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CALENDAR

« Jan. 2008 »

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	1	2

- 1/7/2008 - Goal Setting Workshops
- 1/9/2008 - Public Hearing on the Expanded Transfer of Development Rights Program

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Boulder, CO
 39° F
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BCBR Poll

Should Twenty Ninth Street allow Whole Foods to sublease its Wild Oats space to a

BCBR ARTICLE

MARKETPLACE

Tough look at future energized Fresh Foods

By Monique Cole

December 21, 2007 --

BOULDER - After five years of rapid growth Phil's Fresh Foods has paused to catch its breath.

The Boulder-based producer of burritos and other natural foods saw sales grow from \$70,000 in 2001 to \$1.4 million five years later. In the fall of 2006 at the Naturally Boulder event, owner Phil Anson won the pitch slam contest and was awarded free consulting services from the Boulder Innovation Center, or BIC.

"At that point I felt pretty overwhelmed by the business," Anson said. "I had grabbed every opportunity, but I didn't have a cohesive business plan."

Anson, who has a degree in communications and experience as a photojournalist and sous-chef, had gone from selling burritos to rock climbers out of a cooler in Eldorado Canyon to producing a diverse line of natural food products from a 4,000-square-foot facility in east Boulder.

Doug Collier, director of BIC until May 2007, spent hours with Anson refining his branding strategy and defining operating systems.

"We worked backward to look at what we wanted to be and where we wanted to position our product," Anson said. "It was a long but really great process of intellectualization. We had vicious debates about how we should proceed."

Anson created standard operating procedures for all aspects of his business, from production to distribution and sales. "It was a combination of being explicit with the verbiage and implementing it from the paperwork standpoint - using Excel spreadsheets and checklists. This makes sure nothing falls through the cracks."

Another result of the consulting was a restructuring of staff. Anson created team and line leaders, a bookkeeper and a route sales manager. In the past Anson had fulfilled these duties personally. "I'm delegating now - I wasn't before."

He also enlisted the help of industry experts by forming a board of advisers. Stuart Zimmerman, who sold his flour distribution company nine years ago, is now an investor, board member and chief financial officer. Another adviser is Blake Waltrip, a strategic marketing consultant with Growth Ventures.

"From the branding perspective there was a lot of work done on understanding (customer needs)," Waltrip said. "There appeared to be a real opening around the premium grab-and-go products."

sporting goods store?

- Yes, Whole Foods should have some control on what goes into the space.
- No, Twenty Ninth Street should have the final say in what goes into that property.
- I need more information.

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"We looked at the whole competitive landscape of burritos to see where we could create differentiation and consumer appeal."

Anson also did some informal consumer research through focus groups and consumer interviews.

While most basic burritos include "extruded" ingredients, Phil's Fresh Burritos have premium gourmet ingredients such as big chunks of meat and roasted potatoes. "We believe this is really appealing to consumers who are more on the foodie side but who are also looking for convenient solutions," Waltrip said.

The burrito packaging was reworked to link the line of products while differentiating the flavors. Descriptions were rewritten to whet the appetite, and certain selling attributes were called out such as "hand made" and "real ingredients."

In addition to its own branded burritos, the company produces a line of spreads under the Dionysus Heavenly Greek Food brand. It also co-packs products for other brands, including organic baby food, raw dough, Baked in Boulder pizzas and the Wild Oats brand burritos.

"We looked at what products should stay and go," Anson said. "They are all staying for the time being, but we're focusing the future around the burritos."

He said the burritos produced for the Wild Oats brand counts as 15 percent of his business. Following the purchase of Wild Oats by Whole Foods last summer he has struggled to rebuild sales within the regional structure of Whole Foods.

Anson is excited by the growth of natural foods in mainstream grocery stores. The company is currently in the process of launching a new 8-ounce frozen burrito with a price point of \$2.99. "We're going to have eight feet of shelf space in 30 King Soopers stores to start," Anson said. Several Whole Foods regions are also interested in carrying the new product. "That product is our future."

The changes brought about by consulting with Boulder Innovation Center were costly - both in terms of money and energy - without immediate returns. "We haven't seen an increase in profitability." However, Anson sees the value in that investment. "We're in a much more comfortable position to succeed in the future. Doug helped me more with my business than any other single individual."

Through implementing systems and delegating responsibilities Anson has given himself some needed breathing room. He recently took his first vacation in years.

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TOUGH LOOK AT FUTURE ENERGIZED FRESH FOODS

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