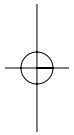
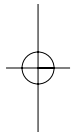




Vision Commercial Kitchens

Case Study
Leon Restaurants



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Henry Dimbleby
Director

Everyone knows there's fast food or there's healthy food. 'Leon' is a new restaurant concept which challenges that maxim by offering cheap, fast food that isn't bad food. Henry Dimbleby, son of broadcaster Jonathan and cookery writer Josceline, is one of the three Leon founders. He's keenly aware how important Vision's role, in designing and installing all the kitchens, has been to the success of the business thus far and to achieving his huge ambitions.

Can you explain the 'Leon' concept?

We want to make it possible to get away from empty, sugary foods that make you fall asleep in the afternoon and wake up fat. So instead of McBurgers and McChips, there's dishes like grilled chicken with salsa verde, roasted sweet potato falafel, mackerel summer couscous – basically Mediterranean and Meze style dishes. The emphasis is on healthy, seasonal cooking delivered with speed - a fast-food style counter service and cardboard boxes at lunch, then table service and cutlery after 6.30pm. We're big on seasoning, so everything radiates with flavour and, above all, the freshness and vitality of the raw materials. Every ingredient, from the meadow-fresh feta to the golden sesame seeds is high quality and seasonal. The ingredients are occasionally organic; the chicken is free-range; the coffee is ethically traded; many items are low-carb, low-GI, vegetarian-friendly, allergy-friendly, gluten-free, dairy-free, sugar-free - all basically light and healthy.

How many restaurants have you opened so far?

The first came in July 2004 in Carnaby Street, serving 800 covers a day; the second opened just over a year later at Ludgate Circus; the third, this was the Knightsbridge outpost; and the most recent is in Spitalfields Market.

Have Vision done all the kitchens?

Yes, the four restaurants and the 'big kitch' - a central production kitchen where we make all our soups, stews and sauces - the things that require intricate cooking skills get done centrally and then the cooks use them, but also prepare things like salads and wraps locally. We've got a fifth opening now which Vision also planned and installed for us.

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How did you come across Vision initially?

We got references for a few kitchen companies from a number of investors involved with the business and Vision were one of a number that we met – their sales Director, Jack Sharkey, was very engaging and immediately understood what we were trying to do.

And what have they brought to the table?

The thing that makes Vision stand out – not only among the kitchen suppliers that we use but amongst all our suppliers – is the way in which they understand what it is I'm trying to do and support us as a partner in contrast to a supplier that's just doing a set piece of work which they get paid for. For example; when we were doing our original planning for a new concept – fast food in the daytime and proper sit down casual dining in the evening – and trying to work out how we'd configure the kitchen, dealing with the two styles of food prep in one kitchen hadn't been done before but was clearly critical to the success of the venture. At lunchtime we're judged on how quickly we can deliver good food whereas in the evening it's still got to be good obviously but in a more relaxed environment. The kitchen enables us to do that. What Vision did was spend a lot of their own time working through that with us. They invested an enormous amount of their own time up front, trusting in our concept, without payment and not seeming to get fed up or starting to wonder if they'd be paid.

And they continue to support you?

Yes, I can ring Vision and they will respond incredibly quickly, provide lots of drawings and even call me and say 'maybe you should do it like this' or 'this won't work'. The way in which they've sought to understand our business and our restaurants is absolutely critical – it's best practice amongst any suppliers.

Have there been any problems given that you're in London and Vision are in Manchester?

To be honest it's been easier to deal with Vision than many of our suppliers based in London. It just hasn't been an issue – if I didn't know they were based in Manchester I would have guessed they were based somewhere like Essex.

When you're looking at a new restaurant do you go back to the market?

The relationship's so strong that we go straight to Vision – we occasionally put out feelers for prices just as good business practice but whenever we do, we have found, as we thought, they're trustworthy and have been competitive. And if there was a price difference I'd go back to Vision to discuss it – say a piece of kit which isn't in their range. We're just about to go open book with them anyway. Their objective is to stay with us long term – for the next 100 restaurants.

Do they handle all your maintenance too?

Yes – they're pretty good at that. In fact we had an oven go down yesterday and they were on site next day and fixed it, but they brought a stand by just in case.

What are your plans going forwards then?

We've got one we're designing at the moment, opening in October and ten planned for next year.

That's very rapid?

Well, some people do go faster but our vision is to get the best food to the most people. It's a very main stream concept for people who need fast food during the day and to get it to as many people as possible but at the same time keeping the quality high. The speed of rollout is a balance of those two things.

All London based?

The plan is to move out of London at the end of next year - we think in the UK there's between 150 and 300 high streets potentially. But we have a plan to do 2000 worldwide by 2020. We're working with someone in the States at the moment to set up franchises over there.

Everything so far has been successful then?

So far so good. With any business you survive by spotting things that aren't working and making them work and by spotting things that people like and doing them better. It's hard work but it's fun, it helps if you enjoy it because if you don't you'll pass that negativity on to your staff and customers.

Is it possible to quantify how Vision have helped?

Well, what you're looking for when you start a business is what you need to improve – problems to be fixed. Then there are the things that are working that you don't need to worry about. You've only got so many hours in a day to sort out issues, so when you find a supplier like Vision you feel like you've put something to bed; it's done; it's something you don't need to worry about. I'm happy with that supplier – that the relationship's working. It frees up my time to sort out other things, say a delivery to a restaurant, and that time is invaluable. The more suppliers you can have like that the more time you can spend focussing on what the customer sees and what the customer gets. Suppliers like Vision who really understand us are invaluable. To quantify it? Well, let's say without Vision, life would have been pretty difficult.



Vision Commercial Kitchens provides a full service to a growing number of clients throughout the UK from its base in Manchester. The company is one of the few in the industry to have gained ISO9001:2000 accreditation and has also attained the prestigious Investors in People award.

Vision has proven capability covering:

- Full AutoCAD design and planning service
- Equipment specification, sourcing and supply
- Project management and installation
- Full after sales service and warranty management

Vision's capabilities are demonstrable across a wide range of completed projects including restaurants, hotels, bars, schools, colleges, nursing homes, hospitals and the MOD. Clients include many of the leading names in the leisure sector such as Malmaison, Heathcotes and Out of Town Restaurants as well as numerous projects within the public sector. The company was formed by its four founding directors who have over 60 years combined business experience predominantly in the commercial kitchen industry.

Vision is a member of CEDA, The Catering Equipment Distributors Association, the industry's representative body. All members work to the highest standards as defined within CEDA's 'code of good practice'.



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Turning ideas into reality

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