



Brio and Bravo to Debut New Bar Program in '08

CEO Saed Mohseni wants to lift alcohol sales to 25 percent from 20 percent.

By David Farkas

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"You want *these* guests," declares CEO Saed Mohseni, gesturing at the well-heeled diners in Brio Tuscan Grille. "You want a lady who is willing to pay \$7 for a martini."

He is hoping to attract her—as well as her male counterparts—with a new bar program scheduled to debut at Brio and Bravo, the Italian concepts his company, [Bravo Development Inc.](#), operates in 23 states.

The initiative, scheduled to debut in January, will feature an expanded drinks list, new appetizers and a more experiential service style. Alcoholic beverages account for about 20 percent of total sales. Mohseni would like the percentage to climb to 25 percent.

Growth Vehicles

Mohseni, the [former CEO](#) of fast-growing [McCormick & Schmick's](#), arrived at the Columbus, Ohio-based company two years ago, after serving for several years on BDI's board.

His job was to kick [expansion](#) into high gear—something he has accomplished. The 59-unit company will open 10 branches next year, largely with its own cash. Brio and Bravo each generate sales of \$5.9 million and \$4.2 million, respectively.

The company, which is controlled by private-equity firms [Castle Harlan](#) and [Bruckmann Rosser Sherrill](#), can also tap a \$30 million line of revolving credit.

Today, with consumers deciding between [filling the SUV's gas tank or eating out](#), Mohseni is looking for ways to "increase the velocity of guests into our restaurants." Simply put, it's more butts in seats.

"The game is won on customer traffic," says the amiable 47-year-old executive over a steak salad.

His experience at his former employer, noted for its successful bar business, will help. "I'm partial, but I don't think anyone does as good a job as [McCormick & Schmick's](#)," he says.

Lesson Plans



Saed Mohseni



Brio and its sister concept, Bravo, launch a new bar program in January.

What lessons will he apply? "The trick is to truly exceed customers' expectations," Mohseni says. "The product is the same, of course, but it's the quality of service that's going to establish the difference between you and the competition."

Let's not forget the food. Although a bar menu hasn't been devised, Mohseni wants to offer "shared" dishes big enough to feed several people. He mentions calamari, flatbread and shrimp as possibilities. An expanded wine-by-the-glass list will come with price tags that range from \$5.95 to \$9.95.

Mohseni concedes the changes won't be all that noticeable. He isn't planning to retrofit units or redesign bars that open in new restaurants. "When I talk about increasing the bar business, it is a partly a state of mind," he says.

He contrasts BDI's efforts with Morton's The Steakhouse, which launched a successful bar program—[dubbed 12:21](#)—two years ago (with help, incidentally, from McCormick & Schmick's). "Morton's had to change their bars. We already have bars conducive to selling wine," offers Mohseni, adding wine sales account for 12 percent of alcohol sales.

Marketing therefore will play a major role in the rollout. Mohseni envisions flyers in every restaurant explaining the new program to the company's annual 12 million customers.

One thing customers won't see: \$2 beers during happy hour. Says Mohseni: "You don't want *those* guests."

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