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NY Burger Co. cooks up a franchise



Farnoosh Torabi
TRICKS OF THE TRADE

New York Burger Co. is prepping for super-sized business. The 3-year-old "fast-casual," all-natural burger joint, run by culinary veteran Madeline Poley, has its sights set on franchising this August in the tri-state area. "What I'm looking to do is be able to expand this concept without watering it down to keep the integrity of the food I serve," said Poley, who's spent some 25 years in the city's restaurant scene as an upscale owner and consultant.

The "concept" behind New York Burger Co., her most recent venture, is rather untraditional for the fast-food hamburger market.

Since opening its first location on Park Avenue South in 2004, Poley's been cooking up all-natural beef burgers with fresh ingredients and homemade sauces. Initially, Poley's expectations weren't over the top. She thought the downtown district would attract a decent number of health-conscious working professionals. "Fortunately and surprisingly, our demo was far broader. We were getting everyone in there," said Poley. "They just loved the burger."



The broad success led Poley to quickly launch a second New York Burger Co. a year later on Sixth Avenue in Chelsea. Total sales are up 15 percent since 2004, a sure sign New York Burger Co. is ready for the franchise world. After all, the restaurant industry is "one of the highest-risk businesses," said Poley. She hails the chain as "the next generation of fast food."



Diners eat at New York Burger Co., which buys beef from a ranch where cattle are fed vegetarian diets without hormones or antibiotics.

(Kristy May)

At New York Burger Co., a meal averages about \$10, almost double McDonald's or Burger King, but Poley says consumers, especially New Yorkers, are willing to dig deeper into their pockets for higher quality food. "[The beef] doesn't have all

the crap in it," said Poley, who buys her meat from the Coleman natural beef ranch.

The cows

there are raised strictly vegetarian and there's no use of hormones or antibiotics.

Poley is waiting to finalize the franchising agreement with New York state.

Poley is being patient and said she doesn't plan to expand too rapidly. After all, she spent four years developing her idea for the market. And before any franchise grand openings, the food's "gotta taste great."

Contact Farnoosh at amSmallBusiness@gmail.com.



Pros, cons of franchises

Madeline Poley is working with Michael Sied, a franchise attorney who runs MSA Worldwide and co-author of *Franchising for Dummies*. Here are some pros and cons he offers for opening a franchise:

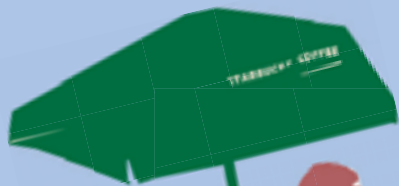
Advantages

Franchising means becoming a "brand" and that has competitive benefits, since consumers can get attached to "brands." A franchisee has access to training, a reduced cost of equipment and a network of other franchisees from which to learn.

Disadvantages

You have to play by someone else's rules. Franchisees must follow rules and regulations set by the parent company, which diminishes some independence in running the business. A black sheep in the franchise network can potentially hurt sales for all others. If, say, one New York Burger Co. on the Upper East Side down the road ends up disappointing customers, that may reflect poorly on all others in NYC. (Farnoosh Torabi)

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