

Restaurant Chains Serve Up Systemwide Growth, Plot Expansion

17% Revenue Boost For Local Chains to \$29B

By KAITLIN AQUINO

Despite extensive headwinds ranging from supply chain shortages, ongoing pandemic restrictions and inflation concerns, Orange County's expansive and varied restaurant chain industry served up a solid 2021.

The region's 28 largest OC-based restaurant chains, a mix of nationally-known giants and regional businesses, ranging from upstart poke bowl chains to iconic brands like **In-N-Out Burger**, saw a cumulative 17% boost from the year prior, marking a return to gains for the industry, which saw revenue fall 2% in 2020.

For comparison, the \$29 billion brought in by those 28 companies and their 14,980 combined stores is about the same as Estonia's GDP.

Many on this week's list added new employees despite one of its worst labor shortages in over a decade.

Local payrolls increased about 12% to about 22,000 employees.

Relocating Workers

Costa Mesa-based **Panini Kabob Grill** saw an 81% increase in revenue to \$109 million in 2021, good for the No. 18 spot on the list. Currently with 18 restaurants, the Mediterranean chain plans to add locations in Las Vegas and Scottsdale, Ariz. An opening date has not been announced.

The company, which halted advertising last year, saw its customer base grow 38% organically, CEO **Mike Rafipoor** told the Business Journal.



After "the pandemic dragged on for two years ... people [became] tired of having hamburgers and pizza."

That translated into demand for fresher, healthier options, Rafipoor said.

"Everything we make is from scratch. Nothing we make is frozen."

Panini increased its OC employee count 73% last year to over 300.

That growth in part stems from Panini's wages; it guarantees \$20 per hour for those working at least 40 hours per week.

Because of this, some employees who left the company during the pandemic returned to ask for their jobs back, he said.

"Even when we are quiet, we don't send employees home. We want them to take the money [they make] and use it to feed their families," Rafipoor said.

The company has also been making efforts of late to relocate workers to restaurants within a 3- to 5-mile radius from their homes, specifically for OC residents working in Panini's four Los Angeles County restaurants.

"Gas prices are too high, and it takes too long for them to be on the road," Rafipoor said.

The LIST
Restaurant Chains
p20

Return to Indoor Dining

Costa Mesa-based **King's Seafood Co.**, the largest local upscale restaurant chain in OC, faced shortages on basic items from Coca-Cola to ketchup, but saw customers—tired of getting food delivered—return to indoor dining last year.

"Business is good. It just poses a lot of challenges that we didn't think we'd have to be dealing with," founder and CEO **Sam King** told the Business Journal in an interview last November. "So, it's good, with an asterisk."

The company, whose 23 restaurants range from fine dining at the **Water Grill** spots in Costa Mesa and LA to premium casual dining in the 12-location **King's Fish House** chain and steakhouses like San Diego's **Lou & Mickey's**, generated \$176 million in revenue last year, more than doubling its sales from the year prior. It moved up five notches to the No. 12 spot on the list, which ranks locally based restaurant firms by their 2021 systemwide sales.

Company officials said last year they hope to add to its fine dining restaurant, **Water Grill**, at the rate of one location per year.

Rising Wages

Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. (NYSE: CMG) is another local chain aiming to offer competitive benefits in order to attract and retain talent.

Locations of the Newport Beach franchise chain are "staffed better than they were pre-COVID," CEO **Brian Niccol** told analysts in a conference call in February.

In May of last year, Chipotle raised its average nationwide wage to \$15 per hour.

"We want to make sure that we continue to be competitive on that front," Niccol said.

Wage increases and inflation hikes did result in menu price increases during the fourth-quarter (see story, page 1).

"We keep thinking that beef is going to level off and then go down. It just hasn't happened yet," CFO **Jack Hartung** said in the February conference call.

Despite rising costs, Chipotle grew its 2021 revenue 26% to \$7.5 billion—with about 45% of that comprising digital sales.

"Incredibly, our full-year digital sales of \$3.4 billion is nearly three and a half times what we did pre-COVID in 2019," Niccol said. ■

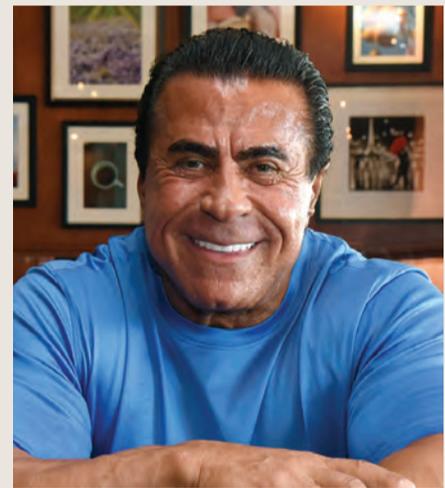
THE LIST RESTAURANT CHAINS



J.R. GALARDI
CEO and President
Wienerschnitzel



ANDREW KIM
CEO and President
WaBa Grill Franchise Corp.



MIKE RAFIPOOR
CEO and President
Panini Kabob Grill



LARRY ROBERTS
CEO and Interim CFO
El Pollo Loco Holdings Inc.



LYNSI SNYDER
President
In-N-Out Burger Inc.



SUSAN TAYLOR
CEO and President
Juice It Up

THE LIST RESTAURANT CHAINS

RANKED BY SYSTEMWIDE SALES

Rank	Company •Address •Phone/fax	Company logo	Systemwide sales for 12 months ended Dec. 31, 2021 (millions) •Ending date •yearly % change	OC employees •yearly % change	Name(s) of restaurant(s) operated in OC	OC restaurant locations •Systemwide restaurant locations	Type(s) of food	Owner/ultimate parent company	Corporate headquarters	Top local official(s) •Title	Photo
1	Taco Bell Corp. 1 Glen Bell Way (1) Irvine 92618-3344 Website: tacobell.com Email: media@tacobell.com		\$12,615 12%	4,500 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Taco Bell	133 ⁽¹⁾ 6,980 ⁽¹⁾	Mexican-inspired	Yum Brands Inc.	Louisville, Ky.	Mark King CEO (949) 863-4500	
2	Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. 610 Newport Center Drive, Ste. 1400 (2) Newport Beach 92660-6479 Website: chipotle.com Email: mediarelations@chipotle.com		\$7,547.1 26%	1,829 4%	Chipotle Mexican Grill	52 3,011	Tacos, burritos, burrito bowls, salads	Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc.	Newport Beach	Brian Niccol chairman/CEO (949) 524-4000	
3	In-N-Out Burger Inc. 4199 Campus Drive, ninth floor (3) Irvine 92612-8604 Website: in-n-out.com		\$1,650.5 12%	2,969 8%	In-N-Out Burgers	30 378	Burgers	Lynsi Snyder	Irvine	Lynsi Snyder president (949) 509-6200/(949) 854-3675	
4	BJ's Restaurants Inc. 7755 Center Ave., Ste. 300 (6) Huntington Beach 92647-3084 Website: bjsrestaurants.com		\$1,087 40%	991 9%	BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse, BJ's Pizza & Grill	9 211	American, bar and grill	BJ's Restaurants Inc.	Huntington Beach	Gregory S. Levin CEO/president (714) 500-2400	
5	El Pollo Loco Holdings Inc. 3535 Harbor Blvd., Ste. 100 (4) Costa Mesa 92626-1494 Website: elpollo.com		\$973.2 11%	1,404 8%	El Pollo Loco	51 481	Mexican, chicken	El Pollo Loco Holdings Inc.	Costa Mesa	Larry Roberts CEO/interim CFO (714) 599-5000/(714) 599-5674	
6	Del Taco Restaurants Inc. 25521 Commercentre Drive, Ste. 200 (5) Lake Forest 92630-8857 Website: deltaco.com Email: jgraves@deltaco.com		\$918 ⁽¹⁾ NA	3,300 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Del Taco	66 596	Mexican, American	Jack in the Box Inc.	San Diego	John D. Cappasola Jr. CEO/president (949) 462-9300/(949) 462-7444	
7	Habit Restaurants Inc. 17320 Red Hill Ave., Ste. 140 (7) Irvine 92614-5695 Website: habitburger.com Email: marketing@habitburger.com		\$588 24%	875 9%	Habit Burger Grill	24 331	Burgers, sandwiches, salads	Yum Brands Inc.	Louisville, Ky.	Russ Bendel/Ira Fils CEO, president/CFO, secretary (949) 851-8881/(949) 852-4650	
8	California Pizza Kitchen 575 Anton Blvd., Ste. 100 (NR) Costa Mesa 92626-7672 Website: cpk.com		\$489.8 19%	350 ⁽¹⁾ NA	California Pizza Kitchen	9 147	Pizza, pasta, salads	Golden Gate Capital	San Francisco	Jim Hyatt CEO/president (800) 919-3227	
9	Wienerschnitzel 7700 Irvine Center Drive, Ste. 550 (9) Irvine 92618-3036 Website: wienerschnitzel.com Email: dkoegeboehn@galardigroup.com		\$360.3 ⁽¹⁾ NA	275 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Wienerschnitzel	26 319	Hot dogs, burgers	Galardi Group Inc.	Irvine	J.R. Galardi CEO/president (949) 892-2699/(949) 892-2618	
10	Lazy Dog Restaurants LLC 3337 S. Susan St., Ste. 100 (11) Costa Mesa 92626-1693 Website: lazydogrestaurants.com		\$294.2 57%	500 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Lazy Dog Restaurant & Bar	4 44	Handcrafted American food and drink	Lazy Dog Restaurants LLC	Costa Mesa	Chris Simms co-founder/CEO (714) 596-9960	
11	Mountain Mike's Pizza LLC 26 Corporate Plaza, Ste. 180 (10) Newport Beach 92660-7966 Website: mountainmikespizza.com Email: contact@mountainmikespizza.com		\$254.6 24%	100 54%	Mountain Mike's Pizza	5 253	Pizza, wings, salads, sandwiches, dessert	Mountain Mike's Pizza LLC	Newport Beach	Chris Britt/Ed St. Geme co-CEOs/principal owners (949) 438-1201	
12	King's Seafood Co. 3185 Airway Ave., Bldg. J (17) Costa Mesa 92626-4601 Website: kingsseafood.com Email: info@kingsseafood.com		\$176 107%	1,421 152%	Water Grill South Coast Plaza, Fish Camp, King's Fish House	5 23	Seafood, steak, sushi, American	King's Seafood Co.	Costa Mesa	Sam King/RJ Thomas CEO/president, COO (714) 432-0400/(714) 432-0111	
13	WaBa Grill Franchise Corp. 181 S. Old Springs Road (NR) Anaheim Hills 92808-1247 Website: wabagrill.com		\$168.3 24%	350 ⁽¹⁾ NA	WaBa Grill	29 191	California Asian-Latin fusion	WaBa Restaurant Group	Anaheim	Andrew Kim CEO/president (562) 908-9222	
14	Xperience Restaurant Group Inc. 11065 Knott Ave., Ste. A (12) Cypress 90630-5149 Website: xperiencerg.com Email: info@xperiencerg.com		\$160 ⁽¹⁾ NA	1,000 ⁽¹⁾ NA	El Torito, El Torito Grill, Acapulco, Las Brisas	15 69	Mexican	Z Capital Partners/FM Restaurants Holdco LLC	Cypress	Randy Sharpe/Ned Algeo/ Michael Johnson CEO/CFO/senior VP, operations (562) 346-1200/(562) 346-1271	

Sources: Technomic Inc. and the restaurant chains. Abbreviations: NA: not applicable; NR: not ranked. Note: To the best of our knowledge, this information is accurate as of press time. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of the list, omissions and typographical errors sometimes occur. Unless otherwise noted, the information on this list was provided by the companies themselves. List may not be reprinted without permission of the editor. Photos show first top official listed. ⁽¹⁾ Business Journal estimate

THE LIST RESTAURANT CHAINS

RANKED BY SYSTEMWIDE SALES

Rank	Company	Systemwide sales for 12 months ended Dec. 31, 2021 (millions)	OC employees	Name(s) of restaurant(s) operated in OC	OC restaurant locations	Type(s) of food	Owner/ultimate parent company	Corporate headquarters	Top local official(s)	Company logo	Photo
Prev. Rank	Address	•Ending date	•yearly % change		•Systemwide restaurant locations				•Title		
15	Sizzler USA Inc. 23353 Madero Road, Ste. B Mission Viejo 92691-7908 Website: sizzler.com	\$139.2 73%	250 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Sizzler	6 95	Steak, seafood, chicken, salads	Sizzler USA	Mission Viejo	Christopher Perkins president/chief services officer (949) 273-4497/(949) 855-8446		
16	Pieology Pizzeria 2642 Michelle Drive, Ste. 100 Tustin 92780-7019 Website: pieology.com	\$125 ⁽¹⁾ NA	400 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Pieology	6 117 ⁽¹⁾	Custom pizza	Pieology Pizzeria	Tustin	Shawn Thompson CEO (949) 800-8314		
17	California Fish Grill Inc. 17310 Red Hill Ave., Ste. 330 Irvine 92614-5691 Website: cafishgrill.com Email: hello@cafishgrill.com	\$110.4 46%	186 NA	California Fish Grill	8 46	Seafood	KarpReilly LLC	Greenwich, Conn.	Bob Holden CEO (714) 525-5809		
18	Panini Kabob Grill 3159 Red Hill Ave., Ste. A Costa Mesa 92626-3419 Website: paninikabobgrill.com Email: info@paninikabobgrill.com	\$109 81%	339 73%	Panini Kabob Grill	7 18	Mediterranean	SPCorp Services Inc.	Costa Mesa	Mike Rafipoor CEO/president (949) 788-1620/(949) 788-1621		
19	Specialty Restaurants Corp. 150 Paularino Ave., Bldg. C Costa Mesa 92626-3339 Website: specialtyrestaurants.com Email: info@srcmail.com	\$100.9 6/21 24%	193 29%	Orange Hill Restaurant	1 18	American, Mexican, seafood	Specialty Restaurants Corp.	Costa Mesa	John Tallichet CEO/president (714) 279-6100/(714) 998-7574		
20	Yogurtland Franchising Inc. 17801 Cartwright Road Irvine 92614-6216 Website: yogurt-land.com Email: info@yogurt-land.com	\$100.3 ⁽¹⁾ NA	450 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Yogurtland	37 224	Frozen yogurt	Yogurtland Franchising Inc.	Irvine	Phillip Chang founder/CEO (949) 265-8000		
21	Nékter Juice Bar Inc. 1844 Carnegie Ave. Santa Ana 92705-5545 Website: nekteerjuicebar.com Email: contact@nekteerjuicebar.com	\$87.8 ⁽¹⁾ NA	1,000 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Nékter Juice Bar	29 170	Vegan juices and smoothies, vegan and healthy snacks, acai bowls, cold-pressed juices, ice cream	Steve and Alexis Schulze	Santa Ana	Steve Schulze/Alexis Schulze CEO, president/chief visionary officer (949) 313-0440		
22	Flame Broiler Inc. 1538 E. Warner Ave., Ste. E Santa Ana 92705-5476 Website: flamebroilerusa.com Email: ylee@flamebroilerusa.com	\$84.7 5%	700 ⁽¹⁾ NA	The Flame Broiler	64 165	Asian	The Flame Broiler Inc.	Santa Ana	Young R. Lee CEO/president (714) 424-0223/(714) 424-0225		
23	Wahoo's Fish Taco 1185 Warner Ave. Tustin 92780-6458 Website: wahoos.com Email: david.renaud@wahoos.com	\$60.2 ⁽¹⁾ NA	400 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Wahoo's Fish Taco	19 48	Fusion of Mexican, Asian and Brazilian ingredients and flavors	Lamkone Restaurants Inc.	Tustin	Renato 'Mingo' Lee CEO/president (949) 222-0670/(949) 222-0750		
24	Paul Martin's American Grill 100 Spectrum Center Drive, Ste. 1240 Irvine 92618-4980 Website: paulmartinsamericangrill.com Email: marketing@pmagrill.com	\$50 ⁽¹⁾ NA	50 NA	Paul Martin's American Grill	1 8	Classic American cuisine	Paul Martin's American Grill	Irvine	Paul Fleming/Rick Scott founder/brand president (949) 336-5237/(949) 336-5238		
24	Pick Up Stix 24422 Avenida de la Carlota, Ste. 360 Laguna Hills 92653-3603 Website: pickupstix.com	\$50 12%	300 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Pick Up Stix	20 58	Asian	West Coast Capital	Sherman Oaks	Robert Rodriguez CEO (949) 429-6500/(949) 900-1761		
26	Pokeworks 220 Technology Drive, Ste. 120 Irvine 92618-2456 Website: pokeworks.com Email: info@pokeworks.com	\$47.3 32%	75 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Pokeworks	3 66	Sushi, poke bowls and nachos, burritos,	NA	Irvine	Peter Yang co-founder/chief development officer (949) 629-3875		
27	Ruby's Diner Inc. 4100 MacArthur Blvd., Ste. 310 Newport Beach 92660-2050 Website: rubys.com Email: marketing@rubys.com	\$43.5 16%	400 ⁽¹⁾ NA	Ruby's Diner Inc.	12 19	American	Ruby Restaurant Group	Newport Beach	Doug Cavanaugh chairman/founder/CEO (949) 644-7829/(949) 644-4625		
28	Juice It Up 24 Corporate Plaza Drive, Ste. 100 Newport Beach 92660-7966 Website: juiceitup.com Email: information@juiceitup.com	\$42.7 30%	186 -4%	Juice It Up	14 83	Handcrafted smoothies, fresh-squeezed raw juices, superfruit bowls	SJB Brands LLC	Newport Beach	Susan Taylor CEO/president (949) 475-0146/(949) 475-0137		

Sources: Technomic Inc. and the restaurant chains. Abbreviations: NA: not applicable; NR: not ranked. Note: To the best of our knowledge, this information is accurate as of press time. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy and thoroughness of the list, omissions and typographical errors sometimes occur. Unless otherwise noted, the information on this list was provided by the companies themselves. List may not be reprinted without permission of the editor. Photos show first top official listed.
⁽¹⁾ Business Journal estimate