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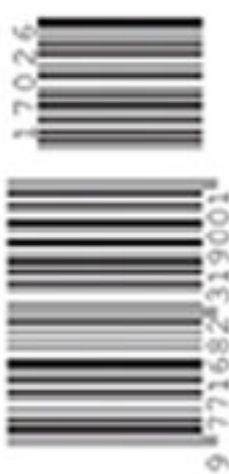


WIESENHOF
passionate about coffee

KOBUS WIESE,
Wiesenhof Coffee/Dulce Café franchisor,
SHARES HIS RECIPE FOR
COFFEE SHOP SUCCESS

How to
UP YOUR ENERGY

(even when you feel like it the least)





The toughest game of all



Wiese says he's also learnt the value of keeping good franchisees in the group and making it worth their while to open second, third and subsequent stores. "You get very good operators who only have the capacity to run one store, and that's fine, but I also believe in operating a bit like the mafia, you know, keeping it in the family."

Thinking of entering the food industry? "You've got to be a born foodie, love working with people, and really be prepared to roll up your sleeves and do what it takes," says Wiesenhof Coffee/Dulcé Café franchisor Kobus Wiese. This is one of the toughest trades in the world, but the rewards can be great, says the Springbok star turned restaurateur and businessman.

It's important that would-be franchisees go in with their eyes wide open – and attracting people who fit the bill has helped Wiese grow his two brands, Wiesenhof Coffee, a chain of gourmet coffee shops featuring coffee supplied by the company's own roastery based in Heidelberg, and Dulcé Cafés, a network first opened in 1984 and taken over by Wiese in 2013, to a combined 85-store network across South Africa and Namibia. And, there is with further expansion on the cards.

BACKING WINNERS

"It's all about the jockey – no horse can win the Durban July without a great jockey on its back, and the same goes for franchise success without a committed operator," says Wiese. "I've learnt over the years that you have to pick the right people – someone who will be personally involved in every detail of running their business."

The Wiesenhof Coffee/Dulcé Café head office team gives franchisees all the tools they need to run their businesses, and aims to keep them easy-to-use and free of loopholes. This applies to everything from the operating manual and open-close procedures through to point-of-sale materials. "The aim is to produce collateral that, if stuck to, will enable a very good chance of success. In this industry you can't take shortcuts; that's when things like shrinkage and food wastage and other issues creep in. You've got to be diligent and stick to stock takes and portioning control and your costings must be right – it may not be fun to go into the fridge and count, but it's critical," explains Wiese.

Providing clear guidelines and operational support to franchisees is an ongoing process, Wiese adds, and the head office team is always open to new ways of doing things and identifying areas that need tweaking. "I don't know any food brand or foodie who is completely learned and knows everything; and on top of that everything keeps changing."

AN EASIER ROUTE IN

It's this volatile and intense environment, along with the support on offer by the franchisor that makes franchising an easier

Wiesenhof Coffee and Dulcé Café have notched up more than 20 years in business, built a network of 85 stores, and carved out a niche in the competitive coffee shop arena. Here KOBUS WIESE shares a little of what it takes to get started in a sector that certainly isn't for sissies...



Some of the Wiesenhof Coffee/Dulce Cafe head office team

option than going it alone. "I believe there are more pros than cons when joining an established franchise brand because you're getting involved with people who are going to set it up for you, and who have the necessary expertise and track record, particularly if you have no formal training or previous advantage," says Wiese. "You get all the benefits of the mistakes having been made already. Customers also like recognised brands as they know what they're getting."

Wiese says that while it's by no means impossible to start out alone in the food industry, it's just much more difficult and the risks are far greater. "What's more, very few people have a couple of million Rand lying around, they may have some cash available but most would go to the bank for a loan. And the banks are much more open to lending to established franchise brands."

Cost is simply not an issue that can be minimised when it comes to setting up a restaurant or food outlet. "It's become so expensive and landlords in shopping centres are charging exorbitant rental amounts," says Wiese. "It's not that the operators are bad, but if you have to pay R70 000 a month in rent for a coffee shop you have to make an astronomical amount in order to earn a profit."

It was this reality that made Wiese and his team think outside the box and target the so-called "captive markets" – hospitals, office blocks, Makro stores and golf clubs. "It's a fair deal as the landlord, franchisee and franchisor all get their share, it's worth their while and not a one-way street," says Wiese. "It wasn't rocket science; we knew we had to look at ways of finding new sites. While initially people were sceptical, we now have competition in this market as others have seen that it's a good way to go, but we have built up good relationships with the big corporate groups over the years."

A FLEXIBLE FORMAT

Wiese is convinced that the coffee shop/restaurant industry is the trade of the future, given that the stores are affordable and provide an environment for anyone to go to any day of the week. "If you look into our coffee shops you'll find business men and women meeting, oupa and ouma enjoying a cuppa, and a family enjoying a morning out. The target market is just so much wider than more specialised eateries," says Wiese. "If you're a genuine steakhouse or sushi bar or pizzeria, you must make sure that you are very good at what you do – I wouldn't order a steak at a pizzeria or a pizza at a steakhouse, as you expect expertise in a particular niche. In our trade, it's far more flexible and diverse."

Wiese says that he's learnt all his mistakes on the job and he's still learning. "You either sink or swim and you certainly learn very quickly from mistakes – it's probably not the ideal way but certainly the best way." Wiese and his wife Belinda entered the sector when they invested in "a worn-down coffee shop" on Gauteng's East Rand in 1994, having had no previous food industry experience but plenty of passion and determination. In fact, Wiese attributes his own personal success to employing the four D's he lives by – determination, discipline, dedication and desire; that it's not always about winning all the time, but rather about being determined to get up again when you fall and not letting fear hold you back.

"You have to be open to new ideas and suggestions all the time. If you think you know everything and you stick to your guns, believe me you will make a big mistake because the industry is ever-changing. The demands of customers are changing – and while the basics of good customer service, good food, and ambience stay the same – you must be willing to listen and to look and to learn new things."

As to what keeps Wiese going in the strenuous game of restaurantering? "There's nothing better than a happy customer. If you get that right, they'll spread the word about your business for you. I can honestly say I love every second of the game."

For franchise enquiries or to contact the coffee roastery call 016 340 8300.

