

Russo's New York Pizzeria & Russo's Coal Fired Italian Kitchen

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Chef **Anthony Russo** has created two unique restaurant concepts, Russo's New York Pizzeria and Russo's Coal Fired Italian Kitchen, based in Houston, Texas. The two concepts have a combined 25 locations. Russo gives Southerners a taste of Italy's fresh, homemade recipes and New York's infamous pizza slices.

Q: Why have you decided to grow your concepts through franchising?

A: It became very clear to me that what I had built from the ground up was a true recipe for success, and I wanted to share that. I have always wanted to expand my brand and share my passion for cooking with the world, and I knew that the best way to do that would be to teach others the secrets behind my proven concepts. I love that I get to help my franchisees realize their life goals with a Russo's franchise.

Q: Your revenues were up 15 to 20 percent over 2010, which is astounding in a recovering economy. To what do you attribute this success?

A: I believe that it's about understanding what your customers need. We understand that the country is going through a rough time and we're all in it together. We offer a lot of deals and coupons because we know that our community needs a break and we want them to enjoy some of the finer things in life without breaking the bank. I think the community really responds to that kind of relationship.

Q: You have developed a line of retail sauces, soups and dressings. What's the first step in making this happen?

A: It became clear to me from customer feedback that there was a real craving in the marketplace for quality Italian foods made the traditional way using fresh ingredients. The first step is realizing that a product you already make fulfills that need perfectly. The retail line evolved organically once I discovered how much my customers wanted to be able to serve authentic Italian meals at home and I realized I could provide that to them.



Q: Are you concerned about consistency throughout the brand as you grow?

A: We are very focused on assuring that every guest has a consistently excellent experience at every one of our stores, whether corporate or franchise owned. The Russo family name and reputation is staked on that experience. For that reason, we are in frequent contact with our stores to ensure that they are providing customers with the food and service standards for which Russo's is known.

Q: You offer two concepts: Russo's New York Pizzeria and Russo's Coal-Fired Italian Kitchen. Why add an upscale option to your brand?

A: The response to Russo's New York Pizzeria has been phenomenal over the years, and we found that there was a high demand for authentic New York-style pizza and pasta dishes with fresh, premium, quality ingredients. So, we decided to take our concept to another level and incorporate some more upscale ideas that just wouldn't fit in a home-style pizzeria concept. We really wanted to step it up. I have always had a passion for coal-fired pizza and I just felt like it was the right time to bring an upscale coal fire concept into the Russo's family.