

SALATA – A CASE STUDY IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

**ROLE: RESTAURANT DESIGN, EQUIPMENT SUPPLY &
INSTALLATION, SMALLWARES SUPPLY, FRANCHISE
DEVELOPMENT**



MARK BREWER

CONTRACT SALES &
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A HEALTHY HISTORY

For more than 30 years, Michelle Bythewood has been working in the restaurant industry leading brands across a variety of quick service and fast casual concepts to include Focus Brands, Raising Cane's and CiCi's Pizza. In 2017, she took her years of industry experience and began a new career with Salata.

After getting to know the owners and embracing Salata's mission statement, it didn't take long for this business relationship to flourish. By early 2019, Michelle accepted the role of President at Salata after serving as Chief Marketing Office for 2 years. Michelle's leadership and vision has not only strengthened the brand but it's relationships with its franchisees and the communities they serve.

The founders of Salata began their journey serving home-style food to the business community in an urban location in downtown Houston. Along the way a salad bar was added to the location, a decision that quickly trended with their customers. As more and more guests made the salad bar their first stop, the owners took note. The business quickly expanded its salad offerings and, 15 years and more than 90 locations later, this healthy alternative has become a household name.

Salata offers the freshest and largest selection of hand-cut vegetables, fruits and toppings for their salads along with a variety of protein options prepared daily in their stores. In addition to salads, Salata also offers healthy wraps and

homemade soups, but it's their dressings that are at the heart of their salad business and one of the biggest draws for their customers. The owners of Salata knew they wanted to have fresh, house-made dressings without any preservatives; a decision that has held true since their humble beginning.

Whether it's the latest jalapeno avocado or their most popular fresh herb vinaigrette, each dressing is prepared in their state-of-the-art manufacturing facility and immediately shipped to ensure the highest quality and freshness. Salata currently offers 12 unique homemade dressings with new LTO's quickly becoming fan favorites. Dressings are a big part of the Salata brand and a promise the owners have vowed to never compromise on.

"We are currently in test on two items – warm proteins (Pesto Chicken and Chipotle Chicken), as well as warm grains (Farro and Quinoa). Boelter helped us think through how to retrofit our line and provided a custom piece of equipment that had to be fabricated to add these new items. We are currently testing in our corporate units and are receiving very favorable results, especially as we are starting to get some cool fall weather. We are hopeful that these menu items will increase our fall/winter sales and offer a heartier option for those guests that want to change up their salad or wrap for the season." – Michelle Bythewood, President, Salata

COLLABORATION AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Mark Brewer, Boelter's Director of National Accounts, was brought in to work with Salata in 2019 as a part of their rebranding efforts. His initial work focused on streamlining the kitchen and developing needed changes to the front of the house that would ultimately provide the customer with an enhanced experience.

Over time, Mark was given the opportunity to further support Salata as their primary kitchen equipment supplier. Through a close working relationship, he has provided Salata corporate and their franchisees the highest levels of support; including an in-depth understanding of the brand, insightful design capabilities, smart equipment selection, and timely installation and support.

Throughout his relationship with Salata, Mark has solved many of the challenges they have faced over the years. Their "tea tap" system, a signature feature of the Salata brand, was

prone to experiencing a bevy of operational issues. The system was consistently dispensing tea at ambient temperatures, resulting in quickly melting ice and a watered-down beverage.

After identifying the problem, Mark provided a custom remote glycol chilled system, capable of dispensing the tea at a cool and consistent 36 degrees. This update has allowed the customer to experience the full flavor profile of the teas and lemonades Salata offers and provides for a better guest experience overall.

"The Boelter team has been a huge asset in helping us innovate our salad line and tackle unique challenges when rolling out new products. Sometimes you have a great product idea but need a solution on how to serve it to the guest. That is when Mark is in his zone! If there is a challenge, he is the one that will have a solution."

– Michelle Bythewood, President, Salata



SALATA

Boelter has also upgraded Salata's front line refrigerated equipment with an integrated forced-air curtain, designed to keep all food at required temperatures while, at the same time, helping to lower costs. Custom stainless-steel frontline equipment was designed for maximum throughput and ergonomics, as well as a variety of new equipment that will support the introduction of Salata's warm grains and proteins; an offering that further differentiates the brand.

And while there is a clearly defined prototypical package that Boelter starts with when designing any new Salata franchisee location, there will always be varying equipment recommendations needed to fully execute each individual space.

Every new addition to the Salata family is unique – from the back of the house, to the overall footprint. Working collaboratively during the early stages of the project helps to ensure the correct equipment is selected, and that the flow and efficiency maintains consistency to execute upon Salata's standard operating procedures.

“Boelter's buying power has allowed a medium-sized growth brand to take advantage of national discounts and availability. Cost is one of our franchisees main focus, as it should be. It is also our focus as a brand to help improve unit level economics and franchisee profitability. Working with a partner like Boelter helps us save money while maintaining our high standards. This is key to both of our success.” – Michelle Bythewood, President, Salata

Over the years and with close collaboration, the development process has been streamlined. Although there may be similarities between projects, a national chain



like Salata will inevitably result in the occasional one-off design build. Regardless, the intent will always be to create a restaurant that enhances workflow and streamlines the business to run at peak efficiency.

“It's been an honor to support Salata over the past three years. I've watched the brand grow, mature and evolve to meet to needs of their customers while always staying true to their values. They never compromise on quality and are constantly looking for ways to improve and provide for an even better guest experience. That's what I love about them the most.” – Mark Brewer, Director of National Accounts, Boelter

THE FUTURE LOOKS FRESH

Michelle Bythewood is taking a close look at the Salata footprint and paying attention to the opportunities third-party delivery services are able to provide. Every location has made adjustments to ensure there is adequate room for customers placing and picking up to-go orders. Based on current dining capacity restrictions, this remains as a top priority. Many existing locations have pickup windows and those are being integrated into new store designs when applicable.

“Boelter has helped us think through evolving our restaurants to this new normal. We are looking at any and every way to make the guest experience contactless and safe. Mark recently brought us a high quality, affordable “bubbler” unit to sell our teas and lemonades in our dining room. He

sourced a machine that allows the guest to get fresh product without the fear of touching a tea tap handle. This is the type of innovation we need to continue to properly elevate our brand.”

– Michelle Bythewood, President, Salata

Boelter's eCommerce and supply teams have developed and recently launched a new smallwares resupply website, unique to Salata, that's designed to speed up the ordering of critical supplies. This new technology is an essential tool that simplifies the process for each of the Salata franchisees. Every user is able to log in, verify their location, enter the quantity of items needed, pay for and schedule a drop ship directly to a specific location. Boelter keeps all of Salata's smallware items in stock for immediate shipment. The experience is fast and efficient, something that every Salata business owner can appreciate.



SALATA

As foodservice trends continue to move more toward an off-premises business model, Salata will continue looking for new ways to increase efficiency for both the customer and the franchisee. In 2019, Salata rolled out an entirely new technology suite package to include new POS systems, online ordering and a rewards program.

In addition to upgrading the online ordering process, a catering software package has also been adopted. Third-party delivery systems were enhanced and a brand-new App has been formally introduced to the Salata brand. Although 2020 may have been a challenging year for everyone in the food and beverage industry, the advancements and upgrades Salata has made has positioned them to better manage the challenges of today's world.

“Mark and the entire Boelter team have been outstanding partners. The professionalism and wealth of industry knowledge have been a key factor into helping us control costs. Having a partner that truly understands our brand has allowed us to take advantage of cost savings on equipment and smallwares we were not previously offered.” – *Michelle Bythewood, President, Salata*

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