

The Rise of Fresh Dough

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 CEO and founder of Extreme Pizza, Extreme Pizza
 San Francisco - CA US

Tell us what you do (or what your team or organization does) and the specific challenge you faced.

Nine years ago, I started Extreme Pizza with the idea to bring a healthier and more gourmet alternative to typical American "fast food." I wanted this company to distinguish itself from the high-volume, mass market pizza chains by offering a higher quality, gourmet product. After winning many awards and accolades throughout the Bay Area, my attention turned to bringing this concept into more markets across the country. As a result, the idea of franchising was sparked. My challenge was to make this concept a success in new markets, many of them very different than the Bay Area. I needed the entire Extreme Team to hone their skills and develop comprehensive manuals and a complete training system so the franchisees could learn how to successfully operate their stores in remote locations. Secondly, I needed to find national vendors who would be able to supply all the Extreme Pizzas across the country with produce and materials while I maintained a strict eye on cost-of-goods. Lastly, I needed franchise operators to be able to supply their own customers' requests on demand and create a fool-proof system to deal with customer service, quality and consistency – quite an enormous goal! All this was necessary to create a viable, new pizza alternative in the national market.

What was your moment of truth?

In December 2001, the first Extreme Pizza franchise store opened up in Fresno, California with sales soaring to over \$3000/day. Now, with a total of 9 franchise locations operating in California, Colorado and Arizona, I'm constantly improving the systems to help these operators successfully manage and run an Extreme Pizza franchise. We recently signed a 17 store deal in the Los Angeles market so I'm looking forward to a new round of challenges, innovation and major growth. With the help of the Extreme Team, I was able to turn a little mom & pop pizza restaurant into a multi-unit corporation with stores opening throughout the United States. Because every single employee at Extreme Pizza has a hands-on approach, we have been able to control inventory and maintain profits in this difficult economy. Extreme Pizza continues to grow exponentially every year and maintain steady profits - quite a success story for this small pizza restaurant.

What were the results?

I started Extreme Pizza in 1994 to bring high-quality pizza to San Francisco. Last year, it did \$4,943,357 in sales by creating a healthy alternative to the typical fast food chains. Extreme Pizza now has 13 stores and plans on doubling that number this year. Extreme Pizza has grown over 1877% during the last six years. Systemwide revenues are projected to be \$6,500,000 this year up from \$325,000 in 1997. I have always listened to the root of Extreme Pizza's success – our customers – to rework concepts to achieve ongoing financial and operational success in a very competitive marketplace. It has been exciting to develop new pizza combinations from customer requests and also anticipate new food trends and incorporate them into our menu. I have successfully done this while maintaining an affordable cost-of-goods for the company. And, to top it all off, Extreme Pizza continues to win awards and be a leader in the pizza industry. Extreme Pizza has been known for its innovative pizza combinations using only the finest ingredients and its philosophy: extreme. not mainstream. The company stands behind its motto that Life Is Too Short For Mediocrity and ensures extreme delivery, extreme customer service and extreme dining. I am proud to bring wholesome, fresh dough into new markets and keep Extreme Pizza on the "rise."

What's your parting tip?

Keep aspirations high and develop ways to make them come true.

Comments that readers have made about this submission:

The So. Cal stores rock!!! I just attended the Irvine grand opening and the pizza was incredible.
 Meghan - Newport Beach, CA

Great Pizza.
 Jim - San Francisco

Best Pizza in the work!
 Robb Nesmith - San Francisco, CA

The Point Loma location has great, high quality delivery service!!!! Good job keeping quality high in SoCal.
 George - San Diego CA

I always get my Extreme fill when visiting CA. Glad to see they are expanding to other regions!!
 Bill - Westport, CT

Awesome product, terrific service. Moved from SF to NYC and I miss it dearly. I can't wait for them to expand east!
 David Hagen - New York, New York

Friends in the Bay Area introduced me to Extreme Pizza on visits I've made out there. We need it on the east coast, and soon please!
 Michael - Monmouth County, New Jersey

I recently ate at a store in Colorado Springs and it was as good as the original store on Union in SF. Keep up the good work!
 David - Denver, CO

pestatoe head is the best pizza on the planet
 pat walravens - san francisco, ca, usa

I am a pizza lover and Extreme is by far my favorite pizza.
 Molly - San Francisco, Ca

Best Pizza in the Bay Area!! Keep up the good work.
 Valerie - Fairfield CA

My favorite restaurant in SF - Extreme on Union Street.
 Dan Sanker - Los Angeles, CA

When are the Los Angeles stores coming? Can't wait. Love the pizza.
 Ned Sully - Los Angeles, CA

If you are quick to adapt to changes that are needed to accelerate growth then you are a Fast Company. Bravo. Great story.
 DK Doyle - San Francisco, CA

I'VE BEEN GOING TO THE BERKELEY CA, LOCATION FOR A YEAR NOW AND I WOULD'NT GO ANYWHERE ELSE I LOVE THE RAGIN'ROOSTER PIZZA LOTS OF BBQ SAUCE AND TASTY CHICKEN THANK YOU EXTREME PIZZA!!!!!!
 FRANK LEVY - BERKELEY CA, USA

I tried this pizza while in San Francisco and felt it was the best I had ever had. While in Colorado Springs it tasted even better. I love the extreme sport atmosphere and the food lives up to the name...extremely good!!!
 Kevin Vandivier - Austin, Texas USA

A very interesting story of step-by-step growth in this demanding economy. It's relieving to read a history of a company that continues to be true to its core while successfully expanding in this marketplace. I've never had this pizza but am looking forward to it in the near future. I also found their website has some valuable information that adds to this story.
 Stephanie - Rhinebeck, NY

An Extreme pizza was delivered to my house in a timely manner. The next day a \$5 coupon was in my mailbox with a note saying they were sorry the delivery took so long. Then just recently I received an email reminder informing me my coupon was about to expire. The pizza is awesome, and the customer service is even better! ¹
 Jeff Schneckenberger - San Francisco, Ca.

Extreme is off the hook! No trip to SF is complete without a stop at Extreme. When can I see you in the DC area?
 Joanne - Fairfax County, VA

GREAT ARTICLES AND COMMENTARIES. WHEN DOES THE CHAIN HIT THE POCONOS, IN PA?
 MIKE STOUT - STROUDSBURG, PA 18360

Not only is the food at Extreme Pizza some of the freshest and most robustly flavored of any pizza-oriented restaurant (believe me, I'm VERY critical in such matters), but all of the employees, from the counter clerks, the drivers, all the way up to the CEO seem to have a personal commitment to the success of the company. It is a very familial atmosphere, where meeting the customers' needs seems to be the over-riding priority. I wish Extreme Pizza much success, as they truly deserve it!
 Raymond E. André III - San Jose, CA., USA

I love that Extreme Pizza has taken a traditional product and made it interesting with creative toppings. Their stores have a great vibe.
 Allie - San Francisco, CA

Todd Parent and his Extreme Team are definitely the epitome of a Fast Company. Great product, great service. It's a simple philosophy, but in this day and age, it seems a hard one to come by. Kudos for keeping your eye on the pie in the sky...and I can't wait for Denver to open so I can get some Piece in the Middle East!
 Amy - Denver, CO

Extreme Pizza is one of my first stops when I travel to San Francisco. When can I look forward to an Extreme Pizza a little closer to home??
 Grace - Rumson, New Jersey

Dude, I can't get enough of this rodkin' pie!
 Amy - SF, CA

Best service and pizza in SF. Extreme Pizza deserves the success.
 Brian Dreyer - Sausalito, CA, USA

I've heard about the pizza from friends who have been out to CA. Planning on make it one of must try places when I head out there next month.
 Adrian Stevens - Howell, NJ USA

I've been an extreme lover since 1994. It's the freshest and most unique tasting za on the market!
 Bryan Everett - San Carlos, CA USA

It takes innovation and drive to succeed in a market as saturated as the pizza market. Extreme has both to spare. I have eaten many Extreme pies, and had the pleasure of working with several members of the team. Extreme Pizza exemplifies how to grow a business the right way. Bring on Pizza Hut!
 Ryan Cox - San Francisco, CA, USA

One of the best places to eat pizza in the SF area. When will they bring it to the midwest?
 Lynette - Omaha, NE USA