Eat well on the go

For people on the go, food must be fresh, tasty and fast. That is the simple formula behind the success of the YORMA’S chain of fast-food outlets, which are all located at busy train and subway stations in cities across Germany. Founded in 1985 by Yorma Eberl with the acquisition of the first outlet – the railway station restaurant in Plattling in Bavaria – the company really took off when he met shop-fitting specialist Karl Kraft. Together they developed the successful YORMA’S concept and began to open new outlets in carefully selected locations. In 2001, they established YORMA’S AG.

There are now 58 YORMA’S outlets throughout Germany. The greatest concentration of outlets is in Bavaria and the south of the country, but the company is already well represented in Germany’s most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, and also has outlets in Berlin and Hamburg. “We are far from finished in terms of national coverage,” says Company Founder Yorma Eberl. “In the next three years, we expect to open eight new outlets on sites operated by Deutsche Bahn and will be refurbishing between 8 and 15 existing outlets. This should allow us to break the 100 million EUR turnover mark by 2020.” Annual sales in 2016 reached 83.5 million EUR, so this target is certainly achievable at its current rate of growth.

The secret behind YORMA’S success story is not complicated. “It is a question of getting the system and structures right and then following them to the letter,” says Board Chairman Karl Kraft. “We have done all of the planning and designing in advance so that the system runs by itself.” With customers generally having less than two minutes to choose and pay for a snack to take with them, efficiency at the serving counter and throughout the store is paramount. This starts with the well-organized and spacious store layout, attractive displays and efficient service staff.

Setting up the system takes skilled technicians, but operating it is a different matter. “We invest heavily in staff training,” says Mr. Eberl. “The systems we work with are heavily automated, and virtually anyone can operate them. We are happy to take on people without qualifications who are motivated and dedicated. We provide them with opportunities to rise up through the organization if they are prepared to put the work in. We even have someone who started with us as a cleaner and rose to become branch manager. Those are the real success stories our company has written.”

Another key to YORMA’S success is understanding its customers. It serves around 150,000 customers in its outlets every day, offering a wide variety of packaged and freshly prepared snacks. From sweets, chocolate and soft drinks to pastries, sandwiches, salads, hotdogs and hot beverages, YORMA’S offers an extremely wide range of foods to choose from. “We have an extremely rapid product turnover and offer our customers excellent value for money,” says Mr. Eberl. “There are also plenty of healthy options.” This is a key development as competition from town center shops rises. More and more bakeries and other fast-food
outlets selling freshly prepared dishes are springing up on the high street and looking to catch people on their way to the station. “Despite this, our sales have not suffered through this development, and our biggest competitor continues to be home-prepared food that travellers bring with them,” says Mr. Kraft. “Our main target group is people in a hurry who have not got the time to make their own snacks and don’t want to carry food with them. To target these people, we have to keep prices as low as possible and quality as high as possible so that the cost of our snacks does not outweigh the effort of bringing their own.”

Around 50% of the product range is packaged items that can also be found in any motorway service station. The remaining 50% is made up of locally sourced fresh items. The emphasis is on using the best possible ingredients and preparing them to be as fresh as possible. “Fresh items are produced on the premises,” says Mr. Eberl. “We offer a wide variety of rolls, baps and buns, all with different fillings and prepared freshly each day in store. We can predict fairly accurately what will sell each day so that there is little wastage.”

YORMA’S has fully embraced the digital revolution and has operated a paperless system for more than a decade. “We have a fully automatic, networked cash register system that helps us manage stocks,” says Mr. Kraft. “We must be open to new ideas and willing to experiment.” After more than 30 years, the two partners are still fully involved in the operative side of the business and are not yet ready to retire. “Running a successful business is more rewarding than any hobby,” says Mr. Eberl. “Neither of us is ready to retire to the golf course just yet – for one thing, neither of us knows how to play golf.” Mr. Eberl has support in the form of his daughter Ramona, who is already involved in the family business. With ambitious plans to open between 50 and 60 additional outlets in the next ten to 15 years, the two founders have set themselves a worthy target, which, if past performance is any indication, they will exceed with ease.