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The Sum of Its Parts

Is Mimi's Cafe's new segmented model all things to all people, or something for everyone?



Mimi's Cafe is trying its hand at limited service with the French Revolution reimage program. MIMI'S CAFE

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Not long after it announced its French Revolution brand reimage program, casual-dining chain Mimi's Cafe thinks it's found the key ingredient to brand expansion.

The new store-within-a-store concept—where guests can opt for a grab-and-go experience, a French bakery with gourmet coffees, a bistro, or a full-service, Parisian-themed dining area—allows the brand to reach quick-service customers, as well as its loyal full-service following.

“We’re offering more and different ways to experience Mimi’s,” says Mark Mears, president and chief concept officer of Mimi's Cafe, which was recently [acquired by LeDuff America](http://www.qsrmagazine.com/news/bob-evans-farms-sells-mimis-cafe-leduff-america-50m) (<http://www.qsrmagazine.com/news/bob-evans-farms-sells-mimis-cafe-leduff-america-50m>) for \$50 million.

Mimi's decision to pursue the model “speaks to the current consumer mindset and shows the power of [quick-serve restaurants] right now,” says Robert Ancill, CEO and managing partner of The Next Idea, an international restaurant consulting group. “You can get a very good meal at a [quick serve] that is not far off from what you might get at a casual-dining restaurant, so there is a need to reinvent, differentiate, or compete directly.”

What will make the difference between success and failure, Ancill says, is setup. Venturing into the quick-service model means hitting all the points of fast service, good product, portability, and digestible price points, he says.

Mears sees the move as an avenue to grow distribution, giving Mimi's the flexibility to open a bakery-café or grab-and-go piece, for instance, in nontraditional locations like strip centers, college campuses, and airports. Long-term plans even include a reach into the retail market.

But Ancill says quick serves shouldn't fret over the competition or try to alter their concepts in a similar fashion.

“[Quick-service restaurants] have got it right at the moment,” he says. “They are leveraging space well and have a good economic balance. I don't think they need to respond.”

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