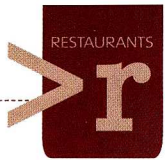


FRESH IDEAS FOR INDUSTRY LEADERS

food & drink

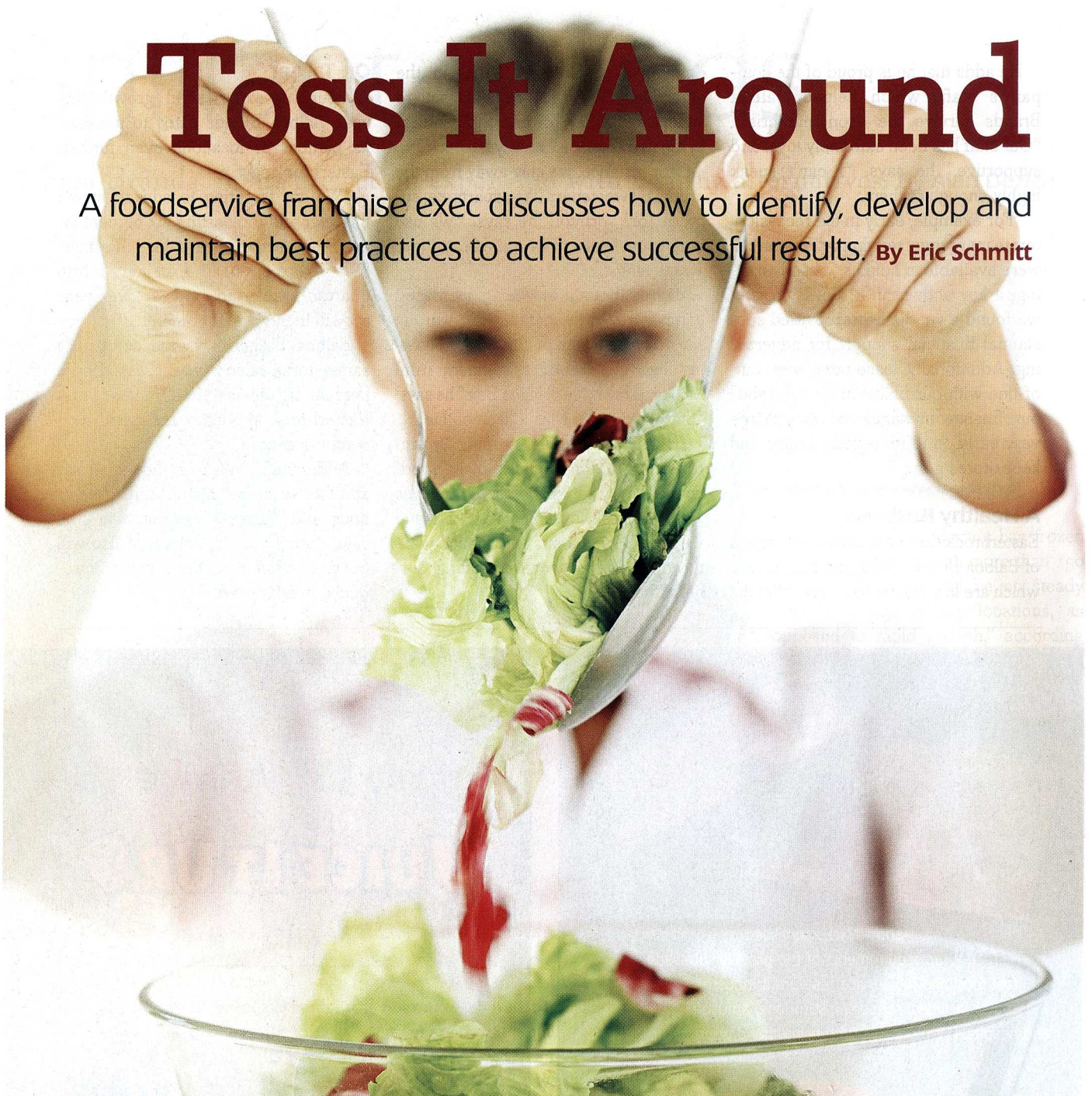
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best practices

Toss It Around

A foodservice franchise exec discusses how to identify, develop and maintain best practices to achieve successful results. **By Eric Schmitt**



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Maximizing the efficiency and profitability of any foodservice establishment, from a single restaurant to a chain of a thousand restaurants, means following best practices. But how do you identify such practices? What's more, how do you develop best practices if they don't already exist?

As with most management objectives, there is no single path to best practices. But that doesn't mean they can't be pursued deliberately. In fact, there are a number of ways to uncover solutions for many of your toughest business and operational challenges just by being aware of what's going on in your organization every day.

Weaknesses into Strengths

To cite classic SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, understanding your company's weaknesses and threats is just as important as identifying its strengths and opportunities. Just as it's essential to know what your business excels at and what your brand represents, it's also important to look at points of vulnerability. Look at where you're exposed, and you're likely to generate ideas that can transform your company.

In the restaurant industry, food safety is perhaps the most sensitive issue we face. It's important to not only follow government and industry guidelines, but also look at gaps in safety procedures that can reduce liability risk while improving your business position. Where are the opportunities to minimize food waste? Increase product quality? And perhaps strengthen your competitive advantage in the process?

At Tossed, 80 to 90 percent of our menu is made from fresh produce. Commercial handling standards for fruits and vegetables call for thorough washing before serving. But with our core product in play, we decided to investigate ways to exceed safety minimums. Our solution, after extensive research, was to invest in a specialized antimicrobial wash product, delivered via a closed dispensing system, which

completely eliminates pesticides without leaving a residue and without imparting any taste or odor of its own. This best practice helps us improve the taste and safety of our signature ingredients while cutting down on shrinkage.

Outside the Ivory Tower

One of the most successful promotions we've developed over the past several years is our National Salad Contest. Each spring, we accept recipe ideas from our customers, exploiting Tossed's "build your own" salad format. The winning entry is featured at Tossed locations nationwide throughout the month of July, one of our biggest sales months. To this day, some past winners are still in our POS systems, bearing witness to their continued ability to attract diners.

Besides involving hundreds of our loyal patrons and generating great customer relations, the National Salad Contest helps us listen better at the store level. Good communication between corporate headquarters and those in the field – employees and customers alike – is key to running a successful business. This is especially true in the restaurant industry, where local managers and employees often know more about where things are headed than executives locked away in an office high-rise halfway across the country.

In a world where consumers dictate the trends within the industry, your employees' comments and ideas can help you make positive adjustments to better serve your customer and streamline your operations. Furthermore, aggressively drawing out employee feedback can generate constructive change where it's needed, creating a more prosperous environment where employees can thrive and customers are better served.

Go Beyond 'Keeping Up'

In the restaurant business, following the lead of other stores and chains is often not enough. Leading the way with innovative marketing campaigns, taking the initiative to get to know your competition and guiding trends is the optimal way to maximize your success. Do better than "keep up." Be a leader.

Ten years ago, Tossed became the first salad concept to introduce online ordering. Unlike traditional online systems where orders pop up on a screen and are keystroked into the POS system by an employee, Tossed partnered with an online ordering company to create an integrated solution that funneled customer orders automatically to the make line. The practice set us apart and helped establish our reputation as a trailblazer in high-touch customer service.

Where can you develop a technique or discipline that breaks new ground? Best practices aren't always about eliminating errors or increasing profit. Building customer loyalty, reducing liability risk, simplifying workflows, improving franchise relations and sharpening asset management are all areas where innovation can lead to better overall business. Be open to breaking the mold and trying new things in order to stay ahead.

If there's anything to be learned about generating and instituting best practices, it's that great results come from a great mindset. Train yourself always to look for opportunities to turn weaknesses into strengths, to listen to people at every level and to create, as well as follow, good ideas. The pursuit of best practices should be pervasive and continual, but once it becomes a part of your organizational culture, it has the power to turn an average restaurant business into a category leader. **FD**

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