



Tossed president chats about chain's growth, 2013 trends and working with family



Editor's note: This is the [second story in a recurring series](#) that features interviews with top-level execs in the fast casual industry. If you would like us to feature a specific exec, please make your request in an email to Cherryh Butler at cherryhb@fastcasual.com.

Focusing on green initiatives as well as offering customers a plethora of customizable menu options have been key to the success of Tossed, a make-your-own salad concept headquartered in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. At the helm of the business is Jason Chodash, who has worked alongside his brother and father for the past several years to grow the chain that opened in 1998 in NYC. There are now seven restaurants open with 68 under development throughout North America — from Boston and Boca to Los Angeles and Vancouver.

Chodash gave Fastcasual.com some insight to the brand's success.

Q: Why do you believe Tossed has been able to flourish even in these economic times?

Chodash: Our Fresh Food Fast mantra keeps guests keep coming back to us multiple times a week. They are looking for fresh, high-quality, customizable food at a great value and they know that with us, they can have that in a matter of minutes. They can also order online and have it ready for them when they walk in the door. Another reason this concept has flourished is our dedication to the ever-growing demand for "green" elements, which we have addressed in our newest locations. The bowls are made of three recycled plastic water bottles (by The Bottle Box), the menus are printed on 100 percent recycled paper (by New Leaf Paper), the napkins are 100 percent recycled and printed with a water-based ink. As we move forward with future locations, there will be even more green elements included in the materials and design.

Q: What is your advice to restaurant owners who aren't seeing the same type of sales growth?

Chodash: Get your guests and team members more involved. Every year we do a National Salad contest. It's a great way to reach out to our guests and hear their favorite salad recipes. In fact, we have a winner from two years ago whose salad is on the menu nationwide and has become a popular menu item. We also love to incorporate our franchisees and company team members. They have all helped us come up with different recipes, dressings and flavor combinations. We want to hear from the Tossed team members out there on the front lines with customers every day.

Q: What has been the biggest challenge you faced as president of Tossed?

Chodash: The biggest challenge in this industry is the fluctuating commodity costs. Commodity costs rise and fall, but you cannot raise prices whenever your underlying costs increase.

Q: What's in the pipeline for Tossed? What's the growth plan?

Chodash: We are franchise driven, and Tossed has 68 units in development. Our growth plans for next year include major cities across the country. We are currently in discussions with a number of large groups both domestically and internationally about opportunities and expansion. We are very excited about our impending opening of a new location in the Financial District of Boston at the beginning of 2013. It will feature a lot of new design elements, both "green" and otherwise, to update the look and feel of the concept.

Q. What is your position on technology? For example, is Tossed a quick adopter of things like social media, mobile marketing and digital signs, or do you have a wait-and-see approach?

Chodash: Sometimes it's best to see how things shake out and then adopt those components that work best for the brand. We are expanding and active in social media outlets, already, and continue to increase our presence there as consumers become more entrenched in those networks. Our social media platform is a great way to communicate with guests; we like to target our fans with exclusive information before the general public.

Q: What do you think will be the biggest trend for fast casuals in 2013?

Chodash: The continuation of customization and the use of fresh products. We predict a continuation of the trends of more health-conscious eating, customizable and fast snack options.

Q: Do you think working with your family is an advantage when it comes to running the business?

Chodash: Yes, because they will voice their true opinions about everything and provide honest feedback. Sometimes employees will tell you what they think you want to hear or "play it safe," but we are in no danger of doing that around our office. We tell it like it is and feel that breeds the most creative, competitive ideas for our brand.