



Green efforts can add value to customer experience

By ELISSA ELAN

By Mark Beauchamp

(April 21, 2008) *Mark Beauchamp, co-founder of the six-unit Café Yumm!, an environmentally friendly fast-casual restaurant chain in Eugene, Ore., says the profit he's received from his concept is twofold: He's benefited financially, while also delivering a socially relevant message to his customers.*

"People are hungry for the information that someone is trying to do something," he said. "They want to find someone who has a shared vision, a shared philosophy. They enjoy that sort of added value to their experience."

Did you always have it in mind to create an Earth-friendly concept?

We have from early on used biodegradable utensils made out of corn and potatoes. At our third and fourth locations we went to durable dishware, and we're moving more and more—even though the products are a little more expensive—toward disposable, compostable materials.

And using organic items is very important, but we do not use them exclusively. If we did, no one could afford [our products]. I would say probably 60 percent to 70 percent of the food is organic, but I haven't done an actual percentage analysis, so that's an educated estimate. There's a price point that must meet a variety of people's needs. We believe in operating a triple-bottom-line concept; that's kind of our mission or guideline.

The green materials, the organic products and being involved in alternative-energy sources—we do this in a viable way to make it economically feasible as well. The idea is always to improve what we do in all of those areas, but there is an element of compromise. That's the financial reality.

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Is it more expensive to operate an eco-friendly operation than a traditional one?

Considerably more expensive, I'd say. I know organics are more expensive materials, and we buy into wind power—there's not a savings there. We use wall paneling made of re-milled wood, and our counters and tabletops are made from biocomposite, crushed sunflower seed shells. Some of those products are four or five times more expensive than conventional products. Our flooring is made from flax fiber, and some of our booth seating is made from plywood that comes from sustainably managed forests. When I say words like this, think about the dollar signs.

What are some tips you can give operators who are thinking about going green?

Our customers have pulled us along as we've pushed new ideas on them; there's a synergy there. It's important to get customers to buy in on these green practices. Let them know if the price goes up 30 cents that's the cost of implementing these things in the business. That's very important.

How has being eco-friendly affected your bottom line?

I don't know that there is a real easy formula to develop. I can tell you that the vast majority of our customers are aware of what we do and appreciate it. It's a core element of our business and, to us, such a core value we really couldn't do business any other way. It's part and parcel of our concept.

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