

## Newk's New Look

Southern mainstay Newk's Eatery unveils a new design and plans for expansion.

Katie Sloan

Since its inception in 2004, Newk's has evolved through a variety of iterations and design concepts. With the development of the company's new Generation Two design, Newk's Eatery is seeking to further define its brand and expand its presence in its predominant market foothold: the south.

"We've gone through an evolution over the years," says Chris Cheek, chief development officer at Newk's Eatery. "We were Newk's with the multi-colored letters, and then Newk's Express Café. With our Generation Two design, we really want to hone in on Newk's Eatery as the defining element of the brand."

The new design features an updated, more neutral color scheme working off of the colors found in Newk's ingredients, subway tile, pendant lighting, upgraded floors and plush upholstery. "We did a lot of research with customers and consultants to figure out the next step in our evolution," says Cheek. "We softened up the colors so that it looked less Mardi Gras, while still keeping our signature red. We reduced the amount of colorful artwork and replaced it with limited elements on the wall. The interior of our restaurants had been basically the same since 2004, and it was time to upgrade."

The new design also features upgrades to the restaurant's signature condiment table, including a reduction of storage for better appearances, and the use of localized artwork in each location. Each aspect of the new design was implemented in the hopes of striking a fresh, on-trend tone with new and existing markets and demographics, while also improving the overall experience of the customer.

With the introduction of this new design into several southern markets, Newk's is also seeking to further expand its national footprint. "We currently have over 100 restaurants open, four of which



Newk's Eatery is viable in a variety of spaces, from freestanding locations to in-line, end-cap space.

are reflective of the new generation prototype," says Cheek. "We're entering a lot of new markets, and we try to enter those markets with a billboard type of location. No matter how good a shopping center may be, we wouldn't want to open by being tucked away somewhere that people can't see us."

The typical Newk's restaurant ranges from 3,800 to 4,500 square feet, and can be found in a combination of sites from freestanding to in-line end cap. Newk's also does not discriminate against a second-generation space, as long as the properties are billboard sites in great locations.

Cheek also notes that the concept does well in both small markets and large, urban markets. "One of the interesting things about the brand is that it does well in small markets," says Cheek. "You've got a slightly different demographic there that is lower to medium income. They use us more as a dinner concept. Newk's also does well in Midtown Atlanta, where the restaurant is frequented more by your typical fast casual guest."

The success of Newk's locations in a variety of markets is largely attributable to the company's emphasis on hospitality and scratch-made, culinary driven food.



Newk's Generation Two design concept features softened colors, upgraded flooring, subway tiles, pendant lighting, plush upholstery and localized artwork.

"People often ask me, 'what's your elevator pitch?' and it really comes down to the fact that it's a hospitality-driven concept where we bring your food to you and bus your table – so it functions almost like you're a guest in someone's home – and our reliance on fresh food from scratch," says Cheek.

One of the restaurant's main components is an open kitchen, providing customers with a glimpse of their food being freshly created. "When we design our restaurants, the very first thing we plan relative to the entrance is where the open kitchen is going to be," says Cheek. "That's our stage."

With lunch and dinner offerings ranging from salads, sandwiches and soups to pizzas and sushi-grade Ahi tuna steak, the restaurant has offerings on the menu to meet every appetite. "We make all of our salad dressings from scratch, grill all of our proteins in-house and slice all of our meats and cheeses," says Cheek. "There are no deep fryers, heat lamps or microwaves – it's all authentic, fresh fast casual."

Newk's Eatery opens both corporate and franchise locations, with the company averaging around eight to 12 company-owned restaurant openings per year.

"We are very disciplined about who we recruit as franchisees," begins Cheek.

"Our franchisees have to have multi-unit restaurant experience. We have an outstanding training program, so we don't need the 500-unit Applebee's franchisee necessarily, but we're looking for people who have been there and done that in terms of building infrastructure for restaurants, operations, accounting and marketing. We want people who have the local knowledge, and who have been there and done it before."

The company recently signed an agreement with a franchisee to bring 10 units to Denver and its southeast suburbs, marking Newk's first foray into Western markets. While Newk's is ex-

cited about this development, its move further west isn't likely to occur soon. "If the best franchisee in the world came along and wanted to develop in Seattle tomorrow, we'd probably say, 'thanks, but no thanks'," says Cheek. "We think we've got another couple hundred to 300 restaurants in our footprint."

While the Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama markets do not have additional opportunities for Newk's at this time with the exception of backfill opportunities, the company is looking across its current markets for new locations, from the Durham and Chapel Hill markets in North Carolina to Florida and Texas. "The sites we're chasing are very competitive these days," says Cheek. "We are proud of our hospitality in our restaurants and the quality of our food, and we are excited about the development of our Generation Two design and the expansion of our footprint." **SCB**

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