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The Good Neighbor

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The heightened commitment to local communities isn't confined to independent operators. National chains that have for years promoted their efforts to financially support high-profile charitable causes are now refocusing their attention on communities to help connect customers to their local stores.

Which Wich is one national chain furnishing its store operators with a system that allows them to make an impact in their communities. The 10-year-old, 300-unit sandwich chain is rolling out a proprietary cause called Project PB&J that will integrate individual stores with their neighbors. The initiative follows the buy-one-give-one model, made popular by TOMS Shoes; every peanut butter and jelly sandwich sold at Which Wich logs a free PB&J in a company database. Store operators can then access those sandwiches to provide for their community in a variety of situations, such as to respond to a natural disaster or to feed the hungry.

Jeff Sinelli, founder and chief vibe officer of Which Wich, says the company is striving to invest more in the idea of "conscious capitalism," a growing movement led by companies like grocer Whole Foods and outdoor gear supplier Patagonia that encourages businesses to focus on a bigger purpose than profitability. Sinelli attended the Conscious Capitalism Summit last year in Dallas and connected with a handful of entrepreneurs who are helping him get Project PB&J off the ground.



Project PB&J, which officially launches in April, will include several different company-sponsored assets, including backpack kits that give restaurants easily accessible field equipment and possibly even branded vehicles to outreach in individual communities. Franchisees will also be prepared to host educational sessions at schools to raise awareness on the issue of hunger.

Sinelli says sales are up around 30 percent at the three corporate stores where Which Wich tested Project PB&J. That came despite the fact that the brand is not marketing the initiative heavily, instead investing in point-of-purchase materials that explain the cause.

"It's miraculous what's going on," Sinelli says. "Now I've got to take that into the franchise environment and say, 'Look, this stuff works.' We're inviting our partners to go out to San Diego in April to the Conscious Capitalism Summit, because when you put yourself around people that you can learn from, you can become a better person yourself. And if you become a better person yourself, now you can do better things in your community and your company."

Read the complete article:
www.qsrmagazine.com/charitable-giving/good-neighbor

"You don't do it to get the badge. There are companies out there ... that are trying to strap onto this to get the badge so they can say they're a conscious capital company," Sinelli says. "It's something you don't go out to earn; it should be natural, because this is who you are about and this is your purpose."



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