

2022 fast casual
TOP 100
MOVERS & SHAKERS

Innovative restaurant brands and executives shaping the fast casual segment



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on technology rollouts, new product promotions and brand culture.

Technology upgrades weren't the only improvements made last year. Tropical Smoothie Cafe also expanded its protein offerings by launching its first shrimp limited-time offering. The Cajun Shrimp Wrap was the most popular food LTO in the brand's history.

29. FAT Brands

FAT Brands, which owns Fatburger and several other concepts, has been growth-oriented over the last several years, but it accelerated the strategy in 2021 by acquiring three concepts. It purchased Twin Peaks for \$300 million, Fazoli's, which cost it \$130 million, and Native Grill & Wings, for \$20 million.

CEO Andy Wiederhorn estimated that the acquisitions would lead to \$45 to \$50 million in incremental normalized post-COVID EBITDA in 2022.

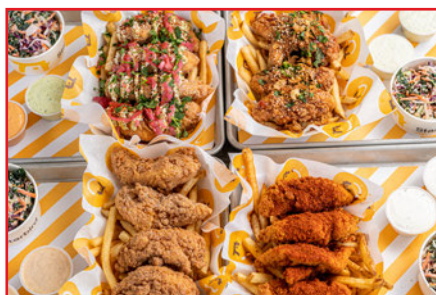
"2021 was a monumental growth year for FAT Brands," Wiederhorn said.

"Despite industry-wide challenges such as labor shortages, supply chain challenges and inflation, we remained laser-focused on adding brands into our portfolio that aligned with our overall growth strategy and existing concepts. While we dealt with the issues that others faced, we didn't let that hinder our plans and we were able to successfully integrate eight brands into our system in addition to building one of our strongest development pipelines to date."

One of the brand's primary initiatives this year is to align the technologies of its 17 brands by rolling out a middleware



solution that is POS agnostic and provides the flexibility to integrate third-party solutions. That will allow the brands to customize messaging for guests and provide marketing teams with insights about their guests and brands.



30. Starbird

Since opening in 2016 in California, Starbird has demonstrated strong qualities in innovation, leadership and resilience, experiencing a 27% increase in same-store sales over 2020 and a 2-year comp at 75% over 2019.

The chain, founded by CEO Aaron Noveshen, has worked to refine its customer experience using tech-enabled solutions, including kiosks that allow it to collect guest demographics through facial recognition.

Similarly, the kiosks provide a solution for guests pinned against longer lines and wait times for their orders. Not only do the devices act as an informative gateway to Starbird's other digital platforms, such as app and web ordering, but they also offer a safer ordering method for guests through their sleek design and placement, as opposed to doing so face-to-face with an employee.

The brand, which has 11 locations and multiple virtual brands -- Starbird Wings, Starbird Salads, Starbird Bowls, and Gardenbird, in Northern and Southern



California, will open additional units throughout the Bay Area and Los Angeles within the next 24 months, hoping to reach 20 locations by 2023.

In January 2022, Starbird made its entrance into Southern California with a pop-up kitchen in the South Bay and is slated to open a pop-up kitchen in Koreatown this spring, with additional streetside locations following throughout the year in Hermosa Beach, Marina del Rey, and other undisclosed locations in the Bay Area and LA.

As part of its growth strategy, the chain raised \$12 million in November 2021, which it will use to open company-owned restaurants and ghost kitchens, increase licensing engagements and launch a franchise offering



31. Freebirds World Burrito

What separates Freebirds from other

Tex-Mex brands is that it uses certified master grillers at every restaurant to ensure its single-cut meats are marinated and grilled to perfection.

Its non-meat items, however, are just as important. In 2021, for example, it expanded plant-based options, adding cauliflower rice to the menu. The year also brought a redesign for each store, which included updated interiors, murals, and seating.

