

Nashville Restaurateurs Dish About Their Secret Sauce

Besides offering bowling and Bocce ball, here are some tips for creating a lasting business--even in the restaurant industry.



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You might think there's a secret sauce to launching a successful restaurant (or six), but for some restaurateurs all that's required is a dash of luck, a heaping helping of passion and enough of a footprint to pack in a bowling alley, karaoke club, pool hall, coffee shop and Bocce ball court.

But even before the December 2013 launch of [Pinewood Social](#), a 13,000-square-foot restaurant/amusement park, the Goldberg brothers were already a household name in Nashville, Tenn. With six successful restaurants under their company's belt, the [Strategic Hospitality](#)

founders were the first to bring a speakeasy-style cocktail lounge, [The Patterson House](#), to Music City in 2009, and their high-end dining concept [The Catbird Seat](#) is one of the hardest tables to book in town.

While creating an adult play land on top of serving three meals a day, seven days a week can seem a bit over the top, the key is to know your audience--always, says Max Goldberg. "We want you to stick around far longer than you ever imagined possible."

We sat down with Max and Benjamin Goldberg, to get their top entrepreneurial tips--and other secrets for building lasting businesses.

1. Hire the right people.

"We surround ourselves with people way smarter than we are," Benjamin says. "[For Pinewood Social] it was a mix of hiring people we've worked with before and bringing new ones into the fold whose work we've long admired."

2. Get your hands dirty.

But don't think you can pick your team and then let the restaurant run itself, Benjamin advises. "This is not a business you can open and leave. This is one that requires a whole lot of attention to detail."

3. Have a unique vision.

A factor that's always worked in the Goldbergs' favor is novelty. In addition to Pinewood Social's anything goes ambiance, the founders also launched [Paradise Park](#), a trailer-park themed live music venue sandwiched between the honky-tonks of Downtown Nashville's Lower Broadway district.

"There are certain places we want to go to that don't exist yet in Nashville, whether we've dreamed them up or seen iterations of that concept elsewhere," Max explains. "That's what drives the ideas: What would we want to do that we can't currently, and how can we create that within the vision of our company?"

4. Put passion before profit--at least initially.

Max believes any restaurateur needs to be passionate about his idea versus thinking of it as a potential moneymaker. "It's hard to put everything you have into something if you aren't as passionate about it as you need to be," he says.

Put yourself in the shoes of your patrons, adds Benjamin. "We create places where we'd be the first ones to go as guests. We've never said, 'this concept will make a lot of money.' It's always, 'this concept is one we would go to,' and then we've backed into the financials."

5. Don't let a bad location get you down.

The Goldbergs have yet to build a restaurant from ground up. Instead, they've molded their restaurant concepts around existing structures. The pre-Prohibition Era-style Patterson House, for instance, occupies an 1899 home, while Pinewood Social inhabits an old trolley barn in Nashville's Rolling Mill Hill.

"We gravitate toward interesting spaces that may not be where everyone is going out, but the bones of the building are what drives us there," says Benjamin who notes that people appreciate a place with history. For Pinewood, "we wanted a location we could enjoy from an aesthetics standpoint but also had the functionality of a restaurant."

6. Know your limits.

Pinewood Social would seem to be packing in a lot under one roof--consequently requiring the majority of the Goldbergs' attention at present. But that doesn't mean the quality of their other projects should suffer.

Just as a tech entrepreneur might not launch every feature of her app right away, Max suggests taking your time between launching various projects. "We have this crazy dream board of things we want to do, but won't dive in until we have homed in on everything going on... It's about not outgrowing yourself, not spreading yourself too thin so that things slip through the cracks.

7. Learn from your successes and failures.

Like many entrepreneurs, Max sees his failures as learning opportunities. "Understanding, recognizing, getting better and learning from those mistakes has helped further our knowledge of this industry," he says. As an example Max notes the big tater tot-eating competition they organized at Paradise Park and were sure would be a big hit given the popularity of the bar's tots--and yet never took off, much to the brothers' dismay.

8. Show your customers some love.

While exclusivity can breed excitement, being genuine is always in demand. Say please and thank you and most of all show your appreciation, says Max. "We're fortunate people are into what we're doing but are also very well aware that people may not show up, " he says. "It's never: 'you're lucky to get a table.' It's: 'we're so thankful you're here.'"

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