

COVER STORY

Bon Appétit's secret ingredient for success

Aug 21, 2015

Angela Swartz

Silicon Valley Business Journal

Cold-brew coffee. Fruit and vegetable juices made to order. Sushi Fridays. Outdoor barbecues and on-site farmers markets. The list of food options that are laid out before the Valley's tech employees, mostly for free, never ceases to amaze.

"I love being able to walk around our two cafés and have so many different options to choose from," said Karin Klein, a senior events manager at Redwood City-based Electronic Arts Inc. "The weekly barbecues outside on the lawn in the summer and our on-site farmers markets also give us a fun break away from our daily routine to enjoy the weather and good food with our coworkers."

Klein is one of the thousands of employees in the Valley who chow down on tens of thousands of meals, snacks and fancy coffees each day. Google alone serves 30,000 meals each weekday within the 30-plus cafés at its Mountain View campus.

But just who is preparing all this food? Most likely it's a company you have probably never heard of, but a phrase you may say often: Bon Appétit.

Palo Alto-based Bon Appétit Management Company's client list reads like a who's who of the Valley: Google, eBay Inc., LinkedIn Corp., Yahoo Inc., Oracle Corp., Electronic Arts and Adobe Systems Inc. Outside of tech, you can find Bon Appétit's vittles at Santa Clara University, Stanford Graduate School of Business, Levi's Stadium, AT&T Park and the law firm Kirkland and Ellis LLP.

This foodie to the tech stars traces its history to 1987, when it was formed in San Francisco by Fedele Bauccio and Ernie Collins a year after their firm, Saga Corp., was bought by the Marriott Corp.



Kitchen Sync café at Google's Mountain View campus

After moving to the Peninsula and being acquired by the British catering conglomerate Compass Group in 2002, Bon Appétit has been able to stay largely independent. Although Compass doesn't release financial information for each of its business units, Bon Appétit is on track to hit, and surpass, \$1 billion in revenue this year, according to Bauccio. With 15,700 employees and 650 cafés being managed in 33 states, the company serves around 200 million meals per year.

"Looking back, Bon Appétit evolved from a boutique, local catering company into a major regional player and then into what has since become a very prominent national brand," said John Lawn, who was editor in chief of Food Management magazine for 20 years and closely followed Bon Appétit's rise.

In the Bay Area, Bon Appétit has 21 local tech clients – some

with multiple locations – and together they account for more than 60 percent of its total Bay Area revenue.

Locally sourced

Bon Appétit's high-quality standards and the autonomy of its chefs have helped it retain clients, Lawn said. For example, Bauccio expects chefs to take responsibility for sourcing seasonally available ingredients and they are charged with developing their own menus that reflect employee tastes.

San Jose-based eBay has used Bon Appétit for 12 years and credits the fact that the food management company is locally based and offers healthy and sustainable choices for employees as a key reason for the lengthy partnership.

Electronic Arts has a newer relationship with Bon Appétit – two years – but employees have been particularly enjoying the vegetable garden and fresh options at the two cafeterias on campus. Klein noted that Bon Appétit promotes its “farm to fork” options to emphasize that the food is sourced locally.

“Years ago, we started the ‘farm to fork’ program and this was a culinary act on my part, not a political act,” said Bauccio, who grew up with an Italian mother who was always in the kitchen. “I wanted a culture of people who had some freedom to create unique kinds of menus that were seasonal and authentic.”

Flexibility

At first, Lawn thought Bon Appétit's chef-driven, rather than management-driven, philosophy was a bit unrealistic, given the expectations customers had for on-site food venues when Bon Appétit started. But after visiting several of its accounts, Lawn was quickly converted to Bauccio's point of view.

“Today we take this approach for granted, but at the time, it was truly revolutionary in this country,” Lawn said. “He (Bauccio) didn't want customers to see traditional cafeteria food. He wanted them to see presentations with the kind of appeal you would find in a well-run, European food market.”

Bon Appétit said it has been the go-to for Silicon Valley tech companies because it is open to experimentation with new kinds of food – like using produce that's cosmetically imperfect but edible.

“It really is an amazing situation, as (the tech companies)

continue to innovate, they push us to be innovative ourselves,” Bauccio said. “As people break bread together it creates innovation.”

It has also offered diverse and personalized food options, like Indian cuisine or food that is safe to eat under halal standards.

“Bon Appétit caters to our individual company's tastes – for example, they've found that EA employees really like spicy food options, so they create more of those to accommodate what we like,” said EA spokeswoman Sandy Goldberg. “They even added a fresh juice bar by request that's been a big hit with our staff.”*

Scalability

The company's flexibility for client sizes has also helped it serve a number of different customers. Bon Appétit says it has created food programs for clients with as few as 30 employees at a single location up to campuses with more than 20,000 workers.

Google's Michiel Bakker, director of global food services, says scalability is what brought Bon Appétit and Google together more than a decade ago. As Google grew rapidly, it decided to outsource the job of feeding its employees from its own chef to a company that was able to make quality food on a large scale.

Local sourcing and sustainability were additional benefits. “Our team collaborates with Bon Appétit on efforts in responsible sourcing, reducing food waste and more,” Bakker said. “For example, inventive and resourceful collaborations with folks like Berkeley's Metropolis Bread – who are piloting the use of CoffeeFlour in their baked goods – infuse sustainability into our menus every day.”

Bauccio says he understands the importance of putting good food into our bodies.

“When I am walking through our restaurants and cafés, I swell with pride – not only with the great authentic food, but our employees who smile and love^f their jobs taking care of our customers,” he said. “I think to myself that we have created a unique culture that is making a difference in the lives of so many.”

*Some content of the original article was removed for purposes of this reprint.

^fIn the original article, the word “live” was used in place of “love.” This was changed per the request of Bon Appétit Management Company (www.bamco.com).

This article was posted on August 21, 2015, 3:00am PDT to the Silicon Valley Business Journal website. It has been reprinted for use only by Bon Appétit Management Company (www.bamco.com) and further reproduction by any other party is strictly prohibited. Copyright 2015 Silicon Valley Business Journal, 125 South Market St., 11th Floor, San Jose, CA 95113 | siliconvalleybusinessjournal.com

Photo and caption supplied by Bon Appétit.