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BREAKOUT BRANDS

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Fresh To Order (f2o)

BY ERIN DOSTAL

Fresh to Order is looking to take on casual-dining restaurants by serving freshly made, higher-quality food in 10 minutes for about \$10 per person.

The Atlanta-based concept fills a niche that has been largely untapped by foodservice operators — the upscale fast-casual sector, said Pierre Panos, founder and chief executive of the eight-unit brand.

"I like to develop concepts that fit into something that's not already there," he said. "I figured out that there was a niche for 'fast fine' — above fast casual but below fine dining."

The numbers appear to be proving him right. Since 2010, the company has grown its sales by about 10 percent each year, a pace Panos hopes to repeat, if not surpass, in 2013.

"I think Americans have finally gotten over the hump," he said. "They don't want to eat food that's unhealthy. They want to eat food that's better for them, that tastes good, and they're willing to pay for it."

The brand incorporates not only aspects of casual dining — such as bussing tables — but also

of fine dining. For example, the restaurant offers "long plates," which include Brown Sugar Roasted Pork Loin with sweet mashed potatoes and apricot chutney, and Bourbon Filet Steak, served with a balsamic-Cabernet reduction and baby greens.



Fresh to Order also features wine by the glass and beers, adding to its upscale perception among consumers.

Those high-end elements and brisk service are what differentiate Fresh to Order from other concepts, Panos said.

"It's certainly not fine dining by a long stretch," Panos said, but the food is inspired by high-end chefs.

Mary Chapman, director of product innovation at research firm Technomic, called Fresh to Order a "nice little concept" bolstered by Panos' industry cred — in 1995 Panos co-founded Stoney River Legendary Steaks.



Fresh to Order was created by industry vet Pierre Panos to fill a niche between fast casual and fine dining.

"Consumers seem to [see] that it is a little better than maybe they were expecting out of fast casual," she said. "It filled a niche."

The challenge for this fast-fine brand will be consistency moving forward, Chapman said. Because Fresh to Order focuses strongly on fresh ingredients and a high level of service, it may be difficult to replicate everywhere.

"It will be hard as they grow because of controls," she said.

As such, Panos said he plans to grow his brand carefully, not quickly, and to keep to the Southeast — from Florida north to Washington, D.C. — for now. He said he hopes to open 40 stores over the next five years.

"Our platform is about being able to deliver that 'fine' element

OWNER: Pierre Panos

HEADQUARTERS: Atlanta

MARKET SEGMENT:

fine fast casual

NO. OF UNITS: 8

SYSTEMWIDE SALES:

undisclosed

AVERAGE UNIT VOLUME:

\$1.5 million

AVERAGE CHECK: \$11

YEAR FOUNDED: 2006

TARGET MARKETS: Southeast

METHOD OF GROWTH/FUNDING:
franchising

BREAKOUT FACTORS:



of dining, of our food," he said. "We want to be able to support our franchisees. If we had a franchisee in California, we wouldn't be able to support them as well as if they were in Birmingham, [Ala.]" ●



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