

—THE— REAL THING

If your pizza is true to
the food's roots, tell your
customers about it

Story by Nadine Goff
Photos by Josh Keown

Authenticity is important to an increasing number of consumers, but is a promise of authenticity an effective means of marketing pizza?

Absolutely, say Rick Rosati, CEO of Rosati's Franchise and Development LLC in Illinois, which owns one of the several groups of Rosati's Pizza restaurants offering Authentic Chicago Pizza. "It's a good way to differentiate our pizza from the major chains," he says.

"Our pizzas are not a manufactured product," says his brother, Jeff, the company's CFO. "They're fresh and still made the way they were originally made 40 years ago when this was a mom-and-pop industry, not big business." He notes that Rosati's makes its pizza sauce on the premises, not at a far-away commissary.

At the four Pier Pizza Company restaurants in Rhode Island, "We make every pizza by hand with only the freshest ingredients," says the company's president, Justin Gallant. Pier Pizza was one of the first pizzerias in Rhode Island to offer authentic New York style pizza, says Gallant. "We've had an overwhelming number of visitors from New York City and they say it definitely tastes like the real thing."

"We think it makes a big difference to stick to authenticity," says Jay Jerrier, who, along with Dennis Reinhold and Miles Panella, owns Campania Pizza, the first restaurant in Dallas, Texas, to offer authentic Neapolitan pizza. "We don't do any advertising, but have relied on good word of mouth and good reviews," he says. "The result





has been **passionate**, loyal repeat customers."

In July 2007, less than two years after its small, 700 square foot restaurant opened in the West Village neighborhood, Campania's pizza was voted "Best Pizza in Dallas" by *D Magazine*. In August 2007, the restaurant grossed \$81,000, says Jerrier. He notes that figure was all food, since Campania Pizza does not sell alcohol because it is too close to a school.

Authentic Neapolitan pizza (Verace Pizza Napoletana) requires a wood-burning oven; proper ingredients, including 00 flour, San Marzano tomatoes, all natural Fior di Latte or Bufala mozzarella, fresh basil, salt and yeast and proper technique. Dough must be kneaded either by hand, or with a low speed mixer. No mechanical dough shaping is allowed. Pizza baking time should not exceed 90 seconds.

"We're as authentic as our location permits," says Jerrier, noting that the space in West Village cannot accommodate a wood-burning oven. When its new 6,000-square-foot Campania Pizza restaurant opens in the Southlake neighborhood, it will have a wood-burning oven, and, he says, "We'll be making our mozzarella in house."

Spacca Napoli Pizzeria in Chicago is one of less than two dozen restaurants in the United States certified by Verace Pizza Napoletana (VPN) Association. An international trade association, founded in 1984 in Naples, Italy, the VPN provides training in the production of Neapolitan pizza and certification for pizzerias and restaurants that produce Neapolitan pizza.

Reviewers and customers have praised Spacca Napoli's authenticity, says owner

Jonathan Goldsmith. "Some people say VPN certification is just for marketing," he says, "but if you actually follow through and are faithful to tradition as we are, you're serving a pizza that's as authentic as possible."

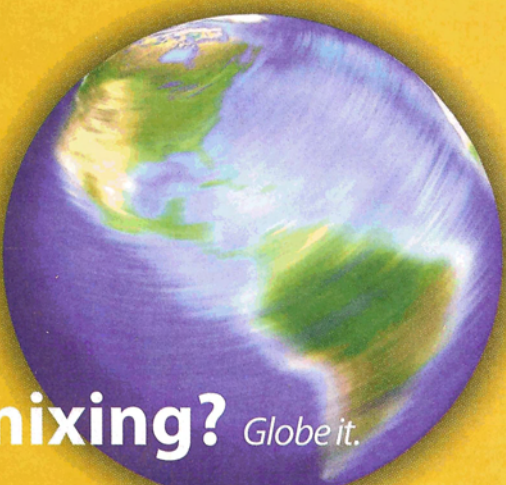
Although the owners of Campania Pizza and Spacca Napoli are passionate about authentic Neapolitan pizza, they've learned that it is sometimes necessary to educate customers in order to help them share this passion. "You have to take baby steps to introduce Americans to authentic pizza," says Jerrier. "Buffalo mozzarella melts and creates a soupy texture."

"Authenticity can hurt," concurs Goldsmith. "Neapolitan pie is a soup: That's why you use a knife and fork."


The Rosati brothers say most non-natives think authentic Chicago-style pizza is deep-dish pizza. However, there is also a thin crust Chicago-style pizza favored by local customers. Traditionally, this pizza is cut into squares rather than wedges. Although Rosati's serves both types of pizza, the brothers say after they open restaurants in other states, customers are often surprised when their thin crust pizza arrives cut in squares.

Producing authentic pizza can also inhibit expansion. It's difficult to expand without losing authenticity to growth, say the Rosatis, who believe that adhering to tradition and not trying to grow too quickly has been an important factor in their success.

Adds Jerrier: "We don't want Campania Pizza to become a chain, although we could certainly support five or six restaurants if we're very selective about when and where we add them." In the end, producing authentic pizza may also increase the costs of ingredients.



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Rosati's uses the same products from the same suppliers in all its restaurants, so a pizza in an out-of-state location may cost more than one in Chicago. Goldsmith, whose passion for authenticity means he orders most of his ingredients from Naples, says he's raised prices twice since opening Spacca Napoli on Valentine's Day 2006. But, he adds, "Customers will understand price increases if it keeps quality high." ♦

Nadine Goff is a business writer based in the Midwest.

Keeping it Real

Thinking about marketing your pizza as authentic? Here are some points to consider:

♦ A promise of authenticity has the most value if it is placed on specific products, says Kristin Branch, director of the A.C. Nielson Center for Marketing Research at the University of Wisconsin School of Business.

"Authenticity" has been a newer public relations buzz term related to building the corporate brand and reputation, says Clarke L. Caywood, director of the Graduate Program in Public Relations at Northwestern University. "The more 'authentic' aspect of the term comes from its application to the leadership and policies of a company."

♦ Companies can say their products are authentic, but consumers are the people who really define what is and is not authentic, says marketing consultant and writer John Moore, author of *Tribal Knowledge*.

"People have emotional connections to pizza because of its regionality," says Moore. "Each compromise you make in your pizza shaves off some of the authenticity. Customers can sniff out fakes. So the important question to ask is how inauthentic is your product?"

♦ Stop buying impressions and start earning opinions, adds Moore. This means doing something real: Making a better pizza.

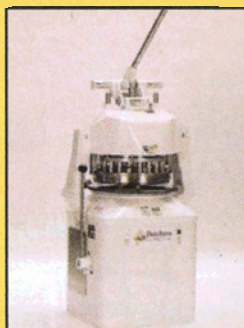
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