



Fast Food Goes Green

Undoubtedly there is more than one interpretation to fast food. A great variety of new formulas created within the last 15 years have demonstrated the versatility of the category. One of these newborn concept types can be summed up by three words: healthy, sustainable and trendy. It might even be the one receiving most attention from youngsters in the European foodservice market. Probably because it thrives at so many places in Europe – albeit under different names but with a similar appearance and products. We picked three concepts dedicated to fast healthy food and took a closer look: EXKi from Belgium, dean & david from Germany and Hitzberger from Switzerland.

Before diving into the details of each of the three, let's begin with the striking similarities between EXKi, dean & david and Hitzberger. Clearly, their first and foremost claim is to serve food that benefits the consumer – because it is freshly prepared, because it contains more vitamins than any other fast food but at the

same time less calories and no additives, colouring, emulsifying agents or flavour enhancers. Wherever possible and reasonable the creators of the green concepts opt for the organic product. But the higher standards these three operators are committed to reach further. By sourcing locally they aim to reduce their ecological footprint, by exclusively selling fairtrade coffee they support cooperative structures and communities in the producing countries.

All three concepts have proved that healthy food can be turned into sexy

products that are craved not only by a niche clientele but by a rather broad target group. Their restaurants bear no resemblance to the health food store one used to know 20 years ago, design and ambiance are young, fresh and stylish. But what's so appealing about their range of products? Their core items on the food side are based on fresh fruit and vegetables: salads, sandwiches, wraps and soups. In addition to the beverage standards such as coffee, water and lemonade they offer freshly made juices and smoothies that – just like the food – come with the promise of beauty and health. Their concept credibility is based on a very high level of transparency. EXKi just like dean & david or Hitzberger disclose the composition of their products to an extent that is still new and uncommon to the industry. Consumers can not only find information about the nutritional value of each product (calory content), but also about protein, fat and carb contents. On Hitzberger's website guests can even look up where the meat is sourced and whether a product is organic or vegan. In an era where fears induced by food scandals are constantly

■ ■ ■ 3 Concepts & their Numbers ■

Concept	Start	Outlets*	Origin
EXKi	2001	66	Belgium
dean & david	2007	35	Germany
Hitzberger	2007	8	Switzerland

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growing these green concepts seem to be safe havens for the alert consumer.

Among the first to explore the field were three Belgian schoolmates. Nicolas Steisel, Arnaud de Meeûs and Frédéric Rouvez opened their first restaurant named **EXKi** in January 2001. "Since the day we started in Brussels, the demand for healthy food has strongly developed, and will continue to do so, given the long-term trends in terms of well-being, health consciousness, allergies, vegetarian or vegan regimen," says co-founder Steisel. Until today, the chain has grown to 66 outlets: 33 in Belgium, 20 in France, 9 in Italy, 4 in Luxembourg and 1 in the Netherlands. Further expansion with the focus on Western Europe is planned. "Although there are some minor differences between the countries in terms of consumption habits, we tend to have the same offer in every market – a wide range of sweet and savoury products to be

opting for transit areas, airports and train stations.

Although the demand for healthy food was high right from the start, EXKi was not an overnight success. On the contrary, the newly founded restaurant chain ran on big losses. The regulations the three entrepreneurs were resolved to abide by came along with significantly higher costs than those of the competition. Today, EXKi still sticks to its strict code regarding the sourcing and the quality of the products, but found a way to also be economically successful. In 2012, the total turnover of the company was €78 m. EXKi's core target group are "young active women". They spend between €7 and €10 per visit. Combo menus consisting of salad, sandwich and bottled water are among the best-selling products. www.exki.be

In neighbouring Germany another successful concept has come into being. Only six years after its start **dean & david** counts 34 stores in Germany, and since last year one Swiss outlet in Basel. Munich is not only the hometown of the concept but with ten locations also the stronghold. In the Bavarian capital the healthy offer of dean & david meets the demands of a modern urban clientele. Growth takes place in big and middle-size cities. "Our concept would probably not work in towns smaller



enjoyed at any time during the day," explains Steisel. During the first wave of expansion, the young restaurant chain looked for locations in or near city centres, office and shopping areas. In recent times the company has also been

than 30.000 inhabitants," says CEO and founder David Baumgartner. Although d&d offers a broad range of dishes, salads are clearly the core product of the concept. Nearly 50% of the sales come from the choice of nine salads. Curries and



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clear conscience. The demand of Swiss consumers for their products seems to prove them right. In January, the eighth store opened at Zurich main station. CEO and co-founder Andy Schwarzenbach is already casting an eye on the neighbouring markets. "Possibilities in our home country are limited as we need bigger towns to reach our target group." You won't find an ordinary ham and cheese sandwich at the Hitzberger stores. For his fast-food concept the star chef created sandwiches that are new to the guest. What they all have in common is a high share of salad and vegetables. A single curry dish was added to the menu shortly after the start when the operators noticed that cold dishes were not considered a full lunch by some of the guests. To make the concept work economically the preparation of the dishes must be simple so that unskilled staff can prepare them. Otherwise prices would exceed the limit people are willing to spend for fast food. Just like d&d Hitzberger can be found in different sizes: as a small take away-store of 10 sq m as well as a restaur-



ant with 100 seats. To attract guests at all daytimes, products range from breakfast offers to warm dishes, sweet and savoury snacks. "It is not only women who come or those who want to lose weight. Our guests are business people with very little time, shoppers, tourists and students," says Schwarzenbach. "A lot of people are willing to pay around 10% more compared to regular fast food if they get high quality, healthy meals." www.hitzberger.com CHO



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