

## Fast 50: Crave Restaurants

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In a challenging economic environment for restaurateurs, Crave Restaurants seems to have found the secret recipe for success.

Over the past three years, the restaurant group's growth rate is an impressive 437.2 percent, with 2010 revenue at just over \$23 million. With six restaurants, including sites in Omaha, Neb., and Orlando, Fla., and 600 employees, Crave will keep expanding locally with an eye on the national scene, said CEO **Kam Talebi**. A seventh location already is under construction in Coral Gables, Fla.

"It all goes back to the strength of our concept," Talebi said. "We have the right demographic, our site selection has been really good and we have a very diverse, eclectic American cuisine offering."

Since its first location opened in 2007, Crave has sought upscale suburban retail centers to expand into, such as the Galleria in Edina and The Shops at West End in St. Louis Park. An exception to the formula is the high-profile downtown Minneapolis location at Eighth Street South and Hennepin Avenue, a sizeable new entry to the city's restaurant scene.

Talebi believes that combining Crave's type of cuisine with a retail setting is a stellar combination, and he's likely to keep that rolling.

"We tend to be more appealing to the female demographic, so being in prime, anchor-type locations has been a contributor to success. In restaurants in particular, location is key," Talebi said.

"Crave travels well, which is something that not every concept does," said **Dick Grones**, principal at Cambridge Commercial Realty. "All the locations make perfect sense."

The restaurants also benefit from a distinctive menu that fuses a variety of tastes. Not only does every location have sushi, but also items such as mini burgers, steak, lobster macaroni and spicy lamb meatballs. Grones calls the menu "mildly exotic, but still understandable."

Recently winning the "Hot Concept Award" from *National Restaurant News*, Crave is poised for more national attention, Talebi said. In the next few years, he anticipates the restaurant group could expand rapidly, both inside the state and nationally, as more communities build mall developments that are ideal for his restaurant concept.

The biggest challenge to growth is likely to be access to human capital, he said.

“We invest heavily in training and retention, because we need to attract great talent to continue growing,” Talebi said.

In general, though, Talebi expects to jump over this hurdle and continue the momentum that’s led to Crave’s current growth rate.

“As we become more visible nationally, we know that we have a concept with a bright future,” he said. “We’re confident that we can continue to bring in the right people and the right capital to help us grow the company.”