

Chatroom: Buffalo Wild Wings CEO Smith

2007-09-13

Like a good head football coach, Buffalo Wild Wings Chief Executive Sally Smith knows to play to her team's strengths, even under adverse conditions.

For Smith, that means having her restaurants cater to what the fans want - fresh chicken wings and the hometown game - while finding ways to offset the rising costs of doing business.

For the past 11 years, Smith has been molding the small Ohio chicken wing chain into a huge success. Few other restaurant chains have been able recently to match the chain in profit and sales growth. While same-store sales at Buffalo Wild Wings (nasdaq: BWLD) are rising - up 8 percent in the second quarter at company-owned locations - much of the restaurant industry is facing same-store sales declines as consumers struggle with high gas prices and declining home values. Same-store sales measure sales at restaurants open at least a year.

Operators have also been forced to raise prices to combat higher commodity costs. Prices for fresh chicken wings, which represent about 23 percent to 24 percent of Buffalo Wild Wings' costs of sales, are at near record levels, according to the National Chicken Council. The resulting higher menu prices have made some consumers even more wary of spending a portion of their paychecks on dining out.

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Source - Forbes

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