

that you could add ingredients to; they couldn't find one that they liked. So, they started tinkering with recipes and came up with the one that we have now, which is super-premium with a high butterfat content and higher quality ingredients than your typical ice cream. Then they realised that everyone likes to choose what they eat, even in an ice cream, so they came up with the nuts, candies, syrups and the rest. Over time it morphed into this ice cream experience that you see today; freshly made, a lot of personalisation and we put a lot of time into the service aspect."

The service aspect present internationally throughout the Cold Stone franchises is something that Knowlton brings from his time at TGI Friday and Planet Hollywood; both known for their quirkiness and interactive customer service. "It should be fun," Knowlton affirms, "people should be happy. So we have fun with the customers, singing, interacting with them, just so that they do leave with a smile. The whole thing is something a little bit different. Generally in many restaurants your service experience is limited to 'what would you like' and 'thank you for coming' – we try and do something different."

To separate the experience from that of the competition the company relies on the staff in each store to engage every customer. Part of the interview process for potential new recruits is actually called an audition. Wannabe's are encouraged to sing, tell jokes, perform magic tricks – anything that shows an outgoing personality. "I often say that you can't make people have fun; you have to have an envi-



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tering the meal around the experience: "He understood that everyone is different, everyone has their own style and different things that motivate them so you can't manage everyone in the same way – you just have to guide them in the right direction and empower them."

Knowlton believes that the key to finding the right staff is finding the right local partner – in the Gulf, Cold Stone has teamed up with the Apparel Group for the UAE stores and the planned roll outs in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The search for a group that meets Cold Stone's criteria is one that occupies most of Knowlton's role as the company's international head: "It's a huge decision to make; it's a deal for the next 10 or 20 years so you really have to make the right choice. I know a lot of US companies that gone abroad and failed, simply because they've picked the wrong local partner. They've just accepted a cheque from the first person that came along. It's about having the patience to make the right decision."

One example of this philosophy in action is the fact that, though the group is expanding globally, Cold Stone has yet to find a suitable candidate to manage the franchises in its continental neighbour, Canada. "People keep asking me why we don't have stores up there yet. I've been looking for two and a half years now and I still haven't been able to find the right one; it's about not going with the second or third choice."

The experience is not the only thing attracting customers however, the product has to be good too. Cold Stone sells its produce on the basis that all the ice cream is produced fresh