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Nontraditional Units Spurring Rising Roll's Growth

In a fierce competition to attract tenants to commercial office spaces in major markets around the country, it turns out Rising Roll Gourmet has found its ideal position. The fast-casual franchise's gourmet sandwiches, salads, soups, and breakfast dishes have become such a hot commodity among local business crowds, that landlords started to not only waive the restaurant's rent, some are actually *paying* Rising Roll Gourmet as much as \$30,000 annually just to be in their buildings.

"We are getting the deal of the century from class A office management companies who want us to be a permanent fixture in their buildings," says Mike Lassiter, president of Rising Roll Franchising Concepts LLC. "Business owners want to have their companies in buildings with a convenient, quality restaurant for their employees to eat, and the landlords recognize that. They see us as a selling point to help lure new tenants in their buildings, as well as keep existing ones from moving out."

Opening "Express Units" in commercial office buildings is just one of multiple growth channels and new revenue streams for franchisees gaining traction at Rising Roll Gourmet. Because Express Units are smaller and don't require ovens or ventilation systems, food is cooked and prepared at a full-scale Rising Roll Gourmet restaurant nearby and then delivered fresh each day for refrigeration and serving. With little to no real-estate investment, the Express Unit allows franchisees a cost-effective way to increase their customer base in their area.

The company also established a new breakfast daypart, heavily promoted its catering business, and added a "Grab-and-Go" option where franchisees can set up tables to offer boxed lunches on a cash-only basis in a company's lobby multiple times per week.

"While the majority of fast-casual restaurant concepts were offering deep discounts or smaller portions to customers during the economic downturn, we remained focused on maintaining brand strength and adding new revenue streams," Lassiter says. "We implemented strategies with the intention that they would become a valuable part of our franchise model, not just a quick fix for the times."

The success of the initial Rising Roll Express Unit in 2009 has led to the implementation and execution of a strategic nationwide growth initiative that focuses on non-traditional expansion in areas including office lobbies, hospitals, airports, and universities. Helping to propel its non-traditional expansion is HMSHost Corporation, the world's largest provider of food, beverage, and retail services for travelers. Rising Roll Gourmet selected the company based on its successful track record and highly experienced operating partners.

“We were approached by four different airport concessionaire groups interested in Rising Roll Gourmet to expand their portfolios,” Lassiter says. “HMSHost was selected based on its values and extraordinary talent coming from the executive team. We are looking forward to complementing our traditional development with non-traditional expansion of our Rising Roll Gourmet Express Unit.”

Rising Roll Gourmet has been rated “Excellent” by ZAGAT for 12 consecutive years and “Best Bang for the Buck” for the past two years. With food quality as its focus, Rising Roll Gourmet prides itself on offering more than 90 different cutting-edge options not seen in other sandwich shops, such as Ham and Brie with Granny Smith apples and the Portobello Mushroom with goat cheese and roasted red peppers. Sandwiches are offered on baked fresh daily bread with choices of multigrain, asiago and basil, sourdough, and French boules (rolls), or on croissants or wraps.

“Our homemade-family recipes, made with the freshest ingredients, keep customers coming back, but so does our impeccable customer service,” Lassiter says. “Our Zagat service ratings equal that of a fine-dining restaurant—another factor that sets us apart from competitors.”

Rising Roll Gourmet has 14 restaurants open throughout Georgia, Texas, and Colorado with eight retail and Express locations under development. Company plans call for an additional 15 traditional retail restaurants and 29 non-traditional locations to open by the end of 2015.

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