



Saladworks Unveils New Prototype with 100th Store

Company officials hope the new design could mean a 20- to 25-percent sales boost for company-owned stores.

By Jamie Hartford



Custom-salad chain Saladworks celebrated a milestone and a change in direction last week when the company unveiled a new prototype design and branding strategy with its 100th store opening in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, on October 1.

Based on the tagline "Fanatic'ly Fresh," the new store design and branding are meant to emphasize to customers the fact that Saladworks salads are made with fresh ingredients chopped right in the store.

"We wanted to get across to the public that we are fanatics about freshness," says CEO John Scardapane.

The new design features a brighter interior with an emphasis on natural light. Floors are made from bamboo, a renewable resource, and colorful photos of produce adorn the walls. The prototype will be supplemented with new uniforms for crew (now called Fanatics) and an updated web site that follows the new branding scheme.

The decision to upgrade the chain's image was made after the addition of Vernon Hill as chairman of the executive committee this past March. Hill is the founder and former

chairman of Commerce Bank (now TD Bank), a New Jersey-based company he helped grow from one location to more than 400 during his tenure.

"We partnered up to take Saladworks to the next level," Scardapane says.

Tapped to head up the re-imaging was InterArch, a New Jersey-based architectural and design firm founded by Hill's wife, Shirley, that also designed locations for Commerce Bank.

Shirley Hill first asked her team to visit Saladworks locations to gauge their initial impressions of the brand. She says most agreed that the food was great but that the experience left something to be desired.

"It lacked the consistency... and detail that a great brand has to have," she says. "Customers didn't know how fresh this food was."

Her team then set about using that freshness as a differentiator. They changed the menuboards, added window boxes planted with fragrant chocolate peppermint, and brought in new display cases to better show off the restaurant's salads.

"Even the salt and pepper shakers were redesigned," she says. "It was a total turnaround of experience."

A new catering system was also developed to help Saladworks grow that part of the business, which currently accounts for about 20 percent of sales, Scardapane says.

"This will enable us to be more efficient at catering and deliver better products to the consumer," he says.

Saladworks' last re-branding came in 2002, after which President Paul Steck says the chain saw sales jump 20 to 25 percent. With this latest effort, they're hoping to repeat that success.

"Customers become fans of Saladworks and they go out and sell Saladworks for us," Scardapane says. "That's how we see our business increase."

But Michelle Bushey, a partner and creative director with Dallas-based hospitality design and development firm Vision 360, says a 20- to 25-percent sales increase might be a stretch.

"I think that's very aggressive on their part," she says. "If you can bump it anywhere from 10 to 12 percent, you're doing great."

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The new branding strategy was introduced to Saladworks franchisees at the chain's annual convention, and Scardapane says reaction was positive. Even so, the chain plans a six-month trial period before making any decisions on how to roll out the new store design, which costs around \$600,000 to get up and running from scratch.

Until then, the chain—which even last year had only one non-franchised location, according to research and consulting firm Technomic—will focus on building company-owned units featuring the new prototype in markets including New York City, Long Island, Boston, Connecticut, and Virginia. Those stores are set to open in the first half of 2009.

"With this new design, we're actually changing the business model slightly," Steck says. "We think this will help us build the brand by bringing us closer to the operations of the stores and further cement the relationship between us and our franchisees."