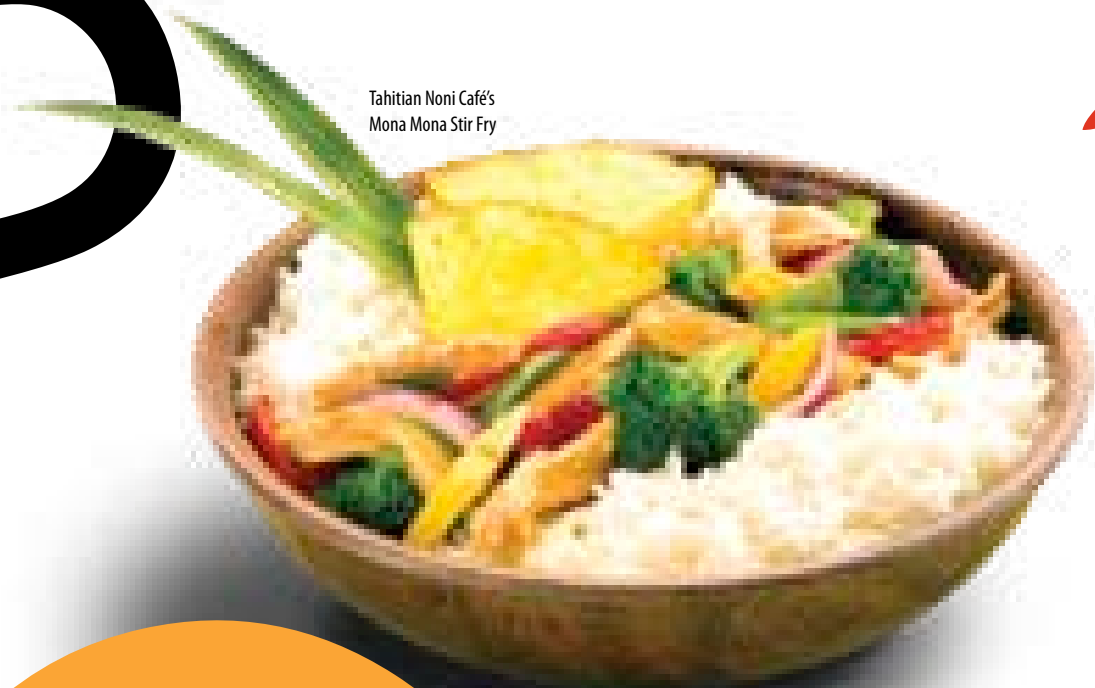


TOP 100

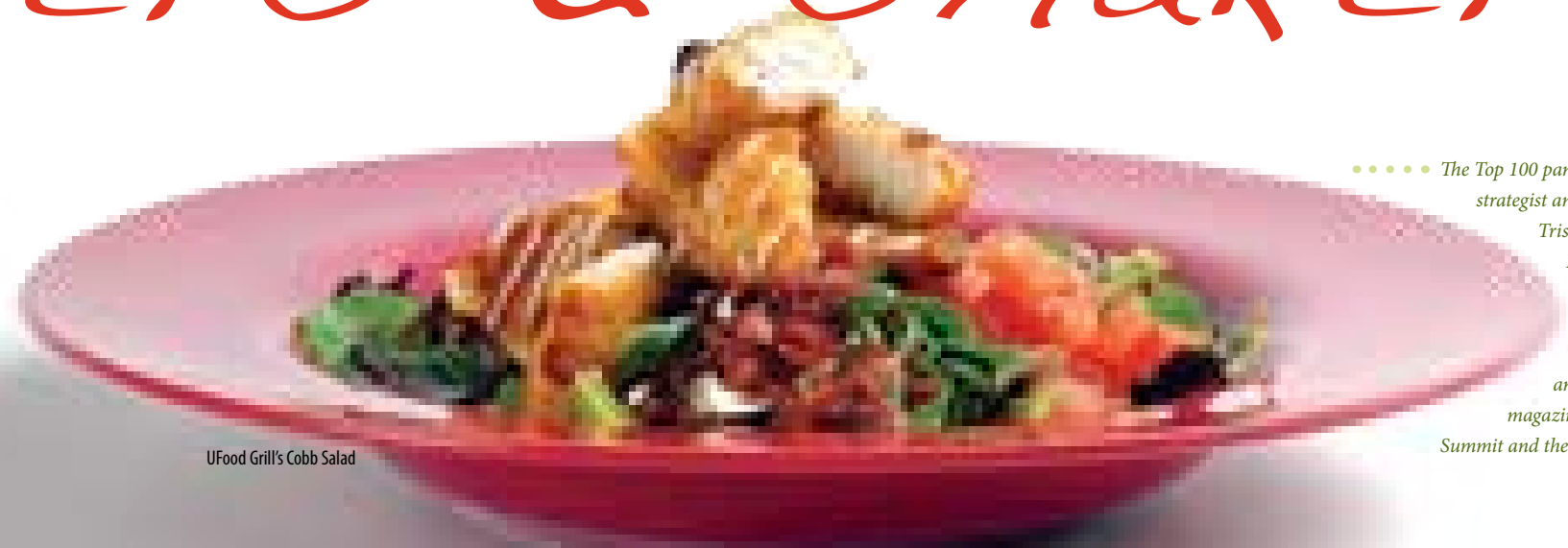
movers & shakers



Tahitian Noni Café's
Mona Mona Stir Fry



Qdoba's Queso Burrito



UFood Grill's Cobb Salad

As for most magazines and industry watchers, culminating the very best of the breed in a fast-growing segment is often a difficult task. With more than 600 fast casual concepts in the half-trillion-dollar restaurant industry, paring the list down to just 100 is not for the faint of heart.

This year's top spot goes to Au Bon Pain. Our choice was a close one, with Café Express, Camille's, Qdoba and Panera rounding out the top five. Panera has held the top spot before, while Camille's and Qdoba have been in the top five for three years running. The choice boiled down to the creative portion tactics Au Bon Pain implemented this year, along with the brand's aggressive growth plan and stellar management team. This group of breadwinners easily deserves the top spot.

We are often asked how we compose the list each year and what it takes to get on it. What we look for are companies that have taken their concept to new places and redefined or excelled at a part of their business in a way that sets them apart, so that the consumer just says, "Wow!" We're not looking for the financially growth-oriented concepts or those with the most units in the ground. Instead, our list is of the "Movers & Shakers," concepts that truly make an impact in the space.

This year marked the first time we've excluded certain concepts that were on the fence of fast casual. We have also excluded dessert-only concepts, as well as beverage-only concepts. You also won't find individuals in our Top 100 this year, and our list of qualifications is getting more stringent as the number of concepts grows each year.

— Paul Barron

..... The Top 100 panel included Janelle Barlow, consumer strategist and author of "A Complaint is a Gift"; Darren Tristano, senior vice president of Technomic Information Services; Linda Duke, CEO of Duke Marketing; Valerie Killifer, senior editor of Fast Casual magazine and online; Christa Hoyland, editor of QSRWeb.com; and Paul Barron, founder of Fast Casual magazine and online, the Fast Casual Executive Summit and the Fast Casual Executive Alliance.



Au Bon Pain Copley Place, Boston

Au Bon Pain founder Louis Kane was strolling through Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace in 1978 when he came across a display of French bakery ovens. The aroma and quality of fresh-baked bread inspired him to create the restaurant, whose name translates roughly as "the place of good bread."

Thirty years later, the company has expanded to more than 225 locations. Earlier this year, private-equity firm LNK Partners acquired a majority ownership interest, putting more than \$100 million into the transaction. The investment will support the company's expansion in the United States and across the globe.

"The rest of the world really lives in urban, dense markets," said Au Bon pain CEO Sue Morelli. "And Au Bon Pain translates beautifully to these other countries."

Lately, Au Bon Pain has developed a reputation for food that's not only good, but also good for you. The company was one of the first chains to begin removing artificial trans fats from its products in 2003, and now all its products have zero grams artificial trans fat.

Au Bon Pain also uses only all-natural chicken in its sandwiches, salads and wraps. Earlier this year, it was recognized

Au Bon Pain

Boston
Bakery/café
Last year: 13

by the editors of Health magazine as one of "America's Healthiest Restaurants." The editors praised Au Bon Pain's Nutrition Kiosks, which allow guests to plan a nutritious meal and sort the menu by a specific nutritional requirement — high fiber or protein; or low carb, fat, cholesterol, sodium or calories.

Au Bon Pain also offers a "Smart Menu" application via the company's Web site, where customers can view the nutrition information for a specific combination of food choices and search for combinations that best meet their individual dietary needs.

Au Bon Pain introduced a new product line in 2008 called Portions, a menu of 14 dishes made fresh daily, packaged individually and containing 200 or fewer calories apiece. They are designed to tap into the tapas/small-plates trend. The company recently expanded Portions with five dessert choices, each with 200 calories or fewer per serving.

— Richard Slawsky



TOP
100

2

Café Express

Houston
Gourmet
Last year: 19

In a September interview, Wendy's former CEO Kerri Anderson expressed no regrets about her decision to sell Café Express, which was not profiting for the fast-food chain. During the five years Wendy's



Café Express Shrimp Campeche



Salmon at Café Express

owned it, Café Express added only six units and saw average unit volumes decline by \$300,000.

What a difference new ownership can make. Today, Café Express officials — now under the familiar umbrella of founder Schiller Del Grande Restaurant Group — should have no regrets either, as the chain rockets from No. 19 in Fast Casual's 2007 ranking to runner-up just a year later, with total revenues of about \$8.7 million.

"We are trying a number of initiatives, like we're bringing back some of the menu

items that were there in the older years, like more desserts," CEO Lonnie Schiller told Chain Leader just after the buy-back.

Wine and imported beers are among the beverage choices, with the glasses holding 33 percent (2 ounces) more than at most restaurants. Such an upscale-dining emphasis in a fast-casual atmosphere has resonated with customers who seek the higher end of what fast casuals can offer. Among the most recent menu innovations: Mediterranean salmon on a bed of green beans and topped with roasted artichoke hearts.

— Julie Sturgeon

3

Camille's Sidewalk Café

Tulsa, Okla.
Organic/green/health
Last year: 5

Camille's Sidewalk Café operates more than 130 restaurants around the country and has more than 900 territories in development worldwide. Several Camille's locations have opened in Puerto Rico, with more on the drawing board. The company also has opened locations in Bahrain and Dubai.

Founders Camille and David Rutkauskas have expanded the café's offerings to include corporate catering and a broader breakfast menu. At the beginning of 2008,

the company signed a deal with Wal-Mart to open in Supercenters around the country. The company hopes to place as many as 200 Camille's locations in Walmart stores within 10 years.

Camille's also increased its focus on healthy menu offerings in 2008. In August, the café introduced a new line of low-calorie Slim Smoothies, each with about 125 calories and 17 grams of protein.

The company also was an early adopter of online ordering, and recently it began experimenting with improving the customer experience by adding touches such as delivering food to the table.

"Camille's strong reputation for creating fresh, innovative, value-packed products, like our new Slim Smoothie, continues to grow," said the owners. "Our ongoing goal is to expand our customer base and reflect current customer trends through a variety of healthy and delicious menu items."

— R.S.



Camille's Catering Tray

4

Qdoba Mexican Grille

Wheat Ridge, Colo.
Fresh Mex
Last year: 3

Parent company Jack in the Box may have tossed off its line of Quick Stuff convenience stores, but don't expect to see it ditch its 400 Qdoba units.

As the pundits at Motley Fool put it, "Qdoba is one of the few ... Mexican food outlets that have succeeded at a time when similar chains, such as Baja Fresh, have stalled."

In reality, chain officials will have more time to concentrate on this perennial fast casual powerhouse brand, which already is growing faster than its parent fast-food burger chain. Indeed, mere days after Quick Stuff got the boot, QCarolina Restaurants LLC, led by former Bojangles' CEO Joe Drury, acquired 16 existing Qdoba units with an eye toward getting in on a good thing.

Look for Qdoba to continue playful marketing stunts like its analysis on food personalities of the presidential candidates, played out through Facebook and MySpace. The chain also sponsored a scientific research study by Dr. Alan Hirsch of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation to relate Mexican food tastes to romantic capability — an online draw sure to pull in the curious long after the election excitement cools.

— J.S.



Qdoba Mexican Grille's Mango Salad



Panera Bread

5

Panera Bread Co.

St. Louis
Bakery/café
Last year: 2

Panera Bread Co. continues to be a top player in the fast casual space, operating more than 1,220 restaurants under the Panera Bread and St. Louis Bread Co. banners. More good news: Despite a tough economic environment, Panera recorded a 3-percent increase in comparable-store sales for company-owned stores and a 3.5-percent increase for franchised stores for the 2008 third quarter. The bad news: The increase reflects a 6.5-percent price hike and not an increase in transactions, which were down by 3.2 percent.

By the end of September 2008, the company had opened 70 new locations, with as many as 90 openings slated for 2009. Panera also is looking to the early morning to help boost its business in 2009. The company has announced plans to add a new low-fat yogurt parfait to its menu as a healthy breakfast offering, as well as a new coffee program featuring new light and dark roast varieties.

Emphasis on the coffee is strong. "We have been developing these blends for over two years," said Panera CEO Ronald Shaich. "With the new coffee will come brand-new packaging and a strict one-hour kill time, both elements that will ensure our customers receive a cup of coffee as good as our food."

— R.S.

TOP
100

6

Pizza Fusion

Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
Organic/green/health
Last year: unranked

This 2-year-old concept has soared straight to the No. 6 spot with a menu of organic pizzas, salads and sandwiches. Offerings include the Portobello Grill, a Goat Cheese & Sun Dried Tomato Pizza, vitamin water and Boylan's All Natural Sodas.

Executive vice president Randy Romano, a franchising expert, has pushed the brand from a single unit to 11 locations, with more than 75 stores preparing to open in 15 states. In October 2008 the brand brought in another powerhouse, Mark Begelman, former president of Office Depot, to fill the chief executive officer chair and further support the chain's aggressive national franchise expansion.

Pizza Fusion also has managed to replicate its LEED-certified restaurant and certified organic menu in all its locations. The chain also purchases hybrid vehicles for its delivery service. That commitment to sustainability has impressed the new CEO, but so has the food. "It's the best-tasting pizza I've ever eaten," Begelman said.

"Pizza Fusion offers a healthy alternative to what has historically been referred to as 'junk' food," he said. "Pizza Fusion is everything I want my family to embrace. Healthy, delicious and organic food served by a restaurant that's doing its part to contribute to the preservation of the planet."

— Christa Hoyland



Pizza Fusion's Greek Pizza

TOP 100 7

Chipotle Mexican Grill

Denver
Fresh Mex
Last year: 1

It's hard to generate excitement when you reach household name status, as the VIPs at Chipotle are learning as they hit their first plateau. On the other hand, it sets up a good cover to raise prices in the fourth quarter of 2008 before food costs rise an expected 7 to 10 percent in 2009. Lately, Chipotle's stock has rebounded from a low of about \$40 in early October to \$55.50 as of this writing.

And in the game of big name endorsements, Chipotle has plenty to boast. According to its franchising Web site: "We've attracted successful multiunit franchisees from such brands as Jack in the Box, Papa John's, Burger King, Sonic, Popeye's and Village Inn, as well as a former president of KFC and a former CEO of Church's and Rally's. Clearly, they know a winning system when they see it."

Chipotle continues to hold fast to a core commitment that the rest of the world is warming up to — green causes — which has led to industry kudos for the chain's use of humanely raised meat and BST-free dairy products.

— J.S.



Chipotle's Chicken Soft Tacos



Peet's Coffee & Tea



McAlister's Bread Bowl Soup

Wi-Fi draws the tech-savvy crowd.

The New York-style deli has almost 300 restaurants with 11 more opening soon. Plans for 2009 include 52 restaurants, most of them multiunit franchises. Within the past year, McAlister's has signed agreements with four major groups to open restaurants in Virginia, Colorado, Arkansas and Texas.

— C.H.

9 Peet's Coffee & Tea

Emeryville, Calif.
Coffee
Last year: 84

Peet's is a company to watch, jumping 75 spots from No. 84 last year. In a sluggish economy, Peet's earned \$2 million in the third quarter of 2008 — that's 40 percent more for the year to date compared to 2007. Expansion into grocery stores, primarily in the eastern United States, helped. Grocery sales rose 15 percent, with sales to offices up 34 percent.

With coffee brands such as Arabian Mocha-Java, Major Dickason's Blend and Sumatra, plus tea blends like Masala Chai and Pride of the Port, it's no wonder the company has a devoted following. Called Peetnicks, these loyal customers are passionate about their Peet's.

In 2008, in partnership with Metropolitan Coffee & Concessions, Peet's opened several kiosks at Bay Area Rapid Transit stations in San Francisco, selling drinks and packaged coffee.

— Kym Voorhees Raque

10 Einstein Bros. Bagels

Lakewood, Colo.
Bakery/café
Last year: 16

Parent Einstein Noah Restaurant Group has positioned the Einstein Bros. brand for growth after paying down and refinancing much of the company's debt. As a result, second-quarter 2008 net income was \$6.9 million, compared to a loss of \$250,000 in 2007.

The company also closed underperforming stores, remodeled existing ones and focused on multiunit franchising and licensed locations. Einstein Bros. now has more than 320 company-owned and franchised locations, plus 130 licensed locations. The licensed locations bring the brand into high-traffic areas, such as airports and college campuses. At the end of September, Einstein had opened 20 stores in 2008 with plans for 15 more by year's end.

Expanding the menu beyond bagels has helped sales. The Einstein Bros. menu now includes offerings such as a Chipotle Salad, California Chicken Wraps and a Turkey Club Panini.

Locking in 2007 commodities prices and reducing hours at some stores helped the brand weather the 2008 economy.

— C.H.



Pei Wei's Wrap

11. Daphne's Greek Café, San Diego
Ethnic • Last year: 23

Currently the largest Greek fast casual chain in the United States, Daphne's — whose name is derived from the Daphne wreath, a Greek symbol of excellence — was founded in 1991. The chain's recent developments include eliminating wine and beer from the menu due to low sales numbers during the busiest daypart and the start of its franchising program.

12. Paul's Bakery Café,
North Miami Beach, Fla.
Bakery/café • Last year: unranked

Originally founded as a French family bakery in 1889, this Top 100 first-timer has only five U.S. locations, all in Florida. With its old-fashioned store design and menu offerings, the concept takes pride in being different and says its secret ingredient (aside from the seven hours it takes to bake most breads) is a “respect for tradition.”

13. Pei Wei Asian Diner, Scottsdale, Ariz.
Asian/Asian fusion • Last year: 33

Despite having closed 10 of its stores due to underperforming sales in October, this faster, more casual take on P.F. Chang's China Bistro (its parent company) appears to be going strong. With more than 150 locations in 15 states and a menu on which everything is under \$10, it's not difficult to see why.

14. Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill,
Carlsbad, Calif.
Fresh Mex • Last year: 18

In 1983, a spring-break revelation led to Ralph Rubio's walk-up fish taco stand. Now, 25 years later, his brainstorm is one of the premier operations in a hot fast

casual category. The chain has more than 180 locations and in October rejected an unsolicited acquisition proposal from Kelly Capital because it was “not in the best interest of the company or its stockholders.”

15. Saladworks, Conshohocken, Pa.
Soup/salad/chicken • Last year: 7

Twenty years after the opening of its first store in a New Jersey mall, Saladworks has turned on the lights in its 100th. The store is a new prototype for the chain — they call it “turbo-charged,” and the goal is to maximize throughput to get customers in, fed and out more quickly.

16. Tony Boomboss, Louisville, Ky.
Italian/pizza • Last year: unranked

With four locations in its home city of Louisville, the founder of this chain is determined to survive among the giant pizza-delivery chains by offering unique menu features, including a secret-recipe pizza sauce and a bourbon-inspired pizza, to what he calls a niche market.

17. Citrine New World Bistro,
Redwood City, Calif.
Gourmet • Last year: unranked

“Out of the melting pot of American cuisine comes a totally new dining experience,” claims Citrine, whose parent company, Safeway, calls it a test store. With menu sections such as Pacific Rim, Latin and Caribbean, New World, Mediterranean and American, the operation's goal is to bring together flavors from around the world.

18. Raising Cane's, Baton Rouge, La.
Soup/salad/chicken • Last year: 12

This concept, named after the owner's dog, credits a limited menu of chicken tenders and a positive internal culture for its enviable success. Recognized as one of the fastest-growing fast casual chains in the country, Raising Cane's added a new VP of purchasing in September and a new CFO in October.

19. Freebirds World Burrito,
College Station, Texas
Fresh Mex • Last year: 17

A favorite among college students throughout Texas, the mission of this Fresh Mex concept is “to be the best damn burrito experience in the world.” A regular on our Top 100 list, its first store opened in Santa Barbara, Calif., in 1987.

20. Shane's Rib Shack,
Atlanta
Burger/steak/BBQ
Last year: 11

According to this concept's Web site, “Shane isn't about flash, he's about food.” Owned by Raving Brands, the chain has more than 50 locations (many of them in Georgia) and offers a gluten-free menu. During the 2008 elections, Shane's stores ran a “Vote America” promotion, through which those who voted received a free BBQ meal.

21. Corner Bakery Café, Dallas
Bakery/café • Last year: 21

Corner Bakery Café operates 111 restaurants around the country, each with average sales of approximately \$2.3 million. About 20 percent of the company's revenue comes from catering. Corner Bakery claims to have the highest annual sales volume of any national bakery/café brand and boasts 22 straight quarters of positive same-store sales. This year, the company inked expansion deals in Arizona and Mississippi.

22. Bruegger's, Burlington, Vt.
Bakery/café • Last year: 8

Bruegger's operates more than 280 locations in 23 states and the District of Columbia, with nearly 100 of them franchised. The company marked 17 consecutive quarters of sales growth in July, aided by an assortment of new menu items, including a Turkey Apple Club Salad; a new blended, frozen coffee drink; and the Very Veggie and Cheddar Omelet Sandwiches.



Corner Bakery's Cinnamon Cream Cake



23. Moe's Southwest Grill, Atlanta
Fresh Mex • Last year: 9

Atlanta-based FOCUS Brands bought Moe's Southwest Grill from Raving Brands in August 2007. The company named Paul Damico, former chief operating officer for SSP America, as president in May, and in August the company opened its 400th location, one more than the 52 restaurants Moe's expected to open in 2008.

24. Paradise Bakery & Café, Scottsdale, Ariz.
Bakery/café • Last year: unranked
Paradise Bakery & Café operates 72 restaurants in 10 states, serving sandwiches, soups and salads along with fresh bagels, rolls, cookies and other baked goods. Fast casual powerhouse Panera Bread owns a 51-percent stake in the company. Panera has the right to purchase the remaining 49



Moe's Burrito

percent of Paradise's common stock after Jan. 1, 2009, at an undisclosed, predetermined sum. If Panera doesn't exercise that right, Paradise's minority owners can buy back the company.

25. Le Pain Quotidien, Brussels, Belgium
Bakery/café • Last year: unranked
Le Pain Quotidien is French for "daily bread," and the chain serves its bread daily in more



Which Wich's Wicked Sandwich

than 12 countries, including 28 locations in the United States. The restaurant was founded in 1990 by Belgian chef Alain Coumont, who was unhappy with the bread then available for his customers and decided to develop his own recipe. The restaurant's focal point is the communal table, a large table in the center of the dining room where friends and strangers alike can break bread together.

26. Which Wich?, Dallas
Sandwich • Last year: 15

Which Wich? serves more than 50 varieties of sandwiches using a unique system that involves bags on which customers mark their choices. The chain hopes to have 100 locations open by the end of the year. In October Which Wich? signed a deal with Delaware North Cos. Travel Hospitality Services to open locations in airports around the world.

27. Zaxby's, Athens, Ga.
Soup/salad/chicken • Last year: 20

Chicken-finger chain Zaxby's has been flying high since its 1990 founding. The company has grown from one location near the Georgia Southern University campus to more than 450 today. Zaxby's advertising has incorporated a partnership with NASCAR, television ads featuring celebrities such as "Laverne and Shirley" stars Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams and placement in the popular video game *Midnight Club L.A.*

28. Boloco, Boston
Fresh Mex • Last year: unranked

Boloco, short for Boston Local Company, got its start in 1996 as The Wrap. Boloco's burritos incorporate flavors from Asia, the Mediterranean, Cajun country and Buffalo, N.Y. The company operates several franchised locations outside the Boston area under the name Currito.

Marketing Trend of the Year

Web-based marketing

In an increasingly competitive environment, Web-based marketing — including Web sites, e-clubs and social networking — is a cost-effective way for restaurants to communicate directly with their customers.

Instead of the phone book, consumers now use the Internet to locate and choose a restaurant, so having a quality Web site is important. In an October 2007 National Restaurant Association consumer survey, nearly half the adults questioned said they had visited restaurant Web sites.

E-mail clubs are one tool operators are using to stay in touch with customers. Through regular e-newsletters, brands can provide coupons, special meal deals, event information and other items of interest, all focused on driving traffic back to the store.

"As further testament to the popularity of e-mail marketing use among restaurants, we've seen a 210-percent increase — 19.5 million to 29 million — from last year to this year in the number of consumers opting to receive their favorite restaurant's e-mails," said Laura Gosse, vice president of marketing for Fishbowl, a provider of on-demand e-mail marketing for the restaurant industry.

The use of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace also has grown as companies search for more effective ways to interact with consumers. Since the sites themselves have no fees, creating a page for a business is a cost-effective way to generate brand awareness. Successful social networking pages engage the audience with honest comments and accurate opinions but avoid the hard sell.

— K. V.R.



29. Smashburger, Denver

Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: unranked
Smashburger opened its seventh restaurant in October and a week later signed a deal to open as many as 30 along the East Coast. The “better burger” concept, funded by Quiznos founder Rick Schaden, plans to have 12 to 15 restaurants open by the end of 2008 and ultimately expects to grow to as many as 500 restaurants in 30 markets.

30. Boudin Sourdough Bakery & Café, San Francisco

Bakery/café • Last year: 26
Boudin Sourdough Bakery & Café has been baking sourdough bread for nearly 160 years, and the company is the oldest continuing business in San Francisco. But don't expect 19th-century amenities: Most restaurants offer online ordering, and in October, the company announced it would discontinue the print version of its gift catalog and replace it with one on the Internet.

31. Tokyo Joe's, Highlands Ranch, Colo.

Asian/Asian fusion • Last year: unranked
Tokyo Joe's, with 17 locations in Colorado, operates on the motto “positive eating = positive living.” The restaurant uses organic foods wherever possible, and its Asian-themed dishes are prepared by grilling or frying. Tokyo Joe's Web site features a full breakdown of the nutritional makeup of its menu.

32. Spicy Pickle, Denver

Sandwich • Last year: 25
Spicy Pickle has been on an expansion drive since the company went public in 2007. The chain opened eight restaurants this year,

bringing its total to 42 stores in 15 states, and has signed agreements for dozens more. In October, Spicy Pickle announced it had acquired Vancouver, Canada-based Bread Garden Franchising Inc., the franchisor of 11 Bread Garden Urban Cafes in Canada. The company currently doesn't plan to convert the Bread Garden restaurants to Spicy Pickles.



Smashburger

33. Jason's Deli, Beaumont, Texas

Sandwich • Last year: 22
Jason's Deli took a temporary hit in September when Hurricane Ike forced the closure of 22 restaurants in the Houston area, along with the chain's corporate office. A few weeks earlier, Jason's founder Joseph Tortorice worked the sandwich line as Hurricane Gustav threatened the Beaumont area. Despite the pounding, most of the restaurants reopened quickly. The chain also announced it dropped high-fructose corn syrup from its food items.

34. Offerdahl's Café Grill, Sunrise, Fla.

Sandwich • Last year: 28
Offerdahl's Café Grill is the creation of former Miami Dolphins linebacker John Offerdahl and his wife, Lynn. The couple first ventured into the restaurant business with a bagel shop that eventually became Einstein Bros. Bagels. They launched Offerdahl's Café Grill in 2003 and have expanded to nine locations. Offerdahl's introduced online ordering in several locations in 2008.

35. Fresh City, Needham, Mass.

Organic/green/health
Last year: 52
Natural wood, bushel baskets and fresh produce on display give Fresh City restaurants an outdoor market feel. The restaurants feature serving stations that offer choices ranging from soups and salads to Asian noodles and stir-fry dishes. Fresh City has been laying the groundwork for rapid expansion, opening the first of 40 planned restaurants in the Washington, D.C., area and introducing online ordering via the restaurant's Web site.

36. la Madeleine, Dallas

Soup/salad/chicken
Last year: unranked
La Madeleine restaurant is equal parts French bakery, European café and cozy bistro. Each la Madeleine location features a fireplace and wooden dining tables reminiscent of a family dinner setting. The 63-unit chain has grown slowly since it was founded in 1984, balancing profitability with a commitment to a friendly environment and an authentic, varied cuisine.



Spicy Pickle Interior

37. Tahitian Noni Café, Provo, Utah

Asian/Asian fusion • Last year: 97
Tahitian Noni Café is a sister company to Tahitian Noni International, founded to introduce the noni plant to the world outside the islands of French Polynesia. The first café opened in Tokyo in 2003. The South Pacific-themed Tahitian Noni Café and its larger sister concept, Motu's Tahitian Noni Island Grills, now have 11 locations around the world, including four in the United States.

Zaxby's Buffalo Wings Meal





38: Firehouse Subs,
Jacksonville, Fla.
Sandwich • Last year: 69
Founded in Jacksonville,
Fla., in 1994 by firemen,

Firehouse Subs specializes in hot, oversized subs served in a firefighter-themed dining room. In October, Firehouse signed a multi-year agreement with Coca-Cola to serve Coke products in its stores. The chain recently topped 340 locations, and current expansion plans are focused on the Northeast, Central and Southwest regions of the country.

39: Lime Fresh Mexican Grill,
Miami Beach, Fla.
Fresh Mex • Last year: unranked
Lime Fresh first opened its doors in South

Beach, Fla., in 2004, serving Mexican-style cuisine in a fun atmosphere. Lime Fresh offers 50 variations of hot sauces, along with a homemade salsa bar. The restaurant currently has four locations in South Florida, with three slated to open in 2009.

40: Penn Station East Coast Subs,
Cincinnati
Sandwich • Last year: 31

Penn Station continues to build on its legendary Philadelphia cheesesteak origins with its hot-grilled sandwiches and wraps. The concept, which boasts more than 185 locations, recently unveiled a new restaurant décor package designed to speed up service and allow customers to see their food being prepared.



Lime Fresh's Taco Salad

41. RedBrick Pizza, Palmdale, Calif.
Italian/pizza • Last year: 39

RedBrick Pizza not only cooks its fire-roasted pizzas fast, but the chain's franchise locations continue to spread quickly, too. With more than 75 locations, the pizza café has a way to go to reach its 12,000-unit goal by 2016. The chain's next goal is 600 Canadian units.

42. Wahoo's Fish Tacos, Santa Ana, Calif.
Fresh Mex • Last year: 36

Wahoo's Fish Tacos turns 10 this year, and the founders continue to play up their mix of Fresh Mex, Brazilian and Asian flavors to the X Games crowd. The chain now has 54 locations in four states with plans for up to 15 stores in 2009, including new markets in Arizona, Oregon and Washington.

43. Wildflower Bread Company,
Scottsdale, Ariz.
Bakery/café • Last year: 34

Wildflower not only offers bread to go and on its sandwiches, but its executives "feed" the community as well. Wildflower chief administrative officer Alison Johnston was selected as 2008 Volunteer of the Year by the Arizona Restaurant Association for her work in educating local restaurateurs and promoting local economic growth.

44. Bimbamboo, Longmont, Colo.
Asian/Asian fusion • Last year: unranked
Presentation is as important as food quality in this single-unit Asian/Asian fusion concept that has wowed reviewers. Inspired by the flavors of Vietnam, Thailand, Korea and East India, the menu features "small bites," entrée "bowls" and soups plus beer, wine and cocktails. And the modern atmosphere offers an international feel with its communal seating options.

Food Trend of the Year

Sustainable, organic

The top food trend of 2008 is not a single menu item, but a move toward offering foods that are organic or sustainable. Organic foods are those grown without the use of conventional pesticides or artificial fertilizers, while sustainable food is produced in a way that promotes environmental, social and economic longevity.

Brands that offer organic or sustainable menu items do so because the advantages, from environmental or health benefits to simply filling a niche sought by customers, outweigh the costs.

Phoenixville, Pa.-based Spiedie Bistro offers organic menu items like bison, tofu, Portobello mushrooms and various teas. Spiedie founder Brian Laing said ordering organic food items from a supplier is expensive, so he buys what he needs from local farmers.

"It's more cost-efficient because I don't have to over-order just to get what I want," Laing said.

The market for sustainable beverage offerings is growing, too. For example, Sara Lee introduced UTZ Certified Good Origin sustainable coffee to the U.S. market in 2008. The company has increased its sustainable coffee volumes from 2,500 tons in 2004 to 20,000 tons in 2008.

Truitt Bros. Inc., a Food Alliance-certified food processor based in Salem, Ore., provides sustainable, shelf-stable products for the foodservice industry. More operators are requesting sustainable products as consumer interest in the topic grows, said Truitt Bros. president Peter Truitt.

"It's clear that the consumer is becoming more and more enlightened on these issues," Truitt said. "As a manufacturer of food products, we want to be responsive to that (because it's a) change taking place in the consumer marketplace (that's) here to stay."

— Christa Hoyland



45. Five Guys Burgers 'N Fries, Lorton, Va.
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 14

The burgers at family-owned Five Guys have developed a cult-like following as the chain has opened more than 300 units in 30 states with 1,500 more in development. Fans continue to vote the chain “best burger” and “best fries.”



Wolfgang Puck Express' Pizza

46. Starbucks, Seattle
Coffee • Last year: 49

It's been a tough year for coffee giant Starbucks, but it looks as if chairman and chief executive officer Howard Schultz is following through on his plan to shore things up as he took back the reins this year. The chain may right itself, as it now has ownership of the patented Clover brewing system and has retrained baristas on providing the coffeshop experience.

47. Wolfgang Puck Express,
Beverly Hills, Calif.
Bakery/café • Last year: 32

Wolfgang Puck Express and Wolfgang Puck Gourmet Express eateries continue to build on the celebrity chef's popularity, feeding sandwiches, salads, pasta dishes and signature thin-crust pizzas to hungry passersby at airports, malls and other high-traffic areas.

48. Bread & Company Bakery & Café,
Nashville, Tenn.
Bakery/café • Last year: unranked

Bread & Company has plenty of company for its fresh-baked breads. With four Nashville, Tenn., locations, the bakery/café has an extensive sandwich menu, as well as create-your-own sandwiches and salad offerings.



Salmon Salad at Atlanta Bread Company

51. Atlanta Bread Company,
Smyrna, Ga.
Bakery/café • Last year: 47

Atlanta Bread Company is now 15 years old, and its 110 locations span 25 states. The restaurant's menu centers on the brand's fresh-baked bread from breakfast to dinner. The chain continues to offer global flavors, from Caribbean-inspired sandwiches to pizza.

52. The Counter,
Culver City, Calif.
Burger/steak/BBQ
Last year: 37

The Counter's build-your-own burger concept is catching plenty of attention. The company has 13 locations in seven states, as well as one in Ireland and more than 100 in development. Ed Casey joined the corporate team as president and chief operating officer, bringing 30 years of restaurant industry experience, most recently at Red Robin.

49. Great Harvest Bread, Dillon, Mont.
Bakery/café • Last year: 41

Rising commodity costs have hit the bakery segment hard, with wheat prices doubling in the last year. Great Harvest purchases grain directly from farmers, rather than speculating on commodity prices. With 210 stores in 42 states, the brand gives franchisees the freedom to set their own pricing and adjust product offerings as needed.

50. Tijuana Flats Burrito Company,
Maitland, Fla.

Fresh Mex • Last year: unranked
Known for its huge, hand-rolled burritos and signature hot sauce, Tijuana Flats halted franchising in 2007. This year, the company bought back at least three locations. The chain continues to grow and has 67 locations in six states, mostly in the Southeast.



Starbucks in Louisville, Ky.

53. Cosi Sandwich Bar, Deerfield, Ill.
Sandwich • Last year: 70

Cosi Sandwich Bar is closing the gap on its quest to profitability with a 3.6-percent increase in revenue and 59-percent net improvement in the second quarter of 2008, but it is still in the red \$1.7 million. The chain is focusing on improving operations and cost management in its 145 locations. In September, Cosi debuted a lighter version of its menu.

TOP 100

54. San Francisco Oven, Springfield, Mo.
Italian/pizza • Last year: unranked

San Francisco Oven has expanded its Italian/pizza chain beyond Ohio with a total of 12 units in five states. Its menu includes brick oven-baked pizzas, San Francisco-inspired sandwiches, homemade soups and take-and-bake pizza.

55. Coffee Beanery, Flushing, Mich.
Coffee • Last year: unranked

Coffee Beanery is positioning itself to fill in where Starbucks is cutting back, beginning with targeting Starbucks' customers when that company shut down for a three-hour training session in February. Now the chain is looking at closed Starbucks units for its new locations. Coffee Beanery plans 14 new domestic stores this year, including in Walmart stores, in airports and standalones with drive-thrus.

56. Fuddruckers, Austin, Texas
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 38

Fuddruckers' 200 stores may have a 1950s theme, but the burger chain is employing 21st-century marketing techniques, including its own Facebook page. Its menu now includes trans fat-free chocolate chip cookies and sliders.

57. Zoup!, Southfield, Mich.
Soup/salad/chicken • Last year: 74

Ten-year-old Zoup! Fresh Soup Co. is poised for growth. It has 20 locations throughout Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio, with plans

to grow to 100 locations within three years, thanks to an agreement with Michigan-based AFS, a provider of brand-support services.

58. California Tortilla, Rockville, Md.
Fresh Mex • Last year: 42

Showing its trend savviness, California Tortilla tied into the presidential election with politically themed dishes and an unofficial vote tally. The chain followed up with a free food offer to any customer who sported an "I Voted" sticker on Election Day. The Fresh Mex chain stays up to date with customers via an electronic newsletter.

59. Farmer Boys, Riverside, Calif.
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 46

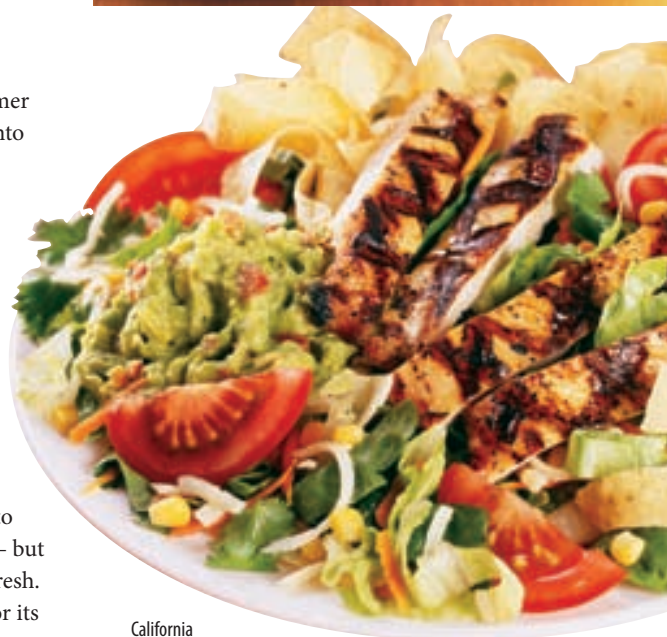
Now with 60 California locations, Farmer Boys plans to expand out of the state into Las Vegas and Arizona. Its 2008 menu reflects several trends, with all-natural hormone- and preservative-free chicken sandwiches, iced lattes and four new chicken wraps, as well as trans fat-free frying oil.

60. Zoe's Kitchen, Birmingham, Ala.
Bakery/café • Last year: unranked

Recipes from scratch may not be new, and the Cassimus family isn't the first to name a restaurant after a real person — but this southern chain offers something fresh. The franchise has numerous reasons for its rise, including the fact that leaner meats such as chicken are becoming more popular, and few chains have jumped into the Greek cuisine niche.



Bagel at Caribou Coffee



California Tortilla's Chicken Salad

61. Baker Brothers American Deli, Dallas
Sandwich • Last year: 43

In nine years, the brand has amassed only 16 locations, but Baker Brothers said in late September the chain is ready to fire up for a national presence. CEO Ken Reimer trimmed the equipment overhead to \$70,000, an attractive price for investors.

62. Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches, Champaign, Ill.
Sandwich • Last year: 48

Americans can't resist a quick gourmet sandwich served with an irreverent attitude. Still, it hasn't hurt to hire a franchise consultant through the years to keep this sandwich shop on the right track. Private equity investment in 2007 was mayonnaise on the fresh-baked bread, and a NASCAR sponsorship really put the wheels to Jimmy John's message.



Quizno's Sammies



63. Caribou Coffee, Minneapolis
Coffee • Last year: 56

Just when coffeehouses were about to become a cliché of themselves, Caribou took its unique lodge look to second-largest-operator in-the-world status. With its slogan “An experience that makes the day better,” new CFO Timothy J. Hennessy should see profits continue steadily. Total net sales increased 0.5 percent to \$63.2 million for the quarter ended June 29, 2008.

64. California Pizza Kitchen — ASAP, Los Angeles
Italian/pizza • Last year: 27

Last year, MSHost Corp. extended its contract to develop ASAP outlets and kiosks at airport and travel plaza locations through 2012. So far, only Oakland International Airport has cut the ribbon on the fast casual version. The parent company has little to say about this division in news releases, but diners continue to applaud the idea in blogs.

65. Java Brewing Company, Louisville, Ky.
Coffee • Last year: unranked

In 12 years, this coffeehouse has gone from a 72-square-foot drive-thru kiosk to five homey lounges for folks to hang out with their cups of joe. Gourmet coffee selection and precise roasting procedures keep the chain in the fast casual category, despite the fact it serves no food beyond pastries.

66. Quiznos, Denver
Sandwich • Last year: 51

The toasted-sub sandwich chain promoted the president of its Latin American division to the COO spot in September 2008 to find ways to increase franchise owners’ profitability. But franchisees are complaining it’s not working, thanks to the economy and a promotion war with Subway. In 2008, 150 franchise stores closed.

67. Salsarita’s Fresh Cantina, Charlotte, N.C.
Fresh Mex • Last year: 63

The 2008 plan was to open more than 22 units of this Fresh Mex eatery, then double those 100 locations by 2010. The company hired a new CEO with an ownership stake in July and posted same-store sales growth of 7.7 percent for the first five months of 2008. So far, so good.

68. Zpizza, Newport Beach, Calif.
Italian/pizza • Last year: 57

Zpizza keeps chugging along serving its gourmet pizzas, opening new locations and landing on industry lists of top chains. It’s a boon for foodies who want to see the classic pie elevated from junk-food status to a healthy meal worth a higher price point.

69. Baja Fresh Mexican Grill, Thousand Oaks, Calif.
Fresh Mex • Last year: 73

This burrito-loving Fresh Mex chain was on a mission to catch the public’s attention in 2008, popping up as an express version in airports and college campuses. In October officials signed with a consumer-products brokerage firm to place its branded products

in stores such as Costco Wholesale, BJ’s Wholesale Club, Sam’s Club, Trader Joe’s and Wal-Mart.

70. Mad Greens — Inspired Eats, Denver
Soup/salad/chicken • Last year: 79

This concept’s eight locations have not only made custom salads a hit, but trying something different is a watchword here as well. Why else would Nestlé choose it as a test restaurant for its new Sjora drink, a fountain beverage that blends milk and juice?

71. It’s a Grind Coffee, Long Beach, Calif.
Coffee • Last year: unranked

The husband-and-wife ownership of this

Tech Trend of the Year

Online ordering

Once strictly the domain of the pizzeria industry, online ordering is now firmly a part of the fast casual segment.

Restaurants on this year’s Top 100 list that offer online ordering are the rule rather than the exception. In fact, several fast casual chains, including Panera Bread, are testing drive-thru windows as part of an effort to cater to on-the-go customers.

And if there’s anything to be learned from the pizza business, it’s that online ordering offers the potential to dramatically increase revenue. Studies show that online customers spend more than those ordering inside the restaurant.

Many companies are finding online ordering to be an ever-growing part of their business. Chipotle Mexican Grill, for example, has received more than 2 million online orders since the company introduced the feature in December 2005. The company employs a second back-of-house food line in its restaurants dedicated exclusively to fulfilling online orders.

Susan Anderson, CEO of online ordering-systems provider OrderNetwork.com, said that operators who use online ordering services see an average ticket price increase of 23 percent. And the system ensures better customer service.

“The biggest benefit is the higher average ticket price per consumer, as well as freeing up employees to concentrate more on in-house dining — plus, no more dropped phone calls and lost orders,” Anderson said.

— Richard Slawsky



TOP 100

chain has publicly stated many times that its goal is to come in No. 2 behind Starbucks in number of units. Current figures show that it has reached 81 stores across the country, with 92 percent of those owned by franchisees.

72. Potbelly Sandwich Works, Chicago
Sandwich • Last year: unranked
To prove it's definitely in the game, Potbelly



Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf Iced Coffee

introduced a new Clubby sandwich in Fall 2008 to compete with extra-meat options at competitors Quiznos and Subway. It's a big order for a company that owns more than 200 units but hasn't franchised or gone public — but it hasn't stumbled on big decisions yet.

73. FireFresh BBQ, Louisville, Ky.
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 85
Although founder Bruce Loeffler has left the brand to form another concept, FireFresh BBQ continues with its firefighter theme, as well as its menu of wings, pulled pork and ribs flavored with the brand's signature sweet sauce with a bite. The brand also is pushing its franchise model and has a Troy, Mich., location to add to its handful of Kentucky locations.

74. Starwich Salads & Sandwiches
New York City • Gourmet • Last year: 94
When the masterminds behind Tavern on the Green and Maggiano's decided to get into the fast casual arena, Starwich was the result. To stand out from sandwich shops and delis in the Big Apple, this restaurant works with local farmers for 100-percent organic produce.

75. Sandella's Flatbread, West Redding, Conn.
Sandwich • Last year: 44

It began franchising only a year ago, and already owners have signed on the dotted line to open 12 restaurants in Dubai. Sandella's claims that makes it the largest and fastest-growing flatbread concept in the world, but customers are more fascinated with the many menu options they can create using flatbread.

76. Swich, New York City
Sandwich • Last year: unranked
Located in Manhattan's meatpacking district, the goal of this pressed-sandwich shop is "to offer the world a simple, happy place to eat a simple, happy sandwich." The company takes pride in its commitment

to sustainability, from using locally grown ingredients to its goal of switching exclusively to hydro and wind energy in the coming months.

77. Mooyah Burgers & Fries, Plano, Texas
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 92
Innovation in fast casual these days isn't built so much around menu expansion as it is around delivery methods. Just ask officials at Mooyah, who are seeing an encouraging response to a text-messaging ordering service, allowing them to increase sales without taking their eyes off the 100-percent-beef hamburger.

78. Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, Los Angeles
Coffee • Last year: 55
A Google search of this California staple turns up celebrity names like Miley Cyrus and Brody Jenner. The hot spot's claim to fame is placement in paparazzi shots and reality shows such as *The Hills*. The now-international brand celebrated its 45th anniversary this year and continues to enjoy popularity thanks to its "totally free" Wi-Fi and signature flavored coffee drinks.



Vapiano's Salad

79. Vapiano, McLean, Va.
Gourmet • Last year: 96
Vapiano opened new U.S. locations in Detroit, Atlanta and Fort Meyers, Fla., to bring its U.S. total to seven. Vapiano plans to open more than 80 new restaurants in the next four to eight years, expanding its presence in North America, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. At only five years old, the young company is preparing to triple in size.

80. Noodles & Company, Broomfield, Colo.
Asian/Asian fusion • Last year: 59
In 2008 Noodles & Company was named "Healthiest Fast Food Restaurant" by Health magazine for its balanced menu options. 2008 year-end goals included opening 40 new restaurants and becoming a 500-unit concept within five years.



Noodles & Company's Whole Grain Tuscan Fettuccini with Chicken

86. Go Roma, Warrenville, Ill.
Italian/pizza
Last year: 54

It's not often that one can enjoy traditional Italian cuisine for \$10.99 or less, but that is the highest price to be found on Go Roma's comfort-food menu. Selected by Nation's Restaurant News as a 2007 "Hot Concept," the brand has eight units, all but one of which are in Illinois.

87. Mama Fu's Asian House, Atlanta
Asian/Asian fusion • Last year: unranked, 2006: 64

In 2008 Murphy Adams Restaurant Group acquired the Mama Fu's Asian House concept from Raving Brands, began delivery service and online ordering at select locations and launched a new redesigned logo, menu and interior décor package to reposition the brand for further success. The group will begin selling franchise agreements in December 2008.

81. Fatburger, Santa Monica, Calif.
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 66

Fatburger expanded into Western Canada, Nebraska and Miami as part of a plan to open 20 to 30 new stores in 2008. It also announced a new green program to move toward the use of recycled materials as opposed to foam. Fatburger opened a location in Chase Field, the home of the Arizona Diamondbacks, that helped increase awareness of the brand.

85. New York Burger Co., New York City
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: unranked

Opened in 2004, this chain has made a mission of offering traditional burger, fry and onion ring cuisine without the typical quick-serve atmosphere. The company, whose menu has been called an inspiration to the burger industry, launched its franchising program late last year.

82. Grand Traverse Pie Company, Traverse City, Mich.
Bakery/café • Last year: unranked

Grand Traverse Pie Company was recognized as one of the "Michigan 50 Companies To Watch," an awards program sponsored by the nonprofit Edward Lowe Foundation. In 2008 GTPC had \$12 million in gross sales, an economic impact of more than \$25 million in Michigan, and employed 400 people.

83. The Habit Burger Grill, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 81

What began as a hamburger stand in 1969 is now a 20-unit brand, recognizable for its signature "charburger" and quality ingredients. With a new president and CEO taking the lead this past June, the California-based chain hopes to build on its motto, "There's no substitute for quality."

84. Village Burger Bar, Dallas
Burger/steak/BBQ • Last year: 99

The single-location "uptown twist on the burger joint" features a built-to-order burger menu and three varieties of french fries (even sweet potato!), as well as a swanky drink menu including everything from Italian coffees and herbal teas to cocktails, beer and wine.

The Top Movers & Shakers in the Dessert/Beverage/Yogurt Category

Sweet 16

While these "Sweet 16" brands set themselves apart in the dessert/beverage/yogurt category, they don't meet all the criteria of a fast casual restaurant. This list notes the concepts that stand out for their quality products, as well as for an upscale dining experience. With most of them being new mentions in the Top 100 issue, this category increasingly is attracting more attention.

These brands, listed alphabetically rather than by rank, do more than hand a soft-serve cone through a window. They draw customers inside for the atmosphere, as well as for the indulgent treats.

- Amy's Ice Cream
- Bittersweet: The Chocolate Café
- Coldstone Creamery
- FreshBerry
- Jamba Juice
- J.P. Licks Homemade Ice Cream Café
- Kilwin's Chocolates & Ice Cream
- MaggieMoo's Ice Cream
- Marble Slab Creamery
- Melt Café and Gelato Bar
- Paciugo
- Pinkberry
- Planet Smoothie Café
- Red Mango
- Yovana
- Zack's Famous Frozen Yogurt





88. Frankitude, Miami
Sandwich • Last year: 89
Frankitude's menu evolved in 2008 from primarily premium franks to include new panini, wraps and salads. The brand also opened its first food court location in the Dolphin Mall in Miami. And in May, the board of directors brought on new CEO Richard Babboni.

89. Wingstop, Richardson, Texas
Soup/salad/chicken • Last year: 76
Wingstop's first-quarter sales increase of 8.9 percent marked the 19th consecutive quarter of comparable-store increases, dating back to the third quarter of 2003. In 2008 the rapidly growing chain also opened 80 stores across the country with plans to add another 75 in the Northeast over the next five years.

90. City Bites, Edmond, Okla.
Sandwich • Last year: unranked
This upscale sandwich brand now has 19 locations, including one outside Oklahoma, in neighboring Kansas. A centralized baking commissary sources 17 varieties of cookies and brownies to all locations. City Bites also has partnered with Oklahoma City-based Burke & Grow LLC to form C.B. Franchise Systems LLC and kick-start the brand's franchising plan.

92. Organic To Go, Seattle
Organic/green/health • Last year: 86
America's first fast casual café chain to be USDA certified as an organic retailer, this brand has enjoyed strong sales growth (57 percent in the first three quarters of 2008) and now boasts 33 café locations, as well as 17 university locations and 11 outlets at Los Angeles International Airport.

93. Pho Hoa, Sacramento, Calif.
Asian/Asian fusion • Last year: unranked
Pho Hoa expanded by three locations in 2008, two in the United States and one in Asia. An upcoming opening in Elk Grove — near Pho Hoa's corporate home base — will be the company's first foray into an "express" concept primarily targeting to-go diners. Internationally, Pho Hoa opened its first store in Macau, China, following its success in the Hong Kong market.

94. Schlotzsky's, Austin, Texas
Sandwich • Last year: 75
2008 was a year to try new things for the sandwich chain. Schlotzsky's ran two successful limited-time offers (Rocks the Ranch and Hip Chick Trio), opened its first location in Jordan, began co-branding with sister company Cinnabon and created a system-wide catering program.

95. Rising Roll Gourmet, Atlanta
Sandwich • Last year: 60
Rising Roll Gourmet still is growing during the economic downturn, with three stores under construction and another 30 planned to add to its 12 units in the Southeast. The chain recently saved money by installing stained concrete instead of a brick-and-tile interior. The company also is counting on the addition of the breakfast daypart.

96. Kaldi's Coffeehouse, St. Louis
Coffee • Last year: unranked
This coffee concept has six Missouri locations offering scratch-made cookies and breakfast breads, as well as a vegetarian menu featuring grilled panini, fresh salads, soups and more — and of course, coffee. The chain, which offers about 30 organic roasts, also boasts that it has the only certified kosher coffee in the Midwest.

97. The Mixx, Kansas City, Mo.
Gourmet • Last year: unranked
Not to be confused with the nightclub or information Web site, this single-store concept aims to differentiate itself with high-end, trendy furnishings; wine offerings; and local microbrews. Customers can customize their food order and then watch its preparation in the show kitchen. Among the offerings: 300 premium salad ingredients, including organic vegetables and herbs.

98. The Loop Pizza Grill, Jacksonville, Fla.
Italian/pizza • Last year: 64
Although The Loop Pizza Grill has been



Schlotzsky's Original Sandwich

91. Super Mex, Long Beach, Calif.
Fresh Mex • Last year: 100
The president of this West Coast mainstay, founded in 1974, set his sights on the fast casual segment last year but promised that the menu wouldn't go Tex-Mex as so many others had. Now offering online ordering, the concept is known for its "super-mex" burritos and salsa.



Kaldi's Coffee



around for nearly 30 years, its franchising efforts have moved slowly. The chain, which offers pizzas, burgers, sandwiches and salads, has about 30 locations in Florida and five other southern states. Another 50 are in development.

99. Chicken Dijon Rotisserie Grill,
Torrance, Calif.

Soup/salad/chicken • Last year: unranked
This family-owned chain has seven California stores, mostly in high-profile lifestyle and retail centers, with plans to franchise nationwide. Its menu includes popular Mediterranean rotisserie chicken, as well as sandwiches, salads and soups for in-house dining, take out, delivery or catering.

*Contributing writers: Caroline Cooper,
Richard A. Webster*

100. UFood Grill, Newton, Mass.
Bakery/café • Last year: unranked
Formerly KnowFat! Lifestyle Grille, this rebranded concept brought boxing champ George Foreman in as spokesman and became a publicly traded company as

it focuses on national franchising. The company has three franchise models: a two-in-one food and retail store, a smaller food-only model and a mall food court model.



UFood Grill Steak

Fabulous 50

With more than 600 fast casual concepts around the country, narrowing our list to only 100 Movers & Shakers is quite difficult. So the expert panel responsible for ranking the Top 100 concepts included this list of 50 additional brands that deserve mention. Some have been on the Top 100 list in years past, but nearly half — 24 — have never garnered a mention before.

Each of these concepts is making a name for itself in the fast casual segment and could be at or near the top next year, so keep an eye on the Fab 50. The concepts are listed alphabetically rather than by rank.

- Amazon Café, bakery/café
- Bar-B-Cutie, burger/steak/BBQ
- Bear Rock Café, bakery/café
- Blue Spoon Café, sandwich
- The Buckhead Café, bakery/café
- Burrachos Fresh Mexican Grill, fresh Mex
- Coffee Culture Café & Eatery, bakery/café
- Coney Beach, other
- The Cravery, bakery/café
- Crescent City Beignets, other
- Crispers, sandwich

- D'Angelo Sandwich Shop, sandwich
- Doc Chey's Noodle House, Asian/Asian fusion
- Doc Green's Gourmet Salads & Grill, soup/salad/chicken
- Donatos, Italian/pizza
- Dos Amigos Burritos, fresh Mex
- Dressed, soup/salad/chicken
- Earl of Sandwich, sandwich
- El Taco Tote Real Mex Grille, fresh Mex
- Elevation Burger, burger/steak/BBQ
- Extreme Pita, ethnic
- Genghis Grill — The Mongolian Stir Fry, ethnic
- Grains of Montana Restaurant & Bakery, bakery/café
- Ingredient Restaurant, gourmet
- ink! Coffee, coffee
- Kidfresh, lifestyle
- Kokopelli Sonoran Grill, ethnic
- La Boulange, bakery/café
- La Salsa Fresh Mexican Grill, fresh Mex
- Nothing but Noodles, Asian/Asian fusion
- O'Naturals, organic/green/health
- Pick Up Stix, Asian/Asian fusion
- Pockets, sandwich
- Pollo Campero, soup/salad/chicken

Fast Casual Brands Worth Watching



- Port City Java, coffee
- Pret A Manger, other
- Pyrogrill, fresh Mex
- Rib Crib BBQ & Grill, burger/steak/BBQ
- Rumbi Island Grill, ethnic
- Smiling Moose Deli, sandwich
- Tacone Flavor Grill, fresh Mex
- Terra Breads, bakery/café
- Tin Star, fresh Mex
- Tony Roma's Fast & Casual, burger/steak/BBQ
- Topz Healthier Burger Grill, burger/steak/BBQ
- Tropical Smoothie Café, dessert/beverage
- Tossed, soup/salad/chicken
- Uberger, burger/steak/BBQ
- Wild Noodles, ethnic
- Wow Bao, Asian/Asian fusion