

Prudent Pizza

MaMa Rosa's pizza is a value buy, making it more in-demand in the weak economy. Its Lean Lifestyle brand provides healthy options. **By Genevieve Diesing**



>> For more than 30 years, MaMa Rosa's has grown through acquisitions and an expanding product line. Its popular mini pizza line is now sold at more than 5,000 Walgreens locations.

Sidney, Ohio-based MaMa Rosa's is the largest branded, refrigerated pizza distributor in the United States, producing millions of pizzas a year for retail outlets such as Kroger, Meijer, Shoprite, HEB, Food Lion and more. Despite its enviable position at the top of the heap, the company refuses to rest on its laurels.

With acquisition of Amstar/Virga Foods in 2008, MaMa Rosa's has further diversified its brand to include pizza crust and dough balls, which helped the company establish a successful relationship with Whole Foods.

company profile

Mama Rosa's
www.mama-rosas.com
Headquarters: Sidney, Ohio
Annual sales: \$70 million
Employees: 300
Products: Refrigerated pizza, dough balls and pizza crusts
Bill Mackin: "The market has come to us, vs. us chasing the market."

Since its inception 30 years ago, the company has grown largely through acquisition and its diverse product line. The newest pizzas include the Lean Lifestyle brand, a health-oriented frozen pizza line certified by the American Heart Association, as well as MaMa Rosa's ever-growing mini

pizza line. MaMa Rosa's has secured distribution of its mini pizzas at more than 5,000 Walgreens locations nationwide, and is looking to increase revenue by securing business in the foodservice and restaurant channels.

In a recent interview with *Food and Drink*, President Bill Mackin gave details about these strategies.

Food and Drink: In addition to the Whole Foods collaboration, what are some recent company developments?

Bill Mackin: Since growing the all-natural side of our business with our Whole Foods collaboration, we also have partnered with several of the major frozen pizza players in the United States.

We look at growing our revenue chan-

nels like a foot stool. What you try to do is put many as legs on the foot stool as you can, so it doesn't tip over.

The legs represent revenue streams. We have successfully put many legs on the stool over the last three years.

For example, we recently were awarded the Puerto Rico school business.

We are very excited about doing that. The contract is for multiple years and for several million dollars.

We acquired Amstar/Virga Foods about a year ago. We transferred the entire production of that plant into our Sidney, Ohio, facility.

That gave us a whole new avenue of revenue streams; it put us into the food service segment.

FAD: How is the economy affecting MaMa Rosa's?

BM: Because we're a value proposition, what's happened is the market has come to us, vs. us trying to chase the market.

Everyone is looking for value, and the

two things people say about our MaMa Rosa's pizza is, it tastes great and is a great value. It is the perfect answer for a great-tasting meal solution. MaMa Rosa's has been at the forefront of value/taste for a long, long time.

Our target market is a family of four or five that makes less than \$50,000 a year. Our large pizzas are sold two pizzas in a pack and are mainly targeted for family meal occasions.

MaMa Rosa's large twin pack will feed a large family for under \$6, which is a substantial value.

We also have products for multiple meal occasions. Our mini MaMa Rosa's can be used for a child's meal or a snack, and we have a small pizza targeted for today's teenagers.

FAD: With the popularity of your Lean Lifestyle brand and the all-natural Whole Foods collaboration, are you seeing a trend toward healthier pizza?

BM: We did an extensive focus group

study on healthy pizzas, and we learned that pizza is an indulgent item, much like ice cream.

What the groups told us was that the majority of people in the United States who want to eat healthier will eat one less slice of the pizza they like.

The next generation of moms is looking for more fiber, and less sodium and fat. We are looking at those things and that is why we were able to obtain the Puerto Rico school system contract, because we are paying attention to nutrition.

FAD: What do you see in the near future for your company?

BM: MaMa Rosa's will continue to look for more channels for distribution.

We have been looking at C-store food service programs, in particular.

We have that growth targeted as a major revenue stream. We are currently in a food service test right now with a major C-store. We're having some really incredible results. **FD**