

Leveraging Innovative Partnerships

One idea can easily spark another which may become the difference between your concept and competitors.



As CEO of a fairly young franchise, my No. 1 priority is to expand and achieve widespread brand awareness. There are several strategies business leaders can choose to implement growth as the goal. I've personally found the best way to come by expansion organically and successfully is by leveraging innovative partnerships while always staying true to your brand.

Every relationship formed, whether it's inside or outside your respective industry, should reflect or coincide with your messaging and plans for growth to be truly beneficial in the long term. Partnerships should offer support not only on a national scale, but also within the franchise system in terms of company culture and satisfaction. It's important for franchisors and business leaders to understand that it truly does take a community to achieve hyper-growth, and often working with external partners on unique projects can open doors you never thought possible.

When looking into partnership opportunities, always stay true to your brand.

In 2013, we were approached by an American film distribution company about the possibility of working together to promote a film premiere. While joining forces with a film studio may not seem like an obvious choice for a restaurant chain, it was a fit since it was in line with our Mexican fast-casual concept given the film's Mexican setting. We spent sufficient time brainstorming campaign and contest ideas and landed on the idea of hosting a sweepstakes that would engage consumers and offer instant, weekly and VIP prizes. After a successful first run, we partnered again for a second film premiere in 2014, further developing our relationship while continuing to advance both companies.

Through a partnership like this, it's essential to do your due diligence in identifying your shared demographic and know how to effectively interact with them so each business can benefit and expand its bandwidth. Franchisors need to make sure they tailor their promotional efforts to fit their target audience and messaging.

Social media channels can serve as a great platform for getting the word out and increasing engagement if your franchise caters to a younger group, as ours does. Leveraging Facebook, Twitter and Instagram can connect you with Generations Y and Z on a level that differentiates you from other brands that don't take full advantage of that space.

It's essential to consider every option and every possible outcome before deciding on a course of action; sometimes the most successful route is the one less traveled.

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Recruit celebrity ambassadors only who fully understand, respect and have a passion for your brand.

Based in Southern California, we're fortunate to be located in a goldmine for celebrities. A couple of years ago, our founder and president, Randy Wyner, met MTV star Jason Acuña (also known as Wee Man) who took an instant liking to our food and concept, and began discussions with corporate about opening a franchise of his own. Today, Wee Man is a dual franchisee and corporate minority partner, and is highly engaged with the brand on both a regional and national scale. He's always happy to speak with reporters, travel to attend grand opening events to help draw crowds, sign autographs, and more. His involvement even created an opportunity for the franchise to be spotlighted in the film "Jackass 3" where we sponsored one of the stunts; a very cool moment for every franchisee across North America.

Another celebrity brand partner is Dexter Holland, lead singer for The Offspring and founder of Gringo Bandito, a line of premium hot sauces. Holland heard about our chain and delivered free hot sauce to our restaurant. After a year, our founder and Holland connected and discussed forming an official partnership. For the past three years, our companies have paired for an annual taco eating contest, bringing together our tacos with the hot sauce. This also leverages Holland's celebrity status to attract some of the world's best-known competitive eating champions, including Takeru Kobayashi. Since our first contest, both brands have grown significantly in terms of development and recognition.

Since both of our celebrity relationships developed organically, we knew they'd be promising given their genuine interest in our product and vision; however, we face the challenge of not letting them become the brand. Franchisors need to ensure anyone who represents their brand is well educated on brand objectives and trained so they can adequately engage with media and consumers about the concept or partnership.

It's important to continue leveraging outside partnerships and opportunities so the brand remains strong with or without celebrity involvement. After adequate training, having one or several celebrity spokespeople can be very rewarding for both the brand and franchisees who can leverage the association with their customers and marketing efforts.



Michael Mohammed is the CEO and chief financial officer of Chronic Tacos Enterprises.

Seek supportive partnerships that enhance corporate culture and franchisee fulfillment.

One of the best ways to create a positive, gratifying franchise system is to partner with an organization that gives back to your clientele demographic. For those in the service industry, this might mean offering free services to homeowners in poor areas; for those in education, providing free tutoring to education-deprived children would be an excellent option. In our case, it made the most sense to connect with a hunger-relief charity since the cause aligns both with our brand and the industry, as well as our socially conscience consumers.

Once you've identify the appropriate niche, do extensive research to narrow down the options and find a foundation with the same objectives in terms of overall goals and growth. It's also helpful to find one that can provide case studies outlining their offerings and previous successful partnerships for validation. Also, consider whether you'd like to partner with an organization that has regional chapters in addition to a national presence.

Locally, we've always encouraged our franchisees to incorporate charities into their promotions and special events, starting at their grand opening. This helps connect the franchisee with his customers and the causes that directly apply to the area, serving as a way to help both the cause and the franchise. It's imperative for franchisors to make their

franchisees aware that corporate is 100 percent supportive and always happy to contribute in this regard, which often means leveraging these innovative partnerships and ambassadors as clout.

When pursuing partnerships for expansion, the single most important factor for franchisors is to make sure they join forces with companies, organizations and people who are just as invested in your franchise's growth as they are in their own entities. The goals and vision must be the same to reach success and sustain a harmonious relationship.

To find the right relationships that will drive a brand forward, franchisors must remain open-minded to any and all opportunities and ideas thrown their way, no matter where they come from or how they came about. Remember: one idea can easily spark another which very well may become the difference between your concept and competitors.

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