



Deanna Dent, Sun Sentinel

Tossed Vice President of Operations Lou Palermo, left, CFO Eric J. Clark and President Eric Schmitt spent a year improving their franchise.

SIMPLIFY, SURVIVE

Fort Lauderdale salad and sandwich franchise takes year to perfect restaurants

By **Cindy Kent**
STAFF WRITER

Rather than open new locations in this tough economy, one franchise company took the year off — sort of.

Tossed Franchise Corp., a salad and sandwich restaurant franchise, undertook a year-long make-over, lead by Eric Clark, its chief executive officer in its Fort Lauderdale headquarters.

Clark, who joined the firm more than a year ago, has worked for other franchise eateries: Cheesecake Factory and most recently Stir Crazy.

"We knew 2009 would be a difficult economic year for us," said Clark. "This was the time to re-evaluate and re-engineer the company for growth."

The company wants to expand beyond its nine locations around the country, through franchising rather than investing in corporate-owned locations. But to make the opportunity attractive to potential franchisees, the company knew it had to restructure its franchise pricing; create a template for sustainable affordable operations; and tap into profitable locations.

That included creating a new menu, a new logo and a smaller restaurant footprint. Inside, the eateries are redesigned with more efficiencies, colors, lighting and signage.

At 1,500 square feet, a Tossed restaurant will fit snugly in a downtown space and cater to the company's target market: the busy office employee. And "a smaller footprint means fewer steps are needed to perform a task," said Clark.

It's not about cutting corners, settling for less or trading down. It's working smarter, said Clark. "We're trading intelligence."

Brain-storming with employees and franchise owners and managers, Clark and his team visited the com-

pany's locations in New York, Boston and Arizona and at their PGA Boulevard restaurant in Palm Beach which also serves as the company's corporate training center.

Because of feedback, trial and error, the company decided to reset its own table.

It's scrapping tableside service, which will eliminate a need for employees to carry food around. Instead, workers will be refocused on the food line, providing quicker service. The company also is shelving its china. Paper products eliminate the need for a dishwasher, appliances or expensive plumbing — and the move saves on water bills.

By the time the Franchise Expo South opens for a 3-day run in January at the Miami Beach Convention Center, Clark said, his company will be ready to exhibit Tossed's new image to prospective franchisees. "It was up to us to make this a good year and step back to see what we accomplished," he said.

By focusing more on branding and marketing, Clark said franchisees can focus more on the customer. "The guest is the most important person to walk into any business," said Clark.

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Taking notes

Don't over-complicate a simple system.

Be willing to take a hard look at the company without pointing fingers. Don't be tied to what doesn't work — have the ability to move forward.

Details. Tossed Franchise Corp., Fort Lauderdale. 866-314-8677.

Resources: Purchasing a franchise is an investment. Always review contracts and evaluate the risks. For information and advice, contact the Small Business Administration: SBA.org or SCORE at SCORE.org. Network and talk with other franchisees through the newly-formed organization for franchisees: ZeeZone.org Learn about franchise businesses at Franchise.org.