

OCEAN BASKET

REELING IN THE CUSTOMERS



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By focusing on domestic and international expansion, and by aligning itself according to the changing demands of its customers, Ocean Basket remains one of South Africa's true success stories

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South Africans love their seafood, and with perfectly good reason. With businesses supplied year round by an astonishing array of seafood fresh from the waters of the Atlantic and Indian oceans, the straight-from-the-sea freshness of the country's dishes has become legendary in local and international circles.

A particularly impressive success story linked to South Africa's seafood industry is that of Ocean Basket. Established in 1995, today it boasts 160 outlets across Africa, Europe and the Middle East. What makes Ocean Basket's story all the more remarkable is the fact that not only was it able to survive the economic downturn that gripped the world during 2008 and 2009, but that it remained highly profitable.

In the time since the financial crisis, Ocean Basket has successfully opened nearly 20 new stores, while retaining its position as the best loved seafood restaurant in South Africa. Among these new stores is the company's first in Lagos, Nigeria, which is performing well beyond initial expectations, and two new stores located in Mauritius.

While Ocean Basket's business remains at its strongest in Gauteng, followed by the Western Cape, its international expansion plan is proceeding extremely well, with six stores now in Cyprus and a store in Dubai's international airport providing it with a great deal of visibility. Nevertheless, the company believes there are still a great number of growth opportunities in South Africa. This means it is in the enviable position of being able to target expansion both at home and abroad.

In recent years, competition has grown like



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wild fire, with over 600 take away fish and chip outlets in South Africa targeting the lower end of the market. One of the reasons Ocean Basket has been able to sustain this challenge is that its value positioning and shared family values have positioned it perfectly to meet changing social-economic conditions head on.

What does give Ocean Basket even greater encouragement is the fact that customer surveys have indicated a 20 percent rise in seafood being identified as a first choice option, ahead of other products such as chicken or beef. This has resulted in the company capturing a broader target audience, a trend that is helping make Ocean Basket a destination brand in the eyes of its customers.

What Ocean Basket has noticed more and more from these customers is that they are becoming increasingly demanding from a service perspective. These customers work hard for their money and when they visit a restaurant they demand quality, excellent service and, above all else, value, and it is the job of Ocean Basket to align itself closely to these needs.

This loyalty is further highlighted by the vast list of customer accolades that the company

has accumulated over the years. For example, Ocean Basket has, for 12 consecutive years, been named the Best Seafood Restaurant in Johannesburg.

In addition to its commitment to careful



price balancing, Ocean Basket's success has been a result of a combination of its passion, perseverance and its ability to adapt. There is however, one further ingredient that it views as being key to its continued prosperity and that is simplicity. Increasingly the company is seeing that all of its competitors are giving in to adding another protein option to their menus with even international seafood brands adding chicken products to their offering. By

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focusing on seafood, which brought it to the fore in the first place, Ocean Basket has created a consistent and trusted customer experience that is virtually unrivalled.

By maintaining strong supplier relationships the company ensures it is able to consistently source quality products at the best possible prices. Meanwhile, its distribution business enables it to deliver products to its stores on

time and frequently so as to ensure that its customers receive only the freshest seafood. From an internal perspective, each of the company’s founders remains deeply involved in the business and continues to advocate a flat business structure where nobody within the company possesses a title.

Notwithstanding the explosive rate of expansion that Ocean Basket has experienced

in recent times, the company’s strategy does not revolve around growth for its own sake. Growth has occurred because its franchise model is extremely simple and easy to run, both in respect of the nature of the business and its operations. Its strategy is one of sustainable growth, maintaining the brand by focusing on franchising and distribution.

By continually reviewing its entire franchising model and philosophy, Ocean Basket has recognised the need for it to focus increasingly on reducing costs and building stronger partnerships with its key dependencies. Similarly it is aware that it needs to dedicate greater efforts towards creating more centralised and pre-packaged

offerings to its stores so that less labour intensive work is required to take place.

Ocean Basket’s success has been built upon a combination of its passion, the emphasis it places on its customers and its determination to provide every franchisee and licensee with a great business. At the same time, the investments the company makes towards its own people and its drive to deliver the best products and experiences at all times singles Ocean Basket out as being a real pioneer and leader in its field. **BE**

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