BUSINESS

Chipotle's founder wants to open a new chain of robotic restaurants in the US

Founder and former CEO of Chipotle, Steve Ells, plans to re-enter the fast food industry with a new robot-powered concept called Kernel. The 56-year-old businessman has been actively meeting investors since 2022, pitching his business ideas to revolutionize labour, tech, real estate. Menu.

Chipotle's founder wants to open a new chain of robotic restaurants in the US. Kernel is envisioned as a robotic, plant-based company that defies traditional norms and promises a fresh approach to the fast food experience.

Kernel spokeswoman Sarah Rosenberg described the startup as a "tech-enabled fast food concept that leverages software and robotics." While he declined to elaborate on the technology, he confirmed that the light labor model is key to the operation.

"The kernel's operating model requires materially fewer employees than the status quo business model," Rosenberg told the New York Post. Chipotle's founder chose New York as the base of operations for Kernel, with its offices and initial production center located on 14th Street in Manhattan. The first restaurant will open in late 2023.

Notably, Ells, Chipotle's founder, is self-funding the startup, ahead of a planned fundraising initiative to raise between $30 million and $50 million. However, there is already a lot of investor interest in Kernel.

Kernel's automated kitchen will be designed to optimize efficiency, with a minimum of labor. This will allow the company to keep its store size compact at 800 square feet per location. This footprint is roughly one-third the size of Sweetgreen's and Shake Shack's stores, demonstrating the Chipotle founder's commitment to a streamlined approach to business.

According to Arlene Spiegel, a renowned consultant on Restaurant, Retail and food service and president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, Kernel is likely to adopt a business model similar to competitors such as Dig and Little Beet.

The menu is based on a variety of culinary influences including Greek, Chinese, Indian, Mediterranean and Thai. As for competition, Kernel identifies Shake Shack, Sweetgreen, Digg, Kava and Ales' former company Chipotle as its main rivals.

In addition to Storefront, Kernel plans to license its robot operating system to other companies. Rosenberg declined to comment on the size of its founding team, which includes Eric Wilson, an Apple and Chipotle veteran, and Andrew Black, the chef at Eleven Madison Park. ∎