Chicken Dijon hopes to have 30 to 45 units opened in California and the Western United States in five years.

Snapshot

Concept **Chicken Dijon** Rotisserie Grill

Headquarters Torrance, Calif.

Units 7

2007 Systemwide Sales \$5.8 million

2008 Systemwide Sales \$6.2 million (company estimate)

Average Unit Volume \$800,000

Average Check \$13

Expansion Plans At least 2 franchised units in 2008



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