



>> CEO Todd Parent says he wants the high-quality, fun and upbeat aspects of Extreme Pizza to ensure the brand is "above and beyond what anyone would expect from a pizza place."

Going to Extremes

Todd Parent's high expectations for service and quality help ensure Extreme Pizza's continuous growth through franchising. **By Staci Davidson**

If there was a to-do list of actions that would ensure one's success in the business world, its items probably would include a curious nature, ongoing drive and perseverance, a strong desire to learn, and a willingness to develop experience from diverse sources. If such a list existed, Todd Parent would be able to check off most of the items.

During summer jobs in high school, the now CEO and president of Extreme Pizza began thinking about business models that were unique, successful and fun.

While studying abroad in Paris during college, he noticed an abundance of crepe stands that produced high-quality goods that also were affordable. Upon graduation, he began working on Wall Street and learned about finance and money management, but also learned a lot from the experiences of his entrepreneur clients.

He kept all of this information, and after about four years on Wall Street and ongoing networking, he met a couple who owned a few restaurants in New Jersey. They asked him to run their business, but stressed he should start at the bottom to learn as

much as possible.

"I hated the restaurant industry in high school and had no interest in it, but I saw this as a good opportunity," Parent says. "I accepted the job and did a lot of menial work at the start, but I also learned the importance of knowing all aspects of the business."

He spent a few years there and eventually went on to Denver and then San Francisco, working at a number of restaurants along the way. In San Francisco, he began working for Noah's Bagels, which wanted his help in opening new locations throughout California. Parent, however, had other ideas.

"I told Noah's I wanted to eventually go out on my own," he says. "They told me to start pursuing that goal because I was still young, and that is when I creat-

ed the strategic plan for Extreme Pizza."

Starting Small

In 1994, Parent opened Extreme Pizza's first location. The operation focused on fresh ingredients, store-made crust and unique combinations of toppings, such as the Paia Pie with mandarin oranges, Canadian bacon, pineapples, mozzarella and cheddar, or the California Cactus with black beans, ground beef, olives, onions, cilantro and cheddar. The operation started out small, but Parent continued to learn key lessons in business success — listen to your customers and learn from your mistakes.

"We added an oven, and I reached out to some Wall Street contacts who were working in Silicon Valley," he continues. "Their companies began ordering our pizzas for their gatherings."

One of the first such orders involved 500 pizzas for a group of investment bankers. "We really botched that job," Parent recalls.

"We didn't have the baking or delivery capacity to make that order, and we didn't even figure out a parking strategy for delivering that many pizzas. After that, I really dug in deep to figure out how to handle that kind of business and not make a mistake like that again."

Going International

As time went on, Parent got many requests to bring Extreme Pizza to other towns and states. He decided to franchise the concept and spent nearly two years developing a franchise plan. The company's first franchise opened in 2001 in Fresno, Calif.

"That store is still doing well," Parent says. "It allowed us to take a different path for our growth. We walked slowly and cautiously for many years and opened about five franchises in the next five years. Our goal was for each fran-

chise to be more successful than the last."

In 2006, Extreme Pizza refined its franchise business model and now plans to open about 10 franchises a year for the next five years. In 2008, the company opened its first international location in Ireland and will open its second location there by the end of 2009. Parent says there also is a lot of interest in southeast Asia, as well as throughout the United States.

"We can keep growing because we have a great team — a lot of long-term team members, which make for a fantastic support system," he says. "Having long-term team members who know the product and all aspects of the business leads to consistency of product and a high level of customer service, which keeps our customers coming back."

Continued Evolution

Extreme Pizza strives to provide "high-quality, fun and upbeat service," Parent says. "We want to be above and beyond what anyone would expect from a pizza place or delivery service, and we want every order to be as good as it can be."

To this end, the company focuses on "training, training and retraining," Parent notes. It strives to "wow customers every time," so Extreme Pizza will call clients periodically to get their feedback.

"About 99 percent of the time, things are OK," he says. "But if there was a problem, we do our best to show we care about our quality of service and a customer's overall experience."

A focus on quality also drives continuous improvement in every part of the Extreme Pizza operation. Parent describes his brand as a gourmet, specialty retailer, and explains he always wanted it to be "innovative, hip and current." Its menu boasts pizzas with unique topping combinations and quirky names, and new additions are always being made to its signature line.

"Our goal is to ensure our products are high-quality, innovative and relevant to customers," Parent says.

"We strive to always create craveable pizza and provide high-quality, fun and upbeat service," he adds. "We want to be above and beyond what anyone would expect from a pizza place or pizza delivery service."

Always Learning

Parent understands technology also plays a role in growing the business. Extreme Pizza has been offering online ordering for about 10 years, putting it far ahead of the rest of the food industry in that regard. The company uses its online ordering and point-of-sale systems to track all of its data and business metrics, which then flow into its book-keeping software.

"This technology has made our people decision makers instead of data-inputters," Parent says.

Improvements to Extreme Pizza's

business model have focused on making the concept greener. In fact, one of its locations in Berkeley, Calif., is one of the first green restaurants in Alameda County, Calif.

"We are using packaging, equipment and lighting that helps us reduce our carbon footprint," Parent explains. "The construction process on this new store is very sustainable, and we will continue to evolve in every part of our business. We have been buying remanufactured plastics, and some of our locations use snowboards for tables, and chairs and picnic tables have been made from skis."

As Extreme Pizza continues to grow, innovation will remain a part of the business. Parent notes that having an open mind and an interest in unique opportunities are two other actions that are key to a successful business.

"Every day is a learning experience — we always can learn something that will enhance the brand or improve the customer experience," he says. "If we are not learning, we're doing something wrong. We've learned a lot from our growth and made a lot of mistakes, but we will continue to be methodical. Learning from our experiences helps every store opening get easier." **FD**



>> Extreme Pizza says it strives to "always create craveable pizza." Its Mr. Pestato Head Pizza, pictured above, is topped with homemade pesto sauce, new potatoes, red onions, feta cheese, fresh basil, oregano and mozzarella.

company profile

Extreme Pizza
www.extremepizza.com
2008 sales: \$208 million
Headquarters: San Francisco
Employees: Approx. 1,000
Specialty: Gourmet pizza
Todd Parent, CEO and president: "[Our first franchise] is still doing well. We walked slowly and cautiously for many years."