

and closed a year later because they skipped on the recipe or something, it would do serious damage to our brand," he continues.

As Knowlton notes it is far easier to sell something when you have a product that everyone loves such as ice cream. "We have a product that is universally loved. Something like meat is loved by some and hated by others but everyone loves ice cream. I don't think I have ever met anyone who hates it, so it is just a matter of finding the right partner and operating at the same level that we do in the US."

Patient he might be but now the right partner has been sourced and a Cold Stone franchise has opened in a new country, Knowlton is keen to allow the brand to develop itself and as he describes it not to be "micromanaged" from the US.

"We visit our stores between three to four times a year and work with them on the brand but our partners appreciate the fact that they are not micromanaged," he says. "We have an arrangement with our partners over here that we take a percentage of their sales so it is our incentive to help them to grow. If the stores are not successful, we are not successful. It is a great arrangement."

This style of management internationally is very much Knowlton's style in the US. The ex-TGI Friday's and Planet Hollywood executive's attitude to work is like his ice cream — work hard, play hard.

"Working with Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger for Planet Hollywood was great fun and working at Cold Stone is certainly not a 9 to 5 desk job," Knowlton says. I like to think I have a great team with common goals. We get the work done but I certainly don't micromanage. When you do international business you learn that you have got to have a great team and everyone has their share." While the Cold Stone brand is committed to being



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consistent with its winning formula from the US, it does allow for some cultural amendments. The recipe remains the same throughout the world with all Cold Stone ice cream made fresh in-store with ingredients from the US, as does the entertainment aspect, however, there are a few small changes here and there. Employees are encouraged to rework well-known local songs into the Cold Stone Creamery ethos and Knowlton is keen to listen to what local customers want from their ice cream man.

"We are a big fan of listening to our customers and we recognise that different people have different tastes." This is why the store also stocks a sinless variety of ice cream, as well as frozen yoghurt, both of which are low calorie — a pretty good move considering that some of Cold Stone's ice creams can be up to 1000 calories depending on the mix.

"When we opened the store in Japan we were told by local consultants that we may offend customers if we continued to sing while we mixed the ice cream, which was surprising given that the Japanese love karaoke so much. We tried the singing, watched the customers' reactions and it was fine. We'll do the same thing here."

So will Cold Stone be stocking camel milk and date ice cream any time soon? "We did the dates as a mix-in for Ramadan and it went down pretty well but as for camel milk, it depends on how many requests we get," he laughs.

Cold Stone Creamery, Dubai has already noted differences in taste in this region. While vanilla or sweet cream are the US top sellers, Dubai ice cream lovers are enjoying chocolate and fruit flavours more than anything else. On the back of this, Knowlton is already discussing the possibilities of introducing more varieties of the best seller such as dark chocolate peppermint or mocha chocolate to the region. "Tastes vary depending on the country. In Korea customers enjoy our sinless varieties which are barely in the top ten in the US. In Japan, during the first week we were asked by someone if we could mix all 35 mix-ins into their ice cream. His bill was almost a foot long when we printed it."

The recipe may be the same the world over but being ahead with flavours is one of the areas which Knowlton admits can be difficult. "When you look back you always wonder if you could have offered flavours earlier. A couple of years ago there was a big no-carb phase in the US which we were probably on the back-end of.

1.2
BILLION
Total revenues reported by
Cold Stone Creamery for
the year 2006

The fun
starts
here